



La Nación, Peronism, and the Origins of the Cold War in Argentina

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the international dimension of Argentine domestic policies by exploring one of the strategies of the conservative daily newspaper *La Nación*, between 1946 and 1950, in order to challenge Juan Perón's hegemony. *La Nación* presented the Peronist regime as akin to the totalitarian regimes established under the Soviet Union's vigilance. This is not surprising, but revealing the complex ideological mechanisms employed by *La Nación* in its strategy is a noteworthy endeavor. This work will provide a thorough exploration of the process through which *La Nación* shifted from its former opposition to Peronism, initially identified as a Nazi-Fascist movement, to a new articulation of the regime as a totalitarian one. To some extent this was not so different from the strategy that the United States' (US) intellectual elites were carrying out in order to justify their struggle against a former ally in war as a continuation of purpose and not a rupture. Yet, the most interesting aspect of this evolution in the Argentine case is that it emerged in an autonomous way as a result of specific national and international phenomena. This shows that the characteristics of the early phase of the Cold War were shaped by transnational processes of convergence rather than US hegemony alone.

KEYWORDS: Peronism; totalitarianism; *La Nación*; Cold War ideology

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RESUMEN: *La Nación*, el peronismo y los orígenes de la Guerra fría en Argentina.- Este artículo analiza la dimensión internacional de la política interna argentina explorando la estrategia del diario conservador *La Nación*, entre 1946 y 1950 en su enfrentamiento con el gobierno de Juan Domingo Perón. *La Nación* presentó el régimen peronista como similar a los regímenes totalitarios establecidos bajo el control de la Unión Soviética. Esto no resulta sorprendente, pero comprender los complejos mecanismos ideológicos empleados por *La Nación* en esta estrategia es un objetivo relevante de investigación. Este artículo ofrece un análisis detallado del proceso que permitió a *La Nación* transformar su descripción del peronismo como un movimiento nazi-fascista a otro totalitario. De alguna manera este proceso caminó en paralelo a la estrategia de los intelectuales estadounidenses para justificar el conflicto con un antiguo aliado como una continuación de los mismos objetivos de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y no como una ruptura. Sin embargo, lo más interesante es que en el caso argentino esta evolución surgió de manera autónoma como resultado de condiciones específicas nacional y de una particular interpretación de los fenómenos internacionales. Esto muestra que algunas características de la Guerra Fría temprana fueron moldeadas por procesos transnacionales de convergencia y no por la hegemonía de los Estados Unidos en solitario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Peronismo; totalitarismo; *La Nación*; ideología de la Guerra Fría

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INTRODUCTION

Argentine historiography has paid much attention to the impact of the Second World War on the domestic political scenario, showing how international events and national conflicts closely interacted. Yet historians have not fully explored the international dimensions of the domestic conflicts (perhaps with the exception of economic issues) that occurred after Juan Domingo Perón came to power in 1946. The literature dealing with international affairs and the literature dealing with domestic issues seem to diverge when addressing this period. It is true that links between the Argentine domestic and international policies were more apparent during the Second World War than in any other period of modern Argentine history (Rapoport, 1988; Rapoport, 1989; Halperín Donghi, 2003); however, this does not mean that foreign connections vanished after the end of the war.¹ This article analyzes the international dimension of domestic policies in Argentina under Perón by delving into the discursive strategies the liberal-conservative daily newspaper *La Nación* used when addressing the national government.

Historians have noticed the importance of the press in shaping Argentine public opinion. Argentina had achieved significant breakthroughs in the field of public education by the end of the nineteenth century and its levels of literacy at the time were comparable to the most developed countries in the world. In the 1940s, Argentine readers — many of them coming from the growing middle class — could choose from among a wide variety of newspapers that presented radically different ideologies and writing styles. Internationally, the number of newspapers sold in the country was only comparable to figures for the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Indeed, Argentina's contemporaries were surprised by the dimension and impact the Argentine press had on the country (Ruiz Jiménez, 2006: 19-20).

La Nación was created by Bartolomé Mitre (an Argentine founding father) in 1870. As Ricardo Sidicaro (1993: 11) points out, *La Nación* has always been a newspaper targeted toward the ideal Argentine ruling class and national policy-makers who seek to preserve specific liberal doctrines. In the 1940s, struggling in a competitive milieu as far as the written media was concerned, *La Nación* was far from being the most popular paper in the country. However, alongside the doyen of the Argentine press, *La Prensa*, it had a reputation as a “serious” daily newspaper and acted as the conscience of Argentine elites.

Narratives about the Cold War in Latin America can generally be divided into two groups. First, there are numerous historians who view the Cold War in Latin America as a continuation of US aspirations to establish its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. According to this group the Cold War was a new avatar of US imperialism.² Second, the revisionist account presents the Cold War in Latin America as a reaction on the United States' part toward left-wing radicalism, guerrillas, and Soviet influence in the region. In this narrative, the Cuban Revolution

marked a major turning point in the evolution of Latin America's Cold War (Brands, 2010).

However, these two approaches miss some important points about the development of the Cold War (in Latin America in particular). Some ideological devices closely associated with the Cold War originated from local political conflicts at an early date. Thus, *La Nación* resorted to analyzing the early phase of the Cold War as a vicarious way to portray Perón's regime as akin to the totalitarian states that had been built in East European and were under Soviet control.³ This is not surprising, but the way in which this strategy was displayed as well as the ideological contributions derived from this operation deserve to be explored.

This article aims to understand the operation that allowed *La Nación* to reconceptualize its old opposition to Peronism as a Nazi-fascist movement into a new description of Perón's political regime as totalitarian. The operation was similar to the one carried out by US elites in order to justify their fight against a former ally as a continuation of the Second World War enterprise (Wood, 1985; Oren, 2003). The most revealing fact is that this development was autonomous in Argentina, which shows that some important ideological tools of the Cold War were being forged in “peripheral” geographies. This notion is related to what Anson Rabinbach has referred to as the “protean” characteristics of the term “totalitarianism.” That is, totalitarianism was a conceptual tool that helped smooth otherwise abrupt transitions from one constellation of historical events to another by providing a framework in which it was possible to accommodate and modify new political groupings (Rabinbach, 2006: 74, 87-88). Thus, in the Argentine case, the surprising emergence of Peronism altered traditional political alliances and challenged firmly rooted ideological premises. Totalitarianism served a wide gamut of political actors, from conservatives to socialists, allowing them to make sense of their opposition to the new political force. Of course, totalitarianism did not mean the same thing for these political actors. Equally important, totalitarianism as employed in Argentina did not simply replicate the discourse elaborated in the United States but instead referred both to national and international ideological traditions and to current world affairs, especially those in Western Europe. In truth, *La Nación's* embrace of “Western values” offered some significant nuanced agreements with the US position. The newspaper provided its readers with a passionate defense of the British Empire in a moment of imperial decline that might be interpreted as a nostalgic elegy for the Argentine belle époque, which had been intimately connected with British hegemony.

This was part of *La Nación's* conservative outlook vis-à-vis Perón and the Cold War. But at the same time, the newspaper elaborated its discussion on totalitarianism by drawing on liberal traditions. The concept of “liberalism” in Argentina is linked to a right-wing position in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, since the nineteenth-century, Argentina's liberals had perceived themselves to be promoters of a progressive ideology,

even if it was an authoritarian one (Halperín Donghi, 2009). The use of the word totalitarian by Perón's political enemies was part of a global, or at least an Atlantic, convergence of ideas. Totalitarianism was a concept rooted in the international "progressive" traditions of the 1920s and 1930s,⁴ and *La Nación* followed these traditions in order to strengthen its interpretation of Peronism as a totalitarian phenomenon. Both as a conservative and liberal movement, it is possible to observe a discursive convergence in different parts of the world that helped shape the ideological characteristics of the Cold War.

LA NACIÓN DURING PERÓN'S RULE

La Nación's relationship with Perón and his government evolved from an early moment of support, before the military man became a candidate for presidency in the February 1946 elections, to a longer period of conflict between 1945 and the end of 1951, which ultimately culminated in a concluding phase where the newspaper attempted to reconcile with the government. Perón was one of the military men who achieved power after a coup d'état in June 1943. Step by step, from his position at the Department of Labor, Perón established his own political constituency and gained formidable influence within the regime. In mid-1944 he simultaneously held the positions of Vice President, Minister of War, and Secretary of Labor.⁵

Argentine Economic elites and the United States government never trusted Perón. The former considered his economic policy a threat while the latter saw in Perón a figure that had been too close to the Axis during the Second World War. Yet these attitudes did not initially alter *La Nación's* positive image of Perón. Perón's rise to power and the apparent possibility of Perón becoming an electoral candidate who could save the 1943 regime in the polls led *La Nación* to a profound shift in its position. The newspaper opposed Perón in the elections of February 1946 and endorsed a Democratic Union (*Unión Democrática*) candidate. *La Nación*, like many supporters of the Democratic Union, hoped that the wisdom of the Argentine voters would defeat the incumbent.⁶

After Perón's unexpected victory, *La Nación* and other newspapers faced a tough government that was willing to suppress discordant voices. *La Vanguardia*, the socialist newspaper, was shut down by the government in 1947. In late 1949, the so-called Visca Committee of the Congress began a direct attack on the media. For instance, the government controlled the account books of *La Nación* and other newspapers (Artinian, 2015; Sidicaro, 1993: 209). In 1950, *La Nación* sharpened its critical attitude toward the government. In mid-1950, editorials and opinion pieces in the paper paid more attention to domestic than international issues and criticism of the government became harsher and more obvious. The economic recession of 1949, the hardening of governmental positions, and Perón's announcement that he would not be a candidate for reelection might have been interpreted by *La Nación* as a window of opportunity. Furthermore, by then

the first phase of tension in the Cold War had seemingly vanished and international affairs were not considered as urgent as before, at least not until the beginnings of the Korean War.

In the following months the situation abruptly changed. In January 1951 a sour conflict occurred between *La Prensa* and the union of newspaper salesmen. The government ultimately decided to nationalize the paper. Fear of a governmental intervention was a constant reality for *La Nación* (Sidicaro, 1993: 214-5). From the end of 1951, the paper took on a strategy of approaching the government. By 1952 the goal of reconciliation had become paramount, perhaps due to the newspaper's political weakness or to the government's shift in economic policy (Sidicaro, 1993: 218). Therefore, I focus here on the beginning years of the Cold War up until the Korean War, when *La Nación* took its most critical stance against the government.

Defining Totalitarianism

Perón's enemies painted him as a "criollo imitation" of European fascist leaders. Thus, the Democratic Union pursued the strategy of presenting itself as a new popular front facing the advance of Nazism in Argentina. This image of Peronism as the Argentine fascism remained for a long period in the political discourse. To the Socialist, Perón was an aberration, a winning fascist politician after the collapse of the Axis in Europe.⁷ Nonetheless, in the case of *La Nación* (and likely within the liberal and conservative milieus that constituted the bulk of its readers), the Peronist regime was increasingly characterized as totalitarian rather than fascist.

This does not mean that the word "totalitarian" appeared at that moment. It had already been used to define fascist regimes during the Second World War (Sidicaro, 1993: 181). During the international conflict, *La Nación* supported the Allies and criticized the Argentine military government established in 1943 for its defense of neutrality. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was described by *La Nación* as the moment when "totalitarian aggression reached America" (*LN*, 27 January 1944). Yet this does not mean that the daily considered the Argentine military regime tantamount to a totalitarian system; in fact between 1943 and 1944, it sought to appease the government and establish fluid relationships with national authorities.

Thus, in 1944, the newspaper defended the then Minister of War, Perón, against accusations from the US Department of State, which said that the Argentine minister took the bellicose and totalitarian position of the Argentine government in his speeches. *La Nación* argued that the US government had misinterpreted Perón's words and criticized US hostility toward a representative of the Argentine government (Sidicaro, 1993: 184). This episode shows that the Argentine newspaper's interpretations of events did not solely depend on the images produced by US authorities.

The animosity of the US government toward Perón had its roots in the traditional diplomatic rivalry between the two countries and in the Argentine government's persistence in maintaining neutrality during World War II (Escudé, 1983: 52-65). The United States considered a US-led united front in the Western Hemisphere, to be necessary in order to adequately face the Nazi's aggression in Europe, but Argentina and Chile held out until the very last minute. In February 1944, the US government did not recognize the new military government of General Farrell (of which Perón was a member) and US Secretary of State Cordell Hull accused Argentine rulers of being "totalitarian" (Lanús, 1984: 19; Escudé, 1983: 128-134). Finally, after almost a year of diplomatic isolation, the Argentine government was forced to declare war on the Axis in March 1945.

Spruille Braden, US Ambassador in Argentina for few months in 1945, clashed with Perón repeatedly. Braden participated in the political mobilization of government opposition and accused the military government of being under Nazi influence (Lanús, 1984: 34-37). He was the author of the so-called Blue Book, which had been published by the US Department of State a few weeks before the Argentine elections of February 1946 with the goal of defeating Perón's candidacy. The Book reinforced accusations about Perón's totalitarian features and denounced his connections with the Axis. Nevertheless, there was no unanimous position among US governmental circles with regard to Argentina (Escudé, 1983: 180-198; Lanús, 1984: 37).

Perón's ascent within the regime and the clear perception that the military was trying to perpetuate its power through Perón led to a rift between the government and *La Nación*. The creation of the Democratic Union and Perón's victory were crucial here. The Democratic Union, a motley coalition of groups opposed to Perón, spanning from radicals to the communist party (with some conservative support), quickly obtained the endorsement of *La Nación*. In this context of tectonic shifts in political alignment, the concept of totalitarianism came alive again for *La Nación* as well as most of the opposition.

The convergence of Braden with Argentine opposition should alert us about the peculiar path of the word totalitarian in the Argentine public sphere. The creation of the Democratic Union drew more on the European example of anti-fascist coalitions (the Popular Fronts) than on the United States' influence. Argentine elections were held in February 1946, more than a year before Harry S. Truman proclaimed his famous doctrine and observed that the world was witnessing the clash of totalitarianism against freedom (Engerman, 2010: 36). Furthermore, an important part of the US conceptual construction of totalitarianism, the dichotomy between freedom and slavery, was completely missed in the Argentine case.⁸ In fact, rather than speaking of direct influences it can be argued that the conceptualization of totalitarianism in Argentina ran parallel to the process as it unfolded in the United States. The European debates loomed large both in the US and Argentina.

After the Second World War, the meaning of totalitarianism evolved and increasingly referred to the context of various European nations under Soviet influence. As shown by Artinian in his contribution to this dossier, Argentine socialists also labeled Peronism as a totalitarian movement. But in the socialist discourse, totalitarianism referred more frequently to the Nazi and fascist paradigms than to the Stalinist one (Artinian, 2015). Another difference is important here. Whereas the socialists did not hesitate to accuse Perón himself of being a totalitarian ruler, *La Nación* preferred to concentrate its increased use of the word totalitarian in its exploration of international topics. The Socialist Party had already been excluded from the political game by the Peronist juggernaut, but the stakes were higher for *La Nación*, which was still a part of the mainstream media; therefore it had to act more cautiously.

As a consequence, the conservative daily newspaper launched an indirect criticism of the Peronist government through a narrative about the origins of the Cold War. In fact, *La Nación*, as with its critiques of Soviet totalitarianism, used tougher words in its articles on international affairs than those that had been employed in their criticism of Peronism. International affairs allowed the daily a more aggressive position, which would have been a risky one in the case of domestic news.

La Nación also updated its criticism of Peronism but avoided becoming entrenched in the idea of Perón as a fascist leader. Its denouncement of Soviet communism and its —more or less hidden— allusions to Perón's government did not imply that Peronism was a communist movement. The journalists of *La Nación* clearly distinguished between both political options. Nor did *La Nación's* writers seek to launch an attack on Argentine communists, who at least for a while were considered to be allies in the fight against Perón. Nevertheless, *La Nación's* analysis of the Cold War allowed the newspaper to elaborate on the issue of a radical rupture in the Argentine public scene between the totalitarians and the defenders of freedom, between those who wanted to break the rules of civilization and end the traditions required for peaceful life in society and those who wanted to preserve them. This rupture was akin to the one Peronism was imposing on Argentine society through its rhetorical distinction between an oligarchy and the people.

How did *La Nación* define totalitarianism? What role did play Peronism in that definition? How did this definition work within the Cold War context? Totalitarianism had multiple features, and it is difficult to establish a coherent position. Editorials sometimes emphasized its economic or political dimensions while others preferred to accentuate the ideological aspects of the phenomenon. It is not possible to point out an evolution of the daily in this regard or to observe a greater concern for some features of totalitarianism over others. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity, I will focus first on economic and labor issues, second on political and ideological aspects, and third on cultural ones.

Economic Intervention and Social Conflict

La Nación paid significant attention to the issue of the state's intervention in the economy. Usually seen as a negative feature, it was variously labeled as "dirigisme," "planning," "statism," or "collectivism." The very abundance of definitions reveals the complexity behind this topic. Totalitarian economic measures such as central planning or greater economic intervention in production and distribution were assumedly part of the Peronist repertoire as well. Thus, the IAPI (Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Trade), the state agency in charge of regulating Argentine exports, was connected by *La Nación* to both Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism (Sidicaro, 1993: 201). References to "statism" were linked to the negative progression of a bureaucracy that was too powerful (*LN*, 11 May 1947 or 1 June 1947), which was also one of *La Nación's* constant critiques of Perón's government. Economic interference meant the end of any hope for the "advance[ment] of . . . multiple establishments of . . . entrepreneurs" ("*en la prosecución de la marcha de los múltiples establecimientos de las fuerzas vivas*") (*LN*, 11 May 1947). *La Nación's* readers easily found in these lines the newspaper's frequent concerns with regard to Argentine domestic issues, particularly, its desire to encourage the activities of the entrepreneurial classes ("*fuerzas vivas*").

The negative impact of "dirigisme" was obvious to both totalitarian regimes and Perón's Argentina. The most insidious effect was inflation (see *LN*, 10 February 1950). In an article entitled, "The unavoidable mechanism of prices" (*LN*, 13 February 1950), the monetary policies of Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and fascist Italy were compared. In Germany an attempt was made "to guarantee businessmen a fair and reasonable profit." In Soviet Russia, "different mechanisms were employed." In Italy, "despite the measures taken, it was not possible to avoid intense variations in prices." (*LN*, 13 February 1950) The article did not refer to Argentina, but the reader could easily grasp the implicit comparison between Argentine inflation and the three dictatorships. This connection was particularly true with Italy, where according to the newspaper article's author, interventionist measures had been less successful.

The issue of economic interventionism was nonetheless complex. Planning, an increase in state bureaucracy, and so on were not features that belonged exclusively to totalitarian regimes. The 1930s economic crisis and the Second World War had bequeathed a wide consensus among international politicians concerning the need for state intervention in order to regulate economic cycles. In its recent past, *La Nación* had maintained a position in favor of stimulating manufactures, an idea not far from Perón's beliefs, and the Democratic Union defended an economic and social program that was not radically different from the one espoused by Perón.

In fact, it has been argued that most Latin American governments expected to continue on a path of industrial growth and state intervention after the Second World

War with the help of US loans. Yet, the new circumstances created by the overstretching of US compromises in the World and the emergence of the Cold War scenario led the Truman administration to encourage a more liberal (i.e., laissez-faire) attitude toward governments in the Western Hemisphere (Leffler, 1992; Bethell and Roxborough, 1992: 21-22). *La Nación* assumed a similar position, but its defense of economic liberalism was a result of its political conflict with the Argentine government.

US economic policy, in comparison to those of Western European countries, occupied a marginal place in the pages of *La Nación*. However, resorting to these nations as models of economic policy for Argentina raised some serious problems. In fact, Perón's economic policies, including the idea of nationalization or of having generous social policies, were closer to those that had been implemented in some democratic countries, such as the United Kingdom, than those applied by totalitarian states (Halperin Donghi, 2003: 238). This complexity forced the writers of *La Nación* to elaborate a more sophisticated argument, with an eye to the realities of Western Europe. Thus, if these countries implemented interventionist policies, it was due to the Second World War and to the pernicious influence of totalitarianism (*LN*, 15 May 1949):

The commotion in the ideas as a result of the totalitarian systems and the war has brought the reform of the traditional concepts . . . following precipitat[ing] procedures, sometimes abrupt ones, in lieu of the profound meditation that must accompany the actions of the governments. The value of traditions . . . has been destroyed by the iconoclasts of the new era . . . The images of the old cult [have] been destroyed, being replaced by the faith in a single god, the omnipotent and omniscient State (*LN*, 11 May 1947).

This passage provides some themes that would become common in *La Nación's* analysis of the Soviet regime, such as the cult of the State and the idea of attacking traditions. The difference here is that these features appeared to be linked to the policies of democratic nations. How then could this conundrum be solved? *La Nación* sought in an appropriate example from some Western political leaders but focused mainly on their civil societies as a ray of hope for the future. Thus, Italians and their representatives were applauded because of their rejection "of the omnipotent State of the fascist era" (*LN*, 11 May 1947). The reaction of European civil societies was well reflected, according to the editorials of *La Nación*, from the electoral victories of conservative, Christian, democratic, or anti-communist forces in general (*LN*, 10 June 1950). Only in Britain was the Labour Party still committed to a program of nationalization. However, even there, "the consequences of the statist fervor" had become apparent (*LN*, 10 June 1950).

If democratic nations were escaping from the traps of dirigisme thanks to the solid reaction of their civil societies, a question rose about the capacity of Argentine civil

society. As was mentioned above, *La Nación* maintained an optimistic view of the Argentine voters before the elections of 1946. After that, its comparison with European democracies cast some shadows on the possibilities of reacting against interventionism: “the only Western examples of vitality of dirigisme are found in our primitive [*primaria*] America, always untimely in the election of its fashions” (*LN*, 10 June 1950).⁹

In addition to economic troubles, communist influence on the postwar period brought a second evil: an increase in the number of strikes. Again, the situation in Western Europe served as a frame of reference for the Argentine case. This preoccupation with labor unrest reached its peak in 1947, coinciding with an intense wave of strikes in Europe and the presence of communist representatives in the Italian and French governments.¹⁰ According to *La Nación*, strikes and excessive workers’ demands put a halt on economic recovery. In France, the economic difficulties inherited from the war were difficult to overcome due to the fact that “strikes are constantly repeated.” (*LN*, 23 November 1947) In *La Nación*’s analysis of these strikes, it is easy to identify a veiled criticism of the inflationary wage policy carried out by Perón. French workers had asked for better salaries in order to catch up to prices, but this action caused greater havoc: “The same phenomenon [which happens] in other nations is reproduced there” (*LN*, 23 November 1947).¹¹ Obviously, by “other nations,” the paper was referring to Argentina.

La Nación put the blame on “disoriented unions,” which did not understand reality or the “demands of society” (“*exigencias de la sociedad*”). Such was the case of bank clerks in France who walked out of work after asking for a five-day workweek (*LN*, 13 April 1947). Not only French strikers were irresponsible, but also, according to *La Nación* “the Buenos Aires government[,] which has established . . . Saturday as a day off, [did so] without any reasonable justification” (*LN*, 13 April 1947).

The “demands of society” included an increase in work hours and productivity. This would help European recovery and ultimately aid in the fight against Soviet threats. This rhetoric of productivity as the solution to the social and labor problems of the postwar period agreed with the recommendations of US experts and politicians for Western Europe (Maier, 1977; Roxborough, 1994: 259). Concern about labor unrest in Europe reflected the general preoccupation with labor conflicts at home. Not only did *La Nación* consider the number of strikes occurring to be excessive but it also found the increasing lack of discipline in work places to be dangerous: “From some time ago it is noticeable the frequency with which some groups of workers abandon their tasks, [even without] mentioning their apathy when they fulfill them” (*LN*, 9 September 1947). This was a criticism of worker empowerment by Perón’s policies, such as the so-called *comisiones internas* (internal commissions), composed of union representatives, which monitored compliance to labor agreements and influenced the way work and labor discipline was carried out

within factories (James, 2006: 84-90). For *La Nación* (and most businessmen) the co-option of trade unions and the political demobilization carried out by Peronism were not enough when the country faced an increase in labor costs and episodes of indiscipline.

The daily insisted on the need for an increased work effort in Argentina. Revealing enough, this effort was intended to help European recovery (*LN*, 9 November 1947). In comments about labor conflicts in Argentina, references to the European situation were commonplace. Thus, while criticizing a stoppage of milkmen in Buenos Aires, *La Nación* stated: “Within every nation and in the international community, the spirit of solidarity we have referred to is indispensable” (*LN*, 1 February 1948). Ultimately, European recovery might contribute to Argentine economic growth. Nonetheless, this latter argument did not appear in the newspaper’s pages. In fact, European recovery was as good in itself as a bulwark against communism (*LN*, 9 November 1947).

At home, one of the most daunting efforts of the US Democratic Party’s government was to persuade US citizens of the need to contribute to European recovery after the Second World War. The Marshall Plan and other financial aid were justified as an inexcusable duty for the United States in its fight for freedom. In particular, as tensions mounted in 1947, the recovery of West Germany became crucial (Hitchcock, 2010: 166.167; Leffler, 2010: 76-79). *La Nación* also believed that European recovery was essential in order to defeat communism, although Germany played a secondary part in its narrative, thus revealing Argentina’s traditional connections with countries such as France or Italy. Furthermore, recovery was only possible through the establishment of labor discipline both in Western Europe and in those countries not directly affected by the Second World War, like Argentina. Therefore, the international challenge became a domestic challenge against Peronist unions and workers.

Totalitarian Policies

But rather than focusing on economic or social issues, the political dimensions of totalitarianism became the fulcrum of *La Nación*’s attitude toward the Soviet Union. Through its critique of the Soviet regime, the daily newspaper introduced a veiled indictment of Perón’s administration. Some topics such as constraints on freedom of speech or harassment of the opposition helped *La Nación* compare the Argentine government to totalitarian rulers. On some occasions, the paper, out of precaution, spoke of “imitators” or “emulators” of totalitarian governments, which still constituted an obvious reference to Perón’s rule.

For the sake of clarity, we can separately analyze the different features that composed the concept of totalitarianism as employed by *La Nación*. First, as happened in the United States, totalitarianism served to label together fascist and communist regimes; therefore it helped legitimize the new conflict with the Soviet Union as a continuation of the struggle from World War II. In fact, in

one of its references to this question, *La Nación* quoted Spruille Braden —then in charge of Latin American Affairs within the Department of State— mentioning the similarities between fascism and communism (*LN*, 9 March 1947). Nevertheless, *La Nación's* position evolved in an autonomous way, without significant influence from the US media or academic discussions.

The memories of World War II were still fresh both in the United States and in Argentina, and the idea that fascisms might strike back was not foreign to most people (*LN*, 25 May 1947).¹² Yet, the idea that communism was the natural inheritor of those “aberrations” became commonplace in *La Nación*. As in the US discourse on totalitarianism, *La Nación* underlined similar characteristics in the methods employed by communist and fascist regimes (*LN*, 22 June 1947 or *LN*, 4 May 1950; Adler and Paterson, 1970: 1048). A 1948 editorial stated clearly that communism was the successor of Nazism (*LN*, 12 September 1948).

What was Peronism's place in this comparison? As Ricardo Sidicaro pointed out, the new political phenomenon, Peronism, was categorized by *La Nación* as a reformulation of an old Latin American practice: nineteenth century *caudillismo* (Sidicaro, 1993: 192). Nonetheless, the arrival of the Cold War altered the definition of Peronism as a form of *caudillismo* and at the very least introduced some nuances by adding the totalitarianism label to the picture.

Sometimes, other words such as “dictatorship” were employed, inducing readers to compare Perón's regime with those systems. Hence, an editorial published in early 1947 referred to a “more or less disguised dictatorship,” where “with the exception of [a] few countries in which there is a more or less disguised dictatorship, there is a trend toward joining efforts beyond ideologies” (*LN*, 26 January 1947). The idea of joining efforts referred to the coalition governments established in Western Europe, which included communist members in some cases. But the ambiguous mention of a “more or less disguised dictatorship” spoke of some European countries under the aegis of the Soviet Union and at the same time to Perón's government, which was usually criticized for his rejection of any kind of cooperation with opposition parties.

As time went by, the references to Perón became more obvious. Peronism began to be conceived as an “authoritarian tendency” or a “strong government.” In these expressions and in the idea of a more or less hidden dictatorship, the former definition of Peronism as *caudillismo* and its new one as totalitarianism merged: “Everyone notice the authoritarian governments which mock constitutions and rules. In the end, they are not other things but the traditional South American dictatorships, which hide their historical ascendancy under demagogic forms taken from the totalitarian regimes” (*LN*, 6 February 1951). The dictatorships found at home in South America had formed due to the lack of political culture in the region. In those nations with a solid democratic political culture (the United States and the United Kingdom were the ideal models

for *La Nación*), it “is pointless to speak not about totalitarianism, rejected as a crime, but even of a strong government if this means a government that dismisses popular sovereignty This is the reason why a plebiscite does not transform a dictator or a despot into a democratic ruler” (*LN*, 23 November 1947). The reader could easily assume that Perón's Argentina belonged to this pessimistic account of South America, among other reasons because *La Nación* had explicitly mentioned this opinion elsewhere (*LN*, 27 November 1949).

Several features of totalitarian regimes lambasted by the Argentine daily served as a mirror of Peronism. The most significant ones referred to procedures and rules, the harassment of opposition, the violation of fundamental liberties including freedom of speech and the press, and the cult of the leader. The violation of rules and procedures in Perón's Argentina was akin to the many abuses committed by communist governments in Europe. In an article about the debates in Moscow on the federal organization of the Soviet Union, the article writer ended up commenting on the Argentine situation and the “trend among some governments to infringe [upon] consecrated principles” (*LN*, 23 March 1947). What distinguished totalitarian countries and their imitators from true democracies was their respect or lack thereof for rules and procedures (*LN*, 8 June 1947; *LN*, 22 June 1947). The defense of democratic procedures was a fundamental battle: “one of the surest means in order to preserve human dignity is the strict application of the principles [*postulados*] of democracy” (*LN*, 31 August 1947).

What were these coveted principles? First the defense of the civil liberties, among them freedom of speech and the press. The latter was obviously a recurrent preoccupation for *La Nación*. Indeed, growing Peronist influence on the media had caused a bitter conflict with the opposition press; therefore it is not surprising that the denouncement of communist curtailment of freedom of the press occupied numerous pages in the daily. Perón's government sought support within the media and tried to silence those outlets unsympathetic to its positions. In 1947, for instance, the Argentine Central Bank suspended permission for imported printing paper and the government arbitrarily allocated paper quantities among the newspapers. Beginning in August 1947, the authorities closed many papers considered hostile. *La Nación*, in a risky move, angrily denounced the constraints on freedom of the press in the Soviet Union and its satellites as a means to attack constraints on freedom of the press in Argentina (Sidicaro, 1993: 204).

The question of the freedom of the press had played an important part in relations between Argentina and the United States beginning in the last years of the Second World War amidst a battle of propaganda concerning the declaration of war against the Axis powers. Thus, a memo sent to the US Secretary of State in January 1945, revealingly titled “Attitude of the United States toward Argentine Censorship of the Press and Treatment of Press Representatives,” complained about the restrictions to the freedom of the press imposed on the “democratic dailies,

La Nación and *La Prensa*,” by the Argentine military government.¹³ Of course, freedom of the press belonged to the core part of US ideology, but connections with some Argentine papers such as *La Nación* or *La Prensa* were particularly apparent. Both were frequently referred to as the “democratic” or the “independent” press. In the case of *La Prensa*, the newspaper owner had important relationships with the US media, and the situation of the Argentine press was a theme of discussion within US public opinion and the Department of State (Morgenfeld, 2012: 80). On some occasions, the US representatives in Argentina used economic negotiations as a weapon in an attempt to press Perón’s government to offer gentler treatment of *La Nación* and *La Prensa*. In 1950, amidst negotiations with Perón’s government regarding a loan from the Export-Import Bank of the US, Edward Miller, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, stated that thanks to “our new cooperative attitude in the economic field” he had obtained from the Argentine Minister of Finance, Ramón Cereijo, “a personal commitment that newsprint will continue to be granted to *La Nación* and *La Prensa* as long as he is in office.”¹⁴

It might also be possible that United States media and cultural structures influenced Argentine newspapers. But the development of “public diplomacy” was still precarious in many Latin American regions during the early phases of the Cold War.¹⁵ Furthermore, cooperation between US authorities and the Argentine media had obvious limits. Strategic reasons sometimes stymied US pressure on the Argentine government. Thus, in 1951, the United States government impeded the Latin American Ministers of Foreign Affairs attempt to pass a resolution condemning the Argentine government for the nationalization of *La Prensa*. The US government thus avoided a new confrontation with Argentina in the context of the Korean War (Morgenfeld, 2012: 80). On the other hand, as seen in the case of *La Nación*, autonomous impulses ultimately shaped the ideological evolution of the daily.

Democracy was also about the rule of law and the absence of arbitrariness. This evolution toward a procedural definition of democracy was concurrently taking place in the academic and political environment of the United States during these years. The former emphasis on the social meanings of implication was being replaced by a conceptualization that accentuated democracy’s differences from the Soviet Union. The United States’ main characteristics were precisely those that were more conspicuously absent in the Soviet Union: civic liberties, competitive elections, and a free press (Jervis, 2010: 29).

The parallelism with Argentina was apparent. In Argentina, the social implications of the word democracy became important after the economic crisis of 1930s, and these implications achieved a hegemonic position with Perón’s ascent to power and his rhetoric about “social justice.” *La Nación*, by emphasizing procedures, distinguished its position on democracy from Perón’s practices and from his constituency, which linked popular sover-

eignty with social policies. There is, however, a significant difference in the evolution of ideas concerning democracy, especially with regard to electoral devices, in *La Nación* versus the US media. Whereas in US academia and media competitive elections were an essential feature of democracy, for *La Nación*, elections played a secondary role. Until 1946, when the newspaper was still hoping for an electoral defeat of Perón, elections were an undisputable source of legitimacy. But Perón’s triumph led the paper to cast some doubt on the legitimacy of elections (Sadicaro, 1993: 197, 203).

La Nación regularly denounced the government’s harassment of the opposition, the ban on meetings, the attacks on the press, and the imprisonment of political leaders.¹⁶ These actions undermined the credibility of electoral processes in Argentina partially because they eroded the rights of minorities. Therefore, obtaining an electoral majority was not enough to be considered a legitimate authority (*LN*, 27 April 1947). The denouncement of attempts to impose unanimity by excluding the opposition was constantly brought forth as an attack on communist countries (*LN*, 29 March 1950 or *LN*, 27 March 1950) but it also appeared in the context of domestic politics (*LN*, 28 March 1950).¹⁷

The Argentine reader probably read the comments about elections in communist countries with an eye on the domestic situation. More than a precise analysis of the processes through which communist governments in Central and Eastern Europe had built their power, the denouncement of attempts to impose unanimity or single lists reflected Peronism’s attempts to shape a national political community whose borders would coincide with the political movement in power. In fact, the idea that Peronism was a plebiscitary rather than a democratic regime emerged at this time. In March 1950, an editorial fittingly entitled “Plebiscites and Majorities,” stated: “Minorities whose will expresses itself in elections, sometimes with numbers close to those obtained by majorities . . . did not deserve to be treated in a democratic and constitutional regime as [if] defeated in a merciless war” (*LN*, 18 March 1950). The reference to Perón’s government is obvious, both in the idea of a war being waged against the “defeated” and also in the issue of an adjusted electoral victory. In February 1946, Perón won the political election but the opposition obtained 46% of the ballots (Torre, 2002: 38).

At this time, *La Nación* developed another more conservative line of criticism to Perón. According to the daily, democracies should respect tradition. In fact, on many occasions, rules, procedures, and traditions appeared to be synonymous. Thus, when the paper spoke of nations with a better political culture than Argentina (or Latin America), it also asserted that there was greater respect for tradition in those nations as well (*LN*, 26 January 1947). In 1948, facing the proposal for a constitutional reform that included the possibility of presidential reelection, *La Nación* advocated the need to preserve institutional continuity (*LN*, 18 January 1948). The newspaper linked its defense of stable rules with the Cold War: “The

unstable situation in the European continent, with its inevitable impact on the rest of countries, contributes to intensify the expectations aroused by the . . . coming elections” (*LN*, 18 January 1948). In an editorial that appeared at the end of 1948, this position became even more obvious. The Argentine Congress had recently voted to allow a constitutional reform. According to *La Nación*, this process would open the door to an uncertain and dangerous future:

Representatives will obtain a blank check and we cannot discard beforehand any possible exaggeration in their innovative spirit

We have the privilege of being among the peoples who, amidst a deranged world and submitted to the chance of temerarious adventures, continue being ruled under old institutions, [which are the] basis for [our] political stability and historical continuity (*LN*, 5 December 1948).

“Temerarious adventures” referred to the political experiments carried out in Central and Eastern European nations. The options for Argentina were clear: it could respect its historical traditions and follow the example of nations with a better political culture and more stable institutions, such as the United States or Britain, or it could embark upon an uncertain voyage under the guise of a constitutional reform. In the turbulent context of the early Cold War, respect for tradition was the best guarantee of stability.

Facing a Totalitarian Culture

The defense of traditions against dangerous experiments was also present in *La Nación*’s reflections on the cultural features of totalitarianism and therefore in its analysis of the cultural practices of Peronism. In 1950, perhaps as a result of the economic slump begun in 1949 or because the government felt strongly enough, Perón pursued a tougher line in his search for social consensus. Thus educational policies openly became doctrinaire, stirring the newspaper’s opposition. This conflict led the daily to pay greater attention to the cultural features of totalitarianism.

According to *La Nación*, totalitarian regimes made a sinister use of words, resorting constantly to the manipulation of language: “This is the favorite field of the totalitarian strategy. Their insolence is to maintain that black is white, that those who were assaulted were the aggressors, that the few are the many, that two plus two is six, that yesterday is after tomorrow, according to convenience” (*LN*, 30 July 1950). This manipulation of words was carried out through propaganda. In totalitarian regimes propaganda was controlled by the state (*LN*, 20 August 1950). The word propaganda acquired negative connotations after its use by the Nazi regime and became a synonym of falseness. What were the lies propaganda tried to convey? First, it attributed to a single group the only authentic representation of the nation (*LN*, 20 August 1950). Second,

propaganda created a cult of personality dependent on the leader, especially in Stalin’s case (*LN*, 22 December 1950). A 1950s article emphasized that the cult of personality was usually accompanied by so-called mysticism (*mística*), that is:

A devotion without limits, more about feelings than about reason, an idea, always incarnated in a man, the adoration in rapture of that man Political mysticism, moreover, did not intend to influence individuals on a small scale, but on the crowds. The instrument of that influence is propaganda, the art whose permanent masters are the totalitarian regimes (*LN*, 3 November 1950).

It is impossible not to perceive the local echoes of these words. It has been common in Argentina, even among Perón’s supporters, to speak of “Peronist mysticism.” Furthermore, Peronism tried to indoctrinate the Argentine masses through intense propaganda campaigns. These campaigns praised the leader and his role in the transformation of the country and appropriated national symbols for Peronism. This process culminated in 1952 with the government’s proclamation of the “Peronist doctrine” as the “national doctrine” (Plotkin, 1993: 46). Of course, the capacity (or willingness) of Peronism to unite the whole society and suppress any source of dissent was far from the realities of the Soviet Union. Yet, in the context of bitter political conflict between the government and its opposition, *La Nación* provided its readers with an image of totalitarian regimes that served as a mirror for Perón’s rule.

Educational issues became one of the thorniest battlefronts in the political conflict. Here, resorting to the totalitarian image became ubiquitous (Sidicaro, 1993: 211). The goal of political indoctrination through the schools became apparent with Armando Méndez de San Martín’s arrival to the Ministry of Education in 1950. As Mariano Plotkin (1993: 151) points out, Peronism sought to transform itself into a sort of religion of state. At the end of 1949, the Ministry of Education adopted a single textbook for elementary schools nationwide. According to *La Nación*, the textbook, which had not been submitted to Congress for approval, began to be distributed to schools in 1950; in truth, “Peronist” textbooks were not widely introduced until 1952.¹⁸ The idea of introducing a unified textbook (*el texto único*) had already been proposed by nationalist thinkers in the 1930s. *La Nación* acknowledged that this was not a Peronist invention, but it rejected a policy that attacked the neutrality of public schools (Plotkin, 1993: 173; *LN*, 17 March 1950). The textbook “means the ideological monopoly of the state. [This is a] system adequate for the education of a country under a totalitarian regime” (*LN*, 2 April 1950). These were, according to the daily, the kind of policies implemented in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and, obviously, the Soviet Union. *La Nación* mentioned as evidence the well-known words of the former Soviet Commissar, Grigory Zinoviev: “we have to appropriate the soul of the child” (*LN*, 2

April 1950). Fear of young minds being manipulated was a permanent facet of these denunciations: “In this, as in other psychological devices, the Soviets resemble the Nazis, and both totalitarian regimes . . . led new generations to the death of the soul” (*LN*, 3 December 1950. See also *LN*, 4 February 1951).

La Nación was also preoccupied with the Peronism project for the political control and intellectual indoctrination of teachers, which had become apparent in 1950 (Plotkin, 1993: 172-174). In an editorial from that year, entitled “The Democratic School,” the newspaper denounced the coercion exerted on teachers who were being forced to affiliate themselves with the official union and warned, “We must strictly avoid that our public education system adopts ways of organization or contents of learning identical to those of the communist or fascist regimes” (*LN*, 25 June 1950. See also *LN*, 21 August 1950).

One of the aims of propaganda and totalitarian education was to transmit a new view of history. Thus, *La Nación* warned that society should avoid the textbook because “through capricious diversions in the appraisal of facts, epochs and historical figures . . . [it could become] an organ of factious propaganda” (*LN*, 13 February 1951). The issue of the reinvention of history carried out by the totalitarian regimes occupied a significant place in *La Nación*'s analysis, and it was linked with the daily's defense of tradition. Nonetheless, this entailed some risks for the paper.

La Nación echoed the nineteenth-century conservative idea about the impossibility of making a blank sheet of the past (*LN*, 5 January 1951). Totalitarian regimes aimed at “inculcating in the young and the ignorant what can be called a new consciousness and it is usually a deceitful consciousness . . . by rejecting the work of past generations . . . [Totalitarianism] extols at the same time the unique splendor of the regime in power” (*LN*, 5 January 1951). Did Peronism embody these practices? In the same article, the journalist introduced an ironic comparison between Chinese and Argentine peoples: “The aspiration to be the first comers is as suicidal as to believe to be the last ones . . . We don't have reasons to believe that these elemental truths are only known by Argentineans and not by the clever yellow people” (*LN*, 5 January 1951). One possible interpretation of this phrase was that neither Argentines nor Asians would be cheated by those who wanted to alter the narratives of the past, to suppress old heroes and create new ones.¹⁹ A second interpretation might indicate that both in Argentina and in China a process of historical forgery was already taking place and both societies should be on alert.

In another article about Czechoslovakia, criticism of iconoclasm from the new revolutionary totalitarianisms appeared. The editorial mentioned how the Czechoslovakian communist government, under Moscow's influence, had banned the circulation of postage stamps with the faces of Tomás Masaryk and Edvard Benes, two of the nation's founding fathers. According to *La Nación*, the crime both historical figures were guilty of was their re-

publican ideas and their profession of “an ideal of freedom for everyone.” The article ended with an attack on the foundational character that the dictatorship aspired to establish as well as a new defense of continuity (*LN*, 31 July 1949).

The brutal use of propaganda, attempts at indoctrination, and the manipulation of history and words characterized totalitarian regimes (and therefore Peronism). However even if this portrait is to some extent accurate, it is also a stylization and reminds the reader of well-known dystopias, such as the one found in George Orwell's *1984*, which was published in 1948. In fact, *La Nación* referred to Orwell several times. Adler and Paterson (1970: 1,063) have shown Orwell's impact in the US imagination with regard to totalitarianism. A similar process occurred in the Argentine case (not only for *La Nación*), and these European oeuvres elaborated by left-wing critics of Stalinism helped create a negative image of Peronism among both left-wing intellectuals and liberal and conservative critics of the movement.

La Nación's View on Global Affairs

La Nación's analysis of the use of history by totalitarian regimes did not depend exclusively on the practices of Perón's government. The newspaper had its own view of the world, one that it had forged before the rise of Perón and the beginnings the Cold War. Peronism and the Cold War influenced the daily's ideas about the world, but the central tenets of these ideas had roots in the past that survived under Perón's rule.

The presentation of the communist regime as a totalitarian system was not only a moral denunciation but also a warning about the threat that such systems constituted for all of humanity. This position was similar to the one adopted in the United States. After the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), *La Nación* expressed its sympathy with the project: “This universal cause is also our cause, is the cause of America [that is, the Americas]. If this cause is defeated, life would lose meaning for authentic Westerners” (*LN*, 13 March 1949).

La Nación emphasized the threat of Soviet communism by comparing it to the past Nazi threat toward civilization as a whole. Communism was a global threat; therefore Latin America could not isolate itself (*LN*, 29 January 1950). The newspaper's aggressive tone and content recalls many of the messages elaborated in the United States when confronting the Soviet threat. Yet *La Nación* pursued its own way, autonomous from the discussions in the United States. Two examples are relevant here. The first refers to relationships with Francisco Franco's Spain. In 1950, *La Nación* did not hesitate to criticize the US approach to the Spanish dictator. It stated that to appease regimes such as Franco's was “dangerous and dangerously futile” (*LN*, 22 January 1950). In a different piece, without referring to the United States, a columnist said that supporting Franco in the process of integrating Spain into the United Nation (UN) caused disorientation and

frustration among “many men of good faith” and was effectively rescuing the weak Spanish dictatorship (*LN*, 27 September 1950).

La Nación's attitude toward Francoism did not emerge out of a liberal position; instead, it was probably linked to Perón's cooperation with Spain. In 1946, Argentina was one of the few defenders of Franco's Spain in the UN and in 1948 both countries signed the so-called Perón-Franco Protocol (Paradiso, 2002: 539). For a few years, Perón's government was the only international ally to the isolated Spanish regime. Perón's goal was to show his independent stance on international affairs. But *La Nación* emphasized the ideological connections between the Argentine government and a successor dictatorship from the defeated fascist regimes.

The second example refers to communism in Latin America. *La Nación* saw communism as a global threat. In Latin America, after a wave of democratization at the end of World War II, the Cold War encouraged the reaction of conservative forces. Military and conservative governments repressed political freedoms: communist parties were banned and the labor movement was crushed, in many cases with US encouragement (Roxborough, 1994: 257; Bethell and Roxborough, 1988). Commenting on a wave of strikes in Bolivia in 1950, *La Nación* seemed to back Washington's view that every social protest opened the way to communist penetration.²⁰ When the communist party was proscribed in Chile, the daily newspaper applauded it (*LN*, 3 February 1950).

However, *La Nación*'s analysis of the communist threat in Latin America as a whole and Argentina in particular offered some nuances. First, the struggle against communism did not justify all measures to combat it. Thus, *La Nación* condemned attacks on the “luminous principle” of freedom of the press in other Latin America countries, like Peru, in the name of the defense against communism (*LN*, 22 May 1950). This attitude reflected *La Nación*'s liberal ideology and its clash with Perón's government regarding this issue. Besides, the newspaper denounced coups d'états, many of which were portrayed as combating communism; these seizures of government had been multiplying in the region since 1948: “the dictatorial spirit wins every day support” (*LN*, 11 May 1950; see also *LN*, 6 February 1951).

The role of communism in Argentina did allow some room for nuances as well. In fact, rather than focusing on communist activities in the country, *La Nación* preferred to insist on the government's violations of civil rights in the name of anti-communism (*LN*, 24 June 1950).

There was also a divergence from the line established by the US administration toward Perón's regime. In 1946, the new Ambassador in Buenos Aires, George Messersmith, left the position established by his predecessor, Braden. According to Messersmith, there was no Nazi menace in Argentina. The main problem was what he perceived to be the Soviet Union's growing influence in Latin America. Taking this into consideration, Messersmith recommended that his

government court Argentine friendship since the country could be an important asset in the hemispherical fight against communism (Lanús, 1984: 40). This was, of course, quite a different view from the one held by *La Nación*. However, the US Department of State, still under Braden's influence, did not easily welcome Messersmith's ideas about Perón as a bulwark against communism. Even though between 1947 and 1950, the relationship between Argentina and the United States was fraught with ambiguity (to some extent due to the conflicts among US bureaucratic bodies), President Truman's proclamation of containment for communism relieved the pressure on Perón's regime (Morgenfeld, 2012: 76-77).

But for *La Nación* the main focus of containment was Peronism. The Argentine Communist Party had participated in the 1946 elections as part of the Democratic Union against Perón. According to *La Nación*, Peronism and not communism was the greater threat to its independence and autonomy in Argentina. A piece that appeared in February 1951 reveals this position; it was a note from the union of newspaper salesmen. This union accused *La Nación*, with a threatening tone, of working for the interests of Wall Street by permitting in its pages “a group of communist of Rosario, which declared themselves leaders of a so-called Federation of Newspapers and Magazines of the Argentine Republic, a union that only exists in their imagination, [which] give[s] free rein to their disappointment for not having been able to win over our trade” (*LN*, 10 February 1951). *La Nación* responded that it sought to inform its readers with objectivity. The virulence of the union's attack led *La Nación* to a moderate tone in its response, probably in fear of reprisals.²¹ The daily's position vis-à-vis Argentine communists aimed to protect pluralism against governmental aspirations to represent the entire community.

Although this position can be understood in the domestic context, there persisted a contradiction between the image of communism as a formidable threat to humanity and the image of communist as a part of a diverse society in Argentina. How can this contradiction be explained? In order to respond to this question, it is worth exploring *La Nación*'s position regarding the process of imperial decomposition that accompanied the early phase of the Cold War. A good example is the Italian case. *La Nación* showed its solidarity with the country, which was losing “the administration of its colonies and, even more, [had] been stripped of the city of Trieste, despite the fact [that] most of its people” were Italian (*LN*, 18 April 1948). This solidarity might have emerged out of Argentina's “close links with Italy” due to the presence of a sizable Italian community in the South American country (*LN*, 18 April 1948).

But the solidarity with European imperial powers went beyond the Italian case. The British case was paradigmatic. In 1948, *La Nación* reported on the electoral defeat of Jan Smuts in South Africa against the nationalists. For *La Nación* this result was ominous: “it challenges, or even puts in immediate jeopardy the fidelity of the dominions to

the Empire in moments [where] it faces global difficulties [that are] increasingly complex.” Furthermore, the nationalists had in the past shown sympathy for the Nazi Party and its goal was to marginalize natives. Therefore, “it is not an emancipatory movement in a democratic sense.” On the other hand, “the venerable Marshal Smuts, former hero of the Boers, represented progressive liberalism and imperial loyalty” (*LN*, 30 May 1948). However, *La Nación*’s backing of Smuts was rather a defense of empire than a defense of democracy. Smuts was the architect of the new South Africa after the Boer Wars, recasting the country’s relationship with the British Empire. In fact, Smuts believed that a segregated regime (of Boers and Britons) would unify whites in a common discourse of civilization and racial supremacy. The survival of empires, and in particular the British Empire, was essential in order to guarantee the success of white civilizing enterprises in Africa. Thus, as Mark Mazower points out, Smuts played a significant role in the design of both the League of Nations and the United Nations as international bodies that would help empires survive the profound impact of the World Wars (Mazower, 2009: 28-65).

By portraying Smuts as a “progressive liberal,” *La Nación* also referred to the defense of the British Empire as a part of the liberal project. Manuel Mujica Láinez, an Argentine writer and journalist stationed in London, sent *La Nación* a gloomy account of the electoral results in South Africa (Mujica Láinez, “En las universidades se valora la permanencia espiritual británica,” *LN*, 30 May 1948). This defense of the British Empire again appeared in a critique of the British Labour government, which was accused not only of advancing dirigisme in Britain but also of weakening “the solidness of the British Empire” (*LN*, 12 January 1950). Quoting Winston Churchill, *La Nación* underlined how the losses in the British Empire might have been caused by a “too realistic” conception of international affairs, a conception based upon “materialism, like in the totalitarian regimes” (*LN*, 12 January 1950). In particular, *La Nación* emphasized the defense of the British Empire, although it thought that all European empires should be protected. The Cold War made it even more necessary to preserve imperial stability (*LN*, 18 November 1950).

The defense of European empires was not, according to *La Nación*, a defense of imperialism. In fact, this word always appeared in association with the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany; it did not refer to Britain or any other Western European power. *La Nación* defended a gradual approach to the independence of African and Asian colonies. This position was akin to the one defended by US authorities. Whereas in principle the United States promoted an anti-colonial discourse and the Wilsonian idea of self-government, as the Cold War scenario evolved, the need to support its European allies led to a more cautious and gradual perspective on decolonization. In fact, this contradiction had always been latent in US thought. Thus, President Woodrow Wilson himself did not consider African and Asian peoples to be ready for self-government (Engerman, 2010: 22, 40; Manela, 2007). However, again, rather than being influenced by US ideas about de-

colonization, *La Nación*’s position evolved autonomously based upon its own ideological traditions.

As in the case of the United States, Argentina as a nation emerged out of a revolt against a European empire. Also, Argentine elites believed themselves to simultaneously belong to both the New World and to European civilization. Many Argentine intellectuals and politicians found in Wilson a congenial figure and hoped that the US President would bring a new brilliant era to the world (Halperín Donghi, 1999: 73). Wilson’s moralist approach to international affairs and respect for self-determination converged again with the mainstream liberal thought in Argentina.²² But, like Wilson, most Argentines believed that the colonial world was not ready for democracy and self-government.²³ *La Nación* inherited these ideas. It shared the Wilsonian credo for the necessity of applying a moral criterion to international affairs (*LN*, 15 October 1944: 6), a specific contractualist view to international relations, and it also distrusted non-European civilizations. But these ideas came from a strong Argentine liberal view of the world as much as from the influence of the United States. (In fact, until the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, *La Nación* showed more enthusiasm for European empires than the more ambiguous and reluctant United States, (see Bradley, 2010:473).

The particularities of *La Nación*’s ideas can be better grasped by looking at the Peronist view on imperialism. In international affairs, Perón’s government adopted a rhetorical position labeled “third position,” that is, the idea of an autonomous international policy without the influence of the superpower. Yet, this was not a position of non-alignment but rather an emphasis on national sovereignty. In fact, Perón’s diplomats never abjured from Argentina’s condition as a Western and Christian country and their anti-communism was an obvious fact (Paradiso, 2002: 542-544). Perón’s actual international policy was not usually challenged by *La Nación* (with some exceptions concerning the Argentine government’s decision to not send troops to Korea).²⁴ In a paradoxical way, *La Nación* converged with some nationalists who opposed Perón and criticized the weakness of the “third position,” choosing instead to defend the need for a close alliance of Latin Americans with the United States in order to respond to the communist threat (Walter, 2001: 267).

A crucial difference between the government and *La Nación* was that the former oriented its discourse toward Latin America whereas the latter continued a tradition of supporting Argentine elites who searched for references and models in Europe (Paradiso, 2002: 566). This helps us understand the defense of European colonialism in the newspaper. Even if Peronism had not obtained power, one can assume that *La Nación* would have adopted a similar stance. International news was mostly European news (with the addition of the United States). Until 1950, European affairs dominated *La Nación*’s front pages. Although there were scattered references to India or the civil war in China, Europe was still the center of the world as understood by the Argentine daily. In editorials, references to Asia were rare until at least 1950.²⁵ The Korean War al-

tered this feature to some extent, but it did not cause a major transformation in the newspaper's perspective.

For *La Nación*, Europe was the keystone on which the international liberal order was laid. Its fall meant the end of that order. This is the reason why a threat to Europe was a threat to the world: "to help Europe is today a way of universal salvation" (*LN*, 26 September 1947). Many things happened in the world, but the most important events occurred in Europe: "Europe is a continent covered with painful wounds What is therefore, this enigma of Europe, which constituted the enigma of universal peace?" (*LN*, 12 September 1948).

The defense of European empires was a defense of countries that, according to *La Nación*, were fighting for humanity against communism. This was a battle for humanity, and humanity meant the collective of human beings as well as a way of being civilized. Several editorials underlined these ideas. To defend Europe was "an unavoidable moral obligation for the Christian civilization" (*LN*, 26 September 1947) and "this is a crusade launched in defense of the basis of our civilization and Latin American peoples have to participate" (*LN*, 21 December 1947). As in many battles about civilization, religious language appeared (e.g., "Christian civilization" and "crusade"), but this does not mean that religion was the crux of the matter.²⁶

Actually, civilization as conceived by *La Nación* refers to the values of the nineteenth-century liberal-conservative ideology, which had constituted the daily's philosophical roots from the time of its inception. As was mentioned in the introduction, the concept of totalitarianism offered a simplified interpretation of a complex reality in a moment of rapid and uncertain change. This supreme act of simplification reduced conflicts to manifestations of a cultural clash (frequently between two worlds). Also in the United States the Cold War was portrayed as a struggle for the salvation of Western values, in particular those represented by the US itself. In the case of *La Nación*, the defense of Europe was a defense of a representation of Western values. Soviet communism was the other. This view appeared clearly in the newspaper's comments on the Paris Conference (which established the basis for the Marshall Plan):

The Oriental interests, in their apparent recent form, have begun to move in Europe with a vigor unknown before the last war. In other moments of history, these interests acted in search of their own westernization [*occidentalización*]; today [there is] the intent to extend over Europe with the aim of orientalizing it [*orientalizarla*] This venerable civilizing continent cannot renounce to its destination or declare to be defeated To win this battle it has the cooperation of the United States and the willingness of nations that, like ours, are branches of the same tree and [an] advance party of the same civilization (*LN*, 13 July 1947).

State interferences that submitted human beings to the total surveillance of the state were "an aberration, a step backward to the old monarchies of the East" (*LN*, 12 Oc-

tober 1947). Communist victory could not be conceived from a moral and civilized point of view. During the Korean War, once Chinese intervention became apparent, *La Nación* did not hesitate to label communist troops as "Asian hordes" (*LN*, 17 December 1950).

This view, which equates totalitarianism with Asian barbarism or despotism, helps us understand the scarce sympathy the daily expressed for Asian independence movements. It also reflects the virulence of opposition against Perón. Still, ideological tropes are only a part of the story. The journalists working for *La Nación* (like most actors involved in the global Cold War) understood that every conflict involves other aspects such as strategy, alliances, and conjunctures. Thus, in 1951, when *La Nación* attempted to appease Perón's government, its attitude toward decolonization shifted and a new, more "Third Worldist" position emerged (Sidicaro, 1993: 231). After that, tensions in Korea diminished and the Cold War slowly advanced toward an initial period of equilibrium and détente.

FINAL REMARKS

The understanding of the Cold War as a conflict between civilizations appeared in many other places and moments during the period. Thus, among the most conservative sectors of Latin American societies or among military men, the idea that Western civilization was collapsing extended beyond the Cuban Revolution (Brands, 2010: 27). Yet this view had already emerged before the Cuban events in many parts of the continent and such opinions were not necessarily the result of US influence. In Brazil, opposition to Getúlio Vargas, which was defeated in the 1945 elections, put communists, fascists, and Vargas supporters under the same umbrella as a part of totalitarian expression (Bohoslavsky, 2011). In Argentina, this view was the result of the bitterness of the conflict between Peronism and its enemies. When the conflict reached its critical stage, the actors tended to consider it irresolvable and to think about it in cultural terms. That is, the conflict was the unavoidable result of "who we are" and "who they are," which in turn made it more difficult to find a solution. As this article has shown, for *La Nación*, Peronism embodied the totalitarian other. The widespread use of the word totalitarianism to implicitly refer to Perón's political movement was a result both of its relevance to the international arena and of the growing intensity of the domestic Argentine fracture. In fact, *La Nación* elaborated a multilayered concept of totalitarianism in which domestic and international issued interacted.

Moreover, *La Nación* drew on diverse ideological traditions in order to construct its definition of totalitarianism. Some had their roots in the nineteenth-century liberal-conservative credo. Others were more recent and were linked to the wide "progressive" coalitions that had been built against fascism during the interwar period in Europe and were then replicated in several parts of Latin America. It has to be noted that *La Nación* blended conservative

and progressive arguments in its discussion of international affairs mainly when it intended to implicitly refer to domestic policies. In a well-known article, Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (1988) provide a fine analysis of the “conjuncture” of the years 1946–1948 in Latin America. They observed how the end of World War II motivated a process of mobilization against authoritarian regimes and the success of social and political democratization in many parts of Latin America, and how the convergence between the initial tensions of the Cold War and the reaction of traditional elites in Latin America wrecked any hopes for transformation (Bethell and Roxborough, 1988). The peculiarity of the Argentine case (and probably of the Brazilian case as well) was that the process of social democratization was propelled forward by the inheritor of the authoritarian regime himself. This made *La Nación* a democratic and conservative critic at the same time.

Beginning in 1951, *La Nación* tried to establish friendlier terms with the government. Up until then, the newspaper and many of its readers had put significant weight on simplified cultural interpretation of the many conflicts that divided Argentine society and the world. It has been shown that the newspaper’s view on world affairs and its analysis of domestic issues created a feedback loop.

NOTES

1. See Escudé (1983) for an important contribution to the international dimensions of Argentine domestic policies at the beginning of the Cold War.
2. This is the perspective of Grandin and Joseph (2010).
3. This article is based on the editorials and articles that appeared in *La Nación* between 1946 and 1950. Unfortunately, I could not find relevant archival material for this essay. Nonetheless, *La Nación*’s editorials and opinion pieces constitute an extremely rich source for the analysis of the daily newspaper’s political strategies. On *La Nación*’s editorials, see Sidicaro (1993: 8-9).
4. See the interesting reflections on this topic in Rabinbach (2006). The Italian case was the key for the conceptualization of totalitarianism; refer to Prezioso (2008). And for more about European influence on the debate in the United States, see Adler and Paterson (1970: 1047).
5. See a good analysis of this process in Torre (2002: 14-23).
6. *La Nación*’s position was shared by most Argentine newspapers, among them, *La Prensa*. For some comparisons, see Ajmechet (2011) and Nallim (2009).
7. However, the communists changed the strategy and tried to woo the Peronist working classes (James, 2006: 26).
8. Stephanson (2000) has emphasized this discursive dichotomy as being key for understanding the Cold War. Nonetheless, his account is too idealistic, not allowing room for ideological modification and being unable to explain the timing of various political actions. In Stephanson’s view, the Cold War was an unavoidable result of permanent features in US ideology.
9. On the issue of the Labour Party’s policies in Britain, see also the articles: “La pendiente colectivista” (14 August 1950) and “La experiencia del estatismo británico” (5 October 1950).
10. At the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, US concerns about Western European social and economic conditions dramatically increased and were entangled with the perception of a communist threat on the American continent (Leffler, 2010: 74-75).

11. On strikes in Italy, see “La población y las huelgas” (14 November 1948) and several articles published on December 19th concerning various strikes in Italy and a strike of bakeries in Argentina.
12. See also “Resurrecciones inquietantes” (12 October 1947).
13. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1945V09,835.918/1-1145>. The Chargé in Argentina (Edward Reed) to the Secretary of State, “Attitude of the United States toward Argentine Censorship of the Press and Treatment of Press Representatives,” Buenos Aires, 11 January 1945: 505. [Accessed 14/ March/2015]
14. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1950v02,611.35/5-150>. Memorandum by the Secretary of State (Dean Acheson) to the President, Washington, May 1, 1950, Confidential. Effects on Brazil of Argentine Developments and Significance to Brazilian-American Relations of Possible Election of Vargas to Presidency: 713. [Accessed 13/March/2015]
15. Beginning in 1938, the US Department of State created institutions aimed at influencing cultural discussions in Latin America, but the Cold War propaganda did not fully explode until the Cuban Revolution. See Ninkovich (1981: 28) and Rodríguez (2012).
16. See “Atropello de fin de año” (*LN*, 31 December 1950) and “Nada de adversarios” (*LN*, 4 February 1951).
17. See also 24 October 1950.
18. Nevertheless, Mariano Plotkin states, in his insightful and detailed study of this topic, that it is difficult to establish whether the *texto único* was employed in schools (Plotkin, 1993: 174).
19. In the Argentine case, the emphasis of some nationalist sectors close to Perón on rescuing the figure of Juan Manuel Rosas was harshly criticized by *La Nación* (*LN*, 17 January 1951). Nonetheless, the relationship between nationalists and Perón was rather complex. See Walter (2001).
20. See “El comunismo en América”, published on February 8th, 1950, a particularly paranoid article on this matter.
21. In its note, the union stated: “*La Nación*, a paper forged in the same furnace as *La Prensa*, has forgotten the proverb ‘forewarned is forearmed’” (*LN*, 10 February 1951). When Perón’s government ordered the shutdown of *La Prensa*, it took advantage of an opportunity provided by a conflict between the union and the newspaper. Furthermore, the closing of newspapers multiplied in those months and it was impossible not to hear a threatening sentiment in the union’s words.
22. The impact of Wilson’s ideas on the colonial world has been explored by Manela (2007). The ideological influence of Wilson in Latin America deserves further analysis.
23. In 1920, the Argentine representative at the Assembly of the League of Nations proposed to keep colonial countries under the surveillance of the League in order to help them fully mature before becoming independent nations. See Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto (Argentina), Liga de las Naciones, Caja AH/0021 c. 67, A.12. “Projet de Voeu déposé par la Délégation Argentine,” Génève, s/f.
24. On the complex reasons for the Argentine decision, see Paradiso (2002: 553). *La Nación*’s position can be found in 22 January 1951.
25. Concerning the first editorials about Asia in January 1950, see “La política occidental en China,” (*LN*, 4 January 1950: 4).
26. In the conflict with Perón’s government over education issues, *La Nación* supported the secular public school system as conceived by nineteenth-century Argentine liberal politicians.

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