The idea of Soviet identity: how it arose and how it was articulated within Soviet governments

Maria Luiza Tessaro Mariano [*]

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais - PUC-MG
*Autor correspondente. Email: marialtmariano@gmail.com

Abstract

The idea of Soviet identity, which would be the social sharing of an identity, is what will be studied in this article. Throughout it, it will be explained what this identity truly would be and how it was used by the Soviet governments to maintain unity between the Republics and their populations. Using the study of constructivist theory and the idea of articulation, this article sought to analyze the process that this identity went through and whether it was used by governments during their years, in the end, it was seen that, in addition to being used, it was also thought and manipulated by each of the Soviet governments. The aim is to understand how this identity was promoted and how it can be seen until shortly after the end of the USSR.

Keywords: USSR, Soviet Identity, Constructivism, Articulation

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, after the end of the Cold War and bipolarity, the international system underwent several significant changes, whether the return to multipolarity, the independence of several new states or even the new regional integrations that began a focus of studies of international relations in regions of the globe. Some of these changes could be seen within what today is called post-Soviet space, with the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), all 15 republics that were part of it, became independent states. Some countries, such as the Baltics - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - decided to become part of Europe, seeking to join the European Union and move away from the Soviet past. The other Caucasus countries, Central Asia and Eastern Europe countries, continued to maintain their relations and created an Intergovernmental Organization in the region, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In this work, we will seek to develop what many understand as the main factor of the continuation of relations between these countries, the so-called Soviet identity, or

homus sovieticus. The central question is how this identity was constructed over the years and, if it was used within the governments of the USSR, how it occurred. The central objectives will be to understand this identity, relate it to characteristics of the time and seek to analyze how governments took advantage of it. The methodology used will be based on constructivist theory, we will talk about speech acts and forms of articulation and how this can be seen within the process of formation of Soviet identity.

In the first part of this article, the main theoretical concepts will be brought to the study, in order to show the reader the importance of theory for the understanding of international relations studies, in addition, focus will be given to the study of articulation, thought by Thompson (1995) and developed by him. The concept of cultural identity by Stuart Hall (2006) and the research by Svetlana Aleksiévitch (2013) will also be used, during the first years after the end of the USSR, on life and society's perception of the dismemberment of the country, and, more importantly, on their perception of themselves.

In the second topic, we will bring a brief contextualization of the history of the Soviet Union, seeking to understand how it was formed and the main characteristics of each government, until its end in 1991. Finally, in the last topic, we will deal with the ways in which Soviet identity can be seen and understood within each government, and how we can relate it to the Soviet state itself.

2.   The role of theory

To first understand how Soviet identity can be seen in the present day, one must first understand how it was created and what role it played for years in the former Soviet Union. For this, it will be necessary to understand some central concepts of constructivism to explain some phenomena that occurred during the years of the USSR and that can also be seen in the current political scenario.

The first concept to be defined is that of corporate identity and its relation to speech acts. Corporate identity, as defined by Wendt (2014), refers to the property of an actor who has awareness and memory of himself. This actor goes through processes that lead him to share a collective identity with other individuals, and the stronger the notions and resistance of this identity among individuals, the greater the maintenance of the corporate identity of this State. The state depends on this collective narrative of its individuals to become a corporate agent. This narrative originates from a culture that is internalized by the agents and accepted by them, thus forming the collective identity that will serve as the basis for the State, since, by adhering to this culture, individuals begin to wish to preserve it over time (Wendt 2014). Speech, when it is intentionally uttered to influence someone's action, is called *speech act*. For the speech act to be effective, there must be a positive response to the message transmitted (Austin 1962). That is, the recognition of speech by the one to whom the message is intended is fundamental. That is, by combining speech acts with corporate identity, we see the possibility of creating an idea that can be shared within a society and that, through this, reaches the point of creating an identity for that group.

The articulation of an idea through speech acts constitutes a process in which the meanings attributed to things are used to establish and sustain the relations of power

and domination in societies (Thompson 1995). There are five forms of articulation: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification. In legitimation, according to Thompson (1995), relations of domination are established as a requirement based on grounds considered correct. In this process, rationalization is employed, which seeks to create a consensus that certain social institutions are worthy of support by society. In addition, universalization is used, which presents agreements that serve the interests of a specific group as if they were beneficial for everyone. Finally, we resort to narrativization, which seeks in the past stories that can be incorporated into the present as part of a tradition (Thompson 1995).

In this article, the process of narrativization is one of the most important to understand how, today, this idea of identity is used to maintain relationships within the region. According to Thompson (1995), it is highlighted that traditions, for the most part, are constructions invented with the objective of establishing a sense of belonging in individuals. They are constituted as stories that transcend the experiences of conflict, division and difference that may exist (Thompson 1995).

In turn, dissimulation reveals relationships being maintained by being concealed, denied, obscured, and/or by diverting our attention from them. Within this process, euphemization is used, which consists of always positively describing actions, institutions and relationships, avoiding criticism. In addition, displacement is used, transferring connotations, whether positive or negative, to something or someone through references (Thompson 1995). The process of unification reveals the relationships being established through the symbolic construction of forms of unity, connecting individuals to a collective identity, regardless of their differences or divisions. This process involves the standardization of symbolic forms that adapt to a given pattern and serve as a shared and acceptable basis between individuals. It is also the symbolization of unity, creating symbols that are collectively identified and attribute an identity to society, diffused through groups. Unification is closely related to narrativization, since it is often used in narrative processes to generate stories that share and project a collective destiny (Thompson 1995).

In the next topic, the formation and use of Soviet identity, the *homus sovieticus*, will be studied, and how this idea is still articulated, to the present day, in order to maintain relations between these States. In the fourth mode, called fragmentation, relationships are maintained by separating individuals considered a problem or a challenge to dominant groups. It also employs what Thompson calls the "purge of the other–the construction of the idea of one enemy as being evil, dangerous, and threatening. The author also addresses the last mode, called reification, in which relations of domination are sustained through the perpetuation of a historical situation, told and believed as if it were a permanent and natural reality in the present. Here, naturalization is used to portray something that is a social construction as if it had always been natural; and eternalization to portray certain socio-historical phenomena as permanent and recurrent, disregarding their historical context (Thompson 1995). In this article, historical factors are important, as they allow us to understand the relations between ex-Soviet countries and the role and collective identities and speech acts in this process.

To better understand the relationship between theory and the relationship between

former Soviet states, it is necessary to explain what this identity that is shared between these countries is, and how it helps perpetuate the behavior of these states over the years. Since 1917, with the Russian revolution and the beginning of the USSR, the creation of a new society and a new culture, anchored in the old Russian culture, has been created in the country. In addition, from the moment the other republics were annexed to the Soviet Union, they all became part of that culture and shared it. The creation of homus sovieticus brought to the citizens of these republics a sense of belonging and integration between them, which led to a good relationship between countries and opened space for a society where cooperation and friendship were the bases of behavior and relationship between these states.

For the purpose of theoretical understanding of what this identity would be, then, three definitions will be addressed below that will help us understand the complexity of said Soviet identity. According to Stuart Hall (2006), cultural identity can be differentiated into three types, the subject of the Enlightenment, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject, for notions of this research, the concept used will be the second presented, this is defined as a subject who does not have his opinion and his interior self-sufficient and/or autonomous, but has his consciousness formed in the relationships he has with other people who are important to him and who pass on to this subject notions of values, symbols and meanings (Hall 2006). In the book "Modernity and it's futures: The question of Cultural Identity" Hall says that:

> "Identity, in this sociological conception, fills the space between the 'inner' and the 'outer' between the personal world and the public world. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, while internalizing their meanings and values, made "part of us," contributes to aligning our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world." (Hall 2006, 11).

In this sense, it is possible to understand how the creation of relations between societies and countries of the former USSR is based on the fact of sharing certain values, memories and meanings, this can be seen in the book "The last of the Soviets", by the author Svetlana Aleksiévitch (2013). In her book, the author deals with how it was for people the rupture between the Soviet being of the late twentieth century, which saw its life and identity collapse along with the USSR, and the beginning of new peoples in the twenty-first century. In her book, she talks about *homus sovieticus* as follows:

> "I have the impression that I know this person, she is well known to me, I am with him, I have lived next to her for many years. She's me. They are my acquaintances, my friends, my parents. For years, I traveled all over the former Soviet Union, because *homus sovieticus* is not only Russian, but also Belarusian, Turkmen, Ukrainian, Kazakh...Now we live in different countries, we speak different languages, but we are unmistakable. You can recognize it right away! We are all people of socialism, similar and not similar to other people: we have our vocabulary, our notion of good and evil, of heroes and martyrs." (Aleksiévitch 2013, 20).

The author Svetlana Aleksiévitch says in her book that, at the end of the USSR, even with the separation and independence of each country, they still considered themselves Soviets, as they lived and shared moments, victories, memories, symbols and values for many years, these experiences would not be forgotten overnight, or

in a few years of dissolution, but would be carried by several generations, as can be seen in the young people and adults of the societies of the current CIS Member States (Aleksiévitch 2013). The author Stuart Hall (2006) in his book says that, "identity is formed in the 'interaction' between the self and society", from this, it is possible to say that the interaction and relations that were lived and shared during the years of the Soviet Union between governments and societies formed what is now called homus sovieticus, transforming the people who lived within this bubble into who perpetuate the behaviors and ideas that existed at the time (Hall 2006).

3. The history of the USSR

To understand the creation of Soviet identity and itself, it is necessary to understand how the relationship between the countries that were part of the USSR took place and how these relations gave room for the creation of the same identity. To this end, we will briefly talk about the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which has brought together 15 countries for more than 50 years. Near the end of World War I, in 1917, there were demonstrations in Petrograd, now St. Petersburg, led by students and members of the lower classes. They demanded an end to Russian participation in the war and the overthrow of the tsarist government. In this context, Soviet councils charged with coordinating revolutionary movements were established, with significant participation of workers and soldiers who sympathized with the revolution. The workers' movement, together with the soldiers and the class of opposing parliamentarians, is considered as the main forces that culminated in the overthrow of the monarchy in the country. After the fall of the tsarist government, these forces were institutionalized into the new political order that emerged after the 1917 revolution. The war generated disbelief and aggravated the problems caused by the government of Tsar Nicholas II, such as hunger, misery, violence and oppression. As a result, Russian nationalism declined, while the nationalism of non-Russian regions and peoples gained strength after the revolution (Smith 2006).

P. V. Struve (1990 *apud* Smith 2006) characterized the Russian revolution as "the first triumph of internationalism and the idea of class over nationalism and the idea of the national." (Struve, 1990 *apud* Smith 2006, p. 130). This statement allows us to understand a little more about how the Soviets managed to establish themselves and reach the top of the governmental hierarchy, giving rise to the Soviet Union. By emphasizing that the idea of class supplanted the notion of national, the author gives meaning to the adherence to the Soviet movement during the revolutionary period and at the beginning of the civil war, which took place between 1917 and 1922. During the years preceding the formation of the USSR, there was an increase in the political participation of these groups, engaging in movements and demonstrating greater engagement in party elections held after the fall of the monarchy. On October 25, 1918, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known as Lenin, arrived in Petrograd proclaiming that the provisional government, established after the fall of the monarchy, no longer existed, and that it was necessary to build a socialist state, belonging to the proletariat, in Russia. With the fall of the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks rose to power, spreading Lenin's socialist ideals. In the same month, there were several changes in areas that were claimed by the groups supporting the revolution (Smith 2006).

Initially, the Decree of Peace was promulgated, whose objective was to unify the regions that previously belonged to the Empire, based on the principles of non-annexation, indemnity and respect for the self-determination of ethnic minorities present in the territory. In addition, the Land Decree was implemented, which resulted in the expropriation of all land belonging to the aristocracy, the Church and the Crown, transferring it for the use of the peasants. These factors were essential for the relatively easy establishment of Soviet power in the country, reflecting the popularity of the idea of returning power to the working class within society (Smith 2006). After the completion of the revolution in 1918, a confrontation broke out between the Bolsheviks, also known as the Reds and the Whites. The former were considered communists, and the latter went against socialist thought. Over the years, faced with the fear of a white army victory, many moderate socialist parties eventually offered support to the Bolsheviks, a fact widely regarded as crucial to the triumph of the Reds. In 1918, the Russian state, now ruled by Lenin, proclaimed itself as a new federation of Soviet republics, recognizing and upholding the principle of self-determination of territorial minorities. However, in the same year Lenin made it clear that the goal of the new Soviet state was to emphasize that interest in socialism outweighed the pursuit of self-determination. As a result, as several previously Russian territories gained independence, such as Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Estonia, Soviet nationalist policies began to emerge (Raleigh 2006).

The Soviets understood that the class and ethnic conflicts present in these countries made them vulnerable to civil wars and foreign invasions, and this is exactly what happened in several cases. In 1918, Belarus proclaimed its independence from German tutelage. In 1920, the Red Army invaded Armenia and Azerbaijan, and annexed Ukraine. In 1921, Georgia was invaded after three years of fighting in Central Asia. In 1923, the Soviets obtained the support of the governments of these countries and annexed these states to their federation. In December 1922, with the end of the civil war and the victory of the Bolsheviks, a new state was established called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Soviets created a federation that granted some autonomy to the federated states, but which remained under the structure and support of the Russian Soviet state. In establishing the Union, Lenin and Stalin sought to create a centralized, multi-ethnic, anti-imperialist and socialist state, thus aiming to prevent the emergence of nationalisms by promoting the development of non-Russian territories and minimizing the influence of tsarist institutions in the new state (Raleigh 2006).

During the more than 65 years of existence of the Soviet Union, there was the construction of a multi-ethnic space, in which the state played a central role in all social spheres. This resulted in an experience shared by the various peoples who inhabited this territory over these years, creating common historical and identity elements. During more than six decades of existence on the international scene, the Soviet Union underwent several transformations, especially in the political sphere and in the organization of the State itself. Initially, it is necessary to understand the system adopted in the country.

In the early years, under the rule of Vladimir Lenin, the USSR went through intense debates about federalism, adopting a model that approximated what we know

today. As mentioned earlier, during Lenin's rise during the years of revolution and civil war, as well as during his rule, was a concern to establish the Soviet Union. Many of the republics incorporated in this period were part of the territory of the former Russian Empire. However, after the latter's collapse in 1917, most of these previously annexed republics gained independence, including the Baltic states, Caucasus regions, and some Asian republics (Hodnett 1967).

At that time, Soviet federalism emerged as a coherent model, allowing the reintegration of these territories into the Soviet Russian borders, while granting them a certain degree of autonomy. Initially, according to the Soviet constitution, these republics were granted various rights, such as sovereignty, establishment of their own constitution, right of secession from the USSR and control of territories within their ethnic borders, among others. In short, Soviet federalism, in its initial phase, sought to preserve the autonomy of states, keeping them integrated into the great structure known as the Soviet Union. However, much of this scenario changed with Joseph Stalin's rise to power in 1925 (Hodnett 1967).

Lenin and Stalin collaborated during the revolutionary years before the formation of the Soviet Union, however, it is possible to identify some disagreements between them regarding the conduct and governance of the Union and its Republics. While under Lenin, during the first two years, the republics were considered equal parts of the same organization, Stalin's government introduced a division between "us", the Soviets, and "them", the non-Soviets. The Stalinist government, which lasted from 1925 to 1953 until Stalin's death, sought greater centralization of power in the Russian Republic. During this period, the economy, politics and even the social sphere were centralized and brought into the Russian territory, with the argument that the Soviet state was not a nation like the others, like Germany, for example, but rather a state composed of nations, in which several national political entities should be controlled under a central state system. This centralization caused several problems at the time, since the government took advantage of its status to appoint new leaders of parties and governments in the other republics, all of them of Russian origin (Hodnett 1967).

For years, this style of governance in the new USSR showed effectiveness for a reason, there was a quest to create a new identity during his rule. Stalin recognized, even before assuming the leadership of the state, that the question of identities and nationalities within Soviet territory had to be addressed in some way. Thus, in the 1930s, a project was started for the formation of a new cultural identity. Rather than allowing distinct ethnic groups to unite and develop their own cultures and national identities, with the risk of turning against the government, the approach was to guide them through a constructed national strand (Shearer 2006).

This project was the basis for what we now often call Soviet identity. By creating small nationalities and consolidating them into new territories, reforming entire alphabets, and reviving old traditions, the government took advantage of these moments and achievements to celebrate the idea of Soviet brotherhood proposed during its rule. One of the key elements to the success of this nationality policy was that, in the late 1930s, mass repression, promoted by political propaganda, was no longer based on social criteria, as was previously the case, but instead focused on ethnic and/or national groups that refused to accept the new national identity. Moreover, as mentioned

by David R. Shearer (2006), this policy ran parallel with the centralization of the state in the Russian Republic. During his rule, Stalin appointed Russians to important positions in other countries and established educational institutions to spread his new national identity. He also incorporated elements of Russian identity and culture into his new identity proposal, which generated some discontent in the other republics (Shearer 2006).

After Stalin's death in 1953, several discussions arose about the path to be followed by the Soviet Union, since, although Stalin's government achieved certain feats in some areas, the way the country was governed was not well regarded, including by its own supporters. During the rule of Nikita Khrushchev from 1955 to 1964, there was an attempt to return to the federalism proposed and implemented by Lenin in the early years of the USSR. In 1957, the *sovnarkhozy*, regional councils charged with administering the economy of republics and autonomous regions, were established in order to grant greater autonomy to regional leaders. However, although these councils were designed to reflect the return of Soviet nations, they were all led by Russian citizens, which generated some discontent among the populations that, after years of Russian rule, would continue to be led by them. With Khrushchev's exit from power in 1964, the councils were extinguished and the central government sought to restore the ministerial system, which caused disruptions in the local economic system of each republic. All these factors can be considered examples of the reasons that contributed to the loss of credibility of Soviet federalism and the Union itself, along with the decrease in the use of the terror policy and the increase in the influence of the intelligentsia in the other Republics (Hodnett 1967).

In addition, the people noticed a change in the posture and speech of the government, moving from a dictatorship of the proletariat to an all-encompassing state for all people. This change was interpreted as an attempt to homogenize nationality, which, during Stalin's rule, had begun to overlap with the idea of the Soviet community, now focusing on ethnic identity rather than politics. Lenin believed that in the modern world there were two central tendencies: the tendency for individual nationalism to develop and the tendency for nations to unite. For him, in imperialism, these tendencies clashed, while in socialism they were strengthened (Hodnett 1967). In the early years of the Union, political, economic and social relations between the Republics were successful. Soviet federalism functioned in such a way that nations depended on each other and were seen as equals. Each had its leader and lived together under the shadow of a larger organization. However, over the years and with the changes in governments and ideologies, these relations have changed. The centralization of power and the creation of a central government to which everyone should submit resulted in the loss of the essence of Lenin's original idea of a socialist nation. All these factors are important to understand the deterioration of these relations and their role in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

4.   The idea of the *homus sovieticus* and foreign policy

After the 1917 revolution in Russia and the establishment of a socialist state, a number of transformations were implemented in the country in the early years. Of all these, the most significant, and which became the basis of the whole nation, and later of the

vast Soviet state, was the adoption of Marxist ideology in various spheres. However, at the end of the revolution in 1917, there were still dissident groups that did not fully agree with Lenin's principles and actions. This resulted in a Civil War that lasted until 1921, when Lenin and his allies emerged victorious. From this point, plans were initiated for a broad restructuring of the country, aiming at its recovery from the damage caused by both the First World War and the Civil War.

According to the article "Russian, Imperial and Soviet Identities"by Dominic Lieven (1998), national identities are grounded in two spheres: political and cultural. In the political sphere, this identity is constructed through the State, institutions, armed forces, collective memories and shared symbols. In the cultural sphere, this identity is manifested in language, customs, values and even religion. During the period of the Soviet Union, these two spheres played a key role in the construction of Soviet identity. Initially, there was an attempt to abandon everything that referred to the Russian Empire, seeking to establish a country and society whose identity was based on social classes, but which also incorporated the various identities present in the State. However, this approach underwent significant changes in the 1930s when Stalin realized that multiple national identities could pose a challenge to the Soviet Union. As a result, he retook identity elements of the Russian Empire, emphasizing patriotism, culture and nationalism referenced in the Union, with the aim of controlling separatist movements and keeping the state unified (Lieven 1998).

In the book "Russian Identities: A Historical Survey", Nicholas Riasanovsky (2005) explore how the Soviet Union was able to stay stong for all of it's 74 years, even When facing changes of governement e all the political and social challenges. According to the author, ideology played a central role in this cohesion. Riasanovsky (2005) argues that socialist/communist ideology was initially established and rooted in the Soviet government. Subsequently, this ideology was disseminated throughout all layers of society, so that everyone came to see the state not as a separate entity, as a Russian, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani or Kazakh state, but rather as a Soviet state. This unifying ideology served as a fundamental foundation that connected all people through a common goal. By adopting socialist/communist ideology, the Soviet Union sought to create a collective and supranational identity, in which political and ideological ties transcended individual ethnic and national identities. This ideological union allowed the cohesion and stability of the Soviet state over time (Riasanovsky 2005).

This can be seen not only in the political question of fact, but in the cultural and societal question of the peoples who shared this identity. By investigating, interviewing and walking through the former Soviet countries, between 1992 and 2012, Svetlana Aleksiévitch tries to understand what this Soviet man really is and how he is rooted within the people and countries that were once Soviet. In her research, Svetlana brings the vacuum between those who lived the USSR to the fullest, from its beginning, and the young people who lived only its last days. It is possible to see that, even though they have not lived the years of "former Soviet glory", desiring freedom, –that according to the author the Russians do not know what it is– and wanting to leave the entire history of the USSR in the past, young people still carry part of an identity that was cultivated by their parents and grandparents for years, and which, in the end, ends up being a part of them. At one point in her book, Svetlana says

that "Looking back, were we ourselves? Was it really me? I remembered along with my heroes. Some of them said, "Only a Soviet can understand a Soviet." We were people with a single communist memory. Neighbors from memory" (Aleksiévitch 2013, 21). It is possible to perceive, through this, that many times several people led a life, recognized a past or believed in stories that were not lived by them and that, through their families, ended up being brought to the present day, which can be found a certain degree of nostalgia in the populations of the current former Soviet countries. Next, we will better understand how this identity was formed, within each government in the USSR years.

During the years of the Soviet Union, each ruler interpreted communist ideology in his own way. Riasanovsky (2005) says that in the first years of Lenin's rule, from 1921 to 1928, the main emphasis was on solving the economic problems caused by wars, through the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Moreover, the government sought to spread socialist ideology in all spheres of society. Lenin recognized that much of the population had little knowledge about socialism and, in some cases, did not believe that this ideology could save the country. Therefore, a process was initiated to disseminate this ideology to all individuals, both in the public and private spheres, so that they understood the role and importance of socialism in their daily lives. The aim was to promote understanding and adherence to socialist ideology, seeking to involve all aspects of people's lives. In this way, the government hoped to establish a solid basis for the construction of the socialist state, in addition to creating a collective consciousness around communist ideology. These initial efforts to spread socialist ideology reflect the importance attributed by Soviet leaders to the transformation of the mentality and ideological adherence of the population (Riasanovsky 2005).

Ted Hopf (2006) was another author who also sought to study and better understand what Soviet identity would be. In his studies, the author divided this identity into six different phases during the USSR years. In the Table 1 below, it is visually exemplified how this division occurred (Hopf 2006, 663, Author's translation):

Tabela 1. Phases of the construction of Soviet identity by Ted Hopf

Period	Phases
1945-1947	Soviet Union as part of a Great Power condominium
1947–1953	Soviet Union within the capitalist circle
1953-1958	The Soviet Union as a natural ally
1958-1985	The Soviet Union as a superpower
1985-1991	Soviet Union as a normal Great Power within international society
1991-2000	Russia as the Great European Power

Source: Prepared by the author with data extracted from Hopf (2006)

As mentioned by him, all these phases had identities based on the relations between society and the state (Hopf 2006). In another book, Hopf (2002) details the means used by governments to articulate this identity during the years of the Soviet Union. According to him, the four main elements used by the rulers were: class, modernity, nationalism and the New Soviet Man (NSM) (Hopf 2002). These terms will be

explained below and will be listed in Table 2 at the end of this topic.

During the period when Lenin was in power, the Russian Soviet Republic began a project of expanding socialism to neighboring countries. Initially, the goal was to recover the territories lost during the First World War. As a result of this effort, several new republics were annexed, culminating in the formation of the Soviet Union as we know it today. However, this territorial expansion brought with it a significant challenge: how to deal with the diversity of nationalities present in societies that were now part of a single state. In the Soviet Union, the question of nationalities was addressed through a reinterpretation of Marxist dialectics. For Lenin, national identity did not matter as much as social class and ideology. The main goal was to create a state in which society would unite into a single entity. In this sense, one of the policies adopted at the time was to give space for the development of all nationalities, believing that when each of them reached an advanced level of development, consciously and freely, they would unite into a single nationality. This would result in the transformation of society and the establishment of a unified community within the state. This approach reflected Lenin's belief that national diversity could be overcome through a process of progressive and conscious development. The ultimate goal was to build a society in which ethnic differences became less relevant as a collective and unified identity emerged.

The Soviet authorities of the time endeavored to promote the growth of cultures within each ethnic unit of the Republics. This resulted in a rapid development of small groups, which created their own alphabets and enriched their cultural traditions. In addition, the government encouraged the training of native intellectuals in each Republic during the 1920s and early 1930s. During the revolution and the first Soviet government, the notion of class was greatly simplified: we, the Soviet people, were workers; those who were not, did not belong to our class and therefore were not part of our Union. Author Raymond Williams (2007) conceptualizes class in two main ways: as a generic term for any social group and as the specific description of a social formation. Both conceptualizations can be applied to the Soviet case (Williams 2007). The Soviet approach aimed to create a common identity based on the working class, while valuing and promoting individual ethnic and cultural identities within the Republics. This balance between class identity and national identities was a distinctive feature of the Soviet Union during that period.

During the period of the revolution and in the early years of its preparation, the notion of class to which the Soviets and Leninists referred was still a group in formation, without a specific defined group. The idea of class and proletariat was restricted to a limited space at that time. However, with the establishment of the Soviet state and the dissemination of the conception of classes and their relevance, we can observe Williams' second conceptualization. The proletarian class came to define the social formation of the Soviet people from that moment on, all proletarians being considered Soviets, and all Soviets should be proletarians. Ted Hopf offers a clear example of how this change occurred over the years in the Soviet Union and how it affected not only class ideas within the country but also the identity built from that context.

Hopf (2002) argues that there was a hierarchy among the Soviet classes. At the top

of the revolution were the workers, followed by the peasants, who were considered allies, and, finally, the intelligentsias and the petty bourgeoisie. According to the author, the Soviet class identity was the one that most produced and excluded the "others". Soviet nations and bourgeois nations were essentially different, as the latter still suffered from a polarization between classes, while socialists no longer had to worry about issues of nationality and ethnicity. Class identity suppressed any significant national identity and created a nation in which only one class prevailed and where work was considered the central theme (Hopf 2002).

With Joseph Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death, several significant changes took place. Although economic problems were to some extent resolved by the New Economic Policy (NEP), there was still a portion of the elite in each republic that did not support the revolution or fully believe in its benefits. During the 1930s, Stalin's government implemented a series of purges to eliminate the agrarian elite known as the kulaks, who opposed the collectivization of land by the state. The republics most affected by these purges were Ukraine and Kazakhstan. This policy has resulted in serious social problems in the affected countries, such as hunger and population displacement, as well as fueling separatist movements. This situation led the Soviet government to undertake a persecution of the *native* intelligentsias that had been established in the previous government. Many were eliminated and others were forced to follow guidelines imposed by the government. This resulted in the suppression of much of the independence movements that were emerging in the republics. Over the years, Stalin's government focused on an industrialization geared toward military production, the collectivization of all Soviet lands, economic growth, and improved education. During his rule, several Soviet schools were established throughout the territory, resulting in a significant increase in the literacy rate (Riasanovsky 2005).

Stalin, in the early years of his rule, adopted two approaches to articulating the discourse on Soviet identity. According to Piotr Sztompka (1998), the notion of modernity can be approached in a historical or analytical way. The historical perspective focuses on changes over time, in a spatial context and at a specific time in history. On the other hand, an analytical approach to modernity considers its specific characteristics, foundations and combinations in each particular period and situation.

Following the analysis of Sztompka (1998), modernity can be understood through five fundamentals. The first is individualism, which involves the perception of ourselves as distinct individuals and the search for an accurate understanding of the world. The second is differentiation, which refers to the divisions between "I" and "other," "we" and "them," and how these distinctions affect interpersonal relationships. The third is rationality, which highlights the appreciation of reason and the search for rational explanations for events. The fourth is economism, which describes economic development and growth, and how this influences our perception of the environment around us. Finally, expansion addresses the willingness and need to expand our knowledge, interests, and understanding of the world. During his rule, Stalin used these points to articulate nationalism and legitimize his modernist choices.

In the early context, modernity was a constant presence in the lives of Soviet citizens. In addition, the discourse of modernity involved three other elements: religion, the differentiation between rural and urban areas, and the distinction between

central Moscow and the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union. With regard to religion, during the Stalin period, there was persecution and religious prohibition in several Soviet countries, especially those with Muslim roots in Central Asia. In relation to the differentiation between rural and urban areas, modernity was associated with the urban proletariat, and the closer to the proletariat, the greater modernity. As for the distinction between the centre and the periphery, the nationalist process arose. During these early years, modernity and industrial development were concentrated mainly in Moscow, while the other Soviet countries and capitals were considered less developed and pre-modern, destined to follow Moscow's example towards the future and modernity. However, it was realized the importance of creating a notion of glorious past, belonging and success story for the Soviet people. However, as Hopf (2002) points out, this glorious past did not really exist. The Revolution of 1917 was the closest event to this, but it still generated doubts in part of the population. Therefore, following the line of existing discourses, the past chosen to be celebrated and remembered was the Russian past (Hopf 2002). However, before addressing the Russian nationalism present in the Soviet Union, it is important to understand how national identities were treated and how one came to this point.

During his rule, Stalin recognized the danger of national identities to the stability of the Soviet government. Therefore, even without completely denying the policies adopted in the 1920s, he gave greater political importance to the question of nationalities. During the 1930s, Soviet leaders continued to encourage the development of some national cultures, especially those considered minor, of nomadic origin, and which did not pose a threat. It was argued that these new cultures and institutions were national in form but socialist in content, i.e. they were still grounded in the Leninist policies of the 1920s. This led to the creation and consolidation of new national identities and cultures. New alphabets were created and some old traditions were officially celebrated again, all attributed to the brotherhood of the Soviet people (Shearer 2006).

The nationality policies implemented by Stalin's government had a political nature. Instead of allowing ethnic groups to develop autonomously, government officials sought to establish official laws for the formation of new identities, allowing only those deemed valid by the government to seek assistance and development. In this way, the government prevented certain nationalities from becoming overly powerful and difficult to control, as Stalin believed to be the case in Ukraine, while at the same time using state power to create and spread an identity of its own. In the 1930s, this identity under construction came to be called the official Soviet identity, because it used all means of propaganda and was accessible to the entire Soviet population, in all republics. However, over the years, it was realized that the discourse of class struggle was no longer effective in maintaining people's enthusiasm for government and ideology. It was at this time that one of the greatest transformations in relation to Soviet identity occurred (Shearer 2006).

As mentioned earlier, a central element of Soviet identity was the division into social classes. During Lenin's rule, there was encouragement for the development of national cultures, often with government support, as the priority was proletarian revolution and the construction of a state aimed at this class. In other words, in

the early years of the Soviet Union, Soviet identity was centered on the working class. However, with the end of Lenin's rule and the beginning of Stalin's rule, this emphasis on social classes became less evident. After the defeat of the party's last enemy, the people no longer had a common enemy. It was at this moment that the government changed its identity, ceasing to be based on classes and starting to emphasize nationalities (Shearer 2006).

In the book Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson (2008) explores the rise of nationalism within states and how the space for this phenomenon was created. According to Anderson (2008), nations are imagined political communities, with defined limits and their own sovereignty. For him, the idea of a nation is a collectively accepted construct, which transforms a group of people without significant ties, except for shared territory, into a specific entity of a particular nation. The author argues that nationalism and its expansion were driven by two main factors: the publishing market and the choice of an official language for the nation. The author states that the publishing market has widely facilitated the dissemination of the national idea (Anderson 2008). In the Soviet case, the choice of an official language played a crucial role in spreading a new nationalism. In this sense, Russian was selected as an official language, and from that moment on, all publications, books, magazines, schools, academic works, conferences and other forms of communication began to use this language in all fifteen Soviet republics.

During his rule, Stalin took advantage of the growth of Russian patriotic sentiment, which had already been occurring before World War II, and decided to promote Russian culture as dominant throughout the Soviet Union. As part of this process, the Russian language was established as the official language of the country, patriotism was encouraged during the war, and Russian immigration projects were implemented to other republics, taking with them Russian culture, customs and symbols (Shearer 2006). This new identity was reproduced through two distinct practices. The first involved declarations of difference and subordination between nationalities. The second consisted of the daily practices that introduced this identity into people's routines, such as the use of the Russian language, the translation of books, publications, symbols, and so on. Moreover, the Soviet government appropriated Russian history in such a way that the previous discourse on the 1917 Revolution as a victory of all Soviets came to be incorporated into Russian history. Another relevant point for the dissemination of this identity is described by Hopf (2002, 55, author's translation), in her book:

> "The most significant and expressive aspect of Russian national identity was its relationship to non-Russian identities in the Soviet Union. And the most common relationship between Russians and non-Russians was the hierarchy of subordination of all non-Russian nations to the Russian vanguard, their elder brother, as it was always put."

After the end of World War II in 1945, the old Soviet identity was replaced by a new conception known as the "New Soviet Man"(NSM). This view portrayed the Soviet as someone "ultramodern, supranational and bearer of the secular consciousness of the working class"(Hopf 2006, 663, Author's translation). After the end of World War II in 1945, the old Soviet identity was replaced by a new conception known as the "New Soviet Man"(NSM). This transformation reflected the search for an identity

that transcended national boundaries and emphasized the vanguard of modernity and working-class values. During this period, the United States was providing financial support to certain rebel movements in western Ukraine, the Baltics, and Poland. This revived the ideological discourse and reawakened the ideological war between capitalism and socialism. It was in this context that it became opportune to resume discourses on ideology and class, aiming to rescue the former Soviet identity. In this sense, the focus in the following years focused on keeping allies, both in Europe and Asia. From that moment on, Soviet identity began to have a more evident relationship with the country's foreign policy.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the concept of the New Soviet Man (NSM) took a different turn than he had imagined. There has been an increase in the search for a favorable international image, and subsequent governments have faced difficulties in properly balancing domestic and foreign policies (Hopf 2006). According to Hopf (2002), the NSM, in reality, was a totally unrealistic construction. He says, "The NSM was an ideal type. It could not be found on the streets of Moscow or in another city or village within the Soviet Union " (Hopf 2002, 70). In fact, in 1955, a space was opened to challenge this identity of the New Soviet Man. Debates arose about the limits of this new figure, with different visions: some saw it as a valid differentiation, while others considered it a significant deviation that could lead people to no longer be considered Soviet. This discussion revolved around the degree of deviation from established Soviet identity.

In the end, the conception of classes regained importance, and the perception began to emerge that some Soviet citizens still had memories of the capitalist world prior to the Revolution. Moreover, the individual's understanding of the New Soviet Man and how this deviant form could function depended entirely on each individual's understanding of class and modernity (Hopf 2002). Thus, all the identities previously treated in isolation were intertwined, that is, the NSM became a union of class, modernity, nationality and way of understanding the Soviet world. Hopf (2002) argues that "The NSM had no private identity. His ideas, interests, and actions were all calculated according to how he might serve the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union" (Hopf 2002, 75).

In the end, during Khrushchev's rule, there was greater freedom for the population. The politics of terror and the control of nationalities were ended, returning to the origins of ideological discourses. Then, during the Brezhnev era, there was an active foreign policy. The Soviet leader strove to make the Soviet Union a state with a good image abroad, introducing novelties to the country and seeking allies, while conducting negotiations and demonstrating diplomatic skills with Western countries. Brezhnev sought some control over the republics. Some forms of popular control and Soviet propaganda were reintroduced, which, in a way, helped to improve the image of him and the state before the population. At that time, there was a strong emphasis on trying to convey the idea that the Soviet Union was a country for all, with advertisements that sought to show the diversity of each Republic, while reinforcing the idea of Soviet brotherhood, highlighting Russia as an "older brother".

Under Gorbachev, Soviet identity gradually began to crumble due to economic and political reforms and the country's greater openness to the West. The younger

generation came to value the possible freedom they were experiencing more than political stability or Soviet traditions and ideologies. According to Ted Hopf (2006, 667) "The new identity of the Soviet Union was proclaimed in the new thinking of Gorbachev's foreign policy". At that time, Soviet identity was shaped by the perception of the country in the international arena and the way it was seen by global society (Hopf 2006). Hopf (2002) also argues that the concept of the New Soviet Man was of great importance for the understanding of the Soviet Union on the international stage. The country's foreign policy was based on the notion of deviation from this new man, and just as it occurred internally, there was also a tolerance for differences and ambiguities in the external sphere. The way the Soviet Union related to other countries, sought alliances and presented itself to the world reflected this new ambiguity that existed internally in the country (Hopf 2002).

In 1986, during a ministerial meeting, Gorbachev made it clear that Soviet identity in his period was closely linked to foreign policy. He expressed the motives behind this approach, such as the development of democracy and respect for human rights. Gorbachev sought to bring liberal and international interests as agendas and important points to be considered within the Soviet Union. The changes he implemented internally in the country changed the order and the way the people saw the government and the leader himself. Finally, these new identity elements articulated by Gorbachev gave great importance to the opinion that the West had about the USSR. Gorbachev firmly believed that these opinions, whether positive or negative, were a result of the mistakes made by the country's foreign policy in previous governments (Hopf 2006).

Hopf (2006, 700) says that "Gorbachev spent his last two years in office desperately trying to convince the West that the Soviet Union had become something more and that they should invest in its reforms so that world politics would be forever transformed." In the end, the change that Gorbachev sought outside the country ended up happening internally. With the opening of the borders and the search for recognition from the West, the Soviet government gradually lost the confidence that the population still had in the Soviet system and the Soviet Union.

Below, a table was made relating the three data that have been studied so far, the identity characteristics of the USSR, the period in which each occurred and the forms of articulation, brought in the first topic of this article, which can be seen in each of these characteristics.

Thus, we can establish a relationship between the phases of Soviet identity and the corresponding governments in order to explain how identity elements manifested themselves over the years of the Soviet Union. Thus, one can see how this identity was something truly articulated during the years of the Soviet Union and how it was used to maintain social relations and, in a way, the unity of the nation.

And, in addition, even at the end of the USSR, it is possible to see this identity in various situations of international politics, such as the CIS. It should be noted that at the beginning of the new international order at the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the relationship between the now independent former Soviet countries is no longer summarized in internal and external conflicts, but, in fact, with the formation of an intergovernmental organization in agreement with them, their relations have become one of cooperation and mutual aid in national and

Tabela 2. Identity Characteristics and articulation processes based on the study by Ted Hopf

Identity characteristics	Period	Forms of articulation
Class	1921-1924	- Disguise; and - Fragmentation
Modernity	1924-1930	- Legitimation; and - Reification.
Nationalism	1930-1953	- Probate; - Unification; and - Reification.
New Soviet Man	1953-1991	- Legitimation; and - Reification.

Source: Prepared by the author with data extracted from (Hopf 2006)

international spheres. The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991 brought the former states a new vision of the international order through their respective independence, but without losing the ties that each one created throughout the USSR with its neighbors. In addition, it is possible to understand how this identity was strengthened and maintained through the creation of the CIS, which, in 1991, began with the signing of an agreement between Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, led by Boris Yeltsin and which had the prerogative to accept only former Soviet countries. The CIS was the creation of a new intergovernmental organization, with now independent countries, which was intended to replace the USSR that had been dissolved after the agreement.

5.   Conclusion

In this article the main focus was the study and understanding of what is known as Soviet identity, first talked about the forms of articulation and how they may have been thought and used in this case. Throughout the work, interesting facts were brought about the Soviet Union, making a small recapitulation about its beginnings and the governments that succeeded the country. We then examined the components of Soviet identity over the different periods spanning the history of the Soviet Union, from Lenin's rule in 1921 to Gorbachev's resignation in 1991. During this analysis, it was found that Soviet identity elements underwent transformations over time, adjusting to the different governments that were in power.

The main identity traits of these periods – class, nationalism and the concept of the New Soviet Man – were discussed. Relevant issues were also explored, such as the role of modernity in the emergence of nationalism during Stalin's rule, the coexistence of mixed identities during Brezhnev's rule, in which the class debate resurfaced while the concept of the Soviet New Man was already being introduced. In addition, the Gorbachev government was approached, which maintained the articulation of the idea of the Soviet New Man, but also sought greater interaction with the West throughout its tenure, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Finally, it was possible to understand how this identity was formed and thought

of from its beginning, and how governments took advantage of its existence and even understood its importance. Over the years of the USSR, with the change of thought, life and moment, it became easier to ascertain how this identity was perceived by people and rulers. It can be said that after living for so many years with a social identity that, even changing little by little, still maintained the same basis, the end of the Soviet Union did not mean the end of its own identity. Many still carry these years and history with them, and still believe that their place is in that nation, this shows how the homus sovieticus is rooted and is present, to this day, in various spheres of life post USSR.

In the end, it was possible to identify not only how this identity was created and shaped by governments during all those years, but also how it took root and became part of the lives of all people, families and societies in each of the former Soviet Republics. Having contact with Svetlana's research, it is possible to understand how the dissolution of the country in 1991 was a great shock for the population, especially the elderly. With this territorial change, many conflicts arose in the early years, still trying to understand how to deal with the separation of countries and populations that were within these new countries still with an idea of Soviet belonging. With the creation of the CIS, it was possible to see how governments realized that this identity was still present in people's lives, and how maintaining relations and benefits between the new states was a good way to go. Thus, it can be seen that during the 1990s and, in various situations within the new organization from the 21st century, the Soviet identity is still present.

Referências

Aleksiévitch, Svetlana. 2013. *The Last of the Soviets.* 1ª edição. Traduzido por Lucas Simone. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Anderson, B. R. 2008. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Diffusion of Nationalism.* São Paulo.

Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words.* Oxford University Press.

Hall, S. 2006. The Question of Cultural Identity. Em *Modernity and Its Futures,* 11ª edição, editado por S. Hall, D. Held e T. McGrew, traduzido por Tomaz Tadeu da Silva e Guaracira Lopes Louro. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A.

Hodnett, G. 1967. The Debate of Soviet Federalism. *Europe-Asia Studies* 18 (4): 458–481.

Hopf, T. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999.* Cornell University Press.

———. 2006. Moscow's Foreign Policy, 1945–2000: Identities, Institutions and Interests. Em *The Cambridge History of Russia.* Cambridge University Press.

Lieven, D. 1998. Russian, Imperial and Soviet Identities. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8:253–269.

Raleigh, D. J. 2006. The Russian Civil War, 1917–1922. Em *The Cambridge History of Russia.* Cambridge University Press.

Riasanovsky, N. V. 2005. *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey.* Oxford University Press.

Shearer, D. R. 2006. Stalinism, 1928–1940. Em *The Cambridge History of Russia.* Cambridge University Press.

Smith, S. A. 2006. The Revolutions of 1917–1918. Em *The Cambridge History of Russia.* Cambridge University Press.

Sztompka, P. 1998. *The Sociology of Social Change.* Blackwell.

Thompson, J. B. 1995. *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Age of Mass Media.* Stanford University Press.

Wendt, A. 2014. *Social Theory of International Politics.* Rio de Janeiro: PUC Rio: Apicuri.

Williams, R. 2007. *Palavras-chave: Um Vocabulário de Cultura e Sociedade.* 1ª edição. São Paulo: Boitempo.