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## Neutralist crossroads: Spain and Argentina facing the Great War

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we propose an initial comparative approach to the cultural and political impact of the First World War on Spain and Argentina, considering the common denominators and the singularities of both social experiences of the conflict. The relevance of the proposed comparison lies in several factors. In the first place, deep historical, cultural and demographic ties bound both nations. In second place, during the First World War, Spain and Argentina adopted a neutralist foreign policy, unaltered despite several diplomatic incidents with the warring nations, and of internal and external pressures. In both cases, civil society displayed a high level of political and cultural polarisation, and undertook an active mobilisation. Finally, there was a remarkable circulation of ideas and intellectuals through both margins of the Atlantic Ocean, which nourished the public controversies on the Great War. Nevertheless, beyond these similarities and confluences, there were also significant differences between Argentina and Spain, which exerted an influence on the countries position towards the conflict. The national cases analysed in this article demonstrate that diplomatic neutrality did not imply necessarily the indifference or passivity of civil society. Rediscovering neutrality within the war dynamics is one of the most stimulating paths for research.

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### Introduction

In this article, we propose an initial comparative approach to the cultural and political impact of the First World War on Spain and Argentina, considering the common denominators and the singularities of both social experiences of the conflict. The comparative method has the virtue of putting the case studies into a broader picture and offering the possibility of finding connections with other contemporary processes developing in different spatial scenes. At the same time, it prevents the temptation to proclaim alleged national exceptionalities, something usual in national narratives. This partially explains the relative shortage of studies on the repercussions of the Great War on both countries, a subject that by definition escapes the endogenous logic applied to other developments.<sup>1</sup>

This work will thus be following a theoretical and methodological line to study national paths to build neutrality as a shared ideological political space. Neutral societies needed to legitimate themselves within total war by reflecting on the role of their respective home nations, both by establishing new identity topographies and by calling for the power of agency of their states and fellow citizens within political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Besides, the study of social narratives of neutrality within an Iberoamerican context could be benefited from the research already done into other political and cultural contexts in Europe, such as the Scandinavian one.<sup>2</sup>

We find suggestively illuminating the extent to which other colleagues have dealt with symbolic frames and political rites of neutrality policies as collective demonstrations of the need of making sense of neutrality in a world war, going far beyond any particular diplomatic option and the immediate either successes or failures of specific actions. While in the first six months of the war, neutrality was the most widespread choice both in Europe and outside the old continent, in 1918 only Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia and Paraguay clung to it.<sup>3</sup> As a rule, the evolution of the internal politics worked in warmongers favour in the South of Europe and America as well.

Belligerents' pressures revolving around raw material supplies, geo-strategic issues and domestic public speeches related to both sides soon turned into dynamics of coercive relations that compromised and weakened the 'third option' from the very onset of the war. What happened with Belgium in the first days of August 1914 anticipated the difficult path to neutrality when 'might is right'.<sup>4</sup> However, bordering neutrals like the Netherlands, the Scandinavian states and Switzerland fought for their national self-identity and integrity demonstrating their right to have an autonomous international policy while inevitably 'caught in the middle' of warring pressures. For instance, neutrality researchers such as Abbenhuis, Tames, Krüzinga and Kinklert, on the same Dutch case, have respectively, studied divergent paths drawn by neutrality in politics, military and strategic, economy and social grounds against acute British and German interferences. But also, clinging to neutrality did not mean stay away of war since, as Ismee Tames pointed out, the conflict was 'on people minds' involving a social coding that had a strong impact on domestic political and intellectual processes. Therefore, the armed conflict would unexpectedly intrude on neutral countries daily lives. We have learnt about these inner processes from available studies on the subject in the Netherlands, Switzerland and, to a lesser extent, the Scandinavian countries, that incorporate social and cultural variables into their research proposals for more comprehensive explanations of neutrality beyond the relations between belligerents and neutrals.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, civilian experiences bordering on war as well as the elaboration of a memory and collective understanding of neutrality has brought to the forefront new narrative spaces relating to the conflict experience.

Nonetheless, if one considers the panorama of contributions dealing with neutral experiences against the Spanish and the Argentine backdrops, the evidence clearly suggests that these had received little attention in comparison with other national cases in Europe and America. On the one hand, Spanish neutrality should receive more and renewed attention as a specific foreign policy option intertwined with social and cultural stances. Spanish citizens were soon collateral victims of economic and naval war, suffering high inflation rate and internal shortages and at the same time, they had to reflect on the meaning of being Spanish in a war that would not only be waged on distant fronts. As Spanish journalist Luis

Bello stated in 1920, ‘it is the belligerent powers that strive to unbalance our neutrality and approach Spain because the country has not approached them.’<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the same process would also be experienced over across the Atlantic. In Argentina, the government had to face intense social mobilization after the United States entered the conflict and also because of the submarine warfare. As in Spain, Argentine citizens connected foreign policy to the very definition of their national identity, thus internalizing a war fought thousands of miles away.

On these initial bases, we will compare two cases in order to establish a positive dialogue between social and political backgrounds, which were as much diverse as meaningful to each other. In fact, the acknowledgement of divergences is important to avoid having a view too straight and single-lined solely based on identifying similarities due to teleological convergence models, which are currently under the criticism of a part of the global history scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Besides, the relevance of the proposed comparison lies in several factors. In the first place, deep historical, cultural and demographic ties bound both nations, dating back to the sixteenth century, during the Spanish conquest and colonization of the later Argentine territory. In second place, during the First World War, Spain and Argentina adopted a neutralist foreign policy, unaltered despite several diplomatic incidents with the warring nations, and of internal and external pressures. In both cases, civil society displayed a high level of political and cultural polarization around the belligerent sides. Spanish and Argentine society also undertook an active cultural mobilization, expressed in press debates and in the battle for public space. Finally, there was a remarkable circulation of ideas and intellectuals through both margins of the Atlantic Ocean, which nourished the public controversies on the Great War. Spain constituted a permanent reference for Argentine neutralists when that foreign policy was put into question, and Argentina – as the other Latin American nations – played the same role for Spain in similar circumstances.

Nevertheless, beyond these similarities and confluences, which may suggest a similar response to the war, there were initially also significant differences between Argentina and Spain, which exerted an influence on the countries position towards the conflict. For instance, they encompassed the political regime – monarchist in Spain, republican in Argentina – and the society profile – cosmopolitan in Argentina, marked by strong regional identities in Spain. These social differences, as we shall see below, would also be related to the conception and performance of their respective policies of benevolent neutrality towards a belligerent side.

### **Neutrality as foreign policy: only a starting point**

A first point to compare is the declaration of neutrality made by the governments and its social and political responses. In both cases, since the beginning of the war a neutralist consensus was formed.<sup>8</sup> It was based on several facts: the Spanish and the Argentine cabinets, in spite of the predominance of economic ties with the Allies, were not engaged in formal alliances that the war could set into motion (even when in the Spanish case there were doubts about the reach of the Algeciras and Cartagena agreements with the United Kingdom and France).<sup>9</sup> The consciousness of the own economic and military weakness, which turned unfeasible their active participation in the war, also intervened in that direction.<sup>10</sup> In Argentina, it was also decisive the interest in preserving social harmony, given the

demographic importance of foreigners (30% of the population in 1914),<sup>11</sup> which recreated in a small scale the blocs fighting in the trenches.

The public view of war in Spain was also impacted by the successive neutrality decrees passed on 4 and 7 August 1914 by Eduardo Dato's conservative cabinet. Those decrees were disapproved in an article titled 'Neutralities that kill' [Neutralidades que matan] published on 19 August in *El Diario Universal*, a paper influenced by the Count of Romanones and his inner political circle within the Liberal Party. Throughout 1914, the Spanish Government would set a benevolent neutrality policy towards France and Great Britain. In fact, on 13 August 1914, the Governor of the Spanish territory bordering Gibraltar Arturo Alsina informed the Executive Director of Spanish Customs, Eugenio Espinosa, of the fulfilment of the exceptional measures taken to supply the British colony. Later on, in September, the Foreign Office acknowledged the Spanish cooperation in that matter.<sup>12</sup> By then, the king Alfonso XIII had let the French Ambassador know that he regretted that Spain was 'too weak to have a compromise in the war', though he would not resign himself to a passive stance on the conflict.<sup>13</sup> In the second half of 1915 the King took to the 'Oficina Pro Cautivos [Pro-Captives Office]' in the Royal Palace of Madrid.

Generally, two different ideas of what neutrality really meant for Spain would separate both the conservative and liberal members of the *establishment* and the *outsiders* (left-wing politicians and intellectuals) distorting deeply Spanish domestic politics. On the one hand, there was a demand of being strictly neutral from the most conservative sector, albeit exceptions. On the other hand, the Aliadophile sector, mostly liberal and supported by Romanones, called to 'let England and France know that we are with them'.<sup>14</sup> However, the different Spanish governments clung to the only legal frame they found to be possible due to the lack of inner social consensus.

Once Romanones came to power in December 1915, getting back Gibraltar plus Tangier and getting influence on Portuguese affairs would have been acceptable compensations to take part in the struggle. The sinking of 80,000 tons of the Spanish merchant fleet until December 1916 could also have been a good reason for putting neutrality away.<sup>15</sup> By then, Spain witnessed a serious economic, social and political collapse, which also echoed the international transformations. Among them, the United States entry into the war and the peak of Woodrow Wilson's ideas<sup>16</sup> (more influential than in Argentina); submarine warfare (with much more devastating effects since nearly a hundred lives were lost); and the Russian revolution, which had more direct repercussions than in the Argentine case, fostered expectations of an immediate democratization of the monarchist regime while causing severe political unrest. That year, 1917, at the end of March, Alfonso XIII started to hold a stronger Germanophile position. The King was ever more scared of the Red Danger.

After Romanones' resignation in April 1917, three different cabinets were appointed in less than a year. While Antonio Maura summoned tens of thousands of Spanish neutralists to a meeting hosted at the Madrid Bullring that same month, on 27 May 1917 about 25,000 people attended to a pro-allied meeting at the same venue.<sup>17</sup> The most critical months of Spanish neutrality were August and September 1918. More than 80 Spanish boats had been sunk and, after the sinking of the *Ramón de Larrinaga* by the U92, Antonio Maura's National Government made it clear that a continuation of targeting Spanish vessels would have a response. Nonetheless, neither immediate compensations nor declaration of war would ever be fulfilled.

In Argentina, on 5 August 1914 the government, headed by the conservative President Victorino de la Plaza, issued a decree sustaining the 'strict neutrality' regarding the war, an attitude later reasserted by successive decrees that responded to the entry of other nations into the war.<sup>18</sup> With the intention of maintaining the equidistance in front of both sides, the government had to face at least two serious incidents that challenged neutrality. In the first place, in September 1914 Rémy Himmer, Argentina's vice-consul in Dinant, Belgium, was shot by the German troops occupying the city. Although the Argentine consuls in Brussels and The Hague reported the insult to the national symbols and the fire of the legation's archive, the Argentine government accepted the explanation provided by the German authorities, according to which the army was unaware of Himmer's diplomatic role – shot due to his French citizenship – and there would have been no affronts to Argentina. In this way, the conflict was considered solved. In November 1915, another incident restored the balance by favouring the Allies. An Argentine steamboat, the *Presidente Mitre*, destined to coasting trade, was captured in Argentina's jurisdictional waters by a British ship. In this case, De la Plaza's government accepted again the official explanations and did not claim compensation or amends despite the clear violation of its rights as neutral. Although this passive neutrality aroused enraged complaints in the Parliament, there was no social pressure to change the diplomatic path.<sup>19</sup>

Year 1917 reconfigured this scenery drastically. The United States entry into the war stimulated the abandonment of neutrality by most Latin American countries, fostered by a campaign of diplomatic and economic pressures under the banner of Pan-Americanism.<sup>20</sup> In addition, unrestricted submarine warfare declared by Germany led to the sinking of three Argentine ships – a number incomparably less than that of the sunk Spanish ships. This diplomatic occurrence was exploited by the United States, which published confidential telegrams sent by the Minister of Germany in Argentina – the Count of Luxburg – intercepted and deciphered by the British intelligence service. In those telegrams, the Minister recommended the sinking of Argentine vessels 'without a trace' and referred to the Argentine Foreign Minister in offensive terms.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the internal repercussions that – as we will see in the following section – unleashed the 'Luxburg affair', and of the strong external pressures, President Hipólito Yrigoyen – in office since October 1916 – kept unshakable the neutralist policy. In order to jointly resist Allied economic and diplomatic strains, he summoned the Latin American nations to meet in Buenos Aires in March 1918 in what he called a 'Congress of Neutrals'.<sup>22</sup> However, the vertiginous pace of the war frustrated the initiative, since in 1917 the countries of the subcontinent broke off relations with Germany or even declared war on it; only Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia and Paraguay remained neutral until the end of the war.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Congress was postponed and never took place.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the Pan-Americanist campaign displayed by the United States led Yrigoyen to promote an approach to Spain, thus encouraging Pan-Hispanism. In that line, he issued a decree establishing the celebration of October 12 as 'Day of the Race,' explicitly extolling the discovery, conquest and colonization of America by the Spanish Crown.<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding the continuity of this diplomatic temperament, Yrigoyen's government in fact tempered unrestricted neutrality and adopted a benevolent one towards the Allies, as expressed in some concessions to the American and British fleets during their visit to Buenos Aires at the end of 1917 and in the exclusive sale of cereals to the Allies in very favourable

conditions to their interests.<sup>26</sup> In this way, it was able to formally maintain neutrality in the midst of the most serious diplomatic crisis in Argentina during wartime.

### Neutrality as identity: inner wars

In both countries, the Great War activated reflections that implicated nationalist issues. Opposing understandings of the meaning of being Spaniard or Argentine, and of the bonds between those identity definitions with the pictures of other nations, often lied beneath the debates around foreign policy. Official neutrality coexisted with divergent positions regarding the war, which led to a deep polarization of public opinion, split between two opposing trends: the so-called 'Aliadophiles' and the 'Germanophiles'. These two factions appeared early, after the first battle of the Marne and especially since 1915, once vanished the expectations in a quick resolution of the conflict. Although the polarization of the intellectual field was almost contemporary in both countries, in Spain the intellectuals' activities revealed an early collective articulation, expressed through the dissemination of several manifestos since the beginning of the conflict,<sup>27</sup> while in Argentina it took place later on.

Nevertheless, beyond these polarizations, the cruel spectacle of the war spread astonishment and perplexity among the intellectuals, shocked by the violence of their once admired Europe. In Spain, where the national intellectual debate was amplified by hyperbolic masculinities that put the war as an opportunity for regeneration, either through strict neutrality or through a policy closer to France and Great Britain, there were war correspondents, like Carmen de Burgos and Sofia Casanova, who represented pacifism and gave voice to a strong anti-war message. The chronicles sent by those real witnesses of human barbarism would also become a flag of the international humanitarian movement. The 'Guerra a la Guerra' [War to the War] of Carmen Burgos – one of the chroniclers of the Spanish war in Morocco – perfectly described those pacifist values.<sup>28</sup> In Argentina, for instance, the chronicles sent by Juan José De Soiza Reilly, correspondent for *La Nación* and *Fray Mocho*, also condemned the war as a return to prehistory,<sup>29</sup> as a 'butchery', 'the savagery of the civilized peoples'.<sup>30</sup> Actually, Latin America in general – and Argentina in particular – emerged for this Argentine war correspondent as a land of promise, a pacific earth that remained formally neutral and doomed the violence of their former cultural beacon. As a result, alternative identity models began to gain acceptance, as Latin Americanism and Hispanism.<sup>31</sup> In the first case, the vindication of Latin America as a cultural unity, based on the Spanish language and the colonial past, was inextricably tied to anti-imperialism. Since the turn of the century, the writer Manuel Ugarte was promoting a coordinated action of the subcontinent's countries against the United States' influence. According to him, the Great War stimulated a strong 'reaction against (...) the Monroe doctrine, which excludes Europe from America's affairs and leaves the United States the scrutiny of the twenty Spanish-speaking republics' life and future'.<sup>32</sup> The conflict made imperative a common direction for Latin America's foreign affairs, based on neutrality and constituted an opportunity to 'get rid of the deceitful Pan-Americanism',<sup>33</sup> strengthening the subcontinent's unity. Precisely, the same idea was behind the Government stance on Wilson's peace initiative on 19 December 1916. The Spanish Ambassador in Buenos Aires pointed out that the Argentine Foreign Minister understood that the United States political stand, beyond humanitarian reasons, had to do more with their own national trade interests and, 'given that not all neutral states share same interests', the Argentine Government needed to reflect carefully on the issue before giving an answer

to Wilsons' proposal.<sup>34</sup> On 2 January 1917, the Spanish Ambassador in London, Alfonso Merry del Val, echoed local press stating that Argentina and Brazil would not back USA peace initiative 'following the Spanish example with great influence on nations and people of the same race'.<sup>35</sup>

In the second case, a shift towards the revival of the Spanish cultural legacy took place. After decades of profound Hispanophobia because of the wars of independence, the Spanish–American war of 1898 and the centenary of the May revolution in 1910<sup>36</sup> inspired an incipient recovery of the old metropolis' cultural roots. The Great War gave new boost to this trend, emphasizing Spain's neutrality and extolling her as a model to follow. In the words of the jurist Alfredo Colmo, 'Let us remember the Motherland, which with all the pride resists even more direct influences than those that operate against us'.<sup>37</sup>

Intellectuals were key figures in the mobilization of public opinion around the war. The most recognized ones showed an active militancy in favour of the Allies, while the Germanophiles – with a very few exceptions – used to come from the margins of the intellectual field, although constituting very active minorities.<sup>38</sup> In Spain, the Germanophile tendencies were mainly due to a traditional Francophobia and/or Anglophobia, rooted in historical and geopolitical rivalries, and in religious and political factors. Moreover, some sectors connected to Regenerationism saw in Germany a model to follow to get the desired modernization.<sup>39</sup> On their part, the traditionalist groups recalled different grievances inflicted on Spain by the United Kingdom throughout history, such as the occupation of Gibraltar, the hindering of the Iberian Peninsula's reunification, and the support to the Latin American emancipation process. At the same time, they evoked the Napoleonic invasion and occupation in 1808 with vivid bitterness, while distrusted from the republican and secularist France, which seemed to menace the very foundations of the Spanish Restoration regime.<sup>40</sup>

Clinging to strict neutrality was one of the favourite arguments of the Germanophile faction. On the one hand, the German propaganda service demonstrated great ability to spread the message of Spain being benefited from the Entente defeat even if the country remained neutral. Gibraltar and Morocco were the main earnings in this sense. Historically, Great Britain and France would have taken all chances to get advantage from the humiliation of the Spanish nation, damaging its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The situation with Gibraltar and Tangier were eloquent examples and the unlikely success of Western powers would not change their fixed position against the Spanish territorial claims. Spain should realize that it was not just an Entente friendly country, it was a marionette driven by Paris and London so a virtual German victory could mean a brighter future for the Spanish people in the eyes of the Germanophile sector. Berlin would impose a new Mediterranean equilibrium that would take the chance to relief the already hurt Spanish national feeling.

In fact, the Gibraltar claim was soon one of the flags of the Spanish media campaign against the Allies, or more specifically: against the British people. In this sense, the newspaper *ABC*, since August 1914, would frequently remember the British 'historical larceny' with the publishing of some sections called 'España ante el conflicto internacional' [Spain before the international conflict], 'Mirando la Guerra' [Looking at the war] or 'La neutralidad Española' [Spanish neutrality]. The paper used the Gibraltar conflict as an argument to explain why Spanish people should back the Central Powers cause. Actually, the Spanish irredentism was stressed consistently with the idea of mutilation of the national territory, which tended to mirror Italy before it entered the war alongside with the Entente Powers.<sup>41</sup> Conservatives harshly criticized the politics of understanding with the British on foreign



matters. For instance, one of Juan Vázquez de Mella's most famous quotations can be collected from the address given in the Teatro de la Zarzuela in May 1915, where he argued that 'being Anglophile meant being Spain-phobic'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the Spanish Church adopted a strong Germanophile stance, which also had influence on the young conservative followers of Maurism. Not even Cardinal Mercier's accusations of German atrocities against a Catholic country like Belgium changed the strong anti-Allied sentiment that pervaded the Spanish priests. France and Great Britain were seen as the cradle of laicism and values incompatible with true spiritual features connected with the Spanish identity.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, for a great part of the Spanish intellectuals, neutrality portrayed an opportunity in quite different terms. It provided with a suitable space of action for a long cherished national regeneration mirroring democratic and liberal values embodied by France and Great Britain. Although the Aliadophile wing recognized the Spanish military weakness (with over 80,000 men destined within the Moroccan influence area), a cultural movement in favour of the allies should be made going beyond a neutrality narrative exclusively based on irredentism or territorial demands towards belligerents. As a rule, the debate within the Spanish intellectuals was mainly oriented to identify what type of neutrality towards belligerents was the best one to apply: benevolent, political, moral or even critical.<sup>44</sup> The more widespread concept of neutrality of the Aliadophile trend laid on the idea of a Spanish reform coming from abroad. From that idea, we cannot only see a negative vision of the meaning of neutrality as a passive stance<sup>45</sup> but also, and more momentous, the shared self-perception of a 'subordinated' identity which was assumed in 1898 when the country lost all the remaining colonies in America and the Pacific Ocean. This marks a clear difference from the Argentine experience.

On the one hand, not all Spaniards acquiesced to resilient inaction. Voices linked to peripheral nationalisms also understood solidarity with the Allies by engaging directly in war. The 'neutral alliance' which could be drawn from the Spanish benevolent policy towards France and Great Britain, with preferential trading links – and therefore significant merchant and human losses in the sea caused by German submarines – was not only narrated within the passive resistance of the people but also, albeit less important, by the active commitment of volunteers (mainly from Catalonia) to the French troops. The myth of the 12,000 '*voluntaris catalans*' began to be forged.<sup>46</sup> About 2000 Spaniards enlisted in the ranks of the French Foreign Legion. As David Martínez Fiol and Joan Esculies noted, some of these volunteers wished 'that their struggle would be interpreted as a way of achieving the national liberation of Catalonia'.<sup>47</sup> In the autumn of 1914, *El Progreso*, a Barcelona-based Lerrouxist newspaper, published an article dealing with these volunteers' expectations and enlistment. It was possible to fight for the 'right cause' in the trenches while defining a national identity by creating alterity to Spanish course of action.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, Aliadophile speeches, like the ones from Luis Araquistáin or Melquíades Álvarez, contrastingly demanded for British protection due to their cultural and political superiority. We may see, for instance, Luis Araquistáin's statements while interviewing H.G. Wells in October 1914:

Do not you think that Great Britain should take under its protection those states that cannot defend themselves against an attack by a more powerful neighbour?

(...) The situation in Spain-I let you know-is severely distressing. What we need to spend on education goes to military expenditure [because of the war in Africa]. Leftish people like me fought against that expense, believing that Europe had reached a stage of development

incompatible with an aggression against small and weaker states. This war has shown us that we must review our old conceptions. Henceforth, we must accept a suicidal armaments policy or a great power like England must establish a new international order 'by treaties and reciprocal guarantees' letting us free hand to work for the promotion of culture.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary voices to British tutelage were also heard, like Ortega y Gasset's.<sup>50</sup> He would shame some of the statements of Melquíades Álvarez in his speech in Granada in May 1915. Álvarez, one of the most important supporters of the benevolent neutrality towards the British, putting back on the table the historical claims of Gibraltar and Tangier. The importance of the Mediterranean space for the country made that a significant sector of Aliadophiles held publicly the idea of Spain remaining as a sort of 'neutral ally', which had already been set by the conservative government of Eduardo Dato in 1914. The scope was to stay closer to Great Britain because of the hostile position of the, albeit culturally admired, France regarding Spanish ambitions in Morocco.<sup>51</sup>

Generally, the notion of an Anglo-Saxon superiority – in terms of military force and democracy – and the alignment in the Spanish foreign policy with the Entente was kept within Spanish leading exponents throughout the war. Salvador de Madariaga was one of the most significant examples.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the British naval hegemony in the Mediterranean let the Latin spirit grow as a civilization tool producing weird comparisons and resemblances. The Italian chronicles of Perez de Ayala pointed out in 1917 that the British Empire could be considered 'the intentional and faithful parroting of the Roman Empire.'<sup>53</sup> In this same Anglo-Saxon leading sense, there were same messages published between July and November 1918 in *Los Aliados* magazine in which the American President Woodrow Wilson appeared portrayed as the symbol of justice and democracy. Its moral example contrasted with the effects of the ruthless submarine war since April 1917. At that time, the Spanish national trade was one of the most affected by German attacks with an estimated loss of hundreds of lives.<sup>54</sup> The sinking of the *San Fulgencio* forced the fall of the government of Romanones in April 1917 and the most active sector of the Aliadophile would state that the 'population was somehow narcotized' feeling comfortable with neutrality.<sup>55</sup> Romanones was forced to resign then to behave, in his own words, according to the 'spiritual heritage of a great race', neither modifying the politics of understanding with France and Great Britain nor causing 'the divorce of Spain and the Spanish speaking American Republics' after the United States belligerency.<sup>56</sup> However, by then it was clear the divorce between the Spanish executive power and the diverse interpretations of the Spanish nation, in other words, between the *Real Spain* and the *Official Spain* (albeit both being rather heterogeneous).

The war had already fostered different versions of the Spanish identity, either importing foreign imperialist models – connected to a new Iberoamericanism – or by rescuing the old Spanish Empire idea within a Germanophile and conservative thought of Iberism. However, the efforts to change the Mediterranean status quo through the Aliadophile speech had initially being more influenced by the Italian irredentism. In January 1915, the laying idea on the establishment of a Mediterranean Community, due to the breach between Italy and the Central Powers, would let the chance to act together against the 'Spanish inertia', in words of Ortega y Gasset.<sup>57</sup> However, in February the same year, the Italian Ambassador in Madrid Lelio Bonin de Longare made it clear to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Rome that, despite the Spanish gestures towards the Allies – exporting mules and ammunition to France and supplying Gibraltar, the country could not afford belligerency and would not gain anything with its benevolent neutrality.<sup>58</sup> In fact, we see a relation between the progressive proofs

of the Italian warring course of action not being able to be applied to Spain, on the one hand, and the promotion of the Iberoamericanism in the Aliadophile sector, on the other hand. In this sense, we may interpret the *España* calls, voicing the Spanish alliadophilia for a new kind of 'Hispanic-American Imperialism',<sup>59</sup> as well as the vindication of Romanones for preventing Spain's divorce 'facing the war, from the American republics of Spanish language'.<sup>60</sup> However, this kind of speeches translated into political action had its limitations as Romanones put in November 1916 before his ambassador in France:

It is an excellent idea to take advantage of the Spanish role of protective mother with the South American Republics. It is anyway a nice and easy façade but the bottom is very different to what you called fellowship. Nonetheless, it is better to pretend that they give us their biggest love and feel we are their loving mother. You do fare well in saying, as many times as you can, that we are the only representatives of those people.<sup>61</sup>

However, on 14 April 1917, when the Italian ambassador in Madrid compared the Spanish response to the sinking of the *San Fulgencio* to the Brazilian diplomatic reaction after the sinking of the *Paraná*, he reported the Romanones' Government incapability to 'adopt a position of strong resolution' projecting weakness onto South American republics. Against the acute state of domestic division with the Spanish Liberal Party fractured, the Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Amalio Gimeno, would have admitted that while the same circumstances existed in Italy and the United States, 'once their governments had made the decision to go to war critics were silenced and public opinion turned out to be unanimously supportive towards them'.<sup>62</sup>

As in Spain, Argentina's domestic controversies regarding neutrality interwove cultural elements deeply rooted in the country's history, mainly the grievances inflicted by the belligerents on national interests. Thus, Argentine Germanophiles, emphasized the aggressions perpetrated by the Allied powers – especially by Britain – to Argentine sovereignty throughout history. These included the British invasions to the River Plate in 1806–1807 in the context of the Napoleonic blockade, and the occupation of the Falkland Islands in 1833. The reference to the Falkland Islands was a constant in German propaganda discourse aimed to Argentina, which combined an anti-imperialist stance with an entrenched irredentist nationalism. On this basis, it asserted a tactical convergence between Argentine interests and the German victory in the war, which would imply the certainty of the return of the islands to Argentine territorial heritage.<sup>63</sup>

While the Germanophiles alerted about the peril of British imperialism, they denied the alleged threat posed by Germany to Latin America.<sup>64</sup> They also rejected the barbaric character that Allied propaganda attributed to Germany. With that purpose, intellectuals like Ernesto Quesada made a meticulous account of the Empire's achievements in the economic, social and cultural fields.<sup>65</sup>

As in Spain, the Germanophiles became one of the main social supporters of official neutrality, thus trying to prevent Argentina's open alignment with the Allies. To the denunciations against Britain, increasing questions to the United States from an anti-imperialist perspective were added, attributing it the intention of

dominating de facto all the Latin American countries and becoming the director of the continent, with the purpose of seizing the trade [...] and in the name of freedom and the Monroe doctrine, directing, dominating, exploiting and protecting them, not from the threat of Europe -our friend- but of European trade and capitals, its enemies.<sup>66</sup>

The Germanophiles argued that the expansion of the United States' influence on Latin America posed a menace to the Argentine manifest destiny in South America. It meant the possibility of losing its regional leadership in favour of Brazil, a traditional rival that in 1917 had aligned with the United States and declared war to Germany. In that vein, pro-German circles widely publicized the book *Nuestra guerra: la coalición contra la Argentina* [*Our war: The coalition against Argentina*], written by Gonzalo de Reparaz under the pseudonym of Pedro de Córdoba, where this Spanish intellectual warned about a Brazilian threat to Argentine sovereignty, instigated by the United States.<sup>67</sup>

On their part, the Allied cause benefited from the overwhelming predominance of immigrants from the Allied countries, which in 1914 constituted the 51% of foreigners.<sup>68</sup> The Aliadophiles underlined their diverse contributions to the building of the nation, demanding solidarity with the Triple Entente's nations. Although they recognized Britain for its capital investments and trade relationships, and Italy for its abundant flow of immigrants – the 11.79% of total population, what positioned it as the largest immigrant community in the country,<sup>69</sup> France was the main reference for the Argentine elites. While solidarity with Great Britain was restrained by the dispute over the Falklands and by an entrenched anti-imperialism, the relationship with the French Republic was devoid of conflicts. France was eulogized as the inspiration for the independence from Spain and for the construction of a republican and secularized national state during the nineteenth century. To gain support to their cause, the Allies and the Argentine Aliadophiles appealed to Pan-Latinism and the devotion for France,<sup>70</sup> contrasting with the Spanish resentment at the French policy in Morocco. Argentine society also mobilized several thousands of volunteer soldiers to serve the Allied armies. Although the concrete number is still imprecise, that contribution demonstrates the identification of a great majority of Argentine society with the Allied cause.<sup>71</sup>

Until 1917 the social sympathies for one or another belligerent side did not imply criticism towards the official foreign policy, but eventually expressed the cultural affinities linking the major part of society with France and, in a lesser extent, with the other Allies. 1917 signified a fundamental watershed. The 'Luxburg affair' resulted in the breakdown of the neutralist consensus and in a new polarization of civil society between the advocates of neutrality and the defenders of the severance of diplomatic relationships with Germany.<sup>72</sup> At the beginning of the war, the Argentine intellectuals tended to pronounce themselves on an individual basis such as Almafuerte, Roberto Payró, Ernesto Quesada, Juan P. Ramos, Francisco Barroetaveña, or those who answered the survey launched by the cultural magazine *Nosotros*. In general, the war was seen as a distant spectacle that did not involve the country in a direct way. In the words of the poet Ricardo Rojas, it was considered 'a sportive emotion or a philosophical controversy'.<sup>73</sup> The diplomatic crisis of 1917, with the aforementioned consequences, promoted a more intense activism, channelled through associations on a national scale, like the *Liga Patriótica Argentina Pro Neutralidad* [Argentine Patriotic League Pro Neutrality] or the pro-Allied *Comité Nacional de la Juventud* [National Youth Committee], where intellectuals played a key role.

Foreign policy quickly became an input in domestic political struggles. Some critics of the Argentine government alluded to the divorce between the executive power and the nation. From their perspective, the sovereign nation expressed itself in the streets and in the Congress – controlled by the conservative and the socialist opposition –<sup>74</sup> in favour of the diplomatic rupture with Germany, being disregarded by the executive branch, which persisted in neutrality when 'in foreign policy, governments need, more than ever, to obey

the explicit vote of the national will.<sup>75</sup> Other more extreme adversaries of the government came even to demand the presidential resignation.<sup>76</sup>

Both sectors of the polarized public opinion claimed the exclusive representation of national identity and accused its adversary of serving foreign interests. Thus, for example, the pro-Allied intellectual Alberto Gerchunoff coined the term 'neutrophile' to summarize the supposed identification between neutralism and Germanophilia.<sup>77</sup> On their part, the neutralists maintained that 'interventionist Aliadophilia is basically nothing more than a sum of passions and foreign interests (...) [while] neutralism is an explosion of virile nationalism and of exclusive and patriotic argentinism.'<sup>78</sup>

The opposition between Germanophiles and Aliadophiles in the first place, and neutralists and rupturists later did not correspond exactly with the ruling party and the opposition. Nevertheless, as aforementioned, since 1917 the international question was employed as a powerful argument in the disputes between the government and the opposition. Besides, among the mobilized groups of each trend of opinion there were middle and upper classes, workers, students, showing that the alignments around the Great War had a cross-sectional nature.<sup>79</sup>

### Nationalizing neutrality

Undoubtedly, both in Spain and Argentina nationalism was the decisive factor in the concern of the state and the different sectors of public opinion for the impact of foreign policy on the international status of the country. For many actors, neutrality entailed the risk of isolation and/or potential reprisals during wartime and its aftermath, as well as the possible loss of the bargaining power as regards the belligerents. For others, it assured the satisfaction of the irredentist demands. Either by keeping the Argentine regional leadership in South America or by defending the Spanish precarious position in the Mediterranean, the national cases analysed allow us to incorporate many topics previously considered secondary or external to the kernel of the question.

In this new and necessary narrative space, rediscovering neutrality within the war dynamics is one of the most stimulating paths for research.<sup>80</sup> First, because the war (even from the controversial position of a supposedly neutral observer) forced a two-sided interpretation in those who were aware of the need to exercise their citizen rights while their home countries faced with deep processes of change and modernization fostered by the international war context. Secondly, because the conflict interpretations were clearly linked with identity processes, which were taking place in the neutral countries promoted by the strong notion of alterity to belligerents. These were the reasons why we can observe key similarities in Europe or America during 1914–1918 even when both realities were distant and singular. The traditional crossfire between different political wings would be the perfect field to grow nationalist projects bound to the fight for the survival of the so-called 'third option.' Neutrality was thus a dynamic foreign policy that included a strong activism from the state agents as well as civil society ones, in either contradiction or agreement.

On the other hand, these cases show the global character of the Great War, which made an impact on countries not directly involved in the conflict and on dimensions not strictly limited to economy. As we have seen, in both Spain and Argentina the war had important repercussions at the cultural and political levels. It put national definitions on the table, posed again the international connections of both countries, and fuelled the internal political

struggles. The conflict that was initially perceived as external to national interests, turned out to be internalized and re-appropriated by different social sectors, providing a new language to settle pre-war disputes.

## Notes

1. About the limitations of these narratives and their effects on the Argentine historiographic production on the First World War, see Tato, "La Gran Guerra," 97. For a critical examination of the Spanish historiography on the war from a cultural perspective and the exceptionalist notions, Fuentes Codera, "Los intelectuales españoles".
2. Here we follow, for example, the interesting proposal of study about Sweden from Jonas, "Three Kings Posturing?" <https://www.historici.nl/sites/default/files/documents/Michael%20Jonas.pdf>.
3. A good survey may be consulted in Kruizinga, "Neutrality," 542–76.
4. A recent reflection on these issues in transnational perspective from the Spanish case study, in García Sanz, "Repensar la neutralidad en la Gran Guerra," 183–208.
5. Den Hertog and Kruizinga, *Caught in the Middle*; Ahlund, *Scandinavia in the First World War*; and Rossfeld, Buomberger, and Kury, *La Suisse et la Grande Guerre*.
6. Bello, *España durante la guerra*, 8.
7. The different points of view about the narrative of the historical convergence processes can be found in: Crossley, *What is Global History?*; Mazlish, *The New Global History*; Chase-Dunn and Anderson, *The Historical Evolution*; and Manning, *Navigating World History*.
8. We take the expression from Olivier Compagnon, who verifies its persistence in Latin America until 1917 (Compagnon, "Entrer en guerre?").
9. Ponce, "La política exterior española de 1907 a 1920," 93–116; and García Sanz, "Between Europe and the Mediterranean Spanish-Italian," 37.
10. Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 39; Meaker, "A Civil War," 5; and Roldán, "Por la neutralidad argentina," 360.
11. *Tercer Censo Nacional*, 396.
12. *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (AHN Madrid), H 2491, N°39 *Commercial* (44857/14) 3 September 1914, see also García Sanz, "Gibraltar y su campo," 567–98.
13. Niño Rodríguez, "El rey Embajador," 262.
14. Díaz-Plaja, *La España política del siglo XX*, 241–2.
15. During those months, some measures were supposedly taken to 'give Neutrality a less passive character being somehow more benevolent to Allies', in Romero Salvadó, *España 1914–1918*. The Count of Romanones stated in his memories that during 1916, in only four months long, the German submarine weapon destroyed 80,000 t of the Spanish merchant tonnage (Álvaro de Figueroa y Torres (Conde de Romanones), *Notas de una vida*, 392).
16. The so-called 'Wilsonian moment' covered the period between the United States entry into the war and the ending of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919 (Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 6).
17. Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 163.
18. Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 55.
19. Lanús, *Aquel apogeo*, 65–72.
20. Compagnon, "Entrer en guerre?"
21. Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 129–30.
22. Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 117.
23. Compagnon, "Entrer en guerre," 39.
24. Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 117–18.
25. Yrigoyen, "Decreto instituyendo la Fiesta de la Raza," 115.
26. Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 125–8, 138–9, 141–4.
27. The "Manifest del Comité d'Amics de la Unitat Moral de Europa," November 1914; the "Manifest des Catalans," March 1915; the "Manifiesto de adhesión a las naciones aliadas,"

July 1915; the “Amistad hispano-germana,” December 1915; the manifesto of the Liga Antigermanófila, January 1917.

28. See chronicles excerpted from López Alcón, *La narrativa breve*, 71, 124–44.
29. Soiza Reilly, “Cementerio de cañones en Berlín,” unnumbered page.
30. Soiza Reilly, “La obra humanitaria de Suiza,” unnumbered page.
31. Compagnon, *Ladieu à l’Europe*, 215–21; and Tato, *Identities in turmoil*, 317–23.
32. Ugarte, “La doctrina de Monroe,” 85.
33. Ugarte, “Sobre la neutralidad,” 149.
34. *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (Madrid), H3114, Politics Reserved, 27 December 1916.
35. *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (Madrid), H3114, London, no. 7, 2 January 1917.
36. The prelude to Argentine independence, achieved in 1816.
37. Colmo, *Mi neutralismo*, 66.
38. Among the Spanish Aliadophiles, it is worth mentioning José Ortega y Gasset, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Miguel de Unamuno, Luis Araquistáin, Adolfo Posada, Azorín, Manuel Azaña, Antonio Machado, Ramiro de Maeztu, Benito Pérez Galdós and Ramón del Valle Inclán, while the most recognized Germanophiles were Juan Vázquez de Mella, Pío Baroja, Jacinto Benavente, José María Salaverría and Vicente Gay.  
Among the Argentine supporters of the Allies, there were Leopoldo Lugones, Ricardo Rojas, Alberto Gerchunoff, Ricardo Güiraldes, Almafuerte, Pedro Miguel Obligado, Alfonso de Laferrère and Alfredo Palacios; the most prominent pro German intellectuals were Ernesto Quesada and Juan P. Ramos.
39. Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 107–11.
40. Meaker, “A Civil War,” 10–11.
41. ‘España ante el conflicto internacional: la “España irredenta,”’ in *ABC*, 3 January 1915, 2.
42. Fuentes Codera, “Imperialismos e iberismos en España,” 28.
43. Botti, “The Great War in Religious Spanish Reviews,” 165–86.
44. Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 47.
45. Fuentes states the optimistic view of neutrality of the most important representatives of the Spanish Hispanic Germanophile feeling like Juan Vazquez de Mella; see Fuentes Codera, “Imperialismo e Iberismos en España,” 21–48. The contrary happened to the Aliadophiles, however, the reasons were very different, as we will explain in this work.
46. For more information about this topic, Martínez Fiol, *Els ‘voluntaris catalans’*; Esculies – Martínez Fiol, *12.000!*
47. Martínez Fiol and Esculies Serrat, “Identidades cruzadas, identidades compartidas: españolidad y catalanidad en los voluntarios españoles de la Gran Guerra,” 77.
48. Regarding neutral but also warring identities, see Brezier, “Norway and the First World War,” 423–36.
49. *El liberal*, 9 October 1914, 1.
50. Araquistáin, *El Liberal*, 3 August 1914; “Política de Neutralidad,” *España*, 19 February 1915, 3; Ortega y Gasset referring to a Melquíades Alvarez’s speech in Granada, “Lo que quiera Inglaterra,” *España*, 14 May 1915, 3–4.
51. For more information about the benevolent neutrality of Spain and its cooperation with the British throughout the war, García Sanz, *El Estrecho de Gibraltar*.
52. De Madariaga, “El egoísmo inglés,” *España*, 31 May 1917.
53. Pérez de Ayala sent his chronicles from Italy to the Argentine newspaper *La Prensa* (August 1916–October 1917), see López Alcón, *La narrativa breve*.
54. See Ponce, “Neutrality and Submarine Warfare,” 295. See other figures relating Spanish losses: 170,000 tons, one-fifth of the total bulk of Spanish merchant fleet (152,387 tons lost due to submarines and 16,104 tons because of mines): See Bailey, *The Policy of the United States*, 273 and González Calleja and Aubert, *Nidos de espías*, 161.
55. Luis Araquistáin, “Un pueblo narcotizado,” *España*, Madrid, 17 May 1917.
56. Luis Araquistáin, “¿Una crisis germanófila?” *España*, Madrid, 26 April 1917.
57. See the opening article of *España*: Ortega y Gasset, “La política de neutralidad, la camisa roja,” *España*, Madrid, 29 January 1915, 2; “Política de Neutralidad, Italia resuelta,” *España*,

- Madrid, 19 March 1915, 3. See also on this issue connected with his own idea of Spain Archilés Cardona, “Una nación descamisada: Ortega y Gasset y su idea de España durante la Primera Guerra Mundial (1914–1918),” 29–47.
58. García Sanz, “The End of Neutrality?” 245.
  59. *España*, Madrid, 4 June 1915.
  60. “A todas las izquierdas españolas,” *España*, 26 April 1917.
  61. *Archivo Romanones* Records, 11 November 1916.
  62. *Archivio Politico e ordinario di Gabinetto Ministero degli Affari Esteri* Roma, 235, Italian Embassy Madrid, 14 April 1917.
  63. “Las Malvinas,” *La Unión*, 8 and 23 December 1914.
  64. Quesada, *El ‘peligro alemán’*.
  65. Quesada, *La actual civilización germánica*.
  66. Vergara Biedma, *Guerra de mentiras*, 37.
  67. Córdoba, *Nuestra guerra*.
  68. Calculation based on *Tercer Censo*, 395–6.
  69. Calculation based on *Ibid.*, 396 and 451.
  70. Tato, “Identities in turmoil,” 312–16.
  71. Otero, “Convocados y voluntarios”.
  72. About the realignments of 1917, see Tato, “Identities in turmoil,” 309–30.
  73. Rojas, “La voz del atalaya,” 38.
  74. In September 1917, the two Chambers of the Parliament issued statements in favour of breaking relations with Germany (Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 133). They were not binding, since the Argentine Constitution granted the president of the nation the management of the country’s foreign policy.
  75. Rojas, “La hora del destino,” 25.
  76. Gerchunoff, “La moral del Sr. Irigoyen,” 54.
  77. Gerchunoff, “Los neutrófilos”.
  78. Colmo, *Mi neutralismo*, 49–50. Lecture given at the Coliseum Theatre on 19 July 1917.
  79. Tato, “La disputa por la argentinidad,” 231–2.
  80. Even when there is an improvement, there are still very few monographic works which study the neutrality within the conflict by uniting systematically the different aspects (politics, society, economy and culture) with the location. In fact, both the two only available collection volumes are cited here: Den Hertog and Kruizinga, *Caught in the Middle* and Ruiz Sánchez et al., *Shaping Neutrality*.

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