

Propaganda, Censorship, and the Shaping of the Brazilian Experience in the First World War

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Abstract: This article places itself within the renewal of the cultural-historical paradigm of the First World War and the global perspective of the conflict in Latin America. Due to the lesser intensity of its military involvement in the war, the region has been considered “peripheral” and largely overlooked by the historiography of the conflict. The First World War has also been relatively ignored by Brazilian historiography, although the country was the only South American nation to become a belligerent in 1917, a decisive year in the various theatres of the war. Thus, I seek to analyse the impact of propaganda and censorship in Brazil during the First World War, particularly when the country entered the conflict. It will tackle two main reactions unleashed by this event. On the one hand, it led the Allied to enlarge the production, translation, and distribution of war propaganda in Brazil. On the other hand, it gave rise to a novel approach regarding the Brazilian war effort, which was considered more valuable to the great powers in terms of transatlantic censorship. Ultimately, this assessment concludes that the Brazilian cultural and political mobilisation in the First World War was more complex and nuanced than the current historiography suggests.

Keywords: *First World War, Brazil and the Great War, Censorship in Brazil 1914-1918, Latin America and the Great War*

According to Jay Winter, “for nearly a century the Great War was framed in terms of a system of international relations in which the national and imperial levels of conflict and cooperation were taken as given. In recent decades, however, a new phase of writing has emerged, known as the ‘transnational generation.’” (Winter 2014, 6). This shift in historiography tends to discuss the war in a broader context that goes beyond Europe, recognising its trans-European, transatlantic and global nature, which can renew our understanding of the war’s impact. Therefore, taking into account a broader chronological framework to examine the conflict means decentring a national and Eurocentric perspective – focused on belligerence and military issues – and incorporating discussions about resources, mobilisation, colonial conflict, political violence, genocide and the global impact of conflict (Purseigle 2018, 30-32).

This paper aims to analyse the impact of propaganda and censorship in Brazil during the First World War, particularly after the country entered the conflict in 1917. It will consider two main reactions unleashed by this event.

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Firstly, Brazil's entry into the war prompted the Allies to expand the production, translation, and distribution of war propaganda in Brazil. However, my focus will not be on how this propaganda was received and interpreted by public opinion, but rather on its structural forms. Secondly, the declaration of war led to a new approach regarding the Brazilian position, which became more valuable to the great powers in terms of transatlantic censorship. Ultimately, this assessment concludes that the Brazilian cultural and political mobilisation in the First World War was more complex and nuanced than the current historiography suggests.

Propaganda and censorship as a war effort

During the First World War, the belligerent countries engaged in a discursive struggle to justify their participation in the conflict through the use of "propaganda." This term has historical roots dating back to the Reformation, and it was originally applied to methods used for spreading doctrine (Welch 2003, xvi). However, following the conclusion of the war in 1918, the term "propaganda" started to acquire a distinctly negative connotation, primarily influenced by the pervasive stories of wartime atrocities that circulated widely and profoundly altered public perceptions of the event, mainly from alleged "barbaric" acts committed by German soldiers against the Belgian population. Gradually, propaganda evolved into an organized weapon of modern warfare and became essential to the mobilization of societies during the conflict, contributing to the process of totalising warfare (Chickering 1999, 14-15). Waging total war implies the existence of an absolute enemy, which drives the concentration of technological and economic resources, either for internal purification or for the defence of national borders. Thus, from 1914 onwards, propaganda was deployed to manipulate collective attitudes, in particular by dehumanising the enemy, in order to guarantee civilian and military support and to justify the heavy casualties on the battlefields (Nagler 1999, 346-347).

In structural terms, the great powers initiated various state-driven efforts during the First World War. Official propaganda played a pivotal role in mobilising their respective national populations and disseminating ideas, both within their borders and in neutral and allied countries. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the war's propaganda campaign was decentralized, driven by committed civilians encompassing graphic designers, writers, musicians, and scientists. At the outset of the conflict, governments established state propaganda organizations, initially operating at local levels but gradually centralizing their efforts (Welch 2021).

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Notable agencies such as the *Maison de la Presse* in France and the Ministry of Information in England played crucial roles by censoring information, translating press articles, compensating photographers, and distributing materials worldwide. From 1917 onwards, governments launched more sophisticated propaganda campaigns, marking a new phase in their endeavours to win hearts and minds, both domestically and internationally. As an illustrative case in point, in the aftermath of its substantial setback at the pivotal Battle of Caporetto, Italy initiated a deliberate and strategic enhancement of its propaganda machinery (Row 2002, 144). Conversely, on the Eastern Front, the Central Powers orchestrated a more coordinated propaganda offensive against the Russian army, which would have a far-reaching impact on other theatres of the war (Cornwall 2000, 1-2).

Since August 1914, all belligerent countries actively harnessed cultural discourses to legitimise their extensive wartime efforts, both for soldiers and civilians. This undertaking was not limited to their national territory; it was imperative to garner the support of other nations as part of the broader economic and military strategies. Consequently, shaping public opinion became just as critical as recruiting troops and advancing modern warfare technology (Winter 1998, 218). Propaganda thus emerged as one among numerous facets of war culture (Becker & Audoin-Rouzeau 2003), which was true for nations directly embroiled in the main theatres of combat, as well as those on the periphery of the conflict. As a result, it significantly influenced how societies comprehended and experienced the war. As Jay Winter aptly observes,

the most powerful propaganda did not come from the centers of power, but rather from within these societies themselves. The politics of hate was mass politics; it was as much visual as verbal, and it was effective. It worked because it drew on images and notions broadcast from below, through commercial advertising, through cartoons, through posters and postcards, through sermons, through sentimental songs and the amateur poetry which flourished in wartime (Winter 1998, 218).

War propaganda assumed diverse forms, encompassing written texts in traditional media, visual imagery, physical objects, and speeches, for which the press was the main, but not the only, vehicle. In the Brazilian context, the dissemination of propaganda materials reached a wide spectrum, comprising pamphlets, books, cinematic productions, illustrated magazines, maps, calendars, lithographic panels, photographic exhibitions, posters, postcards, medals, and satirical cartoons, all within the national borders throughout the war.¹

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Predominantly, it was Great Britain that emerged as the leading producer, translator, and disseminator of this wartime propaganda, with the assistance of local diplomatic and consular agents. The official documentation preserved within the National Archives serves as a significant indicator of the extensive scope of the British propaganda campaign in Brazil. The confidential report originating from Wellington House in 1915 reveals a substantial body of work, encompassing 14 official British productions, 9 speeches, along 92 pamphlets and books, which were, to varying degrees, translated into Portuguese and other languages since the outbreak of the war. Notably, the illustrated periodical *O Espelho* stood as a remarkable support to this effort, being it disseminated fortnightly over the course of four years, thereby establishing itself as the most enduring publication in Portuguese language addressing the conflict. Moreover, the comprehensive inventory of visual materials derived from diverse sources, including *Album da Guerra*, *Echos da Guerra*, *La Guerre Illustré*, and *Le Monde Illustré*, further underscores the multifaceted nature of this propaganda campaign. Concurrently, the transmission of British films, particularly in the aftermath of a change in the directives from the Ministry of Information in 1918, augmented the reach of these persuasive initiatives.

Similarly, the United States directed a significant portion of their propaganda efforts towards the medium of cinema, recognizing its potential to engage and captivate audiences with varying levels of literacy. Conversely, German propaganda, while also notable, held a somewhat more restrained presence in Latin American countries, primarily channelled through immigrant publications and wireless broadcasts.² Significant periodicals were translated into Portuguese, such as *Welt im Bild*, an illustrated supplement of the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* newspaper, and *Der Große Krieg in Bildern*, published by *Transocean* in Berlin. Nonetheless, the influence of the international press was paramount across the region, keeping millions of inhabitants informed about the evolving dynamics of the war, particularly those unfolding on the European continent. In the Brazilian context, the dissemination of information from Europe was predominantly under the control of the Allies. Yet, the news underwent local reinterpretation and adaptation by writers and artists who aligned themselves with the Allied cause. Concurrently, there existed a distinct narrative promoted by voices sympathetic to the Central Powers, resulting in a complex discourse and symbolic production that demands attention and analysis (Claro 2022).

A significant turning point in the control of information occurred when Britain, with an act of paramount strategic importance, severed Germany's submarine telegraph cables connecting the nation to the Americas. This decisive

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move bestowed upon Britain a virtual monopoly over communications on the South American continent in the early months of the war (Tato 2014, 325). During this period, the global news dissemination landscape was largely under the influence of a consortium of four major companies: the French *Havas*, the British *Reuters*, the German *Wolff*, and the North American *Associated Press*. These entities effectively partitioned the world into distinct spheres of influence, further underlining the intricate web of information control during the era.

In the South American context, *Reuters* could gather local news, while *Havas* emerged as the primary agency responsible for supplying the press in Rio de Janeiro, which served as the capital of Brazil at the time (Enders & Compagnon 2004, 893). This influential role played by *Havas* and similar agencies facilitated the dissemination of information and the construction of narratives that legitimised the outbreak of the conflict, garnering the support of a significant portion of Brazil's intellectual elite. Therefore, newspapers and illustrated magazines assumed pivotal roles in ensuring that narratives related to the conflict reached broad audiences across Latin America. Subsequently, during the state of emergency, the local press experienced heightened levels of scrutiny and control by the state, further underscoring the evolving dynamics of information management during this period.

War propaganda was closely intertwined with this process, enabling the state to mould narratives that could rally national support by selectively withholding certain information. Both sides in the conflict recognized the press as a powerful tool for propaganda, using it as a platform to promote specific agendas, disseminate nationalistic ideas, and uphold the status quo. Nevertheless, while propaganda and censorship played vital roles in shaping wartime narratives, the public's response to these stories was more aligned with a process of consent, negotiation, and desire rather than outright manipulation and coercion (Winter 1998, 217).

In the context of the Brazilian state of war, by the end of 1917, the government had established national censorship guidelines under the oversight of multiple ministries. These regulations aimed to enforce strict control over military information as a means to safeguard the nation. However, the federal government made no substantial effort to intricately regulate wartime censorship, resulting in inconsistent applications and interpretations of media content. In Brazil and other nations during the First World War, censorship evolved, going beyond its initial purpose of preventing sensitive information from falling into enemy hands also to bolstering the morale of both citizens and

soldiers (Welch 2003, 70). Regarding the fundamental value of the mass media, Welch elucidates that the Great War

was the first modern war in which all the belligerents deployed the twin weapons of censorship and propaganda to rigidly control public opinion. Most nations considered it vital, from the point of view of national security, to control the means of communication. Of all the means available, none was more highly regarded than the press (70).

Wartime decrees allowed the nationalisation of schools and supported the repression and persecution of German-Brazilians and German-born residents (*Reichsdeutsche*), allowing aggressive action against any attempt at subversion of German origin in the major cities, especially in the southern provinces of the country (Bisher 2016, 162).³ German-Brazilians were also subject to censorship and additional legal requirements, including compulsory registration with the police. Furthermore, following the declaration of the state of emergency, approximately seven hundred German naval and military reservists were apprehended and transferred to internment camps.⁴ Such treatment, by and large, cast German-Brazilians as internal adversaries in the eyes of the political elites and public opinion.

In light of Brazil's relatively low susceptibility to national security threats, the discourse about external enemy threats was predominantly utilized as a means to quell local tensions, uphold social order, and provide validation for the nascent republican endeavour. In alignment with Olivier Compagnon's perspective (2014, 251), it can be posited that the decision to not only declare a state of belligerency but also to enact a state of emergency resonated with the nation's nationalist agenda, subsequently shaping the narrative surrounding Brazil's involvement in the war, as will be noted subsequently.

Framing Brazilian belligerence

The evolution of Latin American historiography on the First World War has distinctive characteristics. Initially, it developed from the 1950s to 1970s, rooted in Marxist economic history, and later shifted to the perspective of traditional international relations history. In recent years, spurred by cultural, global, and postcolonial perspectives, a resurgence of studies in the region has led to the publication of works on countries that were previously overlooked.⁵ This trend is discernible in Brazilian scholarship, where recent research on Brazil's involvement in the war has shifted its focus from updating the cultural history

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paradigm of war to adopting a global perspective on conflict in Latin America.

Formally, Brazil's contribution to the First World War was limited: the country sent a medical-military mission to France, nine Army and Navy Aviation officers to assist in aerial battles, and a naval division that tragically succumbed to influenza on the African coast in 1918. While traditionally considered a "peripheral" participant in the theatres of the Great War, Brazil was undeniably impacted by the conflict's global scale. Such impact reverberated across various sectors of the country, triggering repercussions in the political, economic, and social realms.⁶ Diplomatic relations with Berlin were particularly strained due to unrestricted submarine warfare and the blockade of the region. The political crisis escalated with the United States' entry into the conflict in April 1917, leading to a lack of consensus on the neutrality of several nations in the hemisphere. Consequently, several Latin American countries severed diplomatic ties with Germany.⁷

Brazil's decision to align itself with the Allies was significantly influenced by two key factors: declining exports during the war and German submarine attacks on Brazilian ships in the Southern Atlantic Ocean. These submarine attacks were perceived as not only a breach of Brazilian sovereignty but also as a violation of international laws of war, leading to a significant deterioration in diplomatic relations between Brazil and Germany throughout 1917. In the diplomatic context, the global conflict presented an opportunity for Brazil to assert its political influence in South America, especially concerning its neighbour, Argentina. Finally, joining the Allies was perceived as a means to secure a seat at the peace negotiations for the establishment of a new world order, which would further solidify Brazil's diplomatic role in the global landscape (Compagnon 2014, 147-148).

In response to mounting pressure from public opinion, the press, and various sectors of society, the Brazilian government declared war on Germany in October 1917. Just one month later, amid significant controversy in the National Congress, a state of emergency was officially declared. This declaration, known as "estado de sítio", was based on the perceived threat to national sovereignty resulting from frequent German attacks on Brazilian ships, as mentioned earlier. The exceptional measure involved the suspension of constitutional guarantees, granting the federal government supremacy over the legislative and judiciary powers, along with the restriction of certain freedoms.

As in most countries, the war had a detrimental impact on the Brazilian economy, particularly affecting exports of primary products, with coffee being the primary casualty. Consequently, it led to a rise in the cost of living and

exacerbated existing social tensions, which were further intensified by a wave of strikes that swept across the country in 1917. It is noteworthy that labour struggles were not unique to Brazil; they were observed throughout Latin America until 1919, occurring in countries such as Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Cuba, a phenomenon closely connected to the global influence of the Russian Revolution (Rinke 2017, 79). In Brazil, the declaration of a state of emergency granted authorities the power to respond firmly to militants, as part of on-going efforts to suppress the workers' movement. This action was framed within a discourse of social hygiene, targeting groups considered "undesirable" in the national territory.⁸

The outbreak of the Great War introduced measures against foreign enemies and civilians, marking the beginning of a systematic repression of immigrants and their descendants. This practice would later reach its zenith during the Second World War. Prior to this, in times of conflict, very few governments had implemented such measures since the protection of foreign citizens and their property was a well-established norm in international law (Rohr 2003, 1-2). However, in the context of the Great War, a shift occurred. Strong nationalistic perspectives shaped a new logic of warfare, leading several belligerent states from 1914 to 1918 to incorporate population control as a core component of their strategies. As a result, a global pattern emerged, characterized by the persecution of minorities and the dehumanization of the adversary. "The enemy", according to George Mosse, "was transformed into the anti-type, symbolizing the reversal of all the values which society held dear" (1990, 174). This wartime experience was made possible through a combination of public support and government policies that collectively brutalised, physically assaulted, and disenfranchised foreign groups (Panayi 2004, 3).

In Brazil, the imposition of the "estado de sítio" granted the government the authority to enact measures aimed at exerting control over the country's sizable German community.⁹ This particular ethnic group had maintained strong connections to their German heritage, thereby presenting a challenge to the emerging national identity envisioned by the intellectuals of the young republic (Vogt 2007, 226).¹⁰ To address this challenge, those in power believed that the German-Brazilians were too culturally distinct and needed to be assimilated into the broader Brazilian society. Nonetheless, the situation exhibited greater complexity, as Brazil's immigration policy inadvertently perpetuated the ethnic isolation of this group through the deliberate settlement of recently arrived immigrants in remote and scarcely populated rural regions (Seyferth 1992).

At the heart of the nationalist discourse lay a profound aversion towards

anarchists and other labour movement affiliates, who had long been perceived as subversive elements since the early twentieth century. In the eyes of the authorities, these individuals posed a dual threat as they not only destabilized public order and clashed with the interests of industrialists but also defied the very notion of the homeland itself (Carvalho 1990, 60). This staunch opposition marked them as a group resistant to assimilation into the state, leading to severe repression through both physical and legal means.

The Brazilian government's actions were part of a wider movement since the First World War inaugurated a permanent state of emergency in the belligerent countries, which became an essential practice of contemporary nation-states, including democracies. In fact, the "estado de sítio" was already a recurrent measure in the early years of the First Brazilian Republic and would continue until its end.¹¹ The Great War, however, gave this legal measure a special quality, justifying its use to support national sovereignty in the face of an external threat. Following an intense debate in the National Congress, the proposal of November 1917 for a state of emergency was gradually adopted by the political sectors, until the final word was given by the President of the Republic, Venceslau Brás (Gasparetto Júnior 2018, 236). This authoritarian orientation would affect the organisation of propaganda and war censorship in the country.

Luring neutrals: The Allied agenda in Brazil

On 10th November 1917, Brazil declared a state of emergency and established guidelines aimed at the regulation and control of information dissemination within the nation concerning the on-going war. These measures were aligned with the strategic interests of the belligerent powers and conformed to their respective paradigms of propaganda and censorship. The unprecedented and transformative nature of the Great War resulted in the suspension of constitutional guarantees in numerous countries, thereby precipitating ethical breaches of hitherto unparalleled magnitude. Furthermore, it prompted international collaboration that often tested the legal boundaries of such endeavours. In this context, the structure of Brazilian censorship, once established in a state of war, underwent several adjustments to align with the framework employed by the Allied system powers in 1917.

The United States' entry into the conflict as an active participant prompted the administration under President Wilson to expedite the establishment of global communication networks. On the continent, the US government actively sought to serve as an intermediary between its European allies and Brazil for

the establishment of a censorship base in the country.¹² This collaboration commenced in 1917 when the United States expressed their interest in jointly operating telegraph stations in the provinces of Pará and Pernambuco, located in the North and north-eastern regions of Brazil, respectively.¹³ Wilson appointed Navy Lieutenant William Young Boyd,¹⁴ a member of the Telegraph Control Commission stationed in Gibraltar, to assist in the implementation of this endeavour in Pernambuco.¹⁵ To learn more about censorship methods, Boyd underwent preparatory training and consultation with the Chief Cable Censor in Washington DC prior to his departure for Brazil, which was facilitated with the help of Captain J. H. Trye,¹⁶ a liaison officer and member of the British Mission in Rio (Winkler 2008, 124; see also Lyddon 1938).

The first reference to the Brazilian Censorship Commission (*Comissão Brasileira de Censura*) materialized in December 1917, through a memorandum dispatched by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nilo Peçanha, to the British Minister for Brazil. Concurrently, the President of the Republic Venceslau Brás extended official authorization to the allied governments, permitting them to dispatch their representatives to collaborate with Brazilian authorities stationed across various regions of the country for the purpose of overseeing the censorship of telegraph and radiotelegraph communications. France also formally lent its endorsement to this initiative and requested that Boyd concurrently act as its representative. In contrast, Great Britain's attempts to deploy its own representatives were thwarted when their officers encountered a shipwreck in March 1918 and subsequently returned to Belfast.¹⁷

Throughout the course of the war, the United States harboured an interest in exerting control over the dissemination of information within Brazil. Leveraging its intelligence apparatus, Washington successfully intercepted radio transmissions between South American and German operatives, which revolved around the maintenance of a favourable exchange rate in neutral European countries, a strategy devised to benefit German financial institutions and trading enterprises. Wilson's overarching objective was to disrupt these communications, thereby devaluing the exchange rate and consequently inflicting harm upon the German economy. In conjunction with these efforts, there was a concerted endeavour to impede the transmission of military intelligence, particularly information concerning troop deployments.¹⁸ Finally, the establishment of an efficient telegraphic censorship service also aimed to proactively prevent South America from extending material support to Germany, given the region's significant economic affiliations with the Central Powers.¹⁹

Beyond economic and military considerations, another facet of information control pertained to the imperative of securing popular support, a matter of decisive significance during the Great War. In April 1917, President Wilson established the *Committee on Public Information* (CPI), a national propaganda apparatus under the leadership of George Creel, “to fill the information void left by [the government’s] strict control on the expression and distribution of fact and opinion” (Fisher 2016, 57). The CPI embarked on a multifaceted effort that included the production of various informational resources such as pamphlets, films, and illustrations. In addition to these endeavours, the organisation extended its reach globally by establishing a foreign section and deploying “publicity agents” to numerous world capitals, including Madrid, Moscow, Rome, and Rio de Janeiro (Hasian 1998, 51-55).²⁰ This strategic manoeuvre allowed the United States to engage in proactive efforts to shape international perceptions and garner support for its wartime endeavours.

The CPI extended its influence to numerous nations, with its undertakings in Latin America assuming particular significance. Tasked with the role of intermediary between the United States government and the Latin American region, the *Creel Committee* adeptly propagated war-related information via various mediums, including pamphlets, photographs, films, newsreels, and lithographs. This propaganda served a dual purpose: firstly, it aimed to portray the United States as a paragon of “civilization”, deliberately highlighting a stark dichotomy with the perceived “barbarism” associated with Germanic entities. Secondly, it actively advocated the United States as a staunch advocate of liberal democracy, while concurrently facilitating the dissemination of American values on a broader, international scale (see Government of the United States 1920). Notably, the CPI emerged as a precursor to American foreign policy in Latin America during the 1930s and 1940s, which would subsequently adopt a paradigm of cultural rapprochement (Larson & Mock 1939, 321).

In Brazil, the activities of the *Creel Committee* were primarily conducted through the channels and publicity materials made available by the US Embassy. It is worth noting that cable news, however, remained under the control of the French news agency *Havas* at that time (Mock 1942, 273). As the war progressed, both in Brazil and throughout South America, American news agencies, namely *Associated Press* and *United Press*, gradually assumed control of communication networks, which was pivotal in ensuring the on-going operation of the CPI.

In this context, the contributions of Ambassador Edwin Morgan and Lieutenant William Boyd can be construed as more than mere expressions of the United States' wartime engagement in Brazil. They also represent integral components of a more expansive initiative that transcended the duration of the conflict, bearing discernible ideological dimensions, particularly within the framework of Pan-Americanism.²¹ The endeavours associated with the *Committee on Public Information* served as a mechanism not only to counteract German propaganda but also to regulate broader communication with Latin America. Nevertheless, the efficacy of such endeavours proved limited by several factors, chiefly the sophisticated strategies employed by Germany to infiltrate the region and the relative inexperience of the United States and its allies in intercepting and obstructing such communications (Government of the United States 1920, 105).

It is noteworthy that concurrently, Britain sought to bolster its strategic standing in the region following the war, with an aim to supplant the firmly entrenched German commercial interests with British enterprises. According to Emily Rosenberg, the British Foreign Office meticulously devised an economic blueprint to fortify its prospective foothold in Brazil. However, these strategic endeavours faced considerable hindrance, stemming from internal opposition within the department, particularly from the Treasury, and external opposition from Washington. The United States, in particular, voiced their disapproval of any financial interventions initiated by Britain and France within Brazilian territory (Rosenberg 1978, 136-139).²²

The internal correspondences within the British government underscored the potential advantages associated with Brazil's prospective entry into the conflict. On the one hand, benefits encompassed enhanced control over the export of South American commodities, particularly rare metals, and the commandeering of German and Austrian vessels interned in Brazilian harbours. On the other hand, the British government expressed reservations about financing Brazil's military involvement in the European theatre of war, given the limited capacity of this South American nation to provide substantial contributions in that arena.

Nonetheless, the overarching objective of this effort extended beyond the immediate exigencies of the war. It represented a fertile opportunity to consolidate a more substantial sphere of influence within Brazil, a goal that could be further reinforced through propagandistic efforts. In 1915, the British Ministry in Rio de Janeiro, Arthur Peel, articulated this perspective as follows:

In making the above suggestions I confess that my idea is that the effort should be

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sustained, and that we should lay a sure foundation for the future, rather than expect to glean immediate advantage from the somewhat discouraging present. If we are to compete with the Germans, to take part in the development of what is, naturally, one of the most variously endowed countries in the world, we must show a living interest in its people, study their institutions and, if possible, lend them an understanding and helping hand, financially and commercially, in recognition of the fact that they have done their best for us in this crisis.²³

This statement underscores the multifaceted nature of the propaganda efforts undertaken by Great Britain in Brazil and Latin America, which, by all accounts, held a more prominent position than that of France. These initiatives served not only as a means to legitimize the narrative of the continuing war but also as tools aligned with various other strategic interests in the region, many of which, in hindsight, would prove unsuccessful post-1918. Economic imperatives underpinned these endeavours, and they were manifest in concrete initiatives, exemplified by a mission led by Maurice de Bunsen, which was subsequently reinforced in 1919 through the visit of Roberto Simonsen and Ernest Hambloch to the United Kingdom on behalf of a Brazilian trade mission.²⁴ Through the coordinated efforts of numerous stakeholders within Brazil, the sphere of war propaganda engaged in a constructive dialogue with the broader discourses of the era, encompassing themes of sympathy and belonging that intertwined race, culture, and trade within the region.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of the First World War, the great powers acknowledged the vital roles played by both propaganda and censorship as indispensable instruments in the broader war effort. Yet, the deployment of these tools was far from straightforward, characterized by a non-linear trajectory punctuated by significant challenges. This complexity emerged from the evolving nature of the conflict itself, which transitioned from being a war commenced with limited objectives to becoming a totalizing enterprise aimed at securing ultimate victory. The First World War experience illuminated a crucial lesson for these nations: public opinion, susceptible to influence through national propaganda, would henceforth wield considerable influence in shaping future policy formulations (Sanders & Taylor 1982, 248).²⁵

Brazil experienced the reverberations of the First World War through several impactful channels, ranging from the erosion of its trade balance to the torpedoing of its ships. This tumultuous period also bore witness to the

rekindling of nationalist dialogues and the establishment of a civilian association wherein individuals rallied both in support of and in opposition to the war. While Brazil's unique circumstances, marked by its non-involvement in frontline campaigns, set it apart, its war-related experience was neither insular nor insignificant. On the contrary, it was thoroughly politicized and internalized, aligning with broader patterns of mobilization that extended beyond a "peripheral" characterization. Its engagement was, in fact, an integral facet of the First World War's complex tapestry. Within this context, Brazil assumed a belligerent stance and effectively aligned itself with the Allied powers, most notably the United States, particularly in the domains of propaganda and war censorship.

Contrary to more conventional historiography, the Brazilian experience reveals a deep integration with the political-economic agendas of Allied countries that transcended mere formal support, exemplified by the limited dispatch of doctors, sailors, and aviators to Europe. More notably, a substantial material effort was undertaken to garner Brazilian public support and, ultimately, to fill the gap left by the German companies with an anticipated victory.

Nevertheless, the Great War marked a pivotal juncture in the interactions among major global powers, and notably, in the context of Latin America, it ushered in economic transformations that predominantly favoured the United States. The events during this period served to lay the groundwork for new dynamics in inter-country relations within the region, which would further intensify during the Second World War and persist throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. As early as 1916, the United States surpassed Great Britain to become Brazil's largest trading partner. Thereby the war prompted Washington to recognize the limits of its influence in Latin America and set in motion a rapid expansion, particularly in Brazil, where the challenge to British economic supremacy gained substantial momentum.

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280-2-13

284-2-8

301-4-14

303-4-1

305-2-14

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- ¹ *Exposição*. In *O Paiz*, 6 October 1915, 7; National Archives, London. Correspondence from Thomas Contrell Dillon to Stephen Gaselee, *Foreign Office*. 14 February and 31 March 1918. FO 395 – 251. Also see FO 395 – 76; *Report*. Dezembro de 1917. FO 395 – 235 and FO 395 – 251; correspondence from Francis Edward Drummond-Hay to *Foreign Office*. 26 March 1917. FO 395 – 142; correspondence from *Foreign Office* British Consulates. January 1917. FO 395 – 137; memos from the Committee of Uruguay written by Charles W. Bayne (*British Patriotic Fund*) to *Foreign Office*. 14 November 1917, 20 January 1918 e January 1918. FO 395 – 252; correspondence from *News Department (Foreign Office)* to British Legation. 5 April 1917. FO 395 – 76; telegram from Charles W. Bayne, *British Patriotic Fund*, to *Foreign Office*. 11 April 1918. FO 395 – 252; correspondence from British Consulate of Rio Grande do Sul to Stephen Gaselee, *Foreign Office*. FO 395 – 251, and Government of the United States (1920, 135).
- ² National Archives, London, FO 371-2212; FO 371-2213; FO 371-2218; FO 371-2552; FO 371-2559 and FO 371-2580.
- ³ The idea of nationalising schools was not new in Brazil. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the teaching of German in particular was seen as a form of resistance to national assimilation and a way of preserving German identity. German immigrants began to fear the loss of their identity, which led them to develop strong community enterprises, including investments in schools, which were built with almost no state support. At the same time, other ethnic groups, such as Italians, Poles, and Japanese were increasingly present in Brazil, especially in the south. See Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence from Nilo Peçanha to Carlos Maximiliano. 23 January 1918 and 31 July 1918. 303-4-1; correspondence from Carlos Maximiliano to Nilo Peçanha. Rio de Janeiro, 21 February 1918 and 23 April 1918. 301-4-14; and Klug (1997, 181-182).
- ⁴ Although imprisonment has been a common practice throughout the history of warfare, at the end of the nineteenth century the violence of armed conflicts increasingly affected civilian populations. It was during this period that a new form of confinement was introduced with the creation of internment camps. The camps created during the First World War were to a large extent a development of practices initially implemented in colonial wars and were characterised by impoverishment for all imprisoned, including children, women and the elderly. For an analysis of the concentration camps of the First World War, see Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker (2003, 70-90). The concentration camp phenomenon of that period differs from the concentration camp system that characterised the Second World War (see Wieviorka, 1997).
- ⁵ We must take into account the non-essentialisation of the notion of “Latin America”, since the effects of the war in the region were manifold.
- ⁶ While the theoretical reference for *total war* used in this article is that developed by John Horne (1997), it should take into account the different uses that this concept has had over the decades, responding to specific agendas. The idea is originally associated with the dominant narrative of modern military history, informing histories of combat such as the French Revolution and the American Civil War, and also with philosophical premises of German origin. These include Carl von Clausewitz’s notion of “absolute war”, the Weberian ideal type and Erich Ludendorff’s “total war”. This article uses the expression as a theoretical perspective for analysing the phenomenon of the First World War in Brazil. For more details see Chickering (1999); Strachan (2000); Sesseger (2014).
- ⁷ This was also the case in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

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- ⁸ In addition to strikes related to living and working conditions, there were patriotic factory closures as a form of pressure for Brazil's entry into the conflict. Unions also organised street fundraising campaigns to contribute to the war effort.
- ⁹ In the nineteenth century, Brazil was an attractive destination for Germans. At the time of the First World War, the community comprised approximately 400,000 people of German origin, who settled mainly in the southern states of Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul.
- ¹⁰ Brazil became a republic in 1889, and the First World War fell within the so-called First Republic (1889-1930), when various groups competed to promote their vision of national identity.
- ¹¹ For an analysis of the German perspective see Welch (2000, 14). For the French case see Crochet (2007) and Sorrie (2014, 47). Finally, for the British perspective see Cotter (1953) and Hynes (2017).
- ¹² Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence from the US Embassy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil. 15 December. 280-2-13 and telegram from Nilo Peçanha to Augusto Tavares de Lira. Rio de Janeiro, 31 January 1918. 305-2-15.
- ¹³ Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence from Edwin Morgan (US Embassy) to Nilo Peçanha (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil). 18 July 1917. 280-2-13.
- ¹⁴ Born in 1884 in the town of Auburn, New York, William Young Boyd graduated from Syracuse University in 1906. From 1910 to 1917 he worked as a foreign trade consultant and analyst. For more details on the mission of William Boyd to Brazil see Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence Edwin Morgan (US Embassy) to Nilo Peçanha (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil). 28 November 1917. 280-2-13.
- ¹⁵ Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence from Paul Claudel (Legation of France) to Nilo Peçanha (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil). 26 January 1918. 284-2-8.
- ¹⁶ National Archives, London. Correspondence from War Office to Hubert Montgomery, *Foreign Office*. 19 November 1917. FO 395 – 157.
- ¹⁷ London-born Gerald Clair William Camden Wheeler (1872-1943) was a trained anthropologist who spoke several languages, including Portuguese. He published *The Tribes and Intertribal Relations in Australia* (1910) and, years later, *Mono-Alu Folklore* (1926), after spending time in the Solomon Islands. There is little information about the second man, but a certain Johnstone is named in M.I.7b's (British Military Intelligence) correspondence with the Foreign Office, in which the officer in question is referred to as being responsible for intercepting German correspondence bound for South America. (Cf. FO 395 – 231). National Archives, London. Correspondence from *Foreign Office* to Arthur Peel (British Legation). 16 March 1918. FO 395 – 258 and Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence from Nilo Peçanha to Augusto Tavares de Lira. Rio de Janeiro, 5 June 1918. 305-2-15.
- ¹⁸ Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence Nilo Peçanha (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil) to Augusto Tavares de Lira. Rio de Janeiro, 6 June 1917. 305-2-14.
- ¹⁹ Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro. Correspondence S Embassy to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil). 27 November 1917. 280-2-13.
- ²⁰ The infiltration of these countries was not limited to the production of propaganda material itself. It also included cooperation with educational and charitable organisations and the promotion to teach and promote English.

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- ²¹ Pan-Americanism was a US policy that sought to promote continental cooperation between the United States and Latin America at the economic, legal and intellectual levels and was to some extent related to the Monroe Doctrine.
- ²² Correspondence between the British government and its agents in Rio de Janeiro during the war, Barry Walter Munn also emphasises the possible contribution that Brazil could make in this regard. In his words, “Brazil could perform an inestimable service by closing down German banks and commercial organizations still operating in the country, thus interfering with German communications and blocking the future development of her trade” (1971, 215).
- ²³ National Archives, London. Correspondence from Arnold Robertson (British Legation) to Edward Grey, *Foreign Office*. 23 April 1915. FO 371 – 2294.
- ²⁴ Bunsen served as Ambassador in Vienna until the war broke out. In 1918, the Foreign Office sent him to Latin America, and he visited the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Santos. The purpose of his mission was to discuss the British interests in the region during the conflict. His mission also looked ahead to the post-war period, both in seeking more effective measures to deal with the collapse of German trade, and in seeking to strengthen the patriotism of British expatriates.
- ²⁵ Historian Emily Rosenberg maintains that “the war [...] stimulated observations about the effects of “mass” persuasion on the future of democracy [...] Propaganda provided new and potentially powerful means to exercise leadership in a democracy. It also provided innovative and possibly potent means to deceive and mislead” (2010, 59).