

***The Marginalia of the History of Neutrality in the Great War. Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective.***

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Despite the development in research on neutrality during the First World War, there is still much to be learned about that complex position in such a global conflict.<sup>1</sup> In particular, least studied aspects are related to the Southern Europe periphery<sup>2</sup>, a context in which neutrality failed as a feasible option. There are few studies that comprehensively deal with the subject and almost none compares national experiences on the regional scale.

Overall, case studies are related to local experiences and do not cover the broad-spectrum of neutrality implications, neither at a domestic level nor at an international level. On one hand, the existing narratives are partial and constructed on local accounts in teleological relation to national historical evolvement. On the other hand, the fragmentation of academic contributions has also prevented from a comparative narrative or general explanation of the neutrality issue in the Mediterranean theatre. Specific research has long circulated within relatively small scholarly circles.<sup>3</sup> So, meaningful progress should be made not only in establishing methodological criteria for the historical analysis of neutrality in Southern Europe but also in setting up a specific research network. Theories and methods from the diplomatic history, economic history, social history and cultural history should be better integrated in new approaches to the issue.

### **Finding Regional Patterns**

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\*JAE-DOC Program (EU funding)

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive insight into the topic: S. KRUIZINGA: "Neutrality" in J. WINTER (ed.): *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume II: The State*, Cambridge University, 2014, pp.542-576.

<sup>2</sup> By *periphery* we mean here regions that were far from the Central Europe epicenters of the armed conflict.

<sup>3</sup> However, the current improvement due to collaborative networks within the First World War Studies field should be acknowledged because of high parameters of internationalisation of research and scientific dissemination. See the outstanding outcomes of the international project *1914-1918 on line* or the collective efforts of the First World War Society Studies, <http://www.firstworldwarstudies.org/bibliography.php>.

On the bases of existing scholarly research, it is possible to identify constructions of neutral discourses in the North of Europe. Holland, the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland would respectively have fought for their neutrality, not only as their right to have an autonomous international policy but also as the foundation for their national self-identity and integrity.<sup>4</sup> Bordering neutrals had to learn at their cost that their status entailed severe disadvantages. They were inevitably “caught in the middle” of warring pressures. The Dutch experience has extensively been studied from this perspective.<sup>5</sup> Actually, one of the most interesting aspects of civilian experiences bordering on war was the elaboration of a memory and collective understanding of neutrality in connection with the effects of the conflict on their daily life. The harshness of war experiences and humanitarian calamities would finally make full sense of a neutral stance.

Neutrality, on the contrary, did not seem to be a suitable guarantee for surviving the war intact in the South of Europe, where *neutralities* were intertwined with *belligerencies*. While geographical factors would have been decisive for the maintenance of neutrality in the North of Europe, the same factors counted against neutral states in the South. Only Spain remained neutral throughout the conflict. However, a full range of questions remains open against this background. Neutrality has mainly been seen as a preparation phase for war or for revolution (even for both), so the way in which those societies represented themselves as neutrals has been rather overlooked.

Even though domestic tensions played a decisive role in the maintenance/abandonment of neutrality, it is clear that this primary approach tends to neglect a completely different dimension of the question: neutral roles and regional

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<sup>4</sup> Among recent compilation works that might be cited: Johan DEN HERTOOG and Samuël KRUIZINGA (eds.): *Caught in the Middle. Neutrals, Neutrality and the First World War*, Amsterdam University Press, 2011; C. AHLUND (ed.): *Scandinavia in the First World War: Studies in the War Experience of the Northern Neutrals*, Nordic Academic Press, 2012; Roman ROSSFELD, Thomas BUOMBERGER, and Patrick KURY (eds.): *La Suisse et la Grande Guerre*, Hier + Jetzt, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, P.v T. VAN SEROSKEEN: *The Netherlands and World War I. Espionage, Diplomacy and Survival*, Leiden, Brill, 2001; M. ABBENHUIS: *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918*, Amsterdam University Press, 2006; S. KRUIZINGA: "Government by Committee. Dutch Economic Neutrality and the First World War", in James E. KITCHEN, Alisa MILLER and Laura ROWE (ed.): *Other Combatants, Other Fronts. Competing Histories of the First World War*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 99-124; Wim KINKLERT: *Defending Neutrality: The Netherlands prepares for War, 1900-1925*, Brill, 2013. For social and intellectual Dutch representations see Ismee TAMES: “War on Our Minds: “War, Neutrality and Identity in Dutch Public Debate during the First World War”, *First World War Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012), pp. 201–16.

transferences within a context where high internal volatility and allied pressures made negotiating neutrality strenuous.

In Greece, for instance, war would have come as the extension of the operations in the Balkan front. In 1913 its territory significantly increased as a result of the Balkan wars while the government in Athens might hardly guarantee the new gains against foreign aggression (expectedly coming from Bulgaria). The Greek policymakers' position at the beginning of the conflict would be that the country kept benevolent neutrality towards Serbia. However, their country suffered from repeated violations of sovereignty as shown in Salonika.<sup>6</sup> That "violated" neutrality coincided with the *Ethnikos Diasmós*. Therefore, historiography has primarily focused on that profound civilian conflict. The national schism was politically visible in the harsh discrepancies between the Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos and the King Constantino I.<sup>7</sup> But academic contributions has not specifically addressed neither Greek public mind nor the extent to which representations of neutrality were present in public discourses and cultural life, beyond the *Ethnikos Diasmós* in the context of a long term domestic crisis.

In the Italian case, despite the popular negative responses to the Libyan war, the nationalist irredentism with its Adriatic aspirations carried weight in tipping the balance against neutrality.<sup>8</sup> The same can be said of Romania, with its territorial ambitions in Transylvania. Both countries entered into the war against former allies. Vigezzi stated that the Italian decision to remain neutral was harder to make than the decision to go to war.<sup>9</sup> Actually, the controversial process that explains the *Intervento* has been one of the most studied from the immediate post-war period. After a first generation of Italian historians, who could not publicly discuss the sacredness of a patriotic war, critical

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<sup>6</sup> R. PORTE: "Comment faire plier un neutre ? L'action politique et militaire de la France en Grèce (1915-1917)." *Cahiers de la Méditerranée, La Grande Guerre en Méditerranée*, (December 15, 2010), pp. 45–62. Kostas KOSTIS : "La paix introuvable : le cas grec", in Stéphane AUDOUIN-ROUZEAU and Christophe PROCHASSON (ed.): *Sortir de la Grande Guerre : le monde et l'après-1918*, Paris, Tallandier, 2008, pp. 349–366.

<sup>7</sup> See reference book by George B. LEON: *Greece and the First World War: from neutrality to intervention, 1917-1918*, Columbia University Press, 1990. Contemporary views on this issue: *Hē historia tou ethnikou dichasmou kata tēn arthrographia tou Eleutheriou Venizelou kai tou Iōannou Metaxa* (Thessaloniki 2003).

<sup>8</sup> G. E. RUSCONI: *L'azzardo del 1915. Come L'Italia decide la sua Guerra*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Vigezzi's book continues to be a landmark in the historiography of the period: B. VIGEZZI: *L'Italia neutrale*. Volume 1 of *L'Italia di fronte alla prima guerra mondiale*, Milano, Ricciardi, 1966.

historical assessments even reached the conclusion that the belligerence might have been the result of a Prime Minister Antonio Salandra's *Coup d'Etat*.<sup>10</sup>

On the whole, Italian discourses on neutrality has almost entirely been interpreted from the *Intervento* outcomes and post-war perspectives. Ventroni gave, for instance, a suggestive insight into the pre-war period focused on the political violence exerted against neutralists, considered as a fifth column (internal enemies would have been more targeted than the external ones).<sup>11</sup> The war experiences consequently prefigured political practices of the fascism. So, despite a few remarkable exceptions, the academic terms of the national debate on neutrality are practically the same that they were forty years ago.<sup>12</sup> There are no comprehensive narratives about what socially meant to be neutral (even when a vast majority of Italian people would have declared themselves neutralists in 1915). In this vein, among all Italian titles published within the centennial, we should highlight the collective work edited by Fulvio Cammerano on neutralists praxis. The essays compiled in it revolve around the social mobilization of the so-called *neutralisms*.<sup>13</sup>

As a rule, the struggle for national state reforms (under revolutionary threats) worked in warmongers favour in the region. Militarists and radical jingoists, despite being a political minority, successfully mobilized the domestic public opinion towards the Entente Powers. This also happened in Portugal, whose neutrality is particularly worthy of attention because it had an African dimension and was linked with the Spanish politics as well. The Portuguese “ambiguous neutrality” was considered as an instability factor for the Spanish statecraft.<sup>14</sup> In 1914 Portugal, despite being neutral, mobilized its military forces in Angola and Mozambique against German expansion.

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<sup>10</sup> G. VOLPE: *Il Popolo italiano tra la pace e la guerra* (1914-1915), Istituto per gli Studi di Politica, Milano, 1940; C. DE BIASE: *Concezione nazionale e concezione democratica dell'intervento italiano nella prima guerra mondiale*, Roma, 1964; a general insight of Italian politics from classic diplomatic history in P. PASTORELLI: *Dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale. Momenti e problemi della politica estera italiana (1914-1943)*, Roma (ed. 1998).

<sup>11</sup> A. VENTRONE: *La seduzione totalitaria. Guerra, modernità, violenza politica (1914-1918)*, Roma, Donzelli, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Daniela Caglioti's research on enemy aliens' legislation should be marked in connection with the evolution of economic nationalism and German xenophobia in neutral arenas. D. L. CAGLIOTI: “Germanophobia and Economic Nationalism: Government Policies against Enemy Aliens in Italy during the First World War” in Panayi PANIKOS (coord.), *Germans as Minorities during the First World War. A Global Comparative Perspective*, UK, 2014, pp. 147–70; “Why and how Italy invented an enemy aliens Problem in the First World War”, *War in History*, 21/2 (2014), pp. 142–69.

<sup>13</sup> F. CAMMARANO (ed.): *Abasso la Guerra! Neutralisti in piazza alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale in Italia*, Milano, Mondadori Education, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> H. DE LA TORRE: *El imperio del Rey: Alfonso XIII, Portugal y los ingleses (1907-1916)*, Junta de Extremadura, 2002.

However, in Africa, the self-defensive objectives were rather different from those to achieve after March 1916 in the European war. The latter were, namely, consolidating the new republican system and bringing the King of Spain's chimeras of Iberian unity to an end.<sup>15</sup> However the war, far from consolidating the democratic republican system, challenged it. Inflation and lack of foodstuffs provoked strikes and military *coup d'états* (resulting in the *sidonismo*).<sup>16</sup>

Only Spain kept the neutral status throughout the conflict. In 1914, Spanish colonial ambitions revolved around Tangier and the hope that the French officially recognized a Spanish protectorate in Morocco, to which Paris Governments had firmly opposed since November 1912. On one hand, entering the war alongside its traditional "international friends", Great Britain and France, would be a rather risky choice, given that Britain might only satisfy Spain's ambitions in Morocco at the expense of its main war ally, France.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the King Alfonso XIII wished to take advantage of the Spanish neutrality, presenting himself as a pacifist and a humanitarian king.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, Spain fluctuated "between war and revolution" while a civil "war of words" between Germanófilos and Aliadófilos flared up.<sup>19</sup> Generally, left-wing workers (so-called the "real Spain") would have been ideologically closer to the Allies, whereas church and monarchist parties (identified with the "official Spain") actively supported the German cause (identified as the neutralist party).<sup>20</sup> However, the German policy still needs to be extensively studied and measured itself against the allied strategies in Spain. In general, there is a significant lack in analyses that interweave external elements of pressure with domestic conditions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, A. PIRES: *Portugal e a I Guerra Mundial. A República e a Economia de Guerra*, Lisboa, Caleidoscópio, 2011; F. ROSAS and M. F. ROLLO (eds): *História da Primeira República Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Tinta da China, 2009; F. RIBEIRO DE MENESES and P. AIRE OLIVEIRA (eds): *A Primeira República Portuguesa: Diplomacia, Guerra e Império*, Lisboa, Tinta da China, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> F. RIBEIRO DE MENESES: *Portugal 1914-1926: from the First World War to military dictatorship*, University of Bristol, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> C. GARCÍA SANZ: *La Primera Guerra Mundial en el Estrecho de Gibraltar: Economía, Política y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid, CSIC, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> J. PANDO: *Un rey para la esperanza. La España humanitaria de Alfonso XIII en la Gran Guerra*, Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> F. J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: *Spain 1914-1918: Between War and Revolution*, London, Routledge, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> G.H.MEAKER: "A civil War of Words: the ideological impact of the First World War on Spain, 1914-1918", in H. A. SCHMITT (ed.): *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution, 1917-1923*, Charlottesville Virginia, 1988, pp.1-66; among remarkable recent works see: Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial. Una movilización cultural*, Madrid, Akal, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> A fully updated historiographical balance on the Spanish case may be found in: C. GARCÍA SANZ and M. FUENTES CODERA: "Toward New Approaches to Neutrality in the First World War: Rethinking

Even though recognising the limitations of such an incomplete regional picture provided in this section, it is clear that the collective dilemmas between neutrality and belligerency in Southern Europe have chiefly been explained in view of inflammatory domestic backgrounds. The main historiographical line has thus revolved around the intense division opened up between those willing to go to war and those unwilling to. Against that background, local societies would have fluctuated between the deadweight of oligarchic liberal systems and *sui generis* aspirations for democracy or revolution. This implies that social notions and ideas about neutrality as a conscious “third option” in a large-scale armed conflict would have been ruled out owing to acute national schisms.

### **A Matter of National Polysemy**

Yet, the historical analysis centered around the discourse on neutrality would allow us to shed light into national case studies as a starting point for revising them in regional perspective. In this section, I will give examples regarding Italy and Spain. On the one hand, Italy was the first state to abandon neutrality; on the other, Spain was the only one that maintained the status of neutrality until the end of the conflict. Overall, we are addressing two very different ways of interpreting a country’s international position in terms of its relations with other powers.

While the research is only in its very preliminary stage, the comparative approach to the Spanish and Italian cases reveals the extent to which local representations of neutrality were the outer mirror of inner worlds. As reflected in the press, those not at war cast an eye over their analogues. That is, precisely, why representations emerge from interrelations between self and other from the very onset of the conflict. Likewise, the study of self-perception in a changing regional context allows us to explore diverging paths of neutrality during the so-called “short war”. The liminary moments gave those societies the first chance to realize their original ideas about the meaning of being neutral in an international theatre of war.

While I am the first aware of my limits and partiality of the few examples given in the following brief sub-sections, I shall try to proceed by comparing some ideas on

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the Spanish Case-study” in J.L. RUIZ SÁNCHEZ, I. CORDERO and C. GARCÍA SANZ: *Shaping Neutrality throughout the First World War*, Universidad de Sevilla, 2015 (forthcoming).

neutrality expressed by leading exponents of the movement identified with the assertion of neutral rights against German aggression (which usually meant anti-German views).<sup>22</sup> The following pages mainly delve into opinions expressed through *El Liberal* on the Spanish part and the *Corriere della Sera* and the *Messaggero* on the Italian one.

## Spain

By the end of the XIXth century, collective crisis of conscience were experienced in Southern Europe. The British ultimatum of 1890 to the Portuguese in Africa; Spain's loss of last colonies in America and Asia; and the Italian defeat at Adwa impacted deeply on their respective national public opinions.<sup>23</sup> Actually, those circumstances brought about stances on the conflict in 1914.

However, I would like to call attention to the Spanish case since it is rather singular against the regional context. Unlike in Portugal or in Italy, where the external insecurities and lack of social consensus about the political system tipped the balance toward war, in Spain these were exactly the reasons alleged by the vast majority of politicians and intellectuals for not taking the step toward belligerence (at least until well into 1917). From the onset, the Spanish opinion tended to agree that neutrality was the only realistic choice in view of the national weaknesses. I will try to illustrate this domestic sensitivity through the pages of the pro-allied *El Liberal*.

In an article published on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1914, the main editorial point was already that neutrality was the best choice at the crossroads:<sup>24</sup>

Every country, despite its alliances and Platonisms, waging war if necessary (what is always problematic) fears ruin, because the most successful war also destroys the winner side for many years after the armistice. Stock market oscillations compelled to neutrality much more than street demonstrations.

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<sup>22</sup> I fully realize the problems that a historian like me, more familiarized with diplomatic and strategic aspects of the cases, might encounter dealing with questions posed by existing studies on public opinion.

<sup>23</sup> The thesis of the decline of Latin powers at the beginning of the xxth century tended to be most popular among Spanish diplomatic historians. See J.M. JOVER ZAMORA: *1898: Teoría y práctica de la redistribución colonial*, Madrid, Fundación Universitaria Española, 1979; differing from this view through a comparison between the Spanish and Italian cases before the war, F. GARCÍA SANZ: *Historia de las relaciones entre España e Italia: Imágenes, comercio y política Exterior (1890-1914)*, Madrid, CSIC, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> "Austro-Serbian Conflict. Expectant", *El Liberal*, 27 July 1914, p.1.

The editorial run by the paper actually made a stand for neutrality in clear reference to the great powers politics. When the facts defied its attempts at prediction, *El Liberal* editorials would portray neutrality as an ideal concept invalidated by the reality of a “new and terrible factor”, in other words, the German militarism.<sup>25</sup> Neutrality as an international stance appeared worthless without belligerents’ consensus.

Nevertheless, Spain due to its peripheral location and protective barrier of neighbouring powers, Great Britain and France, would be able to keep on it. On 17 August, in an article signed by Genaro Alas, the columnist regretted that owing to military incapacity “our neutrality is entirely entrusted to geography and belligerents’ good will or helplessness”.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, other European neutrals should be quite anxious since “Germans do no respect the neutrality of the border states”.<sup>27</sup> According to *El Liberal* contributors and correspondents, the use of the military force seemed to be the only choice for “armed neutrals” such as Holand, where General Synders was appointed commander in chief, and Sweden, where the garrison in Gothland and other strategic points had been reinforced. Portugal was nonetheless considered as a special case. The internal situation and the measures that the young Republic took in view of the events were publicly contended.

*El Liberal* main editorial line was a sound of defeatism because the national feeling of powerlessness. However, it is notable the earliest duplication of the public discourse on neutrality between the ideal and the real. On one hand, *El Liberal* took a pro-allied stance because that was the right side committed to the just cause. On the other hand, Spain should remain neutral in the international conflict since their governments were engaged in a more urgent national battle.<sup>28</sup>

#### ABOUT HOME

Keeping the Spanish neutrality in a war where the greatest powers of Europe are engaged is laboured; our government has many reasons to be deeply concerned; but there is another reason of great importance that essentially affects the life of the nation, approaching as a terrific downpour and threatening with general calamity.

It would be a good thing that the action was concentrated on the inner problem, studying how to implement effective measures to avert industrial stoppages, strikes and the high cost of living.

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<sup>25</sup> “New and terrible factor” in *El Liberal*, 5 August, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> *El Liberal*, 17 August, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> “Germans do no respect the neutrality of the border states” in *El Liberal* 6 August, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> *El Liberal*, 9 August, p.1.

(...)

In other words: Spain may or may not be neutral in the present war; what it cannot do is committing suicide staying neutral in view of the hunger and the unemployment suffered by its people.

Despite that undercurrent of editorial scepticism on the neutral role, front-page stories were selected on the basis of the great epic of Belgian fight for freedom of humanity. That struggle resembled heroic deeds such as David's exploit against Goliath.<sup>29</sup> The newspaper even instructed its readers to look for parallelism of the Belgian resistance and the Spanish Pyrrhic opposition to the French in the Peninsular War.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, in that historical event, an international coalition was necessary to strike the decisive blow against Napoleon.

In general terms, members of Spanish liberals and leftish circles considered neutrality at two different levels: the state should remain neutral<sup>31</sup> while there was no room for neutrality on social and cultural grounds. As a rule, intellectuals agreed with the "state neutrality" until mid-1915. In the social sphere, quite the contrary, the Spanish people were consented to have their own preferences and take one side or the other. The concept of neutrality would be no more univocal. Papers publicly discussed about "benevolent neutralities", "political neutralities", "moral neutralities", even "critical neutralities".<sup>32</sup> Actually, different social conceptions of neutrality turned out to be *neutralisms* due to partisan interpretations. The initial debate revolved around "the ways of being neutral", although there was a focal and crosscutting point in all public speeches, from the "*integrist*" (fundamentalist) right to the revolutionary left: flaws in national policies made belligerency impossible.

The undetermined and indeterminate nature of neutrality was better depicted by the alliadophile discourse. From a more radical platform such as *El Socialista* in September 1914, "the socialists expected that war would lead to revolution, but they supported the Spanish policy of neutrality. Spain was not prepared to enter into the war because of its ruling class. The country should remain neutral but at the same time it should favour the

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<sup>29</sup> *El Liberal*, 7 August, p.1.

<sup>30</sup> *El Liberal*, 8 August, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> The official policy of neutrality would not be questioned apart from the Romanonist section on the liberal side. The famous article "Neutralidades que matan" (Neutralities that Kill) was published in the *Diario Universal* 19 August 1914.

<sup>32</sup> This process of attributive or adjectival use of the word "neutrality" and its intellectual roots can be followed in: Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: *op. cit.*, p.47.

Allied side”.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the term of “active neutrality” coined by José Ortega y Gasset intended to call for “Spanish vital energy” identifying the fair side.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, that kind of *neutralities*, as worded, led to all sort of paradoxes because it was like being in two places at once.

By contrast, those who were attempting to turn the idea of an active neutrality into a concrete strategy for Spanish foreign policy (whether consciously or unconsciously) soon succumbed to the temptation of subordination to a great power. That *sui generis* “mental map” can be found, for example, in Luis Araquistain’s proposals while interviewing H.G. Wells in October 1914:<sup>35</sup>

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

(...)

The situation in Spain-I let you know-is severely distressing. What we need to spend on education goes to military expenditure [because of the war in Africa]. Leftish people like me fought against that expense, believing that Europe had reached a stage of development incompatible with an aggression against small and weaker states. This war has shown us that we must review our old conceptions. Henceforth, we must accept a suicidal armaments policy or a great power like England must establish a new international order “by treaties and reciprocal guarantees” letting us free hand to work for the promotion of culture.

It is somewhat ironic that the conservative Government of Eduardo Dato pursued that precise course of action in the crisis of July, while submitting neutrality to France and Great Britain; but certainly not for the same reasons openly argued by the leftish journalist.

## Italy

In May 1915, before Antonio Salandra submitted his resignation, belligerency was held by 120/150 votes out of the 500 Italian Parliament members. So, going beyond radicals’ violence and state repression, one may wonder how the social consensus of entering the war had swiftly been reached. Actually, according to Viggezzi’s classic views on the theme, neutralists ran out of steam due to its incapacity to have a

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<sup>33</sup> “Modos de ser neutral”, 12 de septiembre de 1914, p.1; in M. FUENTES CODERA: *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial...op. cit.*, p.48

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>35</sup> *El liberal*, 9 October 1914 p.1.

consistent speech.<sup>36</sup> That is precisely the reason why, in this section, it might be worthy to focus on *interventisti*'s speeches on neutrality, where the adjectival use of the word was also straightaway.

In August 1914, newspapers like the *Corriere della Sera*, the *Mattino* or the *Messaggero*, even accepting the initial policy of neutrality, insisted on the idea that it was to be an "armed neutrality" (in which armed meant "vigilant"). The nation needed to be alert to defend "our interests" (especially in the Adriatic):<sup>37</sup> "Italy must be alert with the army ready... the national security is at stake: any particular aspiration of political parties and social classes must be submitted to national security". In the *Tribuna*, "the meaning of the Italian neutrality" was even more precise:<sup>38</sup> "The Italian neutrality should be clearly distinguished from that of small and weak states, which need to arm themselves because they have not been protected by international laws".

For liberal and democratic nationalists, the country's neutrality became a conditional neutrality. The way in which they understood the international stance was not linked only with risorgimental irredentism but also with the process of redefinition of the national identity.<sup>39</sup> Their representations of neutrality as an international choice played a part giving shape to a new national identity as absolute concept. There was not possible duplicity of political and social spheres. The European war provided the Italian people with the opportunity to reconcile the "two Italies" that the Florentine intellectual, Giuseppe Prezzolini, had distinguished: "the Italy that acts and the Italy that talks". Even in neutrality, Italy could fight for its future:<sup>40</sup>

This is the time for greatest meditation and not for street demonstrations.  
If it is appropriate, the government shall let us know how it decides to protect the Italian interests. We will know whether neutrality will be sufficient or not.  
But we need to keep calm: such difficult decisions cannot be taken in a few days before we have a more precise design of the Great War (...)

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<sup>36</sup> As a recent collective book clearly reveals, not only the neutralisms discourses but also their praxis were quite heterogeneous, see F. CAMMARANO (ed.):...*op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> *Il Corriere della Sera*, 3 August 1914, p.2.

<sup>38</sup> "For Italy, all", *La Tribuna* 10 August; in *Il Corriere della Sera* 11 de agosto 1914, p.2.

<sup>39</sup> For this period of "war expectancy", see A. VENTRONE: *op. cit.*, pp.3-7.

<sup>40</sup> "The duties of neutrality", *Il Messaggero*, 7 August 1914, p.6. In an article signed by Arturo Labriola a week later, neutrality was questioned as a beneficial policy. However, whether neutrality or not, the point was the nationalist nature of the international policy. In the Italian political language it was also successful the idea of "active neutrality". See, for instance, Mussolini's article in October 1914 "*Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante*", *Avanti* cit. G. E. RUSCONI: *op. cit.*, p. 114.

In fact, whereas the Spanish pro-allied newspapers portrayed the heinous crime against the neutral Belgium, the general tone of news about Belgium in the Italian analogous press was rather contrastive. Despite their stressing on the heroism of the resistance in Liège, there was no Belgian mirror at all.

The controversies over the value of international laws in view of the principle of might is right were dropped on the Italian tradition and character. The diplomatic crossroads was considered in light of Machiavelli's reasoning (chapter XXI, *the Prince*).<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the relation between a national concept of neutrality and geography was particular. Italy was not neutral because of geography. It was neutral because it had decided to be it. The national policy did not have to do with the fear for territorial integrity. Quite the contrary, neutrality was a bargaining chip in negotiations for the irredentist territories. This public discourse maintained that the value of the country's neutrality was laying on the potential threat to the Mediterranean balance. That was a somewhat different interpretation, based on the national strength, from that sustained by neutralists, who tended to warn Italians about the dangers of war. This is one of the reasons why the campaigns the ex-German chancellor Bernhard von Bülow launched in Italy strengthened the nationalistic views on the right to decide the strategy for an independent foreign policy.

In this regard, we find another example in February 1915, when an article in the *Corriere della Sera* gave a reply to Count Monts's (former German Ambassador in Rome) declarations to the *Berliner Tageblatt*:<sup>42</sup>

His mistake is precisely this: He believes or maybe he wants to make us believe that he talks for our own interest and not for the German good.

Italy, he says, it is weak and is not in a position to fight not only against Austria-Hungary, but also against Germany with all its great power. The best for Italy is therefore to remain neutral. Our answer is very simple: if Italy does not count as potential contender, why are Germany and Austria-Hungary such deep concerned about our neutrality advising us to keep it? Our weight cannot be indifferent to them.

Likewise, the Italian intellectual, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who had received a German education, caustically made the same points in a speech against a German tutelage:<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Arturo Labriola, *Il Messaggero*, 12 August 1914, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> "Once more German bad judgement. Pieces of advice and threats from a ex-German ambassador in Rome. The Italian Problem", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 2 February 1915, p.1.

If Germany conquers the government of Europe, we will not stop being of mixed blood, brown eyes, low height, slaves and liars. Therefore, what does the world expect of German hegemony? That is the reason why few desire it fervently. How can these miserable races, in contact with intangible superiority, heal? The dog is always a dog, even if the man has honoured him with his friendship; and the Mediterranean tribes and plebs will not become blonde and dolichocephalic under the noble German game.

War may be waged for many reasons, also for this. People like the Germans, with their classic and romantic literature (...) cannot long believe and enjoy clumsy lies. They must learn that others are ready to live and die for a greater cause, that *spiritus flat ubi vult*, that ideals are not a German monopoly and there is a place in the sun for non-German people as well.

From the onset, the *interventist* discussion on neutrality revolved around the feasibility of a conscious policy that fitted the national identity. Actually, radicals and nationalists put what meant to be neutral at the centre of the public debate in a more consistent way than neutralists. One may wonder how a political and intellectual minority achieved in producing such a strong feelings of self-affirmation whether or not Italy remained neutral.

The Italian path to the Great War had long been considered as rather singular (as a kind of Latin version of *sonderweg*). However, as Giuseppe Galasso together with other Italian historians pointed out, that shift in public opinion still requires much more research.<sup>44</sup>

### **A Final Remark: Neutrality under Historical Construction**

Scholars have long ignored not only the study of cultural entanglements of neutrality in the South of Europe, but also the study of issues like transactional models of power and the role played by shared responsibilities either in neutrality or at war. We may also wonder not only *why or why not* neutrality but *how* neutrality was experienced collectively.

On these premises, this paper does present merely a small aspect of a potentially much wider field of research. The neutral position in the Mediterranean theatre is worthy of further consideration because, at least on political and social grounds, there were diverging interpretations of the meaning of being neutral. There were even

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<sup>43</sup> *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1 January 1915, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. the role of intellectuals during the neutrality period in P. DOGLIANI: *Los intelectuales italianos en la Gran Guerra: intervencionismo, patriotismo, neutralismo (1914-1918)*, *Ayer* 91(2013), pp.93-120.

diverging interpretations from the legal side of the issue. This is a main reason why a specific new research line for the South of Europe will significantly be productive in the future. Our research proposal intends to fill a research gap in the understanding of the transformation and legacies of neutrality values in the South of Europe, completing and qualifying northern European experiences and models of explanation on the First World War basis.