

Introduction

It is strangely still on the harbor and in the markets. And for several days already, the theater and cinemas have been empty. The noise levels, however, have increased in front of the offices of the major newspapers, where masses of people have come together already at the crack of dawn to hear the latest news. When sirens sound to announce important news off the wire, orators spontaneously stand up to either condemn the war or take sides with one of the two parties. Streetcars are no longer able to pass through the streets. The air pulsates with rumors, as word spreads that the Austrian Emperor has fallen prey to an assassination attempt. Huddling together before the closed gates of banks, frustrated customers curse loudly. How was one to pay the exploding prices if you couldn't get to your money, or if your job was all of a sudden at risk like never before? All over, unemployed from the lower classes flock together, with more coming each day from the countryside. There, large foreign mining and plantation companies dismissed thousands overnight.

Meanwhile, uniformed marines and reservists from various countries march through the streets in formation. They intend to report to their consulates for military service. A few streets away, demonstrators singing the Marseillaise and "God save the Queen" tramp toward the diplomatic embassies of the Allies to proclaim their sympathy. At about the same time, vocal socialists demonstrate in favor of restoring peace. The faithful follow suit in their own way by joining pilgrimages for peace. Politicians, business owners, and bankers gather in the ministries to consult with each other about what to do next, without however finding an answer. A sense of unrest prevails far and wide, as the police institute measures to maintain public order. It is as if people are simply waiting for the storm,

*whose rumbling thunder is heard in the distance, to unleash a bolt of lightning and inflict unimaginable devastation.*¹

According to the press of the time, similar scenes played out with greater or lesser intensity throughout the cities of Latin America in August 1914. When news broke of the war in Europe, there was talk of a catastrophe that, because of the close-knit global entanglements, would embroil the world in an unprecedented crisis. On August 2, 1914, a commentator from *La Nación* in Buenos Aires, one of Latin America's leading newspapers, concisely summed up the view of many like-minded interpretations:

We are witnessing one of the most momentous events, and one of the greatest catastrophes, of human history. The European war, which has been inevitable for some time, plunged the world into a crisis unlike anything it has ever seen before. Indeed, our civilization, which unquestionably controls distances and time for the benefit of our species' productivity, is paying brutally with nerve and emotion for the material advantages that this mastery has borne. Just as the flash of inspiration of a discovery, an invention, or genius illuminates every layer of thought almost instantaneously from the place where it is sparked, a lightning strike at some point on the planet affects and devastates the totality of space where human beings live, work, and suffer with even greater speed and potency. This time, the lightning hits the center – the great stage of life, which shivers with apprehension and horror, as if the interminable night has already descended.... A problem arises from the explosion in Europe – from the convulsions moving social organisms today – which has never been posed until now, and whose premise is the following: There are no spectators in this drama; all of humanity is more or less directly implicated.²

The world dimensions of the events were in evidence to contemporary Latin American observers early on. At the same time, they consciously or unconsciously subscribed to ideas that Europeans had already cultivated before the outbreak of hostilities. For example, when German author August Niemann entertained the possibility of a “world war” in 1904, he meant nothing less than a European world or a world that would be drawn into the great European conflicts without protest.³ The Eurocentric view that “if Europe fights, it is as though the entire world fights” had defined historiography for centuries.⁴ Certainly, the war began in Europe and the majority of the front lines were located there. Beyond the continent

¹ This is based on the analysis of a representative selection of news items from the Latin American press in August 1914 and an essay from María Inés Tato on Buenos Aires: “La contienda europea,” pp. 34–7.

² “Ecos del día: La catástrofe,” in: *La Nación* (Buenos Aires, August 2, 1914), p. 8.

³ Niemann, *Der Weltkrieg*. See also Langewiesche, “Das Jahrhundert Europas,” p. 38.

⁴ “In 1914 conflict spread from the European centre to the periphery, and it did so because the states of Europe were imperial powers. War for Europe meant war for the world.”

itself, the Europeans initially dragged their colonies into the war, along with other, originally neutral states later on. Yet when historians today “refer to the war which acquired global significance due to its geographic dimension extending over numerous continents and the unfettered use of every available strategic resource,” those very regions come into view that were considered peripheral from the classical Eurocentric perspective and can be recognized as actors in their own right.⁵ To understand the world war as a global war, without falling prey to the epistemological trap of Eurocentrism, historiography must endeavor to look beyond the trenches. Indeed, it was not possible to be a “spectator” in the “drama” of this world war.

The First World War was undoubtedly a “global moment” that intensively involved a supposedly peripheral Latin America.⁶ From the beginning, Latin Americans sensed that this war had worldwide scope. As a matter of fact, above and beyond the commentary from *La Nación*, the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 represented for many Latin American observers a profound turning point in the unfolding of history. Because of the breakdown of the European civilizational and development model and the unreserved belief in human progress in the years from 1914 to 1918, a world where Latin America had occupied a fixed position was effectively gone. Many contemporary witnesses agreed that an era had come to an end in the days of August 1914, and a new, still uncertain age had begun.

By focusing on the First World War, it is possible to show how strong the global mindset had already been at that time in Latin America, and how much it changed over the course of four years of genocide. “Global mindset” in this context does not refer to a cosmopolitan form of thinking, but much more an awareness of the importance of worldwide interdependencies and processes of integration. Despite the considerable distances to the battlefields, the First World War was felt more than any other previous event in Latin America, and it was clear that its repercussions would impact the lives of average citizens. Of course, people in the region were by no means affected by this state of interconnectedness to the same degree. Nonetheless, the relative isolation with which they had witnessed other conflicts in Europe prior to 1914 came to an end.⁷

Strachan, *The First World War: A New Illustrated History*, London 2003, p. 68. Strachan, *The First World War as a Global War*.

⁵ “Weltkrieg,” in: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weltkrieg> (accessed on: May 27, 2014).

⁶ Conrad/Sachsenmaier, “Introduction,” pp. 13–6.

⁷ Conrad/Sachsenmaier, “Introduction,” pp. 1–25.

Latin Americans took an active interest in the horrors, hopes, and fears that the war had triggered. They participated in the debates about the end of Western hegemony and the downfall of Europe, which took place around the world and would become emblematic of the twentieth century. The perception of the war followed a global yardstick, as Latin America was caught up in the events more than ever because of the new type of propaganda war and innovative communication technologies. In fact, it was because the media reported on the war the world over that it could become a world event. Latin America was no exception, where the media landscape had grown leaps and bounds since the turn of the century and where circulations and advertising revenue, especially in the dailies, had exploded in the 1910s.⁸ From the public's viewpoint, the war was an event of significance for the entire world, which went beyond the familiar regional framework of previous conflicts. For Latin Americans, the First World War made the world's interdependency, and one's own place within it, tangible.⁹

Historians have only recently returned their focus to the role of the media in the First World War and, by the same token, to the role of the war in the development of the media.¹⁰ In Latin America, as elsewhere, the war stimulated the massive utilization of new forms of media like photography and cinema. Press photography proved an important instrument of propaganda, which contributed to the worldwide circulation of war pictures that seemed to depict objective reality. The understanding of reality expanded, for what was real no longer simply pertained to one's own life, but also to events mediated through imagery. It was precisely in places like Latin America where there was a geographical separation from the front lines that people experienced the war, both privately and publicly, through media-produced images.¹¹ What is more, the First World War took place there especially as a propaganda war, which also caused a largely unprecedented form of radical hatemongering among rivals to spread in the subcontinent.

The primary concern of this book is with the perspective of Latin America. Its central question relates to the contemporary interpretive models of the world war used by Latin Americans. From the Latin

⁸ These media-historical developments in Latin America have been largely overlooked in the research. For Rio de Janeiro, see Garambone, *A primeira Guerra Mundial*, p. 46.

⁹ These observations draw on Stichweh's theory of the world event. See: "Zur Soziologie des Weltereignisses," pp. 28–9.

¹⁰ König/Neitzel, "Propaganda, Zensur und Medien," p. 125.

¹¹ Paul, *Bilder des Krieges*, pp. 105–6.

American standpoint, it is necessary to consider the context of the eruptions of violence, which began in the subcontinent as early as 1910 with the Mexican Revolution. That is not to say that there was a causal connection between the civil war in Mexico and the world war. Just the same, from the perspective of many Latin Americans, both events were an example of the crisis-ridden state of a world shaken by a wave of global violence and thus at the end of its self-certainty. For Latin America, the First World War is embedded in a decade of social revolutionary upheaval and political unrest, which reached its peak between 1917 and 1919.¹² This book aims to reveal the specific Latin American associations and connotations of the First World War, which, as in the case of the Mexican Revolution, are not always apparent at first sight.

As this study deals with a region of continental proportions with nineteen nation-states – from Mexico in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south – questions immediately come to mind about the heterogeneity of experiences, along with doubts about the validity of generalizations. This book, however, does not claim to undertake a detailed investigation of each of the individual nineteen national cases. It examines much more how specific, local, social developments and perceptions become embedded in world contexts, and how certain local and regional discourses can be comprehended only in terms of the larger global discursive framework. To cite one example: the general anti-imperialistic discourse of the Global South in response to the world war evolved in Latin America in a thoroughly eclectic and contradictory manner and was distinct from its equivalent in the colonies in Africa and Asia. Unlike the latter, the spirit of supremacy persisted, not least because of internal racism. The participants in these discourses operated in transnational spaces and shared their experiences with a larger global context. This book centers on Latin America's shared history during the First World War – shared both in terms of the national entities that make up the region, but also other continents.

The goal is not to establish direct causal connections, as if the First World War first brought about and determined the changes in Latin America during this time. Of course, causes can be singled out, as in the case of the radicalization of the workers' movement from 1917. Nonetheless, it is necessary to ask about the extent to which the war

¹² The demand for a broader periodization of the war, which has been recently expressed in relation to Europe-centered research, hence also applies to the subcontinent. Janz, 14: *Der große Krieg*, pp. 13–4. Strachan, "The First World War as a Global War," p. 11.

may have either strengthened or weakened specific tendencies. It is certainly possible to identify the concentration and acceleration of specific processes during the war years. When, for instance, Argentinian Carlos Ibarguren in 1917 compared the events in Europe to the decline of the Roman Empire, or his countryman Ricardo Rojas stated, looking back a few years later, that the war had destroyed all the known institutions of Western civilization, contemporary Latin Americans (like others elsewhere) suffered a loss of confidence in the promise of modernization.¹³

The traditional bias toward European models proved obsolete and the future had to be conceived anew.¹⁴ Due to this attitude, the call for a reorientation of identities on a national and regional level, which had already gained momentum before the war, grew even louder. As in other regions of the world, the emphasis on nationalism and regionalism in Latin America was also a reaction to a global constellation created during the era of imperialism, which experienced both its culmination and its demise during the First World War. Latin America was not unique in this regard. The region's particular difference rather lay in the fact that the governing oligarchies understood themselves as an integral part of the European civilization that collapsed in the First World War. Consequently, after 1914, the question of redefining one's identity was much more urgent here than in other world regions. This is not the only level, however, where the influence of the global on the local becomes evident.

For decades, an awareness of the interrelationship between local development and global entanglements during the First World War was hardly expressed in the historiography of Latin America. In general, historiography tends to separate the developmental phase of the Latin American states in the "long nineteenth century" from their evolution into modern mass societies in the twentieth century. Classic overviews frequently do not suggest a turning point in their periodization until around 1930.¹⁵ The world economic crisis, accordingly, represents the moment in which Latin American history assumed a new direction. In this view, not only is the First World War not a watershed in the region's historical evolution, but the related interpretations either do not mention the war or only do so in passing.

¹³ Ibarguren, *La historia que he vivido*, p. 301. Rojas, *La guerra de las naciones*, p. 310.

¹⁴ On the experience of rupture, see recently Hölscher, "The First World War as a 'Rupture,'" p. 75.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Bakewell, *A History of Latin America*. Halperin, *Geschichte Lateinamerikas*. Chevalier, *América Latina*. Ayala Mora et al., *Historia General*, Vol. 7, *Los proyectos nacionales*.

All the same, a comprehensive historiography of the events in fact emerged early on. The first contributions that appeared at the end of the war were still trying to make sense of its impact and arguments were made as a kind of score settling. These texts uniformly concentrated on the diplomatic level and clearly distinguished in their assessments between “good” (those who supported the Allies) and “evil” (those who stayed neutral).¹⁶ U.S. historian Percy Martin’s study from 1925 was the first to take a less partisan look at the subject, though its evaluation of Mexican politics remained wholly under the sway of antirevolutionary sentiments.¹⁷ Afterward, the First World War was not treated as a subject for some time, as it was displaced by the experience of the global economic crisis and the Second World War. It was not until the advent of dependence theory that interest was rekindled in the significance of the First World War of the twentieth century for Latin America. The theory, however, that independent industrialization and development in Latin America was only possible due to its break with external ties was put forward, not by a historian, but rather sociologist André Gunder Frank. Frank identified the period of the First World War as definitive proof. As historians examined the theories of the dependence theorists more closely, however, they proved largely untenable. Bill Albert, for example, demonstrated in his economic and social-historical work from 1988 – which today is still considered a standard work on the subject – that external dependencies rather increased as a result of the economic war and that the export sector actually grew.¹⁸

Frank’s and Albert’s concern with the First World War remained an exception until the end of the twentieth century. A different picture emerges, though, with regard to national historiography. There are thus studies on countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico on diplomacy during the First World War, which nevertheless do not take account of transnational relationships.¹⁹ What is more, in many national historiographies, the 1910s are highlighted as a transformational period. In the case of Mexico, for example, the year 1910 was undoubtedly a seminal moment because of the start of the revolution. For Bolivia, Chile,

¹⁶ See, e.g., Gaillard, *Amérique latine*. Kirkpatrick, *South America and the War*. Barrett, *Latin America and the War*. Barrett, the general manager of the Pan American Union, nevertheless clarified that by no means could the maintenance of neutrality be viewed as an unfriendly act toward the Allies.

¹⁷ Martin, *Latin America and the War*.

¹⁸ Frank, *Latin America*, pp. 9–10. Albert, *South America and the First World War*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Vinhosa, *O Brasil e a Primeira Guerra mundial*. Couyoumdjian, *Chile y Gran Bretaña*. Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico*. See also Rinke, “Ein Drama der gesamten Menschheit.”

Guatemala, and Peru, the year 1919/1920 is acknowledged as an important turning point as a result of the incipient political and social upheavals. Clear ruptures, however, can also be identified for smaller countries of the region like Nicaragua, Haiti, or the Dominican Republic, where U.S. military intervention began in 1912, 1915, 1916, respectively, or in Panama, where the transoceanic canal was opened in 1914 just before the war broke out and the United States likewise massively reinforced its presence. The war years, however, are only rarely dealt with in particular.

Argentina is an exception. Rojas had already remarked in hindsight: “Over the last two decades, two events have fundamentally altered the Argentinians’ consciousness: The democratic reform and the world war.”²⁰ In fact, Argentinian historians consider the year 1916 momentous because it was the year that radical party candidate Hipólito Yrigoyen assumed power. At least four monographs and a collection of source material focus on the significance of the war for Yrigoyen’s presidency.²¹ Philip Dehne analyzes the English economic war in Argentina.²² Especially noteworthy are the essays by María Inés Tato, which examine the mobilization of the urban masses and the public controversies during the war years.²³ In his recently published study, Olivier Compagnon undertakes a comparison between Argentina and Brazil.²⁴ Meanwhile, there persists an absence of studies taking a transnational approach. It is precisely by examining the region as a whole from the outside – an approach that will inform the present study – that it is possible to recognize the cross-border dynamics and thus to expand a Latin American historiography that has generally been preoccupied with individual nations.

While the First World War may have long been a marginal concern of Latin American historiography, it was even more common to find histories of the First World War concentrating almost exclusively on the

²⁰ Rojas, *La guerra de las naciones*, p. 7.

²¹ Solveira, *Argentina y la Primera Guerra Mundial*. Díaz Araujo, *Yrigoyen y la guerra*. Siepe, *Yrigoyen*. Goñi/Scala/Berraondo, *Yrigoyen y la Gran Guerra*. An excellent overview of the state of research before 1994 is provided by Weinmann, *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, pp. 21–30. See also: Tato, “La Gran Guerra en la historiografía argentina,” pp. 91–102.

²² Dehne, *On the Far Western Front*. Dehne relies exclusively on English sources.

²³ Tato, “La disputa por la argentinidad.” Idem, “La contienda europea.” Idem, “El llamado de la patria.” Idem, “Contra la corriente.”

²⁴ Compagnon (*L’adieu à l’Europe*) calls for respecting national differences and devalues other approaches as Eurocentric. At the same time, he falls into a trap, for he does not recognize that one methodologically reproduces Eurocentrism by giving preference to the nation as a unit of analysis.

perspectives of Europe and the United States. Here, the political and economic consequences were the main focus. On the other hand, a range of studies has emerged over the past few years, in parallel to the emergence of global-historical approaches in historiography, which deliberately embed the war in its global context. In accordance with Jürgen Kocka's demand in 2004, historians have adopted a broader understanding of the term "world war" over the past ten years and more closely studied its global dimension.²⁵ Not surprising, attention has been largely limited in most cases to the colonies in Africa and Asia, or to only those regions where there was combat on land or at sea, a limitation that effectively mirrors the predominant focus on the military in historiography on the First World War. Latin America is only rarely mentioned in this context; when it is, the focus is usually on providing complete depictions of the sea battles of Coronel and the Falkland Islands in 1914.²⁶ This can be said of Lawrence Sondhaus, for example, who aptly speaks of a "global revolution" in connection with the war, yet fails to meaningfully explore this idea in his observations.²⁷ Only recently has the global dimension of the war, including the mobilization of economic, social, militaristic, and cultural resources, come into focus.²⁸

In world war historiography, the Latin American states that were completely neutral until 1917, and largely remained so afterward, have been perceived (like all neutral countries, with the exception of the late entrant into the war, the United States) as passive and uninteresting. Be that as it may, in the total wars of the twentieth century, neutrality could no longer be maintained passively – the neutral countries were caught up in the events in manifold ways, whether they liked it or not. As a result of their natural resources or strategic position, they possessed varying degrees of negotiating power. If the thesis of a total and global war is to be taken seriously, this deserves to be explored more meticulously.²⁹

The subject of Germany's global war and revolutionizing plans has recently regained attention in connection with the remembrance of the "Fischer Controversy" fifty years ago.³⁰ The provocation and

²⁵ Kocka, "Der Große Europäische Krieg," pp. 183–4.

²⁶ Strachan, *To Arms*. Storey, *The First World War*, pp. 67–72. Sondhaus, *World War One*, pp. 103–9. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, pp. 123–50. Segesser, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*. Liebau, *The World in World Wars*.

²⁷ Janz, 14: *Der große Krieg*, pp. 133–40. Sondhaus, *World War One*, pp. 1–2.

²⁸ Janz, 14: *Der große Krieg*, p. 10.

²⁹ Hertog/Kruizinga, "Introduction," pp. 1–2. Frey, "The Neutrals," p. 4.

³⁰ This has been recently noted in Jenkins, "Fritz Fischer's 'Programme for Revolution.'" See also Strachan, *World War I*, Ch. 9.

encouragement of uprisings in the colonial world also concerned Latin America, even though it was colonized only informally. Such activity was especially evident in the secret war in Mexico, and, not just Germany, but the other major powers were also actively involved with their own spies and citizens residing there. All of the belligerent nations aimed to support social revolutions or nationalistic liberation movements in their enemies' dominions.³¹ These observations once again shift the imperialistic rivalry outside of Europe – one of the reasons for the First World War – to the forefront of historiographical interest, and, as a consequence, the region of Latin America.³²

This is where this book finds its point of departure. Benefiting from the turn in historiography toward global themes and global history, this study will analyze the global dimension of the history of the First World War from the perspective of a continent, which may have existed at the margins from the European standpoint, but nonetheless experienced lasting changes due to the conflagration in Europe. The innovative potential of this study reflects three levels: the concentration on Latin America, a region that for all intents and purposes has been ignored in this context; second, the commitment to coming to terms with the changing perception and understanding of the world of the Latin American region of the Global South; and, third, the concern with the issue of the periodization of Latin American history, in which the role of the First World War has so far been ignored.

The central questions are the following: What factors caused Latin Americans from 1914 to 1918 to view the First World War as a critical turning point in their own life world? To what extent did Latin America participate in the war, directly or indirectly? How did Latin Americans perceive the war and how did they interpret it? How did people of different social classes reposition themselves in the context of the world at war given the collapse of the traditional Eurocentric world view? What kind of global mindset did they develop against this backdrop? What visions of the future did they derive as a consequence for their own development?

As the aim of this book is to cover the range of Latin American experiences at least *pars pro toto*, a comprehensive collection of sources was essential. The study is based on sources from the nineteen independent states of the entire subcontinent, whereby archival material from twelve countries is included in the evaluation. As might be expected, it was

³¹ This observation appears in Katz, *The Secret War*, p. X.

³² Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p. 472.