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The British Film Campaign in Spain during the First World War (1914–1918)

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The First World War brought a propaganda battle of enormous proportions to Spain. The conflict mobilised a popular debate in the country, and the belligerent powers deployed persuasive campaigns that included films as an instrument of control. Cinema overcame its traditional role of entertainment and turned war material into an ideological weapon. Despite the French monopoly of film industry and the limitations imposed by the Spanish Government, Great Britain unleashed film campaigns that spread throughout Spain through private and diplomatic events. This article examines the British film industry in Spain, analysing its operation and progressive improvement during the First World War.

KEYWORDS Britain, cinema, Spain, First World War, diplomacy

In the First World War propaganda became a new instrument of war, capable of modifying the thinking and attitude of the military, the population at home, and the citizens of neutral nations. The combatant powers deployed large propaganda campaigns using printed material, discursive

messages, patriotic objects, cartoons, photographs and moving images. Although cinema was already a popular entertainment artform, the United States and France realised the ideological potential of film material a few years before the conflict. Between 1914–1918, the belligerent powers launched premeditated film campaigns that spread to all countries, including Spain.¹

Spain was located in a strategic position of great importance. Therefore, despite its neutrality, the country became an alternative war scenario. The conflict left its traces in the country through the complete modification of commercial networks, naval warfare, intelligence activities, the spread of revolutionary movements, and the mobilisation of diplomatic and propaganda campaigns. The war created an important national debate that questioned the nature of neutrality, which ended up becoming a heated controversy between Germanophiles (*germanófilos*) and supporters of the Entente (*aliadófilos*).² The belligerent powers exploited national frictions to deploy and reinforce their persuasive campaigns in Spain, also channelled through film industry.

Cinema was already very popular in Spain. When the war broke out, most of the country's cities had theatres and small venues dedicated to representation and film projection that were visited by a significant part of the population, especially the lower-middle classes.³ Foreign film companies, especially French companies, had set up subsidiary firms in Spain, and Spaniards could consult specialised magazines on topics related to cinematography.⁴

During the war, commercial distribution was strongly limited by national censorship, Spain's logistical deficiencies, and the effects of the Allied trade blockade. As Sánchez Salas reveals, foreign powers circumvented the difficulties imposed by the Spanish censorship through private events that were hidden behind an image of charitable, scientific, or cultural activities. The international powers made agreements with the owners of Spanish cinemas and commercial theatres for the rental or concession of their rooms, while the money raised was directly given to charities such as the Red Cross. The events were also organised by associations and support groups that rented venues for cultural purposes. Foreign powers exhibited their material in luxurious

¹ On the international film propaganda: Paris Michael, *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Nicholas Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda during the First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 230–783 and Gunnar Norda, *Der Deutsche Propagandafilm Im 1. Weltkrieg (Zum Propagandistischen Stellenwert Des Deutschen Films Im Ersten Weltkrieg)*, (Munich: GRIN: 2007). On wartime film propaganda in Spain: Jens Albes, 'La Propaganda Cinematográfica de Los Alemanes En España Durante La Primera Guerra Mundial', *Mélanges de La Casa de Velázquez- Dossier: Propagande Étrangère En Espagne, Propagande Espagnole à l'étranger* 31, no. 3 (1995): 77–101; Julio Montero Díaz and María Antonia Paz Rebollo, *La Larga Sombra de Hitler: El Cine Nazi En España, 1933–1945* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2009), 184–200; Javier Ponce Marrero, 'Propaganda and Politics: Germany and Spanish Opinion in World War I', in *World War I and Propaganda* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 291–322; Daniel Sánchez Salas, 'Discipline and Punish. On Censorship of World War I Informativa and Propaganda Films in Spain (1914-1918)', *L' Atalante* 21 (2016): 107–10.

² Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, 'Germanófilos y Neutralistas: Proyectos Tradicionalistas y Regeneracionistas Para España (1914–1918)', *Ayer: Revista de Historia* 91, no. 363–92 (2013), 66; Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, *España En La Primera Guerra Mundial: Una Movilización Cultural* (Madrid: Akal, 2014), 11–14.

³ Vicente José Benet, *El cine español. Una historia cultural* (Barcelona, Paidós: 2012), 48–54 and Julio Pérez Perucha, 'Narración de un aciago destino', in Román Gubern, et al., *Historia del cine español* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2009), 47–88.

⁴ José Antonio Bello Cuevas, 'Cine Español (1896–1930): Origen y Evaluación de Sus Géneros y Estructuras Industriales', *Filmhistoria Online* 2 (2012); Juan Ignacio Lahoz Rodrigo, *A Propósito de Cuesta: Escritos Sobre Los Comienzos Del Cine Español 1896–1920* (Valencia: Ediciones de la Filmoteca, 2010).

premises, educational and political buildings, or diplomatic venues, such as embassies and consulates.⁵

As was the case in Europe, French cinema played a leading role in Spain, through propaganda campaigns characterised by the distribution of high-quality films, the mobilisation of resources and specialised staff, and the rapid acquisition of screening venues.⁶ Germany and Austria-Hungary deployed their cinematographic activities from the beginning of the conflict through independent agents and diplomatic bodies that held private events supported by charities.⁷ Great Britain also mobilised important film screenings in Spain, especially from 1916. Although its campaigns were especially promoted by diplomatic representatives, patriotic associations, charities, and British citizens residing in the country, the authorities did not dispense with the cooperation of France. The British managed to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the Spanish Government and screened films such as *The Battle of Somme* and *Britain Prepared* in diplomatic buildings and rented premises throughout the country.⁸ This article includes a contextualised analysis of the film campaign deployed by Great Britain in Spain during the First World War. The article analyses the importance of war cinema in the country and, especially, the efforts made by Great Britain to screen its cinematographic material. The article also complements the study of the British propaganda apparatus in Spain, which is analysed in detail in the doctoral thesis *Filias y Fobias en Acción* (2021).⁹

Spain and the First World War: Foreign policy, public opinion, and propaganda

During the Great War, Spain was characterised by the weakness of its socio-economic, political, military, and institutional structures. Its economy was completely backward; national morale had been destroyed after the progressive decline of its empire, and its political system showed signs of exhaustion. The country had lost its overseas territories and, therefore, its prestige and international position were also diminished, especially when continental affairs were once again crucial. Spain lacked a powerful army, and its population was caught in an ideological confrontation that divided the country between those who aspired to reform the system and those who preferred to maintain the *status quo*. Even though Spain defended its neutral status throughout the conflict, the country had an important economic dependence on the allied countries and accordingly it inclined towards the Entente of France and Great Britain.¹⁰ Spain was not left out of the development of new modes

⁵ Albes, 'La Propaganda Cinematográfica de Los Alemanes', 77–101; Daniel Sánchez Salas, 'Film/Cinema (Spain)', in: *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2017-12-05). On Spanish censorship during the Great War: Sánchez Salas, 'Discipline and Punish', 105–7; Luis Alonso García, 'De Arañas y Moscas. La formación del sistema de cine y los principios de la distribución cinematográfica en España', *Archivos de La Filmoteca: Revista de Estudios Históricos Sobre La Imagen* 66 (2010): 130–45.

⁶ Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, The National Archives (TNA), FO 185/1340; Carolina García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial en el estrecho de Gibraltar: economía, política y relaciones internacionales* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla y Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2012), 168–71; Albes, 'La Propaganda Cinematográfica', 90–3.

⁷ Albes, 'La Propaganda Cinematográfica', 77-101; Jens Albes, *Worte Wie Waffen: Die Deutsche Propaganda in Spanien Während Des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen: Krartext, 1996); Ponce Marrero, 'Propaganda and Politics', 292–321.

⁸ García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial*, 168–71 and Albes, 'La Propaganda', 88; 97.

⁹ Marta García Cabrera, 'Filias y fobias en acción: propaganda británica en España durante la Primera y la Segunda Guerra Mundial', University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Thesis, 2021.

¹⁰ Francisco Romero Salvadó, *España, 1914–1918: Entre La Guerra y La Revolución* (Madrid: Crítica, 2020), 60; Javier Ponce Marrero, 'La neutralidad española durante la Primera Guerra Mundial: nuevas perspectivas', *Ayeres en discusión: temas clave de Historia Contemporánea hoy* (2008), 472.

of communication and the establishment of modern propaganda. Its territory witnessed a real struggle of words and images between the belligerent countries.¹¹

Spain's position in the war: between neutrality and the popular debate

At the beginning of the conflict, the official position of Spain was that of strictest neutrality, being made official by the Spanish president Eduardo Dato on 7 August 1914. However, according to Ponce Marrero, Spanish Government conceived its strict neutrality in the context of a short war, so this soon became a benevolent neutrality towards the Entente once the war progressed. Although the Allied powers did not desired a military participation of Spain, they tried to exploit the economic and strategic potential of the country.¹² The period of greatest vulnerability of Spanish neutrality, between December 1915 and April 1917, was mainly characterised by the new government of the Spanish Conde Romanones – one of the most pro-Allied politician in Spain during the war —along with the effects of the German submarine warfare. Spain's social and political situation worsened in 1917 with economic conditions deteriorating and growing social unrest. The country was adversely affected by German submarine warfare, the British commercial blockade, and the deteriorating Spanish-German diplomatic relations.¹³

The national debate between pro-German and pro-allied groups caused by the international conflict reflected the country's traditional ideological divisions, which incorporated foreign war causes and propaganda campaigns as new activist slogans.¹⁴ The defenders of tradition, such as the aristocracy, the Church, and the army, supported the cause and propaganda of the Central Powers. In contrast, defenders of Spain's political and cultural reform, such as the liberals or the intellectuals, supported the cause of the Entente.¹⁵

International propaganda and war cinema in Spain (1914–1918)

Spain was positioned in the middle of the main shipping routes that connected the Mediterranean with the Atlantic, at the intersection of two continents and two seas. Its territory offered direct access to Gibraltar, the Spanish coasts served as a refuge for submarines, and the country was also positioned as an excellent supplier of resources. In addition, it possessed strategic territories, from the Balearic Islands to the Canary archipelago, Morocco, and Fernando Poo.¹⁶ Consequently, Spain became one of the most important neutral countries on the continent and, therefore, an active battleground of international propaganda.

The German government undertook a mixed propaganda campaign composed of diplomatic and private initiatives that guaranteed their expansion. The campaign was promoted by the German ambassador Maximilian Prince von Ratibor und Corvey, together with the consulates

¹¹ See, for example, a recent review of the state of the art on the international propaganda war in Spain, which also includes new contributions, in Marta García Cabrera, 'International propaganda in Spain during the First World War: state of the art and new contributions', in *Communication and the First World War*, ed. John Griffiths (London: Routledge, 2020), 187–218.

¹² Javier Ponce Marrero, 'España en la Primera Guerra Mundial: Política exterior, neutralidad y algunos apuntes sobre Canarias', XXI Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana, (2016), 6–12.

¹³ Romero Salvadó, *España, 1914–1918*, 70.

¹⁴ Paloma Ortiz-de-Urbina Sobrino, 'La Primera Guerra Mundial y sus consecuencias: la imagen de Alemania en España a partir de 1914', *Revista de Filología Alemana*, 15, 1900 (2007), 193.

¹⁵ Ponce Marrero, 'Propaganda and Politics', 296; Ubaldo Cuesta Cambra, 'La I Guerra Mundial y los orígenes de la teoría de los efectos. El caso de aliadófilos y germanófilos', *Historia y Comunicación Social*, 18 (2013), 129.

¹⁶ María Dolores Elizalde Perez-Grueso, 'España y Gran Bretaña en la Primera Guerra Mundial: una colaboración buscada y deseada más allá de la neutralidad', *Hispania Nova. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 15 (2017), 321 and Eduardo González Calleja y Paul Aubert, *Nidos de espías* (Madrid: Editorial, 2014), 211.

and some self-taught propagandists such as Heinz Hofer and Karl Coppel. Through the dissemination of printed material, newspaper financing, and film screenings, the Germans tried to justify their cause in the conflict, blaming the enemy and spreading an anticlerical, radical, and revolutionary image of the Entente. Hofer and Coppel devoted part of their efforts to film management, and the German Information Service for Spain held regular screenings of visual news material from the Messter film company.¹⁷ The impact of German cinema was reinforced in the summer of 1916 when figures such as Herman Rosenow and Gustav Flamme promoted private film events sponsored by the German Red Cross in many Spanish cities.¹⁸

The French government's propaganda machine was also active in Spain, especially from 1916. The campaigns were promoted through committees supervised by the embassy secretary Louis de Vienne and other influential French citizens, such as Albert Mousset, Pierre Paris, and Leon Rollin. France led the international film campaign in Spain, with the screening of feature films, documentaries, and news programs edited by Pathé Frères and Gaumont. Despite national censorship, France had selected staff in most consular legations who exhibited the French material in private locations throughout the Spanish national territory. In addition, France collaborated with Great Britain and Italy to expand cinematographic activities in the country, through organisations such as the *Committee for Propagande Alliée et du Cinématographe des Allies* and the *Cercle Interalliée de Propagande Cinématographique*. One of the most powerful instruments of the French film campaign was the rental of the *Teatro Benavente* in Madrid. The establishment favoured the periodic exhibition of allied material from 1916 until the end of the war.¹⁹ Although Great Britain was late in promoting its cinema campaign, the British also channelled their propagandist messages in Spain through the screening of films in private locations that, especially from 1917, spread throughout the country.

British propaganda in Spain (1914–1918)

Britain promoted a neutrality favourable to its interests, mainly regarding the use of infrastructure and the strategic position of the Canary Islands. British foreign policy included several components, such as diplomatic and economic pressure, the commercial blockade, and espionage. The British also unleashed a major propaganda campaign that gradually expanded as the war progressed.

Despite the initial decentralisation and poor coordination of London's propaganda divisions, British official departments paid special attention to influencing Spanish public opinion. The Foreign Office, the Neutral Press Committee, the News Department, and the War Propaganda Bureau (Wellington House) provided informative and propagandist material to the Madrid

¹⁷ Ponce Marrero, 'Propaganda and Politics', 20; Ron Carden, *German Policy Toward Neutral Spain, 1914-1918* (London: Routledge, 2014), 50-78; Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial*, 131-32; Barcelona to Foreign Office, 22 January 1915, FO 185/1234; Barcelona consulate to Foreign Office, 25 January 1915, TNA, FO 185/1234; German intercepted letters, 8 November 1915, FO 371/2577; Report of the German News Service in Spain, 21 January 1916, FO 185/1259; Report on German propaganda in Spain, FO 371/2840.

¹⁸ German film invitation Teatro Olympia and Zaragoza, November and December 1916, Politische Archiv Des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA), Berlin, RAV-Madrid/135; Albes, 'La Propaganda Cinematográfica', 77-101; Ponce Marrero, 'Propaganda and politics: Germany and Spanish opinion in World War I', 307-12.

¹⁹ Eduardo González Calleja, 'Nidos de Espías: Los servicios de información franceses durante la I Guerra Mundial', *Revista de historia militar*, 3 (2005), 199; Paul Aubert, 'La propagande étrangère en Espagne dans le premier tiers du XXe siècle', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 31, 3 (1995), 109-128; Albes, 'La propaganda cinematográfica', 91-2.

embassy, the consulates, the national newspapers, and the patriotic clubs in the country.²⁰ In Spain, British propaganda was initially managed by the ambassador Sir Arthur Hardinge, but the campaign was executed by the consular bodies, especially in Andalusia—through the diplomat Arthur Keyser. In 1916, British propaganda underwent a readjustment process that culminated in the establishment of a centralised agency in Madrid under John Walter—chairman of the Board of Directors of *The Times*.²¹ Consular activity was strengthened and new propaganda committees were established in Barcelona and Bilbao.²² British propaganda agencies in London were centralised in 1917 under a new Department of Information, which gave new impetus to Walter's office and the British film industry in Spain. The team responsible for propaganda in Madrid was progressively expanded and Captain Charles T. S. Ewart was hired as head of cinematographic activity, in which he was helped by figures such as John Dalebrook in Andalusia.²³ In 1918, the British culminated their progressive improvement of propaganda management by establishing the powerful Ministry of Information (MoI) that reinforced British propaganda activity in Spain. The ministry favoured the creation of a new film department in Madrid, supervised by Henry Slade.²⁴

Britain's propaganda messages highlighted British courage, justice, and war potential, while its themes encapsulated the enemy's atrocities. Its slogans brought the conflict closer to Spain, reminding citizens of their economic dependence on Great Britain, the German submarine warfare, and the benefits of a friendly neutrality with the Entente. Those responsible prioritised distributing printed material in the form of pamphlets, brochures, magazines, and subsidised news material.²⁵ The British also gave priority to cinematographic activity as the cinema had by then become the most powerful instrument of persuasion. The films projected the war scenario in a direct and shocking way, with messages that penetrated the public's mind without major cognitive hurdles.

British war cinema in Spain

When the war broke out, British government film campaign in London was initially characterized by improvisation, making it considerably difficult to establish a guided, coordinated, and truly effective policy worldwide. The British progressively expanded the projection of film material beyond their national borders, overcoming limitations imposed by foreign authorities in countries such as Spain. After 1916, Great Britain possessed a consular network that had already improved its propaganda potential in neutral Spain and could also effectively coordinate the involvement of

²⁰ Michael Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18* (London, Macmillan, 1982), 33–5; Michael Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 18, 1 (1975), 120.

²¹ Vauham to Montogemery, 13 February 1916 and Vaugam to Montgomery, 22 February 1916, TNA, FO 185/1259; Vaughan to Montgomery, 5 February 1916, FO 185/1265; Enrique Montero, 'Luis Araquistáin y la propaganda aliada durante la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 25, 5 (1983), 246–7; María Dolores Elizalde Pérez-Grueso, 'Los servicios de información británicos en España durante la I Guerra Mundial', *Revista de historia militar*, 3 (2005), 239; García Cabrera, 'Filiás y fobias en acción'.

²² FO to Hardinge, 25 September 1916, TNA, FO 185/1263; Smith to Hardinge, 21 March 1916, FO 185/1306 and Kendall Park to Smith, 16 June 1917, FO 185/1409.

²³ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440; From Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, FO 185/1340; Keyser to Hardinge, 20 December 1916, FO 185/1320; Keyser to Balfour, 4 February 1917, FO 395/120; Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 57; Gary Messinger, 'An inheritance worth remembering: the British approach to official propaganda during the First World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 13, 2 (1993), 118; Montero, 'Luis Araquistáin', 249; García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial*, 168–71.

²⁴ Slade to MoI, 25 June 1918 and Granada consulate to Slade, 20 June 1918, TNA, FO 185/1469; FO to Hardinge, 3 September 1918, FO 185/1536.

²⁵ García Cabrera, 'Filiás y fobias en acción', 171–216.

British companies and citizens. In addition, those responsible did not overlook allied cooperation in propaganda campaigns, favouring the screening of films and documentaries from France and Great Britain in Spain. Although the British film industry was characterized by private financing, the British prioritised the financial support of propaganda organisations and specialised allied committees. The improvement of the British propaganda machinery between 1917 and 1918 reactivated Britain's film screenings in Spain.

British film campaign during the First World War

Cinema managed to give life to the image and to those events that seemed abstract, such as death, war, or violence. Although the cameras accompanied the British Expeditionary Forces in the first months of the war, their activities were soon curtailed to avoid the public exhibition of strategic war information. Filmmakers and private companies circumvented the early difficulties and recreated the war scenarios until the middle of 1915, when the Wellington House, the War Office, and the Admiralty reinforced state's involvement in the film campaign. The Government was forced to allow the photographers and cameramen to the war fronts to favour the arrival of new film material.²⁶

The first commitment of the propaganda organisations in London was the film *Britain Prepared* (1915), which projected a positive image of the army and navy and was made up of different documentary pieces. As Nicholas Reeves indicates, the film had a special impact in neutral countries, where it convincingly managed to demonstrate the strength and commitment of Great Britain in the war efforts.²⁷ However, the war scenes of the film were static and remote, so the true maturation of British war cinema came in mid-1916 when the War Office released its first major official film, *The Battle of the Somme*. Although the film plainly distorted information, it showed a more realistic war that encapsulated the violence and suffering.²⁸

The third year of war became a decisive point for the orientation and management of the conflict, both from a military and propaganda point of view. The British government, the population behind the lines, and the military realised that the war was going to be a long conflict with an uncertain resolution. From then on it was more important than ever to resort to propaganda as a motivating instrument, capable of keeping the support of their physically and psychologically exhausted society. Moreover, film propaganda was also conceived as a strategic weapon of war in the neutral countries, with the aim of projecting and propagating the British cause in those alternative scenarios. Therefore, the British reinforced the cooperation and involvement of the Government with the film industry, through the establishment of the *War Office Cinematograph Committee*, which considerably strengthened the potential of British film campaigns. The re-evaluation and expansion of British cinema in the world continued during 1917 and 1918, with the subsequent creation of new film material, such as *A day in the life of a munitions worker* and *The Battle of Ancre*.²⁹

²⁶ Nicholas Reeves, 'Official British Film Propaganda', in *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present* (New Brunswick Rutgers, University Press 2000), 27–50; Reeves, *Official British Film*, 230–783; Sanders, 'Wellington House', 119–46; Michael Paris, 'Film/Cinema (Great Britain)', in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Freie Universität Berlin.

²⁷ Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda during the First World War*, 737–8.

²⁸ Nicholas Reeves, 'Cinema, Spectatorship and Propaganda: The Battle of the Somme (1916) and Its Contemporary Audience', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 17, no. 1 (1997): 5–28; and Stephen Badsey, 'Battle of the Somme: British War-Propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3, 2 (1983): 99–115.

²⁹ Sanders, 'Wellington House', 135–39; Michael Hammond and Michael Williams, *British Silent Cinema and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 166; Reeves, 'Official British Film Propaganda', 42–6.

Initial efforts in Spain: diplomatic campaigns and allied cooperation

Even though the Spanish authorities restricted the commercial exhibition of war films, cinema became the newest and most effective channel for British propaganda in Spain. Those in charge of Wellington House described cinema as the bible of the working classes, ‘which were little influenced by the effects of books and pamphlets’, especially in countries like Spain.³⁰ ~~The British campaign in the neutral country sped up with the flurry of activity in London. Therefore, it would not be until 1916 when propagandists and diplomats managed their first film events in the territory.~~

The supply of visual material was initially managed in a disaggregated and uncoordinated way through limited distribution campaigns conducted by the News Department and the Wellington House. The organisations counted on the collaboration of the embassy and John Walter's press office, which facilitated contact with intermediary agents in the country. Rufino de Orbe (from *Agencia Cinematográfica Orbe*) was the representative and main distributor of the film *Gran Bretaña preparada* [*Britain prepared*], composed of a series of independent documentary fragments such as *Making ammunition*, *Manufacturing Shrapnel Shell*, *Royal Flying Cops*, *Building and Launching a Battleship*, *On a British mine sweeper*, *With the great fleet in the North Sea*, *Jack Afloat*, *The submarine Service*, and *The Hornets of the Fleet*.³¹

Despite the existence of sufficient material, the British had to face their main obstacle in the country, Spanish Government censorship, which was reluctant to grant the licenses necessary for the commercial screening of foreign war films.³² Consequently, Great Britain had to resort to private exhibitions in embassies, consular sites, or rented premises for popular events that were promoted by influential British residents and charities. The first major film exhibition was organised by the British consulate at the Gaiety Theatre in Bilbao in July 1916. This was a popular event supported by the British Red Cross, which managed to assemble foreign citizens and Spanish workers, politicians, and members of the Spanish army who, in addition to information, also sought entertainment.³³ A month later, Rufino de Orbe received authorisation to screen many of his films in the casinos of Madrid and San Sebastián. In September 1916, the material was screened in other major cities, such as Barcelona.³⁴

The film sections established in London and Madrid were progressively reinforced, and the embassy was used as an improvised theatre for film events at diplomatic parties. The events became a potential propaganda instrument not only because of the dissemination of cinematographic material but also because of the social and cultural prestigious of the attendees (intellectuals, journalists, aristocrats, businessman, etc.). The first screening of the *Battle of the Somme* in Spain was organised late in 1916 at the British embassy in Madrid with the support of an extensive list of influential guests. The British planned to invite King Alfonso XIII. The diplomatic representatives, however, considered that the monarch of a neutral nation should not attend an event organised by one of the belligerent powers, so they dedicated their efforts to screen the film privately in the royal premises.³⁵ Other films screened by British diplomats between 1916-1917 were *Sons of our Empire*, *The Battle of Arras*, *A day in the life of a munition worker*, *German prisoners' camp*, *Women's land army*, *With the Portuguese expeditionary force in France*, and

³⁰ Sanders, ‘Wellington House’, 135–6.

³¹ Note from Madrid, n.d., TNA, FO 185/1314; Letter from Montgomery, 6 April 1916, FO 185/1260; Orbe to Madrid, 19 August 1916, FO 185/1314. On *Britain Prepared*: Sanders and Taylor, *British propaganda during the First World War*, 151–2.

³² Sánchez Salas, “Discipline and Punish”, 107–10.

³³ FO to Hardinge, 31 July 1916, TNA, FO 185/1263.

³⁴ Note from Madrid, 1916 and Orbe to Madrid, 19 August 1916, TNA, FO 185/1314.

³⁵ Telegram From Madrid, 17 September 1916, TNA, FO 185/1263 and Telegram from Madrid, 26 October 1916, FO 185/1271.

American troops in London, among others.³⁶

The real circumventing of the restrictions imposed in the capital was achieved by allied cooperation with the renting of the influential *Teatro Benavente* at the end of 1916. The site became a prominent establishment for allied propaganda in Madrid, where the international powers held periodic conferences and persuasive exhibitions in exchange for a monthly rent financed by France, Great Britain, and Italy.³⁷ Jules Lacoste, representative of the French association for film, and manager of an influential photographic company, had managed to rent the premises as an annexe to the French Club.³⁸ Thenceforth, it was used by the allied powers as the location of private film screenings, conferences, and photographic exhibitions from 1916 to 1918. Even though the commercial exhibition of *The Battle of the Somme* was prohibited, the British managed to screen the film periodically in the rented theatre. According to press attaché John Walter, the famous documentary film was viewed in the Spanish capital by more than 15,000 citizens, both Spanish and foreigners, who visited the allied facilities between November 1916 and January 1917.³⁹

With the passage of time and the improvement of the allied film programmes, the theatre attracted 1,160 predominantly Spanish regular members who attended the sixteen performances or events organised on a weekly basis, especially during April, May, and June 1917.⁴⁰ The *Benavente* audience was made up of members who paid a monthly subscription of 3 pesetas and, in addition, invited their friends to the events.⁴¹ Britain used to screen five new films a month, at a time when its propaganda apparatus was intensified through the hiring of a new cinematography attaché, Charles Ewart.⁴²

The expansion of the British film campaign in Spain (1917-1918)

The initial operations of the British film campaign in Spain were considerably limited, since its scope of action was mainly restricted to the big capital cities —Madrid, Barcelona, or Bilbao. Therefore, the main objective of British propagandists from 1917 was to extend the cinematographic projections to other regions of the country through the intensification of Franco-British collaboration and the promotion of British consular activity.

The Allied powers had tried to extend their provincial exhibitions in Spain since the summer of 1916 when Lacoste organised small film circuits – kinematograph tours –that toured large parts of the country.⁴³ It would not be until 1917 when the Allies perfected a permanent

³⁶ Madrid to Grey of Fallodon, 30 September 1916, TNA, FO 185/1270; film report from Walter, 1 January 1917, FO 185/1439; From Northem to Gilmour, 19 October 1917, FO 395/120; telegram, 17 September 1916, FO 185/1263; and Department of Information to Hardinge, November 1917, FO 395/120.

³⁷ Report on cinema by Walter, 1 January 1917, TNA, FO 185/1439; Fernando García Sanz, *España En La Gran Guerra: Espías, Diplomáticos y Traficantes* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014), 237; Albes, 'La propaganda cinematográfica', 92. For a description of the importance of the Teatro Benavente before the war, see: Benet, *El cine español. Una historia cultural*, pp. 48-51.

³⁸ Report on Somme and other British Films, 1 January 1917, TNA, FO 185/1439; Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, FO 185/1440.

³⁹ Sanders, 'Wellington House', 137; Albes, 'La propaganda cinematográfica', 92.

⁴⁰ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440.

⁴¹ From Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, TNA, FO 185/1450.

⁴² Ewart was hired in February 1917, and he arrived to Madrid in March: From Montgomery to Walter, 15 January 1917; Montgomery to Ewart, 2 February 1917; Ewart to Montgomery, 6 March 1917, TNA, FO 395/117; Albes, 'La propaganda cinematográfica', 92, 97; García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial*, 168–71.

⁴³ Seville to Keyser, 23 February 1917, TNA, FO 185/1433; From Walter to Gaselee, 6 July 1916, FO 395/30; Keyser to Hardigne, 6 March 1917, TNA, FO 185/1419.

system of private war exhibitions in the provinces that gave a new impetus to British cinema.⁴⁴ British diplomats and film representatives managed to extend the screening of *The Battle of the Somme* to other locations, such as Seville, Cádiz, Algeciras and Barcelona.⁴⁵ Throughout the summer, the Spaniards witnessed the exhibition of new films such as *The Battle of Ancre* — screened, for instance, at the French School of Bilbao and the Hotel María Cristina in San Sebastián.⁴⁶ The premises of the English Club were also used in areas such as the Murcian district of Águilas. In addition, the British continued using university premises, such as the Guadalajara School of Engineering.⁴⁷ The Royal Palace, the Ministry of War, and the palace of the Duke of Medinaceli, among others, also converted their facilities into improvised film rooms that hosted private events.⁴⁸

The main obstacle to wider allied propaganda in Spain continued to be the ban on commercial screening of their films, as local authorities always refused these.⁴⁹ Consequently, the new British Information Department promoted films with non-war content that included indirect elements of propaganda. To organise the distribution of this type of material, the British resorted to agencies located in Spanish cities — such as the E.B. Cox in Barcelona, in collaboration with the Transatlantic Film Company.⁵⁰

The British deployed one of their most active film campaigns in Andalusia, and the advances in the British film industry in 1917 had immediate results in the south of the country. For example, the British consul in Seville, Arthur Keyser, issued a detailed report highlighting the achievements made in his district.⁵¹ In Andalusia, the cinematographic section of the consulate was headed by Dr John Dalebrook, who, together with J. Lucas, Dunstan, and Keyser, implemented the instructions issued by Ewart in Madrid. Dalebrook was a prominent doctor in the British community in Andalusia, as well as the founder of the organisation *Sailor's Room Fund*, and one of the promoters of Sevilla Football Club.⁵² During the war, he was responsible for taking advantage of the French film monopoly in Seville. His involvement with the British community would expand his field of activities to other regions in southern Spain.⁵³ Contact and collaboration with the French were vital, as they had an excellent organisation in full operation, which distributed a good supply of films, and controlled the only fully prepared theatre in Seville. Consequently, Dalebrook collaborated regularly with the person in charge of French propaganda in the region, M. Adema, who oversaw the cinematographic exhibitions.⁵⁴ The British made a monthly payment of 500 pesetas for the use of the French facilities in Seville, and therefore guaranteed almost regular screenings of their films in the Andalusian capital. Some films were periodically screened in the

⁴⁴ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440; From Ewart to Montgomery, 6 September 1917, FO 395/120.

⁴⁵ Hardinge to Balfour, 23 March 1917, TNA, FO 185/1342; From Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, FO 185/1450.

⁴⁶ Madrid to Bilbao, 24 June 1917, TNA, FO 185/1435 and Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, FO 185/1450. According to Albes, Ewart also managed to show other films such as *Dorchester Prisoner* or *Capture of Messines*: Albes, 'La propaganda cinematográfica', 97.

⁴⁷ Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, TNA, FO 185/1450.

⁴⁸ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440.

⁴⁹ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440.

⁵⁰ Department of Information to Montgomery, 28 September 1917, TNA, FO 395/120.

⁵¹ Report on British propaganda in Spain, May 1917, TNA, FO 185/1440.

⁵² Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, TNA, FO 185/1340; Keyser to Hardinge, 20 December 1916, FO 185/1320, and Keyser to Balfour, 4 February 1917, FO 395/120; 'Sevilla F.C.', *ABC Sevilla*, 21 January 2013.

⁵³ García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial*, 168–71.

⁵⁴ Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, TNA, FO 185/1340.

Pasaje Oriente, some were exhibited diplomatically upon invitation, and others were reserved for private events. In addition, the shows were also very well received in other Andalusian cities such as Jerez, Cádiz, Sanlúcar, Riotinto, Huelva, Cueva de la Mora, Nerva, and Córdoba.⁵⁵ The Río Tinto and the Soria mining Company offered its services to the film campaign, erecting temporary facilities in rural areas to screen allied films to more than 100,000 people.⁵⁶

In Catalonia, the cinematographic activity was also intense. The British consular representative in Barcelona, Charles Smith, was considerably involved in the propaganda activities, and controlled the distribution and scope of the British campaigns in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. He made monthly reports to the Foreign Office and communicated the requests made by the vice-consuls of the districts under his control. Although his efforts did not reach the effectiveness of Arthur Keyser in Andalusia, Smith also acted as a direct adviser, sending guidelines, suggestions and proposals that tried to reinforce the impact of the allied campaign in the country. Thus, for example, the diplomat registered the initial deficiencies of the British propaganda apparatus in Spain, requested the increase of persuasive material, and proposed the creation of new regional journalistic platforms.⁵⁷ British propaganda in Catalonia though was mainly channelled through a local Propaganda Committee, which was controlled by the businessmen Kendall Park and E. Bendir.⁵⁸ During the outbreak of the Great War, Park was a prominent member of the British Chamber of Commerce for Spain, for which he had even served as president. He was a founding member of the *Sociedad Anónima Naviera Española* [Public Limited Company for Spanish Shipping], as well as regional manager of the Anglo-Spanish Coaling Company and the company *Depósito Flotante de Carbones* in Barcelona and Cádiz. E. Bendir was a representative of the English *Kelly's Directories*, whose primary purpose was to list all businesses and merchants in Barcelona. During the war, he was also Pathé's representative in Spain and Portugal, in conjunction with Madame Garnier. Together, they managed to organise and promote several allied screenings in cities such as Barcelona, Reus, Badalona, Gerona, Manresa, Tarrasa, Sabadell, and Mataró. Between July and September 1917, the British expanded their exhibitions using new prestigious facilities, such as the *Teatro Novedades* and *Teatro Español* in Barcelona.⁵⁹

Between October and December 1917, the showings were further extended to cities such as Málaga (Jesuit College), Alicante, Vigo (*Salón Pinacho*) Coruña and Ferrol, Almería, Zaragoza, Valencia, Murcia, and Cartagena. Most of the exhibitions were financed through subscriptions made from British citizens residing in Spain.⁶⁰ Consequently, many of the events were also

⁵⁵ Seville to Hardinge, 6 March 1917, TNA, FO 185/1419; From Hardinge to Balfour, 23 March 1917, FO 185/1342; Invitation for the British event at Salón Jerez, 6 March 1917, PAAA, RAV-Madrid/137.

⁵⁶ From Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, TNA, FO 185/1340.

⁵⁷ Madrid to Montgomery, 3 May 1916, TNA, FO 185/1267; Madrid to Palma de Mallorca, 7 May 1916, FO 185/1323; From Vaughan to Locock, 7 November 1915, FO 371/2564; From Smith to the embassy, 28 March 1918, FO 185/1468; Monthly reports from Barcelona, 25 January 1915, FO 185/1234.

⁵⁸ Smith to Hardinge, 21 March 1916, TNA, FO 185/1306; private letters, November 1915, FO 185/1255; Kendall Park to Smith, 16 June 1917; Smith to Hardinge, 20 June 1917; Joaquín Heliodoro Calado Crespo to Kendall Park, 23 May 1917, FO 185/1409 and Walter to Tombs, 17 December 1918, FO 395/284; Kendall Park to Vaughan, 21 December 1917, TNA, FO 185/1450 and Walter to Koppel, 17 January 1918, FO 395/194.

⁵⁹ Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, TNA, FO 185/1450; Walter to Tombs, 17 December 1918, FO 395/284. On the role played by Madame Garnier: Daniel Sánchez Salas, 'Defensoras de La Causa. Las Mujeres Como Agentes de La Propaganda Bélica Audiovisual En España Durante La IGM', in *Preséncies i Representacions de La Dona En Els Primers Anys Del Cinema (1895-1920)* (Ayuntamiento de Girona: Girona, 2018), 258.

⁶⁰ Montgomery to Vaughan, 22 October 1917, TNA, FO 185/1340.

organised by associations such as the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas and the Overseas Clubs located in Barcelona, Vigo, and Gijón.⁶¹

Despite the strong restrictions imposed by the Spanish authorities, British cinema also reached the Canary Islands.⁶² The authorities prohibited the screening of *The Battle of the Somme* in public premises such as the *Teatro Leal (La Laguna)* or *Cine Cuyás (Las Palmas)*. Nonetheless, the British consulate organised the exhibition of the documentary series *Britain Prepared* at the *Theatre Parque Recreativo* (in Santa Cruz de Tenerife) in May 1917. The material was later distributed to other theatres in La Laguna and Las Palmas.⁶³

Despite the substantial change in the British film campaign in Spain during 1917, some American and British diplomatic agents still criticised the absence of a systematic Allied campaign that managed to overcome the mark left by German activities.⁶⁴ Consequently, during the last year of the war, Walter and Lacoste reinforced the role played by the allied film committees, such as the *Cercle Interalliée de Propagande Cinématographique* in Madrid, which coordinated the joint financing and use of the theatres established in the country.⁶⁵ The regular payment reserved for Seville was immediately stopped, and the financial support of the British film campaign in Spain was quickly harmonised.⁶⁶ The newly created Ministry of Information (MoI) established a new film department in 1918, described as a great educational and advertising tool that was supervised by film specialist Henry Slade in Spain.⁶⁷ The new section expanded the influence of British cinematographic material in the country through new instruments such as the cinema in motion. Where there were no theatres or cinemas, the MoI sent *cinemotors*, that is, big lorries carrying ‘all the necessary paraphernalia for improvised open-air cinema shows to the great wonderment and edification of innumerable villagers’.⁶⁸ The British cinematograph even reached the Canary Islands for small tours during the summer months.⁶⁹

Conclusions

The geostrategic position of Spain and its commercial position led the country to become a prominent ideological battleground during the First World War. The conflict left its traces through well-defined diplomatic, economic, and propagandist movements that led to a vigorous socio-cultural debate on the war and the establishment of important persuasive campaigns by foreign powers. Great Britain, France, and Germany all deployed their propaganda activities in Spain through printed material, oral speeches, photographic or illustrated material, and cinematographic screenings. The war reinforced the propagandist potential of cinema, and all the warring powers deployed their film campaigns in the country. France took the lead in the struggle to conquer the Spanish screens, which in turn caused the rapid mobilisation of the activities of the Central Powers and the progressive reinforcement of British activities. Spanish censorship considerably limited

⁶¹ Ewart to Gilmour, 15 December 1917, TNA, FO 185/1450.

⁶² Crocker to Hardinge, 26 February 1917, TNA, FO 185/1419.

⁶³ Orlando Betancor, ‘El Cine Durante La Primera Guerra Mundial a Través de Las Páginas del Diario El Progreso de Tenerife’, *Vegueta: Anuario de La Facultad de Geografía e Historia* 10 (2008): 9–58; Orlando Betancor, ‘Los Noticiarios y Documentales Bélicos, en La Prensa de Tenerife, Durante La Primera Guerra Mundial’, *Boletín Millares Carlo*, no. 30 (2014): 277–88.

⁶⁴ J. A. Montero Jiménez, ‘España y Los Estados Unidos Frente a La I Guerra Mundial’, *Historia y Política: Ideas, Procesos y Movimientos Sociales*, no. 32 (2014): 17; Montero Jiménez, ‘España y Los Estados Unidos Frente a La I Guerra Mundial’.

⁶⁵ Ewart to Hardinge, 11 February 1918, TNA, FO 185/1468.

⁶⁶ Walter to Vaughan, 15 January 1918, TNA, FO 185/1468.

⁶⁷ Slade to MoI, 25 June 1918, TNA, FO 185/1469 and FO to Hardinge, 3 September 1918, FO 185/1536.

⁶⁸ War Encyclopedia published by *The Times History*, December 1919, TNA, INF 4/5.

⁶⁹ Consular register, 1914–1918, TNA, FO 772/7.

the public and commercial exhibition of foreign war films. Therefore, the belligerent powers and their respective patriotic and charitable associations organised private events to circumvent the restrictions.

Although Great Britain began its film campaign late and was initially uncoordinated, it strengthened its exhibitions in Spain from 1916 onwards. Its campaigns were promoted by local film representatives, diplomatic agents, patriotic associations, charitable organisations, and the influential British community. The British did not though overlook Allied cooperation, favouring the progressive spread of film events organised by Great Britain and France. The British managed to circumvent the limitations imposed by the Spanish Government and held private exhibitions of films such as *Britain Prepared* and *The Battle of Somme* at the British embassy and rented premises throughout the country (theatres, halls, college faculties, institutional premises, schools, clubs, etc.). The most significant film events were held periodically in the *Teatro Benavente* (Madrid), rented by the French representatives to host the celebration of allied socio-cultural events.

The improvement of British propaganda machinery between 1917 and 1918 facilitated the progressive expansion of film screenings throughout the country. The propagandists and diplomatic officials of Great Britain organised events in all the cities and provinces of the country. These campaigns were especially active in Catalonia and Andalusia, where those responsible were able to establish an efficient machinery that counted on the cooperation of French representatives, the allied clubs, and some prominent British companies. In 1918, the British Ministry of Information reinforced the potential of British cinema in Spain through specialised agents who favoured the extension of new screenings in urban and rural settings.

Notes on contributor

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