

# Fighting for a Lost Cause? The Germanophile Newspaper *La Unión* in Neutral Argentina, 1914–1918

War in History

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## Abstract

During the First World War, the belligerent powers attempted to recruit the neutral States to support their cause. Their citizens abroad and propaganda were a crucial part of their strategy. This article examines a German propaganda initiative addressed to Latin America through a case study focused on Argentina: the daily newspaper *La Unión*. This publication – developed by the local German community with the support of its government – sought to neutralize the allegiance to the Allied cause that prevailed in public opinion due to demographic, economic, cultural, and informational factors. This article reconstructs the obstacles faced by *La Unión*, as well as its objectives and strategies, and offers an assessment of its achievements.

## Keywords

First World War, Latin America, Argentina, propaganda, press, *La Unión*

The First World War was not solely fought on battlefields. It was also a war of information on a global scale. Nations struggled to mobilize the home front – including their citizens abroad – and to influence public opinion within both enemy and neutral countries. In pursuit of this goal, propaganda was a powerful weapon that could be combined with censorship and control of information channels.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Olivier Forcade, 'Information, censure et propagande', in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker, eds, *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre 1914–1918* (Paris, 2004), p. 451.

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The neutral nations were a relatively late addition to the historiography of the First World War. Formerly, the narrative had concentrated almost entirely on the belligerent powers. Over the last two decades, the contributions of global and transnational history have enabled discovery of these ‘peripheries of the war’.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Latin America, historiography on the impact of the Great War remains in its embryonic stage, focused on just a few nations, with the principal emphasis placed on the economic and diplomatic arenas,<sup>3</sup> although in recent years there has been progress on the social and cultural history of the war in the subcontinent.<sup>4</sup> Among the topics relevant to the present article, the study of the immigrant

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- 2 Oliver Janz, “Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40:2 (2014), pp. 147–59; Helmut Bley – Anorthe Kremers, eds, *The world during the First World War. Perceptions, experiences and consequences* (Essen, 2014); Maximilian Lakitsch, Susanne Reitmair-Juárez, and Katja Seidel, eds, *Bellicose Entanglements. 1914: The Great War as a Global War* (Zurich, 2015). Some recent reference works have included chapters on regions previously excluded from Great War narratives. See Becker and Audoin-Rouzeau, *Encyclopédie*; Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (3 vols, Cambridge, 2014), volume I, ‘Global War’; Stefan Rinke and Karina Kriegesmann, ‘Latin America’, in Ute Daniel et al., eds, *1914–1918 Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin, 2015). Among the works on the repercussions of the war in neutral countries, it is worth mentioning Hans A. Schmitt, ed., *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution, 1917–23* (Charlottesville, 1988); Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert, eds, *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900–1940* (Leiden, 2011); Johan Den Hertog and Samuël Kruizinga, eds, *Caught in the Middle: Neutrals, Neutrality, and the First World War* (Amsterdam, 2011); Alain Clavier and Claude Hauser, ‘Les États neutres et la neutralité pendant la Grande Guerre: une histoire pas si marginale’, *Relations Internationales* 159 (2014); José Leonardo Ruiz Sánchez, Inmaculada Cordero Olivero, and Carolina García Sanz, eds, *Shaping Neutrality throughout the First World War* (Sevilla, 2015).
- 3 For a historiographical survey of the study of the war in the subcontinent, see Olivier Compagnon, ‘Latin America’, in Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*; Stefan Rinke, ‘Historiography 1918–Today (Latin America)’, in Daniel et al., eds, *1914–1918 Online*. For some examples of studies of the conflict from an economic and/or diplomatic perspective, see Juan Ricardo Couyoumdjian, *Chile y Gran Bretaña: durante la Primera Guerra Mundial y la postguerra, 1914–1921* (Santiago de Chile, 1986); Bill Albert and Paul Henderson, *South America and the First World War. The Impact of the War on Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Chile* (Cambridge, 1988); Francisco Luiz Teixeira Vinhosa, *O Brasil e a Primeira Guerra Mundial* (Rio de Janeiro, 1990); Ricardo Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial: neutralidad, transición política y continuismo económico* (Buenos Aires, 1994); Philip A. Dehne, *On the Far Western Front: Britain’s First World War in South America* (Manchester, 2009); Frank Notten, *La influencia de la Primera Guerra Mundial sobre las economías centroamericanas, 1900–1929. Un enfoque desde el comercio exterior* (San José, 2012).
- 4 Some recent works offer a general overview of the cultural repercussions of the war in Latin America: Olivier Compagnon, *L’adieu à l’Europe. L’Amérique latine et la Grande Guerre (Argentine et Brésil, 1914–1939)* (Paris, 2013); Stefan Rinke, “‘Ein Drama der gesamten Menschheit’. Lateinamerikanische Perspektiven auf den Ersten Weltkrieg’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40 (2014), and *Im Sog der Katastrophe. Lateinamerika und der Erste Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 2015); Michael Goebel and María Inés Tato, ‘Making Sense of the War (Latin America)’, in Ute Daniel et al., eds, *1914–1918 Online*; María Inés Tato, ‘The Latin

communities' mobilization around the war is particularly noteworthy, including their economic and military contributions, internal conflicts, and interactions with their host society, especially in the traditional immigration countries: Argentina and Brazil.<sup>5</sup>

This article intends to contribute to this emerging area of research through the analysis of a propaganda initiative promoted by the German community resident in Argentina with the support of the Empire's government during the First World War. The daily newspaper *La Unión* was founded in Argentina's capital city with the purpose of counteracting Allied propaganda and to defend German economic interests in that country. This German initiative, therefore, faced numerous obstacles in its attempt to change the uneven balance of public attitudes.

Although *La Unión* was the most important German propaganda journal in South America,<sup>6</sup> it has not been systematically analysed.<sup>7</sup> This article will examine

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American Intellectual Field in the Face of the First World War: An Initial Approach', in Xavier Pla, Maximiliano Fuentes, and Francesc Montero, eds, *A Civil War of Words. The Cultural Impact of the Great War in Catalonia, Spain, Europe and a Glance to Latin America* (Bern, 2016).

- 5 Ronald C. Newton, *German Buenos Aires, 1900–1933. Social Change and Cultural Crisis* (Austin, 1977); Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil. A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I* (Baton Rouge, 1987); Emilio Franzina, 'La guerra lontana: il primo conflitto mondiale e gli italiani d'Argentina', *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* 44 (2000); Álvaro Cuenca, *La colonia británica de Montevideo y la Gran Guerra* (Montevideo, 2006); Hernán Otero, *La guerra en la sangre. Los franco-argentinos ante la Primera Guerra Mundial* (Buenos Aires, 2009); Pauline Bilot, *Allemands au Chili* (Rennes, 2010); María Inés Tato, 'El llamado de la patria. Británicos e italianos residentes en la Argentina frente a la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* 71 (2011), and 'Italianità d'oltremare. La comunità italiana di Buenos Aires e la guerra', in Andrea Scartabellati, Matteo Ermacora, and Felicita Ratti, eds, *Fronti interni. Esperienze di guerra lontano dalla guerra* (Naples, 2014); Stefan Rinke, 'The Reconstruction of National Identity: German Minorities in Latin America during the First World War', in Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel, eds, *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America* (Gainesville, 2014). Some works on the United States offer interesting points of comparison with the Latin American case. For instance, Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty. German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, IL, 1974); Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-born Soldiers in World War I* (Texas, 2001); Christopher M. Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish immigrants during the First World War* (Oxford, 2003); David Laskin, *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War* (New York, 2010).

- 6 Rinke, *Katastrophe*, p. 120.

- 7 Throughout the Americas, similar propaganda publications flourished, but, except for some case studies, they have also been ignored in the historiography. Among them, the American magazine *The Fatherland*, run by the poet George Sylvester Viereck, created and distributed in New York is worth mentioning (Ross J. Wilson, *New York and the First World War. Shaping an American City* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 72–73; Luebke, *Bonds*, p. 91); the newspaper *El Demócrata*, in Mexico (Yolanda de la Parra, 'La Primera Guerra Mundial y la prensa mexicana', *Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de México* 10 (1986)); and the illustrated magazine *La Guerra Gráfica*, in Lima, Peru (Guillemette Martin, 'Vivir el conflicto lejos de los campos de batalla. La comunidad alemana del Perú y la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Études Andines* 44:2 (2015)).

this publication's profile, the discursive strategies it used in its battle for the Argentine audience, its linkages with the German government, and its interactions with the German-Argentine community and Argentine society. Finally, it will assess the outcomes of this peculiar journalistic project and its impact on public opinion.

## A Lonely Defender of Germany

Allied propaganda found clear comparative advantages in Argentina. In the first place, due to the economic ties that connected the country with Europe, especially with the United Kingdom, the country's main commercial partner. In 1913, 24.9 per cent of Argentina's exports went to Britain, accounting for 90 per cent of this market's meat purchases; on the other hand, Argentina bought 31.1 per cent of its imports from the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, demographic factors were also influential. Argentina was an immigration country, which received around 4.6 million immigrants between 1857 and 1914, occupying second place in the reception of migratory flows behind the United States, and largely surpassing Canada and Brazil.<sup>9</sup> In 1914, on the eve of the Great War, 15.25 per cent of the Argentine population was composed of migrants from the Allied countries, while those from the Central Powers made up barely 1.65 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Allied propaganda spread relatively easily due to the deeply rooted Francophilism of the cultural elite. This sentiment had its origins in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when Latin American countries' struggles for independence from Spain encouraged the search for a cultural and political alternative to the model of Spanish rule. France was also perceived as mother of the arts and literature, an image that encouraged a considerable exodus of intellectuals to Paris, considered 'the Mecca of the artistic pilgrimage'.<sup>11</sup> During the war, support for an 'eternal France' extended to the other Allied nations and lent early backing to their cause.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, German admirers were a small minority in the intellectual arena and were practically confined to the spheres of law, medicine, militia, and natural and exact sciences,<sup>13</sup> giving them less impact on public opinion than those involved in pro-French literature and arts.

8 Roger Grivil, 'The Anglo-Argentine Connection and the War of 1914-1918', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 9:1 (1977), pp. 61, 84; Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto. Un siglo de políticas económicas argentinas* (Buenos Aires, 2005), p. 36.

9 Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2003), p. 247.

10 Calculation based on *Tercer Censo Nacional levantado el 1° de junio de 1914* (10 vols, Buenos Aires, 1916), II, pp. 395-6.

11 Beatriz Colombi, 'Camino a la meca. Escritores hispanoamericanos en París (1900-1920)', in Jorge Myers, ed., *Historia de los Intelectuales en América Latina* (Buenos Aires, 2009), p. 544.

12 Tato, 'Field', pp. 100-6.

13 Víctor Tau Anzoátegui, 'La influencia alemana en el derecho argentino: un programa para su estudio histórico', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 25 (1988); Elizabeth B. White, *German Influence in the Argentine Army, 1900 to 1945* (New York, 1991); Gustavo Vallejo, *Escenarios de la cultura científica argentina: ciudad y universidad (1882-1955)* (Madrid, 2007).

The pro-Allied affinities were not limited to the intellectual field. The massive press also reflected those perspectives, influenced as it was since the nineteenth century by the French agency Havas, the British Reuter, and the American Associated Press. The information received from those news agencies was transmitted telegraphically through submarine cables by two British companies: the Western Telegraph Company and the Central and South American Company. On its part, the German agency Wolff had no influence in Latin America, and the Empire only had at its disposal the services of the *Südamerikanische Telegraphengesellschaft*, which connected Emden (Germany), Monrovia (Liberia), and Pernambuco (Brazil); the service between this last city and Buenos Aires was provided by the Western Telegraph Company.<sup>14</sup>

On August 4 1914, the British government obtained the Allied virtual monopoly on communications by cutting the transatlantic submarine telegraphic wires linking the Empire to the American continents, thus preventing transmission of information from the Central Powers. Somewhat later, at the end of 1914, Germany obtained access to wireless telegraphy, but this means of communication had some technical limitations that reduced the volume of transmittable information.<sup>15</sup> At the end of August 1914, several German businessmen and consuls from neutral countries such as Denmark, Spain, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina devised a complementary procedure to provide official German information about the war to the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking press. They launched a publication in Frankfurt called *Servicio de Informes para los países de idioma español y portugués* (Service of Reports for Spanish and Portuguese language countries), which later changed its title to *Servicio de Informaciones para la América Latina* (Service of Information for Latin America).<sup>16</sup> It was distributed free of charge until 1916 and by subscription from that date onwards.<sup>17</sup> However, its frequency varied, which affected the topicality of the information, and its distribution depended on the vicissitudes of British naval requisitions.

This restriction on the transmission of information reinforced the predominance of Allied perspectives in the Argentine press. With the exception of a few newspapers that attempted to maintain a balanced perspective on the belligerent powers, the great majority of national periodicals supported the Allies from an early date. They showed different levels of commitment, from the moderation of *La Nación* and *La Prensa* – the two most widely read newspapers in the country – to the passionate activism of *Crítica* and *Idea Nacional*.<sup>18</sup> By contrast,

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14 Emiliano Sánchez, 'Pendientes de un hilo. Guerra comunicacional y manipulación informativa en la prensa porteña durante los inicios de la Gran Guerra', *Política y Cultura* 42 (2014), pp. 60–4.

15 H.C. Peterson, *Propaganda for War. The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914–1917* (New York, 1968), pp. 12–14; David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2000), pp. 22–3.

16 *Servicio de Informes para los países de idioma español y portugués* I, 1, 28 August 1914.

17 *Servicio de Informes para los países de lengua española y portuguesa* II, 9, 7 January 1916.

18 Weinmann, *Argentina*, p. 65; Raimundo Siepe, *Yrigoyen, la Primera Guerra Mundial y las relaciones económicas* (Buenos Aires, 1992), pp. 63–4; Olivier Compagnon, "'Si loin, si proche ...'" La Première Guerre mondiale dans la presse argentine et brésilienne', in Jean Lamarre and Magali Deleuze, eds, *L'envers de la médaille. Guerres, témoignages et représentations* (Québec, 2007), pp. 77–91.

the cause of the Central Powers found its lonely representatives in the newspapers of the German community (the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* and the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*). However, due to language barrier, these ethnic publications generally did not reach beyond their community of origin, and they had no impact on the core of Argentine public opinion. By contrast, some of the Allied communities' press was usually read by the Argentine elites, such as the French *Le Courrier de La Plata* or, to a lesser extent, the British *Review of the River Plate* and *The South American Journal*,<sup>19</sup> which circulated among the local business networks and had articles that were echoed in the Argentine press.

Within this difficult framework, Germany attempted to find a way to distribute its own favourable propaganda to Argentine society, with the diligent cooperation of the German-Argentine community.<sup>20</sup> The German community was neither homogeneous nor monolithic. It was traversed by social, religious, regional, political, and ideological tensions. However, the adverse circumstances of wartime and the resulting hostility of local public opinion, as well as the effects of the economic war, contributed to a 'siege mentality'.<sup>21</sup> It favoured a quest for unity, a kind of 'overseas truce',<sup>22</sup> 'a papering-over of internal dissensions, and a closing of ranks'.<sup>23</sup> As a result, in 1916, three new organizations emerged with the aim of constructing a unified community and defending its common interests: the German National Association for Argentina (*Deutscher Volksbund für Argentinien*), the German Chamber of Commerce (*Deutsche Handelskammer*) and the German Charity Society (*Deutsche Wohltätigkeitsgesellschaft*).<sup>24</sup> In the press field, old rivalries and tensions between the two most important community newspapers (the liberal *Argentinisches Tageblatt* and the monarchist *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*) halted temporarily during wartime, leading to unexpected cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

Although this truce within the community began to crack, especially at the end of the conflict,<sup>26</sup> solidarity around the war effort prevailed until 1918, including propaganda activities to neutralize the Allied ones.

19 Otero, *Guerra*, p. 91; Oliver Marshall, *The English-Language Press in Latin America* (London, 1996), pp. 10–11; Roberto Cortés Conde and Stanley J. Stein, eds, *Latin America: A Guide to Economic History, 1830–1930* (Los Angeles, 1977), p. 41.

20 The French minister in Argentina, Henri Jullemier, highlighted the local German community's 'extreme generosity of their donations for the homeland cause', which were applied to the material support of several publications, among other initiatives (France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Archives Diplomatiques de La Courneuve (MAE-ADLC), Fond Guerre 1914–1918, Dossier 190, 'Le Ministre de France en Argentine à Son Excellence Monsieur Delcassé, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères', 8[?] February 1915).

21 Rinke, 'Reconstruction', p. 172.

22 Rinke, 'Reconstruction', pp. 161–2.

23 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 33.

24 Hoffmann, 'Construyendo', p. 131.

25 For instance, when Germán and Emilio Tjarks were expelled from the Press Circle (*Círculo de la Prensa*) in 1917, the director of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, Theodor Alemann, also left the institution in solidarity with his colleagues (Georg Ismar, *Der Pressekrieg. Argentinisches Tageblatt und Deutsche La Plata Zeitung 1933–1945* (Berlin, 2006), p. 48).

26 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, pp. 45, 47–8; Rinke, 'Reconstruction', p. 177.

Propaganda tasks were conducted through the German Scientific Society (*Deutscher Wissenschaftlicher Verein*), whose budget increased substantially during the war due to contributions of German firms; the German Argentine League for the Promotion of Economic Interests (*Deutsch-Argentinischer Zentralverband zur Förderung wirtschaftlicher Interessen*); and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin.<sup>27</sup> The boundaries between cultural diplomacy and propaganda seem to have become blurred in wartime. Thus, the German Scientific Society's president since 1912, Wilhelm Keiper, was considered the de facto director of German propaganda in Argentina.<sup>28</sup> Among the propaganda activities developed under Keiper's command, the subsidizing and dissemination of printed propaganda, including the press, are worth mentioning.<sup>29</sup>

As part of the propaganda effort in Argentina, on 31 October 1914, a new Spanish-language newspaper was founded in Buenos Aires: *La Unión*.<sup>30</sup> It was created by the experienced German journalist Hermann Tjarks, owner and director of the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*,<sup>31</sup> and financed by the Legation<sup>32</sup> and the German community resident in Argentina, as was evident in the profusion of commercial announcements from German advertisers. Tjarks's journalistic expertise, combined with his vast social, political, and

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27 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 35.

28 United Kingdom, The National Archives, Foreign Office (NA-FO), FO 118/428, 'Press report no. 87 from Sir Reginald Tower to Mr. Balfour', 3 June 1917; Gonzalo de Reparaz, journalist of *La Unión*, also described Keiper as the 'director of German propaganda' in Argentina (Spain, Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (CDMH), Archivo Gonzalo de Reparaz (AGR), caja 125, Letter from Gonzalo de Reparaz to the Count of Luxburg, 18 January 1920). Apparently, Keiper was part of the commission of propaganda in the German Legation (CDMH, AGR, caja 125, Letter from Gonzalo de Reparaz to Mr. Glesser, 1 January 1920). Historians also agree with that evaluation: Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 42; Rinke, *Katastrophe*, p. 119.

29 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 35.

30 The Argentine capital was a key focus for the dissemination of European news and propaganda to the Southern Cone, regardless of its origin. News from the agency Havas, which arrived in Buenos Aires from New York through the Pacific via Valparaíso (Chile), was retransmitted to Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Montevideo (Uruguay), and Santiago (Chile) (MAE-ADLC, Fond Maison de la Presse et Services d'Information et de Presse 1914–1940, Dossier 3, 'La transmission des Communiqués Officiels de guerre à l'étranger, 23 December 1915). On the role of Buenos Aires in the dissemination of German propaganda to the Southern Cone, see Percy Alvin Martin, *Latin America and the War* (Baltimore, 1925), p. 182; Rinke, *Katastrophe*, p. 119.

31 Katrin Hoffmann, '¿Construyendo una "comunidad"? Theodor Alemann y Hermann Tjarks como voceros de la prensa germanoparlante en Buenos Aires, 1914–1918', *Iberoamericana. América Latina, España, Portugal* 33 (2009), pp. 121–37.

32 In 1917, the German minister in Argentina, the Count of Luxburg, requested from his government a monthly subsidy of \$10,000 for *La Unión* as a compensation for the newspaper's inclusion in the blacklists ('Argentine. La publication complète des télégrammes Luxburg', *Bulletin Périodique de la Presse Sud-Américaine* 28 (1918), p. 2).

commercial contacts,<sup>33</sup> may explain why this initiative lasted much longer than its predecessor, the ephemeral *Boletín Germánico* (published by the *Comité Pro Germania* (Pro Germania Committee))<sup>34</sup> and longer than the fortnightly illustrated magazine *Germania*, which ceased publication after 24 issues<sup>35</sup> due to lack of local financial support.<sup>36</sup>

*La Unión* was formally managed by Emilio and Germán Tjarks – Hermann's sons – but in practice the latter was the driving force behind its editorial content until his death, in 1916. The director of the newspaper was the dramatist Edmundo T. Calcaño, replaced after the war by the Spanish journalist Román Rodríguez de Vicente.<sup>37</sup>

The purpose of the creation of *La Unión*, as stated by its founder, was to help 'fade prejudices and hostilities' towards the Central Empires that had resulted from the journalistic dominance of the Triple Entente, to promote 'a better intelligence between Germans and Argentines', and to 'be understood and be judged with justice and impartiality'.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the paper sought to maintain cordiality with its colleagues by declaring that its 'rectifications will not be addressed to newspapers, but they will actually be addressed to the news, or better said, to the tendentiousness of those news, which only the British censorship is responsible for'.<sup>39</sup> During the war the journal constituted itself in an unavoidable interlocutor and antagonist for pro-Allied publications such as the cultural magazine *La Nota*, and the newspapers *Crítica* and *La Mañana*, which engaged themselves in passionate daily controversies with it.<sup>40</sup>

Its adversaries recognized that *La Unión* was 'quite well-written', that it contained 'many interesting articles about different topics',<sup>41</sup> and that it was 'quite documented from

33 Hermann Tjarks was member of the German Club (*Deutscher Klub*), the German Navy League of the River Plate (*Deutscher Flottenverein am La Plata*), the Association for the Protection of German Immigrants (*Verein zum Schutze Germanischer Einwanderer*), the Association of German Veterans in Buenos Aires (*Deutscher Kriegerverein Buenos Aires*), the German Hospital (*Deutscher Hospitalverein*), and the German Lodge Teutonia (*Deutscher Loge Teutonia*). He was decorated by the Kaiser William II with the Red Eagle Order (*Roter Adlerorden*) and the Order of the Crown (*Kronenorde*) (Hoffmann, 'Construyendo', p. 125).

34 This evening newspaper, subtitled as 'Defender of the German communities' interests' ('Defensor de los intereses de las colectividades germánicas'), was founded in August 1914 and directed by Walter Klug. This newspaper was distributed, based on subscription, to South American countries. It had only four pages and a few advertisements.

35 'Suspensión de Germania', *La Unión (LU)*, 9 June 1916. The magazine had been founded by the trader Eduardo Retienne and was under the management of Pablo Fabatz.

36 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 36.

37 'Las nuevas orientaciones de "La Unión"', *Correo de Galicia*, 27 February 1921.

38 'Nuestros propósitos', *LU*, 31 October 1914.

39 'A nuestros colegas', *LU*, 31 October 1914.

40 Verónica Delgado, 'Reconfiguraciones de debates y posiciones del campo literario en el semanario *La Nota* 1915–1920', *Anclajes* 8 (2004); Sylvia Sáitza, *Regueros de tinta. El diario Crítica en la década de 1920* (Buenos Aires, 1998); María Inés Tato, *Viento de Fronda. Liberalismo, conservadurismo y democracia en la Argentina, 1911–1932* (Buenos Aires, 2004).

41 MAE-ADLC, Fond Guerre 1914–1918, Dossier 189, 'Le Ministre de France en Argentine à Son Excellence Monsieur Delcassé, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères', 28 March 1915.



the economic and political view'.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, its key role in the diffusion of German propaganda led to the expulsion of its director and managers from the Press Circle (*Círculo de la Prensa*), an association of Argentine journalists that represented the Argentine press establishment, chaired alternatively by the proprietors of *La Nación* and *La Prensa*.<sup>43</sup> This fact strongly illustrated the isolation of *La Unión* within Argentine journalism.

To counteract the Allies' propaganda campaign, *La Unión* had at its disposal the radio-telegraphic services provided by Transocean, which it publicized as 'free from British censorship'. This press agency transmitted reports from the German localities of Nauen and Hannover, which were then received by the United States' stations of Sayville and Tuckerton.<sup>44</sup> From these stations, reports were retransmitted by cable to Buenos Aires through Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia. The *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* and *La Unión* received wire information from the Central Powers free of charge, and the *Zeitung* selected and forwarded information to the German Legation in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>45</sup> *La Unión's* sources also included official German documentation, unsolicited contributions from readers (generally from Argentina, Germany, and Spain), and news selected from the press of neutral nations and from Argentine journals sympathetic to the German cause, such as *La Gaceta de España* and *The Southern Cross*, the newspaper of the Irish community.

*La Unión* was published from Monday through Saturday and was approximately ten pages in length. Its distribution reached throughout Argentina, as well as other South American countries by subscription.<sup>46</sup> In addition, some of their articles were picked up by Spanish pro-German newspapers, like the *Correspondencia alemana de la guerra*, printed in Barcelona.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, to ensure diffusion of the German message, it was distributed free of charge among several Argentine institutions and private individuals at significant financial cost.<sup>48</sup> In 1916, *La Unión* established a branch in the city of Montevideo (Uruguay) to enhance its operational range. The newspaper distributed in Montevideo not only contained the same information published in the Buenos Aires edition, but it also offered its local readers two extra pages written by Uruguayan journalists about the situation in their country.<sup>49</sup> A nightly edition of the newspaper was also published in Buenos Aires; it reported on breaking news, especially about the war.<sup>50</sup> A branch

42 MAE-ADLC, Fond Guerre 1914–1918, Dossier 192, 'Le Ministre de France en Argentine à Son Excellence Monsieur Pichon, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères', 18 November 1917.

43 On the expulsion of *La Unión's* managers, see note 25. About the Press Circle, see James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy. Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955* (Pennsylvania, 2011), pp. 53–4.

44 Heidi Evans, "'The path to freedom'?" Transocean and German Wireless Telegraphy, 1914–1922', *Historical Social Research* 35 (2010), pp. 216–17.

45 Hoffmann, 'Construyendo', p. 128.

46 The newspaper had agents in Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Brazil ('Agentes y revendedores de La Unión', *LU*, 10 May 1915).

47 CDMH, AGR, caja 118, Letter from Gonzalo de Reparaz to the Prince of Ratibor, German Ambassador in Madrid, n.d.

48 MAE-ADLC, Fond Guerre 1914–1918, Dossier 189, 'Le Ministre de France en Argentine à Son Excellence Monsieur Delcassé, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères', 28 March 1915.

49 'Instalación de una sucursal de "La Unión" en Montevideo', *LU*, 15 July 1916.

50 '*La Unión*', *LU*, 24 March 1916.

was also settled on the esplanade of Mar del Plata, the most important summer seaside resort in the province of Buenos Aires.<sup>51</sup> In its attempt to gain wider social support, *La Unión* even offered additional services to its readers, such as free legal consultations.

Information regarding this paper's circulation is variable: some sources indicate that it published approximately 25,000 copies per day, while others indicate that circulation was double this number.<sup>52</sup> The paper itself stated that it distributed 100,204 copies of its first issue, although it did not offer information on subsequent editions.<sup>53</sup> In any case, *La Unión* distributed approximately the same number of copies as most national periodical publications, although its circulation was far below that of the newspaper with the highest circulation in Argentina, *La Prensa*, which distributed between 160,000 and 200,000 copies per issue.<sup>54</sup>

Among the contributors to *La Unión* were distinguished Argentine Germanophiles, such as the lawyer, attorney general, historian, professor, and prolific writer Ernesto Quesada; the lawyer and professor Juan P. Ramos; the lawyer, sociologist, and writer Carlos Octavio Bunge; the physician Augusto Bunge; the lawyer and diplomat Alfredo Colmo; the writer Gustavo Martínez Zuviría; the lawyer and professor Ernesto Vergara Biedma; General José Félix Uriburu; and the poet and writer Calixto Oyuela, all of whom were important figures in their professional fields and part of the Argentine social elite. Some of them published serial works that would later circulate as brochures or books. Such was the case of Ernesto Quesada,<sup>55</sup> Juan P. Ramos,<sup>56</sup> and General Uriburu.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the staff of *La Unión* included many Iberian journalists, writers, and intellectuals, with a long and distinguished career in Spain and Argentina, such as Javier Bueno, Enrique Domínguez Rodiño, Antonio Barranco Garrido, Manuel A. Bares, Manuel Mateo Campos, Gonzalo de Reparaz, José Ladrón de Guevara, Ricardo Monner Sans, and José María Salaverría. The newspaper often published the opinions of Spanish politicians and writers, such as Jacinto Benavente and Joaquín Costa. This was not unusual, as Spain stood out among the neutral nations because of the overwhelming dominance of its Germanophiles. This turned the country into a key centre for the production and/or translation of pro-German propaganda.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Spain was extolled by the

51 'La Unión en Mar del Plata', *LU*, 2 February 1918.

52 The first estimation belongs to *Anuario Industrial de la Nación Argentina 1919–20* (Buenos Aires, 1920), p. 12. The French diplomatic source calculated approximately 50,000 copies (Otero, *Guerra*, p. 67), while the German Legation stated that the number of edited copies was between 30,000 and 35,000, despite the fact that official financing allowed the publication of 70,000 to 80,000 copies (Ismar, *Pressekrieg*, p. 53).

53 'Nuestro primer número', *LU*, 2 November 1914.

54 F. Antonio Le Rose, Montmasson, ed., *Guía periodística argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1913), pp. 12, 73–4; *Anuario Industrial*, p. 9.

55 Ernesto Quesada, *La actual civilización germánica y la presente guerra* (Buenos Aires, 1914).

56 Juan P. Ramos, *Alemania ante la guerra* (Buenos Aires, 1915). Published in *La Unión* under the title 'La palabra del Dr. Juan P. Ramos' ('The word of Dr. Juan P. Ramos').

57 José Félix Uriburu, *La batalla del Marne: apuntes y enseñanzas de la guerra actual* (Buenos Aires, 1918).

58 Gerald H. Meaker, 'A Civil War of Words: The Ideological Impact of the First World War on Spain, 1914–18', in Schmitt, ed., *Neutral Europe*, pp. 8–11.

newspaper because of its neutrality, which was proposed to Latin America as a model to follow.<sup>59</sup> The promotion of Hispanism was a strategy employed to counteract the appeal of Pan-Latinism and Pan-Americanism, which were used by the Allied powers to gain Latin American support.<sup>60</sup> Although *La Unión*'s target audience was primarily Argentine public opinion, the publication of articles by Spanish authors, often referring to current affairs on the peninsula, provided the newspaper with a broader range of readers. In 1914, Spaniards made up 10.52 per cent of the national population, making them the second largest immigrant community by population, at short distance behind the Italians.<sup>61</sup> In the city of Buenos Aires, they were the 19.47 per cent of the population.<sup>62</sup> The German community financed a weekly propaganda newspaper specifically addressed to the Spanish one, *La Gaceta de España*, which was run by the journalist Julio Cola and published on Saturdays.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, *La Unión* complemented this publication during the week and enjoyed a greater popularity among the Spanish community in Argentina.<sup>64</sup>

*La Unión* also published some contributions by German writers, such as Leonore Niessen-Deiters,<sup>65</sup> and by the Swiss G.W. Zimmerli, the representative of the German Red Cross, who has usually been labelled an agent of German propaganda in South America.<sup>66</sup>

The newspaper contributed decisively to Germanophile propaganda in Argentina, informing its readers of recently published works from Argentina and Spain, such as those mentioned above, as well as *La significación de Alemania en la guerra europea* (The significance of Germany in the European war), by Juan P. Ramos; *Diario de un argentino, soldado en la guerra actual* (Diary of an Argentine, soldier in the current war), de Juan B. Homet; *La batalla del Marne* (The battle of the Marne), by General José Félix Uriburu; *De re bellica*, by Armando Guerra (pen-name of Francisco Martín Llorente); the eight volumes of *El enigma de la guerra* (The enigma of the war), by Néstor Carrico; *Gitanos y caballeros* (Gypsies and gentlemen), by Pedro de Córdoba (the pen-name of Reparaz); *Mi neutralismo* (My neutralism), by Alfredo Colmo; *El pensamiento y la actividad alemana en la guerra europea* (German thinking and activity in the European war), by Vicente Gay; and *El vampiro del continente* (The vampire of the continent), by Graf Ernst Zu Reventlow.<sup>67</sup> Towards the end of the war, when propaganda

59 'España y las repúblicas americanas', *LU*, 23 January 1915.

60 Paul-Henri Michel, *L'Hispanisme dans les républiques espagnoles d'Amérique pendant la guerre de 1914–1918* (Paris, 1930).

61 Calculation based on *Censo*, pp. 395–6.

62 Calculation based on *Censo*, pp. 109, 148–9.

63 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, p. 35.

64 CDHM, AGR, caja 118, Letter from José J. Cortázar to Gonzalo de Reparaz, 28 July 1918.

65 On Niessen-Deiters's intellectual and professional trajectory, see Sandra Carreras, 'Spengler, Quesada y yo ... Intercambio intelectual y relaciones personales entre la Argentina y Alemania', in Eugenia Scarzanella and Monica Raisa Schpun, eds, *Sin fronteras. Encuentros de mujeres y hombres entre América Latina y Europa (siglos XIX–XX)* (Madrid, 2008).

66 Luebke, *Germans*, pp. 106–10.

67 María Inés Tato, 'Luring Neutrals. Allied and German Propaganda in Argentina during the First World War', in Troy Paddock, ed., *World War I and Propaganda* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 333–43.

films became increasingly important,<sup>68</sup> *La Unión* also publicized certain principal titles, such as ‘El *Deutschland* en Norte América’ (*Deutschland* in North America), ‘Vistas de la guerra del lado alemán’ (Views of the war from the German side), ‘Los alemanes en la guerra’ (Germans at war), and ‘Las batallas de una nación’ (Battles of a nation). It also disseminated other sources of propaganda: theatrical pieces,<sup>69</sup> announcements of conferences, postcards from the war, maps of significant battles, souvenirs of the war, portraits of leaders of the Central Powers, and so forth.

*La Unión* devoted itself daily to refuting the war information that came through the Allied cables, including the causes of the conflict and reports on military operations. Although this information was contained within a wide range of articles, the newspaper had a section (under various titles) dedicated to conveying its own rectification of Allied press information. In this section, it compared (in two columns) news received from the Allies with news originating from German radiotelegraphy, showing the striking differences between these two sources of information. Moreover, to prove false the optimistic perspectives about the war spread by the Allies, it published a monthly list of ships that had been sunk by German U-boats, detailing their names, nationalities, tonnages, and dates of sinking. Sometimes, this information was accompanied by maps with the locations of the shipwrecks. This feature was considered ‘very effective ... as a propaganda weapon’.<sup>70</sup>

The core of *La Unión*’s arguments focused on correcting stereotypes about Germany that had been spread by Allied propaganda: a savage, militaristic and expansionist power, responsible for the outbreak of the war, the outrages against civilian populations, and the violation of the neutrals’ rights. To refute those accusations, the newspaper celebrated the material and cultural achievements of German civilization, affirming the defensive nature of Germany’s participation in the war (i.e., it had entered under pressure from its enemies), and denying the atrocities attributed to Germany, especially with regard to the occupations of Belgium and France, upon which the characterization of Germany as a barbarian power was based.<sup>71</sup> The civilian population was not only blamed for the eventual excesses perpetrated by the German army,<sup>72</sup> but the alleged war crimes committed by the Allies were also highlighted.<sup>73</sup> For example, the French authorities’ supposed mistreatment of enemy soldiers and war prisoners constituted the core of a book that went through six editions: *Los bárbaros*, by Alfredo Luis Beltrame. This journalist and

68 Welch, *Germany*, p. 48.

69 For instance, Ricardo Cappenberg’s play in three acts ‘La lista negra’ (The blacklist), or the German comedy ‘¡Mi Leopoldo!’ (My Leopold!).

70 NA-FO, FO 118/386, ‘Press report no. 65 from Sir Reginald Tower to Foreign Office’, 1 August 1916.

71 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, 2001).

72 ‘¿De quién es la culpa de lo rudo de la guerra?’ *LU*, 31 October 1914.

73 ‘Civilización y barbarie’ (Civilization and barbarism), *LU*, 8 December 1914; ‘De la “Legion des étrangers”’ (From the ‘Legion des étrangers’), 16 December 1914; ‘Atrocidades cometidas por las tropas rusas’ (Atrocities committed by the Russian troops), 5 June 1915; ‘El terrorismo inglés en Irlanda y las atrocidades alemanas en Bélgica’ (English terrorism in Ireland and the German atrocities in Belgium), 18 November 1916, among others.

war correspondent for *La Unión* described his experience in the French prisons where he had been confined after being charged with espionage for Germany and arrested. His book was widely publicized by *La Unión*.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, after his liberation, he gave a series of conferences at various locations in Argentina and Uruguay, denying the accusations against Germany and addressing similar charges against the Allies.<sup>75</sup>

## Perfidious Albion

However, *La Unión* treated the members of the Triple Entente very differently. Its discourse revealed a deep Anglophobia, which contrasted with its respectful tone towards the French cause. As Troy Paddock notes, the effectiveness of propaganda depends on its adaptation to the social context in which it is displayed, as well as on its use of cultural codes.<sup>76</sup> *La Unión*'s politeness towards France, which was notably different from the aggressive German nationalism of the Tjarks' other newspaper,<sup>77</sup> may have intended to garner the support of a public opinion dominated by Francophiles.

Nevertheless, Anglophobia was clearly dictated by the global economic rivalry that had started at the end of the nineteenth century among the European powers. Britain had started to experience a declining share of the South American market, and the increasing expansion of German economic interests was perceived as a threat to British dominance.<sup>78</sup> The Great War accentuated that rivalry. Britain not only intended to reserve Argentine foreign trade exclusively for Allied supply during wartime but also to displace Germany from its rising economic position, thus eliminating its principal competitor in

74 Alfredo Luis Beltrame, *Los bárbaros* (Buenos Aires, 1917).

75 At the conferences that he gave in Buenos Aires, for example, the following issues were discussed: (1) '¡A hierro y fuego! La leyenda de las devastaciones sistemáticas alemanas' ('By iron and fire! The legend of the German systematic devastations'); (2) 'Cómo presencié la destrucción de Péronne, Halle, Radegonde, Flammicourt, Doingt, Saint Denis, Allaines, Aizecourt y Bossul, por los ingleses' ('How I witnessed the destruction of Péronne, Halle, Radegonde, Flammicourt, Doingt, Saint Denis, Allaines, Aizecourt, and Bossul, by the English army'); (3) 'En Italia ... Atrocidades cometidas contra prisioneros austríacos. Horrores presenciados en el presidio-isla de Nápoles' ('In Italy ... Atrocities committed against Austrian prisoners. Horrors witnessed in Naples prison island'); (4) 'Los campamentos de prisioneros aliados en Alemania' ('The camps of Allied prisoners in Germany'); (5) '¡Nos engañan! ¡Nos engañan!' ('We are deceived! We are deceived!'); (6) 'Frente a Verdún' ('Facing Verdun'); (7) 'Un regimiento glorioso. Con los héroes del Somme' ('A glorious regiment. With the Somme heroes'); (8) 'Retorno de prisioneros enfermos y mutilados a su patria' ('Return of sick and mutilated prisoners to their homeland'); (9) 'Las hordas cosacas en Prusia oriental' ('The Cossack hordes in Eastern Prussia'); (10) 'Vida, agonía y muerte de Gorizia. Escenas espantosas presenciadas durante su destrucción por la artillería italiana' ('Gorizia's life, agony and death. Awful scenes seen during its destruction by the Italian artillery') ('La guerra vista desde Alemania. Conferencias del periodista argentino Alfredo L. Beltrame', *LU*, 31 May 1917).

76 Troy Paddock, 'Introduction', in Paddock, ed., *World War I and Propaganda*, p. 13.

77 Hoffmann, 'Construyendo', p. 129.

78 Dehne, *Front*, pp. 8–9.

the region.<sup>79</sup> In fact, in 1913, 12 per cent of Argentine exports were destined for Germany, and 16.9 per cent of the South American country's imports came from William II's Empire. Therefore, on the eve of the Great War, Germany occupied the second place in both categories of Argentine foreign trade, behind the United Kingdom. Furthermore, approximately 60 per cent of grain exports from Argentina were controlled or influenced by German companies.<sup>80</sup> The naval blockade and the confiscation of goods and ships were designed to prevent Germany from receiving supplies of grain, but at least until 1916, those restrictions were avoided through a triangulation of Argentine foreign trade: Argentina sold its exports to neutral states such as Sweden, Denmark, and Holland, which then redirected the shipments to Germany.<sup>81</sup>

The British government implemented the Statutory List in March 1916. These so-called 'blacklists' ordered the boycott of any German commercial houses and non-German companies that did business with blacklisted firms, which were viewed as acting on behalf of British enemies. The British goal was to break off Germany's local commercial contacts and replace them with British businessmen. A firm's inclusion on the blacklist was frequently controversial and led to private and official complaints.<sup>82</sup>

*La Unión* responded to this economic war, which harmed its own interests,<sup>83</sup> criticizing Britain's influence on the Argentine economy and attempting to prove that British firms were a kind of state within the state.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, there were constant indictments of the transgressions of British firms, which had involved intentional snubs of Argentine sovereignty.<sup>85</sup> With regard to the blacklists, they were portrayed by the newspaper as the reduction of Argentina to a 'mere colony' of Britain.<sup>86</sup> From this perspective, the British reprisals had breached articles 14 and 20 of Argentina's National Constitution, which,

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79 Gravil, 'Connection', pp. 60, 67.

80 Gravil, 'Connection', pp. 61, 84, 63. On the contrary, meat trade was almost completely oriented to Britain, and was handled by British, North American, or Argentine companies (Gravil, 'Connection', pp. 76, 79).

81 Gravil, 'Connection', pp. 63–4.

82 On the blacklists, see the fundamental book by Dehne, *Front*.

83 Since the appearance of *La Unión*, the railroad companies, controlled by British capital, prevented the journal from being sold at their stations and on their trains ('La Unión y los ferrocarriles', *LU*, 4 November 1914). Later, the journal was included in the Statutory List ('La Unión en la "lista negra"', *LU*, 24 July 1917).

84 'Imperio británico dentro del Estado argentino', *LU*, 10 April 1915.

85 For example, '¿Argentina soberana o factoría inglesa?' (Is Argentina a sovereign country or an English factory?), *LU*, 21 November 1914; 'Cómo burlan los ingleses las leyes argentinas' (How the English sidestep Argentine laws), 6 April 1916; 'Cía. Anglo Argentina. Sus malos servicios' (Company Anglo Argentina. Its bad services), 1 March 1915; 'Un clamor desde los ingenios. Oprobiosa explotación inglesa' (A clamor from the cane sugar mills. Disgraceful English exploitation), 18 August 1915; 'Manejo de nuestros ferrocarriles. El caso del Trasadino. Cómo se violan las leyes del país' (Management of our railroads. The Trasadino case. How the laws of the country are sidestepped), 1 September 1915; 'En el virreinato inglés del Chaco' (In the English Viceroyalty of Chaco), 3 July 1917.

86 'Las listas negras. Sus efectos en nuestro país', *LU*, 29 April 1916.

among other civil liberties, granted all inhabitants of Argentina the right to freely engage in any legal economic activity.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, such retaliations involved a violation of the neutrality adopted by the Argentine government, which was then in the hands of the conservative Victorino de la Plaza. The president was criticized for his lack of action, and his behaviour was compared to the stronger reactions of other neutral nations.<sup>88</sup> As part of its daily indictment campaign, the newspaper supported the so-called *Comité Patriótico Argentino contra las Listas Negras* (Argentine Patriotic Committee against the Blacklists), organized at the end of June 1916. *La Unión* backed and helped publicize this group's activities, including a massive rally in front of the National Congress in support of a parliamentary initiative opposed to the 'blacklists', driven by the conservative deputy Marco Avellaneda.<sup>89</sup>

However, the most significant chapter of *La Unión*'s anti-British campaign was its constant reminders of the negative impact of British foreign policy on Latin America in general and Argentina in particular. From the English invasions of the River Plate in 1806–7 to the occupation of the Falkland Islands in 1833, the British were portrayed as having oppressed Argentina throughout much of its history. The Falklands event involved a direct appeal to nationalism. Its invocation enabled the insertion of a wedge among the pro-Allies, as ignoring or minimizing the British attacks on Argentine territorial heritage could be considered disloyal. In addition, the Falklands issue was also useful in recruiting supporters for the German cause: the journal declared that if the German Empire were to win the war, Argentina could recover the islands. Although this was mentioned frequently in *La Unión*, it was emphasized more often in 1918 as a result of statements by the German chancellor, Count Georg von Hertling. He would have wanted to include this issue on the agenda for peace negotiations in the event of a British defeat. Therefore, *La Unión* stated that

We said it a long time ago among the general scepticism: one of the impositions of a victorious Germany would be the return of the Malvinas [Falklands] to their legitimate owner. ... [T]here is an Argentine interest in a German victory; Germany has just sanctioned in front of the world our right to the islands that were stolen from us, and is willing to impose its reintegration to the national land.

We put these transcendental statements of the German chancellor under the consideration of the Alliadophiles in its double aspect: as an undeniable sign of the fact that the democratic and fair principles of the international law are at odds with the Allied victory, and as an expression, also indisputable, that this does not certainly happen with German triumph and Argentine interests ...<sup>90</sup>

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87 'Las "listas negras" británicas. Constituyen un atentado a la soberanía nacional', *LU*, 15 June 1916.

88 'Las "listas negras" británicas. Nuestra neutralidad, de hecho, es una ficción', *LU*, 17 June 1916.

89 The Committee had been housed in a building next to the newspaper office; therefore, it is possible that *La Unión* fostered the initiative.

90 'Las Malvinas', *LU*, 26 January 1918.

## In the Neutralist Field

In 1914, Argentina – as well as the other Latin American nations – adopted a neutral policy towards the war, driven by different factors. First, that policy allowed the country to preserve trade with all the warring nations and avoid further dependence on the United Kingdom or the ascending United States. Second, given the cosmopolitan character of Argentine society, neutrality reduced ethnic tensions between immigrant communities. An internal consensus was built around neutrality, which reflected the general agreement on the matter among the Latin American states.<sup>91</sup>

The year 1917 was a turning point on many war fronts.<sup>92</sup> In Latin America, it was decisive for several nations' interpretations of the conflict and for the abandonment of the (hitherto) ruling neutralist consensus. At that time, the consequences of the economic warfare between the belligerent powers and increasing pressures from the United States began to have a more direct impact on the subcontinent and on Argentina. At the beginning of 1917, Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare in response to the British commercial blockade; this led to the sinking of many Argentine-flagged ships and triggered intense controversies in Argentine society. In September, the United States, to pressure the Argentine government, publicized the content of several telegrams addressed to the German government from the German minister in Argentina, the Count of Luxburg, where the diplomat referred to the Argentine president in derogatory terms and recommended continuing sinking Argentine ships 'without a trace'. The diplomatic crisis led to the polarization of Argentine society. Some sectors supported the severance of diplomatic relations with the Central Powers, while others advocated neutrality, calling one another 'rupturists' and 'neutralists' or 'Alliadelphiles' and 'Germanophiles'. The latter label included a wide range of positions that converged in defence of neutrality and showed an insulting meaning, equated to being unpatriotic.<sup>93</sup>

Within this context, *La Unión* focused on reaffirming the concrete advantages of Argentina's neutrality, agreeing with other members of the neutralist field that had been inspired by different motives. In this sense, the newspaper gave space in its pages to the activities and opinions of officialists, internationalist socialists, Catholics, and especially members of the *Liga Patriótica Argentina Pro Neutralidad* (Argentine Patriotic League Pro-Neutrality). Among the members of this association (which had sprung up in April and reorganized in September) were frequent contributors to *La Unión*, such as Ernesto Quesada, Alfredo Colmo, Juan P. Ramos, Calixto Oyuela, Ernesto Vergara Biedma, Belisario Roldán, and José Monner Sans,<sup>94</sup> as well as Carlos Meyer Pellegrini, one of the major shareholders of the newspaper.<sup>95</sup> The League attempted to centralize the spontaneous mobilization of several neutralist groups that had previously bloomed throughout

91 Olivier Compagnon, 'Entrer en guerre? Neutralité et engagement de l'Amérique latine entre 1914 et 1918', *Relations Internationales* 137 (2009), pp. 31–43.

92 Ian F.W. Beckett, ed., *1917: Beyond the Western Front* (Leiden, 2009).

93 María Inés Tato, 'La disputa por la argentinidad. Rupturistas y neutralistas durante la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Temas de Historia Argentina y Americana* 13 (2008), p. 243.

94 'Asuntos internacionales', *La Prensa*, 21 October 1917.

95 Otero, *Guerra*, pp. 92–3.



Argentina and conducted massive public demonstrations in various cities in the country. They competed with the *Comité Nacional de la Juventud* (National Committee of Youth), which galvanized those who supported severing diplomatic relations with Germany. Both associations organized huge rallies in support of their respective causes, attempting to influence public opinion and the Argentine government.<sup>96</sup>

During that decisive juncture, the offices of *La Unión* were the target of violent attacks and even arson attempts from pro-Allied demonstrators,<sup>97</sup> being identified as it was as a newspaper that served German interests. Although recognizing its admiration for the German Empire, it denied the identification between a pro-German stance and an anti-national attitude, stating that

we are Germanophiles because we are Argentines, because we want for our country the methods that have made Germany great in every area, from the industrial to the scientific, from the financial to the social democratic field. ... We are Germanophiles, in sum, because we understand with the mind, not with the instincts of the heart, that the triumph of the Central Empires is the triumph of all the nations as ours, of all the nations incapable of opposing themselves to the imperialism of the sea ...<sup>98</sup>

As part of its defence of neutrality, *La Unión* supported the foreign policy of the radical president Hipólito Yrigoyen, who took office in 1916. Despite pressures from the United States government, Yrigoyen maintained official neutrality during the war, even when some of his measures were considered 'benevolent neutrality' towards the Allied powers.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, his strong rejection of the 'blacklists' and of the American government's interference in Latin American issues garnered him the support of *La Unión*. The newspaper had supported the Argentine president's initiative of convening Latin American countries at a Congress of Neutral Nations that was to be held in Buenos Aires with the purpose of agreeing on a common diplomatic strategy that would be independent of the United States' Pan-Americanism, an initiative usually characterized as 'Pan-Hispanist'. As *La Unión* had observed, it was essential that this meeting be held promptly.<sup>100</sup> The successive postponements of the meeting date undermined the efficiency of the undertaking: as 1917 progressed, most Latin American countries abandoned neutrality, with the exception of Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, and Paraguay, all of which remained neutral until the end of the war.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to its repudiation of the Pan-Americanism encouraged by the United States and its support of Pan-Hispanism, the anti-imperialist discourse of *La Unión* was nourished by a deep anti-Americanism. In this respect, the newspaper regularly denounced

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96 Tato, 'Disputa', p. 237.

97 'Contra la violencia', *La Mañana*, 15 April 1917; 'El gran escándalo diplomático' and 'La expulsión del ministro Luxburg', *La Época*, 13 September 1917; 'Los graves sucesos de ayer tarde y noche', *LU*, 13 September 1917.

98 'En La Unión', *LU*, 10 July 1917.

99 Weinmann, *Argentina*, pp. 141–3.

100 'La política panhispanista', *LU*, 4 July 1917.

101 Compagnon, 'Entrer'.

the United States for its 'insatiable imperialism, from which the small nations of Central America have painful and indelible marks' and for its foreign policy 'full of ambitions of territorial expansion at the expense of the other weak nations of this American continent',<sup>102</sup> and it called upon Argentine authorities and the rulers of other Latin American nations to reaffirm their sovereignty in matters of foreign affairs. Brazil's allegiance to the United States lent support to the angry criticism of *La Unión* against its neighbouring country, which was also accused of imperialism that had 'developed thanks to Hispanic-American nations' disunity, and which currently, because of the kind of foreign affairs it cultivates, may become a serious danger for South America'.<sup>103</sup> The Tjarks' newspaper publicized the book *Nuestra guerra: la coalición contra la Argentina* (Our war: the coalition against Argentina), written by its contributor Gonzalo de Reparaz under the pen name of Pedro de Córdoba.<sup>104</sup> The author deemed inexorable a military finale to the traditional rivalry between Brazil and Argentina, which was by that point being incited by the American government to weaken continental unity. Nevertheless, to avoid such a conflict in the short term, de Córdoba suggested defusing conflicts with other neighbouring countries, reaffirming 'the solidarity of our destinies, look for, altogether, the harmonic, friendly, and fraternal solution to the problems that divide us', and giving birth to a block of nations that he called 'Austral America', which would then be joined by an 'Equatorial America' and a 'Central America'.<sup>105</sup>

This anti-American campaign was not only motivated by politics and ideology but also economics. From the beginning of the Great War, the United States' interests advanced substantially in Latin America to the detriment of Britain as well as Germany. In the case of Argentina, exports to the USA grew from 4.7 per cent in 1913 to 18.4 per cent in 1919, while imports from the Northern power increased from 14.7 per cent in 1913 to 35.5 per cent in 1919.<sup>106</sup> As a result, the United Kingdom maintained a declining first place in Argentine foreign trade, and Germany lost its previous position to the USA. This commercial displacement represented a new challenge to the German economic status in Argentina and widened the range of enemies that *La Unión* would confront from its columns.

## Assessing the Impact of *La Unión*

The global character of the First World War is clearly evident in its echoes in neutral countries, which experienced the economic, political, and cultural effects of the confrontation between the belligerent powers. European migrants were a crucial factor in the globalization of the war, fighting it from afar and contributing to their fatherlands' war efforts through diverse activities, including the dissemination of propaganda.

102 'América y la guerra', *LU*, 5 April 1917.

103 'El Brasil imperialista', *LU*, 11 April 1917.

104 *La Unión* reproduced many praiseworthy comments on the book ('Nuevas publicaciones', *LU*, 13 July 1917, and 'Nuestra guerra', 22 October 1917).

105 Pedro de Córdoba, *Nuestra guerra: la coalición contra la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1917), pp. 63, 78.

106 Gravil, 'Connection', pp. 61, 84.

This article dealt with the case of the propaganda activities of the German community in Argentina through the daily newspaper *La Unión*, a local version of a reaction shared by similar communities all along the subcontinent to counteract Allied attacks. It aimed to offer a counterbalance to the pro-Allied perspectives of the conflict that dominated local public opinion due to cultural affinities and Allied control of the flow of information; it also worked to defend the status of the community facing economic war. Wartime lessened internal community divisions and brought about intense cooperation in pursuit of a common front to face the challenges of the time. *La Unión* was devised as a tool of self-defence and relied on support from the German government. Although it spread general propaganda topics used in different latitudes (an emphasis on German material achievements, the Triple Entente's responsibility for the war, alleged Allied barbarism, the infringement of sovereignty by Britain's economic war), the journal also enjoyed relative autonomy in setting its agenda according to local reality to try to connect with its specific readership. Thus, it not only distributed war news and universal propaganda produced by the German government but also addressed general current affairs, which undoubtedly gained the sustained favour of its audience.

*La Unión* maintained uninterrupted publication throughout the war and afterwards until 1923. Although the newspaper was devised as a war propaganda tool, the German government believed that it could be useful in the aftermath of the conflict.<sup>107</sup> However, several factors would have determined the suspension of official financial support. First, *La Unión* was not in tune with the political orientation of the new German government. During the Weimar Republic, the Tjarks resisted official directives by resuming the conservative and royalist stance that had defined the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* and enlisting those nostalgic for the Empire. Thus, for instance, although Walter Zechlin – from the Press Office of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs – recommended cautious treatment of the communication policy towards France, *La Unión* – under the influence of Hilmar von dem Busschen-Haddenhausen – adopted a more aggressive attitude.<sup>108</sup> Second, several accounting inconsistencies detected in the management of the newspaper would have reinforced the decision to eliminate the subsidies.<sup>109</sup>

After the war, internal dissensions reappeared within the community in the form of criticisms of the ethnic elite or different evaluations of the Weimar Republic experience.<sup>110</sup> Having survived the urgencies of wartime, the truce came to an end. The press

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107 Stefan Rinke, 'Der letzte freie Kontinent': *Deutsche Lateinamerikapolitik im Zeichen transnationaler Beziehungen, 1919–1933* (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1996), I, p. 500.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 499. Hilmar von dem Busschen-Haddenhausen was a former ambassador in Argentina, who became, after the war, an unofficial agent of the Kaiser loyalist cause (Newton, *Buenos Aires*, pp. 31, 111).

109 During the war, the Count of Luxburg, as well as his successor, Count Dönhoff, doubted the capacity of the Tjarks brothers to manage the newspaper. Count Dönhoff stated that they were 'completely incompetent to manage a great journalistic firm'. The final incident between the Tjarks and the Legation was related to the misrepresentation of the copies issued daily: the first reported having sold between 70,000 and 80,000, while in fact they only had sold between 30,000 and 35,000 (Ismar, *Pressekrieg*, p. 53).

110 Newton, *Buenos Aires*, pp. 45, 47–8.

reflected the community's fragmentation. The *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* and the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* returned to their usual clashes and at the same time faced the competition of new press initiatives, such as the monarchist *Unser Deutschland*, the anti-Semitic *Die Wacht*, the liberal *Neue Welt*, and the socialist *Neue Deutsche Zeitung*.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, the community prioritized other issues, such as the recovery of its previous economic positions. As a community businessman stated,

The German community no longer pays attention to propaganda, and all traders take care of their business in the belief that newspaper articles cannot change things. They try to find new ways to make a living, and in some way, they are right because it is difficult to achieve union if there are not issues of immediate interest.<sup>112</sup>

After the war, *La Unión's* *raison d'être* disappeared, and their former sponsors – the local community and the German government – decided to put an end to this journalistic experience.

Considering that its proclaimed purpose was to modify Argentine society's perception of Germany, *La Unión's* outcomes were limited: it could not dismantle the hegemonic stereotype of Germany entrenched in public opinion. A rooted Francophilism, combined with the Allied control over the flows of information, left very little room for alternative perspectives about the war and the warring nations.

Nevertheless, this should not detract from the accomplishments of *La Unión*. Its field of action was not limited by Argentine borders: it was the centre of a vast propaganda network in South America whose main activists were Hermann Tjarks and Wilhelm Keiper, partially financed by the German Legation in Argentina.<sup>113</sup> In addition to this wide range of influence, another important feature of the newspaper was its long life. It is remarkable that it had been able to maintain its daily battles for nearly a decade within a cultural environment recalcitrant towards Germanic values.

Furthermore, the voice of *La Unión* managed to expand its social reach in the aftermath of the war. Until 1917 the Tjarks' newspaper was devoted to vindicating Germany, denying journalistic information received from Allied sources, and emphasizing the virtues of German culture. Nevertheless, from 1917 onwards, encouraged by the local impact of the new situation created by submarine warfare and the entry of the USA into the war, the newspaper's discourse shifted to defending the Argentine government's neutrality, which seemed to be threatened by the growing activism of the rupturist cause. In this neutralist campaign, *La Unión* agreed with other sectors of society that supported neutrality for a wide range of reasons. *La Unión* highlighted certain topics that could be read in a nationalist key, therefore getting a wider audience. Thus, for instance, the invocation of Falklands irredentism was intended to dissolve solidarity in support of the British cause and to encourage the transference of this support to the German Empire, which was presented as the champion of the victims of British imperialism. For its part,

111 Rinke, *Kontinent*, p. 502.

112 CDMH, AGR, caja 119, Letter from Emilio Roehrs to Gonzalo de Reparaz, 14 May 1920.

113 Rinke, *Katastrophe*, p. 119.

the anti-blacklist campaign again recalled the United Kingdom's aggressions toward national sovereignty. Finally, the denunciation of USA expansionism in Latin America appealed to the extended notion of an Argentine manifest destiny in South America, supposedly threatened by the 'Colossus of the North' and its Brazilian partner. By embracing a much wider cause than the defence of Germany, the newspaper extended its reach to other sectors of Argentine society, thus overcoming the limitations of its initial appeal.

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