

Giovanny Simon Machado**Weaponising social rights:
Soviet propaganda for Brazilian
women during the Cold War
(1950-1964)****ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyse how social rights appeared in Soviet propaganda for Brazil between 1950 and 1964. This is a case study that uses as its main source the Spanish-language version of the magazine Soviet Woman (La Mujer Soviética), written and published by the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC). For this analysis, a global history approach has been used to highlight the connections between the SWC and its Brazilian counterparts, especially the leadership of the Federation of Brazilian Women (FMB). The main result was that great importance was given to social rights and the role of the state in their provision. The evidence strengthens the main argument that Soviet propaganda sought to convey a polity paradigm. The reception of this propaganda in Brazil occurred simultaneously in syncretic and orthodox ways, the former combining the Soviet narrative of social rights with idealized, romantic and even Christian views, while the latter demonstrated orthodoxy and imitation of the typical Soviet vocabulary.

KEYWORDS

Soviet Union
Propaganda
Brazil
Social rights

INTRODUCTION

This study involves an analysis of both textual and visual components of Soviet propaganda disseminated in Brazil from 1950 to 1964.¹ In this analysis, I focused on the theme of social rights, how they were portrayed, what narrative means were employed, and how they were perceived by their target audience.

The main hypothesis suggests that the Soviet Union propagated democratic and progressive values, presenting an alternative societal model where the state provided for individual needs. During the Cold War, words such as democracy, freedom and progress were contested, with opposing blocs assigning different meanings to these terms. Examining this societal model in-depth could shed light on the nuanced interpretations of these concepts, revealing both shared and distinct worldviews. Freedom may extend beyond personal choices, democracy cannot be reduced to multi-party elections alone, and progress can encompass more than just economic aspects. This paper follows György Lukács' interpretation of democracy and freedom, specifically discussed in his 1968 essay, *The Process of Democratization* (Lukács, 2011: 83–206).

He argued that the more democracy is stripped of any tangible material substance, becoming increasingly formal and detached of human needs, the more susceptible it becomes to fetishisation by the manipulation machinery of the ruling classes; while freedom from necessity is achieved by "placing the objective choices of economic development at the disposal of the conscious designs and humanistic goals of the species" (Lukács, 2011: 114).

My aim is to analyse the content of Soviet propaganda, specifically focusing on the magazine *Soviet Woman* (*SW – Советская женщина, Sovetskaya zhenshchina*) and its Spanish translation, *La Mujer Soviética* (*MS*), as primary sources. Understanding the impact of these messages on recipients is crucial, making this study a case analysis of Soviet propaganda's progressive message (Peri, 2018: 622). The circulation of *Soviet Woman* abroad, particularly in Brazil, serves as an object of analysis. The magazine, produced by the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC) in Moscow and printed by *Pravda*, spans 152 issues from 1950 to December 1964. All editions examined are available at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. Correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women, predominantly members of the Federation of Brazilian Women (FMB), provides insight into how the Brazilian public received Soviet propaganda. These letters, stored in the Soviet Women's Committee collection (P7289) at the Russian State Archive (GARF) in Moscow, reflect long-term pen-pal relationships formed through international conferences, political pilgrimages, cultural exchanges and similar encounters.

The first two sections of this article cover the context in which the Soviet propaganda under analysis was produced and distributed – the international peace movement and the Soviet Women's Committee and their activities in the post-war and Cold War period. The subsequent section delves into the depiction of social rights within the magazine, exploring how they evolved into a tool wielded by Soviet propagandists and advocates of democrat-

ic fronts. The analysis further examines how Soviet propaganda portrayed social rights as a form of technology. Additionally, it scrutinizes the hybrid reception among Brazilian women, occasionally mirroring the Soviet lexicon and, alternately, adapting it to align with their romantic and quasi-religious perspectives.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Key parts of this research are the Soviet Women's Committee (*Комитетом советских женщин, Komitet sovetskikh zhenshchin*) and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The WIDF was created for the purpose of uniting women from various countries in their struggle for peace and equality (Castledine, 2012: 46). As an international federation, the WIDF was composed of several nationally based sub-organizations that were affiliated with the world organization. These, of course, included the SWC and the FMB. Therefore the WIDF served as a medium and arena of contact between women's movements in different countries. The WIDF also maintained an international journal entitled *Women From Around the World*, which was first edited in Paris, but then moved to the German Democratic Republic because of the repression by the French government.

Along with the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the WIFD and other international federations, which could be called international democratic front organizations, were created by socialist, communist, and social democratic parties in order to organize different social segments in the struggle for peace and progress (Orth 1964). In the period immediately after World War II, because of the growing tension, a great demand for peace arose to prevent the continuation of the conflict that was then taking shape between the USSR and the other victorious Allied powers. Thus agitation and campaigning for peace was visibly one of the most important themes of *MS* magazine, relying not only on political texts and resolutions but also on artistic forms and correspondence with people, institutions and movements that were repeatedly called "partisans of peace".

The geopolitical situation in which the Soviet Union found itself after the war is well known: a context of increasing mutual threats, showdowns, and reciprocal aggression between the two major Cold War superpowers. Increasing hostilities and nuclear blackmail marked the period when the US, directed by the Truman doctrine, invoked its policy of "containment", engaging in action wherever the USSR might be acting to seek influence (Kennan, 2012: 116). In domestic affairs, one of the effects of the anti-Soviet Truman doctrine was the persecution of the Communist Party of the United States along with non-communist movements that opposed American warmongering policy, which were accused of "subversive activities" and closed by the government² (Castledine, 2012: 48).

During the era of de-Stalinization known as the thaw period, a defensive discourse was introduced into the Soviet view on peace, which led to Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence". One of the supposed purposes of this new policy was to relieve the USSR of its military burden and to shift the compe-

¹ This paper summarises master's research conducted at the Higher School of Economics - Saint Petersburg in the Applied and Interdisciplinary History program in the year 2020. For the complete discussion see "Paradise is just ahead: Social rights in Soviet propaganda to Brazil (1950-1964)" (Machado 2020).

² It is worth mentioning the WIDF member, the Congress of American Women (CAW), which had been accused of being an instrument of Soviet policy and "a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current 'peace' campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States and democratic nations in general, in order to render them defenceless in the face of the 'Communist drive for world conquest'" (Weigand, 2001: 63).

tion with the West to economics and quality of life rather than weaponry. Khrushchev intended to break with the isolation characteristic of the Stalin era and present the USSR as a friend and defender of peace, propagating the superiority of socialism in the field of material and human progress (Friedman, 2015: 28).

The peace movement emerged as an effective platform for disseminating the Soviet worldview, serving as an opportunity to showcase what they referred to as “the peaceful way of life of the Soviet people”. In contrast to the May 9th celebrations featuring Katyushas, nuclear warheads, tanks, and soldiers with AK-47 rifles, the parades at world peace events in the socialist East presented a different spectacle. These demonstrations highlighted an alternative aspect of Soviet achievements, featuring students, pioneers, scientists, athletes and artists. The individuals showcased symbolized the outcome of a society organized to meet the needs of the people through state provisions.

Regarding the autonomy of women’s organizations from the communist movement, despite a natural Soviet hegemony, the democratic young women’s movements were not a monolithic bloc in the service of the Soviet state. According to Yana Knopova (2011), the relative autonomy of the women’s movement could be seen through its active role in trying to change aspects of domestic policies in the Soviet Union, in the case of the SWC³. In this sense, this case study of the interaction between Soviet and Brazilian women within the Cold War political landscape can give us important indications about the multiple forms of Soviet political work with relative autonomy from the line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and regular state diplomacy. Simultaneously, we can grasp something of the aspirations of subjects from the Global South at a time of great turmoil and social tensions.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE MS MAGAZINE AND ITS EDITORS

When comparing *La Mujer Soviética* with its Russian counterpart, it becomes evident that they share nearly identical content. The differences lie primarily in the layout and arrangement of articles, which are adjusted to maintain the overall structure of the journal. While this analysis does not delve into the translation methodology, an initial observation suggests that early translations in the 1950s were often literal and somewhat mechanical, whereas translations in the 1960s seemed more tailored to the mind set of Spanish-speaking readers. Maria Ovsiannikova served as the editor-in-chief of both the magazine and its Spanish version. However, the journal had a specific editor for the Spanish version, Emma Volf,⁴ who remained active throughout from 1950 to 1964.

The magazine had distinct roles, including art editor and tech-

nical editor, which sometimes involved one, two or even three different individuals. The personnel for these roles varied across editions and rotated among different translations of the journal. The editor’s staff was located at Kusnetski Most, 22, in Moscow, which remained unchanged for both the Spanish and English editions throughout the entire period. However, it is worth noting that Nina Voronina, a professional translator and member of the SWC, mentioned a different building on Pushkinskaya Street in Moscow.⁵ The first mention of Kusnetski Most appeared in the November-December 1952 issue, and again in 1955’s February issue. From then on, this address became a permanent part of the technical sheet of every issue published. The correspondence from Brazilian women was primarily directed to Pushkinskaya Street, leading me to believe that this address served as the main point for both receiving and sending letters at the SWC office. In contrast, Kusnetski Most appeared to be the address specifically designated for the editors.

In some issues, *Soviet Woman* magazine dedicated a few pages to promoting international subscriptions, listing addresses of bookstores and businesses that collaborated with Moscow to distribute the magazine in various countries. The increasing number of accredited stores for subscriptions served as an indicator of the magazine’s growing popularity worldwide. In 1951, six Latin American countries had local subscription centres, which decreased to five in 1952 and finally to only two in 1956. However, the number of countries offering subscriptions increased again in 1958, peaking in 1963 with a total of nine countries. By 1963, the list of suppliers mentioned in the Spanish version of the magazine focused exclusively on Latin American countries. These numbers reflected the political situation of each country and its relationship with the Soviet Union. There were five accredited suppliers in Brazil⁶ in October 1963; after 1964, the year of the military coup, the suppliers decreased drastically until they disappeared.

The size of the magazine remained relatively stable, typically ranging from 40 to 60 pages per issue. However, there were notable fluctuations in three specific periods. From 1950 to 1953, the number of pages varied among 62, 64, and 66, except for a special issue dedicated to Stalin’s death, which had 18 pages. Between 1954 and 1960, the magazine consistently had 50 pages, while in 1961, it ranged from 42 to 48 pages. Initially, the magazine was published bimonthly, with six issues a year, but from 1954, it became a monthly publication.

The print run of the magazine provides an interesting parameter for analysis. Although the number of prints does not guarantee distribution, it offers insights into the magazine’s popularity, even without precise data on sales and distribution. During the Stalin period, the print run remained relatively consistent, ranging from 3250 to 5000 copies. Initially, the number of copies was fixed at 5000 until January 1952, after which it was reduced to 4500 in February, March and April. In May, it further decreased to 4100,

³ The SWC, an independent and public organization comprised of women from across the Soviet territory, played a pivotal role in advocating for women’s rights. As protagonists of the post-war reconstruction, women’s organisation became authorities in the matter of social rights. Besides the Soviet Woman, the SWC had other publications with broader circulation in the Soviet Union, including magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* [The Working Woman] and *Krest’yanka* [The Peasant Woman]. In her comparison of *Rabotnitsa*’s circulation with that of *Soviet Woman* within the USSR from 1945 to 1950, Peri (2018: 623–24) notes that the former had a circulation of only 20 000 copies, while *Rabotnitsa* ranged from 75 000 to 200 000 annually. *Soviet Woman* had the distinctive feature of being a magazine for both a domestic and a foreign audience.

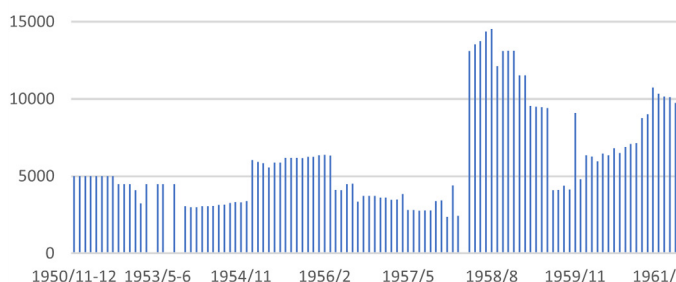
⁴ During the research for the aforementioned MA thesis and this paper, no relevant information was found about Emma Volf.

⁵ The SWC was located in a building on the corner of Pushkinskaya Street and Pushkinskaya Square (Voronina and Costamo, 2016).

⁶ In my interview with Anita Prestes (2019), a dedicated activist of the PCB during that era and the daughter of Luiz Carlos Prestes, the party’s General-Secretary, I highlighted the subscription addresses in Brazil. She then informed me that, interestingly, two out of the five listed bookstores (Vitória and Intunliv) were under the direct control of Brazilian communists. Consequently, it became evident that the magazine had a more extensive readership beyond the circle of communist sympathizers.

and in June, it declined to 3250. From then until the end of 1953, the print run returned to 4500. Starting in January 1954, after a significant change in Soviet leadership, monthly variations in print occurred with strong fluctuations, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Print run of *La Mujer Soviética* magazine



Source: Graph created by the author from data compiled from all 152 issues of the magazine from 1950 to 1964. The x-axis represents years, and the y-axis represents the number of copies printed.

The circulation of the magazine may have been influenced by shifts in Soviet domestic and foreign geopolitics during the Cold War. Notably, fluctuations in the print run coincide with significant events such as the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and the de-Stalinization process. The Sino-Soviet split, which disrupted the unity of the international communist movement, also had a profound impact on communist parties worldwide, including those in Latin America and Brazil. Conversely, the Cuban revolution's adoption of socialism as its official ideology, political system, and mode of production in 1961 had a positive influence. The Global South, as a whole, served as a pivotal battleground for the major superpowers during the Cold War, as well as for countries within the same camp.⁷

WEAPONIZATION⁸ OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

In the textual analysis section, before going into the subject of the technology of social rights, it is worth pointing out a preliminary aspect regarding the use of social legislation as a form of political propaganda. This feature is not new and dates back to the Soviet revolutionary period, when the law itself had a "propagandistic" format (Borisova, 2012). This means that the law was not only designed to solve social conflicts through customs and tradition. Nor was the legal dimension a semi-autonomous social sphere ruled by the positivist law scientists, with formulas applied by legislators and judicial bureaucrats. Law was weaponized as means of mass mobilisation of the working class against the bourgeois class. Unlike the revolutionary period, the more prosaic post-war period made the law less of a weapon, since the domestic bourgeoisie had already been vanquished

(Losurdo, 2004). However, it retained certain propagandistic aspects when employed in the external geopolitical context. So, what is seen as a protection won by the people who were already living under socialist regimes continued to function as a propagandistic form in foreign relations. This is what we seek to demonstrate with this article.

The law or the constitution itself were seen as both a form of protection and an achievement of the people living under socialism. The article *El Sanatorio "La Madre y lo niño"* [The Sanatorium "Mother and Child"], for example, reported on the operation of a sanatorium on the Kirov Islands, which was visited by Lenin in the past. This sanatorium guaranteed specialized treatment for postpartum women and their newborns. In this article, the right to maternity leave, guaranteed "by the Stalinian constitution to all pregnant women", was highlighted (Kirichenko, 1950: 24). Another example is in the text entitled *Las Ideas de Lenin y Stalin* [The Ideas of Lenin and Stalin]:

We do not know the exploitation of men by men. We are unaware of the sinister shadow of forced unemployment, of insecurity in the future, of sad old age. Under the sun of the Stalinist constitution, the Soviet people, relying on the power of their socialist economy, work inspired and freely with their happiness. (La Mujer Soviética, 1951 (04))

Here the Stalinist constitution of 1937 was seen as a source of security, stability in life, joy and happiness. The choice of the sun as a metaphorical mirror is noteworthy, given that the illumination of the sun is one of the most stable and "secure" natural phenomena present in human experience. Many other examples could be quoted: M. Kartashova, speaking about elections, wrote that their social achievements "have been endorsed by our Constitution, to which the people have lovingly given the name of Stalinist Constitution, Stalinist law for all the people" (Kartashova, 1951: 7); the Spanish communist, Dolores Ibarruri (1951: 47), hailing Soviet women for their struggles, argued that they shared with the women of the world "their experience of women living in the freest country on earth, protected by the Stalinian Constitution".

Numerous examples demonstrate the dedicated efforts of Soviet propagandists to promote social rights as a means of attracting their target audience to the sphere of influence of the socialist camp. They not only presented the rights of labour, women, education and public health as abstract ideals or mere party program points, but frequently referenced Soviet law and its constitution as tangible evidence of a viable alternative political paradigm.

While the Soviet Union did not invent the concept of state-guaranteed social rights with material support for its citizens, it served as a powerful stronghold for such rights. As Conrad (2016: 66) noted, the synchronicity of historical events holds significant importance in the global history approach, surpassing the mere study of origins. And, as argued by John Quigley, the

⁷ Clara Charf, a Brazilian communist cadre and spouse of the renowned Carlos Marighella, went so far as to write a letter to the SWC expressing her dissatisfaction, contending that they ought to receive increased material support from the Soviet Union due to an alleged "attack by the Chinese magazines". While this observation may not comprehensively elucidate the overall trend, it could suggest a competitive dynamic in the realm of printed propaganda between parties aligned with China and those aligned with the Soviet Union in various countries (Charf, 1963). It is also consistent with the work of Jeremy Friedman (2015).

⁸ By "weaponise", I specifically refer to the process of adapting or employing something as a weapon. This entails utilizing tools, concepts, information, and any other resources in a manner that strategically leverages them for a particular purpose. In the Soviet context, the weaponisation of social rights was not hypocritical; their accomplishments in the realm of social rights have long been acknowledged, even by individuals critical of the Soviet system. In employing this term, I aim to highlight how the Soviet Union strategically utilized social rights – both as ideas and tangible demonstrations – to enhance their influence, propagate their ideology, and potentially garner support and sympathy from other nations and peoples abroad.

Soviets challenged the West with social rights, and this objectively resulted in a new situation where capitalist states began to invest heavily in social policies (Quigley, 2007). During the Cold War, the debate over which mode of production best served the interests of its citizens was a significant global challenge, rivaling the arms race in importance. The Soviet narrative placed great emphasis on social rights and the role of the state in this realm, offering its own solutions to address this issue. Meanwhile, some countries, particularly in Western Europe, appeared to seek intermediate or alternative approaches to this question.

SOCIAL RIGHTS TECHNOLOGY

The USSR strategically used its technical and scientific achievements, exemplified by Yuri Gagarin's historic space flight, as a propaganda tool. Each issue of MS featured articles on science, showcasing advancements in power plant construction and innovative machinery and production methods. The Soviet Union openly aimed to increase productive forces, develop the economy, and surpass the United States in terms of production.

The technology of social rights was a material demonstration of a broad concept and a legal principle that, together, assigned particular significance to modernity and progress in the Soviet vision. What I call the technology of social rights was a narrative resource to express the existence and practical operation of an alternative social configuration opposed to Western individualism. This is how Soviet propaganda attempted to materialize the paradigm of how society and the state should provide for and protect the individual. Logically, any argument about the superiority of a system seeks to provide actual proof of its functioning. Such a characterization is significantly fair when we think that the USSR employed planning and intervention in the form of large-scale social reproduction. Specifically in this case, I present cases found in the textual analysis of the USSR propaganda presented and disseminated of a particular technology of guaranteeing social rights through devices and institutions. The singularity of these devices was presented as if they were created for this purpose and maintained by the state, promoters of a culture considered as high, universal and free, with a civilizing and emancipatory purpose.

Figure 2: Article "Así Somos en Siberia" in the pages of *La Mujer Soviética*



Source: *La Mujer Soviética* (11), 1964: 22-25. Digitized from the original copy held at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

The idea of social rights has a necessarily positive character – that is, they require action on the part of the state, different from natural rights that are considered essentialist and immutable parts of human nature and which need to be protected from the action of the state or third parties, and therefore have a negative character. Thus different societies have found diverse ways to

realize a right that needs to be made positive. This sometimes requires the use of a variety of instruments, often understood as social policies. The technology of social rights can thus be summarized in the discourse that also advocated the combination of some elements, such as institutions, social devices, legal guarantees, and mechanisms that were blended to produce two things: socially emancipated and multipurpose individuals, and a new kind of civilization.

The article *Colaboración Creadora* (Creative Collaboration) by Tatiana Yachmeneva, explained how engineers and Stakhanovist workers collaborated to expand production and search for new productive methods as well as how workers could acquire specialized knowledge and prepare for entry into higher education, or even study at the factory library. She said: "Each Soviet factory is a university that provides the most diverse knowledge, which gives workers the possibility of catching up with people engaged in intellectual work" (Yachmeneva 1950: 12). The factory was presented as a space for the production of consumer goods necessary to meet social needs, but also for the self-production of a subject considered to be improved, or who had access to education, by these means. This technology, however, needed certain devices or tools. The library and the courses can be considered as tools for the realization of a right.

In Ekaterina Fomina's article, *En Nuestra Fábrica*, something similar was done. The article began by highlighting one factory's successes in achieving the goals of the five-year plan, praising the union's role in industrial organisation: "The factory's union organization, which with great concern for creating the best working, living and resting conditions for the workers, without forgetting their cultural development, has notably contributed to these achievements" (Fomina, 1951: 22). She then listed the various services that the workers had at their disposal in the factory. They studied in the high school next to the factory; numerous dwellings were built, being part of the urbanization project planned by the union; "Those who work well, rest well", because permits were granted to attend the sanatoriums, and there was also the rest house built by the union; the concern with health included a polyclinic with dentist, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, gym, X-ray machines, and assistance from other medical centres with balneotherapy, diet therapy and physiotherapy; the library had fifty-six thousand volumes, with works by Lenin, Stalin, Gorki, Shakespeare, Pushkin, Tolstoy and Turguenev; the union's House of Culture promoted plays and exhibitions and hosted films, conferences and concerts (Fomina, 1951: 22-23).

The narrative revealed a microcosm surrounding the factory where all the material and spiritual needs of the workers were met. The subjects had everything they needed right there in the workplace. This social complex, built to improve the lives of workers, was materialized through those technologies and social rights devices that have appeared in this article, but also in many others.

This technology of social rights was also constituted in its uniqueness by the "source of power" drawn on. In many of the articles analysed, public funds and free access to services were highlighted as a distinctive aspect of the Soviet model compared to the rest of the world. This is demonstrated, for example, in a text named *Los Primero Catorce Dias* [The first fourteen days], on the care of newborn babies, in the February 1963 issue. After

a detailed explanation of what care a mother should have for her newborn, a final paragraph draws attention by stating: “As the magazine *Soviet Woman* is sent to many countries, it is not superfluous to remember that all medical care, doctor and nurse consultations in the polyclinic and at home are free” (Podkaminer, 1963: 39).

Marx understood the technological innovation of modern industry to be combining a source of power (animal, steam, combustion, electricity) with the mechanisation of tools already known and used by craftsmen into automated machinery (Marx, 2013: 445–59). None of the institutions listed in the MS magazine pieces were invented by the Soviets, but their particular arrangement, combined with universal and free access, converted this particular organisation into a new technology not known until then. This social rights technology was being advertised to the West and the Global South to increase Soviet influence in the world, and to compete in the quality-of-life arena for the superiority of their political paradigm over others. As John Quigley has argued, these policies were not created by the Bolsheviks, but their strength and influence occurred through their ability to put them into practice for the first time⁹.

THE HYBRID RECEPTION OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA IN BRAZIL

In this final section, I briefly discuss how the reception of Soviet propaganda was registered in essays and correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women.¹⁰ The period spanning the 19 years from the conclusion of the *Estado Novo* to the military coup of 1964 in Brazil was characterized by political upheaval and a concerted effort to overcome economic underdevelopment through industrialization, albeit accompanied by social challenges. Various iterations of the developmentalist doctrine were implemented, yet, under pressure from the far right, the state consistently favoured major foreign capital. This had a direct impact on the lives of women, prompting them to organise to resist inflation, famine and other such issues. In this context, the Soviet Union emerged as an alternative model of societal organization and development for many individuals in the so-called Third World.

The Soviet-Brazilian correspondence analysed here can be divided into two categories: official communication between the SWC and FMB, and personal exchanges between individuals. Two notable pen pals were Lydía da Cunha from Brazil and Natasha Berezhnaya from the Soviet Union. Their personal correspondence began after meeting at women’s movement events and continued for several years. However, the tone of the letters differed significantly. Brazilian letters displayed a personal touch, with inquiries about their pen pals’ lives and expressions of longing. Soviet letters, on the other hand, focused on political and social aspects, expressing frustration over delays in receiving periodicals and news from Brazil. All letters were translated into Russian, and reports had to be sent to superiors, even for

individual exchanges.

The difference in tone between the Brazilian and Soviet women’s correspondence can be attributed to a functional asymmetry. Brazilian women juggled their militant activism with their personal lives, while Soviet women such as Natasha had a professional obligation as an interpreter and translator. Being under scrutiny, they maintained a strictly professional approach, avoiding personal discussions. This led to a more professional tone, whereas Brazilian women blended militancy with personal matters.

Figure 3: Note *El Brasil coronó a Valentina*¹¹



Source: *La Mujer Soviética* (8) 1963: 09. Digitized from the original copy held at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

Social rights as the foundation of happiness was a frequent reference in the correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women. This is a main feature present in the writings of the Brazilian women. One postcard sent by Elisa Branco to the SWC read, “For a world in which all children live as happily as Soviet children” (Branco, 1952). Life in the USSR was, in these terms, understood as a parameter of a happy life. When Nina Popova, a Soviet cadre in the women’s movement, was awarded the *Stalin Peace Prize* in 1953, the FMB sent a letter saluting the achievement, because she was one of them, a woman. In that letter, they expressed an idealized and romanticized image of the USSR, saying that the country was the homeland of socialism, where

9 “Many of the ideas reflected in the Soviet legal innovations had been aired before the Bolsheviks came to power [...] The implementation of those ideas in concrete legislative form in Soviet Russia likely added to the potency of these ideas” (Quigley, 2007: 189).

10 For a more detailed discussion, see Machado (2020: 67–106).

11 In June 1963, the USSR sent Valentina Tereshkova into space, making her the first woman in space. Upon her return, she became a celebrated public figure, and in 1968, she assumed the presidency of the SWC and became a prominent member of the communist party. Following the USSR’s dissolution, Tereshkova joined the ruling party, United Russia, and was elected to the State Duma in 2011 and subsequent elections.

women have their rights guaranteed, children are healthy and cheerful, and all people are happy, lovers of peace and progress (FMB, 1953a). Socialism again was understood not necessarily as state ownership of the means of production or dictatorship of the proletariat, but as a regime of social rights and guaranteed material conditions.

Brazilian women were effectively taking the social rights conquered in the USSR as weapons for their local combats. Branca Fialho and Arcelina Mochel, the main leaders of the FMB at the time, sent a letter to the SWC informing them that they were giving speeches all over the country explaining to Brazilian women about the life and rights of Soviet women (FMB, 1953b). To illustrate the leaflet, they also asked for photos of the recent visit of a delegation of Brazilian women to the USSR, probably after the Third World Congress of Women in 1953, held in Copenhagen.

As a parameter and example of a social rights regime, the Brazilian women expressed not only their admiration for the Soviet Union, but also their gratitude and love. Elisa Branco, wrote a short note, as one of the personalities awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. In that note she said:

I am a Brazilian mother, who loves her country and her children, and I want to express my deep love for the Soviet Union. We women express profound gratitude to the Soviet people for having liberated the women of their country and for having won the right to a free life also for our children during the battles in defence of their homeland. (La Mujer Soviética, 1954: 3)

Another noticeable feature in the discourse of the Brazilian women was their political syncretism. Even though they formally agreed with Soviet politics, and were led and inspired by them, their discourse was not exactly the same. A short text by Aldenora de Sá Porto, published in September 1958, revealed this subtle difference. Her text, published on the first page of this specific issue of the magazine, was not addressed to those already admiring and following the USSR, but to those who for some reason cultivated a hostile stance. She criticised prejudices against the Soviet people and their women, such as lack of elegance or masculine appearance by overwork or being an atheist. She appealed to some kind of religious sentiment:

And a foreigner came to see her, to hear her! She contemplated the clear beauty of her blue eyes, the eloquence of her words, which are Love and Peace. May the hungry wolves devour themselves in their own sands, the truth will break through! To see her in the fullness of her work, it is not necessary to expel God from your religion, it is not necessary to violate the laws of your country. Let us do the same. Let us cease to inquire if in your heart there is a God empowering you with a soul. It is too petty to pray for peace only for your own. For this supreme desire for peace is already the presence of good fortune, of one who approaches the true meaning of "love one another". (Porto 1958: 1)

She not only associated the Christian principle of "loving thy neighbour" with the positions uttered by the Soviet peace propaganda, but classified this as its "true meaning". The idyllic romanticism mixed with the Christian meanings of peace, love and truth show that some Brazilian women tended to a syncretic interpretation when they received the Soviet propaganda,

adjusting it to their own setting and to their own thinking so that they idealized an almost Edenic Soviet Union, an almost biblical paradise built on earth.

While some of these Brazilian women incorporated the traditional Soviet lexicon, and communicated in a flattering way, taking positions that seemed orthodox and faithful to the communist party line, others absorbed and reinterpreted the viewpoint present in Soviet propaganda according to their own religious or romanticized beliefs. Both inclinations, syncretism and orthodoxy, were present in the Brazilian reception of Soviet propaganda. However, in this diversity of receptions, the point of convergence among all was the agreement on the importance of social rights and positive action by the state for the betterment of citizens' lives.

FINAL REMARKS

The Soviet Union projected a democratic and progressive set of values to the world, presenting a distinct polity paradigm that advocated for organizing society with the state catering to individual needs. This paradigm cannot be simply labelled as socialism, as it aimed to encompass even capitalist states, in contrast to the liberal paradigm.

It is widely observed that the USSR toned down the strictly revolutionary nature of its propaganda abroad, opting for broader communication in its content. Nevertheless, traces of revolutionary discourse persisted in Soviet messages to the Brazilian public, particularly following the Cuban revolution in 1959. The revolutionary overthrow of power, the seizure of means of production, and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat were not the central themes of Soviet propaganda. Instead, the persistent and stable aspect was the dissemination of an ideology advocating for social rights and state guarantees.

The polity paradigm promoted by Soviet propaganda emphasized the positive role of the state in ensuring the collective well-being of the people. According to Lukacsian ideas, this propaganda engendered an ideology that advocated freedom from necessity (Lukács, 2011: 112-13), where true freedom is intertwined with the provision of material conditions for individuals to develop themselves fully.

In this study, I also introduced the concept of "social rights technology" as a narrative resource employed by Soviet propaganda. This technology used narrative and visual tools to deconstruct various material needs and the mechanisms through which they were fulfilled, presenting them as part of a new, state-driven complex. The narrative aimed to captivate readers by highlighting the diversity of applications, universal access, and state funding associated with social rights.

The fulfilment of material needs was prominently featured in both the language and visual elements of Soviet propaganda. Within the texts of MS, it was common to encounter extensive lists of devices and institutions that were created and implemented to satisfy these needs. These encompassed a wide range of facilities such as houses, hospitals, clinics, sanatoriums, day care centres, schools, universities, theatres, cinemas, cultural

palaces, libraries, galleries, parks, squares, canteens, subways, buses and more. The distinction between different dimensions of material needs was merely indicated by commas in the texts. Moreover, visually, reports within the magazine showcased these social rights apparatuses through a variety of small photos, presenting them in a manner reminiscent of a catalogue of consumer goods ■

REFERENCES

- Borisova, Tatiana Iu. (2012) The legitimacy of the Bolshevik order, 1917-1918: Language usage in revolutionary Russian law. *Review of Central and East European Law* 37(4): 395–419. <https://doi.org/10.1163/092598812X13274154887024>.
- Branco, Elisa. (1952) Postcard: Elisa Branco to Soviet Women's Committee, April. F. P7289 op. 2 d. 1289 l. 20a. GARF.
- Castledine, Jacqueline. (2012) *Cold War Progressives. Women's Interracial Organizing for Peace and Freedom*. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.
- Charf, Clara. (1963) Letter: Clara Charf to Fanny, 11 March. F. P7928 op. 3 d. 1084, l. 70-72. GARF.
- Conrad, Sebastian. (2016). *What Is Global History*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- FMB. (1953a) Letter: Federation of Brazilian Women to Soviet Women's Committee, August. F. P7289 op. 2 d. 1289 l. 26. GARF.
- FMB. (1953b) Letter: Federation of Brazilian Women to Soviet Women's Committee, August. F. P7289 op. 2 d. 1289 l. 17. GARF.
- Fomina, Ekaterina. (1951) En Nuestra Fabrica... *La Mujer Soviética*,
- Friedman, Jeremy. (2015) *Shadow Cold War. The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Ibarruri, Dolores. (1951) Luchamos Por La Paz. *La Mujer Soviética*.
- Kartashova, M. (1951) Elecciones Autenticamente Populares. *La Mujer Soviética*.
- Kennan, George F. (2012) *American Diplomacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kirichenko, A. (1950) El Sanatorio "La Madre y Lo Niño". *La Mujer Soviética*.
- Knopova, Yana. (2011) The Soviet Union and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles: A Theoretical Framework and a Case Study of the Soviet Women's Committee (1941-1991). Budapest: Central European University.
- La Mujer Soviética*. (1951) Las Ideas de Lenin y Stalin Iluminan Nuestro Camino.
- La Mujer Soviética*. (1954) La Revolucion de Octubre y La Paz. October.
- Losurdo, Domenico. (2004) *Fuga Da História? A Revolução Russa e a Revolução Chinesa Vistas de Hoje*. Rio de Janeiro: Revan.
- Lukács, György. (2011) *Socialismo E Democratização: Escritos Políticos 1956-1971*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da UFRJ.
- Machado, Giovanny Simon. (2020) Paradise Is Just Ahead: Social Rights in Soviet Propaganda to Brazil (1950-1964). Master's dissertation, Saint Petersburg: Higher School of Economics.
- Marx, Karl. (2013) *O Capital. Crítica Da Economia Política*. Vol. 1. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Orth, Robert. (1964) *International Communist Front Organizations*. München: Pfaffenhofen/Ilm.
- Peri, Alexis. (2018) New Soviet Woman: The Post-World War II Feminine Ideal at Home and Abroad. *The Russian Review* 77(4): 621–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12202>.
- Podkaminer, Liudmila. (1963) Los Primeros Catorce Dias. *La Mujer Soviética* February.
- Porto, Aldenora de Sá. (1958) "¡Paz! ¡Paz! ¡Paz!" *La Mujer Soviética* September.
- Prestes, Anita Leocadia. (2019) Anita Prestes interviewed by telephone by Giovanny Simon Machado.
- Quigley, John. (2007) *Soviet Legal Innovation and the Law of the Western World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Voronina, Nina, and Vera Costamo. (2016) Nina Voronina: nasha inoprovernochnaya baza proslavilas' na vsyu Moskvu. <https://ria.ru/20160113/1358117913.html>.
- Weigand, Kate. 2001. *Red Feminism. American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Yachmeneva, Tatiana. (1950) "Colaboración Creadora." *La Mujer Soviética*.