



## Transcript and translation of the Socialist Medicine podcast episode with Gabriela Alves Miranda

[Intro music vignette]

Welcome to the Socialist medicine podcast.

### **Alila Brossard Antonielli**

Welcome to this episode of our podcast on socialist medicine, linked to the research project “Socialist Medicine: an Alternative History of Global Health”. The project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and is based at Humboldt University of Berlin in Germany. This podcast features guests for interviews and conversations about their research into socialist medicine and the history of global health.

My name is Alila Brossard Antonielli and I am a postdoctoral research fellow with the Humboldt University of Berlin.

Our guest today is Gabriela Alves Miranda, from FIOCRUZ’s Casa de Oswaldo Cruz.

In March 2023, Gabriela defended her doctoral thesis in History of Science and Health entitled: “Ambassadors of Soviet Medicine: Communist Doctors, Health and Political Propaganda in Brazil (1930s-1950s)”<sup>1</sup>, under the guidance of Professor Gilberto Hochman, also from the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz. We’re going to talk about this work today.

Welcome Gabriela, congratulations on your thesis! Thank you very much for accepting our invitation to take part in the podcast, we’re delighted to have you!

### **Gabriela Alves Miranda**

Hi Alila, hello to all the listeners, thank you for inviting me, it was a surprise and I really appreciated it. I’m delighted to be here, it’s a pleasure to get to know the project. Good winds have found us.

### **Alila**

Great! We here at the Socialist Medicine Project were also very happy to discover your thesis, your work. We found out about it thanks to the announcement of your defence and we were completely fascinated when we read your abstract. Could you start by summarising your thesis and then we’ll go into the details, of course.

### **Gabriela**

Thank you. I started this thesis very slowly, from when I took part as a research assistant with my advisor Gilberto Hochman, that you mentioned, to do some documentation research and organisation of the documentation from when he visited the Rockefeller Foundation’s archive. He still works today with the relationship between the history of health and the communist perspective, the relationship between doctors and communism. He was organising documentation around his research into doctors and grant applications during a Rockefeller Foundation project, and he came up against some denials, and it was interesting.

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<sup>1</sup> MIRANDA, Gabriela Alves. Embaixadores da medicina soviética: médicos comunistas, saúde e propaganda política no Brasil (décadas 1930/1950). 2023. Tese (Doutorado em História das Ciências e da Saúde) - Casa de Oswaldo Cruz, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, 2023. Available in Portuguese at : <https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/handle/icict/61759>



And I ended up visiting some archives of doctors who had been, who are in the archives of the political police, and also organising documentation from the diary of the Rockefeller Foundation's representative in Brazil.

Well, I came into contact with Maurício de Medeiros' book, *Russia*, something that was completely new to me. A travel book written by a Brazilian doctor about his time in the Soviet Union in 1930, published in 1931. And that became an artefact. So, for me, there was nothing directly linked to his research at the time and, anyway, we were talking about the possibility of a new research project for me to develop my PhD. I ended up surprising myself by digging around and reading the bibliography. When I studied the bibliography that commented on this book, I discovered that it is considered to be the first travel book by a Brazilian who went to the Soviet Union and talked about it as a book and published it here. Well, I thought that was quite interesting, because up until then we hadn't heard of any other, possibly this is a fact. It's in the book by Rodrigo Patto, the professor from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)<sup>2</sup>.

Soon afterwards, I discovered another book, another important source in this regard, Osorio Cesar – Ah yes! I can't forget the work of Raquel Torres<sup>3</sup>. She had done and defended a master's degree, and she was about to defend her doctoral thesis in which travel books were the source and object of her history research. She mapped them all out, she made a panorama of Brazilian intellectuals, both men and women, and this relationship of narrating, telling their journeys.

So, looking for sources and consulting the national library's digital newspapers archive and communist newspapers from that period, I came across the journal in the '50s. And as we worked through and read these sources, we realised that there was something there, some lines of intelligibility for historical analysis. It was more or less like that. Initially it was with Maurício de Medeiros' travel book.

### **Alila**

And how did the subject of the thesis evolve? Once you started the thesis, for example the police files, how did you go about putting the different parts together?

### **Gabriela: on police files**

I had already been to APERJ<sup>4</sup> at some other point in my career, in my professional training, but I hadn't worked there. Now, my contact to help Gilberto was with the police archive, since we work with the contemporary period, for various reasons it might be worth checking it out. Here's the thing, the police documentation has its own organisation and has a whole relationship with the memory of our country too. Because initially, it was restricted. With our

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<sup>2</sup> Mota, Rodrigo Patto Sá, *Em guarda contra o perigo vermelho: o anticomunismo no Brasil (1917-1964)*. 2. ed. Niterói: Eduff, 2020. See also the article by the same author: MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá. "O diabo nas bibliotecas comunistas" In: DUTRA, Eliana; MOLLIER, Jean-Yves (Org.). *Política, nação e edição: o lugar dos impressos na construção da vida política - Brasil, Europa e Américas nos séculos XVIII-XX*. São Paulo: Annablume, 2006. pp. 135-152. "A verdadeira Pátria dos trabalhadores: a URSS e as edições comunistas." In: ABREU, Márcia; SCHAPOCHINK, Nelson (Orgs.). *Cultura Letrada no Brasil: objetos e práticas*. Campinas, SP: Mercado de Letras, Associação de Leitura do Brasil; São Paulo: Fapesp, 2005. pp. 343-365.

<sup>3</sup> Mundim Tôres, Raquel, *Transpondo a Cortina de Ferro: relatos de viagens de brasileiros à União Soviética na Guerra Fria (1951-1963)*, PhD thesis in Social History, University of São Paulo, 2018 ; and *O Inferno e o Paraíso se confundem: Viagens de Brasileiros à URSS (1928-1934)*, MA thesis in History, State University of Campinas, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro (APERJ).



process of re-democratisation, back in the 1980s, in the Constitution of 88, it was given the right and the duty to be open, right, and to become public. So, it has a historiographical value, but also a citizenship value. The political police was an organisation that dates back to the Vargas state, the dictatorship and the Estado Novo (1937-1945). And there was the archive, the information archive, it was very important, and since then, this structure has been created, so sometimes you have documentation there from the 1930s, from the Revolution [of 1930 in Brazil], from participation in the communist uprising [in Brazil in 1935], and you can also find documentation from the SNI<sup>5</sup> from the military dictatorship [1964-1985]. There are other archives and they have a very local, regional organisation, because this documentation is distributed in the state archives.

I researched the political police in Rio de Janeiro, and, of course, they communicated, so eventually you have an exchange of information. Another important point, perhaps, which ties in with your question, is that these archives have a nominal, biographical organisation, the researcher can search by name. We often don't have access, especially some of the binders aren't digitised, you wait a few days and then it comes back to you with a series of folders, you ask to see it, and sometimes you get very frustrated along the way, but you do find some things. Some studies that have looked at police files often point out that they often say more about the police than about the character, the subject of research. I started researching Maurício de Medeiros, and some of the students at the University of São Paulo (USP) medical school, like Samuel Pessoa's students for my supervisor. It was an archive that I consider very important, and very complementary to the research. But what I want to say is that it doesn't work, like any other source, it doesn't work if we don't cross-reference and complement it.

#### **Alila: Sources and materials**

But exactly, then I jump to the question about the materials more specifically, we've already talked about these archives of the political police in Brazil. I liked that you mentioned that they sometimes say more about the political police than about the characters and how they reflect that moment, that political situation in Brazil, right? I'd like you to talk a bit more about the other sources you collected, because during your thesis defence, the members of the committee praised your research into documentation, highlighting the great diversity of sources and iconography. So perhaps we could go back a little to the books you collected, which you mentioned at the beginning, what are these books, and what exactly was the content and structure, and the objectives of these Brazilian doctors who went to the Soviet Union, came back and started publishing these books.

#### **Gabriela: about who went to the USSR**

It's interesting that you mentioned these comments about the reception from the thesis committee members, because one of my biggest concerns, I thought, especially at the beginning of the project, I thought it wouldn't work, you know? I thought the research was interesting, but I didn't think I had enough material. And in one of my meetings with my supervisor, commenting a little on this anxiety, he said no, there is research and research, this is a qualitative research, it's not quantitative. This gave me confidence, even at the beginning to write the project, right? Over the course of the research, I came to understand that this was a project of the intellectual communist doctors to disseminate knowledge, in a more or

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<sup>5</sup> National Intelligence Service (SNI).



less organised way, and that they were totally crossed by the context. The main material for my research right from the start was the travel books. And then I realised that there was, I came into contact with a literature that developed this, there's a historiography that's drawing attention to political travel books. Because until then, I considered it something of a source limited to researchers who studied or were concerned with narrative literature, or those narratives by naturalist scientists, in other words, very limited to the 19th century, the foreign researchers that came to Brazil. And indeed, there has been a great deal of development of a concern for travel narratives with this group of historians and more than historians, researchers focused on narrative concerns, the placement of the other, alterity. There is another historiographical movement that is drawing attention to the importance of political narratives, or travel books with this connotation. And then, speaking of the Soviet Union, a quality of travel book about the Soviet Union, and from the post-revolutionary implementation and stability, which began in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it was part of the Soviet Union's foreign policy to present the Soviet Union as a model for foreigners. And it's interesting, perhaps we can investigate this later, but there are a few movements. The first has to do with the Soviet Union's foreign and domestic policy of encouraging the presence of foreigners. And another has to do with the contexts of these countries themselves when their citizens go. Brigitte Studer<sup>6</sup> argues that there is also a history to their passage, there are times when there are more Germans, more French, etc. What I realised is that the Brazilians started visiting in the 1930s, right? Raquel [Mundim Torres] has mapped this very well, some books have been published, other travellers have been, but that doesn't mean that they haven't published this perception and this narrative in articles, in other formats. But we have an engineer who took part in Stalin's economic planning work, and it's at this point that Maurício de Medeiros goes, and Osorio Cesar. Well, in the 1950s there was an inflection point. In the 1950s, there were more Brazilians visiting and there was much more of state presence in the Soviet Union welcoming Brazilians as representatives of Latin American intellectuals. The Soviet Union was very concerned with bringing and showing the Soviet Union as a model, and was much more focused on absorbing approaches and interactions between Latin American and Soviet intellectuals in the post-war period.

#### **Alila : specifically about doctors' books**

And you've really placed them in relation to this issue of travel narrative books, as you were saying, and specifically to the Soviet context. And in this case, I wanted to ask you, Medeiros and Osorio are the ones who publish specific books, I mean, their book, if I understood correctly, wasn't just specific to medicine, right, it was a general perception of what the Soviet Union was. But because they're doctors, they'll be interested and perhaps describe this issue of Soviet medicine in the '30s in greater detail and with a little more analysis.

#### **Gabriela: militant intellectuals travelling and writing**

Exactly! I realised in the reading, we saw this differentiation between the 1930s and the 1950s in the narratives. Within this historiography that is drawing attention to this travel literature with a political connotation, travel literature about the Soviet Union, the narration of this new model, they realised, I quote Sylvia Saítta<sup>7</sup>, as well as Studer whom I've already mentioned,

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<sup>6</sup> STUDER, Brigitte. "Le Voyage en URSS et son retour". *Le Mouvement Social*, n. 205, oct.-dec. 2003, pp. 3-8. Last accessed September 2022: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-mouvement-social-2003-4-page-3.htm>

<sup>7</sup> SAÍTTA, Sylvia. *Tren estación cielo*. *Estudios de Teoría Literaria*, digital magazine, year 2, n. 4, 2013, pp. 61-70. Available at: <https://fh.mdp.edu.ar/revistas/index.php/etl> .....



who worked with the Argentinians. And I think that the historiography of Argentinians has a tradition of travelling and political culture. She worked with a range of Argentinian communist intellectuals who had been to the Soviet Union, and she saw a certain pattern, some things that are repeated in this way of narrating. And I found it very interesting to realise that they also read each other, and that this ended up developing a certain narrative pattern. For example, the passage is a structuring factor in these narratives, they narrate the passage, the arrival, the crossing of the border, the idea of stepping into the Soviet Union as a new world, it was almost like a discovery of the Americas. The intellectual, especially a militant intellectual or a sympathising intellectual, had this feeling of arriving in a fantastic new world, etc. And this appears in the narrative more or less according to the mentality of that intellectual historical actor or how he would like to be read as well. Well, in the 1930s you really do have some differentiation, at least in the narratives I worked on in my thesis, in other words, the doctors' narratives. Maurício de Medeiros is an intellectual who seeks this broadness. There's a model for dealing with women's health, the issue of abortion, the issue of civil marriage and divorce, and the position of women in terms of their civic freedom, their position as mothers and their position as workers – this was very interesting to them. In the 1950s, the narrative was considered to be a little more tied up with the visits they made to the institutions. However, I believe that the narrative of Medeiros and of Osorio Cesar are quite different from each other, even in such a close period, due to biographical and personal issues and positions. At that time, when Cesar published his travel diary, the trip he took with Tarsila do Amaral, an important artist, a reference for our modernism, he was a communist militant and wanted to show himself as such. Medeiros, on the other hand, was much more critical of the regime, although they both suffered persecution later when they were in Brazil. There's a flow there of what "I saw", what "I want to show" and how "I want to be seen".

**Alila: clarification on dates**

Can you just remember, you said at the beginning that Medeiros went in 1930 and published the book in 1931, and Osório Cesar, when did he travel and when did he publish the book?

**Gabriela on the dates and the success of *Rússia***

Publication and their journey are very close, but it's not always like that. The actors from the 1950s took a few, three years to publish. No, two years. In the 1930s it happened more quickly. It was in 31 that *Rússia* was published, but it's important to remember that *Rússia* was a publishing success, as Rodrigo Patto Mota, a professor at UFMG, rightly pointed out. Osorio Cesar's book, on the other hand, didn't circulate as widely. But both were published very close to the return trip<sup>8</sup>.

**Alila: the career of these Brazilian doctors**

So, since we're talking about these actors who published these books, perhaps you could introduce them a little more and their trajectories as disseminators of Soviet medicine in Brazil. What are the singularities of these actors, doctors, intellectuals and the fact that they are Brazilian?

**Gabriela: on doctors' trajectories**

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<sup>8</sup> The book "Where the Proletariat Leads..." written in Portuguese by Osorio Cesar dates from 1932.



The concern with dissemination is the motto, the guiding principle of the research. The main objective is to map and analyse this dissemination work by communist doctors for Brazilian doctors, Brazilian communist doctors for the Brazilian public. This endeavour began with Maurício de Medeiros when he published his travel book *Russia*. Maurício de Medeiros is a super multitasking man, which was something of his time, but I find it fascinating. He was a parliamentarian in the government that was ousted by the Revolution of 1930, so he was there at the time, recently ousted as a former parliamentarian. And he was a political critic with several articles published in newspapers, his brother<sup>9</sup> was an important figure in the press at the time and he published a lot. And he was also a professor of clinical propaedeutics at the Faculty of Medicine, now the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, UFRJ, but at the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro, in the field of illness and psycho-knowledge, I don't know if you can mention him as a psychiatrist, but he was what we understand today as a psychiatrist. And it's interesting that both he and Osorio Cesar, at that time, were from the field of mental health.

Osorio Cesar was also a man, an intellectual doctor from Paraíba, who had arrived in São Paulo. He even studied dentistry, or finished and didn't practise, and ended up going into the field of mental health medicine, did his medical residency on it, but the interesting thing is that he was an art critic, throughout his life, in his youth he was a musician, he had this contact with the circulation of artists. So much so that he is known, along with Níse da Silveira, for having an approach to working with patients with art, he has books and published exhibitions and has fruitful work in the Juquery hospital institution. He worked there as a student. Osório Cesar then had thus this mediation with artists, fine arts and music.

By the 1950s, the medical authors already had a background in broader specialities. It was another moment in the party's history. They were in the Soviet Union accepting an invitation, which had everything to do with a conference organised as part of a culture of the peace movement, and which had to do with the circulation of intellectuals who had been invited. So there's already a greater involvement of a party structure. Of course, this wasn't publicised on the street, but we can see it researching in the archives, it wasn't publicised on the street, given the time when the [Brazilian Communist] party was outlawed, and communists were being persecuted. But this is interesting, this function of the party, this sociability between militants and how this was absorbed, this was approached from the perspective of the history of health and medicine. Well, those medical intellectuals who were in Vienna in '53 and then went on from there, they already intended to visit the Soviet Union, that was their great dream. And Brazilian were invited from within Brazil, there were representatives from various Brazilian states and this had to do with organising congresses and events, even local, regional ones, as part of the peace movement. And it's interesting to note that this happened with other professions: economists, educators, especially writers, literary writers had a very important circulation in the Soviet Union. That's why our research concern was to look at doctors. So, in the 1950s we have public health sanitarians, surgeons... Until now, I don't know if it's a coincidence, it could have been other intellectuals, but I believe that these intellectuals were very attentive to looking at how this model of the Soviet Union was thinking about medicine and health policies and social policies. As doctors, Maurício de Medeiros and Osorio Cesar, had this concern with social behaviour, with regulations, has to do with this intense context of the '30s. And I believe that yes, issues of professional and personal concern appear in these narratives.

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<sup>9</sup> José Joaquim Medeiros e Albuquerque (1867-1934), politician, journalist and writer.



### **Alila**

In other words, each person's context and specialisations will certainly influence their outlook and what they write. What you were also talking about, the idea of what they need to tell, to show that they are activists too.

### **Gabriela: doctors' careers and interests**

Yes, I found, for example, the narrative of Milton Lobato, a phthisiologist, the nomenclature was still phthisiologist, today's pulmonologist. He's a charming character. Perhaps my character who narrated the most, who was most concerned with disseminating, with making the work of scientific dissemination of Soviet medicine for Brazilians a mission, with this idea of the gap of knowledge. Milton Lobato was very concerned and throughout, he was the one who followed the most dissemination practices, cultural mediation practices, in this sense of bridging the gap between two types of knowledge. And he was very concerned about the health campaign. That's where the function of scientific dissemination, which I'm trying to get at, in his speciality, is very characteristic of his concern with health campaigns to prevent tuberculosis. And he was fascinated by the institutional, political, and institutional structure, and the Soviet state's investments in health programmes. He produced an exhibition and used illustrations and was concerned about publicising the campaign to children, it was very much inspired by what he saw in the Soviet Union, that's what he says in the travel book. I believe that despite this structure that is repeated, which comes from the source, we find their singularities, particularities of the narrative, which have to do with personal and professional issues in the speciality.

### **Alila: question about the medical journal "Atualidades médicas e biológicas"**

Maybe now you can tell us a bit more about the journal "Atualidades médicas...", which was something that really caught my attention in your defence. And exactly how it was created<sup>10</sup>, what was the context in which it was created and what were the main themes it dealt with.

### **Gabriela: on "Atualidades médicas" and the sociability of militant doctors**

That's right, Alila. The journal "Atualidades médicas e biológicas" was a watershed in the way we looked at the object. So it was while researching information on the repercussions of travel books, especially in communist newspapers, in the *Imprensa Popular* – which is easily accessible in the "Hemeroteca digital" [digitised newspaper archive], a marvellous project of our National Library that is accessible anywhere in the world – that I came across the advert for the journal "Atualidades médicas e biológicas", which was then edited by Doctor Alcedo Coutinho<sup>11</sup>. So it was a big name, he produced this journal, so we went to look for it, and it's there in the National Library's collection, but it hasn't been digitised. Up to that point, I hadn't known about this journal and, from what I've learnt, it had been covered in one or two articles as a bibliography. Until then, it hadn't been worked on as an object as a whole and I think there's still a lot to work on from it. That's why I found it very interesting, that's why it's so

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<sup>10</sup> The journal "Atualidades Médicas e Biológicas" was published between September 1951 and December 1960.

<sup>11</sup> Alcedo de Moraes Coutinho was a physician and a politician from the Brazilian Communist Party, who participated in the Revolutions and uprisings in the 1930s. In the late 1940s, he was one of the communist congressmen who lost their mandate when the Communist Party was outlawed in 1947. As an underground member of the Brazilian Communist Party, he also organised medical assistance to his fellow party activists.



important as a watershed, and it was from finding this documentation that I said, we said, we had orientation meetings: these intellectuals did have a work of dissemination, of scientific dissemination and it makes a lot of sense to understand them as cultural mediators. And that these intellectuals were no less important than those who were recognised for creating and applying those techniques in the Soviet Union, for example.

I was inspired by the work of my professor and member of the committee, Professor Kaori [Kodama], from my department. She is part of a group, a larger movement of historians, who have this perspective of looking at intellectuals as cultural mediators. Both in perspective to the press and also in art, for example, there are people working with theatre, in education. But what they draw attention to is the role of the press in this process. So I said, “Wow, that’s the approach that would be a way of looking at it.” Because what this says is that they had a dissemination project and it’s an intellectual project and this is often not appreciated, as this group of historians draws attention to it. But there is a historiographical movement to look at this in a different way, to give it the importance it deserves.

Then I saw that this is a system of dissemination, because it involves travel books, it involves other forms of publications, and I was reading a bit about the communist press, and there was a whole concern to show how travel books play a very important role, and it’s not just them. There are novels, very much focused on socialist realism, we have Jorge Amado as the greatest representative of all this, as a figure who transcends Brazil, he is very well known among the Soviets. And as well as novels, there are books of theories, essays, so all of this was a huge investment of the Soviet political culture.

Then I said, well, we too, these doctors made this communist political culture from the perspective of medicine and the history of health. The journal was fundamental, and it was produced by Alcedo Coutinho, and you realise the participation of other actors. Milton Lobato, he wrote in the journal, and was appointed editor of the journal from a moment on. I don’t know the exact function, but in my research, I realised that this, there’s a very strong indication that the journal was much richer in practice, there were many more people taking part in the making of the journal, that’s what I pointed out. So what is it? It’s a confluence that has to do with the communist press, the dissemination of Soviet medicine in Brazil has to do with the militancy of these intellectuals, with the interests they had in developing these, and with the participation in these events of communist political culture from a more international perspective, of the peace movement, in which almost all of them are participating. And that’s when I began to realise the lines, however tenuous, of this circulation and sociability of these communist intellectuals.

Lobato he himself said this in letters that he published decades later, he remembered his relationship with Graciliano Ramos, and how even before he went to the Soviet Union in '53, he had heard him at his bedside, because he was Graciliano Ramos' doctor as well as his friend. And as a phthisiologist, Graciliano Ramos died of lung cancer, and he helped and advised him in this regard. And while at his bedside, he was proud of the mug he used, which he got as a present from Moscow, and this was instigating him. He was Graciliano Ramos’s doctor and would proudly recall this later in his reports to the press. So, this was something of his, to publicise, he was here in the 1980s publishing in the readers’ letters section of the *Jornal do Brasil*. This was also very nice to read in the research, this affective data of memory, and which is essential, I think, this look at the reconstruction of the memory of communist militants. There are works along these lines. The characters in the research, the doctors, I think it was Reinaldo Machado in the book – because Lobato’s book has his narrative and then Reinaldo Machado’s narrative in a single book – there’s this [story]... and Raul Ribeiro da Silva,



they took a handful of earth, you know, I don't know if it was from Leningrad, to take it, as an artefact, they said they took some of them. It's very interesting how these are practices, you see that it's collective, that it's social.

### **Alila**

It's interesting, because it really is a ramification, 40 years later there are still memories, there's still material, that also represent, show the importance they gave to these experiences they had.

### **Alila: question about ways of dissemination**

And the other thing I wanted to ask you Gabriela, you mentioned that they did other forms of dissemination, that they also held conferences, right?

### **Gabriela: about the supports**

That's it. The practice of scientific dissemination carried out in Brazil by communist doctors had a variety of supports. Maurício de Medeiros began by saying that when he arrived, what encouraged him to write the book was that he was being sought out a lot by the press, by friends, by people who wanted to know from him. So, he had been to both private and public events, public conferences, and some of them were mentioned, and newspaper readers were invited to take part. And so did Osorio Cesar, and Tarsila do Amaral, took part in some conferences in the sense of saying how, what she saw, what she narrated. Now, this conversation reminded me of the importance of drawing attention to the importance of the gaze. The narrative of "I was there, and I saw", which is so important and structuring in travel narratives. But it takes on an even greater contour when it comes to travelling to the Soviet Union, because of the ideological battle that took place there in the 1930s, it's important to mention this, of the representations that were attributed to the Soviet Union. And people who had never set foot in the Soviet Union took part in this battle. This was very strong in the press, it's possible to map this out. The importance of looking.

The conferences reached people, so perhaps we can think about the characteristics and quality of this audience, the public conferences, lectures, etc. There were books and some took part in radio programmes. Lobato, in his book, so concerned was he to show that "we are spreading the word", he pointed out what they had done to make this known to the Brazilian public, being, in his words, interested in promoting and increasing this exchange with Brazil and the Soviet Union, and that it was a shame and absurd that the Brazilian state didn't have this cooperation with the Soviet Union, didn't have diplomatic relations. So they were doing it, and hence the importance of his travel book, and also the importance of the journal, the journal is already another medium. As well as travelling books and public lectures, the journal "Atualidades médicas e biológicas" was created in 1951, with this perspective and with this discourse from the editors that there was a need to bridge this gap, that knowledge of Soviet medicine wasn't reaching us, due to the Cold War context at the time. Hence their important mission to translate what was most modern and interesting about Soviet doctors. Reading the editors' narratives in their editorial letters, we also realise that the journal is a publication that responds to a transnational model of disseminating Soviet medicine. They say they were inspired, they cite other journals that publish similarly, mainly in France. The journal "Atualidades Médicas e Biológicas", we have indications that some articles were translated directly [from Russian], but a lot came from France. Like the entire Latin American communist press, a lot of it was translated from France. But as I said, the Soviet Union's



investment in the communist press, in its gaze towards Latin America, was so intense that, especially in the post-war period, there was a publishing house in Moscow that specialised in Latin America. So the books were printed there mostly in Spanish, but there are publications in Portuguese edited there. And they were sold in communist bookshops, there are some very interesting works showing them, the bookshops such as *Livraria Independência*, *Livraria Progresso*, and they were all advertised in the newspaper *Imprensa popular* [linked to the Brazilian Communist Party]. There were books from different segments, and there were magazines from a more general intellectual perspective, and the journal “*Atualidades médicas e biológicas*” is an example of this work aimed especially at doctors. Within it, there are some very technical, theoretical articles, and some softer, more palatable articles for people who aren’t doctors. There are articles in the form of travel narratives by English authors who were there. There are bigger articles and articles from all over the world, from different segments of medical specialities. There was also another point, which I realised during my research, that until then I hadn’t known about, which was the conceptual figure of Pavlov and Pavlov’s legacy. This, I believe, was the journal’s main concern, to publicise Soviet medicine from the perspective of the Pavlovian approach.

**Alila: the specifics of the medical journal “Atualidades...”**

You’ve given me a very good hook, thank you very much, which is for us to go into the particularities of Soviet or socialist medicine, and what the interests of these Brazilian doctors were when they were already translating and bringing this material to Brazil and publishing it in this journal.

**Gabriela: on Soviet science and Pavlov**

The discourse of the journal “*Atualidades Médicas e Biológicas*” from the perspective of its editors, our actors, characters, was to cover this gap, as I said before, of what was most modern and interesting in Soviet medicine for Brazilian doctors. It turned out that the idea of Soviet medicine had been developing since the 1930s. Medicine was an arm of the construction of this new state and this new Soviet man, it very important in terms of institutional structure and public policy. In terms of public policies, it aimed primarily at prevention, which was accessible to everyone, all workers, and that should also be accessible to the rural population. And that these values that have been guided by what is Soviet medicine, techniques and programmes that have this perspective of being simple, cheap, solutions, and not just curative technological ones, although that appeared, but it wasn’t a banner, without ceasing to be curative. So, the idea of prevention and prophylaxis is one of the hallmarks of Soviet medicine. Well, these characteristics are considered differentials that Brazilian communist doctors had to offer their colleagues here in Brazil with this publication translated and publicised in “*Atualidades médicas e biológicas*”.

What I come across was the figure of Pavlov, and I had to reflect on its importance. Pavlov was a physiologist, trained in old Russia. Tzarist Russia had a tradition in the discipline of physiology, and he was part of a materialist current in physiology. I encountered the master Pavlov through my readings and through the characters, and with what became of it after the war, and they are different things. Osorio Cesar does mention him, and Maurício de Medeiros not so much. But in the 1950s, what happened, there was a policy in the Soviet Union to organise and systematise, to put the house in order of what Soviet medicine was, everything had to do with the policy of Soviet science in the post-war period, which had to do with Lysenko’s science. The internal politics of the Soviet Union and its approach to science,



Stalinist science, had a whole context of systematising and saying what Stalinist science was. Stalinist science was not bourgeois science, European science, so medicine comes into it. And authors who understand that Lysenkoism was a model for spreading a Stalinist perspective in other sciences as well, works by Ethan Pollock and Kremensov<sup>12</sup>: Pollock analysed examples from physics, examples in philosophy, in other sciences. In other words, all disciplines were influenced, and therefore medicine and physiology as well.

There was a very important, striking event, full of political and ideological complexities, which was *the Pavlovian week* in 1950, which took place in Moscow. It was a week that was widely publicised in the newspapers, in *Pravda*. And “*Atualidades médicas e biológicas*” is, in a way, the fruit of this. Now, I think this route is a gap that we need to address. I think it’s a collective endeavour, either me or another researcher, but it does interest us. It’s this path that I think was a gap in my research and that we as historians can pursue: if it is in fact a product and what the contradictions of this are. Well, because there are articles, founding articles of the week, of this event that took place in Moscow, which were translated and published in the journal. But at no point is this, shall we say, made clear, either in the editors’ presentation or in the editorial letters to Brazilian readers. That’s what I thought about the extent to which they were much more interested in circulating, that was my point in the thesis. I believe that the communist militants were much more concerned with circulating this material, this information, than exactly discussing this theory. Speaking of dissemination supports, the courses were also very important. They took place in France, many of the lessons from France are in the journal, because they were circulated in the French press and published in “*Atualidades médicas e biológicas*”. And the organisation of courses too, in conference format, week-long things, for Brazilian professionals and which these doctors took part in and produced here. The theme was what Pavlov’s epistemology was and why it is important for medicine.

#### **Alila: question about the legacy of Soviet medicine in Brazil**

And something you were saying that there have been several courses, including in Brazil, on the particularities of Soviet medicine, especially Pavlov. And you also mentioned Milton Lobato and the question of how he was inspired by tuberculosis control and prevention programmes. I was wondering if you were able to observe, I imagine that this would be another research project, but it’s always good, sometimes you have some clues, some elements, what were the legacies of this approach to medicine and this dissemination of Soviet medicine in Brazil in Brazilian medical knowledge and practices, at that time or a little in the following decades.

#### **Gabriela: on the techniques and whether or not they are used in Brazil**

**Pavlov’s epistemology** in medicine is very marked by the development of certain techniques that appear in the journal. Lobato used and mentioned in his article in the journal how he was inspired, for example, by the placental graft technique for treating patients with asthma. This placental grafting technique refers to tissue therapy, which was created by Filatov and there are articles in the journal by a French doctor, Émile Aron, who was one of those responsible for publicising this method. The mapping of the use of these techniques so far in my thesis is very much based on the journal. I haven’t yet consulted other types of archive, other types of

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<sup>12</sup> KREMENTSOV, Nikolai. Stalinist science. Princeton; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.  
POLLOCK, Ethan. Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006.



material, but my chapter 4 – I think it was the one I had the hardest time doing – focussed on what this Soviet medicine was like based on the journal. It was very difficult for me to find a narrative line. After all, you find medical journals that are the result of medical societies or the result of a particular medical society focused on a speciality, or by a group that has a speciality that is very much in vogue, and they get together. There I found a series and, well, what brings these techniques together, or these discussions, these debates, would be Pavlov's theory. The techniques of Soviet medicine, to point this out was very much a function of what I saw repeated in the travel books, in the narratives, or in the press when they reported on the conferences, or made a little note talking about the repercussions of that conference that they had invited readers to a few days earlier. But I think this deserves to be more systematised because it was mentioned. What I'd like to do is systematise the relationship between these press supports and the articles in the journal. And I'm going to list the most important techniques for you.

**Painless childbirth**, as they call it, is undoubtedly the most famous of the Soviet techniques. I think it's the greatest legacy of this export context and of Soviet medicine as a showcase. The idea that ended up being very well known here in the West by Lamaze, a French gynaecologist, who passed through, you see how the theme of travelling is repeated. He spent some time training with the Ukrainians, in fact, the Ukrainian method of painless childbirth is prophylactic, and he had a moment of encouragement and of making it a model, he went to Russia and then it dissipated, and from there he went to France with Lamaze and in the West. The Lamaze method still exists today, there's a foundation dedicated to publicising it, welcoming pregnant women and families, and spreading the word about it. When I said that I found a bibliography that used the journal "Atualidades médicas e Biológicas", it was a quote from an article on the psycho-prophylactic method of pain-free childbirth. Lamaze visited Brazil, this is recorded in the journal and in the press, just before his death. We've had promoters here who have not only been through my characters, which I worked on more in my thesis, but Hirsch Schor published a booklet promoting painless childbirth. "The parto sem dor", I even have a small publication in the journal "Actualidades Médicas e Biológicas" and in the Vitória publishing house, a very important publisher that lasted the longest in this communist press system. Childbirth without pain has gone through, it's gone beyond, it's not a communist thing or anything, it's had a really big impact on the West. They always mention the Pope's note saying that it wasn't a sin, in the encyclical. Whoever looks at these articles, you'll realise that there was also a way of narrating these scientific articles. And the theme, the subject of childbirth without pain, reached the wider press, non-communist, important newspapers, *Correio da Manhã*, etc. In addition to painless childbirth, and the courses that were given here at the Escola Paulista de Medicina, Hirsch Schor wrote a report and commented that never had a seminar or conference attracted so many people, that there were even people sitting on the floor when the course on childbirth was given.

And another technique was that of **tissolutherapy** and that Lobato, as a doctor at the Hospital dos Servidores in the state of Rio de Janeiro, a hospital that still exists today for state civil servants. He worked there, he applied it there, and he mentions other colleagues who used and worked with this technique. He had this perspective on the qualities of what is understood as Soviet medicine, the idea of it being an accessible, cheap and easy-to-apply technique. He didn't need an operating theatre. And the technique of asepsis, etc., he reports in his article the step-by-step process, so it's a concern in the way I told you, which is also in Aron's article, which is that the doctor, the Brazilian colleague here, can reproduce this in his office, within his speciality, with his patients, in the case of placental grafting for the



treatment of asthma. Milton Lobato reports on his case study and invites his colleagues to use this technique in a disease that is so difficult to treat and complicated to understand, which is asthma, why not use it? And he tells us, he shows the response of his patients in his chart, and he doesn't hide the fact that some of them weren't positive, weren't interesting, but that there were many more positive responses to the treatment than not, and so why not try it. I showed it to them as a way of telling them about it and trying to convince their colleagues of its dissemination and ideology, which is an audience we draw attention to – I'm getting away from it a bit – but it's a different audience. We're militants, but I'm not here as a militant, I mean, they were militants, but they weren't talking about ideology in their speech. This was repeated a lot in their words, editors, in the editorial letters.

Well, another technique for publicising and showcasing Soviet medicine is **prolonged sleep therapy**, which I'd like to explore more, to understand, because with this technique there was then a whole criticism of the Soviet Union, or from the perspective of the discourse of what this Soviet medicine is in contrast to European bourgeois medicine, of psychoanalysis. And then psychoanalysis in their discourse was associated with the North American discourse, so with a spiritualistic, individualised approach, *versus* the approach inspired by Pavlov's medicine, which is materialistic, concerned with the environment. So the battle of ideas continues there, the battle of ideas with this ideological perspective in science. In addition, but there are reports and scientific articles on the treatment of high blood pressure, for example, or prolonged sleep as it should be done, there is a note from the nursing perspective. Nursing played a very important role, the patient was hospitalised for days in a dark environment, in silence, what drugs were applied. Painless childbirth played a role, painless childbirth was a popular name, it didn't mean that there was no pain, but it was the idea of training the woman's reasoning, her thinking through breathing and exercises so that she could ease her pain, and there's a whole range of nervous types, personality types. So I think there's still a lot to discuss, think about and work on. Even what the role of sleep therapy is here in Brazil, I was left with a concern, by the professor who was assessing my thesis, why this criticism of the use of lobotomy and invasive techniques in mental health treatment. Because this was abolished by decree, this decree was reproduced in the journal, this was abolished in the Soviet Union in the '50s, in 55. So, it's mapping this debate from the perspective of the Soviet Union and this was published here as if there was no debate there, but there was. Well, invasive treatment techniques for patients with mental problems were criticised, as was psychoanalysis, which was ineffective. They understood that prolonged sleep would be a technique, although they mentioned it, it was always presented as experimental techniques. It wasn't a panacea for all cases, there was this concern to say that it wasn't a panacea, and they would report case studies, I had a good response here, not here. I believe that the legacy is much more noticeable with pain-free childbirth. From what I've heard, sleep therapy is no longer very effective today, it's been put aside. I'm just not so sure about its applicability here, with our Brazilian doctor characters, and I'd like to investigate further.

### **Alila**

At some point in your defence you said that these intellectual mediating doctors were also hybrid figures, because of these different positions, and also because they also go to Rockefeller Foundation courses, I think there was a moment during your defence when you mentioned this. So there are various networks, various, shall we say, nodes of connection between these different types of knowledge and dissemination. It wasn't just linear, leaving



the Soviet Union and arriving in Brazil, but there's a circulation as you mentioned, it goes through France, there are different routes.

**Gabriela: comment on exchanges**

Yes, perfect, marvellous how you tied it up. That's right, I agree. I agree and I think that perhaps this needs to be better publicised, talked about, and I believe that by talking to other researchers, by using work that is being developed now, I think we can put together a patchwork quilt and I think we'll be able to learn more.

**Alila**

Yes, that was precisely the idea behind our interest in your work, because you bring an experience, and a really very unique experience because of this question of books, and the journal "Atualidades Médicas", of really decentring the study of techniques, of the medical knowledge of the time. I think that this dissemination, I'm not going to say that it's marginal, but it's outside the more classic paths, right, which would be the Rockefeller Foundation, or the Pasteur Institute in France, which would be more dominant, hegemonic institutions and which have become, in a way, much more hegemonic in the historiography of the history of medical sciences and the dissemination of medical knowledge. So, your contribution to this de-centring is very important, we thought it was even fundamental, for this conversation, as you say, so that we can better understand and make a patchwork quilt out of these different stories and be able to better understand how all this circulated and the legacies.

**Gabriela**

Yes, yes. I'm also very interested in getting to know it and I'm very honoured by this recognition, this little bit of this link, this chain. And I'm very interested in moving forward, both in research and in debate, on this issue of decentring. I like this term, I had used non-hegemonic, but I think it was a notion that the actors themselves had in their writing, but I think that as researchers we can make connections and understand a little bit of the latency of some concepts that were to emerge and appear much more in the public health discourse in the '60s and '70s. For example, because Pavlov was absorbed so strongly in the Soviet Union, as a teacher he had a good image in Europe, and in the post-war period his idea, his perspective on physiology was such that it brought the importance of the environment, so it was believed that it was possible to change some structures, from there to Lysenkoism, including genetics, from the environment and the interference of the environment, right? And then I think there's this twist, which is interesting for our Brazilian and non-Brazilian communist doctors, which is the importance of mental health – it's not just individual dysregulation, but it has to do with the social conditions that the individual is in, where they are, what their job prospects are, which is why the world of work is so important, right, what conditions they receive, so from there you define mental health as something much bigger. This importance of mental health and the relationship between the psyche and other organs of the body is fundamental to Pavlov.

**Alila: question about research prospects**

We're coming to the end, I wanted to ask you, you've already mentioned it several times, what are the open perspectives and what would you like to continue in future research if you continue with these themes?



### **Gabriela: on sleep therapy, the public and looking through other archives**

There's a lot, Alila, a lot! One aspect, well, I was talking about mental health and the relationship between this technique of prolonged sleep, and I'm staying here with the teacher, Kaori's point, because they called themselves and defended themselves as materialists, in opposition to the approaches of psychoanalysis, which was fantasist in their terms. But they rejected lobotomy techniques and more invasive techniques, so how did this equation work out on a narrative and practical level? For example, the very applicability and practice of these techniques among the medical community in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, but we had other doctors who were professors at the faculty in Recife and in other states, in Minas Gerais. How was this accommodated, what tensions were created here, from the local perspective in Brazil. Because after all, we knew about the courses, but until then I only had the syllabus, I didn't even have the course syllabus, just the programme. What did this generate? I think this is worth the effort of us researchers.

As well as, thinking about police archives and thinking about the persecution of our actors, intellectual mediators, investigating other state archives. Because of the pandemic, I wasn't able to access the archive or letters of João Belini Burza. It was good to mention him, I couldn't forget. I think Burza's career is essential and worthwhile, it's a research agenda, and it's in São Paulo. I got support from the fund, I got everything they had, which wasn't much, but it was great, I talked to the people at the historical archive of the Faculty of Medicine of São Paulo. Burza, a little bit about his career very quickly, he was a doctor who didn't take part directly in the, well, he's not listed on the journal "Atualidades médicas e biológicas", but he was another very important disseminator and mediator of this medicine, also in the field of mental studies. His book was published in the 1980s. He even lived, he went into exile in Moscow and was a pupil of one of Pavlov's disciples, who is well worth researching. He was born in Minas Gerais, but he was a professor at the University of São Paulo (USP) and I know that there is important documentation about him in São Paulo, in the DOPS<sup>13</sup> archives there, including the letters that were seized by the police at the time, and some letters with patients, letters from him to colleagues. And that was, for example, a burden of the pandemic on my research, because I couldn't go there.

Finally, the question of the public with some concerns that were missing. For example, the audience, how we could pinpoint the journal's audience, looking into this a little, perhaps letters from readers, in short. After all, the aim was to understand the dissemination of science and one sphere of dissemination is the reception process. And that was a question, a provocation from the committee. And I think it's also a difficulty for us researchers when there isn't a readers' section, for example, in that journal, because readers' letters are very good for tracing this, but that wasn't the case, I mean, they invited readers to send letters and make communications, I just don't have them because they didn't replicate them in the publication itself. In fact, when we're talking about documentation, about the communist press, it's about dealing with various gaps arising not only from the actual process of producing a document, but also from repression and seizures. Anyway, these letters from Burza, which interest me a lot, are seized letters, which is why they're there in the police archives. For example, when the journal said that issue 4 had been sold out, I have evidence that Alcedo Coutinho was complaining about the seizure of issue 4. That's interesting to know precisely what happened. So we keep trying, it's not impossible, but it requires a more careful

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<sup>13</sup> Portuguese acronym of the Department of Political and Social Order, the political police responsible for the repression of the different Brazilian dictatorships opponents.



and creative look, and I think historiography is now drawing attention to this. Communist political culture, a culture that goes beyond party and official documents, and I think it has everything to do with what we're talking about here.

**Alila**

So, Gabriela, as we come to the end of our podcast, I'm going to ask you the last question. Which book was fundamental to your education, to the way you think about your thesis?

**Gabriela: on the books that inspired her**

So, I think that was the question, this is the most difficult question of the conversation, because thinking about a book. I think I could share a few. I remember my supervisor recommending the work of Tobias Rupprecht<sup>14</sup>. Rupprecht's work on Soviet internationalism made great use of travelogue sources and the transactional perspective, inspiring me to realise the importance of Latin America in the Soviet Union's foreign policy, and it was interesting. It's a book I'm going to return to, it contains a lot of data. And a book also recommended by my supervisor, a very recent work, which I really enjoyed reading, at the end of the thesis it was published in 2023, by Marcelo Ridenti<sup>15</sup>. He endeavoured to comment on the international exchange of intellectuals from both the communist and US liberal perspectives. And this cultural approach to the political culture of the peace movement and in opposition to the freedom conferences, and how this impacted in a certain way on the printed media there, he worked with the Cadernos magazine, which was funded by the CIA. The idea of culture in Jorge Amado and other Brazilian writers and the role of travelling. I thought it was fantastic, a work that I'm going to visit more often. The work of the communist press and the travel books by Raquel [Mundim Torres], was very important because she gives a panorama of the Brazilians themselves, she mapped them, she did a lot of work, a lot of effort to map these travel books and the contact with the communist press.

**Alila**

Gabriela, thank you very much once again for taking part in our podcast, it was a very interesting conversation. I hope it will continue, as we've already mentioned, with different discussions between our work on the Socialist Medicine project and your future publications, and maybe seminars, maybe we can talk more about this. Good luck with your future projects and keep up the good work.

**Gabriela**

Thank you, I enjoyed too.

**Final musical vignette**

- This podcast was recorded remotely in May 2023 -

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<sup>14</sup> RUPPRECHT, Tobias. *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: interaction and exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> RIDENTI, Marcelo. *O segredo das senhoras americanas: intelectuais, internacionalização e financiamento na Guerra Fria Cultural*. São Paulo: Editora Unesp, 2022.