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Special Issue – Contemporary Russia in International Relations – Introduction

Dossiê – Rússia Contemporânea nas Relações Internacionais – Introdução



Dossier – Rusia Contemporánea en las Relaciones Internacionales – Introducción

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The Russian launching of the Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine in February 2022 brought Russia back to the agenda of international politics. Due to the unprecedented nature of what was instantly called a “full scale invasion” or a “war of aggression” by NATO allies, the irrelevance conferred to Russia in the last decades gave place to a prominent role in world affairs. Like it or not, it seems that Russia’s continental size, abundant wealth in natural resources, military prowess and long history as a diplomatic broker are once again making the headlines of mainstream media and filling the pages of specialized journals world-wide. This is the context of this special issue of *Estudos Internacionais*.

After the end of the USSR, President Boris Yeltsin and his minister of foreign affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, strove to assure the international society that Russia had a western lineage. All in all, Russia adopted human rights discourse, defended the advantages of multilateralism, and reassured members of the “global community” that free markets were needed to guarantee political freedom. The leaders even affirmed that the communist period was a gap in the Soviet countries’ history of learning with the West.

Nonetheless, in spite of these efforts, Russia’s conciliatory discourse was not recognized by the West. The Western State’s lack of political will to solve Russia’s economic problems and continuing worries about the country’s military revival ensured that the self-image Russia was trying to sell about herself was not convincing. The consequent lack of support for Russia’s leaders resulted in social animosity against the West. Neocommunists and ultranationalists, both political groups with clear

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anti-western platforms, gained popular appeal. This fact forced Yeltsin to shift Russia's foreign policy. To maintain the support of Russia's constituents, the country's foreign policy in the near abroad became more assertive. This tendency was then reinforced by Yevgeny Primakov in the mid 1990's, and has persisted in Russian foreign policy since then, even despite the short honeymoon between presidents Putin and Bush after September 11th. Russia's confrontation with Georgia, in 2008, and the later annexation of Crimea in 2014 appears to only confirm this tendency.

The "emulation-confrontation" dichotomous relationship with the West needs to be qualified. Domestically, Russia passes through a process of consolidating an alternative statehood project in the new millennium. Its significant economic growth in the early 2000s, driven by oil and gas dividends, and the arrival of Vladimir Putin to power served as the starting point for a series of reforms. The growth of the Russian economy enabled relevant social policies at the beginning of Putin's government, leveraging his popular support. In the scope of security and defense, the country focused its efforts on modernizing its military arsenal, with special attention to offensive nuclear capabilities considering the deconstruction of the international nuclear deterrence architecture initiated by the United States of America (USA) in the late 1990s. The security agenda also served as a space for national reconciliation in resolving the situation in Chechnya and for promoting the concentration of powers in the central government in the face of the terrorist threat, especially after the Beslan attacks in 2004.

At the international level, the 21st century witnesses an international order under various pressures. Experiencing crises related to politics, security, economics, health and environment, contemporary international politics challenges the field of International Relations when it debates polarity, continuity and change. While US hegemony is undergoing undeniable deterioration, China's economic projection still does not seem to be a sufficient element for Beijing to take its place as the sole pole in the international system, nor does China show interest in proposing its own version of an order in total opposition to the liberal project articulated by the West in the 20th century.

The current international scenario complexity can be exemplified in the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis in 2022. Politically, the centrality of the Eastern Ukrainian territory for Russian international insertion through access to a year-round navigable sea materializes traditional dynamics of dispute for power-generating capabilities. Moreover, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion into Eastern Europe and the deconstruction of the nuclear deterrence architecture are elements strongly present in the Russian narrative about the escalation in 2022 and reflect pressures on the distribution of power in the international order. The strategic partnership between Russia and China in recent years also illustrates pressures for potential changes in the international order and is a central element in relativizing the Kremlin's isolation. The trajectory of this friendship qualified by Vladimir Putin and by Xi Jinping as "limitless" also reflects deeper revisionist tendencies in the face of the deterioration of US hegemony.

Furthermore, the worsening of the Ukrainian crisis demonstrated effects of international economic integration that had not been felt until then, at least of this magnitude and character. Sanctions on Russia and their impact on the availability and price of a range of products shook markets around the world, especially in the early months of the conflict. In the medium and long term, it is observed that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict contributes to accelerating deglobalization movements already underway in the context of the economic-financial crisis of 2008 and the 2020 Covid-19 pandemics. Added to this, the demand for a more robust international cooperation on climate change may also be impacted by the cleavages fostered in the context of the escalation of tensions and the imposition of international sanctions.

Therefore, it is worth noting that today's International Relations scholars face a world full of paradoxes. On the one hand, we have never lived in a world in which information about international politics was so available and easily accessible. On the other, the plurality of sources and the manipulation of information place specialists in a difficult position to study phenomena whose nature is marked by the diverse political-ideological interests that constitute them. Hence, the special edition *Contemporary Russia in International Relations* aims to promote a qualified debate on the place occupied by Russia internationally. We do not wish to start here by defending the possibility of neutral scientific production. However, diversifying academic production on such a complex topic can bring to the fore relevant contributions produced from different perspectives. In this sense, mobilizing scholars from the Global South to present their views on contemporary Russia may advance alternative perspectives on the current crisis.

This special edition invited authors to incorporate two dimensions in their contributions: (1) Russian interests in light of the Kremlin's contemporary foreign policy; and (2) the context of escalating tensions in the Ukrainian crisis, in 2022. The three articles that were approved for publication share a common concern with empirical analysis and the treatment of data based on primary sources. They also support their arguments through literature reviews that consider not only the arguments of Western specialists, but also those of scholars belonging to other geographic spaces like the Global South. Regarding the theoretical and methodological foundation of the texts presented here, pluralism marks the constitution of pragmatic research designs, suitable for dealing with the complex and multifaceted phenomenon that this edition intends to problematize.

The relations between Russia and Asia are the central theme of the contribution *Sino-Russian Energy Cooperation in the Post-Cold War (2000-2021)*, written by Brazilian researchers Fernanda Albuquerque, Alexandre César Cunha Leite and Cristina Carvalho Pacheco. In their piece, they focus on the Sino-Russian relations from the energy production dimension. Energy is taken as the cornerstone of relations between Moscow and Beijing, which are deepening in a context in which both Russia and China need greater diversification of their trading partners in this field. After analyzing the possibilities and challenges that these partners face in

this sector, they suggest that these ties will last based on the reaching of long-term agreements and the construction of a support infrastructure for joint exploration and import of energetic resources.

Rafael Contreras-Luna and Natthanan Kunnamas address central elements for understanding Russia's international insertion in the contemporary international order in the article *Recalibrating Moscow's Strategies in Asia: Russia and Southeast Asia in a Multipolar World*. The authors investigate the Asian turn of Russian foreign policy with a focus on its rapprochement not only with China, but, especially, with other Southeast Asian powers. In doing so, the article is premised on the multipolar reality of the contemporary international order and problematizes the Russian position as a great power based on its increasingly strategic appropriation of the Asian world. According to the authors, the Kremlin still lacks a more comprehensive and well-established strategy in relation to the powers of Southeast Asia so that it can implement its reorientation towards the continent as a stage for its global projection.

The third article, entitled *The international political economy of the agrifood question in Russia*, reflects on the agenda of agricultural production. Food production presents itself as an important constitutive capability for state power at the international level, as can be seen from the impact that the escalation of tensions in 2022 generated on the grain and fertilizer markets, for example. Fabiano Escher, researcher affiliated with the Graduate Program in Social Sciences in Development, Agriculture and Society (CPDA), at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), analyzes topics such as agribusiness, family farming, food security and geopolitics from statistical data and qualified bibliographical review on Russian agri-food production.

The special edition *Contemporary Russia in International Relations* fulfills, then, its objective of expanding the perspective on Russian international insertion in the scholarship of International Relations, involving researchers from the Global South in problematizing the topic. Furthermore, by focusing on relations with Asia, this edition of *Revista Estudos Internacionais* discusses an extremely relevant sphere within the scope of Russia's foreign policy, which is relatively little explored by mainstream literature that tends to mostly oppose the Kremlin's actions from a western centric perspective.

Recalibrating Moscow's Strategies in Asia: Russia and Southeast Asia in a Multipolar World¹



Reajustando as Estratégias de Moscou na Ásia: Rússia e Sudeste Asiático num Mundo Multipolar

Reajustando las Estrategias de Moscú en Asia: Rusia y el Sudeste Asiático en un Mundo Multipolar

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ABSTRACT

Russia's partnership with China acted as a strategic cushion for the country's leadership to launch the military operation in Ukraine. At the same time, warm relations with long-term allies in Asia reinforced Russia's decision to make such a dangerous move and take the risks of being cut-off financially from the West. In this sense, relations not only with China but with other Asian middle and small powers is crucial for Russia's development in the upcoming years. Southeast Asia appears to be one of the most important prospective partners. Russia-Southeast Asia relations show that despite evident achievements in various spheres, Russia's plans in the region remain unsubstantiated in terms of policies and lack a comprehensive strategy. Ultimately, Russia has first to determine to what extent it is serious on its "reorientation" to Asia and what it expects from it, and whether it is ready to recalibrate substantially its relationship with Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Russia; Asia; ASEAN; Southeast Asia; China; perceptions; multipolarity.

RESUMO

A parceria da Rússia com a China serviu como um colchão estratégico para a liderança do país lançar a operação militar na Ucrânia. Ao mesmo tempo, as relações cordiais com aliados de longo prazo na Ásia reforçaram a decisão da Rússia de tomar uma medida tão perigosa e assumir os riscos de ser cortada financeiramente pelo Ocidente. Nesse sentido, as relações não apenas com a China, mas com outros poderes médios e pequenos da Ásia são cruciais para o desenvolvimento da Rússia nos próximos anos. O Sudeste Asiático parece ser um dos parceiros prospectivos mais importantes. As relações entre Rússia e Su-

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3. Natthanan Kunnamas is Jean Monnet Chair, Jean Monnet Module coordinator, and Associate Professor in Political Science at Chulalongkorn University, where she also leads the Centre for European Studies. In 2019, she was decorated the Knight of the Order of Academic Palm from the Ministry of National Education, France. Her recent research interests are external relations of the EU in Asia, focusing on the Indo-Pacific region as well as comparative regionalisms among EU, ASEAN and Ecowas. She is an author of 'European Studies in Thailand', in Na Thalang et al. (Routledge, 2018).

deste Asiático mostram que, apesar das conquistas evidentes em várias esferas, os planos da Rússia na região permanecem não fundamentados em termos de políticas e carecem de uma estratégia abrangente. Em última análise, a Rússia precisa determinar em que medida está comprometida com sua “reorientação” para a Ásia e o que espera dela, e se está pronta para recalibrar substancialmente seu relacionamento com o Sudeste Asiático.

Palavras-chave: Rússia; Ásia; ASEAN; Sudeste Asiático; China; percepções; multipolaridade.

RESUMEN

La asociación estratégica de Rusia con China fungió como amortiguador en la decisión del liderazgo ruso de lanzar una operación militar en contra de Ucrania. Asimismo, los lazos estrechos de Rusia con aliados históricos en Asia contribuyeron en la determinación del gobierno ruso para realizar un movimiento tan peligroso y tomar el riesgo de ser aislado por Occidente. En este sentido, para Rusia en el futuro próximo son cruciales sus lazos no sólo con China sino con otras potencias asiáticas. De esta forma, el sudeste de Asia se perfila como una de las regiones más importantes para Rusia en el mediano plazo. Las relaciones entre Rusia y los países del sudeste de Asia muestran que, a pesar de éxitos notables en diversos ámbitos, los planes de Rusia en la región carecen de cierta congruencia y no son parte de una estrategia integral. En definitiva, Rusia tiene que determinar hasta qué punto está dispuesta a llevar a cabo su “reorientación” a Asia y lo que espera de ella, así como si se encuentra presto a recalibrar de manera sustancial sus relaciones con el sudeste de Asia.

Palabras clave: Rusia; Asia; ASEAN; sudeste de Asia; China; percepciones; multipolaridad.

The armed conflict in Ukraine and the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West has proved to have a global component and may be the beginning of a significant recalibration of the international order. In this context, Russia's policies in East Asia seem to gain more relevance as Russia's confrontation with the West over Ukraine evolves. At the same time, Russia aims to enhance its status in Asia and the world by seeking business and strategic opportunities to compensate to a certain extent Russia's loss following the sanctions imposed by the West. In this sense, diverse partnerships are being developed between Russian and Southeast Asian countries; this research will analyse the key components of those partnerships along with their potential benefits and impeding factors. Evidence for this paper was drawn from governmental documents, academic articles, news resources, think tank's publications, and occasionally personal interviews with academics and officials in Bangkok, Hanoi, and Moscow. This article is organized as follows. Firstly (1), it argues that Russia's self-perception of being a great power in a multipolar world plays a central and defining role in Russia's foreign policy. The following section (2) is devoted to Russia's “turn” to Asia. It succinctly describes the historical background of the alleged shift and the function of the China-component in the equation. Thirdly (3), this paper examines historical and current trends in Russia-Southeast Asia relations to understand their shifts and continuities. In the following section (4), this research analyses current relevant issues of the Russian-Southeast Asia partnership as well as obstacles and catalysts to development in the

context of the military conflict in Ukraine. This paper concludes (5) by reflecting upon the relevance of the topic and connects it with a broad historical context.

RUSSIA'S STANCE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Russia's self-image as a great power plays a central and defining role in Russia's foreign policy and critically shapes Russia's understanding of its relations with the world. For the Russian leadership and most of its citizens, greatpowerness or "velikoderzhavnost" is inherent to the existence and survival of the Russian state. Russia's great power identity has been scrutinized by a large number of authors and publications over the last decade (Clunan, 2014; Leichtova, 2014; Smith, 2016). Andrei Tsygankov (2020) argues that Russian greatpowerness consists of three main elements: "(1) a sphere of cultural and value influence in Eurasia and Europe, (2) political and economic self-sufficiency, and (3) military capabilities sufficient to defeat any other power". For Russian elites, it is crucial to maintain the internal unity of a geographically vast and complex country; a socially diverse state bordering non-Western and Western states and powerful neighbours.

Accordingly, the Russian elite has developed the concept of multipolarity: an international system in which a handful of large states (great powers, poles) were the guardians of the global order based on a balance of power among them. The Russian government has declared numerous times that multipolarity is the basis of the Russian approach to international politics. Former Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov was the main advocate of multipolarity during the Yeltsin era (Rangsimaporn, 2009), but at that time in the 1990s, the arguments seemed unconvincing as Russia was a weak state. The aim of achieving the status of a great power was more clearly defined under Putin's government, and he began to pursue this end more pragmatically. Putin's purpose was not to restore the Soviet as a superpower, but to make Russia a "normal great power" (Tsygankov, 2005).

Russia's conception of a multipolar world constitutes a prime component in the country's foreign policy decision-making. As Margot Light observes: "The sanctification of Russia's great power status and the declared preference for a multipolar world order based on sovereignty and non-interference in states' internal affairs has been a constant" (Cadier; Light, 2015:23). In this sense, at a summit in Saint Petersburg last year, President Putin reiterated this idea: "A multipolar system of international relations is now being formed. It is an irreversible process; it is happening before our eyes and is objective in nature" (Tass 2022). As a global power in a multipolar world, Russia has pursued a multi-vector foreign policy in the last fifteen years and the Asian vector has gain considerable strength. Russia's 'pivot' to Asia initiated as a long-term rebalancing project under Putin's administration, aimed mostly to maintain its global power identity by preserving Russia's freedom of manoeuvrability and independence in world affairs, and to be recognised as an Euro-Asian power.

RUSSIA'S PIVOT TO ASIA

In 1986, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made a landmark visit to the Russian Far East and delivered an important speech in Vladivostok, signalling that the USSR would engage in international politics as an Asia-Pacific power as much as a European (Thakur; Thayer, 1987). This Soviet version of *Ostpolitik* launched by Gorbachev was followed by President Putin in the 2010s. In December 2012, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin established the development of Siberia and the Far East as a national priority for the whole twenty first century. As a result, the Russian Government commenced to elaborate a long-term project to develop and improve living conditions in Asiatic Russia and advance its integration into Northeast Asia. Subsequently, Russia's "pivot" to Asia has been a highly discussed topic within Russian elites and leading scholars. In this regard, the Russian think tank *Valdai International Discussion Club* presented a series of analytical reports entitled *Toward the Great Ocean* to impulse debate between the Russian elites and leading scholars.

President Putin used the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok as a means to turn assertively to East Asia and to push for development projects in the region. Afterwards, Asiatic Russia attracted important federal-level attention and investment. According to Vladivostok scholar Sergei Sevastianov, one of the main achievements of this "pivot" to Asia has been the implementation of a new institutional framework aimed to improve the investments climate in the RFE (Personal Communication, 2022). This certainly gave impetus to the development of the region. Most analyses on Russia's shift to Asia recognise recent efforts towards the development of Asiatic Russia and the improvement of socio-economic indicators; there is a general agreement in Russia that in recent years "the government is paying more attention to its eastern part" and "has done a lot" (Bashkatova, 2022).

Indeed, the Russian government has devoted much effort and resources to impulse regional development; the problem seems to be that these are isolated efforts reflecting a narrow viewpoint – to certain extent overly technocratic – and full of provisional variables, there is a lack of a comprehensive plan whatsoever and strategies have been guided primarily by fiscal needs based on national security considerations (Kireev, 2017). Russian scholar Igor Makarov considers that Putin himself was committed to the development of the region and the creation of the Ministry for the Development of the Far East under his presidency corroborates this fact. Nonetheless, Russia had many other national priorities, namely the Sochi Winter Olympics, the FIFA World Cup in 2018 (which did not include cities from Asiatic Russia), and the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation. As Makarov underlines, there were too many other projects for the Asian century project to succeed (Personal Communication, 28 September 2022). In this context, success would mean to halt the outflow of population from the Russian Far East that continues to this day.

In terms of foreign policy, the much-touted "pivot" to Asia has been subject of discussions for the Russian elites and Russia specialists alike.

Nevertheless, for many Russian experts in Asia it remains a vague concept that lacks true depth and they cast doubt on the feasibility of such a project. As per Andrei Dmitrichenko, Minister Counsellor of the Russian Embassy in Thailand, it is a futile discussion as Russia cannot simply “turn” to Asia as rhetoric suggests. The Russian diplomat draws a parallel between the alleged “pivot” to Asia and a transatlantic liner: the largest state on Earth cannot “turn” as easily and smoothly to Asia, Russia as an ocean liner can only turn slowly, one degree at a time (Personal Communication, 30 May 2022).

Russia's policies in East Asia seem to gain more relevance once more as Russia's confrontation with the West over Ukraine evolves. Following the military operation in Ukraine, Russia had to drastically reassess its relations with the West, which apparently has accelerated the country's turning to Asia. Nonetheless, the crisis in Ukraine has simultaneously pushed Russia into a sort of insulation, and into China's growing dependence. Both scenarios have their own opportunities and risks.

Russia-China relations have developed into arguably the best relations between great powers. The Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic partnership is one of the most important elements of the world order and the achievements made by the two countries in the last two decades are impressive. Both countries have many common strategies and interests, from global to regional and there is a growing systematic coordination. Suffice to say that in the last ten years, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have met more than forty times.

The relationship with China acted as a strategic cushion for Russia to launch the military operation in Ukraine (Tchakarova, 2022). Seemly, Russia would have never launched such a large-scale military operation if it were not to rely to a certain degree on China's economic and political support. China has maintained a “friendly neutrality” because the country “needs the stability of external sources, resource security, stability at the borders and the presence of a ‘strategic buffer’ in competition with the United States.” (Safronova, 2022). Still, China's economic involvement in several Russian projects came to a halt and the country has restrained from an all-out economic support to Russia as Chinese companies do not want to risk being sanctioned. After initial disengagement, China has gradually deepened economic cooperation with Russia in the second part of 2022 and compared to the same period in 2021, trade volume has increased 50 percent. Still, actual figures may be higher as there are no official data of bilateral trade volume (Trofimov, 2022). According to Igor Makarov, Chinese business has tried to hedge the menace of sanctions from the West by diversifying its partnerships with Russian companies and creating parallel infrastructure to deal specifically with Russia through firms not exposed to foreign markets.

Irrespective of the outcomes of the armed conflict in Ukraine, China will not let this spoil relations with Russia (Wishnick, 2022). Apparently, even some segments of Chinese public support Russia. According to opinion research carried out in China in 2022, Russia turned out to be the most positively perceived country: 70 percent of the respondents claimed to have positive views of Russia. Similarly, 80 percent of the respondents

said that their image of Russia has improved in the last three years (Turcsanyi; Dubravcikova; Kironska, 2022).

For Russia, the partnership with China is essential not only at the global level but also at the regional level. The high profile of the bilateral ties legitimises to a certain extent Russia's claims to Asian power. China remains central to Russia's Asia policy and the Russian leadership seems to agree on the need to keep China as a key partner. Nevertheless, Russia necessitates different partners in East Asia as excessive dependency on China would probably jeopardise Russia's sovereignty. Russia's diversification attempts toward Japan and South Korea ultimately did not succeed; therefore, Russia requires to develop relations with other states and Southeast Asian states appear to be one of the most prospective partners.

RUSSIA-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

Relations between the Russian Empire/Soviet Union/Russian Federation and Southeast Asian states have followed distinct and at times contrasting paths. Still, there are some long-term points of confluence throughout different periods; one of the recurrent lines of convergence has seemingly been the struggle from both sides to be recognised as equal partners in Europe. Indeed, at different periods of time, counterbalance to the perceived Euro-centric world has served as common ground for mutual interactions. It should be noted that this was not exclusive to the Soviet period when the USSR portrayed itself as a non-Western power.

Arguably, the first landmark event in mutual interactions occurred when future Russian emperor Nikolai Romanov visited Asia. After inaugurating the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway in Vladivostok in 1891, the Tsarevich embarked in a historic trip to Japan, India, and Siam. In Bangkok, the future Russian Emperor received a sumptuous welcome by King Chulalongkorn the Great, marking the beginning of mutual interactions between both countries. Six years later, as part of its landmark visit to Europe, King Chulalongkorn visited the Russian Empire and was hosted by Nicholas II. According to records, they met "as two old friends", spending plenty of time only the two of them; during the seven days visit, the King of Siam was taken as part of the family by the Romanov (Phiramontri, 2017).

In political terms, for Siam it was the most consequential visit of the entire trip. Amidst threats from colonial powers such as France and Britain, the Russian Emperor asserted that "the independence of Siam will never be curtailed" (Phiramontri, 2017). It has to be emphasised that the Siamese King was treated by the Russian Emperor as equal (Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 1997). This was immortalised in a famous photograph of the two supreme leaders taken in the outskirts of Saint Petersburg. The picture, which was published in different newspapers across Europe, intended to send a political message to European powers. In this sense, the visit of King Chulalongkorn the Great to Saint Petersburg 1897, "sitting side by side with Emperor Nicholas II, boosted Thai position as an equal partner in Europe" (Phubunlap, 2022). In the end, "amicable relations

between Emperor Nicholas II and King Chulalongkorn helped Siam to avoid colonial dependence and maintain balance between the great powers of the time” (Koldunova; Rangsimaporn, 2012).

By the end of the 1960s, the Soviet Union had managed to establish stable relations with all actors in the region. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union had significantly less official contact with maritime Southeast Asia. The USSR exerted influence in determined countries, especially Vietnam and Laos after adopting communist rule in 1975 (Huan; Thambipillai, 2019), whereas relations with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines were characterised by “discontinuous political involvement” and “nominal economic interests” (Kapoor, 2020). In the case of Indonesia, bilateral relations gained momentum after Sukarno-Khrushchev visits and stable relations remained even under Suharto anti-communist regime.

Relations between the USSR and the five ASEAN members at the time strained after the Soviet Union and Vietnam concluded in 1978 the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, and the subsequent invasion of Cambodia. At that time, ASEAN states tilted towards the United States. Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea remained for a decade the main impending issue for developing relations between the USSR and ASEAN (Thakur; Thayer, 1987).

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia practically vanished from East Asia. Still, Russia became ASEAN Dialogue partner in 1996. As noted by Viktor Sumsy, former Director of the ASEAN Centre of MGIMO University, this was a crucial moment as Southeast Asia signalled it wanted Russia to be there notwithstanding its weakness (personal communication, 28 September 2022). Henceforth, Russia has participated in most ASEAN-led forums and joined ASEAN regional structures. At the same time, Russia has developed cooperation with countries with whom it had limited relations in earlier decades. In 2018, ASEAN-Russia relations finally were elevated to a strategic partnership.

Distant neighbours or strategic partners?

Southeast Asia's main goal developed into avoiding being a sphere of ideological and political struggle and limit the influence of major powers. ASEAN countries have managed to develop “a regulatory framework for managing interstate relations, regional cooperation has made the crucial difference between forces of conflict and harmony that lie at the core of the international relations of Southeast Asia” (Bainus; Manurung, 2021). ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN norms so called ‘ASEAN Way’ (consultation and consensus, non-intervention) are well founded in broader East Asia regionalisms (Acharya, 2017). Analyses frequently emphasise the hedging strategy pursued by regional powers in Southeast Asia aimed to manage regional order: a range of policies encouraging middle positions and avoid taking sides to prevent the dominance of foreign powers (Busbarat, 2016).

ASEAN and Russia have forged diverse linkages in the last thirty years through different institutional arrangements. These multilateral avenues have provided Russia the possibility to enhance ties with

different Southeast Asian states (Huan; Thambipillai, 2019). Certainly, Russia's interests in the region have grown and Russia's diplomacy is more visible in the region. Similarly, the strategic value of Russia for Southeast Asia can hardly be denied. According to Viktor Sumsky, during the last decade Russia has signaled its interest to take incremental steps to engage with the region, and Southeast Asia has made clear that it wants Russia to be there. In this sense, "the welcoming of increased Russian interest is a well-thought out move as [ASEAN countries] they focus on hedging to deal with the challenges posed by a changing regional order" (Kapoor, 2020).

Russia's neutral stance has enhanced its position in the region. Arguably, Russia has managed to establish itself in the region as a responsible power. Russia's foreign policy in Southeast Asia, in contrast to that in the West, is much more pragmatic and conciliatory. For Dmitrichenko in Bangkok, unlike the United States, Russia avoids picking sides and has good working relations with all ASEAN states, as a result, Russia is seen as a balancing power in the region.

As in other cases in Asia, economic cooperation between Russia and its partners lags behind from political collaboration. Russia is ASEAN's 11th largest trade partner (Kapoor, 2020). Efforts to further develop economic ties have had limited success and Russia's economic presence in Southeast Asia continues to be weak. In contrast to other powers' economic involvement in the region, Russia's involvement is minimal: before the pandemics Russia constituted barely one percent of ASEAN's total trade. It should be noted that Russia is the largest arms exporter to Southeast Asia, from 2000 to 2021 the value of the country's arms exports to the region was US\$10.87 billion. US exports by comparison, accounted \$8.4 billion for the same period (Storey, 2022).

Certainly, there is a dissonance between the economic and political vectors of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership. This is, "economic obstacles against growing strategic congruence in their perceptions of international processes" (Kanaev; Korolev, 2019). Most analysts agree that weak economic linkages between Russia and ASEAN countries comprise the major impediment to the qualitative improvement of ties.

Inadequate high-level representation at regional summits also has negatively impacted mutual dynamics. President Putin has shown certain unwillingness to forge personal connections with other ASEAN leaders (Mahaseth; Wong, 2022). This in contrast to personal interaction with other leaders in the region such as Xi Jinping, Shinzo Abe, and Narendra Modi. Russia is not represented at the highest levels in regional forums. Indeed, interactions between Russia and ASEAN countries often take place |on the sidelines of world summits. Putin's visit to Singapore for the 2018 East Asia Summit constituted his first attendance to the ASEAN-flagship Forum.

In recent years, Russia has focused ties with Vietnam, Indonesia and Myanmar while also forging ties Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. It should be highlighted that Russia has succeeded in forging closer ties with Indonesia, which apparently has become one of its most important partners in the region. Russia and Indonesia have

managed to establish broad contacts in different spheres since the beginning of the administration of President Widodo, favouring multilateralism over global power competition. For Indonesia, “Russia is an important partner in maintaining stability and security in the region” (Bainus; Manurung, 2021).

Relations with Vietnam comprise one of the main pillars of Russia's policies in Southeast Asia. After relations were close to zero in the 1990s, after Putin's first visit to Vietnam in 2001 bilateral ties improved substantially and the partnership is based on totally different principles; it is a strategic partnership conceived for a long-term perspective determined by a wide range of common interests. Thus, Vietnam remains the closest and more stable partner for Russia (Lokshin, 2021). This strategic partnership reflects in many aspects “the multifacetedness of bilateral relations and the high level of trust” (Vershina, 2022).

Russia's political relations with Southeast Asia remain Vietnam-centred to a certain degree. Aside from forums and news about high-profile summits, for most Russians Vietnam remains ASEAN's centre of attention whereas Thailand and Indonesia's province Bali constitute the pole of attraction to Russian tourists. In this sense, Russia should attempt to make a “breakthrough in Asian affairs” and activate its Asian vector that should consist not only of conferences, seminars and summits but recipes to solve political issues in the region” (Trofimchuk, 2022). In this sense, for Russia it seems imperative to participate in the decision-making processes in the region and not only at declarative level, otherwise, Southeast Asia may ultimately overlook Russia.

In contrast to other major powers, Russia has a historical disadvantage in the region. Russia does not form part of regional integration processes and ASEAN countries are not in rush for cooperation. Russia is arriving to a region that has already its own dynamic and is unable to determine the agenda. ASEAN countries engage with Russia because of what it is at global level but it is perceived as a distant partner. As for many in the region, “Russia is a European power focused primarily on its relations with the West, drawing strength from its high-profile ties with China” (Dave, 2016). Russia's relations with Southeast Asia are insufficient in substance and effort (Tsvetov, 2016), and at times “minimalist, ad-hoc and reactive” (Huan; Thambipillai, 2019).

ASEAN states have decided not taking sides and to hedge the growing antagonism between the US and China in Asia-Pacific – seeking opportunities but working to place controls and limits on its development. Ergo, Southeast Asia welcomes Russia's great power interests in the region as part of its hedging strategy and attempt to bring other great powers to the region to increase interdependence and reduce the possibility of conflict. This opens up different opportunities for Russia.

The armed conflict in Ukraine has certainly added a sense of urgency to Russia's plans in Southeast Asia. But to what extent can the hybrid war between Russia and the West in Ukraine affairs alter current trends in Russia-Southeast Asia relations?

PROSPECTS FOR INTERACTIONS AFTER THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

The Russian military operation in Ukraine has been seen with ambivalence in Southeast Asia; ASEAN countries have continued to focus on regional issues related to integration and development whilst being vocal against excluding Russia from international structures. Responses and attitudes from the ten ASEAN members towards the armed conflict have significantly varied, ranging from the strong condemnation of Singapore and the subsequent imposition of sanctions to Myanmar's outright endorsement. For most ASEAN countries, it is clear that even while condemning the violation of other countries' sovereignty, officially they have not placed Russia or Ukraine in an aggressor-victim axis.

Singapore was the only ASEAN member to condemn Russia by name and impose sanctions. According to Russian scholars, despite sanctions are far from being symbolic, the impact will be minimal as since 2014 economic cooperation considerably decreased. Other countries have only condemned violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and called to end hostilities. Thailand has maintained cordial relations with Russia and has tried to avoid taking sides remaining neutral during the conflict. Laos and Vietnam have sought to preserve their time-hallowed relations with Russia and have refrained of any criticism and constantly exercise restraint. Myanmar is the only ASEAN member to vocally support Russia. Indeed, Russia has been one of the first countries to recognise the military government in Naypyidaw. Multilaterally, ASEAN has expressed deep concern over hostilities in Ukraine and calling all parties to exercise maximum restraint (ASEAN, 2022). In this sense, ASEAN simply followed its approach which maximises diplomatic options and manoeuvrability, and distanced itself equally from Russia, Ukraine, and Western countries.

Economic ties between Russia and ASEAN countries will certainly resent the "draconian sanctions" in place by the West and this will leave little space for furthering cooperation (Korolev, 2022). Nevertheless, as Viktor Sumsky suggest, most ASEAN countries will not refrain to buy cheaper hydrocarbons nor to engage in trade with Russia if it happens to be beneficial. Much will depend on Russia's ability to adapt to partners and its necessities considering new conditions. Indonesia and Vietnam seem to be the most prospective partners, but the list should not be reduced to them. For instance, Malaysia could partially compensate for the current losses in the field of high-tech products.

In bilateral terms, practically all Southeast Asian countries have maintained stable and cordial diplomatic ties with Russia and have not ceded to the pressure of Western countries to isolate Russia. It should be noted the important role that Indonesia has played in this matter. In late June 2022, President Widodo embarked on a landmark visit to Europe, including visits to Kiev and Moscow and sustaining meetings with his counterparts Zelensky and Putin. As noted by a Russian specialist, "Indonesia, for the first time in modern history, entered the European and global arena beyond the historical borders of its sphere of influence, reclaiming its role as a global intermediary" (Kuklin, 2022). Indeed, the country archipelago became the first Southeast Asian state attempting

to impact global events through multilateralism. Indonesia attempted to speak to the wider world and specially the West representing Southeast Asian countries and demonstrating the state of “realpolitik” in the region (Chongkittavorn, 2022).

The visit of President Widodo attempted to prove the country's ability to chair the G20 and not further destabilise the world economy but “recover together”. Indeed, the armed conflict in Ukraine coincided with the “ASEAN year” as Indonesia and Thailand took over the chairmanship of key global and regional organisations, the G20 and APEC respectively. As Russian scholar Ekaterina Koldunova points out, despite big pressure from the United States and the European Union, Southeast Asian countries rejected calls to exclude Russia from ASEAN-centred format. According to her, for ASEAN multilateral institutions the organisation of the summits comprised an endurance test (Personal Communication 30 September 2022). President Putin decided not to attend any of the summits. For Russian scholars Timofey Bordachev and Vasily Kashin, whilst it was desirable in political terms Putin attending the summit in Indonesia, the “fate” of Russia-Southeast Asia ties and the G20 would be decided not in Bali but in Ukraine (Bordachev, 2022). In the end and despite all complexities, the three summits were successfully hosted by Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand with the participation of the Russian Federation.

According to Viktor Sumsy, many in Southeast Asia would lose if Russia, who is seen as at the forefront in the struggle for a multipolar world, completely failed in Ukraine and weakened. Notwithstanding Western sanctions and political pressure, ASEAN countries have signalled their interest in Russia to become involved in regional affairs. Nevertheless, the current model of interactions between Russia and Southeast Asian countries seems to be exhausted and has been unable to evolve into an actual strategic partnership. Arguably, there are three features that may turn vital in this endeavour: (a) the development/engagement of Asiatic Russia; (b) being a viable option for hedging between the US and China; (c) a shift in the attitudes of the Russian elites towards Asia.

(a) *Asiatic Russia*. Arguably, one of the intrinsic reasons for Russia to be perceived as a distant partner in Southeast Asia is that Siberia, and particularly the RFE, is still viewed by these countries as a Russian territory in Asia, but not as Russia per se. The mere existence of Asiatic Russia is not sufficient basis for Russia to be recognised as an Asian power. Ergo, Asiatic Russia may play a crucial role in Russia's shift towards closer relations with Asian countries.

In this sense, physical connectivity comprises one of the main obstacles hindering further economic cooperation, particularly due to “the poor level of transport infrastructure in the Russian Far East and its insufficient integration into the logistic network of the Asia-Pacific region” (Kanaev; Korolev, 2019). The situation was tested a few months after Russia's military campaign in Ukraine: as European companies refused to work with Russian cargo, Saint Petersburg and other Russia's ports in the Baltic were largely “blocked”. Consequently, it was expected that flows could be redirected to Asiatic Russia through Vladivostok and Vostochny ports.

Indeed, there is an increasing demand for transport corridors to the Russian Far East. The main question, however, is how border and port infrastructure in the region can handle the recent workload increase that could lead to an even greater growth of export-import flows (EastRussia(a), 2022). News emerged about ports in Primorskiy Krai overloaded by cargo and long waiting lines for freight to be transported through the Trans-Siberian Railway (Primamedia, 2022). The situation in Russian far eastern ports became critical by Summer 2022 and ports such as Vladivostok and Vostochny started working to the limit. According to specialists, cargo ships arriving to the RFE had to wait in average ten days to be unloaded as they were working at full capacity due to lack of infrastructure and personnel.

As a matter of fact, the new economic reality opens up new chances for RFE to become a larger hub of Russia with countries of East Asia. Nevertheless, the turn of the majority of logistics chains to the Far East has led to a significant shortage of transportation capacity in the region (Bashkatova, 2022). Thus, it is essential for Russia to enlarge and modernise current transportation infrastructure in the RFE, particularly the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) and to clear up bottlenecks at customs checkpoints. As per Russian officials: “Western markets have closed for Russia, only the eastern ports remain. Therefore, building infrastructure for Russia’s turn to the East is an important task for the country. It is extremely costly, but in the near future it should become a priority for the country” (EastRussia(b), 2022). According to Deputy Prime Minister for the Development of the Far East Yuri Trutnev, the shortage of work power of the Trans-Siberian Railway and BAM comprises about 40 percent of the current demand. In 2022, the demand for transportation would be around 258 million tons, currently both railways can transport about 150-160 million tons. Thus, the volume of non-transported cargo could reach 100 million tons (Bashkatova, 2022).

It is imperative for Russia to pay utmost attention to improve Asiatic Russia-Southeast Asia connectivity and develop air and maritime communications linking the region with the Russian Far East and ease dependency on Japanese and South Korean transport companies (Lukshin, 2021). The absence of direct flights embodies Russia-ASEAN weak connectivity. It should be noted that in October 2022 Russia launched a direct flight to Laos from Vladivostok, linking the RFE the capital Vientiane. At the same time, the FESCO transport group launched a regular sea line FESCO VIETNAM DIRECT LINE (FVDL) on the route Vladivostok – Haiphong (Vietnam) – Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) – Ningbo (China) – Vladivostok. This should constitute one big first step in the region’s integration process. (EastRussia(b), 2022).

(b) Viable option for hedging. As Russia and China declare a “partnership with no limits”, an important question rapidly arises: to what extent Russia’s relations with Southeast Asian countries can be limited/affected by close relations with China?

Southeast Asia’s quest for multipolarity is not unambiguous; it consists of many vectors and despite the clear presence of certain anti-West sentiments, it would be fallacious to argue that they comprise the main

element. Arguably, the current hedging strategy of the region is more China-related. According to the latest survey *The State of Southeast Asia 2022* (Seah, 2022), China is notoriously seen by Southeast Asian elites as the most influential economic and political power in the region, 59 and 41 percent respectively. Incidentally, 64 percent of the respondents claimed to be “worried about China’s growing regional economic influence”. Concern is particularly pronounced within the respondents from Vietnam (86 percent). Conversely, Indonesia and Cambodia appear to be the least concerned over China’s economic influence. By the same token, 49 percent of the regional elites in Southeast Asia “distrust” China whereas 54 percent “trust” the United States. Finally, when asked, “if ASEAN was forced to align itself with one of the two strategic rivals, which should it choose?” 61 percent of the respondents replied they would choose the US whereas 39 named China. Vietnamese elites decisively choose the United States (77 percent) whereas regional elites in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia are somewhat equally divided. Finally, 73 percent of the respondents fear that ASEAN is becoming an arena of major power competition and its member states may become major power proxies. For Vietnam and Cambodia, this concern ranks at the top at 90.4 and 84.3% respectively.

Certainly, there is a consistent trend in the region’s anxiety over China’s growing influence. Nevertheless, for the regional elites Russia does not appear to be one of the most viable third parties to hedge against the US-China strategic rivalry (Skosyrev, 2022). In this matter, the EU and Japan seem to be the elites’ first choices and not Russia; for ASEAN countries, Russia’s pivot to Asia signifies primarily Russia siding with China. Ergo, if there is no effort from the Russian side to build simultaneously ties with other regional powers, this could negatively impact Russia’s position as a neutral and strategic player in the region. Russia should avoid being perceived as a pure declarative power and most importantly an independent actor in relation to China. In this sense, one of the most prospective partners is the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

It has to be emphasised that such a partnership with Vietnam should be not conceived as an alternative to Russia’s partnership with China but together as diversification of ties in the East so to prevent relations with China “to become those of vassal and suzerain” (Lokshin, 2021). Vietnam remains the closest and more stable partner for Russia. At the same time, Vietnam position as a middle power becomes more precarious as it attempts to hedge the growing Russia-China and the US antagonism. As Ekaterina Koldunova underlines, among all ASEAN countries Vietnam faces the biggest foreign policy dilemma. On the one hand, Vietnam endures tremendous pressure for the US and its allies to curtail ties with Russia. On the other hand, as the antagonism between the United States and China continue to grow, Vietnamese bamboo diplomacy seems to be gradually losing manoeuvrability. “As a result, [Vietnam] it is walking a tightrope between the superpowers. But as their rivalry gets more intense, Vietnam’s tightrope will get thinner. There will likely be a time when the tightrope becomes too thin to walk” (Vuving, 2022).

Vietnamese scholars verily believe that Russia's military operation in Ukraine could set a bad precedent if similar incidents were to occur in Southeast Asia, particularly in the context of the growing antagonism between China and the United States. Vietnam remains "friendly neutral" to Russia's actions in Ukraine and whilst Vietnamese political elites sympathise with the victims in Ukraine, they certainly blame NATO for provoking this conflict. Still, many in Vietnam fear China could at some point take similar actions in the South China Sea (Personal Communication, Hanoi, April 2023).

Russia could become a power balance in the region by supporting regional order amidst the growing antagonism between China and the United States. Ergo, Russia should reconceptualise Russia-China-Vietnam relations and in general Russia-China-Southeast Asia relations. A reinvigorated partnership with Vietnam and a strategic partnership with Indonesia would help Russia to cement its image as a reliable partner and as an effective power balance.

(c) *Attitudes of Russian elites.* One of the main impediments to significantly improve ties with Southeast Asia is the Eurocentric worldview of the Russian elites. In the aftermath of the merger of Crimea with Russia in 2014, Russian China-specialist Vladimir Portyakov disputed the idea of Russia's reorienting itself to Asia. According to him, most of the Russian elites were mostly pro-Western, including Dmitri Medvedev and all vice-prime ministers. In the words of Portyakov: they were "classical liberals", whose heart and soul aware not in Asia but in Europe" (Personal Communication, 20 April 2016). Indeed, among the Russian intellectual elite, the majority belongs to those people who are still European oriented. Specially the liberal part of the society, which is the core of the economic group of the Russian government and Russia experts, and they are still very influential, and prior to the military conflict in Ukraine they still asserted that Russia should collaborate primary with Europe. To what extent have hostilities in Ukraine and the hybrid war between Russia and the West altered this?

Dmitri Trenin, long-time director of the Carnegie Moscow Endowment for Peace, argues that "long gone are the days when Moscow could straddle the divide between the West and the non-West" (2022). Consistently, Trenin calls for the preferment of non-Western embassy posting over the Western ones. According to the Russian scholar: "Above all, [Russia] it needs to give priority to relations with non-Western countries over de facto frozen ties with the West. Being an ambassador to Indonesia should be more prestigious than an ambassadorship in Rome" (Trenin, 2022).

In the same manner, Fyodor Lukyanov, editor-in-chief of Russia in Global Affairs and Research Director of the Valdai Discussion Club, argues that "Russia faces a totally unprecedented existential challenge". Consequently, Russia must attract the non-Western world not on an ideological basis but in more practical matters and benefits from interactions. For this endeavour, Lukyanov considers that "one prerequisite is necessary. Understand that all this is not a way to beat the West, but the only guarantee of Russia's adaptation to the changed

circumstances for its survival. What we are used to will not be any longer” (Lukyanov, 2022).

Before the war, there had been much ambiguity over Russia's turn to Asia. For the last decade, the East has been “mostly a function of the interaction between Russia and the West” (Narozhna, 2021). In other words, relations with Asia were not an end in itself, but a geopolitical bargaining tool. Plausibly, Russian elites mostly saw the conflict with the West as an interval before a new future rapprochement. Russia has now severed consciously ties with the West, however. It seems imperative for the Russian elites to follow a strategic and congruent approach to Southeast Asia. Arguably, success on this endeavour will hinge more on will than on capabilities.

Strategic shifts of unprecedented proportions are unfolding in global affairs. Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has transformed the political and economic landscape for the country. Most of Russian analysts/civil servants interviewed for this work appear to be certain that Western countries attempt to torpedo multilateral structures created in the last two decades and exclude Russia from global decision-making processes. In this sense, there is an ostensible complementarity between Russia's and Southeast Asia's interests and possibilities. ASEAN countries appear to be as one of the best natural partners of Russia as it promotes multilateralism and multipolarity that Russia favours.

At the G20 Summit in Bali, the Russian delegation headed by Foreign Minister Lavrov was welcomed at the airport with a banner depicting an “updated” map of Russia, including the four provinces Russia had incorporated in late September (Rentv, 2022). Southeast Asian countries have made a few polite nods in the direction of Russia, but they are not in rush for cooperation. Several ASEAN countries have slyly and subtly expressed Russia they understand the reasons behind its military operation, and they have signaled their readiness to explore new economic opportunities. Ultimately, Russia has first to determine to what extent it is serious on its “reorientation” to Asia and what it expects from it, and whether it is ready to recalibrate substantially its relationship with Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSIONS

Russia's self-perception of being a great power in a multipolar world plays a central and defining role in Russia's foreign policy. As noted by Tsygankov (2020), greatpowerness is associated “not only with independent foreign policy and national security, but also with the opportunities and influence that only a few states in the world have”. It is to be seen whether Russia can influence regional dynamics in Southeast Asia. Prior to the armed conflict in Ukraine, relations with East Asia were not an end in itself for Russia but means to counter the West. There was no comprehensive vision in Russia for its relations with Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular. Additionally, Russia's Asian strategy was Sino-centric. New patterns of cooperation comprise the condition of possibility for Russia to substantially move closer to Southeast Asia. Inasmuch as no reconceptualisation of the Russia-Southeast relations is

articulated by Moscow and framed on current realities, it seems implausible to change prior trends.

Russia-Southeast Asia relations show that despite evident achievements in various spheres, Russia still lacks political and economic strength in the region to carry a proactive agenda. Arguably, one of the main reasons is due to the low level of interactions between Asiatic Russia and Southeast Asia. It is paradoxical that Russia conceives of itself as a Euro-Pacific power but most channels of interactions between Russia and Southeast Asia does not occur in Asia-Pacific but via Moscow. As to enhance economic and political ties with ASEAN countries, Russia should strive to build relations as a federation, avoiding relations to be triangulated. It is crucial to have the active involvement of Asiatic Russia and particularly the RFE.

Certainly, Russia's partnership with China acted as a strategic cushion for the country's leadership to launch the military operation in Ukraine. At the same time, warm relations with long-term allies in Asia such as India and Vietnam reinforced Russia's decision to make such a dangerous move and take the risks of being cut-off financially from the West. In this sense, relations not only with China but with other Asian middle and small powers is crucial for Russia's development in the upcoming years. Undoubtedly, Southeast Asia appears to be one of the most prospective regions for cooperation. Additionally, Russia-Southeast Asia ties could reinforce their mutual aspirations to forge a multipolar world and hedge the growing antagonism between the United States and China, which plausibly will exacerbate in the foreseeable future.

One of the challenges Russia faces in engaging Asia, is that Russia is in Asia but not of Asia. Russia should avoid being perceived as a pure declarative power and most importantly an independent actor in relation to China. Therefore, Russia should strive to follow a middle course in Southeast Asia: hedge the antagonism seeking opportunities but limiting the trend towards US-China bipolarity. This also points Russia towards new understanding with other states in the region that are hedging, one a well-known partner – Vietnam – but also those that are less recognised, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

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SINO-RUSSIAN ENERGY COOPERATION IN THE POST-COLD WAR (2000-2021)¹



COOPERAÇÃO ENERGÉTICA SINO-RUSSA NO PÓS GUERRA FRIA (2000-2021)

COOPERACIÓN ENERGÉTICA SINO-RUSA EN LA POS GUERRA FRÍA (2000-2021)

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze Sino-Russian energy cooperation. Energy cooperation is the cornerstone in the relations between Russia and China. The Russian interest in this cooperation is to assure demand for the country's energy exports, to acquire investment capital, and to benefit from Chinese labour. On the Chinese side, the aim has been to obtain access to Russian natural resources and to invest surplus capital. Despite the overlap in supply and demand, as well as the geographical proximity, the Russian energy market is directed towards Europe, while Chinese energy demand primarily is covered by the Middle East and Central Asia. The need for energy diversification has changed this situation and spurred Sino-Russian cooperation. The article is structured in three parts: it first presents Sino-Russian energy trade, secondly, it treats the agreements signed between both countries, and finally, it analyses energy cooperation. We concluded that this cooperation tends to endure due to the energy-related ties formed as part of the long-term agreements and construction of infrastructure. Also, that this cooperation is of a strategic nature for both countries, as it offers an alternative to other energy relations and provides the necessary room of maneuver to defend central political and security-related interests.

Keywords: Energy cooperation; Russia; China.

RESUMO

A cooperação energética é o principal elo no relacionamento entre Rússia e China. O interesse russo nessa cooperação é, sobretudo, assegurar demanda para suas exportações energéticas, adquirir capital para investimento e aproveitar a mão de obra chinesa. E o interesse chinês é ter acesso aos recursos naturais russos e investir seu capital excedente. Apesar da coincidência de oferta e demanda e da proximidade geográfica, o mercado energético russo é voltado majorita-

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riamente para Europa e o fornecimento energético chinês obtido sobretudo do Oriente Médio e da Ásia Central. É a necessidade de diversificação energética que inicia a mudança desse cenário e impulsiona a cooperação sino-russa. O objetivo do artigo consiste em analisar a cooperação energética sino-russa. Para tanto, o artigo está estruturado em três partes: primeiro, apresenta o comércio energético sino-russo, em seguida aborda os acordos firmados entre os dois países; e por fim, analisa a cooperação energética. Conclui-se que essa cooperação tende a ser duradoura em razão dos vínculos energéticos criados com os acordos de fornecimento a longo prazo e a construção de infraestruturas. Ademais, constata-se que a cooperação é estratégica para ambos países, pois oferece alternativa às demais relações energéticas proporcionando a liberdade de ação necessária para defender seus interesses em questões político-securitárias.

Palavras-chave: Cooperação energética; Rússia; China.

RESUMEN

La cooperación energética es el eslabón principal en la relación entre Rusia y China. El interés de Rusia en esta cooperación es, sobre todo, asegurar la demanda de sus exportaciones energéticas, adquirir capital para invertir y aprovechar la mano de obra china. Y el interés chino es tener acceso a los recursos naturales rusos e invertir su excedente de capital. A pesar de la coincidencia de oferta y demanda y la proximidad geográfica, el mercado energético ruso se concentra principalmente en Europa y la oferta energética china se obtiene principalmente de Oriente Medio y Asia Central. Es la necesidad de diversificación energética lo que inicia el cambio en este escenario e impulsa la cooperación chino-rusa. El objetivo del artículo es analizar la cooperación energética chino-rusa. Para ello, el artículo se estructura en tres partes: primero, presenta el comercio energético chino-ruso, luego aborda los acuerdos firmados entre los dos países; y finalmente, analiza la cooperación energética. Se concluye que esta cooperación tiende a ser duradera debido a los lazos energéticos creados con acuerdos de suministro a largo plazo y la construcción de infraestructuras. Además, parece que la cooperación es estratégica para ambos países, ya que ofrece una alternativa a otras relaciones energéticas, brindándoles la libertad de acción necesaria para defender sus intereses en temas político-de seguridad.

Palabras clave: Cooperación energética; Rusia; China.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In December 2019, the pipeline Power of Siberia, was inaugurated, a result of the “silent agreement” (BBC, 2019) between China and Russia. The agreement, which was reached in May 2014, encompassed a contract worth some US\$ 400 billion according to which Gazprom committed to supplying China with 38 billion of m³ of gas annually, during a period of 30 years, through an oriental route: the Power of Siberia pipeline (Gazprom; Pallardy, 2020). At the inauguration of Power of Siberia, Xi Jinping (in power since 2013) declared: “The Eastern route of the Russian-Chinese gas pipeline is a landmark project of bilateral energy cooperation. It is an example of deep integration and mutually advantageous cooperation of our countries” (Tass, 2019).

According to Salin (2011, p. 72) the essence of the bilateral relations between Russia and China can be resumed by the following sentence “Russian natural resources in exchange for access to Chinese financial resources, including conditional loans”. Salin argues that the objective of the

Chinese policy of partnership with Russia is to gain access to Russian natural and energy resources, and also to establish long-term economic ties to guarantee the continued growth of the Chinese economy; on the Russian side, the objective is to ensure exports of natural resources and to obtain Chinese capital and labour (because of the Russian demographic decline).

This article's goal is to analyze the Sino-Russian energy cooperation in the period from 2000 to 2021. For this purpose, answers are sought for the following two questions: how do China and Russia cooperate within the field of energy? Which role does this cooperation play within both countries? Two hypotheses were established in relation to these questions: hypothesis 1 sustains that China concedes loans and financing for Russia in exchange for long-term energy supplies; hypothesis 2 affirms that this corporation is strategic for both countries, as it diversifies energy demand and supply (guaranteeing energy security and economic development) and consequently, provides a wider room of manoeuvre regarding political and security-related matters – such as the Ukraine crisis (2014)⁵ and the South China Sea Conflicts⁶. Since its initial economic opening in the 1970s, Chinese energy demand has increased markedly. The elevation of industrial, civil, and military consumption has repositioned China as the world's largest energy importer (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 2). According to BP (2022, p. 8), China is the largest global primary energy consumer⁷ (26,5%).

Russia, on the other hand, is the largest global exporter of oil (12,3%) and natural gas through pipelines⁸ (28,6%) and occupies the place as the second-largest global producer of oil (with 12,2%, the same amount as Saudi Arabia, behind only the United States (18,5%)) and natural gas (with 17,4%) and the sixth-largest global producer of coal (with 5,5%) (BP, 2022, p. 15, 27, 29, 37, 38)). The background for this position of energy dominance vary from an abundance of natural reserves⁹, a highly developed energy sector during the Cold War, to the investments made by Moscow within this sector in recent decades (Hill, 2004, p. 47).

Despite significant investments within the sector, Russia still needs to modernize its energy infrastructure (Putin, 1999, p. 51), as it suffers from: 1) a high degree of depreciation of capital goods within the Fuel and Energy Complex (FEC) (nearly 60% within the gas industry and electrical energy and 80% within the oil refinement industry) apart from a minimum replacement of these goods – between 2005-2015, the replacement rate was approximately 2%, – with an exception for oil extraction, which was 4%; 2) technological backwardness in relation to the average level of technology within energy industries (Kuznetsova, N.; Kuznetsova, E., 2015, p. 164-165); 3) aging infrastructure; and 4) the need for increased energy efficiency (Bushev 2014 *apud* Kuznetsova, N.; Kuznetsova, E., 2015, p. 166). Moreover, oil and gas represent half (58,7%) of goods exports (World Bank Group, 2018, p. V), which along with service exports represent more than ¼ (30,7% in 2018) of Russian GDP (World Bank, no data).

It is hereby evident that Russia needs investment in order to develop and modernize its energy infrastructure. Conversely, China requires energy resources to maintain its economic growth rates, while it possesses capital to construct the necessary infrastructure for its energy supply (Bolt, 2014, p. 50-52).

5. The crisis was marked by a series of protests, supposedly incited by the United States and the European Union, against former Ukrainian President, Victor Yanukovich, not to sign a trade agreement with the European Union. The onset of the crisis resulted in the destitution of Yanukovich from the presidency and the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

6. The divergences in this region regard a dispute about maritime resources spread over four island groups (amongst which are the islands of Spratly and Paracel) and the delimitation of territorial waters claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The situation is made worse by the participation of external actors, such as the US, Japan, India, and Australia who are attracted by the strategic importance of these waters (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 20).

7. This estimate includes petroleum, natural gas, coal, nuclear energy, hydroelectricity and renewables (BP, 2022, p. 9).

9. Russia retains the largest natural gas reserves in the world (19,8%), the second largest coal reserves (15,2%) and the sixth-largest oil reserves (6,1%) (BP, 2019, p. 14, 30, 42).

8. The largest global exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is Australia, which represents 20,9% of global exports (BP, 2022, p. 36).

Traditionally, in Russia, this sector has been mainly aimed at Europe, while the Chinese energy supplies have primarily been obtained from the Middle East (oil) and Central Asia (gas). According to Yilmaz and Daksueva (2017, p. 8-9), the aspiration to change this situation and the consequent evolution of the Sino-Russia energy relations takes place as a response to two different types of challenges: 1) geopolitical – more precisely the Conflicts in the South Chinese Sea and the Ukrainian Crisis (2014) – which resulted in the annexation of Crimea by Russia and in the subsequent sanctions; and 2) geoeconomic, as both aim to deepen their energy relations, given that Russian exports are mainly directed towards the European market (See Graph 1 and 4), and as the Chinese oil imports mainly originate from West Africa and the Middle East (nearly 60% – See Graph 2).

Russia becomes relevant for China as an energy exporter (Salin, 2011, p. 60; Gabuev, 2015, p. 2), due to the Chinese concern related to the country's oil imports from West Africa and the Middle East, which are transported by sea routes and pass through the Malacca Strait, a point which could become blocked in the case of an escalation of conflict in the South China Sea. Moreover, the political instability in the Middle East is another factor of Chinese preoccupation concerning its energy supply (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 7-25). In Salin's analysis (2011, p. 61), Russia is the only supplier which can guarantee a stable flow in the case of military conflict between Beijing and Washington or if the situation in the South China Sea simply becomes too unstable.

Russia, on the other hand, has become increasingly focused on its Turn to the East, since the 2000s, due to the Asian economic growth (Lukin, 2019, p. 1-2). In its official foreign policy documents Moscow affirms that the Western ability to dominate the global economy and politics is decreasing, while global power and development potential is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific (Mid, 2013, 2016). Trenin (2015, p. 33-34) views this shift in the politico-economic pole towards the Asia-Pacific as the main motivation for the Russian reorientation towards the East.

Two events have contributed to accelerate the Russian reorientation towards the East: the global financial crisis, which took place in 2008, and the Ukrainian crisis six years later. The financial crisis affected the Russian economy, which was in need of rebalancing, but the country could not seek assistance from the West, which itself was in the course of reviving its economy (Trenin, 2015, p. 33). The effect of the financial crisis of 2008 which was felt most by the Russians was, according to Sussex (2014, p. 215), the lack of liquidity and the increasingly expensive credit which its energy companies faced. This was the case with Gazprom. As a consequence of this, China conceded loans to Russia for the construction of energy infrastructure in 2009 (energy for loans) (Sussex, 2014, p. 215). The second episode regards the political and economic crisis faced by Ukraine towards the end of 2013 and early 2014 that resulted in Russian annexation of Crimea and Western sanctions imposed on Russia.

According to Kaczmarek (2015, p. 12-13), the financial crisis of 2008 led to 1) the end of the "Russian economic renaissance of the 2000s" – as the Russian economy was incapable of resuming the pace of growth that

had marked the period before the crisis and eventually stagnated; 2) the recession of the European and American economies which resorted to austerity policies; and 3) the acceleration of the Chinese ascension (that had its beginning from the 1990s) – which despite having suffered from an increase in unemployment and a reduction of economic growth still was much more modestly impacted than the Western powers.

By redirecting its trade and investment strategies towards Asia, Russia concentrated on China (Lukin, 2019, p. 1-2). The focus on China can be explained by the fact that this is the second-largest global economy, which held significant capital stocks (Bolt, 2014, p. 50-52) and furthermore also was one of the main energy consumers and importers. The combination of these factors made China the ideal partner for Russia which needed to guarantee its energy demand and financial resources to develop its economy (Salin, 2011, p. 72).

In sum, the two states deepened their energy cooperation as a strategy for export and import diversification which has proved to be compatible and complementary and as a response to geopolitical challenges (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 7-9). With this in mind, seeking to analyze the Sino-Russian energy cooperation between 2000 and 2021, this article is structured in three parts: the first presents the Sino-Russian energy trade, the second engages with the agreements signed between the two countries, and the third analyses energy cooperation.

SINO-RUSSIAN ENERGY TRADE

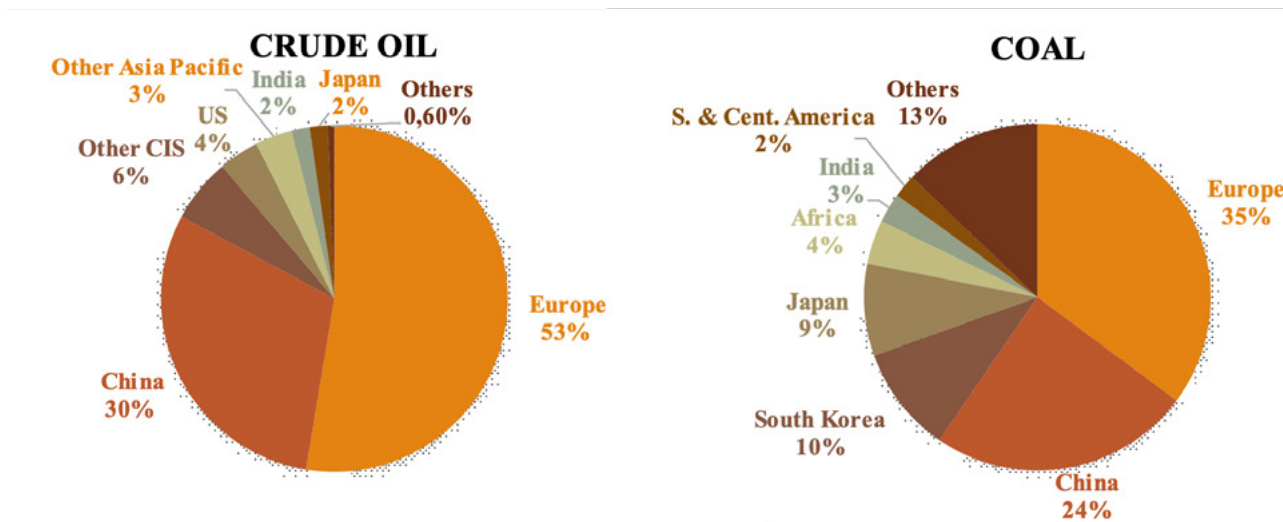
In 1996, Beijing and Moscow established the Russian-Chinese Energy Cooperation Committee which strengthened the bilateral cooperation. However, in this period, as Xu and Reisinger (2018, p. 3) highlight, the Chinese demand for Russian energy resources was still suppressed. The relation between Beijing and Moscow became closer when the two countries in 2001 signed the Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 2). However, it was only from 2008, when another mechanism was established, the Russia-China Energy Dialogue (RCED), that the Sino-Russian energy cooperation entered a trajectory of rapid development. According to Xu and Reisinger (2018, p. 3-12), this occurred because practically all bilateral cooperation initiatives within the energy sector from 2008 were discussed and effectuated within the RCED. For example, it was from this year that Russia ceased selling gas to China at the same price at which it sold to the European market. The RCED permitted a more pragmatic price determination and cooperation was intensified (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 12).

Guided by the deterioration of relations with the West and by economic interests, after the Ukraine Crisis (2014), which resulted in the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the imposition of North-American and European sanctions on the country, Moscow became increasingly oriented towards Beijing. Due to the increase in energy consumption, China became the natural destination for Russia to offset the losses it had incurred because of the sanctions and the decreasing oil prices (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 9). The Chinese financial power also paved the way for

large energy agreements which involved extensive investments in logistics, construction, and maintenance works (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 9).

Currently, China is the main destination for Russian oil exports (accounting for 30% of foreign demand) and coal exports (24%) – see Graph 1.

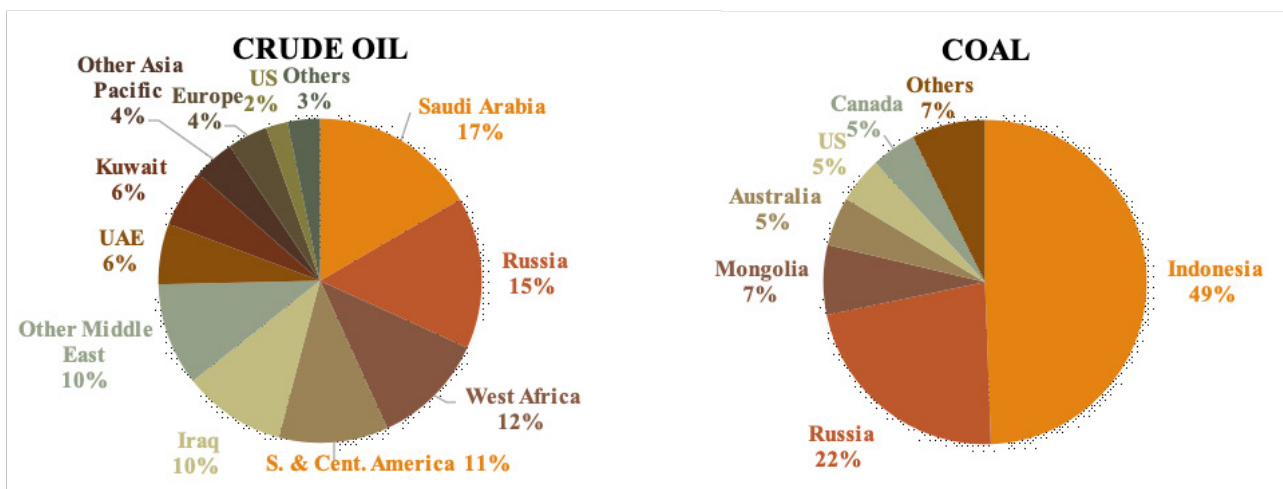
Graph 1- Destination of Russian oil and coal exports in 2021



Author's elaboration based on data from BP (2022, p. 27, 40).

While Russia is the second crude oil (15%) and coal (22%) supplier to China – see Graph 2. The main crude oil supplier to China is Saudi Arabia (17%), which since 2001 had been at the top of the list (DOWNS, 2018) in most of the years. Regarding coal, Indonesia (49%) is the main supplier of commodities to China – see Graph 2.

Graph 2 – Origin of the Chinese crude oil and coal imports in 2021



Author's elaboration based on data from BP (2022, p. 27,40).

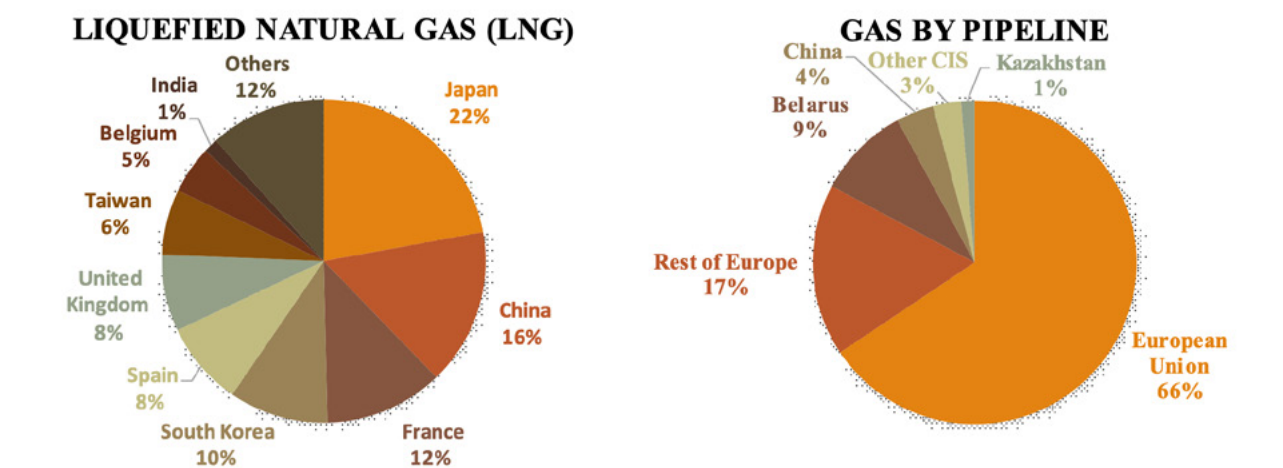
The oil trade between Russia and China grew under favorable geographical and economic conditions. In geographical terms, Russia possesses large oil and natural gas fields in Eastern Siberia, a border region to the industrialized Northeastern China. In economic terms, the Russian economy is blessed with resources that complement the Chinese industrial base (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 3-4).

The energy trade has created such a strong link between the Russian and Chinese economies that the decline in the Chinese GDP growth – which can be observed since 2014 (Spellman; Leite, 2020) – worries Kremlin because a decrease in Chinese growth (which also would affect the country's energy consumption) could seriously compromise the Russian economy (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 15).

Russia supplies oil to China through two pipelines: the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO), the Eastern supply route (the *Taishet-Skovorodino* route (ESPO 1, concluded in 2009) *Skovorodino-Kozmino* (ESPO 2, concluded in 2012) *Skovorodino-Daqing* (*China Spur*, concluded in 2010)); and the *Omsk-Pavlodar-Atasu* Pipeline, in operation since 1980, which supplies China through a Western route which leaves Omsk in Russia and passes through Kazakhstan until reaching China (EIA 2017, 13-14).

In relation to Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), China (16%) is the second destination of Russian exports, while in Russian natural gas exports by pipeline, China stand at a much lower position, responsible for only 4% of the foreign demand – see Graph 3.

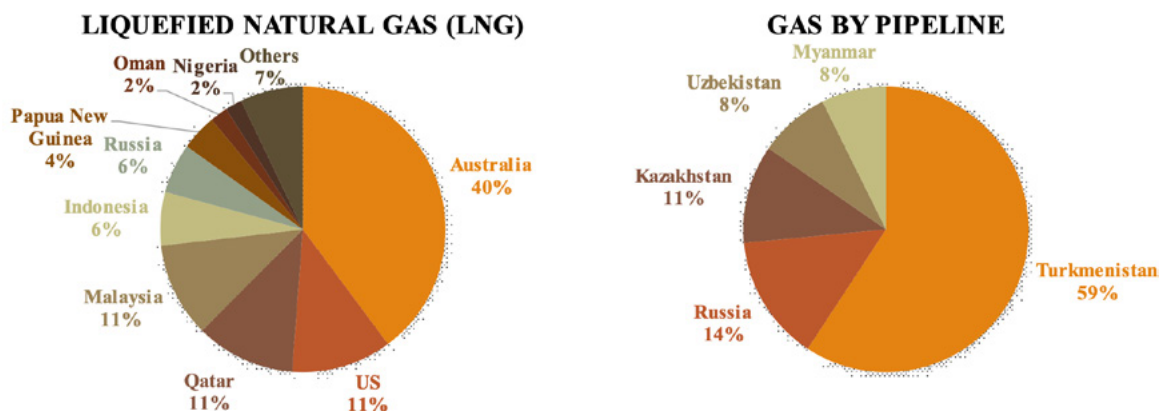
Graph 3 – Destination of Russian natural gas exports in 2021



Own elaboration based on data from BP (2022, p. 36-37).

The Chinese imports of natural gas can be divided into two categories: imports via pipeline, coming mainly from Central Asia (See Graph 4); and imports via ship, in this case of LNG coming mainly from Australia (40%, see Graph 4). China imports more LNG (109,5 bcm) than natural gas via pipeline (53,2 bcm) (BP, 2022, p. 35-37). Despite the low presence of Russian natural gas within the Chinese economy, which only represents 6% of the country's LNG imports – see Graph 4, – the agreements signed in recent years – the theme of the next section – point to a change in this situation.

Graph 4 – Origin of Chinese Natural Gas imports in 2021



Own elaboration based on data from BP (2022, p. 36-37).

The low level of the Chinese imports of natural gas from Russia is understandable when considering that China only began to import natural gas from 2007 (EIA, 2015, p. 16), and, even so, still produces 55% of its consumption (BP, 2022, p. 29-31). Moreover, when China began importing natural gas, the small amounts did not attract Gazprom's interest, which directed Chinese buyers towards Central Asia, and especially Turkmenistan (Gabuev, 2015, p. 3).

In Gabuev's perspective (2015, p. 3), the Chinese orientation towards natural gas from Turkmenistan (which accounts for 59% of Chinese natural gas imports – see Graph 4) can be explained by Moscow's preoccupation with its position on the European market and Gazprom's lack of interest in the Chinese market (which derives from the depressed demand, low prices, and Chinese state regulation). In cooperation with Central Asia, China hereby constructed the Central Asia-China pipeline (between 2007 and 2009), which has its point of departure in Turkmenistan and passes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan before arriving in the Chinese Xinjiang region (Estadão, 2009). Apart from alleviating the immediate Chinese demand for Russian natural gas, it also became an important bargaining chip for China during the energy negotiations with Moscow in 2010 and in the agreement of 2014 with Gazprom. Later, the Chinese energy imports from Turkmenistan awoke Gazprom's interest in the Chinese market (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 8-10).

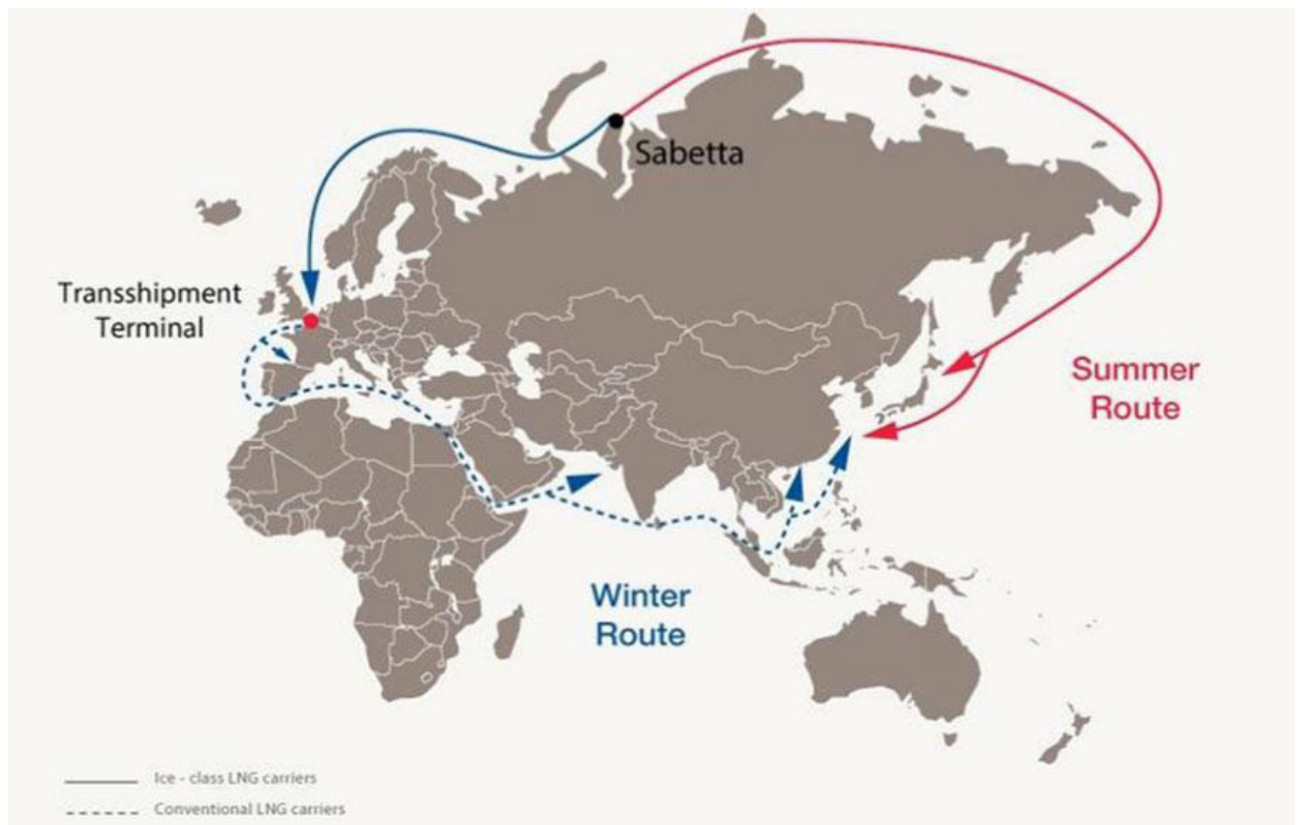
China and Russia have conflicting energy interests in Central Asia – a region that holds large natural gas reserves as well as a strategic position between the two countries and the Middle East. With economic gains in mind, Russia controls the energy infrastructure – because it obtains energy cheaply and resells to Europe – and views the region as part of its sphere of influence, meaning that it does not permit the intrusion of other states. China, on the other hand, is interested in investing, in intensifying economic relations, and in increasing energy imports from Central Asia through energy contracts and infrastructure development, which converges with the Russian objectives in the region¹⁰ (Bolt, 2014, p.

10. On the other hand, the two countries share political and security interests in Central Asia. Both seek to diminish the North American influence and to maintain regional stability. For this purpose, they seek to eradicate the "three evils" – "terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism", and to limit military North American military bases in Central Asia and avoid the eruption of new Colored Revolutions (ZIEGLER, 2010, p. 233-237). One instrument of cooperation between the two countries in Central Asia is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a bloc of Asian regional integration led by China and Russia.

60-61). Bolt (2014, p. 60) highlights that beyond China and Russia, many countries – such as the United States, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey – also seek influence in Central Asia.

The Russian gas supply to China is shipped through two channels. The LNG from the Yamal peninsula is transported by cargo ships through the Northern Sea Route (equivalent to the “Summer Route” on Map 1) or by the Western Route via the Suez Canal (equivalent to the “Winter Route” on Map 1) – varying according to the time of the year (Reuters, 2018; Lng World News, 2018).

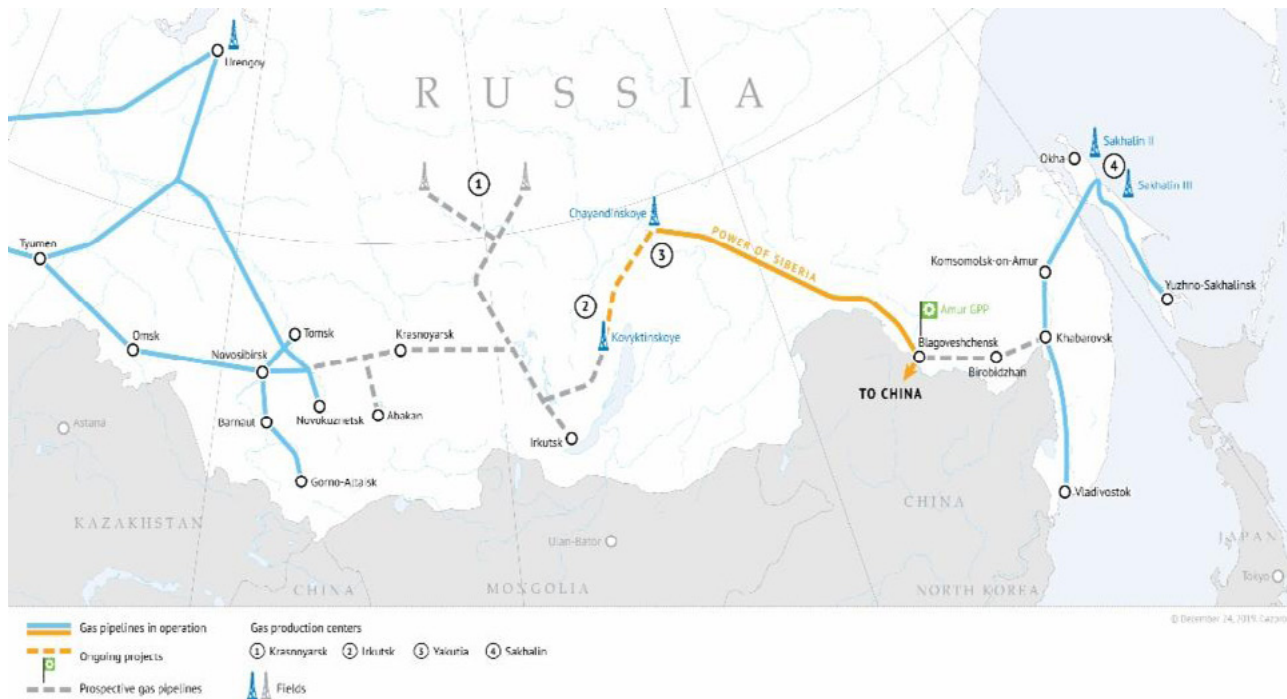
Map 1 – Supply Routes of the Yamal LNG Project



Source: Bianco (2018)

And the natural gas is shipped by the pipeline Power of Siberia (see Map 2), with supply beginning in December 2019 (GAZPROM).

Map 2 – The Power of Siberia pipeline



Source: Gazprom

The main destinations of Russian energy exports are China and Europe (EIA, 2017, p. 11, 21, 28). Although Europe as a whole holds an important position as a consumer of Russian energy resources (see Graph 1 and Graph 3), examining the countries individually, China becomes distinguished and surpasses the European countries as the largest destination of Russian oil and coal exports (as it holds the first place in terms of oil (30%) and coal exports (24% – see Graph 1), and only becomes less relevant regarding natural gas by pipeline (4% – see Graph 3).

The next section presents the agreements signed between China and Russia since 2000, highlighting the continuity and maybe even an increase in the energy trade between China and Russia.

ENERGY AGREEMENTS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CHINA

The Sino-Russian energy cooperation already encompasses trade in energy resources, investments within the energy sector, equity participation, infrastructure development, technological exchanges, nuclear energy projects and even explorations in the Arctic (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 2-10).

Energy cooperation is a vital instrument for the obtainment of Russian objectives, including strategic interactions with China (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017). The Russian interest in energy cooperation with China is, above all, to guarantee demand for its natural resources, to acquire investment capital within the energy sector, and to benefit from Chinese labour (Salin, 2011, p. 73). The Chinese interest in energy cooperation with Russia consists in: 1) guaranteeing energy security through diversification

of its sources of energy supply (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017; Salin, 2011, p. 60); 2) invest its surplus capital; and 3) intensify its trade interactions (Bolt, 2014, p. 50-57).

In Xu and Reisinger's analysis (2018, p. 2), the literature points to various factors which spur Sino-Russian energy trade, such as 1) the overlap in supply and demand – the Chinese energy needs and abundance of Russian energy reserves; 2) the deterioration of Russian relations with the West – this has incentivized Moscow to go beyond pragmatic and short-term energy agreements with China and to move towards strategic cooperation; 3) the Russian aspiration to use energy cooperation with China to promote its economic status in Northeast Asia and the Asia Pacific; and finally 4) Moscow's interest in promoting economic development in the Far East and in Eastern Siberia.

Throughout the 21st Century, various energy agreements were signed between the two countries. According to Meidan (2016, p. 11), in 2005 China conceded the first oil-backed loan to Russia, in line with which the China National Petroleum Corporation – CNPC lend US\$ 6 billion to Rosneft as a payment in advance for the supply of 48,8 million tons of oil until 2010 (Trevisan, p. 2005).

In 2009, the Russian companies Rosneft and Transneft obtained a loan of US\$ 25 billion with the China Development Bank (CDB). As part of this transaction, it was agreed that Transneft would receive US\$ 10 billion (the necessary amount in order to conclude the construction of the ESPO pipeline without delay), while Rosneft would receive another US\$ 15 billion, and in exchange, the company committed to supplying 15 million tons of oil annually during 20 years (the equivalent of 300 million tons in total, as a value of approximately US\$ 90 billion) (Paxton; Soldatkin, 2009). As a result of this agreement, in January 2001, Russia began shipping oil to China through the ESPO pipeline (BOLT, 2014, p. 54).

In June 2013, Rosneft made an agreement worth US\$ 270 billion with the CNPC, as part of which it committed to supplying 300 thousand barrels of oil per day to China during 25 years from 2015; a total of 256 million tons of oil (BBC, 2013; Clover, 2013; Exame, 2013). In October the same year, Rosneft signed a contract of US\$ 85 billion with Sinopec, a Chinese oil refining company, as part of which it committed to supplying the company with some 100 million tons of crude oil for a ten years period (Rosneft, 2013; RT, 2013; Petronotícias, 2013). In this round of negotiations in October 2013, Novatek (a Russian Natural gas company) committed to supplying three million tons of LNG annually to CNPC for 15 years (Rosneft, 2013; RT, 2013; Estadão, 2013; Petronotícias, 2013).

In May 2014, Gazprom and the Chinese State-Owned Company, CNPC, signed a contract at the value of US\$ 400 billion, which determined that Gazprom during 30 years would supply 38 billion m³ of natural gas annually to China through the Power of Siberia pipeline, which was inaugurated in December 2019 (Gazprom; Pallardy, 2020). It is important to highlight that this agreement has been under negotiation for ten years and the price of gas, which always has been a cause of disagreement between Russia and China, – and even blocked negotiations, – was kept secret, including after the signature of the contract (Wan; Hauslohner, 2014).

In 2015, Gazprom and the CNPC signed a preliminary agreement according to which Russia would ship some 30 billion m³ of gas annually to China through the Eastern Route – the pipeline Power of Siberia-2 (Gazprom, 2015; Tass, 2017). Although the project still is on the drawing board, relevant questions such as the price of gas have still not been settled. Gazprom plans to launch Power of Siberia-2 in 2030 (Pallardy, 2020).

Chinese companies also invest – through equity acquisition – in the Russian gas and oil exploration. Amongst the agreements, one was concluded between Rosneft and CNPC to jointly develop the oil and gas fields in Eastern Siberia, while another regards the contract between Rosneft and Sinopec to jointly develop fields of *Russkoye* and *Yurubcheno-Tokhomskoye* (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 5).

In 2016, the Export-Import Bank of China (Exim) and the China Development Bank (CDB) committed to supplying US\$ 12 billion, throughout a 15 years period, to finance the Yamal LNG Project, led by Novatek (Bermingham, 2016; Africa Reuters, 2016). Situated on the Yamal Peninsula (a region rich in natural gas of the Arctic Siberia), the project encompasses production, liquification and transport of natural gas (Sputnik, 2018; Sahuquillo, 2018). Sahuquillo (2018) highlights that this is the energy project with the largest Chinese participation in Russia – approximately 30% divided between CNPC (20%) and the Silk Road Fund (9,9%), the rest of the stocks are held by Novatek (50,1%) and the French Total (20%) (Africa Reuters, 2016; Efe, 2017; Sputnik, 2018; Sahuquillo, 2018) – without Chinese investment, this project would not have been possible.

The main destination of the LNG produced in Yamal are Asia (54%) and Europe (46%) (Exame, 2017) with the main focus on the East, although the Russian icebreakers can travel all year departing from Sabetta (see Map 1) heading West and only six months in the direction Eastwards, given that the ice obstructs and sometimes hinders sailing (Sahuquillo, 2018; Escarda, 2017).

In July 2018, Novatek delivered the first shipment of LNG to Yamal to China via the Northern Sea Route – equivalent to the Summer Route on Map 1 (Arctic Bulk; Reuters, 2018; Novatek, 2018). The deliveries of LNG from the port in Sabetta to China via the Northern Sea Route are significant because they diminish the time and costs of transportation when compared with the first LNG shipment from Yamal to China, which took place through the Western Route – equivalent to the Winter Route on Map 1 – in April that year (Reuters, 2018; Lng World News, 2018; Novatek, 2018; Sun, 2018).

Table 1 resumes the energy agreements presented in this study, albeit it does not necessarily comprise all the contracts signed between the two countries. It nonetheless provides an overview of the intense Sino-Russian energy cooperation.

Table 1 – Energy agreements between Russia and China (2000-2021)

YEAR	RUSSIAN CIA	CHINESE CIA	ENERGY ACTIVITY	VALUE (in billions)	DURATION (years)
2005	Rosneft	CNPC	Oil Supply	US\$ 6	5
2009	Rosneft	CDB	Oil Supply	US\$ 15	20
2009	Transneft	CDB	Construction of the ESPO Pipeline	US\$ 10	X
2013	Rosneft	CNPC	Oil Supply	US\$ 270	25
2013	Rosneft	Sinopec	Oil Supply	US\$ 85	10
2013	Novatek	CNPC	LNG Supply	X	15
2014	Gazprom	CNPC	Natural Gas Supply	US\$ 400	30
2015	Gazprom	CNPC	Natural Gas Supply	X	X
2016	Novatek	CDB e Exim	Yamal LNG Project Financing	US\$ 12	15

X: Information not available.-

Author's elaboration¹¹

11. Based on data from Meidan (2016, 11); Trevisan (2005); Paxton, Soldatkin (2009); Bbc (2013); Clover (2013); Exame (2013); Rosneft (2013); Rt (2013); Estadão (2013); Petronotícias (2013); Gazprom; Pallardy (2020); Gazprom (2015); Tass (2017); Bermingham (2016); Africa Reuters (2016).

Downs (2018) argues that the trend is that Russia will remain as the main source of oil for China due to political and infrastructure-related reasons, and because of the long-term contracts – as presented in Table 1.

The commitments described in Table 1 do not only maintain – for decades – the Chinese demand for Russian energy resources, as the increase in consumption at the cost of other suppliers would suggest. The long-term supply contracts sealed the Russian and Chinese energy partnerships for at least 29 years. After this period, the trend is that the Sino-Russian energy trade will extend for many more decades to compensate for the significant investment in the construction of energy infrastructure – the ESPO and Power of Siberia – in order to connect their countries. Moreover, the Chinese imports of Russian energy resources tend to increase due to the growing capacity and ease of transportation with the construction of the ESPO and Power of Siberia pipelines, and because of the problems in the South China Sea which could make the country redirect parts of its imports from the Middle East and West Africa to Russia.

It is also important to highlight how these agreements impact the current situation of low Chinese imports from Russian gas and lead China, in the near future, to the group of the main Russian gas consumers. The main agreement signed concerning natural gas (between Gazprom and CNPC at a value of US\$ 400 billion) and the energy project with the largest Chinese participation in Russia is the Yamal LNG Project (Sahuquillo, 2018) which already has entered operation. Apart from this, the Chinese natural gas imports tend to increase because of an ongoing change in the Chinese energy matrix in the direction of resources that emit fewer gasses with a polluting effect on the atmosphere and which tend to burn more efficiently (Yilmaz And Daksueva, 2017, p. 6).

It can thus be concluded, that the Sino-Russian energy trade is persistent and that the two countries tend to become increasingly important for each other within the energy sector. The next section analyses the Sino-Russian energy cooperation and its effects.

ANALYSIS OF THE SINO-RUSSIAN ENERGY COOPERATION.....

In the RCED negotiations, Xu and Reisinger (2018, p. 12) conclude that the Chinese ability to shape the agenda is superior to that of Russia, given that nearly all the proposals initiated by China have been concluded and the changes in the themes of the RCED mainly reflect Chinese interests (Russia has been relatively passive in terms of defining the agenda from 2008 until 2015). It also became evident that Russia makes use of price manipulation of energy resources as its principal method to influence the bargaining process (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 12).

The Russian inability to define the agenda could be associated with the economic disparities between China and Russia. Moscow needs to strengthen its economic capacity to obtain an advantageous position in the process of energy bargaining with Beijing (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 16).

There is also a disparity in terms of commercial relevance, in which China is much more important to Russia than that country is to China; while China holds the first place on the ranking of the origin of imports (with 20%) and destination of Russian exports (with 11%) (OEC), Russia is only the 11th most important source of imports (with 2,5%) and the 10th most important destination of Chinese exports (with 1,8%, at a similar level to the Netherlands and Singapore) (OECa). Moreover, the very structure of trade relations of the two countries – in which Moscow mainly exports raw materials (53% crude oil, (OEC)) and imports industrialized products (10% transmission equipment's, 5,7% automatic data processing machines and magnetic readers, amongst others (OECa)) – represents a disadvantage for the Russian Federation (Kaczmarek, 2015, p. 21).

Independently of the abovementioned circumstances, it is a fact that the Sino-Russian energy cooperation has proved itself to be essential and benevolent to both countries, as it spurs energy diversification and consequently, a higher degree of freedom of action in relation to political and security-related crises, such as the Ukraine Crisis (2014) and the Conflicts in the South China Sea.

The Ukraine Crisis (2014) resulted in the annexation of Crimea by Russia and in subsequent western sanctions on Moscow. The Sino-Russian energy cooperation has eased the effects of the sanctions (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 3) in relation to energy demand, capital and technology – given that, 1) energy trade has intensified, as Russia has become the main oil supplier to China from 2016 (Downs, 2018) and China has incorporated Russian natural gas within its economy with the US\$ 400 billion agreement between Gazprom and CNPC¹² – see Table 1; 2) the Chinese investments in Russia increased from 2014 – see Figure 1; 3) China and Russia have engaged in technological exchanges, at least in the construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 9-10).

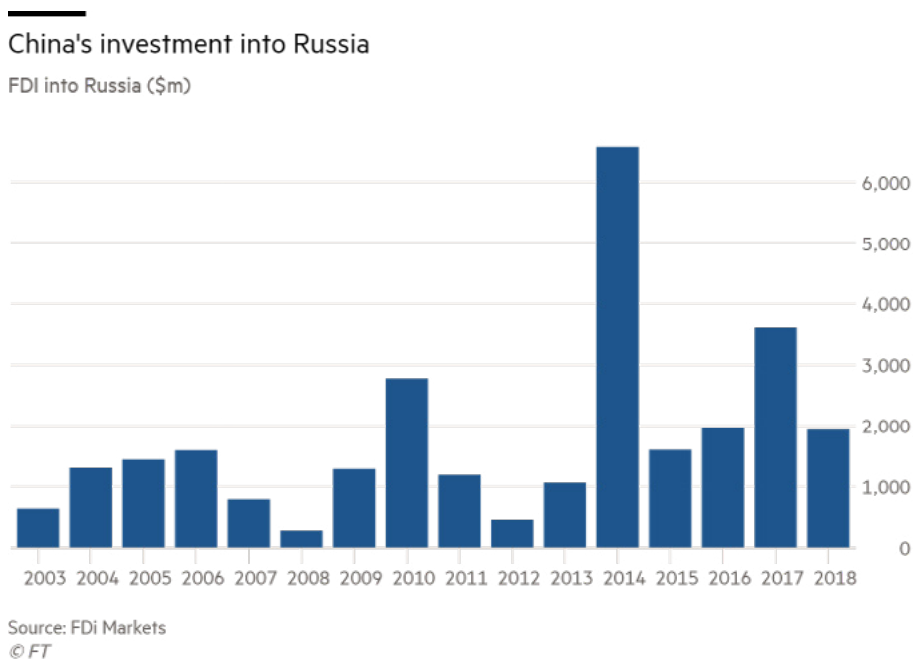
The Western sanctions imposed on Moscow limit the access of certain Russian financial institutions to Western capital markets, isolating them from the financial centers of London and New York. Therefore, the Russian authorities sought to substitute Western credit, with credit from Chinese financial institutions, successfully securing the following investments: 1) Chinese financing for the Yamal LNG project (see Table 1); 2) loans for the

12. Established in May 2014, this agreement has been under negotiation for 20 years and was announced shortly after the US Secretary of the Treasury asked China to refrain from steps which could limit the impact of Western sanctions on China (YILMAZ; DAKSUEVA, 2017, p. 18-19).

Vnesheconombank (VEB) and the VTB, state-owned Russian financial institutions; and 3) the creation of a joint investment between the China Investment Corporation and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (Gabuev, 2015, p. 3-5).

Figure 1 illustrates that in 2014 – the year of the Ukraine Crisis and the subsequent Western sanctions imposed on Moscow – China invested heavily in Russia, and in the following years, although the level of investments did diminish, they still remained higher than before the Ukraine Crisis (with exception only of 2010). Hence, Figure 1 suggests a trend of Chinese support for Russia and boycott of the sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union.

Figure 1 – Chinese investment in Russia (2003-2018)



Source: Spivak and Foy (2019)

Xu and Reisinger (2018, p. 4-5) stress how personalism is a strong characteristic in the Russian political structure, which has been even more evident in the energy diplomacy towards China, in which Putin personally impacts negotiations. Vladimir Putin has proved to be positively minded to opening the energy sector to Chinese companies, to interfere in order to conclude energy agreements, and to participate in multilateral cooperation led by China, thus, demonstrating a Sino-Russian unity in relation to international issues. In exchange, Xi Jinping is also more inclined to provide economic financing to Russia, especially within the field of energy (Xu; Reisinger, 2018, p. 5-13).

Even with the intensification of the Russia-China cooperation after 2014, it is still evident that China does not possess the necessary conditions to completely substitute the West as an energy market, and as a source of capital and technology (Gabuev, 2015, p. 1-8), however, the Sino-Russian relations have eased the effects of the sanctions through an increase in the energy imports and Chinese investments in Russia (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 3).

The increase of the Chinese investments in Russia and the rise in imports of Russian energy resources by China provides Moscow with an alternative to the Western financial institutions and the European energy demand, which results in a larger room of maneuver for Russia regarding questions concerning which the country diverges from the West, such as the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of the European Union, and the Ukraine Crisis (2014).

The Russian energy supply to China has also played an important role in relation to political and security-related matters of this Asian country, especially regarding the Conflicts in the South China Sea, as it represents an alternative to the energy resources of the Middle East and West Africa, which is transported through maritime routes that pass through the Malacca Strait, – a place which could become blocked in case that the South China Sea Conflicts deteriorate. Hence, the Russian energy shipments serve to reassure China with regards to its energy supply and provides a higher degree of freedom to act more assertively within the region, without worrying about how a US naval blockade could cut off vital energy supplies (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 8-23). The recent Chinese signals – such as the development of islands, the implementation of a system of defense on recently constructed islands, and the increasing activity of the Chinese Navy and Coast Guard in the South China Sea – constitute examples of the increased Chinese room of maneuver in the region provided by the energy cooperation with Russia. Thus, this cooperation bestows energy security for China, and, consequently, the freedom of action which the country needs to defend its interests within the region (Yilmaz; Daksueva, 2017, p. 23).

Hence, the Ukrainian Crisis (2014) and the Conflicts in the South China Sea shed light on the importance of the Sino-Russian energy cooperation for both countries, not only in economic terms but also with regards to political and security issues.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Energy cooperation is the main link in the Sino-Russian relationship. China is one of the largest consumers of energy in the world and Russia is one of the main global energy exporters and producers. Because of the aging infrastructure and the inferiority and technological backwardness of the FEC, Russia needs investments to develop and modernize its energy infrastructure, while China needs energy resources to maintain its economic growth, while the country possesses capital to invest and construct the necessary infrastructure to support its energy supply. Despite the overlap in supply and demand, as well as the geographical proximity, the Russian energy market is mainly aimed towards Europe, while Chinese energy supply primarily is met by the Middle East (oil) and Central Asia (gas).

The ambitions to change this situation and the subsequent evolution of the Sino-Russian energy relations has taken place as a response to two challenges: 1) geopolitical – more precisely the South China Sea conflicts and the Ukraine Crisis (2014) – and 2) geoeconomic – the need to diversify energy relations.

The Crisis of 2008 and the western sanctions imposed as a consequence of the Ukrainian Crisis (2014) highlighted Kremlin's dependency on the European energy and financial markets, accentuating the Russian need for energy diversification and a new source of capital, both available within the Chinese market.

Russia, therefore, redirected its trade and investment strategies towards China. China, on the other hand, resorted to increasing imports of Russian energy resources to guarantee the necessary energy supply to secure the growth of its economy, given that more than half of Chinese oil imports originate from the Middle East and West Africa, and are transported through a space vulnerable to blockades (the Malacca Strait). Moreover, the political instability in the Middle East also worries the Chinese leaders as this could threaten Chinese energy security.

Therefore, the two states have undertaken energy cooperation as an export and import diversification strategy which has proven to be compatible and complementary. The Russian interest in energy cooperation with China is, above all, to ensure demand for its energy exports, to acquire investment capital within the energy sector, and to apply Chinese labour. Another Chinese interest is to gain access to Russian natural resources to guarantee its energy security and invest surplus capital.

The energy cooperation between Russia and China encompasses trade in energy resources, investment within the energy sector, infrastructure development, technological exchange, and even exploration of the Arctic. More specifically, the energy cooperation involves: 1) the establishment of agreements according to which Chinese companies – such as CNPC, CDB, and Sinopec – concede loans to Russian energy companies – such as Rosneft, Transneft, Novatek, and Gazprom – in exchange for long-term energy supply; 2) construction of pipelines which connect the two countries – ESPO and Power of Siberia; and 3) Chinese investment in energy projects – such as the Yamal LNG Project and the development of Russian gas and oil exploration fields in Eastern Siberia, by *Russkoye* and *Yurubcheno-Tokhomskoye*. All these agreements reflect the intensity of the Sino-Russian energy cooperation and its tendency of continuity at the cost of other partners. This is because Beijing and Moscow have tied energy supplies to their economies' demand for years (even decades) into the future with long-term supply contracts, and also sought to maintain – and even increase – their energy relations when investing in joint energy projects, such as the construction of the ESPO and Power of Siberia, given that these pipelines harness the capacity, and facilitate and cheapen the transport of commodities and represent a significant investment, compensated only with intense trade in the coming decades. Moreover, the problems in the South China Sea could make Beijing redirect part of its imports from the Middle East and West Africa to Russia.

These agreements also suggest a change in the current situation of low Chinese imports of Russian natural gas, and tend to push China towards the group of main consumers of Russian gas, as the largest energy agreement signed was related exactly to natural gas (between Gazprom and CNPC at a value of US\$ 400 billion) and the energy project with the largest Chinese participation in Russia is the Yamal LNG Project. Apart

from this, the Chinese imports of Russian natural gas tend to increase due to the construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline, and to the ongoing change in the Chinese energy matrix towards resources that emit less polluting gases in the atmosphere and that burn more efficiently.

By increasing imports of Russian energy resources and investments in Russia, China reduces the effects of the Western sanctions imposed on that country and provides Moscow with an alternative to the Western financial institutions and to the European energy market, which gives a higher degree of freedom to Russia in relation to issues around which the country diverges from the West. On the other hand, the Russian energy supply reduces the Chinese dependency on hydrocarbon resources from the Middle East and West Africa (the transport of which is susceptible to Western blockades) representing an alternative for China, which assists the country with regards to its energy supply and provides a higher degree of freedom to act more assertively in the Conflicts in the South China Sea without worrying about having its energy suppliers cut off by a naval blockade. Thus, this cooperation provides energy security for China, and, consequently, the room of manoeuvre which the country needs in order to defend its interests in the region.

We can thereby conclude that the Sino-Russian energy cooperation is essential for both countries, given that beyond contributing to both economies – guaranteeing energy security for China and capital and energy demand for Russia – it also provides a larger margin of manoeuvre regarding their political and security questions.

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A economia política internacional da questão agroalimentar na Rússia

The international political economy of the agrifood question in Russia

La economía política internacional de la cuestión agroalimentaria en Rusia

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RESUMO

O artigo analisa as transformações, tendências e contradições do sistema agroalimentar russo e suas implicações globais de longo alcance. A análise emprega o arcabouço teórico-metodológico da economia política internacional da agricultura e da alimentação. O argumento é que as recentes dinâmicas econômicas, sociais e políticas na Rússia respondem, em larga medida, aos desafios desencadeados pelo deslocamento da “questão agrária” clássica para a “questão agroalimentar” contemporânea. A questão agroalimentar abrange três grandes problemáticas: acumulação de capital, reprodução social e poder político. A pesquisa recorre a uma abrangente revisão da literatura especializada e qualificada, bem como a documentos e dados estatísticos oficiais relevantes, tanto de fontes russas como internacionais. A análise da questão agroalimentar mostra-se bastante fértil para examinar a recente trajetória de desenvolvimento e projeção de poder da Rússia e a sua inserção no regime alimentar internacional contemporâneo, chamando atenção para a abertura de uma formidável, mas ainda pouco explorada, agenda de pesquisas em economia política internacional.

Palavras-chave: Rússia. Agronegócio. Agricultura Familiar. Segurança Alimentar. Geopolítica.

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the transformations, trends, and contradictions of the Russian agrifood system and its far-reaching global implications. The analysis employs the theoretical-methodological framework of international political economy of agriculture and food. The argument is that recent economic, social, and political dynamics in Russia largely respond to the challenges triggered by the shift from the classic ‘agrarian question’ to the contemporary ‘agrifood question’. The agrifood question encompasses three major problematics: capital accumulation, social reproduction, and political power. The research draws on a comprehensive review of specialized and qualified literature, as well as relevant

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official documents and statistical data, both from Russian and international sources. The analysis of the agrifood question proves to be quite fertile to examine the recent trajectory of development and power projection of Russia and its insertion in the contemporary international food regime, calling attention to the opening of a formidable, but still little explored, research agenda in international political economy.

Keywords: Russia. Agribusiness. Family Farming. Food Security. Geopolitics.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las transformaciones, tendencias y contradicciones del sistema agroalimentario ruso y sus implicaciones globales de largo alcance. El análisis emplea el marco teórico-metodológico de la economía política internacional de la agricultura y la alimentación. El argumento es que las dinámicas económicas, sociales y políticas recientes en Rusia responden, en larga medida, a los desafíos desencadenados por el paso de la “cuestión agraria” clásica a la “cuestión agroalimentaria” contemporánea. La cuestión agroalimentaria abarca tres grandes problemáticas: acumulación de capital, reproducción social y poder político. La investigación se basa en una amplia revisión de literatura especializada y calificada, así como en documentos y datos estadísticos oficiales relevantes, tanto de fuentes rusas como internacionales. El análisis de la cuestión agroalimentaria resulta bastante fértil para examinar la reciente trayectoria de desarrollo y proyección de poder de Rusia y su inserción en el régimen alimentario internacional contemporáneo, llamando la atención sobre la apertura de una formidable, pero aún poco explorada, agenda de investigación en economía política internacional.

Palabras clave: Rusia. Agronegocio. Agricultura Familiar. Seguridad Alimentaria. Geopolítica.

Introdução

A invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia exacerba a ruína da ordem mundial neoliberal deflagrada pela crise financeira global de 2008, aprofundada pela guerra comercial e tecnológica entre EUA e China, acelerada pela pandemia de Covid-19 e agora escancarada pela guerra Israelense contra os Palestinos. São múltiplas as incertezas e preocupações que surgem em todo o mundo com as consequências da guerra na Ucrânia e das duras sanções econômicas impostas à Rússia (Cheng, 2022). A Organização das Nações Unidas para Alimentação e Agricultura (FAO) chama especial atenção para os riscos e impactos do conflito sobre os mercados agrícolas e a segurança alimentar global.

Em 2021, a Federação Russa ou a Ucrânia (ou ambas) ficaram entre os três principais exportadores globais de trigo, milho, colza e sementes e óleo de girassol, enquanto a Federação Russa também se destacou como maior exportador mundial de fertilizantes nitrogenados, segundo maior fornecedor de fertilizantes potássicos e terceiro maior exportador de fertilizantes fosfatados. Essa concentração pode expor tais mercados a uma maior vulnerabilidade a choques e volatilidade. [Vários países] que se enquadram nos grupos de países menos desenvolvidos (PMD) e países de baixa renda com déficit alimentar (PBRDA), dependem de suprimentos alimentares ucranianos e russos para atender às suas necessidades de consumo. Muitos desses países, já antes do conflito, vinham enfrentando os efeitos negativos dos altos preços internacionais de alimentos e fertilizantes (FAO, 2022, p.1).

Na imprensa brasileira, analistas alertam para as repercussões do contencioso sobre o aumento dos custos de produção agrícola decorrentes do choque na oferta e nos preços dos fertilizantes, dos índices de preços dos alimentos ao consumidor, particularmente dos derivados de trigo, e dos indicadores de insegurança alimentar no Brasil, que se agravam desde 2018, muito antes da pandemia, depois do país ter saído do Mapa da Fome da FAO, em 2014 (DBO, 2022; ESTADÃO, 2022; BBC, 2022; IFZ, 2022). Salta aos olhos, entretanto, a carência de conhecimento e produção acadêmica especializada no Brasil sobre questões ligadas à agricultura, alimentação e ruralidade na Rússia contemporânea.

São poucas e apreciáveis as exceções. Requião e Gonçalves (2021) apresentam um panorama da evolução do mercado agrícola russo ao longo das últimas décadas no intuito de avaliar desafios e oportunidades e oferecer sugestões para a melhor inserção das exportações do agronegócio brasileiro nesse mercado. Niederle et al (2018) fazem uma análise comparada das monoculturas da soja e do trigo nas estratégias de inserção internacional das economias brasileira e russa, destacando os padrões de intervenção estatal subjacentes, de caráter mais liberalizante e subordinado no Brasil e mais protecionista e autônomo na Rússia. Lima e Dias (2018) argumentam que ao centrar-se na diminuição das importações de alimentos e na produção de excedentes agrícolas exportáveis, o Kremlin visa reduzir a vulnerabilidade econômica do país em um contexto geopolítico hostil, a fim de projetar poder e inserir-se internacionalmente de maneira mais soberana.

Esses trabalhos oferecem contribuições pertinentes, mas não se propõem a analisar o conjunto das recentes transformações, tendências e contradições do sistema agroalimentar russo e suas implicações globais de longo alcance. O objetivo do artigo é justamente fazer isso a partir do arcabouço teórico-metodológico da economia política internacional. Como as dinâmicas observadas no sistema agroalimentar e nas relações sociais rurais russas afetam a sua trajetória de desenvolvimento e a sua projeção internacional de poder? Argumento que as recentes dinâmicas econômicas, sociais e políticas na Rússia respondem, em larga medida, aos desafios desencadeados pelo deslocamento da “questão agrária” clássica para a “questão agroalimentar” contemporânea. Esses desafios dizem respeito à articulação de um novo regime de acumulação de capital na agricultura e no sistema agroalimentar, aos novos padrões de reprodução social dos meios de vida das classes urbanas e rurais e ao caráter do estado e sua política nacional de segurança alimentar em meio a crescentes tensões geopolíticas.

Metodologicamente, a pesquisa recorre a uma abrangente revisão da literatura especializada e qualificada, bem como a documentos e dados estatísticos oficiais relevantes de fontes russas e internacionais. A próxima seção situa historicamente a Rússia na evolução dos regimes alimentares internacionais. As três seções seguintes tratam das problemáticas da questão agroalimentar contemporânea na Rússia: acumulação de capital, reprodução social e poder político. A seção final sumariza conclusões e aponta direções de pesquisa.

A inserção russa nos regimes alimentares internacionais: teoria e história

Byres (1986) oferece uma síntese do intrincado debate sobre a questão agrária no pensamento marxista clássico. Marx superou as teorias da renda da terra de Smith e Ricardo e interpretou a transição para o capitalismo na Inglaterra a partir da assim chamada acumulação primitiva. Mas foram somente seus continuadores na Alemanha e na Rússia que vieram a tratar das especificidades teóricas da questão agrária. Em Engels, a questão assume um sentido primordialmente “político”, sobre as contradições entre campesinato e latifundiários e sua articulação com o conflito fundamental entre proletariado e burguesia nos processos de construção do estado moderno e nas lutas pelo socialismo. Para Kautsky e Lenin, a questão era essencialmente “sociológica”, sobre as formas de desenvolvimento do capitalismo na agricultura a partir do predomínio da propriedade privada da terra, do trabalho assalariado e da grande indústria e as suas implicações para a diferenciação social rural. Para Bukharin e Preobrazhensky, a questão era prioritariamente “econômica”, sobre a extração, apropriação e transferência de excedentes agrícolas (trabalho, alimentos, matérias primas, recursos financeiros) para sustentar a acumulação de capital, a transformação estrutural e a industrialização em condições de desenvolvimento tardio (Byres, 1986).

Friedmann e McMichael (1989), todavia, inauguraram uma nova economia política internacional da questão agroalimentar ao proporem uma abordagem teórica e histórica sobre o lugar da agricultura e da alimentação na evolução da economia mundial e do sistema de estados, tendo como núcleo analítico o conceito de “regime alimentar”.

A definição de regimes alimentares inclui constelações de relações de classe, especialização geográfica e poder interestatal, articulando ‘relações internacionais de produção e consumo alimentar’ a ‘períodos de acumulação de capital’ (Friedmann, 2009, p.335).

[O conceito possibilita] identificar os fundamentos agroalimentares de períodos históricos, ciclos ou mesmo tendências seculares do capitalismo (McMichael, 2009, p.148).

Apesar de algumas controvérsias, possui amplo respaldo a periodização que concebe três regimes alimentares na história do capitalismo, onde a Rússia sempre teve lugar de destaque (Escher, 2021). O primeiro regime (1870-1914/30) foi erigido sob a hegemonia do Império Britânico, o padrão ouro, a ideologia do livre comércio e a subordinação das periferias coloniais ou dependentes como fornecedoras de alimentos e matérias primas para a indústria dos centros imperialistas. Graças à *obschina* e ao *mir* garantindo o acesso à terra aos camponeses, a emancipação dos servos em 1861 pouco favoreceu a formação de uma reserva de mão de obra para a indústria nascente russa. E dada a vasta disponibilidade de uma força de trabalho barata no rural, a nobreza latifundiária tampouco demonstrou interesse em introduzir inovações e aumentar a produtividade da agricultura (Gerschenkron, 2015). Mas isso não impediu que as exportações de grãos entre 1860 e 1905 quintuplicasse, alcançando metade das exportações totais do país, com a agricultura camponesa espremida respondendo por 3/4 de toda a produção (Shanin, 1986). Entre 1850 e 1914,

quando estoura a Primeira Guerra Mundial, 80% do trigo comercializado internacionalmente provinha de Rússia, EUA e Canadá, sendo a Rússia responsável por cerca de metade do total, servindo de esteio do regime alimentar (Krausmann; Langthaler, 2019).

O segundo regime (1945-1973/85) foi construído sob a hegemonia dos EUA, o sistema monetário de Bretton Woods, a ideologia anticomunista da Guerra Fria e a subordinação das periferias através da difusão dos programas de “ajuda alimentar” e dos pacotes tecnológicos da “revolução verde”. O rompimento da aliança operário-camponesa com o fim da Nova Política Econômica (NEP) e a coletivização forçada da agricultura resultaram na formação de grandes fazendas estatais (*sovkhozy*) e coletivas (*kolkhozy*) mecanizadas, de onde eram extraídos os recursos para a industrialização soviética (Niederle et al, 2018). A URSS participou de Bretton Woods, mas não aderiu ao Acordo Geral sobre Comércio e Tarifas (GATT), senão criou o Conselho de Assistência Econômica Mútua (COMECON) para promover o comércio intrabloco, protegendo seus consumidores e produtores das turbulências do mercado mundial. Durante as décadas de 1960 e 1970, a URSS se viu várias vezes obrigada a recorrer à importações de grãos, levantando críticas nos EUA, seu principal fornecedor. E nos anos 1980 tornou-se um cliente regular do Ocidente, importando também carne, frutas, legumes, óleo vegetal e açúcar além de grãos, mas sem cumprir um papel muito relevante no regime alimentar (Wegren; Nilssen, 2022).

O terceiro regime (1995-hoje) foi erguido sob a atualizada hegemonia dos EUA, o sistema monetário do dólar flexível, a ideologia neoliberal e o predomínio das corporações transnacionais do agronegócio. Mas a adesão da China à Organização Mundial do Comércio (OMC) e ao Acordo sobre Agricultura (AoA), em 2001, ao lado do maior protagonismo dos BRICS, tem contribuído para aumentar o poder de barganha dos países periféricos e semiperiféricos frente às imposições dos países centrais, intensificando os impasses da OMC. As reformas pró-mercado implementadas nos anos 1990 por Boris Yeltsin incluíram a privatização da terra e dos ativos dos *kolkhozy* e *sovkhozy*. A “terapia de choque” desorganizou a agricultura, fez a produção desabar e desmontou o sistema de bem-estar existente, deixando as famílias em condições vulneráveis (Niederle et al, 2018). A dependência de importações massivas de alimentos para compensar a queda da produção doméstica acompanhou a liberalização comercial após 1992, que reduziu barreiras tarifárias em antecipação a adesão à OMC, em 2012. A crise financeira russa e a subsequente desvalorização do rublo em 1998 tornaram a situação insustentável, alertando sobre as ameaças à segurança alimentar nacional e a necessidade de o governo assumir um papel mais ativo na regulação e proteção do mercado doméstico. Esse doloroso processo de integração ao regime alimentar pavimentou o caminho para a mudança de rumo iniciada por Putin (Wegren; Nilssen, 2022).

A discussão precedente deixa claro que a questão agrária clássica sofreu deslocamentos históricos e teóricos e adquiriu novos significados. Mesmo assim, seguindo os três sentidos da questão no pensamento marxista clássico, sugere-se que a questão agroalimentar contemporânea

também comporta três grandes “problemáticas”. A primeira é a “acumulação de capital”, que trata do lugar da agricultura e do sistema agroalimentar na dinâmica econômica, especialmente as ligações intersetoriais das empresas de agronegócio e seu desempenho nos mercados interno e externo. A segunda é a “reprodução social”, que trata dos níveis de transição nutricional e suas implicações nas dietas dos consumidores urbanos, bem como da mercantilização da agricultura e seus efeitos nos meios de vida rurais. A terceira é o “poder político”, que trata das contradições, conflitos, alianças e compromissos entre as classes rurais e as demais classes sociais na definição do caráter do estado e das políticas públicas para agricultura e segurança alimentar, entre outras (e.g., econômica, social e externa). É claro que essa distinção entre as três problemáticas é somente analítica, uma vez que, na prática, elas encontram-se profundamente conectadas e entrelaçadas na realidade concreta russa.

Acumulação de capital: expansão das agroholdings e abertura de mercados

Através da liberalização financeira e da privatização de ativos estatais, as reformas de mercado da década de 1990 ensejaram a restauração do capitalismo na Rússia, com a ascensão do capital financeiro na forma de grandes conglomerados industriais controlados por grandes bancos na extração mineral, na construção civil e na mídia. Mas desde a subida de Putin ao poder, em 2000, passou-se a articular um novo regime de acumulação ancorado em um projeto nacionalista de reorganização do estado russo que combina a expansão da indústria de petróleo e gás, voltada à exportação, do complexo industrial-militar, das finanças e do mercado interno (Medeiros, 2011).

A agricultura e o sistema agroalimentar, entretanto, não foram articulados de imediato ao novo regime de acumulação. A partir de 1992, os antigos *kolkhozy* e *sovkhozy* foram assumindo novas formas jurídicas (sociedades anônimas, sociedades limitadas, etc.) e seus ex-membros e funcionários receberam certificados em papel, tornando-se uma espécie de “acionistas”. Apenas uma minoria converteu seus certificados em parcelas reais de terra, registrando-as como propriedades camponesas. Em comparação com as privatizações em outros setores, a privatização da propriedade agrária mostrou-se menos excitante. Gigantes da energia como Gazprom e Lukoil chegaram adquirir terras agrícolas de devedores inadimplentes, mas acabaram por revendê-las. Em 2002, entrou em vigor a Lei Federal de Transações de Terras Agrícolas especificando os procedimentos para a venda ou transferência de terras para o capital das empresas agrícolas reestruturadas em troca de compensações monetárias. Mas foi somente durante o segundo mandato de Putin (2004-2008), com o forte crescimento econômico, o *boom* dos preços das *commodities* e o aquecimento da demanda interna e externa, que a terra veio a ser percebida como um ativo valorizado, atraindo capitais vindos de outros países e setores para o agronegócio russo (Visser; Mamonova; Spoor, 2012).² Teve início então um processo de formação de megafazendas, em geral consolidadas sob a propriedade e o controle de “agroholdings” pertencentes à oligarcas conhecidos – razão pela qual ganharam o apelido de “*oligarkhozy*” (Nikulin, 2011).

2. A maior parte dos investimentos na agricultura russa era capital “repatriado” de seus oligarcas, mas também incluía fundos soberanos do Bahrein, Emirados Árabes Unidos e Arábia Saudita, Líbia, Coreia do Sul e China, bem como uma variedade de fundos de pensão, fundos de hedge e fundos de private equity dos EUA, Canadá, Israel, Dinamarca, Alemanha, Luxemburgo, Suécia e Suíça, etc. (Wengle, 2021).

O Censo Agropecuário Russo 2016 classifica 19,592 das 36 mil “organizações agropecuárias” registradas como “grandes empresas agropecuárias” (ROSSTAT, 2018). Agroholdings são grupos econômicos que congregam várias dessas entidades legalmente independentes, controlados por uma empresa matriz ou por uma pessoa física com participação majoritária, que podem incluir produtores agrícolas, processadores, prestadores de serviços e outros operadores vinculados com atividades agrícolas. São basicamente grandes corporações agroindustriais horizontal e verticalmente integradas, não muito distintas das existentes no agro-negócio brasileiro. Em 2016, foram identificadas 1,063 agroholdings que controlam 3,204 empresas, detêm 24,3 milhões de hectares e empregam 502 mil pessoas. Desse total, 85 são estatais e 978 privadas. As estatais controlam 20,3% das empresas, detêm 14,4% das terras e comandam 14% dos empregos, enquanto as privadas controlam 79,7% das empresas, detêm 85,6% das terras e empregam 86% dos trabalhadores. Considerando o total das agroholdings privadas, apenas 6,3% delas são de propriedade estrangeira, mas controlam 9,9% das empresas, detêm 21,6% das terras e comandam 22,2% dos empregos. Investidores internacionais entram no mercado de terras por meio da criação de subsidiárias russas, pois a aquisição direta de terras por estrangeiros não é oficialmente permitida. Entretanto, uma empresa estrangeira pode ser registrada em *offshores* por cidadãos russos ou ter sócios russos, enquanto empresas de processamento e distribuição podem ser simplesmente filiais de multinacionais. Em 2016, as agroholdings geraram aproximadamente metade dos lucros e das vendas totais das grandes empresas agropecuárias – que somaram RUB\$ 2,6 trilhões. As 100 maiores agroholdings, cujas receitas superaram RUB\$ 2 bilhões por ano cada, abocanharam sozinhas 37% de todo esse valor (Uzun; Shagaida; Lerman, 2021).

A concentração de poder econômico das agroholdings é evidente no fato de que, em 2016, os cinco maiores proprietários controlavam 3,7 milhões de hectares de terras agrícolas na Rússia: Miratorg com 1 milhão de ha; Prodimeks/Agrokul'tura com 865 mil ha; Agrokompleks com 653 mil ha; Rusagro com 643 mil ha; e EkoNiva com 599 mil ha. Prodimeks, de propriedade majoritária de Igor Khudormov, é a maior produtora de açúcar e beterraba, fornecendo para Coca-Cola e Pepsi, além produzir trigo, cevada, girassol, milho e soja. Rusagro, controlada por Vadim Moskovich, é a maior fabricante de margarina, a segunda maior fabricante de maionese e óleos vegetais, a terceira de açúcar e um dos maiores produtores de soja e milho. Miratorg, controlada pelos irmãos Viktor e Aleksandr Linnik, é a maior produtora de carne suína e a segunda maior produtora de aves. Cherkizovo, de propriedade majoritária de Igor Babaev e sua esposa Lidia Mikhailova, é a segunda maior produtora de carne suína e a terceira maior produtora de aves. Ambas plantam terras e fabricam ração para suas operações pecuárias verticalmente integradas e são as maiores processadoras e distribuidoras de carne para o consumidor final. EkoNiva, fundada pelo empresário de origem alemã Stefan Dürr, é a maior produtora de leite. Com as próprias vacas, fábricas de ração e plantas de processamento, abastece a Danone e outros grandes laticínios e vende leite fluído e produtos lácteos sob marca própria. Agrokompleks,

de propriedade da família do ex-ministro da agricultura e ex-governador de Krasnodar, Aleksandr Tkachev, é outra gigante na indústria de carnes e laticínios. Os capitalistas donos dessas agroholdings pertencem à classe dos “super ricos” na Rússia (Wengle, 2021).

Durante a década de 1990, a maioria dos segmentos agrícolas era organizada em torno de complexos agroindustriais altamente integrados (*combinats*) que normalmente incluíam vários *ex-kolkhozy* e *sovkhozy* supervisionados por uma grande processadora, a qual utilizava máquinas e tecnologias herdadas da era soviética. Essa situação vem mudando, com apoio à importação de tecnologias mais eficientes a partir dos anos 2000 e à recuperação da indústria nacional de bens de capital para a agricultura desde 2010 (Grouiez, 2018; Wengle, 2021). O Ministério da Agricultura estima que 10% das 12 mil maiores fazendas da Rússia utilizam tecnologia avançada do tipo “agricultura digital”, incluindo internet das coisas, robótica, drones, sensores a laser e colheitadeiras sem piloto (Wegren, 2018). As tecnologias associadas à “agricultura de precisão”, com equipamentos de informática embarcados em tratores e maquinários, são geralmente importadas. Mas algumas firmas russas de tecnologia agrícola estão ganhando mercado, como a Rostsel'mash, a maior fabricante de colheitadeiras do país. Ademais, as agroholdings estão começando a desenvolver centros nacionais de reprodução genética. A instituição mais importante na reprodução de suínos na Rússia hoje é o Centro de Seleção Genética de Znamensk, que recebeu investimentos dos gigantes da carne Miratorg e Cherkizovo (Wengle, 2021).

A Rússia tem por volta de 128 milhões de hectares de terras agrícolas realmente utilizados e 94 milhões de hectares não utilizados (em sua maioria terras de baixa qualidade em áreas inóspitas). Estima-se que 19,3 milhões de hectares de terras abandonadas possam ser recuperados para o uso produtivo. A população rural russa diminuiu ligeiramente de 38,9 milhões em 1990 para 37,6 milhões em 2018, permanecendo estável em torno de 26% de um total de 144 milhões de habitantes. Mas a parcela de trabalhadores agrícolas no emprego total caiu de 14,2% para 5,9% entre 1990 e 2018. Já a produção agropecuária russa cresceu 55% entre 1999 e 2017, após uma queda de 43% entre 1990 e 1999. E a participação do PIB agropecuário no PIB total aumentou de 3,5% em 2012 para 4,4% em 2017. Entre 1990 e 2017, a produção de trigo, beterraba e hortaliças quase dobrou, enquanto a produção de girassol triplicou e a de milho sextuplicou. A produção de suínos recuperou o nível de 1990 em 2017 e a de aves cresceu 2,5 vezes no mesmo período. Apenas a produção de carne bovina e de leite estagnou em cerca de 50% do nível de 1990 (Uzun; Shagaida; Lerman, 2019).

Se em 2000 as grandes fazendas agropecuárias respondiam por apenas 45% do valor de produção apesar de ocuparem mais de 75% das áreas de terra, em 2016 elas respondem por 52,8% do valor de produção controlando 68% das áreas de terra. As agroholdings, que expandiram suas áreas de terra em quase 8 milhões de hectares entre 2006 e 2016, estão na dianteira desse processo. Elas hoje concentram mais de 30% das terras controladas pelo total das grandes empresas agropecuárias e 11% do total das terras agrícolas do país. Embora pouco relevantes na produção de

vegetais, carne bovina e leite, a sua dominância é absoluta nos ramos mais lucrativos, concentrados e intensivos em capital, que além de atenderem o mercado interno têm forte peso nas exportações. As agroholdings sozinhas concentram a produção de 77% da carne suína, 73% das aves, 69% da beterraba e, junto com as grandes empresas agropecuárias, 70% dos grãos e 64% das oleaginosas na Rússia (Uzun; Shagaida; Lerman, 2019). Atualmente as 20 maiores firmas concentram 60% de toda a indústria de carne suína e 49% da ração animal, enquanto as 25 maiores concentram 43% do abate e distribuição de carne bovina no país (Wegren, 2018).

Essas mudanças estão reposicionando a Rússia no regime alimentar internacional. Entre 2000 e 2020, as importações totais russas cresceram de USD\$ 34 para USD\$ 240 bilhões e as suas exportações totais de USD\$ 103 para USD\$ 336 bilhões, enquanto a proporção de produtos agroalimentares nas importações totais caiu de 21,5% para 12,2% e nas exportações totais subiu de 1,5% para 9% nesse período. De um importador alimentar líquido histórico, com déficit recorde de USD\$ 27 bilhões em 2013, pela primeira vez em mais de meio século a Rússia tornou-se um exportador alimentar líquido em 2020, com um superávit de USD\$ 1,3 bilhão. O ano de 2014 é o ponto de virada, quando a Rússia contrapõe um “embargo alimentar” em reação às sanções impostas pelas nações ocidentais depois da anexação da Criméia (Wegren; Nilssen, 2022).

As agroholdings cumprem um papel chave nesse reposicionamento. Previsões pessimistas sobre a expansão da capacidade de produção e exportação agrícola da Rússia revelaram-se equivocadas (Visser; Spoor; Mamonova, 2014). Entre 2000 e 2020, a área colhida de trigo aumentou de 21 para 28 milhões de hectares e a produção de 35 para 85 milhões de toneladas. Em 2015, a Rússia ultrapassou o Canadá e os EUA, tornando-se o maior exportador de trigo do mundo. Com 19% do mercado mundial em 2020, essa posição deve manter-se na próxima década (USDA, 2022). Apesar dos preocupantes impactos negativos da guerra na Ucrânia em 2022, os principais mercados para o trigo russo – Turquia, Egito, Bangladesh, Arabia Saudita, Irã e outros países da Ásia, Oriente Médio e Norte da África – não aderiram às sanções ocidentais, à exceção de alguns países da Europa, que não obstante seguem recebendo carregamentos (USDA, 2022a). Embora *traders* globais de *commodities*, como a Cargill, operem sob estritas regulações no mercado russo, *players* domésticos dominam o ramo, principalmente agroholdings estatais (Lander, 2018), sendo que as 15 maiores firmas no ramo exportam 75% dos grãos russos (Wegren, 2018).

Mesmo na soja, onde a Rússia ocupa posição de menor destaque, a produção e a exportação têm crescido, respectivamente, a taxas de 14% e 169% entre 2012 e 2020 (USDA, 2022). A China já anunciou uma “aliança da soja” com a Rússia, para que dos menos de 1% atuais o parceiro venha a responder por 10% das suas importações totais na próxima década (Wesz; Escher; Fares, 2023). A *trader* agrícola Sodrujestvo, propriedade de Alexandr Lutsenko, parece ser estratégica nessa empreitada. Registrada em Luxemburgo, a empresa é a maior esmagadora de soja e outras oleaginosas da Rússia, tem operações de originação, processamento e logística no Paraguai, Brasil, Turquia e Bielorrússia e distribui seus produtos por

todo Norte, Centro e Leste da Europa, Estados Bálticos e CEI (Escher; Wilkinson; Pereira, 2018).

A Rússia também fornece quantidades não negligenciáveis de carne bovina e lácteos para China, Vietnã, Ucrânia, Cazaquistão e Bielorrússia, alimentos processados para a CEI, peixes e frutos do mar para Coreia do Sul, China e Holanda, aves para o Oriente Médio, África, Ásia e Europa (Dzhancharoval; Ilyasov; Romadikova, 2022). Ainda, agroholdings líderes como Miratorg, Cherkizovo, Prioskolye, GAP Resurs, Belgranskorm, Agrokompleks e Damate, entre outras, apesar da acirrada concorrência global, em particular com as firmas brasileiras, estão ansiosas para expandir suas exportações de carnes de aves e suínos para o gigantesco e promissor mercado chinês (Dzhancharoval; Bolaev; Murtazova, 2021). Todas essas realizações e expectativas estão firmemente ancoradas no arcabouço institucional da política nacional de segurança alimentar do estado russo.

Reprodução social: transição nutricional e agricultura familiar heterogênea

As reformas da década de 1990 resultaram na queda da produção e no aumento das importações de alimentos, na redução dos níveis de consumo da população e na maior atenção à relevância da agricultura familiar. Desde os anos 2000, a mercantilização da agricultura e a expansão das agroholdings, bem como ascensão do grande varejo e a difusão das refeições fora de casa, têm transformado tanto as dietas dos consumidores urbanos, que experimentam um processo de transição nutricional, como os meios de vida dos produtores rurais, que sofrem um processo de marginalização (Wegren; Nikulin; Trotsuk, 2021).

As possibilidades de consumo alimentar são estruturalmente condicionadas pelos níveis e as desigualdades de renda da população do lado da demanda e pelas estratégias dos grandes oligopólios na indústria e na distribuição de alimentos do lado da oferta, o que é normalmente regulado por certas formas de intervenção estatal. A diferenciação das dietas e tipos de alimento consumidos por distintos segmentos de classe é específica de cada país, mas a carne é um item central em qualquer lugar. Denomina-se “transição nutricional” o conjunto de mudanças nos hábitos alimentares, decorrente do aumento da renda e da urbanização, em direção a maiores níveis de consumo de proteína animal e produtos ultraprocessados em detrimento do consumo de grãos e vegetais *in natura* ou minimamente processados, tendo como efeito colateral a maior incidência de obesidade e sobrepeso, doenças crônicas relacionadas e riscos ambientais (OTERO et al, 2018).

Tal processo encontra-se bastante avançado e possui certas especificidades na Rússia. No período pós-guerra, a fome deixou de ser um problema crônico na URSS. Em 1988, a ingestão calórica diária na Rússia era similar a dos EUA. Mas um alto percentual do orçamento doméstico era gasto em alimentos, a disponibilidade de muitos itens era irregular e as longas filas tornaram-se mais frequentes com a introdução dos cupons de racionamento de comida no inverno de 1990-1991. Entre 1990 e 1999, a renda per capita caiu de USD\$ 3,492 para USD\$ 1,330, o número de

pessoas ocupadas caiu de 74,9 para 64,7 milhões e a ingestão calórica diária média per capita caiu 9%. Em 1991, mais de 40 milhões de pessoas viviam abaixo da linha da pobreza nacional e na década seguinte o consumo de carnes e lácteos caiu mais de 40%, o de cereais, vegetais e frutas diminuiu 5% e o de batatas aumentou 11% à medida que os consumidores se adaptaram comprando alimentos mais baratos. Essas são médias nacionais, mas para a população urbana a situação era mais grave, já que não podia contar com a produção para o autoconsumo como a população rural (Wegren; Nikulin; Trotsuk, 2021).

A situação mudou depois que Putin se tornou presidente. A economia russa cresceu a uma taxa média de 7% ao ano entre 2000 e 2008 e a uma taxa de apenas 1% entre 2009 e 2019. De USD\$ 1,771 em 2000, a renda per capita atingiu USD\$ 15,974 em 2013 e caiu para USD\$ 11,536 em 2019 (World Bank, 2022). Esse desempenho possibilitou que entre 2000 e 2019 o número de desempregados diminuísse de quase 7,7 para 3,4 milhões e de pessoas na pobreza pela linha nacional caísse de 42 para 17 milhões (ROSSTAT, 2020). O poder de compra da renda familiar disponível para uma cesta básica de 23 produtos quase quadruplicou entre 1999 e 2010, mas voltou a cair na medida em que os preços dos alimentos sofreram uma elevação de 41% entre 2013 e 2018 (Uzun; Shagaida; Lerman, 2019). Os gastos com alimentação em relação à renda familiar total despendida em consumo – o chamado “coeficiente de Engel” – são elevados na Rússia em comparação com outros países desenvolvidos ou mesmo muitos emergentes. O coeficiente de Engel cresceu de 44% em 1992 para 52% em 1999, caiu para o mínimo histórico de 26% em 2013 e voltou a subir para 28% em 2019. Em 2019, enquanto o coeficiente de Engel foi de 43% para o quintil de renda inferior, 40% para o segundo quintil mais baixo e 35% para o terceiro, foi de 19% para o quintil de renda superior e 31% para o segundo quintil mais alto (ROSSTAT, 2020).

A ingestão calórica diária per capita da população russa cresceu de 2,394 calorias em 2000 para 2,626 em 2013 e 2,644 em 2019. Como previsto pela tese da transição nutricional, na composição das dietas reduziu-se em 1,5% o consumo de carboidratos e aumentou em 11% o consumo de proteínas e em 10% o de gorduras, com pouca variação entre domicílios urbanos e rurais (ROSSTAT, 2020). Como resultado, a prevalência de desnutrição no total da população russa passou de 6% em 1996-1998 para menos de 2,5% desde 2004-2006. Contudo, em 2019-2021 ainda se verifica a prevalência de 5,5% de insegurança alimentar moderada no país, que afeta as famílias de menor renda. Na atual conjuntura, portanto, a disponibilidade e o acesso aos alimentos já não constituem mais um perigo. Hoje a principal preocupação de segurança alimentar para a Rússia é a sobrenutrição e a obesidade, que acomete mais de 23% da população (FAO, 2022). Pesquisadores russos encontraram dados ainda mais preocupantes a esse respeito: uma prevalência de obesidade de 30,8% entre mulheres e 26,9% entre homens, intimamente associada ao abuso de álcool e a incidência de diabetes, distúrbios metabólicos e hipertensão arterial (Balanova et al, 2018).

Na URSS, grandes lojas estatais gerais e especializadas, cooperativas de consumo, feiras organizadas por agricultores membros dos

kolkhozy, cafeterias públicas e cozinhas comunitárias eram a base do sistema de distribuição de alimentos. Não era um paraíso do consumidor, mas a estabilidade social era garantida pelo controle direto do estado sobre o armazenamento e distribuição no atacado e a oferta de produtos e definição de preços no varejo. Hoje, o estado permite que firmas privadas, publicidade e marcas nacionais e estrangeiras moldem a cultura alimentar e os hábitos de consumo na Rússia. A média de gastos dos consumidores urbanos com refeições fora de casa subiu de 2,5% do orçamento familiar em 2002 para 3,7% em 2013, caiu para 3,5% em 2016 e voltou para 3,7% em 2018. Os principais segmentos do varejo de alimentos são liderados pelas firmas russas Magnit, X5 Retail Group, Lenta, Diksi, Azbuka Vkusa e O'Key, a francesa Auchan e a alemã Metro. Em 2018, as quatro maiores lojas de desconto controlavam 86% do mercado, as três maiores redes de supermercados tinham 59% das vendas e os três maiores hipermercados capturaram 30% das receitas. Algumas agroholdings também têm diversificado seus negócios. A gigante Miratorg, por exemplo, tinha 45 supermercados, dois hipermercados, 11 hamburguerias e 14 açougues em 2018. Por fim, duas agências federais supervisionam diferentes aspectos da segurança dos alimentos: o mandato da Rospotrebnadzor é proteger os consumidores da falsificação de alimentos processados; e o da Rossel'khoznadzor é prover serviços veterinários e padrões fitossanitários para produtos agrícolas *in natura* (Wegren; Nikulin; Trotsuk, 2021).

Embora mais intensas entre a população urbana, essas mudanças também afetaram as relações de produção e os meios de vida rurais. A reforma agrária da década de 1990 não resultou em direitos fundiários bem definidos e segurança na posse da terra. A maioria dos ex-membros das fazendas coletivas considerava os procedimentos cadastrais complicados e burocráticos e os altos custos de registro das suas parcelas como as principais dificuldades para o estabelecimento de pequenas propriedades familiares. Além disso, um dos principais legados dos mais de 60 anos de coletivização foi a erosão da identidade camponesa e a crença na superioridade das fazendas de grande escala. A maioria dos moradores rurais russos raramente se autodenomina “camponês” e sim “trabalhador” (Mamonova, 2016). Em vez de formar unidades camponesas, a sua expectativa no pós-coletivização era que as autoridades públicas atraíssem “bons investidores” capazes de recapitalizar as grandes operações e manter os postos de trabalho e outros benefícios para a comunidade (Groiez, 2018; Vorbrugg, 2019).

O espaço rural russo é povoado por um vasto conjunto de “unidades rurais familiares”. O Censo Agropecuário Russo 2016 registra 23 milhões dessas unidades: 174 mil classificadas como “fazendas camponesas”, 17,5 milhões como “fazendas subsidiárias” e 5,9 milhões como “domicílios rurais”. A última categoria agrega terrenos destinados a residência, casas de veraneio, jardins e hortas, entre outros fins, ao passo que as duas primeiras categorias constituem o que se pode chamar de “agricultura familiar”. Mas cada uma delas é em si mesma heterogênea e possui suas próprias especificidades. A categoria fazendas camponesas é composta por 136 mil “empreendimentos familiares” e 38 mil “empreendimentos individuais”, ocupa 377 mil pessoas (57% membros das famílias, 25% trabalhadores

permanentes e 18% trabalhadores temporários), detêm 28% das áreas de terra agrícola e responde por 12,5% do valor de produção total (18,2% da pecuária e 5,1% da agricultura). Já a categoria fazendas subsidiárias ocupa quase 30 milhões de pessoas (todos membros das famílias), detêm 4% das áreas de terra agrícola e responde por 34,7% do valor de produção total (38% da pecuária e 32,1% da agricultura). Assim, a agricultura familiar em seu conjunto realiza 47,2% da produção utilizando somente 32% das terras (ROSSTAT, 2018). No entanto, enquanto as fazendas familiares dedicam o grosso da sua força de trabalho para a produção agropecuária, operam orientadas para o mercado e obtêm a maior parte da sua renda da venda dos produtos, as fazendas subsidiárias dedicam a sua força de trabalho apenas parcialmente à produção agropecuária, buscando em atividades assalariadas a sua principal fonte de renda e produzindo predominantemente para o autoconsumo, embora também vendam excedentes de produção no mercado (Pallot; Nefedova, 2007).

Apesar de a coletivização da agricultura ter quebrado o campesinato como classe, não se pode imaginar a agricultura soviética sem o papel dos “lotes privados” na produção de alimentos para o autoconsumo dos coletivos e o abastecimento das áreas urbanas. No período pós-soviético, as expectativas dos reformadores neoliberais de que a descoletivização e privatização da terra resultariam automaticamente no surgimento de uma agricultura familiar pujante em moldes europeus foram amplamente frustradas. Com o colapso econômico da década de 1990, a produção de alimentos por pequenos produtores passou de uma atividade subsidiária à uma estratégia vital para a sobrevivência das famílias rurais e urbanas diante da grave situação de desemprego, inflação e insegurança alimentar, pois compensou em parte o declínio da produção das antigas fazendas estatais e coletivas, contribuindo para prevenir a agitação de massas (Wegren, 2021).

Nos últimos anos, porém, a produção das fazendas subsidiárias, que de fato representam uma forma social tipicamente camponesa, tem ficado aquém não só das agroholdings, mas também das fazendas camponesas, que apesar do nome são mais bem descritas como uma forma de produção comercial. Dados de *survey* informam que, em 2019, a participação das fazendas subsidiárias caiu para 28,6% do valor total de produção, enquanto as participações das grandes empresas agropecuárias e das fazendas camponesas subiram para 57,7% e 13,7%, respectivamente (ROSSTAT, 2020). Em razão das dificuldades de acessar crédito, integrar-se com processadores e entrar em mercados exigentes e das restrições legais e burocráticas e falta de apoio do estado, para Wegren (2021) as fazendas subsidiárias tendem a ser cada vez mais marginalizadas em termos produtivos.

Outros autores, contudo, ainda que não discordem acerca do favorecimento estatal ao agronegócio, enfatizam a notável resiliência e relevância da agricultura familiar subsidiária. Alexveev e Safronov (2018) destacam que apesar da redução do peso relativo das fazendas subsidiárias para o valor de produção agropecuária total, a sua contribuição segue crescendo em termos absolutos e o seu desempenho é diferenciado dentro das e entre as regiões, sobretudo por conta de variações geográficas

e naturais, características do padrão de assentamento, estrutura etária e densidade populacional rural, proximidade de grandes centros urbanos e presença de agroholdings no território. Evteeva, Rovný, Petríl'ák (2019) salientam que embora as grandes fazendas e agroholdings dominem na produção de cereais, oleaginosas, beterraba açucareira, suínos, frango e ovos, as fazendas subsidiárias produzem 77% das batatas, cerca de 70% dos vegetais e várias frutas, 57% da carne bovina e 42% do leite, 70% da carne de ovinos e 94% do mel, enquanto as fazendas camponesas produzem 18% dos vegetais e cerca de 30% dos cereais e das oleaginosas, entre outros. Yanbykha, Saraikina e Lerman (2020) demonstram que a agricultura familiar contribui com elevados 33,5% das receitas agropecuárias totais e que, apesar da produção das fazendas subsidiárias ser majoritariamente para o autoconsumo, pouco mais de 3 milhões delas contribuem com 19% da receita total, mais do que as fazendas camponesas, contrariando a visão de que sua participação é marginal no aprovisionamento dos mercados urbanos.

Esses dados parecem contestar a visão de que as fazendas subsidiárias são, até por definição legal, unidades não comerciais voltadas unicamente à subsistência. Mamonova (2016) identifica uma permanência de elementos camponeses na agricultura familiar subsidiária, que se manifesta em seu duplo caráter. Por um lado, se tal segmento não consegue acumular recursos de terra e capital para operar um estilo de agricultura propriamente comercial, consegue resistir à tendência de proletarização com base numa estratégia assentada na “pluriatividade”, combinando atividades agropecuárias em seus pequenos lotes com empregos assalariados nas áreas rurais ou em cidades próximas. Por outro lado, se as fazendas subsidiárias não representam mais o segmento dominante na produção agropecuária, a sua contribuição para a segurança alimentar continua essencial, seja por alimentar a si mesma produzindo para o autoconsumo, seja por ofertar parte significativa da cesta básica de alimentos consumidos nas áreas rurais e urbanas.

Em todo o caso, há relativo consenso na literatura que a reprodução da agricultura familiar subsidiária depende fortemente de suas “relações simbióticas” com as grandes fazendas. Primeiro, porque é do interesse das grandes empresas agropecuárias ter as famílias camponesas autônomas funcionando como um “exército rural de reserva”. O que para os empresários é visto como uma força de trabalho disponível de baixo custo, à qual eles podem recorrer continuamente, para os habitantes rurais é percebido como uma oferta de empregos perto de casa. Segundo, porque é comum as famílias e comunidades rurais serem beneficiadas com formas de assistência das grandes fazendas, uma obrigação coletivista que subsiste como herança do chamado “contrato social” soviético. Embora hoje isso esteja em relativo declínio ou venha sendo repaginado na forma de programas de responsabilidade social corporativa, é esperado que as empresas se disponham ou sejam pressionadas a apoiar a manutenção de infraestruturas e serviços locais, a fornecer serviços de aragem, máquinas e equipamentos, a ceder campos para pastagem e a permitir acesso à filhotes para criação, fertilizantes, pesticidas, forragem e ração a preços abaixo do mercado. Subsiste, ainda, uma habitual tolerância a pequenos

furtos de insumos dos armazéns das fazendas, dando continuidade de velhas práticas da época socialista baseadas na máxima “tudo é coletivo, tudo é meu” (Mamonova, 2016; Vorbrugg, 2019; Grouiez, 2018; Visser et al, 2019; Wegren, 2021).

Poder político: estado e políticas públicas para agricultura e alimentação

Putin emergiu de uma “catástrofe estrutural”, no rescaldo do colapso da URSS, como uma figura “cesarista” que suscitou “o aparecimento de uma espécie de solução arbitral [capaz de] despertar e organizar a vontade coletiva de um determinado bloco histórico, restaurando e reorganizando o estado russo” (Lima, 2019, p.78). Através de alianças urdidas junto ao aparato militar e ao serviço de segurança pública, Putin mostrou-se capaz de restaurar a autonomia relativa do estado frente aos interesses oligárquicos que dominavam a Rússia desde 1991. O notável desempenho da economia russa a partir das reestatizações no setor energético, das reestruturações no setor financeiro e do controle no complexo industrial-militar, permitiu-lhe recompor um estado forte e centralizado, equipado para monitorar a acumulação de capital. Contudo, apenas com as consequências da guerra na Ucrânia no comércio internacional de grãos e de fertilizantes começou-se a dar atenção ao lugar do agronegócio no projeto hegemônico putinista. E quase nada se discute sobre o papel da população rural como base social na sustentação da sua legitimidade política.

O crescimento das agroholdings é incompreensível sem levar em conta o apoio econômico e político recebido pelos oligarcas que compõem essa fração da burguesia, realçando a relação entre interesses de classe e prioridades da política pública do estado.

O governo do presidente Vladimir Putin se voltou para essas agroholdings como aliados privilegiados, recrutando-os para um projeto político conhecido como Agenda de Segurança Alimentar Russa. Os principais objetivos da agenda eram a recuperação das fazendas russas, a redução da dependência de importação herdada dos governos de Yeltsin e mais carne na dieta dos russos. Desde o início dos anos 2000, uma série de medidas de apoio público, como créditos subsidiados, incentivos fiscais e barreiras comerciais, ajudaram as agroholdings a prosperar. Elas também foram incentivadas a adquirir vastas áreas de terras agrícolas em troca de suas contribuições para um projeto político de fortalecer a agricultura e a produção doméstica de alimentos. Mesmo sendo empresas privadas, o governo Putin mobilizou as agroholdings e firmas de agrotecnologia como instrumentos indispensáveis para concretizar sua agenda política. As agroholdings prosperaram e se tornaram atores econômicos globalmente competitivos porque produzem com mais eficiência e lucratividade do que as fazendas coletivas [da antiga URSS], mas também porque podem contar com proteção e apoio político (Wengle, 2021, p.59-60).

As atuais diretrizes da política agrícola na Rússia foram estabelecidas no Projeto Nacional Prioritário para o Desenvolvimento da Agricultura 2006-2007 e posteriormente ampliadas nos Programas Estatais de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento da Agricultura 2008-2012, 2013-2020 e 2021-2025. O valor disponibilizado ronda os 1,3% do orçamento do estado e 0,5% do PIB. A distribuição dos recursos claramente favorece as grandes empresas agropecuárias, que abocanham cerca de 85% do total, enquanto as fazendas camponesas obtêm 13% e as fazendas subsidiárias apenas 2%. Além

disso, no período 2013-2020, apenas 2% dos grandes beneficiários receberam 50% dos subsídios, sendo que 1% levou mais de 40% do total, com as maiores agroholdings no topo da lista; ao passo que na extremidade inferior, 40% dos menores beneficiários receberam apenas 1% de todos os subsídios distribuídos (Uzun; Shagaida; Lerman, 2019).

Entretanto, diferente da “bancada ruralista” no Brasil ou do “*agri-cultural lobby*” nos EUA, “no contexto russo, os atores econômicos geralmente são muito mais dependentes das boas graças dos funcionários públicos e, apesar de alguns donos de grandes agroholdings serem claramente bem conectados por meio de redes informais, eles não são membros de longa data das elites do poder” (Wengle, 2021, p.71). O entrelaçamento de interesses entre governo e agroholdings decorre principalmente desses oligarcas terem se tornado aliados chave quando Putin almejava que o país se afastasse da integração incondicional ao mercado mundial e obtivesse maior independência nacional em relação às principais *commodities* alimentares. A transformação da agricultura e das dietas russas, facilitada pela articulação das agroholdings ao regime de acumulação, é saudada como uma conquista política do governo, como demonstra o alinhamento da retórica de várias firmas – Cherkizovo, Miratorg, United Grain, EkoNiva, etc. – com a agenda de segurança alimentar nacional (Wengle, 2021).

Em 2008, a Rússia era o segundo maior importador mundial de alimentos, atrás apenas da China. Nesse contexto, a escalada nos preços dos alimentos que seguiu a crise financeira global – apontada entre os fatores que motivaram a “primavera árabe” e outros distúrbios sociais pelo mundo – fez disparar o alarme. Em 2010 foi promulgada a Doutrina de Segurança Alimentar da Federação Russa, com o objetivo de reduzir a dependência estrangeira por meio da “substituição de importações” e da “autossuficiência” na produção de alimentos. Cotas tarifárias por país ou região tornaram-se a regra, mesmo após a Rússia ter aderido à OMC em 2012. Mas a virada foi em 2014, quando o decreto do “embargo alimentar” levou à proibição de importação de muitos produtos como retaliação às sanções impostas pelos EUA, União Europeia, Austrália, Canadá e Noruega após a crise ucraniana e a anexação da Crimeia, incluindo posteriormente o Reino Unido em reação ao Brexit (Wegren; Nilssen, 2022).

A Doutrina de Segurança Alimentar, de 2010, e a Estratégia de Segurança Nacional da Federação Russa, de 2015, devem ser analisadas em conjunto. A mensagem crucial nelas contida é que a segurança alimentar é um componente estruturante da segurança nacional (Lima; Dias, 2018). A Doutrina determinou limiares para a produção nacional do consumo de certos grupos alimentares: grãos, 95%; açúcar, 80%; óleo vegetal, 80%; carnes e derivados, 85%; leite e laticínios, 90%; pescado, 80%; batatas, 95%; sal, 85%. Uma vez que as medidas “protecionistas” começaram a gerar resultados em termos de aumento da produção doméstica, na nova versão da Doutrina, promulgada em 2020, alguns percentuais de autossuficiência alimentar foram ampliados – açúcar, 90%; óleo vegetal, 90%; pescado, 85% – e outros adicionados – legumes e cabaças, 85%; frutas e bagas, 60%; sementes das principais culturas, 75% (Solodova; Sigidov; Ilyasov, 2021). E uma vez provado o êxito na substituição de importações e no aumento da

produção doméstica de alimentos, ao protecionismo presente na política de segurança alimentar nacional logo agregou-se um componente estratégico “neomercantilista” de promoção das exportações agroalimentares russas. Consequentemente, em 2018 foi aprovado o Programa Nacional de Exportação de Produtos do Complexo Agroindustrial, com dotação orçamentária de RUB\$ 400 bilhões. O programa previa que o valor das exportações alimentares russas atingisse USD\$ 45 bilhões até 2024. Mas os efeitos recessivos da pandemia levaram o Ministério da Agricultura postergar tal meta para 2030 (Wegren; Nilssen, 2021).

A análise revela que a Rússia hoje reúne as condições para utilizar a produção e o comércio agroalimentar como instrumento de poder nacional e arma geopolítica. Os líderes russos estão plenamente conscientes de que o “poder agroalimentar” é uma variável chave para as grandes potências (Lima; Dias, 2018). Eles sabem muito bem que os EUA, sobre-tudo durante a Guerra Fria, sempre fizeram uso político dos fluxos de alimentos. Zhang (2020, p.63) lembra que, em 1974, o então secretário de agricultura Earl Butz, inspirado no uso do petróleo como instrumento de política externa pela Organização dos Países Exportadores de Petróleo (OPEP), “se referia ao uso dos alimentos como arma para avançar os objetivos estratégicos dos Estados Unidos: conquistar amigos, punir inimigos e conter a propagação do comunismo.” Ironicamente, hoje são os EUA que acusam a Rússia de usar a segurança alimentar como arma num contexto de “guerra híbrida” frente as crescentes vulnerabilidades advindas das mudanças climáticas (Summers; Goodman, 2020). O mais irônico, no entanto, é que tal projeção não é sem cabimento, já que o vice-presidente do Conselho de Segurança da Federação Russa, Dmitry Medvedev, lhe dá toda razão.

Os produtos alimentícios russos são suficientes para atender plenamente às nossas necessidades domésticas. A prioridade no abastecimento de alimentos é o nosso mercado interno e o controle de preços. Ao mesmo tempo, o estado vai dar continuidade à assistência em larga escala e sistemática aos agricultores. Fornecemos alimentos e colheitas apenas para nossos amigos. Felizmente temos muitos deles, e eles não estão na Europa e nem na América do Norte. Vamos vender tanto por rublos quanto por sua moeda nacional em proporções combinadas. Não forneceremos nossos alimentos e produtos agrícolas aos nossos inimigos e não compraremos nada deles. Lembro que na minha infância a URSS comprava grãos do Canadá. Era estranho, o maior país comprando trigo por dólares. Hoje, o quadro é completamente diferente: a Rússia é o maior produtor de grãos, junto com Índia e China. E nos últimos anos, o maior exportador de trigo. Acontece que a segurança alimentar de muitos países depende de nossos suprimentos. Acontece que nossa comida é nossa arma silenciosa. Silenciosa, mas formidável. Supera a exportação de armas reais. Totalizou mais de US\$ 37 bilhões no ano passado [2021] (TASS, 2022).

Além das preocupações com as frações burguesas e a segurança nacional, a política agroalimentar também se propõe assegurar o consentimento das classes populares. A garantia da segurança alimentar e da transição nutricional rumo a dietas mais ricas em proteína animal é um forte argumento para galvanizar o apoio da massa da população urbana, ainda que a inflação nos preços dos alimentos seja um fator perturbador. Mas se e em que medida a massa da população rural, consubstanciada na agricultura familiar subsidiária, sente-se contemplada e concede a sua aprovação ao projeto hegemônico, ou tenta se engajar em projetos políticos alternativos, é algo mais difícil de entender.

A literatura especializada levanta dois problemas chave para analisar o lugar do meio rural na atual situação política russa. A primeiro se refere ao apoio da população rural ao governo de Putin, caracterizado como um exemplo de “populismo autoritário”. Liderança autoritária e carismática, estado forte e disciplinador, apelos tradicionalistas influenciados pela Igreja Ortodoxa, retórica nacionalista exaltando o passado czarista e stalinista para justificar a política do estado em relação à oposição interna e inimigos externos e identificação direta entre o povo e o presidente contra as elites gananciosas e corruptas seriam traços definidores do regime putinista. Os apoiadores de Putin são comumente retratados de maneira homogênea, como uma maioria silenciosa, passiva, conservadora e manipulável, que age irracionalmente contra seus próprios interesses materiais (Granberg; Sätre, 2016). O segundo problema se refere à ausência de movimentos sociais rurais autônomos capazes de propor uma política agrária articulada a um projeto de desenvolvimento mais amplo pautado na ideia de “soberania alimentar”. O legado socialista e as restrições impostas às organizações da sociedade civil pelo regime inibiriam a organização de um movimento de base, associado à Via Campesina, que se oponha à agricultura industrial, ao agronegócio e aos seus impactos socioambientais negativos. O estado tampouco encamparia qualquer programa de soberania alimentar. Como corolário, a ascensão das agroholdings e a marginalização das fazendas subsidiárias atestariam que a soberania alimentar não tem futuro na Rússia (Wegren, 2021).

Embora ambos os problemas levantados encontrem lastro na realidade russa contemporânea, eles não contam toda a história. É possível traçar um diagnóstico mais complexo e nuançado. Na prática, a consolidação de um poder estatal autoritário não é vista pela maioria da população rural como contraditória à democracia. Os russos tendem a ver as eleições como um ato simbólico de expressar lealdade e aprovação ao governo e associam democracia com um estado forte que cuida do povo, estabilidade econômica, lei e ordem doméstica, soberania nacional e proteção contra ameaças externas. A imagem de Putin como um “verdadeiro *muzhik*” (um homem do povo) é muito difundida, mas a maioria não partilha ilusões ingênuas sobre ele. É que a memória amarga do “período de transição” faz a política econômica atual ser percebida de forma mais positiva. Além disso, o apoio popular à Putin revela o fracasso da democracia representativa burguesa frente a corrente crise orgânica do capitalismo neoliberal, à semelhança de outros países que também testemunharam a ascensão de líderes populistas autoritários, como os EUA e o Brasil (Mamonova, 2019).

O baixo estímulo para a ação coletiva, por sua vez, deve-se ao legado socialista de intervenção estatal permanente em assuntos rurais e à dependência da agricultura subsidiária as relações simbióticas com as grandes fazendas. A maioria dos movimentos e organizações sociais rurais existentes na Rússia operam em moldes corporativistas sob o patrocínio do estado. A única exceção foi a *Krestyanskiy Front* (Frente Camponesa), que defendia os moradores rurais da grilagem e apropriação ilegal de terras, mas que devido às crescentes restrições do estado e à falta de mobilização social, foi dissolvida em 2013. Mas apesar das fazendas

subsidiárias serem estigmatizadas como atrasadas e ineficientes, em oposição às agroholdings, vistas como modernas e eficientes, elas fornecem uma parcela substancial dos alimentos básicos. Elas tendem a produzir com tecnologias tradicionais mais sustentáveis (trabalho manual dedicado, rotação de culturas, esterco e compostagem, baixo uso de energia fóssil, tração animal), adotadas por causa da incapacidade de comprar insumos caros e do desejo de cultivar alimentos saudáveis e de garantir a fertilidade a longo prazo do solo. Além disso, comercializam seus produtos majoritariamente em mercados localizados, com uma cadeia alimentar curta e pouca distância do campo ao prato. Mas essa “soberania alimentar silenciosa” não é uma força social de contestação e resistência aberta ou um projeto político que disputa o futuro da sociedade. Tais práticas coexistem com o agronegócio corporativo. Enquanto o direito de produzir os próprios alimentos não estiver ameaçado, a agricultura familiar parece não ter muito incentivo para se mobilizar. Pode-se presumir que exista uma convergência tácita entre a manutenção desse contrato social implícito com as classes populares no campo e a implementação de uma política de segurança alimentar explicitamente protecionista e neomercantilista para as classes dominantes. Se isso for verdade, ao invés de esperar um movimento social russo por soberania alimentar próximo ao proposto pela Via Campesina, o mais previsível é o seguimento de uma espécie de “Via Kremlina” capturada pelo estado (Mamonova, 2016).

Conclusões

Este artigo analisou a economia política internacional da questão agroalimentar na Rússia e suas implicações globais de longo alcance. O surgimento e rápida expansão das agroholdings e seu notável desempenho no mercados doméstico e nas exportações demonstram a articulação do sistema agroalimentar russo a um novo regime de acumulação de capital. O avanço do processo de transição nutricional e a formação de uma agricultura familiar mercantilizada e heterogênea atestam a profunda transformação nos padrões de reprodução social dos meios de vida da população urbana e rural. O recrutamento de um novo segmento da burguesia oligárquica e o consentimento das classes populares rurais ao projeto hegemônico de Putin revelam o caráter complexo e nuançado do seu poder político.

A análise da questão agroalimentar russa empreendida neste artigo chama atenção para a abertura de uma formidável, mas ainda pouco explorada, agenda de pesquisas em economia política internacional. Três linhas de análise podem se mostrar bastante férteis nessa direção. Primeiro, as problemáticas da acumulação de capital, da reprodução social e do poder político são fundamentais para compreender os rumos da trajetória de desenvolvimento econômico e projeção internacional de poder da Rússia no futuro próximo. Segundo, a evolução da política agroalimentar praticada pelo estado russo, de uma reação essencialmente protecionista para uma estratégia cada vez mais neomercantilista, indica que o regime alimentar contemporâneo se está movendo para além do consenso neoliberal. Terceiro, esses movimentos estão em confluência com

o papel do estado e dos capitais chineses na configuração de um sistema agroalimentar global mais policêntrico e multipolar, facilitando novos fluxos de comércio, investimentos, tecnologias e finanças impulsionados pela China por todo o sul global. É difícil imaginar a construção de um novo projeto nacional de desenvolvimento e inserção externa mais justo, soberano e sustentável para o Brasil sem a adequada compreensão dessas grandes transformações da nossa época.

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Prostitutes, Mercenaries and Feminism: The Public and the Private in International Relations

Prostitutas, Mercenários e Feminismo: O Público e o Privado nas Relações Internacionais

Prostitutas, mercenarios y feminismo: lo público y lo privado en las relaciones Internacionales

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ABSTRACT

Feminist approaches have become increasingly present in International Relations studies. Using these theoretical perspectives, the present article analyzes the basis on which rests the prejudice toward prostitutes and employees of Military and Private Security Companies (MPSCs). The premise is that social constructions ideally locate the role of women in the private sphere, while public spaces are reserved for regular military soldiers. Our argument is that both the prostitute, when positioning herself in the public environment, and the MPSC employee, when in the private sphere, destabilize the expected idealities for their categories, generating distrust, repulsion, and uncertainty.

Key-words: Prostitutes, Mercenaries, Feminism, Public and private, Private Military and Security Companies.

RESUMO

Abordagens feministas têm se tornado cada vez mais presentes nos estudos de Relações Internacionais. Utilizando essas perspectivas teóricas, o presente artigo analisa as bases sobre as quais se sustenta o preconceito em relação às prostitutas e funcionários de Empresas Militares Privadas (MPSCs). A premissa é que as construções sociais localizam idealmente o papel das mulheres na esfera privada, enquanto os espaços públicos são reservados aos soldados militares regulares. Nosso argumento é que tanto a prostituta, ao se posicionar no ambiente público, quanto os funcionários de Empresas Militares Privadas, na esfera privada, desestabilizam as idealidades esperadas para suas categorias, gerando desconfiança, repulsa e incerteza.

Palavras-chave: Prostitutas, Mercenários, Feminismo, Público e Privado, Empresas Militares Privadas.

RESUMEN

Los enfoques feministas se han vuelto cada vez más presentes en los estudios de Relaciones Internacionales. Desde estas perspectivas teóricas, este artículo analiza las bases sobre las que se sustentan los prejuicios en relación con las prostitutas y los empleados de las Empresas Militares Privadas (MPSC). La premisa es que las construcciones sociales ubican idealmente el papel de las mujeres en la esfera privada, mientras que los espacios públicos están reservados para los militares regulares. Nuestro argumento es que tanto la prostituta, al posicionarse en el ámbito público, como los empleados de Empresas Militares Privadas, en el ámbito privado, desestabilizan los ideales esperados para sus categorías, generando desconfianza, repulsión e incertidumbre.

Palabras clave: Prostitutas, Mercenarios, Feminismo, Público y Privado, Empresas Militares Privadas.

Introduction

The public/private dichotomy has been used to categorize human beings and normalize their actions as social agents (Barry, 1996; Chapkis, 1997; Gorman-Murray, 2008). The construction and cultural dissemination of this dichotomy point to ideal spaces of occupation of gender that reproduce relations of domination between the masculine and the feminine. The emergence of feminist approaches in International Relations (IR) since the 1980s has sought to introduce the study of these dichotomies into more traditional academic debates. According to feminist theory, binary oppositions such as public and private spaces are mobilized to accommodate pre-defined social roles, with each gender occupying an expected location. Any undue occupation of spaces by certain identities would be seen as abnormal or pathological.

Traditional male-privileging views assign women to the private sphere, the ideal place for their assumed natural qualities and virtues, such as motherhood, love, trust, and integrity. On the other hand, men, likewise idealized for their bravery, boldness, and strength, would find in the public sphere the necessary tools so that their own natural virtues could be fully expressed (Siltanen; Stanworth, 1984).

Drawing on the analytical contributions of feminist scholars, the present work analyzes two categories that contradict this logic of the public/private: the prostitute and the mercenary. Without ignoring the fact that there are also male sex workers, as well as female mercenaries or employees of Military and Private Security Companies (MPSCs), this study focuses on the socially constructed idealities around these professions. Despite the fact that there are men who prostitute themselves and women who work for MPSCs, the narratives that describe these functions refer us to the role of the feminine and the masculine respectively.³

Our argument is that, in contradicting the acceptable logic of their social roles, both the prostitute, occupying the public environment, and the mercenary, when situated in the private sphere, destabilize the expected idealities of their genders, generating distrust, repulsion, and uncertainty. The analysis is developed with reference to a literature composed of theoretical views in the areas of Sociology and International Relations.

3. We may even note that part of the prejudice that is held about men prostituting themselves or women fighting as mercenaries or soldiers comes precisely from the social expectation that delimits their professional idealities into the two genders.

In particular, we try to show how the problem of gender manifests for the two categories analyzed. Through a literature review on this topic, and applying a deductive methodology, we'll discuss the reasons for these specific cases.

The definition of the public/private dichotomy is not a consensus in the literature. In a more traditional sense, the realm of the public is linked to the idea of social practice and politics. According to Hannah Arendt (2016), the very condition of being human requires the company of other people who give meaning to the actions of our species. Thus, according to her, a person who lives in complete isolation from other people, would not differ from other animals for not being able to obtain awareness of their condition or give meaning to their acts as something that occurs beyond the merely biological processes of survival (labor).

The condition of being human requires the activity of creating artificialism over the natural world (work), and, on a social level, practicing interaction in the plurality of a society (action). In this way, the private realm would be linked to the mere effort of survival and to the more restricted human interactions originally linked to family. The creation of the public space occurs in the transposition both of the family nucleus and of the condition of mere provider of biological life. The public (usually guaranteed by the establishment of the State, but historically also having its condition created by the role of religion) would be the exercise of plurality in social and political spheres with the aim of generating consensus, not by the exercise of violence, but by discourse and persuasion (Arendt, 2016).

In this article we work with the dichotomy of public and private using the state sphere as a reference. The regular soldier, by nature an agent of the state sphere, would always be in the public domain. Not so much for defending the interests of society (which could also be done by private agents), but because they are subject to control, inspection, and regulation by governments. Similarly, the activity of prostitution would also be in this public sphere because it is subject to regulation and control by the State.

The mercenary and the figure of the domestic woman would be in the private sphere. Both would not be subject to state inspection and regulation, since their relationships (the mercenary with their contractor and the wife with her husband) ideally don't belong to State interference.

When referring to combatants considered mercenaries, we are not including employees of larger and more transparent Private Military and Security Companies, which are subject to state laws and become susceptible to government regulations. In these cases, social prejudice is minimal or almost nonexistent because the State can control and limit the scope of their actions. Social prejudice towards the figure of the mercenary, when referring to MPSCs, comes precisely from companies that escape this regulation, leaving their employees free to act without any interference from the States.

The same occurs with the phenomenon of prostitution. Those women who prostitute themselves as the only means of survival are not the main targets of social prejudice. These are considered more as victims of

society than susceptible to social opprobrium. By prostituting themselves only for their own sustenance, such women are merely ensuring their biological subsistence (labor). However, those who choose this profession freely, even having other opportunities to ensure their own sustenance, are the main victims of collective prejudice. It is precisely these last women who, instead of limiting themselves to the private sphere of the family nucleus, submit to the regulation of their activities by public bodies, and, therefore, move out of the private sphere and come to be situated in the public sphere.

The debate on mercenaries and prostitutes, with their respective prejudices linked to these two figures, can contribute to a better understanding of two contemporary debates in this area of knowledge. One of them refers to the use of Private Military Companies. Beyond discussions about effectiveness, pros and cons, and the legitimacy of these organizations, there is an ongoing debate about whether the employees of these companies can or cannot be considered modern-day mercenaries.

This discussion becomes relevant not just from a legal standpoint (since mercenary activity is prohibited by the Geneva Convention) but also because the prejudice surrounding the figure of the mercenary leads to any study advocating the closeness between employees of MPSCs and mercenaryism resulting in the tacit delegitimization of the use of these companies. Thus, understanding the origins of the international community's aversion to the figure of the mercenary means situating the debate beyond its merely legal aspects, showing all the complexity of this type of discussion.

A second debate in vogue in International Relations lies in the feminist view of this field of knowledge. Among the various points addressed by feminist authors in IR, we find the denunciation of the sexist view of society that restricts women's roles to spaces ideally considered as private. In this way, women who act in the international environment are often prevented from playing roles as soldiers; from occupying decision-making positions and even from acting in prominent positions in international politics. Therefore, understanding how these idealities restrict and judge the places reserved for women also means having a clearer view of how prejudices can arise from the transpositions of these barriers created by the sexist view. The case of prostitutes, although it can also be applied to the domestic environment (as in the case of mercenaries), helps us better understand the dynamics and the basis of these aversions created by the breaking of these idealized locations by societies.

We begin the article exposing the emergence of feminist theories in International Relations and its main approaches: liberal, critical, constructivist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial. Above all, we emphasize the omnipresence of the gender problem in its critiques and analyses, as well as the denunciation of the power relations and domination that this variable carries. Proceeding with the theme of prostitution, the second part analyzes feminist approaches to prostitution, highlighting the sexological, constructivist, and Marxist interpretations of the theme. We introduce into our analysis a discussion about the binary dichotomies between the prostitute and her conceptual opposite, namely the wife/

mother, showing how the characteristics attributed to each category diverge substantially from each other.

After that, we advance with the analysis of the figure of the mercenary and his conceptual opposite, the soldier in the regular armed forces. In this part, we highlight how the private version of the soldier—the mercenary or employee of an MPSC—destabilizes the idealities expected for his category. Just as the ideal space of occupation of women would be the private sphere, in the case of the soldier defending the homeland, it would be the public sphere. While the soldier (public) is associated with love of the motherland, humanitarian work, nationalism, and ideology, the mercenary (private) is seen as someone who is at the service of whomever pays more; the mercenary is seen as serving their personal interests and can easily abandon their charge in case of a more attractive offer.

In the third and fourth parts, we discuss how gender identities in the international environment (in the case of mercenaries) reproduce the same logic of domination found in the local sphere (the case of prostitutes), reserving for each category a space considered legitimate for the stabilization of their identities. Because they fail to understand the ideational logic, both in the international environment and in the domestic sphere, these workers end up being the targets of prejudice because they do not occupy the places reserved to them.

Feminism and International Relations.....

Feminist theories emerged in IR between the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sylvester, 2003; Tickner, 2001), associated with the so-called third debate (Lapid, 1989).⁴ The first works in the 1980s aimed to question women's role in global politics and how they would be represented (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 2014). More than that, these works challenged scholars in International Relations to think about how their theories could be reformulated and their understanding of global politics improved by paying special attention to new analytical experiences. According to these authors, only with the introduction of *gender* analysis in international studies would we observe a considerable analytical impact on some key IR concepts such as sovereignty, state, and security (Sjoberg; Tickner, 2013b). The introduction of the gender issue as a relevant category and analytical tool would construct alternatives to disciplinary studies dominated by rationalist and reproductive methods of the logic of masculine (True, 2005; Ackerly; Stern; True, 2006; Steans, 2006). Certain that women would be underrepresented in IR, the main concern for feminists would be to explain the subordination of the feminine gender, or the unfair asymmetry between the positions held by women and men in the social, economic, and especially political spheres (Whitworth, 1994).

According to these authors, global politics would not only relegate female experiences to the margins, but would also ratify relations between dichotomies, especially those related to the division between the public and the private. Women would be ideally reserved for the private sphere and characterized by irrationality, weakness, emotion, sensitivity,

4. According to the author, the first debate would be between realists and idealists. The second between neorealists and neoliberals. The third between the latter and post-positivist theoretical approaches, among them, feminism.

and motherhood. Men would be assigned to the public sphere and idealized as rational, virile, strong, brave, and heroic (Shepherd, 2010).

Feminists questioned the frontiers through which such opposition had settled in the international arena and sought the means to combat them. Starting from hermeneutical, discursive and humanistic methodologies, they used philosophical traditions previously ignored by conventional approaches, looking at global politics through “gender lenses” (Peterson, Runyan, 2010; Sjöberg, Tickner, 2013a).

In the field of foreign policy, feminists warn that the male sex is not only dominant, but also the policymaker based on the assumption that if they are rational and strategically oriented actors, they would be better able to represent the nation’s line of defense, making better life or death decisions (True, 2005). In their study of foreign policy and defense, Nancy E. McGlen and Meredith Reid Sarkees (1993) concluded that women are rarely insiders in the political game and even more rarely make or participate in foreign policy decisions that lead to war, for example.

But despite sharing a deep interest in gender equality or, as they prefer to assert, in “gender emancipation” in IR, feminism is not a one-note theory. The variety of activism associated with feminism parallels the innumerable paths that its arguments may take (Jaggar, 1983; Mohanty, Russo, Torres, 1991; Steans, 1998; Sylvester, 1996; Zalewski, 2000). Liberal Feminism, for example, draws attention to the subordination suffered by women in global politics and argues about the need to include women in the areas of the public sphere that have been denied to them (Sjöberg; Tickner, 2013b). It departs from the assumption that women have the same capacity for action as men and cannot be excluded from any social sphere: higher education, government, international institutions, and financial affairs, among others. Liberal feminists investigate, for example, the inequalities between men and women and the human rights violations committed disproportionately against women, such as international trafficking and rape at war. Their approach uses gender as an explanatory variable in the analysis of foreign policy through statistical variations (Caprioli; Boyer, 2001). They also argue that discrimination deprives women of having equal rights to achieve their own goals. While men are judged by their individual merits, women are judged by their feminine qualities or collectively as a group. Such barriers could be eliminated by removing the obstacles that underpin them, and by providing equal opportunities to both genders (Whitworth, 2008; Tickner, 2001)⁵.

Critical Feminism, by contrast, goes beyond Liberal Feminism and its use of gender as an analytical variable. This approach focuses less on women’s participation in the public sphere and more on unequal relationships between men and women as gender representations in a patriarchal society, in which men have historically wished to control women’s sexuality, reproduction, and other social roles. For critical feminists, men and women are essentially different and similar to each other in several respects. These authors tend to agree that men are less prone to showing emotion and more aggressive and competitive, while women are more caring and more emotional. In these terms, society is organized taking into account masculine characteristics, privileging patriarchal norms and

5. However, Liberal Feminists tend to be criticized by other approaches for using methods considered positivist in their analyses. See, for example, McMillan C (1982) *Women, Reason and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Steans J (2010) ‘Feminist perspectives’ in Steans J et al. *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: perspectives and themes*, 3rd edition. Essex: Pearson, p. 155-82; and Mohanty CT, Russo A; Torres L (eds.) (1991) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

rules, influencing not only our institutions, but also the way we see the world (Fraser; Nicholson, 1990).

The same impetus for achieving change in the way we understand international politics is also shared by Constructivist Feminism. Constructivist feminists focus on how ideas about gender form and are shaped by global politics. In her book *The Global Construction of Gender*, Elisabeth Prügl (1999) analyzes how women have been treated in international negotiations and in international law. Even when they represent a greater number of workers than men, women still suffer lower wages and poorer working conditions. In the specific case of domestic workers, the author explains that the justification is given because domestic work is not considered “real work,” since the private sphere associated with the family differs from the public sphere in which work, in fact, would occur, lacking higher wages and individual rights. Such a dichotomy would not be limited to the local environment, but also the international (West; Austrin, 2005). Although in similar positions and with responsibilities as great as those of men in international organizations, the salary between them would diverge under the claim that women are less productive than men who hold the same positions. Prügl and other Constructivist feminists study the processes by which ideas about gender influence global politics, as well as the ways in which global politics shape ideas about gender.

In an even more relativistic and discursive spectrum, Post-structuralist Feminism constitutes one of the most important contributions to International Relations. Post-structuralist feminists assert that the meanings attributed to the things around us are coded through language (Sjöberg; Tickner, 2013b), and that linguistically constructed dichotomies such as strong/weak, rational/emotional, and public/private serve to empower the masculine over the feminine. As regards international relations, the civilized/barbaric, order/anarchy, and developed/underdeveloped dichotomies play an important role in how we divide the world linguistically, always considering a positive side and a negative one. In this way, post-structuralist feminists want to deconstruct hierarchies, especially those related to gender that lead women to be portrayed as inferior and men as superior. To disrupt the hierarchies that privilege one (man) to the detriment of the other (woman), it would be crucial to verify how we value and ratify the superiority/inferiority relationship between genders.

Some prominent works by poststructuralist feminists, the main theoretical argument of this article, serve as the basis for the deconstruction of social roles, especially those related to the valuation of gender dichotomies. Hooper (2001), among others⁶, are examples of poststructuralist researchers who have contributed to feminist thought. Shepherd’s work, in particular, looks at how the concept of gender factors into the UN Security Council resolutions and how it is implemented in peace processes. In arguing that women are more peaceful than men, the former would be expected to be more involved in conflict negotiation processes, assuming that they would be more adept at dealing with the stabilization of violence and the resumption of peace.

6. See also Shepherd L (2008) *Gender, Violence, and Security: Discourse as Practice*. London: Zed Books; Sylvester C (1994) *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Sylvester C (2003) *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

However, this process does not always work, revealing its precariousness and simplicity, as well as the very inability of the United Nations to include women in their peacemaking processes. Something that could represent gender emancipation instead reinforces the continuity of dichotomies and stereotypes around women.

Post-colonial Feminism is also based on binary dichotomies created from gender relations (Spivak, 2010; Lorde, 2007). Its concern, however, is with the relationship of subordination established under the aegis of imperialism. In claiming that history has been told by colonizers who tend to be white and Western, post-colonialist theorists embark on a difficult task: rewriting history including those whose perspectives have been excluded, as well as incorporating interpretations from the margins. Post-colonial feminists criticize Western feminists for treating women as a homogenous category, failing to recognize their differences in culture, social class, race, and geographic location. Such disregard would deprive women of their own stories by assuming that they all have similar needs for emancipation when in fact their realities are quite different.

Prostitutes and mercenaries

Feminist approaches in International Relations introduced gender as an essential variable to analyze the dynamics of actors' interactions in the international environment. However, despite this effort, their analyses still seem to have little practical impact on international policies (Hutchings, 1999). Feminist analysts argue that this vacuum exists because politics, at its various levels, is still considered a mostly male environment (Enloe, 2014). Nevertheless, because it is the only approach that uses gender as an analytical starting point (Sylvester, 1996), some themes find in feminism a legitimate spokesperson for their positions. Prostitution is one such theme.

Commonly considered an intrinsic condition of women under a patriarchal society (Barry, 1984; Gorman-Murray, 2008; Pateman, 1998; Scoular, 2004) and often cited as the absolute embodiment of male patriarchal privilege (see Kesler, 2002, p. 219-35) prostitution has been approached from different perspectives. Sexological approaches, for example, start from the premise that male behavior, when using women in prostitution, is a simple result of their biological imperative, for which such behavior would be natural. Constructivist approaches, on the contrary, consider male behavior in relation to prostitution as historical and socially constructed through male domination in detriment of female subordination, with responsibility and guilt over the existence of prostitutes (Jeffreys, 1997; Rezeanu, 2015). Marxist feminists allege that prostitution is the only activity in a capitalist society in which women are, not infrequently, better paid than men (Overall, 1992)⁷.

As previously observed, the private sphere has historically been considered feminine, while the public sphere has remained exclusive to the masculine gender (Bourdieu, 2002; Bryson, 2007; Löfren, 2003) with each environment having expected and acceptable behavior. In the case of women, the good wife, affectionate, reproductive, and sensitive, would

7. For a critique of the Marxist analysis raised by Overall, see Laurie Shrage's (1993) *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

find in the domestic environment the ideal place where her natural virtues would blossom. Prostitution, by contrast, contradicts this logic. If the private sphere is the proper place for a woman, the prostitute, in pervading the public environment, violates the natural order of things.

At the state level, prostitution in the past was considered by authorities as a problem of law and order; an abnormal phenomenon that would be associated with other anomalous behaviors such as drunkenness and trickery, causing embarrassment and public annoyance in neighborhoods, threatening security and violating peace. Authorities generally took steps to control or to curb prostitution, limiting it to certain areas, and registering women who provided sex services in taverns, pubs, and brothels. From the morality point of view, prostitution was a sin or an addiction. Prostitutes would be “fallen women,” lacking redemption and salvation (Outshoorn, 2004).

From the 1970s, with the strengthening of feminist movements, a great effort has been made to change the stigma created around the prostitute. Claiming that the arguments surrounding the practice said little or nothing about the actual situation of women, feminists problematized this practice, presenting the idea of “erotic work” (see Chapkis, 1997 and Nagle, 1997) in an attempt to eliminate the stereotypes surrounding prostitution and to bring the discussion to a commercial and professional level (Augustín, 2005; O’connell Davidson, 2002). The use of new terms such as “sex work” or “sex worker” represented not only an important semantic change but also the strengthening of the practice in terms of work and human rights⁸ (see Delacoste; Alexander, 1998 and Pheterson, 1989).

In relation to the study of prostitution, at least two great perspectives are present in the literature. The first argues that women who work as prostitutes are exploited by the sex industry (mostly men). In addition, prostitution and the sex industry together would serve to sustain and reinforce this practice while strengthening the distorted image created around the prostitute. The second argues that in a free society, prostitution is chosen by many women as a way of working, although they do not enjoy the same rights afforded to other professional workers (O’connell Davidson, 1998). These women should be free to work without fear of exploitation or violence (O’neill, 2001). More than that, sexual/erotic work arguably serves as a “liberating ground for women” (see Chapkis, 1997) regarding the discipline of their social role, traditionally relegated to the private sphere. These authors also argue that violations of the practice are linked to the legal and social construction of prostitutes as sexual deviants rather than as workers (O’connell Davidson, 2002). Such a view becomes even clearer in light of criticisms of binary dichotomies around sex: normal/abnormal, pleasurable/dangerous, healthy/ill. In this way, prostitutes, besides being stigmatized, are seen as dangerous due to the fact they became accessible to anyone, what is considered inappropriate for the feminine gender.

But we are far from reaching a consensus regarding the idea of considering prostitution a job, especially as regards its ability to liberate women from a strictly patriarchal society. Jill Jesson (1993), in reviewing several papers on the subject, argues that feminism and prostitution are

8. In this article, we used the term “prostitutes” as it is the one most closely associated with the prejudice under analysis. Although we agree that the term “sex workers” is more appropriate, this choice would not reflect the prejudice present not only in reality but also in the designation of this type of professionals.

not easily reconcilable. If, on the one hand, some feminists claim that prostitution is a free choice that empowers women in a society that has little to offer them, many others understand that, regardless of how the practice is seen, it will always represent a masculine exploitation of the feminine. For more radical feminists, for example, prostitution makes a woman a “sex slave” because of the sexual violence that is always present in the relationship between genders. In addition, legalizing the practice means authorizing and granting men the right to women, legally affirming a phenomenon to be combated (Barry, 1996; Jeffreys, 1997). In other words, exploitation and submission would continue, only under a different guise.

Regardless of which argument best represents prostitution, the fact is that by introducing the idea of gender into the discussion, feminist analysis challenges the sexual and social inequalities which, in their view, serve to replicate ideology, patriarchy, and hierarchical gender relations (Barry, 1996).

In turn, studies on Military and Private Security Companies (MPSCs) have noted the growth of this market after the end of the Cold War⁹. Several factors are considered responsible for this exponential growth: the large labor force, militarily well-trained and idle, available for hire by these companies; the presence of cutting-edge weapons on the black market—mainly from the former Soviet republics—and offered at relatively low prices to the private sector; the increase in the number of regional conflicts, generating a greater demand for private security services; and the advent of the neoliberal wave with its assumption that privatization is the best way to increase the efficiency of services provided in society (Singer, 2003).

The myriad of services offered by MPSCs has since ranged from contributing troops for direct combat to reinforce the regular military and personnel in conflict zones to providing military apparel, training soldiers from various countries, and/or working on data processing and logistics. Unlike the former mercenaries, who concentrated their efforts on direct support of regular troops during battles, the current MPSCs also provide aid to humanitarian organizations by supporting populations in regions hit by natural disasters and supporting UN peace operations (Avant, 2005; Ostensen, 2009).

Private security companies provide military and security services to states, international organizations, INGOs, global corporations, and wealthy individuals. Every multi-lateral operation conducted by the UN since 1990 included the presence of PSCs (AVANT, 2005, p. 7).

With the Cold War leading to the growth of MPSCs, there emerged, as might be expected, criticisms surrounding hiring these companies. Among the main arguments used in opposition to this phenomenon are: the high costs and the lack of transparency in the contracts between states and MPSCs; the de-characterization of the nature of states due to their loss of legitimate monopoly over the use of violence; the constant reports of incidents between MPSC employees and the local populations in the regions where they operate; the lack of a clear legal framework for accountability on mistakes made by the MPSCs on the battlefield; and

9. It is a fact that PMSCs (Private Military and Security Companies) can be hired by various international actors, including states themselves. However, even when they are serving governments and, therefore, in pursuit of public objectives, the prejudice surrounding the term ‘mercenaries’ still prevails. Evidence of this is the numerous criticisms made by authors who work on this topic regarding this type of hiring when done by state agents (AVANT, 2005; SINGER, 2003).

the need for greater control of the activities of these firms by the contracting actors (Thomson, 1996). Several experts still criticize MPSCs for the notion that their employees' activities approach mercenary activities condemned by the international community (see Percy, 2007).

In spite of the criticism, however, the growth of the MPSC market seems to be an irreversible phenomenon. The degree of dependence that states have developed in relation to these agents, as well as the need for continuity of services provided to international organizations—especially in humanitarian missions—has made the search for better regulation and transparency of this market the only feasible option to combat the misconduct of MPSCs. As international efforts move towards further limitation of their functions and activities, there is also a collective commitment by the companies themselves to increase the legitimacy and confidence of the international community in the services provided by the MPSCs (Chesterman; Lehardt, 2009).

For centuries the hiring of mercenaries to fight in conflict regions has fueled the imaginary and the discussion about the legitimacy of this phenomenon. Accused of going to war only for material gains, mercenaries have always been seen as second-rate soldiers. Authors studying politics and war have always characterized mercenaries as materialistic people who cannot be trusted, either because of the danger of their changing sides if the enemy offers a greater value than the one already paid, or their easily fleeing from conflict when the violence gets out of hand (Chesterman; Lehardt, 2009).

As noted previously, one of the main criticisms of the activities of Military and Private Security Companies is precisely the proximity of the services offered by these companies to the centuries-old mercenary activities. Authors who try to show the similarities between MPSCs and mercenaries often do so to delegitimize these companies as legitimate actors in the international scene. The more the figure of the MPSC employee is narratively approximated to the role of the former mercenaries, the less legitimacy these companies have to continue offering their services (see Lanning, 2005).

[...] The private military market was delegitimated by the end of the 1800s for both material and normative reasons. The practice of hiring foreign soldiers was universally condemned and legislated against, culminating in the Geneva Conventions that withdrew from mercenaries the legal protections that soldiers enjoyed in warfare. Essentially, the mercenary trade was criminalized (SINGER, 2003, p. 42).

The inverse of this logic can also be seen. The narratives constructed mainly by the owners of these companies, which emphasize the humanitarian work of the MPSCs and idealize them as maintainers of the international order and as stabilizers of conflict zones, try to bring the identity of these actors closer to the narrative ideality of regular soldiers. Disassembling the material motivation of these officials, defenders of MPSCs try to build a counter-narrative that distances the role of their employees from the traditional caricature of the mercenary and brings them closer to the UN's blue helmets with their broad legitimacy already won internationally (Lanning, 2005).

The narratives about MPSCs are not exempt from the relations of power and gender present in every international phenomenon. Discourses on the role of these companies, as well as the imaginary created from their representations, are embedded in subjectivities that idealize the roles of the masculine and the feminine, placing them in supposed discursive arenas with apparent status of naturalness. Through the processes of contraposition, reification, and erasure of identity instabilities, narratives about MPSCs are constructed by contrasting the nature of their activities with other similar phenomena present in the international environment, such as mercenaries and regular armed forces (Singer, 2003).

As with all social phenomena, all constructed identities are ideally linked to the public domain or the private sphere. In this way, the narratives about regular soldiers, precisely because they emphasize their nationalistic aspects and ideological motivations, end up relating them to the public scope. Adherence to the military must be justified by supposed ethical and collective standards and not by personal and financial interests. In this way, the arena of the public ends up becoming the place par excellence of these characters (Singer, 2003).

As for the mercenaries, we can verify the opposite logic. Stories about soldiers of fortune identify them as selfish characters that join in as supporters of regular troops only to take advantage of the money paid by their contractors.¹⁰ In this way, the private sphere becomes the natural domain of this type of agent because the construction of its image ends up presupposing the total absence of national or ideological values (Singer, 2003; Thomson, 1996).

But other ramifications can still be found in these accounts of regular soldiers and mercenaries. Both identities are linked to the role of masculinity, defenders of the homeland or feminized victims (Eichler, 2015). However, although the narratives refer both the soldier and the mercenary to the role of the masculine, the former is always portrayed as a civilized masculinity, while the latter is related to barbaric masculinity, one that imposes order from virility and unorganized efficiency. MPSC employees would thus be posited somewhere between these two identity ideals. When represented as conflict stabilizers, they would approach the public sphere of the regular soldier. However, when narratives about MPSCs depict their military capabilities and efficiency by force, their identity would tend to approach the opposite field, the private sphere and close range of the mercenary.

Prostitutes, Mercenaries, and Feminism: The Public and the Private

Several academic studies have already been and continue to be done regarding MPSCs. Several authors in the field of International Relations study and are dedicated to the classification, criticism, and defense of, or at least reflection on, the future of this security market.

Although studies on feminism and International Relations have left their status of marginality in recent years, research on the relationship between gender and MPSCs is still relatively scarce. Among the efforts to think about the relationship between these two themes, there are

10. Machiavelli's *The Prince* already drew attention to the danger of relying on mercenaries. According to the author, mercenaries would not be trusted to fight for money and would be on your side only in times of peace. See Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

productions that call attention to the reproduction of the relations of exploitation caused by neoliberalism within these companies. Research shows how hiring MPSCs replicates the dominant male logic in the regular military. Other authors demonstrate that MPSCs are a depository of the male chauvinist imaginary that relates the role of their (male) employees to the protection of their always feminized victims.

Though different in content, critical accounts of the contractor business, particularly in the media, take part in this gendered framing of the new state-market relationship and rely on the ideal of soldier masculinity associated with state forces. The stereotype of the hyper masculine, aggressive, greedy, and unpatriotic contractor is contrasted with the image of the disciplined restrained, patriotic, and self-sacrificing state soldier (Stachowitsch, 2015, p. 32).

We believe, however, that other relationships between MPSCs and gender issues can be unraveled. Especially those that refer to the criticisms suffered by these companies and the imaginary that delimits masculine and feminine roles within the armed forces. The choice of this study to focus on the designation of mercenaries is justified by the contemporaneity of the debate on the modern configuration of these agents through MPSCs (Private Military and Security Companies). Moreover, for comparison, the figure of the mercenary is the one that best aligns with the role of prostitutes by traversing a path inverse to them in a process of displacement from their idealized locations.

As seen in this article, the field of International Relations is marked by the presence of gender positions that ideally delimit the scope of the masculine in counterpoint to the space supposedly belonging to the feminine. The construction of gender identities in the international environment, in the case of mercenaries, reproduces the same logic of domination found in the local sphere for the prostitute, reserving for each category a space considered legitimate for the stabilization of their identities.

What we can perceive is that the debate about the legitimacy of MPSCs is based on subjective standards of judgment that go beyond the nature of the services provided by these companies. When questioning the lawfulness of the MPSCs, we are tacitly wondering how much their activities can be considered as belonging to the public sphere or not. Any private connotation of their services can generate destabilization in the construction of their identities due to their supposed proximity to the role of the mercenary. Considering the employees of PMSCs (Private Military and Security Companies) as mercenaries not only places these companies in a legal limbo – due to the prohibition of mercenary activities by International Law – but also disqualifies the work of these agents by linking their activities to merely private interests. This portrayal of PMSC employees as mercenaries distorts the idealized nature of war as a phenomenon of public character with collective goals to be achieved.

The same occurs, only in reverse, in relation to the construction of the feminine role. As the ideality of the woman is situated in the private sphere (mother, wife, daughter, etc.), any activity of a public nature by these will be considered as undue. The legitimacy of female activities depends on the private nature of their intentions. The public

offering of the woman's body generates gender identity destabilization because it places women in an inappropriate environment according to social conventions.

In this way, mercenaries and prostitutes have something in common. Both have difficulty securing their legitimacy because they are supposedly in undue spaces (public or private) according to gendered social constructions. The former would be private soldiers, deprived of the supposed public nature of the profession. The latter would be public women, thus counteracting the ideally deprived character of the feminine role.

Conclusion

Feminist studies in International Relations have brought to the forefront issues of gender, public and private spaces, and relations of domination. Approaching post-positivist theoretical currents, the authors of these approaches have always tried to identify and denounce the constructions of assumptions that would delegate to the feminine marginalized places in the international environment when compared to the constructions of masculine gender present in this space.

First, the present article has demonstrated how the feminine gender figure is socially located as the occupant par excellence of private spaces. In this way, the ideal woman (wife, mother) should occupy activities that always place her in the domestic/private sphere as opposed to in the public world. Any woman who dares to occupy a culturally reserved area (in this case a public space) would be viewed negatively by society as she is in an undue place relative to her social condition. Prostitutes would thus be targets of prejudice and marginalization precisely because they transpose these conventions.

Then, we try to demonstrate that similar phenomena also occur with employees of Military and Private Security Companies. While they are still in the process of growing and consolidating in the international arena, these companies would be building their own identities between the role of soldiers in the regular armed forces (public/legitimate) and that of mercenaries (private/illegitimate). The more these companies approach the identity of the mercenary, the less legitimacy they gain from the fact that they occupy the private space and therefore, are inadequate to those who serve and defend the homeland motivated by pure love of country. The opposite is also true. By approaching regular soldiers (or blue helmets), the MPSCs would emphasize their role of stabilizing conflicts and humanitarian work, which would place them in the public arena, thereby increasing their legitimacy vis-à-vis other international actors.

Prejudice, present both in relation to prostitutes and mercenaries, would have a common, but inverse, subjective basis. In the case of prostitutes, they would be marginalized due to the fact that they are women who take place in the public sphere, considered inappropriate according to the idealization of women. The mercenaries, on the other hand, would suffer prejudice by positing themselves in the private sphere, also considered improper for a soldier in defense of the motherland.

In this way, what can be seen in the discussions on prostitution and mercenarism would not be as objective questions, as the traditional debates have tried to lead us to believe. Behind the discussions about the

legitimacy of prostitutes and mercenaries would be the construction of gender identity with its respective places of action. By occupying the public space, prostitutes, like mercenaries in the private sphere, subvert a gender ideality by not submitting to the socially constructed spaces considered most appropriate.

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Socio-political developments in Greece and Spain in the wake of the grassroots anti-austerity campaign: towards national parliaments and local spaces



Desenvolvimentos sociopolíticos na Grécia e Espanha na esteira da campanha popular antiausteridade: em direção aos parlamentos nacionais e espaços locais

Acontecimientos sociopolíticos en Grecia y España tras el movimiento popular contra la austeridad: hacia parlamentos nacionales y espacios locales

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the socio-political developments in Greece and Spain following the grassroots anti-austerity campaign from 2011 on, which unfolded towards national parliaments and local spaces. It does so by analysing the institutionalisation of the populist radical Left as compared with the local-oriented agency of social movements in these two countries. It argues that these alternative approaches to social change and emancipation illustrate contending paradigms of contemporary political thought reflecting upon collective movements, political action, and social transformation: the vertical politics of hegemony and the horizontal politics of the multitude. It firstly introduces these contending theoretical paradigms and then analyses the political trajectory of Podemos and SYRIZA from the squares to national parliaments vis-à-vis the radical agency of social movements transforming and generating socio-spatial entanglements at the local level. Lastly, the article puts forward theoretical possibilities for an alternative conceptualisation of grassroots radical agency and democratic politics in present times, seeking to reconcile the absolute democratic politics of the multitude with the broad counter-hegemonic revolutionary project.

Keywords: anti-austerity movement. populist radical Left. social movements. multitude. hegemony.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga os desenvolvimentos sociopolíticos na Grécia e Espanha seguindo a campanha popular antiausteridade a partir de 2011, que se desdo-

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braram em direção aos parlamentos nacionais e espaços locais. Analisa-se a institucionalização da Esquerda radical populista em contrapartida à agência dos movimentos sociais voltada para arenas locais nestes dois países. Argumenta-se que estas abordagens alternativas para mudança social e emancipação ilustram paradigmas conflitantes do pensamento político contemporâneo refletindo sobre movimentos sociais, ação política e transformação social: as políticas verticais de hegemonia e as políticas horizontais da multidão. Primeiro, introduz-se estes paradigmas teóricos conflitantes e, então, analisa-se a trajetória política do Podemos e SYRIZA das praças aos parlamentos em contrapartida à agência radical de movimentos sociais que transforma e cria emaranhamentos socioespaciais no nível local. Por fim, este artigo avança possibilidades teóricas para uma conceitualização alternativa de agência popular radical e políticas democráticas nos dias de hoje, buscando reconciliar as práticas políticas absolutamente democráticas da multidão com o mais amplo projeto contra-hegemônico.

Palavras-chave: movimento antiausteridade. Esquerda radical populista. movimentos sociais. multidão. hegemonia.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga los acontecimientos sociopolíticos en Grecia y España tras el movimiento popular contra la austeridad a partir de 2011, que se han extendido hacia los parlamentos nacionales y los espacios locales. Lo hace analizando la institucionalización de la izquierda radical populista en comparación con la acción local los movimientos sociales en estos dos países. Argumenta que estos enfoques alternativos al cambio social y emancipación ilustran paradigmas contradictorios del pensamiento político contemporáneo sobre los movimientos colectivos, acción política y transformación social: la política vertical de la hegemonía y la política horizontal de la multitud. En primer lugar, presenta estos paradigmas teóricos contradictorios y luego analiza la trayectoria política de Podemos y SYRIZA desde las plazas hasta los parlamentos nacionales frente a la acción radical de los movimientos sociales que transforman y generan ámbitos socioespaciales a nivel local. Por último, el artículo plantea posibilidades teóricas para una conceptualización alternativa de la acción radical de base y la política democrática en los tiempos actuales, buscando reconciliar la política democrática absoluta de la multitud con el amplio proyecto revolucionario contrahegemónico.

Palabras clave: antiausteridad. izquierda radical populista. movimientos sociales. multitud. hegemonía.

1 INTRODUCTION: FROM THE SQUARES TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND LOCAL SPACES

The decline of the protest cycle in the grassroots campaign against austerity that broke out across the European periphery in the early 2010s (della Porta, 2017) was followed by two apparently complementary moves aspiring to social transformation, as the popular encampments in public squares were demobilised. The populist radical Left committed to elevating the new common sense and radical democratic politics cultivated in the encampments into the political arena, and so movement-parties² closely associated with the anti-austerity protests achieved significant electoral results across Southern Europe over the past decade (Katsambekis; Kioupkiolis, 2019). At the same time, social movements turned towards local communities and neighbourhoods to translate the

2. The concept of movement-parties employed here follows the relational, dynamic, and constructed approach proposed by della Porta et al. (2017).

new subjectivities and democratic praxis from the movement of the squares into a local-grounded approach, developing a wide array of solidarity initiatives for collective resilience and radical democratic spaces for fostering people's control over the commons (Hadjimichalis, 2018; Nez, 2016).

Albeit striving for social transformation and emancipation, these two endeavours have followed divergent paths. The political trajectory of the populist radical Left towards national parliaments in Southern Europe pursues the hierarchical and representative dynamics of institutionalised state politics (Kioupkiolis, 2019a), whereas the collective agency of social movements unfolds horizontally within local arenas, autonomously from the state and market (Prentoulis; Thomassen, 2019). Arguably, these two projects illustrate contending paradigms of contemporary political thought reflecting upon collective agency, political action, and social change: the vertical politics of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony (1971) and the absolute democratic politics of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's multitude (2004; 2009).

In what follows, this article investigates these two alternative projects: the institutionalisation of the populist radical Left vis-à-vis the local-oriented agency of social movements. It does so by analysing the socio-political developments unfolding over the vertical and horizontal dimensions in Spain and Greece in the years of austerity, which offer particularly constructive case studies for a critical analysis of the shortcomings and potentials of each approach. The interest in the Greek and Spanish cases is explained not only because of the magnitude of the *Indignados* and *Aganaktismenoi* movements – the most developed occupations in Europe (Gerbaudo, 2017) – but precisely because therein the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human agency and political action intersect in pursuit of social change. As these cases are the most illustrative of the reverberations of grassroots radical agency for social and political transformation, this strategic case selection allows to observe the theory at play (Ruffa, 2020). This theoretical prominence, therefore, will expand on building from a detailed analysis of complementary case studies, opposing the political trajectory of Podemos, in Spain, and SYRIZA, in Greece, to a selection of social solidarity initiatives and radical democratic spaces that emerged in these two countries constituting, altogether, the grassroots response to the multiple crises of the neoliberal hegemonic order. The very selection of the cases for analysis here coincides with these aggravating and intertwining crises of the hegemonic order, as this article will engage with different expressions of grassroots radical agency entangling multiple dimensions of human life in common (economic-productive relations, housing and co-habitation, daily needs and everyday-life management, and socio-spatial relations). This analysis will then lay the groundwork for putting forward theoretical possibilities for an alternative conceptualisation of grassroots agency and radical democratic praxis, seeking to reconcile the democratic politics of the multitude with the broad counter-hegemonic revolutionary project.

The first section introduces the theoretical debate opposing the horizontal politics of Hardt and Negri's multitude and Gramsci's vertical politics of hegemony, discussing the alternative ontologies, conceptual

apparatuses and shortcomings of each theoretical paradigm. The second section discusses the trajectory of Podemos and SYRIZA from the squares to national politics, analysing their electoral efforts in the wake of the anti-austerity campaign, and their political achievements and unfulfilled promises since they entered national parliaments. The third section investigates a selection of social solidarity initiatives and radical democratic spaces that flourished across these countries in parallel, resorting to official data available on their websites and social networks, along with other secondary data sources, such as the established literature and newspaper articles. The complementarity of these cases and their reach over multiple dimensions of human life account for the emphasis on different manifestations of grassroots radical agency in Greece and Spain. The fourth section builds from the analysis developed in the previous sections to elaborate on the theoretical possibilities for bridging the horizontal model for being and acting of the multitude and the vertical politics of hegemony, accommodating key categories of each paradigm into an alternative conceptualisation of grassroots agency and radical democratic politics at present. The concluding section offers some final remarks on the limits and potential of the vertical and horizontal approaches to social and political transformation and reflects on the need to think anew to conceive concrete possibilities of social change and emancipation.

2 VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL PARADIGMS OF COLLECTIVE AGENCY, POLITICAL ACTION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: HEGEMONY AND THE MULTITUDE

The Great Recession in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, along with the austerity policies imposed by the European Union (EU), produced an overwhelming toll on social livelihood across the European periphery, not to mention the democratic crisis that ensued it, eroding society's general trust on political institutions both at the national and European levels (della Porta, 2017). Nonetheless, grassroots social forces have responded to these successive crises through autonomous and radical collective action, and so the popular anti-austerity campaign that emerged afterwards brought renewed attention to the debate that has animated contemporary political thought for the past decades (Kioupkiolis; Katsambekis, 2014), expounding alternative approaches to social movements, political action, and emancipation. Intellectual attempts reflecting on grassroots agency and its theoretical and practical reverberations to social transformation, inspired firstly by the Global Justice Movement, have lately theorised about the new subjectivities and radical democratic politics of the movement of the squares. And the variegated interpretations have revolved around two (apparently) contending paradigms: the absolute horizontal politics of the multitude and the vertical politics of hegemony (Kioupkiolis; Katsambekis, 2014).

The vertical paradigm draws upon Gramsci's theory of hegemony, presupposing the elevation of a political agent that brings together and guides subordinate social forces in the struggle against the hegemonic order to enact political and social transformation. A counter-hegemonic

revolutionary project must target institutional power and the occupation of the political realm, understood in terms of the Gramscian extended state (i.e., the entanglement of the political and civil societies), which is the terrain wherein antagonistic political subjects contend for hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The need for taking political power to elevate social struggles into the building of a new social order necessarily entails the construction of a counter-hegemonic historic bloc, in which multiple subjects cohere under the centralised leadership of a political body capable of challenging the dominant forces of a given hegemonic formation (Cox, 1993; Gill, 1993). Consequently, collective mobilisation and action of the grassroots have a decisive role at the liminal stage of the revolutionary project: the development of constituent subaltern politics.

Gramsci assigned the development of “alternative, bottom-up and autonomous forms of life” (Fonseca, 2016, p. 7) to the working class and subaltern groups to give form to an embryonic workers’ democracy. Within these loci of proletarian life, gestated through the association and organisation of the working class (precisely what Gramsci meant by constituent subaltern politics) an emancipatory consciousness is nurtured and the revolutionary praxis instigated among the subalterns (Fonseca, 2016; Gramsci, 1919a). Gramsci (1919a) insisted on the proletarian power and the institutions of the proletarian social life that bore the potentiality of the socialist state, arguing that a genuine workers’ democracy could only emerge from the self-organised association and action of workers and peasants. Furthermore, in these autonomous and spontaneous arrangements of working-class social life (e.g., the occupied factories, socialist clubs, peasant communities in 1920s Italy), a counter-hegemonic common sense eventually embeds within everyday life.

The constituent subaltern politics of the working class allow for the formation of a national popular front, fostering the politicisation of the masses at large and overcoming ideological divisions, cohering a diverse social majority around the counter-hegemonic project. The “amalgamation of politicised masses (...) into a national popular movement” (Briziarelli, 2018, p. 98) provides sustained mobilisation for the revolutionary party (the Modern Prince of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, 1971), which embodies the national popular collective will and, endowed with intellectual and moral leadership, wages a war of position against hegemony.

Gramsci’s notion of war of position foresees the “constant rearrangement of relations of forces” between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic social classes, through the “expansion of the struggle on multiple fronts such as political, economic, cultural, and social” (Briziarelli, 2018, p. 97-8). And just as several dimensions and social confrontations intersect each other in pursuit of hegemony, the war of position unfolds through the patient and laborious effort of putting together the moral and intellectual resources and institutions for building up a counter-hegemonic order – unlike in a war of movement, when the revolutionary party seizes power through a direct assault against the establishment (Gramsci, 1971; Cox, 1993). The task of the revolution is twofold therefore: it requires the implementation of progressive politics for transforming the established political structures and creating alternative institutions within the

hegemonic order; and it relies upon the permeation of a shared consciousness throughout the social fabric, binding together oppressed groups under capitalism into a common subjectivity (Cox, 1993; Briziarelli, 2018).

Notwithstanding the logical influence of the vertical approach among contemporary Marxist circles reflecting on emancipatory struggles against capital, the politics of hegemony also resonates among post-Marxist thinkers, inspired by E. Laclau's (2005) populist-discursive interpretation of Gramsci's works. Understanding hegemony as rhetorically constructed, post-Marxist scholars reinterpret key categories of this conceptualisation to propose a transversalist vision for aggregating different social subjects into a common construct through empty signifiers that establish "a potential chain of equivalence between different social groups, circumstances, identities, and interests" (Agustín; Briziarelli, 2018, p. 15). This populist-discursive approach insists on the transversality of the aggregative discourse for creating an inclusive popular front, bypassing classic concepts of Marxism (e.g., class struggle, the Left x Right dichotomy) and dovetailing with the encounter of multiple subjectivities during the anti-austerity campaign (Kioupkiolis; 2019b). Aggregated under empty signifiers, this social majority challenges the politico-economic establishment, contending for hegemony once elevated into the political arena alongside the revolutionary party. Accordingly, political concentration and cohesion, hierarchy and leadership, and antagonism are key categories of the vertical paradigm, irrespective of whether taking a cue from Gramsci's theory of hegemony or Laclau's populist-discursive approach to it (Kioupkiolis; Katsambekis, 2014).

On the other hand, the horizontal paradigm rejects these categories, centring upon the process of becoming of autonomous subjectivities into a new constituent social subject and the absolute democratic politics it brings into play in a post-hegemonic order. As Hardt and Negri (2004; 2009) theorise, this emerging constituent subject – the multitude – is loosely and horizontally articulated in a rhizomatic network and thence engages in the collaborative production of social reality. The plurality and freedom of the multiple singularities collaborating through this network are nevertheless preserved in this process of collective subjectivation. And from its irreducible plurality stems the constituent potential of the multitude for producing new expansive forms of life: "the full expression of autonomy and difference of each here coincides with the powerful articulation of all" (Hardt; Negri, 2004, p. 87). This autonomous and horizontal articulation of multiple social subjectivities and their cooperative and inventive agency are constituent of the production of social reality, rather than means for taking political power and challenging the hegemonic order, as Gramsci envisaged. These categories of absolute democratic politics are actually an end in themselves, i.e., the very ontology of the alternative social realities that the multitude enacts (Hardt; Negri, 2009). Following this horizontal conceptualisation, radical democratic politics, spontaneous human agency, and horizontal modes for collaborating and acting are, in effect, the *sine qua non* of an emerging post-hegemonic order (Hardt; Negri, 2012). Therefore, the multitude can only rise as the constituent collective social subject of our

times as long as it organically incorporates these fundamental principles in its subjectivation process.

Moreover, it is upon these foundations that the multitude acts: horizontally collaborating within a rhizomatic networked model of association and therein producing social realities (Hardt; Negri, 2009). These horizontal modes of association not only allow for the multitude to come into being but also offer the organisational apparatus for this new collective social subject to act in the production of the common in the context of biopolitical reality (Hardt; Negri, 2009). Precisely because of the biopolitical context of producing the common nowadays – “all spheres of life,” both the natural world and the constitutive elements of human society (Hardt; Negri, 2009, p. 171) – the multitude is “formed through articulations on the plane of immanence without hegemony” (Hardt; Negri, 2009, p. 169). As such, it discards hierarchical and representative politics, for the multitude is itself “capable of making decisions and of taking action without being directed by a hegemonic force” (Kioupkiolis; Katsambekis, 2014, p. 9).

The main objections to Gramsci’s hegemonic politics, according to the horizontal paradigm, refer to two complementary notions: the emergence of a hierarchical power over disparate social subjects and the need for coherence and cohesion around the programmatic unity under this emerging political body. As Hardt and Negri (2009) have pointed out, this vertical conception of political constitution through unified and hierarchical organisation, for providing the oppressed social forces with discipline and education – as Gramsci (1971) attributed this role to the Modern Prince – can only disrupt the constituent potential of the subordinated social subjects coming together in a post-hegemonic order. Accordingly, the emergence of a counter-hegemonic party will eventually arouse vertical and centralising tendencies, reproducing capitalist relations of power and subordination. Moreover, coherence and cohesion essentially contradict the radical heterogeneity of the social field, hence undermining the autonomy and the creative potential of the multiple social subjectivities interacting and cooperating in the production of social reality (Hardt; Negri, 2004; 2009). Bearing the alternative ontologies and conceptual apparatuses of the vertical and horizontal paradigms in mind, the next sections analyse the socio-political developments in Greece and Spain towards national parliaments with the populist radical Left and local communities and neighbourhoods with social movements, respectively.

3 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE POPULIST RADICAL LEFT IN GREECE AND SPAIN

The rise of Podemos and SYRIZA illustrates the breakthrough of the populist radical Left in Europe since the early 2010s (Katsambekis; Kioupkiolis, 2019). Notwithstanding, their fall is instructive about the perils of yet another attempt to contain grassroots agency into the vertical institutions of liberal democracy (Kioupkiolis, 2019b). The electoral success of movement-parties closely associated with the grassroots campaign against austerity indicated the emergence of a new political

cycle founded upon radical democratic politics and a new common sense (Agustín; Briziarelli, 2018). Tellingly, the victory of SYRIZA in the 2015 Greek national elections and the expressive popularity of Podemos since its foundation (eventually securing a place in the coalitional government in Spain as of 2020) can be credited to a bold strategy instrumentalising the Gramscian notion of war of position into their political agenda.

The first pillar of these movement-parties' electoral project is the incorporation of the radical democratic practices developed within the encampments, which became laboratories of grassroots politics (della Porta, 2013). Therein protesters experimented with deliberative and participatory decision-making within assemblies and working groups, and enacted open, horizontal, and egalitarian processes for the collective management of the daily life within the occupations (Kioupkiolis, 2019b). These democratic mechanisms were transposed into the political dynamics of Podemos and SYRIZA. The former established an innovative multi-layered apparatus of direct practices for engaging its constituency through local circles, fully open primaries, and the collective construction of its program (Rendueles; Sola, 2018), insisting on the 'technopolitical' dimension of grassroots democracy through online platforms, such as *Plaza Podemos*, *Agora Voting*, and social networks (Kioupkiolis, 2019a). In its turn, SYRIZA insisted upon the Greek people's sovereignty, extending direct democracy through the popular referendum on a new bailout agreement with the country's lenders (Katsambekis, 2019).

Arguably, these movement-parties endeavoured to transpose the radical democratic praxis from the anti-austerity movement into national politics. Their goal was to incubate oppositional institutions for building a new political order within the shell of the old post-democratic order that had long been rooted in Spanish and Greek politics (Kioupkiolis, 2019a).

Meanwhile, on the strategic plane, is the instrumentalisation of the Laclauian populist-discursive approach to hegemony for creating an inclusive popular front (Briziarelli, 2018). Podemos and SYRIZA articulated the multifaceted identities coming together during the anti-austerity campaign into equivalential chains, using empty signifiers (e.g., 'the people,' 'the masses,' 'democracy') for cohering the grassroots around their electoral projects (Kioupkiolis, 2019a). This aggregated social majority overcame ideological and identity idiosyncrasies for opposing the politico-economic establishment: domestic elites (politicians, banks, corporations, the media) and international actors (the 'troika', i.e., the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund).

This populist-discursive frame was exhaustively explored during their electoral campaigns. Podemos boldly explored the popularity of political talk shows in Spain at that time for devising a "counter-hegemonic television project" (Rendueles; Sola, 2018, p. 34), successfully resonating its aggregative rhetoric with society at large and pervading the everyday language of Spanish politics (Franzé, 2018). Likewise, the coalitional nature of SYRIZA oriented the party's electoral strategy. A "mass connective party" (Katsambekis, 2019, p. 27), SYRIZA emphasised the development of cross-class alliances with social movements, bringing together diverse

struggles (environmental, labour, migrants, and so on) countrywide into the broad anti-neoliberal camp.

The employment of this populist-discursive strategy proved decisive in laying the foundation for the ‘national popular project’ of the populist radical Left in Greece and Spain (Briziarelli, 2018), raising a new social majority behind these movement-parties as elections drew closer. Most importantly, it allowed for the new common sense that emerged from the occupations to eventually expand beyond the encampments, pervading the social fabric of Greek and Spanish civil societies and prefiguring “popular power as a real political alternative” (Agustín; Briziarelli, 2018, p. 5).

Notwithstanding the overreliance on the politics of hegemony as the orienting theoretical-strategic framework for their emancipatory political projects, it is rather contradictory that these movement-parties have failed to acknowledge the risks of ending up entrapped in a passive revolution. Gramsci (1971) understood it as the dialectical relation between revolution and restoration, or progressive objectives hindered by regressive methods. A passive revolution, thus, produces a stalemate opposing the revolutionary and dominant forces, as the former’s progressive potential is not yet sturdy enough to dislodge the conservative foundations of the hegemonic order (Cox; 1993). In that sense, Gramsci saw the dominant forces introducing limited changes that rather than arousing from popular forces are instead interventions ‘from above,’ incorporating revolutionary subaltern groups into the politics of hegemony (Cox, 1993). Comprehensive and systemic change is consequently forestalled, as the counter-hegemonic forces are channelled into the existing political structures of the hegemonic order.

Against the backdrop of an organic crisis of representative democracy at the national and European realms – a critical juncture wherein political institutions lost legitimacy alongside the capability of producing consent (Briziarelli, 2018) – the political trajectory of Podemos and SYRIZA was hindered both within national parliaments and at the supranational level. As they became entangled in national politics, they gradually abandoned the grassroots, becoming more vertical and centralised and adapting their agenda to the institutional logic of parliaments, favouring hierarchical and representative relations (Kioupkiolis, 2019a). These movement-parties also found themselves powerless against the top-down EU intervention on austerity policies (della Porta, 2017) as well as the structural constraints of international economic governance with bailout programmes (Katsambekis, 2019).

One of the central elements of Podemos’ innovative organisational model, the popular circles were soon emptied by a top-down logic that appropriated the party’s leadership (Kioupkiolis, 2019a), just like the digital platforms soon lost influence and autonomy (Prentoulis; Thomassen, 2019). As these participatory practices eroded, “Podemos’ democratic centralism” (Mazzolini; Borriello, 2018, p. 242) manifested in the empowerment of the then secretary-general Pablo Iglesias and his nucleus, who systematically strengthened control over the party at the expense of greater plurality, horizontal participation of the rank and file, and dissonant voices from within.

Unsurprisingly, the party has undergone internal splits and recorded a steady decline in election performance recently. Even more concerning, Podemos has been relegated as a marginal member of the coalitional government led by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE. Critics have pointed out that rather than advancing progressive policies as those championed by the anti-austerity movement, Podemos has instead taken on a more traditional Left position (Errejón, 2021). Thus, the party contradictorily legitimises the ruling of PSOE, the centre-Left party that for decades concurred with a neoliberal agenda, which threw the country into the double (economic and democratic) crisis that brought the *Indignados* to the streets in 2011.

SYRIZA's adventure in Greek national politics is also disappointing, as the party found itself powerless against structural constraints of international economic governance, while developing a vertical and centralist orientation. It became "a much more homogeneous party" (Mudde, 2017, p. 31) dominated by the then Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, what became evident in his unexpected – and unilateral – decision to accept yet another bailout agreement with the country's lenders a week after the Greek people have voted against it. Ignoring the Greeks' manifest will (61% of the voters rejected the new agreement), SYRIZA bent to the 'troika,' failing to uphold its promise to restore popular sovereignty over this matter (Katsambekis, 2019). The capitulation to the third memorandum and the ensuing internal rebellion against Tsipras eroded SYRIZA's governmentability and, all in all, the party navigated the years in government with old-fashioned politics of fiery rhetoric and pragmatic – and rather controversial – policies, or by 'talking left and walking right' (Sheehan, 2017).

Even though Tsipras had managed to secure another win at the snap election that followed the acceptance on the third bailout programme and the subsequent party defections, SYRIZA has recorded poorly in European, local, and general elections since then, not securing a second mandate in the 2019 national elections, hence paving the way for the reinstallation of the conservative New Democracy, ND, in government (Mylonas, 2020). Critically, just as SYRIZA's contradictions discredited the radical Left, the party witnesses the resurgence of far-Right ultra-nationalist forces across the country, which have systematically targeted with xenophobia, racism, and violence, the very same people which the *Aganaktismenoi* stood for – refugees, migrants, and ethnic minorities (Smith, 2021).

This analysis of the journey of Podemos and SYRIZA from the squares to national parliaments (and therein towards a passive revolution) – as well as the position they currently hold, whether in power or opposition – makes a case against the preponderance of the vertical approach to hegemony as the orienting framework for political action and social transformation. The very few social demands attained during their years in government should arguably be understood as marginal concessions from the establishment that, nevertheless, serve to the reproduction of hegemonic structures of neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, at the time of writing, rather than advancing progressive politics enabling a real democratic praxis – as those gestated within the popular occupations

against austerity – both movement-parties are much more on the defensive, currently engaged in containing the advances of the far-right, which appropriates the political agenda and shapes the public conversation (Errejón, 2021). Alternatively, this article now turns towards local-level autonomous and horizontal social reproduction, as did the social movements engaged in the anti-austerity campaign after the encampments' demobilisation.

4 LOCAL-LEVEL COLLECTIVE AGENCY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE YEARS OF AUSTERITY

Local-level capacity building has traditionally been a strong feature of social movements' repertoire of action (Voss; Williams, 2012). Understanding the protest cycle as a specific time frame within the broader fight for social change, in periods of less visible mobilisation – but of latent activity nevertheless – social movements invest in “strengthening [...] autonomous spaces for collective decision-making and social transformation” (Flesher Fominaya, 2015, p. 149). This local-oriented approach is by no means an exclusive feature of the (Greek and Spanish) anti-austerity movement since it has manifested in different historical and geographical contexts of grassroots collective agency. Notwithstanding, within this framework, the radical agency of social movements reaches an impressive scale both in terms of extension and diversity, constituting the grassroots response to the multiple crises of neoliberal capitalism.

As the *Indignados* and *Aganaktismenoi* movements turned towards local communities, the protesters were not leaving but expanding, as they would meet back in the neighbourhoods (Nez; 2016). In the years of austerity, a rich constellation of loci of grassroots radical agency surfaced in Greek and Spanish civil societies autonomously from the state and market (Kousis *et al.*, 2018) and, grounded in the foundational principles of the occupations – equality, freedom, plurality, and social justice – it represents an important legacy of the movement of the squares (Flesher Fominaya, 2017).

Very much important in Spain are the several existing neighbourhood associations that, since Franco's dictatorship, became symbolic spaces of collective mobilisation (Flesher Fominaya, 2015). As the *Indignados* main encampments were dispersed, neighbourhood associations continued decentralising general assemblies, implementing grassroots agency within local communities and suburbs. Despite some loose coordination among these local assemblies, they enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy and flexibility for formulating concrete propositions concerning each neighbourhood (Prentoulis; Thomassen, 2013). Notwithstanding, given the recurrence of critical issues across different areas, the social policies implemented by collective movements transpose and interact beyond geographical limits, especially in regard to labour, immigration, and housing issues (Nez, 2016). Most recently, responding to the COVID-19 health crisis, neighbourhood associations in urban centres that were hit harder by the pandemic (as the Community of Madrid) joined the fight against the precarization of public healthcare services, securing the continuing

operation of public health centres and the jobs of many temporary health workers (Asamblea Popular de Carabanchel, 2021).

Constructive relations were soon developed between these neighbourhood associations and other autonomous citizens' organisations, enabling direct grassroots action to address pressing individual and communitarian daily life issues. For instance, the grassroots association Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform of Those Affected by Mortgages), PAH, that since 2009 has fought home foreclosure and eviction, campaigned for housing rights, and actively participated in the *Indignados* (Mir Garcia, 2019) has expanded its reach of action across the country while engaging with many neighbourhood assemblies, forming a network of more than 200 territorial nodes (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, n.d.). PAH has impacted everyday life in Spain, stopping thousands of evictions and rehousing hundreds of families in occupied buildings (Mir Garcia, 2019). It has also reshaped the debate over public housing policies towards a grassroots campaign for the right to housing in Spain, promoting a "social and shared governance" (Quintanar, 2021, p. 83) around the issue.

Several self-organised social centres also operate across Spain, intervening in the everyday social organisation of neighbourhoods. These social centres navigate different spatial dimensions, legal statuses, temporalities, and funding mechanisms (Saltzman, 2019). The squatted social centre Can Batlló, in Barcelona, is a remarkable socio-spatial experiment, for instance. An abandoned factory converted into a multifunctional socio-cultural facility, Can Batlló has since 2011 been collectively and horizontally self-managed by the local community, becoming a genuine expression of the self-conceived transformation of the neighbourhood's socio-spatial fabric through grassroots agency (Can Batlló, n.d.). It provides the community where the squatted centre is located with several projects that thrive on associationism and cooperation, e.g., solidary economy activities, a publishing house, a communitarian children's school, a library about libertarian thought, a housing cooperative, a restaurant, and multiple workshops (Can Batlló, n.d.). Consequently, the Can Batlló became not only a transformative communitarian socio-cultural space but also an inspiration for local urban networks in several squatting actions and other bottom-up projects across the city (De Balanzó; Rodríguez-Planas, 2018).

In Greece likewise, solidarity networks traditionally associated with grassroots activism entangled with the trajectory of the *Aganaktismenoi*, notably from 2012 onwards, coinciding with the weakening of protests (Malamidis, 2020). Greek solidarity providers have built resilience among most vulnerable individuals, alleviating the toll of austerity on society, and also engaged with social economy experiments, self-organised spaces, and environment-related initiatives.³

The collective self-management of occupied factories represents an important democratic experiment in terms of the emancipatory struggle for combating the economic crisis and expanding social control over production and the workspace (Kioupkiolis; Katsambekis, 2014). Under the slogan 'Occupy, Resist, Produce', the workers of the Vio.Me/Bio.Me

3. Under the scope of the 'Living with Hard Times' (LIVEWHAT) research project, KOUSIS, et al. (2018) mapped a comprehensive database of solidarity initiatives promoting alternative forms of resilience across Greece since the early 2010s.

cooperative, in Thessaloniki, progressed “from a hierarchical company to a horizontal node of resistance” (Malamidis, 2018, p. 25). In 2013, workers occupied and took control of the productive and managerial processes of the factory (that originally produced chemical products and was about to shut down) and, instrumentalising many of the *Aganaktismenoi*-inspired principles, such as horizontalism, participatory and collective decision-making, and assembly-based practices, managed to resume the operation of the factory, shifting the production to environmental-friendly cleaning products (Malamidis, 2018). The cooperative distributes its products exclusively through grassroots channels, participating in local networks of sales and distribution (Vio.Me/Bio.Me, n.d.). As Vio.Me/Bio.Me actively takes part in the markets-without-middlemen movement, it extends the reach of its products and the values of self-management, establishing a direct and social relationship with its consumers (Malamidis, 2018). Moreover, by insisting upon the right to work, dignity at the workplace, and self-determination of the workforce, the cooperative employs a holistic approach to production, its consumers, and the workers themselves (Vio.Me/Bio.Me, n.d.), enacting the self-actualisation of the workers’ emancipatory power.

The 2015 refugees crisis also catalysed social solidarity throughout the country, as the maxim ‘nobody is alone in the crisis’ (an anti-austerity slogan that soon became part of the new common sense in Greece) reached thousands of refugees arriving in Greek shores (Hadjimichalis, 2018). Greek civil society mobilised resources and networks to extend social support structures for addressing refugees’ urgent needs, and offered a constructive response to the governmental migration policy of camps and detention centres that remained in force during SYRIZA’s 4-year mandate (Agustín; Jørgensen, 2019). In a wave of squatting vacant buildings for housing refugees across the country, the City Plaza Hotel, in Athens, ran as an autonomous self-organised space for co-habitation from 2016 till 2019, becoming an alternative socio-spatial entanglement produced by grassroots radical agency. Besides inaugurating a space for communal living and addressing the immediate needs of more than 2,500 refugees, the solidarity movement engaged in the occupation and daily management of the building insisted on the autonomy and empowerment of refugees’ own agency, constituting collective action together with them (Antonopoulou, 2022). The co-habitants of the City Plaza developed new alternatives and imaginaries through the shared coexistence and the self-organising processes of everyday life within the squat (Agustín; Jørgensen, 2019). Albeit closed in 2019, the City Plaza proved the potential of grassroots radical agency towards transformation and emancipation, enacting autonomy and horizontality for producing alternative modes of organising society at the local level and outside the institutional realm of the state.

By conceiving the social movements engaged in these socio-spatial entanglements at local arenas as collaborating nodes in a rhizomatic network of horizontal, associational, and autonomous loci of grassroots radical agency, one realises the process of becoming of a constituent collective social subject (Saltzman, 2019), as Hardt and Negri theorised. Taking

the form of the multitude, this emerging collective social subject raises autonomously, out of the very associative power of the grassroots, and is capable of producing alternative social realities and imaginaries (Agustín; Jørgensen, 2019), which are gestated within these socio-spatial entanglements in communities and neighbourhoods. In these local spaces, multiple autonomous subjectivities (social movements, citizens organisations, activists, vulnerable individuals and groups) come together horizontally and, bound by the constituent principles of absolute democratic politics – solidarity, equality, freedom, openness, and collective self-determination (Hardt; Negri, 2012) – therein engage in the production of the common. And just as this emerging collective social subject embodies and expands grassroots radical agency through this network, it transforms every aspect of life within these local entanglements: social relations, spatial arrangements, political acting, and productive activities.

A detailed analysis of the scope and reach of these selected social solidarity networks and radical democratic spaces (alongside other socio-spatial entanglements interacting in this network of grassroots radical agency), as well as the impact they have produced on human life (both at the collective and individual levels), indicate, therefore, the potential of the multitude’s horizontal politics for social transformation. Although leadership, homogeneity, and hierarchy don’t stand in these local socio-spatial entanglements, key features and dynamics of the vertical politics of hegemony might still be accommodated nonetheless, leading to a fruitful and more accurate conceptualisation of grassroots radical agency in pursuit of social transformation. The next section advances these theoretical possibilities.

5 THEORETICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR ENGAGING THE MULTITUDE IN COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POLITICS.....

While embodying the ontological realisation and conceptual apparatus of the horizontal paradigm, social movements have provided a twofold contribution to neighbourhoods and communities in Greece and Spain in the years of austerity: they shape the terrain of struggle, enacting collective resistance, and implement a revolutionary praxis, democratising local arenas and empowering civil society. In fact, by doing so, this emerging collective social subject embeds and actively takes part in the politics of hegemony. In this regard, this section proposes some theoretical reflections for an alternative conceptualisation of grassroots radical agency, indicating a productive common ground for bridging the horizontal and vertical paradigms.

Within these local socio-spatial entanglements transformed and generated by social movements, the constituent subaltern politics that Gramsci attributed to the working class are, in effect, produced. Prefiguring the multiple “centres of proletarian life” (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 80) of his time, in these autonomous and horizontal arrangements of grassroots social life, a counter-hegemonic common sense develops and pervades everyday life. On that account, both the communist consciousness and mass constructive action that Gramsci (1919a) insisted upon are

put at the service of emancipation and bottom-up social transformation, which is “generated by the associative experience” (Gramsci, 1919b, p. 87) of the multiple subjectivities oppressed under neoliberal capitalism. By producing constituent subaltern politics at the local level through the collective power of the grassroots, this constellation of egalitarian and emancipated socio-spatial entanglements actually embodies a dawning system of socialist living, corresponding to what Gramsci envisaged as an embryonic proletarian democracy, hence building up the cornerstone of the counter-hegemonic revolutionary project.

Moreover, as social movements enact new forms of politics within the everyday life of communities and neighbourhoods, they actively politicise the multiple social subjects coming together within these local universes (Garcés, 2019). A national popular front eventually emerges, expanding beyond each socio-spatial entanglement as these multiple nodes converge and intertwine into a dynamic network of grassroots radical agency. Social movements also develop alternative institutions and practices within these local arenas, on the margins of the state and market, wherein the grassroots engage in the production and management of the common through this self-determining model of collective association and organisation (Voss; Williams, 2012). Furthermore, as an emancipatory consciousness flourishes therein and the revolutionary praxis guides the oppressed social subjects converging into these local arenas, social movements actively perform a counter-hegemonic role. This emerging collective social subject, in effect, wages a Gramscian war of position, which thence takes place outside (and often in opposition to) the institutionalised politics of the state. Tellingly, it takes place in everyday life, itself the prime field of emancipatory struggle (Hadjimichalis, 2018).

Social transformation is, therefore, sparked by the very belief in an alternative social formation that emancipates one from the hegemonic structures underpinning the existing order, which alienate and restrict human life. The multitude raises as a constituent collective social subject that is organically committed to emancipation by opposing and challenging the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism over human life and hence is capable of producing new social realities. This antagonistic relation to the hegemonic order, albeit naively discarded by Hardt and Negri (2009) due to the immanent nature of the multitude’s subjectivation, is actually paramount for this new collective social subject to act politically against the neoliberal capitalist order. In this conceptualisation, the multitude, emerging from these local socio-spatial entanglements is bound by this commitment against neoliberal capitalism, precisely so it can resist and challenge its hegemony. As discussed above, the alternative realities enacted by social movements transform the very social, political, and economic structures oppressing the multiplicity of social subjects entangled within these local arenas, offering a glimpse of egalitarian and emancipated forms of life.

Arguably, Greek and Spanish civil societies became a vibrant theatre wherein counter-hegemonic struggles intertwine with new forms of politics from below and are diffused through the daily life within local communities and neighbourhoods (Kanellopoulos, *et al.*, 2021). These

egalitarian and emancipated socio-spatial entanglements, therefore, indicate the potential of alternative social formations wherein the failures of neoliberal capitalism are tackled in collective, self-determining, and solidary means, even though the harsh impacts of the years of austerity and struggle in these countries – and these are not to be forgotten – will long burden upon collective livelihood in these societies. Most importantly, as the horizontal and vertical dimensions of grassroots agency and radical democratic politics intersect within these local domains, the new constituent social subject of our times eventually emerges to produce social transformation bottom-upwards.

6 CONCLUSION

This article has indicated the shortcomings of the vertical paradigm as the orienting strategic framework for political action, as the analysis of the political trajectory of Podemos and SYRIZA from the squares to national politics (and therein into a passive revolution) produced in the second section corroborates it. Alternatively, the third section has analysed a selection of strategic case studies embodying multiple expressions of local-oriented grassroots radical agency in Greece and Spain, to illustrate the potentials of the multitude's horizontal politics for producing social change at the local level. Most importantly, these analyses laid the groundwork for putting forward theoretical possibilities for reconciling key categories of the horizontal and vertical paradigms, exploring productive common grounds towards an alternative understanding of the subjectivation process of the emerging collective social subject of our times and the radical democratic practices it brings into play. Grounding these theoretical reflections on concrete cases of generative collective action that flourished across Greece and Spain in the years of austerity, the fourth section attempted to bridge Gramsci's counter-hegemonic politics and the networked model for being and acting of Hardt and Negri's multitude. By situating local-level horizontal and autonomous grassroots radical agency within the broad revolutionary project, it expects to unravel the practical possibilities for the multitude to reconstruct socio-spatial arrangements from below, eventually succeeding in producing alternative orders to neoliberal capitalism.

In view of the aggravating crises of the hegemonic order, which recently unfolded over health, migration, and international security issues, to think anew and seek new conceptual approaches to grassroots agency and democratic politics is all the more essential. Moreover, one must transcend the theoretical plane and imbue these alternative understandings into concrete possibilities of social change and emancipation. By opposing traditional conceptions of political action inherent to the vertical dynamics of state politics and horizontal and autonomous grassroots radical agency, this article hopes to make a move in this direction.

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El MERCOSUR ante la desaceleración del comercio intrarregional y las dinámicas de desintegración entre 2012 y 2022: análisis y perspectivas actuales en clave autonomista

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RESUMEN

En el presente artículo nos proponemos analizar el binomio integración regional y comercio intrarregional en América del Sur en perspectiva autonomista. Se aborda la evolución del comercio -en la última década- del MERCOSUR en su conjunto con el resto de los países sudamericanos y con China en el período 2012-2022. El desarrollo del artículo da cuenta del proceso de la desintegración y del aumento de la dependencia y la primarización de las economías de los países mercosureños. Aspectos que, si bien se acentuaron en los últimos años, han caracterizado las estructuras económicas de los países del continente y han condicionado el tipo de inserción y su rol en el comercio internacional. Se busca analizar cómo el aumento del comercio intrarregional es una vía para fortalecer los procesos de integración en clave de autonomía. Para su consecución, consideramos que en el actual contexto -marcado por los efectos de la pandemia y la crisis generalizada que ésta provocó, junto con la guerra entre Rusia y Ucrania- es relevante reflexionar acerca del rol de Brasil en la integración regional. La pregunta problematizadora que guía este análisis es acerca de la posición que la región sudamericana y el bloque del MERCOSUR van a jugar en el presente contexto geopolítico.

Palabras clave: Integración Regional – MERCOSUR- Brasil- Comercio

RESUMO

Neste artigo nos propomos a analisar o binômio integração regional e comércio intrarregional na região -América do Sul- em perspectiva autonomista. Aborda-se a evolução do comércio na última década do Mercosul em seu conjunto com o resto dos países sul-americanos e com a China. O desenvolvimento do artigo dá conta do processo de desintegração e aumento da dependência e primarização das economias dos países “mercosureños”. Aspectos que, embora acentuados nos últimos anos, têm caracterizado as estruturas econômicas dos países do continente e condicionado o tipo de inserção internacional possível no sistema internacional. Procura-se analisar como o aumento do comércio intrarregional é uma forma de fortalecer os processos de integração em termos de autonomia. Para a sua consecução, consideramos que no atual contexto -marcado pelos efeitos da pandemia e pela crise geral que ela provocou, juntamente com a guerra entre a Rússia e a Ucrânia- é relevante refletir sobre o papel do Brasil na integração regional. A questão problematizadora que norteia esta análise é sobre a posição que a região sul-americana e o bloco do MERCOSUL vão ocupar neste novo esquema geopolítico.

Palavras chave: Integração Regional- MERCOSUL- Brasil- Comércio

ABSTRACT

In this article we propose to analyze the binomial of regional integration and intra-regional trade in the region -South America- from an autonomist perspective. We address the evolution of trade of MERCOSUR as a whole with the rest of the South American countries and with China in the period 2012-2022. The development of the article shows the process of disintegration and increased dependence and primarization of the economies of the Mercosur countries. These aspects, have characterized the economic structures of the countries of the continent and have conditioned the type of international insertion possible within the international system. We seek to analyze how the increase in intra-regional is a way to strengthen integration processes in terms of autonomy. To achieve this, we consider that in the current context – marked by the effects of the pandemic and the generalized crisis it provoked, together with the war between Russia and Ukraine – it is relevant to reflect on the role of Brazil in regional integration. The problematic question that guides this analysis is about the position that the South American region and the MERCOSUR bloc will play in this new geopolitical scheme.

Key words: Regional Integration – MERCOSUR- Brasil- Commerce

Enfoque

La desintegración económica y la fragmentación política que la región atravesaba de manera previa a la pandemia se agudizaron con su llegada (Barrenengoa, 2020). Como consecuencia, no sólo se han profundizado las desigualdades existentes (Pérez-Saint 2020), sino que, algunos de los países de la región aumentaron su dependencia económica, y política en un sistema internacional cada vez más desigual (Barceló, Barrenengoa, 2022). Al mismo tiempo, avanzan procesos de largo alcance como parte de la transición histórica espacial y crisis mundial (Merino, 2021), a partir de las cuales se han sucedido una serie de cambios en el propio modelo de acumulación capitalista, y en el Norte global. Como parte de dichas

transformaciones, los Estados de la región sudamericana han visto limitadas sus capacidades de maniobra, su autonomía y soberanía.

El propósito de este artículo es aportar a los estudios sobre integración regional desde una perspectiva autónoma, a partir de problematizar el comercio regional, y los efectos de la primarización de las economías en los últimos años. En un contexto donde los distintos caminos para la integración económico comercial están siendo discutidos, se busca problematizar la situación actual del intercambio comercial entre países y reflexionar a partir de ello. Asimismo, habiendo transitado la crisis por la pandemia, consideramos relevante recuperar los procesos previos. Nos proponemos abordar, en primer lugar, el panorama del comercio intrarregional entre los Estados parte del MERCOSUR y con el resto de América del Sur, con el fin de problematizar la situación de dependencia y reprimarización. A partir de ello, se busca plantear la integración regional como herramienta en articulación con una estrategia de desarrollo que busque mayor autonomía para el bloque regional. Es decir, nos proponemos pensar la dimensión comercial de la integración regional como instrumento potenciador de la autonomía, a partir de revisar datos y análisis de la última década y ponerlas en diálogo con distintas teorías e investigaciones en curso que abordan el proceso de transición histórica espacial (Merino, 2021).

La apertura y la integración son dos caminos considerados aquí como opuestos, por sus sentidos políticos. Las políticas de apertura comercial han sido parte de la historia reciente de la región sudamericana, como parte de las reformas neoliberales del Consenso de Washington (Kan, 2017), que también moldearon un tipo de integración regional de carácter abierto. La apertura total de las economías junto con la baja arancelaria configuró un tipo de inserción en el mercado mundial desventajoso para los Estados del MERCOSUR. Siguiendo a Mariana Vázquez (2019), coincidimos con su caracterización, a grandes rasgos, de tres etapas. La primera, entre 1991 y 2002, con un sentido más aperturista a tono con la época de su surgimiento. En segundo lugar, entre 2003 y 2012, una etapa más prolífica en términos de integración y diversificación de la agenda Mercosureña más allá de lo comercial. Y en tercer lugar, la etapa en la que aquí nos enfocaremos, desde 2012 hasta el presente, caracterizada por los intentos por hacer de la unión aduanera un área de libre comercio, al mismo tiempo que se desaceleraron las tendencias más políticas dentro del MERCOSUR, a la par del cambio en el mapa político regional (Barrenengoa, Kan, 2023).

En los últimos años, especialmente desde 2016, la retórica integracionista pasó a estar marcada por metáforas como “modernización”, “flexibilización” y “distintas velocidades”. Por tanto, ya no se debate si priorizar las negociaciones externas con otros bloques y países, sino la manera de llevarlo a cabo: “negociando todo juntos o habilitando la firma individual, por fuera del MERCOSUR. Incluso en Paraguay ya no cierran la puerta a un acuerdo comercial con China, siempre que se haga en bloque y que no implique condicionamientos políticos, por ejemplo, que Asunción asuma la política de “una sola China” y corte vínculos con Taiwán” (Frenkel, 2022).

Partimos de una concepción de la integración regional que es multidimensional, en tanto política pública (Perrota, 2013). Por ello, sugerimos pensar las políticas de integración como herramientas que posibilitan reflexionar, en el marco de las asimetrías entre Norte y Sur Global, y en medio de los patrones de comercio predominantes. Con ello nos referimos tanto al incremento de la presencia china en los Estados mercosureños, como a la histórica presencia de EE.UU. como potencia regional, y desde estas, los conflictos y tensiones que se vienen desatando. Tanto por el acercamiento chino como por el estrechamiento de los vínculos con la mayoría de los países sudamericanos -excepto Paraguay-, vivimos tiempos de expansión espacial por parte de China, en paralelo con la reorientación del proceso de acumulación material por fuera de occidente y su área de influencia, en lo que algunos autores denominan el heterogéneo espacio del Sur global, constituido además por diferentes jerarquías (Fernández y Moretti, 2020, p. 317).

En ese marco, hacemos referencia a la autonomía regional en diálogo con los aportes de la teoría de la autonomía. Myriam Colacrai (2009) propone pensarla como medio para alcanzar una mejor inserción internacional en un mundo globalizado con una elevada interdependencia, enfatizando la importancia de la integración regional para ellos. La autora enfatiza en los componentes para que una política exterior sea autonómica, y alerta sobre los problemas que conlleva el minimizar la incidencia de los factores domésticos. Otro de los aspectos de la teoría de la autonomía que se retoma para el análisis es caracterizar al sistema internacional como estructurado y jerárquico, donde los países del Sur global tienen una posición subordinada, en contraposición a las visiones que lo conciben como anárquico (Jaguaribe, 1979; PUIG, 1984). De esta manera, pensamos en conjunto las políticas domésticas con las agendas de política exterior, recuperando estudios clásicos y recientes (Míguez, 2020; Simonoff, 2019; Deciancio, 2016; Colacrai, 2009; Lasagna, 1995; Van Klaveren, 1992; Rosenau, 1968) que articulan los actores domésticos y las orientaciones de los países en cuanto a su política económica y exterior.

El presente artículo se divide en tres apartados. En primer lugar, como diagnóstico inicial, se ofrecerá un panorama del comercio intrarregional entre los Estados parte del Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) y con el resto de América del Sur, para visibilizar cómo evolucionó dicho comercio en la última década. En segundo lugar, se analizan los vínculos comerciales con uno de los principales socios³ extrarregión de los países del bloque MERCOSUR en su conjunto: China entre 2012 y 2020. Así se obtendrá un balance que permita trazar consideraciones iniciales sobre las relaciones económicas entre los países, en el periodo seleccionado.

Se analiza cómo la desarticulación del comercio intrarregional coincide con el giro *liberal-conservador* (Sanahuja y Caetano, 2019) en las políticas exteriores de los dos grandes socios del bloque MERCOSUR: Brasil y Argentina, con el triunfo de Mauricio Macri (2015) y la destitución de Dilma Rousseff (2016). Asimismo, la crisis política, con sus matices y particularidades en cada país, contribuyó al desmantelamiento de las principales instituciones de la gobernanza regional, como la Unión de las Naciones Sudamericanas (UNASUR) y la amplia cartera de proyectos

3. Desde 2009, el gigante asiático es el principal socio comercial de Brasil, al comprar más del 70% de productos de exportación agropecuarios, minerales y petróleo (Taglioni, 2021, p. 77). Así, a pesar de las rispideces diplomáticas con China durante el gobierno de Bolsonaro, continuó la tendencia de aumento en las ventas al mercado asiático.

vinculadas a esa organización, en las áreas de Defensa y Seguridad internacionales, Infraestructura, Salud y cooperación para la preservación del ambiente. En el caso del MERCOSUR, los intentos por reconfigurarlo se pueden observar en los acercamientos a un acuerdo preferencial con la Alianza del Pacífico y el acuerdo de libre comercio con la Unión Europea alrededor de 2019. En ambos casos, lo que estaba en juego era su transformación de una unión aduanera común a un área de libre comercio. Si bien no fue reformada la cláusula que posibilita que alguno de los Estados del MERCOSUR firme TLC de manera unilateral, fue por esos años cuando se buscó que el MERCOSUR fuera objeto de acuerdos económico- comerciales con otros actores por fuera de la región (Barrenengoa, Kan, 2023).

En el tercer apartado, se analiza el rol de Brasil en el proceso de integración regional, principalmente, en el bloque MERCOSUR, a partir del retorno de la coalición liderada por el Partido de los Trabajadores (PT), que llevó a Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva por tercera vez a la presidencia. Para ello, se llevará a cabo un recorrido por las principales tradiciones de política exterior brasileña hacia la región y las perspectivas que emergen para el MERCOSUR tras el cambio político. Esto permite reflexionar en torno a cómo una agenda conjunta de negociaciones extrarregionales puede constituirse con anclaje en esta nueva integración.

Se culmina con una sección de consideraciones finales, que recupera las reflexiones y discusiones abordadas. A partir de una estrategia metodológica cualitativa (Marradi, Archenti y Piovani, 2007), basada en el trabajo con fuentes primarias y secundarias, se han tomado estadísticas provenientes de distintas bases de datos para el análisis del comercio MERCOSUR, en diálogo con la bibliografía especializada y la revisión de documentos oficiales de organismos como la Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL).

2. Panorama del comercio intrarregional en América del Sur entre 2012 y 2020.....

Para comprender el escenario actual, es importante tener en cuenta factores de larga duración que contribuyen a analizarlo, como la particularidad de Sudamérica y el modo en que los Estados y sus economías se fueron insertando en un mercado internacional caracterizado por sus estructuras dependientes. Siguiendo las ideas de autores claves de la teoría de la autonomía como Helio Jaguaribe y Juan Carlos Puig, coincidimos con Briceño Ruiz y Simonoff (2015) en torno a pensar un Estado de tipo regional, en perspectiva estratégica. A diferencia de acotar la integración al intercambio comercial y el desarrollo económico e industrial -tal como anunciaban los pronósticos de la CEPAL en los '50-, los pensadores autonomistas han contribuido a pensar la integración, el desarrollo y la autonomía política superando la perspectiva económica, aunque sin prescindir de su centralidad. De allí que la multidimensionalidad nos sirve para pensar en la integración desde un punto de vista amplio. Con relación a esto, Cecilia Míguez (2021) contribuye a pensar en los rasgos específicos que asumieron las periferias de esta región, no sólo por su dependencia en términos económicos sino también políticos.

Partiendo de las transformaciones estructurales del sistema capitalista y la proliferación de empresas transnacionales, las estructuras estatales se ven modificadas ante una nueva espacialidad “glocalizadora” (Ordóñez, Fernández y Brandao, 2021: 16). Bajo estas dinámicas, se genera la fragmentación de los espacios nacionales, y las concepciones de desarrollo e integración se ven afectadas. De esta manera, se desarrolla la economía mundo- capitalista, que liga los centros, semiperiferias y periferias a la acumulación del capital a escala global, reproduciendo un patrón de desigualdad, notable en la región sudamericana. Desde la consideración de la lógica global del capitalismo y su carácter polarizador y desigual, a continuación, analizamos algunos datos del comercio regional a nivel del MERCOSUR.

La siguiente síntesis estadística proporciona datos e información sobre el comercio del MERCOSUR con la región (América del Sur) y especialmente en los intercambios con China y para el período 2012-2020, años en que el gigante asiático se consolidó como el primer socio comercial de los países del bloque, con excepción de Paraguay.

Consideramos que un análisis del comercio internacional conlleva, además de mirar números, entender la economía política que orienta a los Estados y las estructuras productivas que determinan —en mayor o menor medida— la división internacional, social y de género, del trabajo. Por lo tanto, aquí la intención no es solo ver estadísticas, sino interpretar la realidad socioeconómica del MERCOSUR a partir de una lectura crítica sobre qué denotan, en el marco de los procesos de desintegración económica y fragmentación política de la última década.

Partimos de la base de que, en los últimos años, el comercio intrarregional de América del Sur se encuentra en niveles significativamente bajos y la región presenta señales de desaceleración económica desde el fin del *boom de los commodities* (CNI, 2017). Sumada a la crisis política manifestada a través del agotamiento del pacto social, que llevó a levantamientos populares en varios países durante 2018 y 2019 (OBIESUR, 2020). En paralelo a estos procesos, se fueron transformando las dinámicas políticas que habían caracterizado el presente siglo, sobre todo aquellas vinculadas con la integración regional (Barrenengoa, Kan, 2023). A partir de 2015 resurgen, como resultado de las nuevas alianzas de poder en la región, políticas más afines con los modelos de integración de finales de los ‘80 e inicios de los ‘90, enfatizando los vínculos económico-comerciales por sobre las áreas social, política y cultural (Barrenengoa, Kan, 2023).

Entre 2008 y 2014, durante el denominado *boom de los commodities*, se registró el mayor aumento del comercio de América del Sur con el mundo (Barros et al, 2020). El comercio intrarregional siguió esta tendencia y alcanzó sus mayores flujos entre 2012 y 2014, superando los USD 200.000 millones de corriente de comercio (Barros et al, 2020). En este período prevaleció un alineamiento político de los gobiernos nacionales con relación a la integración, generando políticas orientadas al fortalecimiento de los procesos de integración en sus múltiples dimensiones. Como consecuencia, se produjo un *auge* de las instituciones de gobernanza regional, que permitió una mayor concertación política en distintos niveles -regional, estatal y subnacional- y dimensiones de la realidad -economía y

comercio, defensa, social, educativo, entre otras. En este sentido, se destaca el relanzamiento del MERCOSUR con el consenso de Buenos Aires en 2003, la creación de la UNASUR en 2008, a partir de la intensificación del diálogo entre la Comunidad Andina de Naciones (CAN) y el MERCOSUR, y la creación de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC) en 2011. Esta organización tuvo como antecedentes mecanismos históricos de concertación política, como el Grupo de Río y los Grupos de Contadora y Apoyo a Contadora de la década de 1980, creados en un contexto marcado por las transiciones hacia la democracia, principalmente en el Cono Sur (Barrenengoa, Barceló, 2021)

En parte, el mayor entendimiento político y las posibilidades de recrear instituciones regionales se debió a la prosperidad económica de ese ciclo. Ahora bien, dichas instituciones también apostaron por profundizar el regionalismo económico -manteniendo niveles altos de intercambios comerciales intrarregionales- y la concertación política. En este sentido, se destaca la Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Sudamericana (IIRSA, el Banco del Sur⁴, el Fondo Latinoamericano de Reservas (flar) y del Convenio de Créditos y Pagos Recíprocos (ccr) de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración (ALADI), el Consejo Sudamericano de Defensa de la UNASUR y de toda la estructura institucional de cooperación en políticas públicas del MERCOSUR, como el Instituto Social, el Instituto de Derechos Humanos, la Reunión Especializada de la Agricultura Familiar (reaf), La Reunión Especializada de la Mujer, entre otras instancias de participación de la sociedad civil en las instancias regionales de coordinación política. No obstante, estas no lograron dinámicas que permitieran mayor autonomía para no depender de las coyunturas internas y los vaivenes ideológicos de los gobiernos nacionales (Severo, Magalhaes, 2020).

En esos años también se puede apreciar que los países del MERCOSUR participaron en al menos 55 % de los intercambios comerciales intrarregionales durante todo el período analizado (2012-2020). Es decir, el MERCOSUR⁵, pese a ser una unión aduanera imperfecta, con todas las limitaciones inherentes a las políticas domésticas de los países miembros y a las transformaciones, logró incentivar la profundización de las relaciones comerciales con el resto de los países del continente. Este factor es fundamental, considerando que el comercio intrarregional⁶ es más diversificado, tiene mayor valor agregado⁷ que el comercio con el *resto del mundo* y, por ende, genera más y mejor empleo de calidad (Barros et al, 2020). Por su parte, los países del MERCOSUR destinaron, conjuntamente, un 13% de sus exportaciones al propio bloque y, de lo que importan, un 16% proviene de socios del bloque. Difiere con lo que sucede al interior de otro bloque, la Alianza del Pacífico, que destina a sí mismo tan solo un 3% de sus exportaciones (Cepal, 2018). Cómo se señaló antes, los Estados parte de dicho bloque, han adoptado una estrategia de apertura indiscriminada mediante la negociación de TLCs.

En términos comparativos, con otras regiones del mundo, el MERCOSUR cuenta con un arancel externo común (AEC) relativamente elevado (Barros et al, 2020). En consecuencia, el AEC genera cierta reserva de mercado, en particular para los productos manufacturados

4. La división de los fondos que tenía que aportar cada Estado fue uno de los aspectos que mayores controversias y resistencias generó. Por distintos motivos de política exterior y doméstica, al no ser aprobado unánimemente por todos los parlamentos de los países miembros, no pudo entrar en vigor formalmente (Barrenengoa, 2020).

5. Entre 2008 y 2014, el MERCOSUR logró tener entre sus miembros a prácticamente todos los países del América del Sur, ya sea como miembros plenos como en categoría de asociados.

6. Al observar las exportaciones intrarregionales por categorías económicas, se destaca el intercambio de «insumos industriales», equipamientos y partes de transporte (industria automotriz), bienes de consumo y bienes de capital, y gas.

7. La CEPAL señala que el comercio intrarregional presenta mayor diversificación de productos, con un rol preponderante de las manufacturas industriales, lo que se contrapone con la composición de las exportaciones extrarregionales, más concentradas en pocos productos de origen primario (CEPAL, 2018, p.5)

(excluyendo al sector automotor y al azucarero, que no son parte del acuerdo) (CEPAL, 2018). Aún con esa ventaja, la *interdependencia* comercial y la integración productiva intrabloque ha ido en retroceso en los últimos años. La Cepal lo explica por una serie de factores, entre los que destaca la irrupción de China como gran proveedor de productos manufacturados a nivel global desde comienzos de los años 2000, la creciente brecha de productividad que tienen las actividades del MERCOSUR en relación con sus pares en economías más desarrolladas y el débil desempeño económico de Brasil y Argentina (CEPAL, 2018, 2020). Esta combinación de factores dificultó una mayor integración de las empresas del bloque en las cadenas internacionales de producción, excepto en el segmento de provisión de insumos, generalmente materias primas.

Aquí emerge como variable complementaria al análisis del movimiento comercial del MERCOSUR, la presencia de China y su sistemático acercamiento a los distintos países de la región a partir de diversos instrumentos y herramientas que son parte de una estrategia mayor. Ahora bien, esto se ha dado en paralelo a una limitación para la región: no contar con una estrategia común como bloque para comercializar, lo que termina bilateralizando los vínculos, sumado a las dificultades para la industrialización de la mayoría de las economías.

3. El MERCOSUR y su principal socio comercial extrabloque: China.

Balances y perspectivas.....

Al observar las exportaciones del MERCOSUR con China, es posible constatar que estas se deben a la demanda mundial y a los niveles de los precios internacionales. Los precios de las *commodities* aumentaron a partir de 2005, impulsados fundamentalmente por el crecimiento de China, cuya economía crecía a tasas anuales de un 10%. Luego, en 2008, los precios descendieron como consecuencia de la crisis financiera internacional. Retomaron la tendencia hasta 2013, cuando alcanzaron su máximo para el período considerado.

Como se muestra en los cuadros siguientes⁸, a partir de 2014, las exportaciones totales del MERCOSUR hacia China comenzaron a disminuir de forma acentuada, en coincidencia con la disminución de los precios y la demanda de *commodities*, y también con la desaceleración de la economía China, que acentuó esta tendencia. Sin embargo, en 2017 y 2018, los precios de los productos básicos, con excepción del petróleo, se mantuvieron relativamente estables, por lo que se produjo una leve recuperación para esos años, aunque sin llegar a los niveles de 2013. Entre los principales productos se encuentran las materias primas, pero también otros recursos naturales como el litio, cobre, níquel, entre otros.

8. Los cuadros son de elaboración propia de las autoras a partir de datos de Comtrade (<https://comtrade.un.org/>), Veritrade (<https://www.veritrade.com/>) y Banco Mundial (<https://datos.bancomundial.org/tema/comercio>)

Exportaciones desde Mercosur a China



Fuente: Elaboración propia, a partir de datos de COMTRADE. Disponible en: <https://comtrade.un.org/>. Veritrade. Disponible en: <https://www.veritrade.com/>. Banco Mundial. Disponible en: <https://datos.bancomundial.org/tema/comercio>.

Durante el período 2008-2014, las economías de la región orientaron su estructura productiva a atender la demanda del mercado internacional, especialmente de China. Actualmente, este es el principal socio comercial de los Estados parte del MERCOSUR. Dicha estrategia llevó a la *reprimarización* de la pauta exportadora, por lo tanto, al aumento de la dependencia en las ventas internacionales, limitadas cada vez a menos socios comerciales extrarregionales (Obiesur, 2020, Barros et al, 2020).

Como parte de su estrategia, el Estado chino ha ido desarrollando diferentes instrumentos que no sólo lo han ido posicionando en su rol actual como líder global, sino que, además, le han permitido acercarse a la región de AL y el Caribe, consolidando su posición como uno de los principales socios e inversores de la mayoría de los Estados del continente americano (con más contundencia a partir de la primera década de los 2000).

Entre estos, es posible destacar la conformación de un entramado de potencias emergentes a partir del BRICS (Brasil, Rusia, India, China y Sudáfrica), y la más reciente idea del BRICS plus. Es decir, su expansión material (en términos económico-comerciales, financieros, en infraestructura y tecnología) ha ido acompañada de herramientas diplomáticas que contribuyen en la búsqueda de una posición geopolítica de relevancia global. Ejemplo de ello es la conformación en 2014 del Foro China-CELAC, producto del acercamiento entre Xi Jinping y los jefes de Estado de la CELAC, que reúne a los 33 países latinoamericanos y caribeños.

Asimismo, el “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), o la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta es uno de los proyectos de mayor envergadura geopolítica de la actualidad, por el volumen de inversiones que plantea en distintas zonas del mundo, y porque ningún otro organismo de financiamiento viene planteando un proyecto en esa escala en términos de infraestructura. Estos instrumentos marcan la relevancia de la región latinoamericana y caribeña para la expansión geopolítica y geoestratégica del gigante asiático, como parte del Sur global. En esta, los proyectos de infraestructura tienen un rol central. Vinculados también con los objetivos de ampliar el comercio entre AL y el Caribe y Asia Pacífico, estas mega obras tienen como característica central la planificación a largo plazo, las inversiones por parte de bancos chinos y la articulación con empresas también de origen chino (estatales y mixtas). Ahora bien, la creciente presencia de la economía China puede constituir un factor dinamizador para la región, por ser un país que consume nuestros productos, -fundamentalmente carne, soja y subproductos cárnicos- impulsando las cadenas internacionales de agro-negocios, pero también se convierte en un elemento *desintegrador*⁹. De acuerdo con la CEPAL, el peso cada vez mayor de las commodities en la canasta de exportación del MERCOSUR tiende a debilitar el ritmo de crecimiento exportador de cara al comercio intrarregional. Esta trayectoria es indisociable de la creciente desintegración productiva del MERCOSUR (CEPAL, 2021).

9. Desde China, así como desde la UE y Estados Unidos se han propuesto distintas agendas de asociación bilaterales.

Ahora bien, entendemos a la integración como un proceso que responde, también, a los procesos políticos de los Estados parte que, si bien están condicionados por las dinámicas del sistema internacional, tienen poder de agencia para orientar sus respectivas políticas exteriores y trazar una estrategia conjunta. Es decir, no es el factor chino lo que explica el proceso de reprimarización y dependencia. En este sentido, los desafíos para la región son crecientes, en el marco de la nueva posición de China a nivel global y las posibilidades que la región podría construir en términos del juego geopolítico más allá de las características -a esta altura estructurales- de nuestras estructuras productivas.

Si se analizan los cuatro países del MERCOSUR en su conjunto, la participación de China representa el 30% de las exportaciones totales de la región, especialmente a partir de 2012, desplazando a Estados Unidos como destino. De acuerdo con los datos de la Confederación Nacional de Industrias de Brasil (CNI), es posible visualizar cómo el avance chino también impactó a Brasil en cuanto al comercio de bienes manufacturados. La disminución de las exportaciones brasileñas a MERCOSUR contrasta, entre 2010 y 2019, con un crecimiento del 12,9% observado en las importaciones totales del subcontinente en ese lapso. En otras palabras, incluso con el aumento de las importaciones en el subcontinente, Brasil tuvo una caída en sus ventas. Sobre este punto, es central recordar que, según los datos de la CNI, en los últimos años los mercados regionales habían llegado a representar el 71,1% (bienio 2012-2013) de todo el volumen exportado por las montadoras, el 52,6 % de las exportaciones de goma y material plástico, y el 42,3 % de las ventas externas de productos químicos (Con, 2017, p. 3)

Es decir, el MERCOSUR es el principal destino para las exportaciones en sectores importantes de la industria brasileña. Este ha sido un elemento central para la apuesta de Brasil al MERCOSUR, al igual que Argentina. Sin embargo, en los últimos años, Brasil ha ido perdiendo espacio como socio comercial en los países de la región, fundamentalmente desde el gobierno de Temer que y luego Bolsonaro -como parte del giro en la política exterior brasileña desde 2016-. La contracción del comercio se sintió más en los productos industrializados. En la comparación entre 2010 y 2019, las exportaciones brasileñas de este tipo de productos -productos químicos y material plástico- para Sudamérica cayeron un 27,6%. Del lado de las importaciones, hubo una disminución del 25,9%. El decrecimiento del comercio con los países del subcontinente se intensificó a partir de 2017, lo que demuestra una pérdida de calidad en el comercio de la integración entre sectores. De acuerdo con el documento “Interesses da indústria na América do Sul: comércio e investimentos” elaborado por la CNI, la competencia se da con Estados Unidos, China y Alemania (CNI, 2021, p.3), siendo los propios sectores industriales quienes plantean los condicionamientos, que se agravaron con el giro político en la región a partir de 2015.

En dicho marco, la participación de Brasil en las importaciones de países sudamericanos cayó 3,8% en la última década, del 14,5% en 2012 al 10,7% en 2019 (CNI, 2021). En el período, la participación de China en las importaciones del subcontinente creció. Por lo tanto, la pérdida de parte del comercio intrarregional -en especial la presencia de las industrias brasileñas en los mercados regionales- coincide con el avance de empresas chinas. Como destaca Frenkel (2022) las principales dificultades que ha atravesado el MERCOSUR radican en el desacople reciente económico-productivo, sobre todo entre sus dos socios mayores: Brasil y Argentina. Desacople que implica menor peso de los sectores industriales en detrimento del aumento de los vinculados a la agroexportación, orientados a economías extrarregionales, principalmente China. Asimismo, los grupos ligados al agronegocio -que generan poco empleo e innovación- se transformaron en la gran apuesta del gobierno de Bolsonaro para el crecimiento económico y la modernización del capitalismo brasileño, estableciendo como horizonte los modelos de México y Chile (Frenkel, Azzi, 2021).

En síntesis, en los últimos 20 años, las economías del MERCOSUR son más dependientes y se han reprimarizado, en un sistema de relaciones internacionales profundamente asimétrico entre el Norte y el Sur Global. En este contexto, agravado por el impacto de la pandemia y la crisis internacional, apostar a fortalecer el comercio intrarregional constituye en la mejor opción para paliar los impactos socioeconómicos y las graves consecuencias que ha tenido en la población. El comercio de productos con mayor valor agregado genera más y empleo de calidad.

En el escenario actual, la propuesta de “reindustrializar Brasil” constituye uno de los principales objetivos del nuevo gobierno de Lula da Silva, siendo la profundización del comercio intrarregional la estrategia que se busca consolidar. A la par, las negociaciones en bloque con otros Estados -o conjunto de Estados- y el fortalecimiento del mercado

regional continúan siendo los caminos más viables para apuntar a un desarrollo autónomo. Para ello, los Estados son vehículos centrales para el diseño de una estrategia que busque aumentar y la diversificación el comercio intrarregional, apoyándose en la consolidación y el relanzamiento de organizaciones como MERCOSUR y UNASUR, si pensamos en clave de autonomía y soberanía.

4. El retorno de Lula da Silva al Planalto: el reimpulso a la industrialización y la búsqueda de autonomía regional.....

Brasil, además de ser -junto con México- la economía más importante del continente, impulsó procesos de integración regional desde una perspectiva multidimensional, como fue el caso de UNASUR y la ampliación de MERCOSUR tras el consenso de Buenos Aires de 2003. Asimismo, los retrocesos y la paralización en el ámbito de la gobernanza regional también se deben a las políticas regresivas impulsadas desde los gobiernos de Temer y Bolsonaro. Es decir, los impulsos y los frenos están vinculados a la orientación de la PEB, en diferentes momentos históricos. Por ello, entendemos que el cambio de gobierno en Brasil abre una nueva ventana de oportunidades para la región. Coincidimos con Vieira Secches, Vadell y Ramos (2020), quienes desde la economía política internacional lo consideran una potencia emergente y potencia media, a partir de su doble inserción: internacional y regional, en tanto característica sobresaliente de lo que se consideraban las “nuevas potencias medias” (Sennes, 1998, p. 400). Además, se muestran indicadores como el tamaño de su economía y los índices de crecimiento en el período de estudio, junto con la expansión global, para destacar la participación en el BRICS y en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU. Ahora bien, Brasil también comparte con el resto de los Estados sudamericanos la posición de semiperiferia y las oscilaciones marcadas por los ciclos históricos que han afectado a la región.

En un artículo anterior (Barrenengoa, Barceló 2021) postulábamos que, en este escenario de crisis, un camino posible era fomentar el comercio intrarregional, como estrategia que permitiera retomar la senda del desarrollo autonómico regional en el largo plazo. También, que los avances en la integración han dependido en buena medida, de la articulación política de los gobiernos locales y de las condiciones del contexto internacional (Barrenengoa, Barceló, 2021). En esa coyuntura política específica, ninguna de esas dos condiciones se cumplía (Autoras, 2021, p.32). Hoy, el contexto político regional -principalmente por el cambio de gobierno en Brasil a partir del retorno de Lula da Silva- así como la geopolítica del sistema internacional se han transformado. Transformaciones que, implican una coyuntura más favorable a la potenciación del comercio intrarregional y al fortalecimiento de las instituciones de gobernanza regional en detrimento de propuestas más aperturistas¹⁰ y de “flexibilización”. Al mismo tiempo, se trata de oportunidades que se enfrentan a tensiones y disputas en torno a la orientación de las políticas exteriores y como resultado de estas, el modo de participación del bloque MERCOSUR (o en su defecto, de cada Estado por separado) en esta nueva transición geopolítica.

10. Propuestas como la de los dos últimos gobiernos uruguayos sobre la firma de un TLC con China por fuera del MERCOSUR (Barceló, 2023). Ahora bien, como explica Peña (2022) si eventualmente se concretara un acuerdo bilateral entre un país miembro del MERCOSUR y un tercer país, especialmente si fuera con uno relevante en el sistema comercial global y que no fuera país miembro de la ALADI, ello podría abrir una crisis, incluso profunda, que eventualmente derivaría en una fragmentación formal del MERCOSUR o lo conduciría a una situación de irrelevancia definitiva. (citado en Barceló, 2023)

La invasión rusa a Ucrania -desde febrero de 2022-, constituye un evento histórico que acelera y pone de manifiesto las transformaciones estructurales en el sistema de relaciones internacionales que ya se venían dando, en conjunción con otros fenómenos recientes destacados en este artículo, especialmente la pandemia de covid-19. A medida que la guerra fue adquiriendo mayores proporciones, espaciales y temporales, impactó en el orden geopolítico y en las estructuras regionales de seguridad, con una fuerte tendencia a la polarización (Barrenengoa, Barceló, 2022). A esto se suma el ascenso de China y su disputa global con Estados Unidos en el campo económico, productivo, tecnológico y geopolítico (Merino, 2021). Estos cambios impactan en la posición del MERCOSUR y en las posibilidades reales de inserción internacional en el contexto actual.

De manera concomitante, es posible constatar cómo Argentina y Brasil, parecen converger cada vez más con relación a los BRICS, Brasil mediante la reaproximación al bloque con el nuevo gobierno y Argentina tras el pedido de ingreso al mismo¹¹. Los BRICS fueron constituidos en 2009 con el objetivo de fortalecer el crecimiento económico y promover la cooperación sur-sur entre las potencias emergentes, que constituyen un grupo reducido de grandes países en desarrollo que lograron progresivamente diferenciarse dentro del llamado “Sur Global”. Ahora bien, desde el comienzo de la guerra en Ucrania, estos han adquirido un rol estratégico clave en el equilibrio geopolítico y geoeconómico actual, sobre todo por el desafiante crecimiento chino para las potencias occidentales y su rol en el conflicto. En julio de 2022 se llevó a cabo la cumbre virtual de autoridades de los países que lo componen, participaron los presidentes de China, Xi Jinping, de Sudáfrica, Cyril Ramaphosa; de Brasil, Jair Bolsonaro; de Rusia, Vladímir Putin; y el primer ministro de India, Narendra Modi. En esa ocasión el presidente chino enfatizó en la necesidad de “abandonar la mentalidad de Guerra Fría y la confrontación entre bloques”, en lo que constituía un claro mensaje a la OTAN, en especial a Estados Unidos, en respaldo a Rusia ante las sanciones impuestas a mediados de marzo de ese año (Barceló, 2022).

Con el retorno de Lula da Silva liderando una coalición de partidos en Brasil, la aproximación a los BRICS se ha venido profundizando en estos meses. Asimismo, la política exterior que caracterizó a los gobiernos del Partido de los Trabajadores (PT), significa una reaproximación a los países del “sur global”, y tiene como estrategia clave para la proyección mundial de Brasil, fortalecer los procesos de integración sudamericana.

Durante el gobierno de Bolsonaro (2018-2022) se produjo un fuerte aislamiento de la región, tras la salida de UNASUR, de CELAC y el abandono de las agendas sociales y políticas del MERCOSUR (Barceló, 2023). Frenkel y Azzi (2020) caracterizaron a esos años como un *paréntesis* en la historia de la política exterior de Brasil, que tradicionalmente, incluso durante la dictadura civil-militar (1964-1985) tuvo a la región como el eje principal de su orientación internacional. Otro de los indicadores que da cuenta de dicho “paréntesis” es el abandono de la autonomía como objetivo.

El triunfo de Bolsonaro en 2018 terminó por consolidar el abandono de las políticas integracionistas en ámbitos regionales y multilaterales, por un alineamiento automático con los EE. UU. de Trump,

11. En septiembre de 2022 Alberto Fernández envió una carta a Xi Jinping, que constituye una de las diecinueve solicitudes de países que buscan formar parte de dicho foro, que serán discutidas a finales de mayo de 2023, mientras se termina de escribir el presente artículo.

constituyéndose en un giro en la PEB que se venía desarrollando desde Temer. De esta manera, hubo un freno a la estrategia de regionalismo autónomo, desatando una situación de crisis de las instituciones regionales como el MERCOSUR, la UNASUR y la CELAC, sin poder reemplazarlas por la Alianza del Pacífico, aunque con mayor presencia de la OEA en los conflictos regionales. Dicho giro fue parte de una política regional en la que coincidieron distintos gobiernos como el de Argentina.

En ese marco, a pesar de los cambios estructurales que desde 2016 empezaron a llevarse adelante en Brasil con la crisis institucional y el golpe parlamentario a Dilma Rousseff, el gobierno brasileño intenta rápidamente recuperar el rol de potencia emergente y volver a liderar el proceso regional y posicionarse como un actor de relevancia global.

En estos primeros meses del nuevo gobierno -asumido en enero del 2023- es posible constatar una reorientación de la PEB hacia la región suramericana. Y aquí tenemos una primera clave; la región para Brasil es América del Sur y no AL y el Caribe o la subregión. La concepción suramericana tiene raíces en la historia y se remonta a la política exterior del Barón de Rio Branco¹² así como a las escuelas de pensamiento geopolítico, que desde Itamaraty y desde las Fuerzas Armadas se dedicaron a reflexionar acerca de lo internacional (Soares De Lima, 2013).

Ahora bien, con Lula da Silva América del Sur vuelve a estar en el centro de las prioridades de la PEB. Durante su discurso de asunción ante el Congreso Nacional, destacó el énfasis en la integración suramericana desde MERCOSUR, UNASUR y demás instancias de articulación “soberanas”. A esta fórmula, sobre que el protagonismo brasileño iría de la mano de la integración suramericana, la repitió en la cumbre de la CELAC y en los encuentros bilaterales, con Argentina y Uruguay, fiel reflejo del programa de gobierno del PT en las elecciones.

Otra clave para repensar el “retorno de Brasil al mundo” -como ha dado a llamar el propio Lula- está dada por la autonomía como elemento que guía los objetivos de esa política exterior. Entendemos que la táctica adoptada para su consecución -al decir de Cepaluni y Vigevani (2016)- fue la *diversificación*¹³ porque, si bien la integración forma parte del círculo concéntrico más inmediato, Lula da Silva buscará profundizar sus relaciones con el mundo occidental (Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea); con los BRICS, y los países del sur global, retomando una tradición de cooperación -económica, de inversiones y de educación- especialmente con los países lusófonos -de África, y también de Asia, como es el caso de Timor-Leste.

La búsqueda por mayores grados de autonomía, es decir de reducir los lazos de dependencia con la potencia hegemónica, ha sido un objetivo histórico en la proyección internacional de un Brasil que ha buscado posicionarse, desde los foros multilaterales, como un líder emergente global (Barrenengoa, Barceló, 2021). Al igual que la vocación integracionista, la autonomía dejó de ser un objetivo durante el gobierno de Bolsonaro, rompiendo así con décadas de construcción identitaria de la PEB. Por eso, estamos ante una región que se ha desintegrado y desindustrializado provocando una considerable disminución del comercio intrarregional. El eje comercial argentino-brasileño absorbe prácticamente la mitad de dicho

12. Considerado el “patrono de la diplomacia brasileña”, en su gestión frente a Itamaraty a inicios del siglo XX, buscó equilibrio a partir de una alianza con Estados Unidos y la conformación de un espacio de paz y de relaciones privilegiadas con los doce países de América del Sur.

13. La búsqueda de autonomía en política exterior ha sido una prioridad estratégica de los gobiernos de Brasil desde mediados de la década de 1980, aunque ha variado en el tiempo (Barceló, Barrenengoa, 2021).

comercio, y la otra mitad el resto de los países sudamericanos. En este sentido, destacamos lo que fue la alocución de Fernando Haddad, ministro de Hacienda de Brasil en el Foro Económico Mundial de Davos el 18 enero de 2023. Haddad hizo énfasis en el binomio integración-industrialización para el desarrollo y el crecimiento de la región, habló de “reservar una parte de la industria del mundo” para la región. Fue destacada la industria automovilística de “última generación”, los motores híbridos de hidrógeno verde y la producción de Etanol como ejes centrales para la reindustrialización de Brasil y el aumento de la cooperación económica en América del Sur.

De manera concomitante Lula da Silva en sus viajes a Uruguay y Argentina ha dado señales claras acerca de su intención política de retomar el rol del liderazgo brasileño para la integración. Al igual que aquella primera Cumbre de presidentes suramericanos convocada por el entonces presidente Fernando Henrique Cardoso en el año 2000, Lula da Silva está llevando a cabo una movilización para un “diálogo franco”, en búsqueda de reactivar la agenda de cooperación sudamericana en áreas clave como salud, cambio climático, defensa, infraestructura, energía. El marco en el que hoy Brasil intenta reflotar los procesos es una transición del poder a nivel global, donde avanza la construcción de un mundo multipolar a partir de distintos indicadores. Uno de ellos es el BRICS Plus, como hemos comentado antes, en torno a la posibilidad de incorporación de varios Estados de la región en el BRICS.

En paralelo, se retoma con fuerza una agenda regional, en consonancia con la internacional. Consideramos que esta nos indica las bases materiales del proceso de integración regional, entre las cuales la planificación conjunta de áreas estratégicas se erige en una variable central. Ahora bien, estos procesos no están exentos de conflictos. El rol que históricamente Estados Unidos ha tenido en la región viene siendo afectado por la presencia de China, y el cambio que los distintos Estados sudamericanos han tenido en sus orientaciones de política exterior ante este escenario. Está aún por verse si en el presente escenario global y regional, hay condiciones para una estrategia conjunta -desde el impulso brasileño de estos últimos meses- a partir de la cual consolidar las políticas públicas de integración regional en distintas áreas. La tensión entre el diseño de una plataforma propia desde un bloque en común, o la subordinación a otros esquemas -sea Estados Unidos o China- son dos extremos de un problema común que orienta estas reflexiones; cuál es y será, en los próximos años, el lugar de la región sudamericana en la distribución del mapa del poder mundial. Y cómo ante dicho panorama, se sostienen los principios de autonomía y soberanía.

Consideraciones finales

El presente artículo buscó revisar el panorama del comercio intrarregional en el período 2012-2020 para problematizar, en el marco de la transición geopolítica reciente, la situación de fragmentación política y desintegración regional por la que atraviesa la región mercosureña, resultado de un proceso histórico que no puede explicarse a partir de una única dimensión.

En tiempos donde se revitaliza el debate acerca de las relaciones entre Mercosur y otros bloques y/o Estados, se propone una visión a partir de la integración regional como política pública multidimensional. Es decir, pensamos las relaciones comerciales como parte de una tensión que atraviesa dos extremos; por un lado, la apertura económica, que ha tenido un sentido político y geopolítico en nuestra historia, desde los tiempos del Consenso de Washington hasta los discursos recientes en pos de la “flexibilización y apertura”. Por otro lado, la integración regional como llave que posibilita pensar en un horizonte de mayor autonomía, que se ha trazado y sostenido históricamente, pero que ha tenido limitaciones. Este sendero es el que vuelve a proponer el gobierno brasileño en su agenda de política exterior para con la región, y que aquí recuperamos para pensarlo en su multidimensionalidad, como apuesta política de participación regional desde MERCOSUR como bloque, y no solo en la unilateralidad de cada Estado.

Estos debates son abordados en el marco de considerar el análisis del comercio del MERCOSUR como parte de un modo de acumulación que ha polarizado y fragmentado nuestra región. Desde una clave de lectura con base en las teorías autonomistas, observamos a partir del análisis del comercio de la región entre sí y con China, cómo ha avanzado un proceso de primarización y desindustrialización, que es previo a la situación que emerge desde los 2000, donde queda claro el protagonismo chino en los intercambios comerciales -principalmente en las exportaciones de MERCOSUR. A la par, los Estados han ido perdiendo cada vez más su autonomía, soberanía y capacidad de maniobra.

En paralelo, hemos visto cómo los propios sectores industriales de Brasil y Argentina han sabido aprovechar el comercio intra-MERCOSUR para instalar sus productos, realidad que se vio modificada en los últimos años junto con el cambio en los gobiernos en ambos países desde 2015-2016. En síntesis, a la par del proceso de desaceleración del comercio intra-MERCOSUR, ha avanzado la fragmentación política regional, traduciéndose en una mayor desigualdad, que la pandemia ha puesto de manifiesto. Así, el MERCOSUR ha estado expuesto a los vaivenes tanto de los cambios en el orden político, como geopolítico, oscilando entre la repetición de las políticas aperturistas y el freno -durante la pandemia- al proceso de integración regional.

Como corolario, la situación actual pone sobre el tapete un potencial desafío que Brasil está intentando vertebrar: recuperar el ideario integracionista en un contexto muy diferente a aquel de inicios de siglo, en pleno boom de los commodities, y con los Estados menos debilitados que hoy en día. No obstante, el acumulado histórico de los procesos previos en términos de institucionalidad y gobernanza regional permite pensar en una plataforma de posibilidades. Los intentos por relanzar la UNASUR -además de volver a reunir a los presidentes sudamericanos-, fortalecer el MERCOSUR, y participar de los BRICS son algunas muestras de ello. A esto se suman las condiciones más generales del escenario geopolítico, con mayor claridad en torno al declive de Estados Unidos y al liderazgo chino -no sin consecuencias para nuestra región.

En definitiva, sugerimos pensar el comercio intrarregional del MERCOSUR como vehículo para fortalecer dicho bloque, y su

funcionamiento como marco posible de mayor integración, soberanía y autonomía, en tiempos donde es central mantener posturas comunes para negociar con China, con Estados Unidos, y poder dialogar desde una posición común en un contexto geopolítico tan dinámico. Esto significa aumentar la interdependencia comercial y la integración productiva entre los miembros del MERCOSUR, evitando que el comercio con China desacelere los vínculos intra región. Para ello es central el trazado de una estrategia común referida a recursos y lineamientos estratégicos que China necesita y que la región tiene, y que puede transformar en manufacturas. Y en este marco, poder volver a pensar la integración como política conjunta de los Estados sudamericanos con sustento material, más allá de las posiciones ideológicas.

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Ideologia e Instituições Internacionais: uma nova abordagem (Erik Voeten, 2021)

Ideology and International Institutions: a new approach
(Erik Voeten, 2021)

Ideología e instituciones internacionales: un nuevo enfoque (Erik Voeten, 2021)

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De modo geral, a literatura em Relações Internacionais ignora o conceito de ideologia, tratando o tema como de menor relevância no cenário internacional anárquico. No entanto, no decorrer do século XX se estabeleceu uma ordem internacional que foi capaz de integrar grande parte dos Estados ao redor de princípios liberais, promovendo a propagação de regimes de Direitos Humanos, abertura de mercados, e ampliação dos fluxos de capital, pessoas e bens. No entanto, o final da Guerra Fria e os novos conflitos militarizados, assim como os movimentos nacionalistas e populistas, têm estimulado a contestação às instituições internacionais sem propostas robustas de como reformá-las, o que estimula o interesse em entender como essa contestação ideológica afeta a ordem internacional institucionalizada. Nesse sentido, o mais recente trabalho de Erik Voeten, “Ideology and International Institutions” (Princeton University Press, 2021, ainda sem tradução para o Português), oferece uma contribuição original para analisar a disputa institucional internacional a partir do conceito de ideologia.

Para Voeten, a contestação à ordem liberal tem um elemento ideológico que não deve ser ignorado. Ou seja, os atores que desafiam as organizações internacionais liberais sustentam mais do que objeções sobre as consequências materiais, eles têm visões fundamentalmente diferentes sobre como a sociedade internacional deve ser organizada, e sob quais princípios (embora nem sempre ofereçam um direcionamento robusto capaz de formar uma coalizão capaz de avançar uma nova ordem). Nesse sentido, torna-se importante entender o papel da ideologia na disputa distributiva internacional. O trabalho de Voeten avança nesse sentido ao desenvolver um framework teórico que pode ser usado para analisar como

a disputa ideológica afeta a contestação à ordem internacional. O livro é composto por 10 capítulos, sendo o primeiro a introdução e o último a conclusão. Nesta resenha, vamos apresentar o trabalho ao público brasileiro e apontar algumas reflexões sobre a abordagem utilizada.

O objetivo do livro é apresentar um framework que nos permita entender operacionalizar como a contestação ideológica afeta as disputas distributivas internacionais em diversos temas. Nesse sentido, a abordagem se sustenta no modelo espacial (Downs, 2013 [1957]), muito utilizado na ciência política para entender a disputa política entre partidos no âmbito doméstico. Para Downs, a ideologia tem um papel importante na disputa política, principalmente porque ela ajuda a determinar e a comunicar o ponto ideal (o status quo preferível) de cada ator na disputa política, por outro lado, a ideologia também ajuda a promover a confiança de comprometimento com uma determinada plataforma política no futuro. Desse modo, Voeten busca iluminar a disputa ideológica internacional ao posicionar os Estados em um espaço ideológico unidimensional em que os atores se movimentam e buscam criar coalizões ao redor de suas ideologias. O primeiro capítulo é uma introdução, dedicado a apresentar o argumento central do livro, o de que a ideologia está no centro de muitas disputas distributivas que as organizações e regimes internacionais buscam resolver, e explicar o framework teórico a ser articulado e utilizado.

O segundo e terceiro capítulos se voltam para a questão do conceito de ideologia, seu uso na literatura de Relações Internacionais, e como o autor busca operacionalizar o conceito para análises empíricas. O autor começa com a observação de que o conceito de ideologia é praticamente omitido nos estudos sobre organizações e regimes internacionais, inclusive pelas abordagens construtivistas, que tendem a se concentrar em socialização e identidade. O autor examinou os artigos publicados na prestigiosa revista *International Organization* entre 1990 e 2016, e observou que a ampla maioria não utiliza o conceito, ou, quando utiliza, ele não tem um papel teórico chave. Mesmo onde o conceito aparecia com destaque, era usado em termos de fonte de autoridade moral, o que não é exatamente uma definição adequada de ideologia (embora ela possa ter essa função). Nesse sentido, a contestação ideológica e seus efeitos na ordem internacional não são bem compreendidos pela literatura.

Ideologia aqui é definida de modo conciso: um conjunto articulado de ideias, coeso e estável, que define como o mundo é, como deve ser, quais os principais problemas a serem resolvidos, e como. Nesse sentido, ideologia é extremamente útil para transmitir informações e estabelecer confiança, pois os outros atores conseguem entender quais os principais comprometimentos de outro em temas importantes, da forma semelhante como opera na relação entre os partidos e eleitores na política doméstica. Além disso, ideologia, pelo seu caráter normativo, tem implicações distributivas, e, portanto, é importante fonte de conflito, por isso deve ser levada em consideração ao se analisar as contestações à ordem internacional institucionalizada.

O autor então segue para a sua proposta de como operacionalizar o conceito de ideologia. Para medir as posições ideológicas dos Estados, o autor pensa a disputa política internacional num espaço ideológico

1. Importante lembrar que houve um período, em meados da Guerra Fria, que essa disputa foi multidimensional, em que as disputas dos países do Norte e Sul se interrelacionavam com as disputas Leste-Oeste, mas, de modo geral, é possível pensar a disputa ideológica como unidimensional. Essa forma de estimar os pontos ideais se assemelha ao modo como analistas de política doméstica se utilizam dos votos congressuais para estimar o posicionamento dos incumbentes em diversas votações o que ajuda a observar o processo de polarização política.

2. A abordagem é semelhante ao índice NOMINATE conforme foi desenvolvido por Poole e Rosenthau, (1984).

3. Por exemplo, apesar de a Arábia Saudita ser rival do Irã e grande aliada dos Estados Unidos, a similaridade dos votos da Arábia Saudita com o Irã na AGU historicamente é muito maior do que em comparação com os Estados Unidos, (Voeten, p. 30).

unidimensional¹ em que os atores se posicionam em diferentes pontos e buscam atrair os outros para o mais próximo possível de seu ponto ideal. O posicionamento dos Estados é estimado a partir das votações na Assembleia Geral da ONU desde a sua criação até 2016. Portanto, o autor não está interessado em definir o conteúdo das ideologias, apenas em posicionar os estados num espaço ideológico.² O autor escolhe os votos na AGU porque o caráter não vinculativo das decisões da Assembleia permite com que observemos o posicionamento dos Estados de um modo mais sincero do ponto de vista ideológico.³

O quarto capítulo retoma as abordagens na literatura focadas na interdependência, e busca demonstrar a relação entre interdependência e ideologia na constituição de organizações internacionais. Para o autor, devemos levar em consideração que a interdependência afeta a determinação dos pontos ideais dos atores no espaço ideológico, uma vez que esse posicionamento é sempre interrelacional. Quando os Estados têm alta interdependência, essa condição geralmente implica em instituições menos intrusivas e mais técnicas, por outro lado, a criação de instituições entre um conjunto de Estados afeta a utilidade (ganhos ou perdas) de outros Estados, que podem, por sua vez, se afastar dessas instituições por não se sentirem representados nas mesmas. Nesse sentido, a criação de uma ordem institucionalizada pode ser considerada como uma nova fonte de conflito, não só material, mas também ideológico.

O quinto capítulo é dedicado justamente a entender como as instituições podem gerar novos conflitos, e como a ideologia adentra nesse problema. Nesse momento, o autor aponta para um ponto importante, a relação entre confiança nos experts e conflito ideológico. De modo geral, a literatura aborda as instituições internacionais como fontes de informação (científica, técnica e legal), e que seu papel em produzir e transmitir informação legítima parte de sua autoridade. No entanto, essa perspectiva pode estar defasada. Muito da informação que as organizações internacionais produzem e disseminam não necessariamente estariam fora de alcance de muitos Estados; por outro lado, é a apresentação e interpretação da informação o principal papel de muitas organizações internacionais, e, nesse aspecto, a ideologia está presente.

Nesse sentido, as organizações internacionais podem estimular o conflito ideológico entre aqueles que concordam ou não com a interpretação e propostas dessas mesmas organizações. Uma vez que os Estados que financiam e emprestam grande parte de experts para compor o corpo burocrático de uma instituição tem interesse em mover o status quo para seu ponto ideal no espaço ideológico, e que a principal forma como essas instituições funcionam é coordenando, compartilhando, e, principalmente, promovendo uma determinada interpretação da informação, num cenário heterogêneo, até as organizações mais técnicas se tornam parte da disputa ideológica.

Nesse ponto, o autor nos apresenta um problema cada vez mais familiar, a crescente desconfiança em relação à expertise em meio ao conflito ideológico. O autor demonstra que esse processo está em curso em relação às organizações internacionais da mesma forma que no espaço doméstico, e como as percepções de imparcialidade são vulneráveis

a essas disputas. No caso do sistema internacional, a ordem criada no pós-Segunda Guerra, amplamente liberal, faz com que a forma como a informação seja interpretada se dê no âmbito dessa ideologia, e, num cenário de disputa ideológica, esse fato dá aos oponentes do liberalismo razões para acusar de parcialidade os experts e as decisões dessas instituições.

O capítulo sexto é dedicado a entender como a ideologia molda as decisões dos Estados de participar ou não das instituições internacionais. O autor demonstra que as mudanças nos posicionamentos ideológicos dos Estados, medidos desde o final do século XIX até 2016, estão associados com os padrões de associação às organizações internacionais. O autor observa que o padrão de associação se tornou mais heterogêneo após a Guerra Fria, quando passamos a observar mais pontos ideais onde se formam conjuntos de países em organizações diversas (ou seja, o padrão de associação próximo ao ponto ideal estadunidense ou soviético não se observa mais). Esses padrões se mantêm mesmo quando controlamos por fatores como democracia, relações econômicas e proximidade territorial. Assim, podemos observar o quanto a decisão por se associar a organizações internacionais, assim como assinar tratados, reflete divisões ideológicas, e não apenas interdependência econômica, proximidade territorial e semelhança no sistema político (democracia). Obviamente, essa é uma análise descritiva, mas os resultados nos ajudam a observar como a ideologia pode estar em jogo, operando como um mecanismo que organiza a institucionalidade internacional.

Os capítulos 7, 8 e 9 são empíricos, nos quais o autor emprega seu framework para entender o papel da ideologia em três importantes temas: conflitos militarizados, disputas econômicas, e a ascensão do populismo. Em relação aos conflitos militarizados, uma vez que o autor observa como o avanço da institucionalização facilita a cooperação entre atores ideologicamente próximos, mas intensifica o vazio em relação às partes excluídas (capítulo 4), fica a questão de se as distâncias entre os pontos ideais dos Estados organizados em instituições internacionais se correlacionam com os conflitos. O autor observa, a partir de sua análise de regressão com base na base de dados “Correlates of war”,⁴ com dados referentes aos conflitos militarizados desde 1880 a 2010, que a formação de instituições intensifica as tensões com países menos alinhados com os princípios ideológicos que guiam tais instituições, por outro lado, os conflitos se reduzem entre Estados que estão associados às mesmas organizações (muito embora essa correlação não se sustente entre Estados contíguos com disputas territoriais). Essa é outra análise descritiva, mas o fato de a análise ter controlado por interdependência econômica e sistema político fortalece a tese do autor de que um mecanismo ideológico pode estar em atuação nesses casos.

No que se refere ao regime de investimentos, essa correlação ideológica é ainda mais evidente. O autor observa que a contestação ideológica afeta diretamente a forma como se estabeleceu, principalmente por parte dos Estados Unidos, o regime de proteção aos investimentos internacionais. Mudanças no posicionamento ideológico dos países no decorrer do século XX alteraram profundamente seu posicionamento em relação à proteção ao investimento estrangeiro, o que levou países capitalistas,

4. Disponível em : <<https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war/dyadic-inter-state-war-dataset-1>>. Acesso em 30 de setembro, 2021.

principalmente os Estados Unidos, a recorrerem cada vez mais aos acordos bilaterais para protegerem seus investimentos e investidores. No entanto, quando se refere a países ideologicamente próximos a seu ponto ideal, os EUA mantiveram acordos com base nos regimes existentes, sem mais mecanismos de proteção. A questão da confiança que a ideologia promove pode estar em atuação nesse caso.

O capítulo nono é o mais qualitativo do trabalho, onde o autor se sustenta principalmente nas análises de discurso para entender como o populismo afeta a ordem internacional liberal. Para isso, o autor se utiliza especialmente dos discursos de líderes populistas em relação às cortes internacionais. As cortes internacionais são uma boa representação da propagação de valores da ordem internacional, e por isso são alvos de líderes populistas que buscam minar a legitimidade dessas instituições. O autor empresta a definição de populismo feita por Cas Mudde: “populismo é uma ideologia fina que considera a sociedade como, no limite, separada em dois grupos homogêneos e antagônicos, o povo puro e a elite corrupta, e que argumenta que a política deve ser expressão da vontade do povo” (Voeten, 2021, p. 148); nesse capítulo, o autor cita como exemplos de líderes populistas Victor Orbán, Nicolás Maduro e Jair Bolsonaro.

O populismo, por sua oposição aos direitos das minorias, contestações a princípios democráticos e ênfase nacionalista, é uma resposta iliberal. No capítulo 5, vimos como a função de interpretar é um papel fundamental das organizações internacionais, nesse sentido, as cortes são ainda mais explicitamente interpretativas, tornando-as alvos fáceis aos populistas. A vantagem da análise do autor é que ele nos oferece uma forma de operacionalizar a ideia de *backlash* às organizações internacionais; 1) trata-se de *backlash* quando há tentativa de reduzir a autoridade da corte da corte, quando for possível, ou 2) quando um país se retira da jurisdição de determinada organização ou corte, como o caso da Venezuela ao se retirar da Corte Interamericana de Direitos Humanos. O autor se baseia em 28 casos que se enquadram em uma ou duas dessas formas de operacionalizar a oposição populista às cortes e analisa os discursos dos líderes. A partir de sua análise qualitativa o autor indica que os populistas se colocam (e, consequentemente, o hipotético povo puro que dizem representar), como as reais vítimas das cortes internacionais. Por outro lado, de uma perspectiva populista, as cortes falham em refletir a voz do povo pelo seu caráter contra majoritário, nesse sentido, a crítica se estende às cortes domésticas; as duas ideias operam juntas.

No limite, o grande risco da crítica populista às cortes internacionais, e à ordem internacional liberal em sentido amplo, é o fato de não apresentar uma proposta, seja para reformar ou para criar uma ordem que a substitua. A consequência é uma contínua deterioração da ordem institucional internacional, levando a novos problemas de barganha e negociação, afetando também a proteção aos direitos das minorias, principalmente por meio dos direitos de propriedade violados, além de outras implicações. A grande contribuição do trabalho ao dar foco aos movimentos populistas é chamar a atenção dos analistas de relações internacionais para a importância de se observar a política doméstica para entender os movimentos dos atores no plano internacional contemporâneo.

De modo geral, o trabalho de Voetel é inovador ao colocar o conceito de ideologia no centro da análise, algo pouco comum na literatura de Relações Internacionais, e o faz com base numa abordagem consistente e gerenciável, a partir da análise espacial clássica, muito comum na Ciência Política, e desenvolvendo uma medida para identificar a polarização, desenvolvida a partir dos votos dos Estados na Assembleia Geral da ONU – uma espécie de índice NOMINATE, utilizado para medir a polarização política doméstica conforme desenvolvido por Rosenthal e Poole. Nesse sentido, o autor oferece a analistas interessados em entender como a ideologia afeta as disputas distributivas uma forma original de trabalharem o conceito. Os estudos empíricos apresentados mostram como podemos aplicar esse framework, e deram indicações, a partir de correlações interessantes, de como a ideologia pode estar agindo na estruturação dos conflitos nas organizações internacionais.

Por outro lado, o trabalho não adentra numa análise fina dos mecanismos pelos quais a ideologia atua. Ou seja, observamos correlações entre a polarização ideológica e as disputas observadas nas áreas apresentadas pelo autor, mas é preciso análises mais aprofundadas para entender como a ideologia atua para direcionar os Estados a uma ou outra direção, isso implica em os analistas darem atenção à política doméstica e sua interrelação com o cenário internacional, e entender as fontes da contestação ideológica que estimulam a polarização política. Por exemplo, a contestação ideológica pode ser estimulada por ideias sobre qual o papel do Estado na economia, também é possível que o caráter não democrático das organizações seja outra fonte de disputas ideológicas (essa especialmente pelos movimentos populistas), ou, ainda, a nível internacional, a ascensão de novas potências, que não compartilham de valores liberais, pode estimular um debate ideológico. No limite, fica a reflexão sobre o que pode significar um cenário internacional onde o multilateralismo se deteriora e as instituições internacionais perdem relevância, num cenário em que o posicionamento antiliberal, populista e nacionalista, avança em diversos países.

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