Transtext(e)s Transcultures 跨文本跨文化

Journal of Global Cultural Studies

14 | 2019

Re-thinking Latin America: Challenges and Possibilities

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/transtexts/1251>

DOI: 10.4000/transtexts.1251

ISSN: 2105-2549

Publisher

Gregory B. Lee

Electronic reference

Cielo Zaidenweg and Melisa Pesoa, « Imagining the Nation, Building the Region: Discourses and Practices in the Río Negro Press (1900–1930) », *Transtext(e)s Transcultures 跨文本跨文化* [Online], 14 | 2019, Online since 31 December 2019, connection on 28 July 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transtexts/1251> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/transtexts.1251>

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Imagining the Nation, Building the Region: Discourses and Practices in the Río Negro Press (1900–1930)

Cielo Zaidenweg and Melisa Pesoa

Introduction

- 1 The construction of a national identity in Argentina, as well as in other Latin American Nations, was a historical process built on reductionist and homogenising imagery.¹ This imagery was constructed using symbols, emblems and historical figures that represented the nation, such as national heroes who participated in the War of Independence as well as the Argentine flag, badge, rosette and national anthem. A specific iconography and plans for commemorative monuments seen as a useful means to encourage support for the national project were developed. The political powers located in the capital, Buenos Aires, systematised a model for the transmission of identity based on the ideas and discourses of prominent theorists of nationalism, such as Joaquín V. González, José María Ramos Mejía and Ricardo Rojas.² This model was based on the exaltation of patriotism both at school and in the public sphere. The national identity project was conceived by central government elites and was rapidly implemented in the recently acquired regions in the north and south of the country, which were formerly inhabited by indigenous tribes.³ In order to ensure the successful implementation of the national sovereignty initiative in these territories, local societies were provided with the necessary elements to affirm national identity, in other words, to “Argentinise” the populations.⁴
- 2 In 1908, José María Ramos Mejía, President of the National Council of Education (NCE), one of the major institutions related to education at the national level, approved the “Patriotic Education Plan.”⁵ This plan was intended to encourage a sense of national identity in the Argentine population, especially in the recently created administrative units known as the National Territories (NT), located in remote lands that could not be

easily regulated. Patriotic Education included formal schooling (such as teaching programmes and educational practices) and informal education via the exaltation of civic rituals.⁶ Furthermore, the emergence of an “essentialist” and homogenising cultural nationalism during the preparations for the celebration of the Centenary of the May Revolution in 1910 increased the level of patriotism in both, state institutions and public opinion.⁷

- 3 This revaluation and promotion of the “patriotic spirit” during the first decade of the twentieth century was supported and expanded after the political changes of 1916. The election of a president from the UCR Party (Radical Civic Union) meant that Argentinisation projects were pursued with greater fervour. In this sense, President H. Yrigoyen approved the Decree of Exaltation of National Feeling on 4 May 1919. This decree required the “glorification of a genuine sense of Argentine identity.” The president insisted on this measure as a part of the “renovations” initiated by the “new and wide-open horizons” of democracy in order to perpetuate “the sacrosanct cult to the glorious tradition inherited from our ancestors.”⁸
- 4 The historiography of Patagonia has traditionally focused on the crucial role played by the state not only in promoting economic activities, but also in the formulation of strategies to construct a social conscience.⁹ To “Argentinise” the population meant to “give the society ideological references in order to make them feel part of a national community, understood as culturally homogeneous.”¹⁰
- 5 In order to achieve the effective integration and Argentinisation of a NT certain newspapers operated as social agents: they supported and guided the so-called “civilising process” in Patagonia by reproducing top-down discourses. At the same time, the characteristics and realities of each region made newspapers also function as social actors, contributing to this integrational process by producing their own discourses.
- 6 While the sociological concept of the social agent describes an individual, institution or group as a reproducer of practices, the concept of the actor broadens the margins of their decisions and actions to assess their level of autonomy. Thus, the actor is understood as an entity capable of creating or innovating in the field of action. The agent develops practices in keeping with the position it occupies in the social space. The actor is recognised, above all, by the actions that they decide to perform.¹¹ We believe that in the newspapers analysed in this article, the roles of agent and actor are to be found in a complex relationship, in some cases producing and in others reproducing meanings and symbolic systems.
- 7 Following Benedict Anderson’s transcendent concept of the imagined communities, we argue that the continued use of specific language and categories in the regional press, such as “the homeland” and “the nation”, allows us to trace the complex construction of diverse subjectivities in Río Negro.¹² It is via these discourses that hegemonic power structures are successfully legitimised in the analysed territory. Quotidian practices hark to the wider nation in such a way that the strength of individuals converges and can negotiate a sort of patriotic desire.
- 8 In this sense, Alejandro Grimson maintains that,

on one side, nation is a specific mode of identification, a category – as others – to which a group of people consider themselves affiliated and develop feelings of belonging; on the other side, nation is a space of dialogue and dispute between

social actors, a field of interlocution, a configuration on which diverse actors and elements are articulated in a complex and changing way.¹³

- 9 In light of this idea, it is understandable that the nationalising strategies developed across the National Territories in order to strengthen power varied according to different regions and community practices.
- 10 Furthermore, in our analysis of how national identities are embodied in the cultural practices of daily life, we consider Nicola Miller's affirmation of the importance of tracing historical developments in the construction of national identity to be extremely relevant. In line with her argument, we look less at who engages in certain practices or who produces certain images, and more at how such practices and images are endlessly created and recreated.¹⁴
- 11 The aim of this article is therefore to identify how and to what extent the press in the NT of Río Negro influenced, directly or indirectly, the nationalising project as a social actor. This NT was chosen as a case study because of its high level of public participation in the nationalising project, which gained special relevance in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁵ As we agree that in the Latin American context state formation is more complex than hitherto thought, in this study we aim to analyse national identity production in the context of regional relations, in this case, from a socio-cultural perspective.¹⁶
- 12 This research focuses on the most active and relevant areas of the region. One is the lower valley of the Río Negro, an area of early settlement, where the current capital Mercedes de Viedma is located. This locale has a privileged economic and political situation. The other is the upper valley of Río Negro, an area that developed substantially following the arrival of the Southern Railway in 1899. The economic growth of the upper valley was spearheaded by the town of General Roca, and this led to a rivalry with the capital of the NT, Viedma.
- 13 In the first part of the paper, we describe the newspapers selected for the analysis and their main characteristics. The following local newspapers were consulted: *La Nueva Era* and *Río Negro*, and to a lesser extent, *La voz del sur*, *El Imparcial* and *Flores del Campo*. In the second section, we study their role as pedagogical agents and actors in the Argentinising task, and how they produced and reproduced discourses of nationhood. In the third part, we look at the participation of the local populations, mainly through the reports sent by correspondents from the Río Negro region. Finally, we demonstrate that the press played a crucial role in reinforcing the sense of a national community as well as in facilitating local and regional integration.

Figure 1: Political division of the National Territory of Río Negro in 1885 and 1915 (as it remains today). © Authors, based on: Salvador Carlos Laría, "Evolución de la división departamental del ex Territorio Nacional del Río Negro," *Boletín de Estudios Geográficos*, vol. XII, n° 47 (1965), p. 113.

The Press in the National Territory of Río Negro

- 14 The colonisation of Patagonia initially took place in the north and east of the region, and the Río Negro Valley was a key location for accessing the vast interior. The NT of Río Negro was the first area to be colonised on the southern frontier; the Río Negro fort (also known as Carmen de Patagones) was established in 1779 when Spain sought greater control of the Patagonian region. Like other National Territories, at the end of the nineteenth century the NT of Río Negro already had precise limits, and had internal divisions in order to improve its administration (Figure 1). However, during the first decade of the twentieth century, two areas emerged as the most prosperous, mainly because of political and socio-economic factors, and the physical characteristics of the territory. These were the Lower Valley of the Río Negro (on the Atlantic) and the Upper Valley.
- 15 This intense economic activity led to the establishment of several newspapers. Río Negro's press had been a key element of the civilising movement headed by the nation-state since the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it became a vehicle for elaborating, disseminating and implementing initiatives that helped shape the material and symbolic profiles of the region and its inhabitants. Furthermore, it favoured the gestation of customs, beliefs and institutions.¹⁷ This was particularly important at a time when formal education and public libraries were scarce, and there were few sites for the propagation and circulation of state ideas related to civilisation, order and progress.¹⁸
- 16 The newspaper *Río Negro*, created and directed by the Portuguese brothers Julio and Bernardo Guimaraens in 1879, was the first to be founded in the town of Mercedes de Patagones (Viedma). Other pioneering publications were the weekly newspaper *La Razón* (1881) owned by the brothers José Juan and Alberto Biedma, and *El Pueblo* and *La Patagonia* (1884–1904) run by the journalist César Vuillermet.
- 17 At the beginning of the twentieth century, the newspapers *La Unión* (1901) and *Flores del Campo* (1903) emerged.¹⁹ Between 1907 and 1930 the number of publications grew with the appearance of *El Imparcial* (1907, Viedma), *Alem* (1912, Viedma), *La Autonomía* (1912, General Roca), *La Capital* (1921, Viedma), *La Voz del Sud* (1924, Viedma), *La Democracia* (1926, General Roca), *El Nacional* (1926, Viedma) and *El Social* (1929, Cipolletti) among others. Still, most of them were edited in Viedma or in Carmen de Patagones. Only short-lived publications with limited circulation were founded elsewhere.
- 18 The most important newspapers, having the highest circulation and periodicity over time and best representing the interests of the territory, were *La Nueva Era* and *Río Negro*. *La Nueva Era* was a biweekly publication founded on 24 December 1903 and interested in “defending the interests of Patagones and Río Negro.”²⁰ It was edited alternately in Viedma and Patagones by Mario Mateucci and Enrique Mosquera. As time passed, it gained a liberal and anticlerical bent, and its editorial line became more conservative: from 1916 onwards it became critical of the UCR government.²¹ This newspaper was a clear source of inspiration for the regional press.²²
- 19 The second newspaper, *Río Negro*, was established in the city of General Roca on 1 May 1912 and at first was also published biweekly, but soon became a weekly publication. Created and run by Fernando E. Rajneri (1912–1946) it tried to act as a mediator

between the local population and the authorities. It also collaborated with correspondents from different regions in the territory.²³

- 20 This newspaper defined itself as a “tool for expressing the opinions of the neighbours”²⁴ and defended the importance of education as a way of achieving civilisation. For instance, it tried to promote the importance of schooling and figures in the national authorities who made formal education possible, such as Domingo F. Sarmiento and Nicolás Avellaneda. In many of their works, both men praised the national virtue of education based essentially on liberal and Western values.
- 21 Like *Río Negro*, *La Nueva Era* aimed to defend the general interests of Río Negro and Patagones while upholding “the austere principles of high-quality journalism, which looks to the future, and guides the thoughts of the population to the source of truth.”²⁵ Both newspapers had sections dedicated to general information and advertising.²⁶
- 22 Some authors see the year 1916 as a turning point in the early period of Río Negro’s press: during the period of the UCR government it gained more strength as a political actor, building a public image that confirmed the governmental political programme.²⁷ The editors and collaborators turned the newspapers into a space for debating diverse topics with their readers, other journalists and the political sector.²⁸
- 23 As highlighted by Martha Ruffini, these newspapers are an indispensable resource for the history of the NT of Río Negro, as well as for tracking the development of its towns.²⁹ Some of them played a fundamental role in the construction of the national consciousness as well as in the formation of local and regional cultural fabrics. Governments, prominent personalities, cultural entities and individuals expressed in the newspapers what was rarely stated in official documents. Since the press represents the most important ideas, opinions, arguments and interests of the society that produces it, its analysis is fundamental for understanding the development and the historic processes of a region, town or country. In this case, the local press makes it possible to understand the day to day life, as well as the scenarios, realities and social practices that arose around such issues as political citizenship.³⁰ The press is also considered a promoter of public space,³¹ and a promoter of cultural and festive activities and institutions.³²
- 24 These newspapers saw themselves as advocates of social patterns that replaced the practices associated with the ideas of the “wilderness” and the “desert.” They intended to influence the daily behaviour of individuals or promote coexistence and respect for social norms. As Leticia Prislei argues, the press became a public showcase for the norms and foundations upon which legitimation of power was based.³³
- 25 Although the role of these newspapers as political actors has already been highlighted in the works cited thus far, we are interested in emphasising their pedagogical role in the construction of citizenship. We intend to focus on discourse analysis by exploring the nationalist ideas that sought to help regional populations identify with what was *perceived* to be genuine Argentine elements and values.³⁴ Through the analysis of newspaper articles, we address, on the one hand, how these newspapers informed, evaluated and praised practices and mental representations that defined the “national being”; on the other hand, we identify the regional particularities that this process presented. It should be noted that, after studying these newspapers, we have selected the texts that we believe are most suited for this purpose, and which demonstrate the aspiration of establishing national consciousness.

Figure 2: Reminder notice of the anniversary of 9 July on the page of *Flores del Campo*, 8 July 1905, p. 1. © Flores del Campo

Figure 3: National coat of arms showing the masculine face at the top, as it appears on "25 de mayo", *Flores del Campo*, 21 May 1904, p. 1. © Flores del Campo

Celebrating Patriotic Festivities, Imagining the Nation

26 We would like to underline several functions of the Río Negro newspapers mentioned in the previous section. These publications sought to stress the importance of education as a civilising tool, to enhance and diffuse both the work of schools and the illustrious individuals that founded them to propagate the issues related to national commemorations, and to highlight national values through publication of celebrated writings and through dissemination of speeches in which local authorities and citizens characterised Argentina's nationhood.³⁵

27 As festivities approached, local newspapers would report on such matters as preparations for commemorations, the respective party commissions' members lists and the definitive programmes drawn up by these commissions, among other things. The purpose of this reporting was not only to inform but also to encourage participation in these activities. For example, in 1913, Viedma Municipal Council invited "the general population" to attend the Te Deum and *La Nueva Era* advertised the event.³⁶ Furthermore, newspapers also highlighted the duty of every citizen to participate in patriotic celebrations. An editorial from *La Nueva Era*, published as early as six months before the festive events, on 16 January 1916, states that:

Argentines will celebrate the first centenary of their advent to political freedom, proclaimed in Buenos Aires on 25 May 1810 and solemnly confirmed six years later, on 9 July, by representatives of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata, at the congress held in Tucumán. This is the date of the event and we remind the neighbourhoods on both banks of the Río Negro of it, since it is advisable that everybody, without exceptions, which would be deplorable in this case, concur to revere this great historical act of remembrance, which must be greater than the commemoration of the Congress of Tucumán, a sincere, enthusiastic and justified homage to the souls of those venerable patricians who had the honour and the everlasting glory of forever sealing the independence of this land and giving the world a new and glorious nation.³⁷

28 One of the techniques used by the newspapers to highlight the importance of these celebrations was to narrate historical events repeatedly and evocatively. In this sense, *El Imparcial* noted that:

The May event is not a transitory event, nor is it of relative importance, its significance, politically judged, represents the freedom of an oppressed people, and in remembrance must be revered with admiration and pride by all Argentines who know how to appreciate the merit and the scope of the great revolutionary day which destroyed the omnipotent power of the foreigner. We are not going to let this transcendental act that ushered us onto a prosperous path with a rich future become history, as we declare ourselves a free and independent people; But yes, it is patriotic to refresh the memory of our fellow citizens so that when the date comes around it can be commemorated with all the brilliance and splendour that should surround it.³⁸

29 Likewise, on several occasions the regional press chose to publish certain speeches given at commemorative events by local teachers, directors of schools or other prominent local personalities aiming at increasing patriotic sentiment among inhabitants of Río Negro. A speech given by a teacher of the School 16 in Bariloche, Mr. Rodolfo Inaebnit Henry, is an example of this technique. He told the town authorities, students and general public on 25 May 1929:

[...] bringing together that instinctive sentiment of latent nationalism, unintentionally demonstrated in all our actions, in order to further consolidate

those bonds of brotherhood that unite us as sons of a common nation or as neighbours in the territory that nourishes us, we are today reunited by a date, that by the character of the acts carried out more than a century ago, we feel the same vibrations reborn in our breasts as those who exposed theirs against the invasion of strangers and went against authority [...] And the sound of my modest word will float through space to tell everyone that [...] gathered here by the will and inspiration of our spirits as Argentines and foreigners fond of this country, we solemnly worship the symbol of our freedom [the flag].³⁹

- 30 Along with these appeals, one of the common practices of the Río Negro press, which we have followed mainly in *Río Negro* and *La Nueva Era*, was to publish party programmes and later chronicles of the events, taking place not only in the town of publication but also in neighbouring towns. These materials enhanced the visibility of celebratory events in the region. Thus, while *La Nueva Era* reported festivities mainly across the Viedma-Patagones axis, it also published information about activities in other towns, such as General Conesa, Coronel Pringles, Cubanea, Valcheta, General Frías, Colonia Stroeder or Buena Parada. *Río Negro* focused instead on reporting celebrations in General Roca Department (Cipolletti, Allen, Roca, but also other parts of the territory, such as Viedma, Bariloche and El Bolsón).⁴⁰
- 31 Newspapers also published information sent in by correspondents who lived in local towns. They were generally prominent teachers or locals who provided insights into the organisation of an important event, highlighting such aspects as the active role of the commissions in arranging the celebrations, the work of local schools in organising activities, the names of people who gave speeches, as well as the content of their talks or poems read out in public.⁴¹ Other events were also reported: games, gatherings, dinners and dances that took place on the evening marking the end of the celebrations.
- 32 Chronicles published by the regional press, generally called *Echoes of the Territory*, reveal the discourses and practices surrounding the celebrations organised in different towns and social environments. In order to explore these dialogues, we will now consider reports on such events from the regional press. The first one, *La Nueva Era*, describes the participation of citizens of Colonia Stroeder in the town's festivities. In the second chronicle, an excerpt from *Río Negro*, it is agreed that the celebration of the patriotic anniversary will take place in the town of Allen, the decision reflecting initiatives led by the local population. Finally, in the third text, *La Nueva Era* offers a positive assessment of the celebrations held in Coronel Pringles and highlights the importance of "honouring a memory of affection and admiration" of national historical facts.
- 33 In Colonia Stroeder:
- The town of Colonia Stroeder, known for its fervent cult of national glories, prepares a series of festivities with the purpose of honouring the anniversary of the emancipatory revolution of 1810.⁴²
- 34 In Allen:
- The national anniversary did not go unnoticed in this corner of Colonia Roca. Many farmers decorated the front of their houses with flags, at sunrise they were greeted by cannon salute.⁴³
- 35 In Coronel Pringles:
- For a long time in this town the feeling of love for our country has been dormant, and the glorious celebrations of our national history have passed by without our remembrance, or our affection and admiration for the men who gave our country and ten other American republics their political freedom. Breaking with this

tradition of indifference and unforgivable forgetfulness, a commission formed by the police commissioner, Ángel Martínez, and the young man Manuel Herrero, decided to organise a series of public acts in tribute to the heroes of national independence on the 9th of this month. This initiative has been enthusiastically received everywhere, bringing together people's good intentions and achieving the preparation of an excellent programme of celebrations. [...] there is the essential co-operation of the schools, with the director Mr Alberto Avancovich, and we hope that the celebration will assume the proportions and solemnity of a social event of the highest order.⁴⁴

- 36 In these chronicles, we can see that newspapers operated as a punitive actor since they not only played an informative role, but their articles also served to emphasise the moral obligation of the population to participate in public patriotic events. Thus, the press recorded the degree of commitment in various towns and among different social groups across the NT of Río Negro. The chronicles reveal the degree of community participation (especially in the issues related to initiatives and economic support), as well as granting a higher social status to certain individuals.

Invoking Values, Remembering Duties

- 37 Newspapers took advantage of the country's historical anniversaries to encourage the nationalist fervour of its inhabitants. Thus, around this time, a series of patriotic precepts and duties were emphasised in the publications that meant to evoke the memory of the "fathers of the fatherland" and establish them as role models, to promote one's duty to be a "good Argentine," and to demonstrate devotion to the fatherland. We found that it was very common for the newspapers to include the articles and narratives on the historical feats of national heroes, and the texts that tried to reflect the courage and martyr-like spirit of these characters. They aimed to inspire citizens to defend the fatherland and, more importantly, not to question its legitimacy. As an example, in *Río Negro* we read:

Fatherland: so gallant and noble, so beautiful and so magnificent: just as it was bequeathed to us by the iron spirit of San Martín, who climbed mountains to give freedom to the people; The soul of Moreno [...] the genius that shaped the revolution; Rivadavia, constructor of our civil greatness; Belgrano, whose legacy is a precious jewel: a piece of blue sky and a corner of white cloud; Alberdi, with his apothegm "to govern is to populate," we praise its great effectiveness for our progress; Sarmiento, champion of national culture; Urquiza, the flaming sword that overthrew tyranny.⁴⁵

- 38 Here, the newspaper invokes a double sense of responsibility: the obligation of citizens to remember and honour the patriotic anniversary, and their commitment to the men who made this feat possible. It is important to highlight that there is a persistent evocation of masculinity as concurrent with decency and valour in the regional press. It was the "fathers of the fatherland" who succeeded in cutting the ties that bound the colony to the Metropolis, the latter being conceived of as the "mother country." From a gender perspective, this male-driven severance of the virgin territory from its distant motherland evokes images of sexual difference and, consequently, discordant social values.⁴⁶
- 39 Through these reminders, the press appealed to sentimentalism and the evocation of "patriotic values," thus going beyond the mere act of celebrating a national anniversary. In this sense, we see that civic celebrations of a commemorative character

were not only capable of strengthening people's sense of nationality, they also highlighted the importance of the creation of monuments, museums and tributes to important figures, as well as the teaching of history, among other practices.

- 40 The Salesian newspaper, *Flores del Campo*, also assumed the task of propagating national values (Figure 2) and outlined people's duties to their country, with reflections such as: "Love for the Country is more sacred than the love you owe to yourself. [...] in it you have a model of patriotism to imitate."⁴⁷ However, unlike other regional newspapers, this publication did not hesitate to invoke religious morality when deemed necessary. While they celebrated both the revolutionary and pro-independence struggles and the men who carried them on, they also sought to compete with other secular and liberal newspapers by attributing pious and mystical values to the fatherland. Evidence of this can be seen in the following excerpt:

Not only in our country, but in other Latin nations that venerate Mary [...] the idea of a country is linked to love for the Holy Virgin [...] The country is similar in its beauty, in its light, in its ideas, to the pure image traced by the most mystical of the painters.⁴⁸

- 41 As we can see, the title links the idea of the motherland with the love for the Virgin Mary. In this way, the newspaper sought to legitimise national history by constantly invoking the figure of God as responsible for giving "such encouragement to our heroes, and such an effective and constant will to sacrifice."⁴⁹ In order to reinforce this belief visually this statement is accompanied by an Argentine coat of arms with an added male figure that represents God (Figure 3).
- 42 This analysis therefore shows that the regional press encouraged the inhabitants of the various towns to participate in national celebrations. It also helps us trace the spaces of conflict and discord that arose as a consequence of the festivities. These articles show the degree of correlation between nation and region, between state and National Territory, and finally, they demonstrate the means by which the national identity was strengthened at the regional level.

Generating Encounters, Making Disagreements Visible

- 43 So far, we have shown how regional public opinion became a key vector for developing a sense of national identity. However, we also consider the regional press to be a prominent social actor as newspapers reported on contentious situations linked to the local celebrations. While it is true that these situations were rarely mentioned or even known about at the time, a critical reading of the regional press allows us to view these newspapers as spaces for the negotiation of civic identity.
- 44 To this end, we have identified complaints and protests against the level of involvement of local residents in the festivities and their lack of devotion to the patriotic cause; complaints about the squandering of money on these festivities when more urgent needs were being neglected, and also conflicts between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities regarding the celebration of such events. These examples allow us to see that the process of construction and diffusion of national identity was permeated on some occasions by negotiations (about how to celebrate the anniversary, or the annual budget, for instance) and by regional and local habits. There is also evidence that ideological structures are supported by different social sectors which causes tension between regional dynamics and national demands.

- 45 Regarding budgets, although *La Nueva Era* had supported the use of supplementary resources for the celebration of the Centenary of the Revolution (1910), it did not miss the opportunity to denounce the fact that two months after the event was held, the hospital of the Municipality of Patagones lacked financial resources and owed its employees three months salary. They concluded that the Centenary commemoration had been conducted with “a pomp superior to the means of the municipality,” and that the final result of this “error” was “the indigence of the hospital and debts still unpaid of liqueurs, wines, confetti [...] that cost fifteen hundred pesos.”⁵⁰
- 46 This shows that, although the newspaper encouraged the town to celebrate the Centenary with greater fervour, it did not hesitate to criticise actions that it considered harmful to the region’s development, such as the misspending of municipal funds. In other words, nation could be celebrated as long as it was not to the detriment of the economic and social conditions in the NT.
- 47 Another instance of the process of Argentinisation which allows us to trace the tension between national and regional values were the conflicts between the Salesian Congregation and the liberal sector of the population represented in *La Nueva Era*.⁵¹ In the pages of this newspaper, the editorial board complained about the cost of the Te Deum service in relation to the total budget, as well as condemning certain attitudes of the Church, which they considered to be “deplorable.”⁵² An example of this can be found in an account of the 25 May anniversary celebrations, in which they emphasised:
- The festivities [...] have been very lively, and we were fortunate not to experience any unpleasant incidents with the exception of the episode caused by the friars of Patagones. They denied the entrance to the temple to the Italian Society, who were specially invited to the Te Deum. These incidents did not escalate thanks to the prudence of the festivity commission who, noting the Italian Society’s indifference to the 25 May celebrations, chose not to intervene. Although it was the commission’s duty, it preferred not to offend Italians who are the most important foreign community in the country.⁵³
- 48 The newspaper continued to condemn these events:
- those who have wronged the above-mentioned community are foreigners, those who are least called to mission, and wish to bring their partisan miseries into our society.⁵⁴
- 49 The tension between the Salesians and the Italian community was reflected in daily activities in the area, and the newspaper detailed a succession of incidents which resulted in disagreements owing to their irreconcilable ideologies. Whereas the Salesians were concerned with preserving the presence of religion in the affairs of the state and in education, members of the Italian community defended the supremacy of the state and secularism. This episode clearly exposes how these tensions translated into unfortunate events on national holidays.
- 50 Such instances were often described by the press as “minor incidents,” perhaps with the intention of playing down their conflictual nature. Above all, patriotic festivities were understood as optimal spaces for emphasising a shared nationhood, thus encouraging union over discord. While national holidays tended to institutionalise social and political relations and practices as spaces of social integration, they occasionally highlighted tensions between different sects and disagreements at both the local and national levels. Once again, the press became a way of disseminating this information.

- 51 Finally, we shall underline the role of the press as an agent in the Argentinisation process and, at the same time, show how the *national* question was affected by *regional* demands, which led to the creation of a particular type of national identity. In this manner, a column in *Río Negro* denounced the Buenos Aires-conceived centralist and uniform view of the Patagonian territory, and also denied accusations regarding a lack of local initiative in the process of Argentinisation:

From time to time, the declarations of an individual, the comments of a newspaper or an unusual fact pronounced in the metropolis [Buenos Aires] reveal that Patagonia, divided, administratively Argentinised into five territories, is far from beating in unison with national aspirations. And then, there are the usual revelations about the abuses committed by public officials, about the sparsity of the Argentine population, the abundance of foreign elements in some areas, and, most of all, the lack of initiative to root out the natives. Bah! We are already cured from fear. Neither do we accept unilateral judgments, nor do we fail to make our contribution to censorship, when it is necessary. There are in fact several Patagonias, in the social, economic and racial aspects, and it will be a long task, of love and justice, to unite them all, to Argentinise them from the heart.⁵⁵

- 52 This proclamation shows the newspaper's particular nationalistic view as it confronts the idea of territory as an indissoluble entity and cites regional initiatives with the aim of participating in the national project.
- 53 In this way, by analysing how mechanisms that symbolised citizenship in the National Territory worked, we can see that the same conjunctures that encouraged the diffusion and strengthening of the national spirit in these places became optimal spheres for establishing the relationship between local and regional identities. They allowed the establishing of social, political and economic dynamics in the short, medium or long term.

Final Considerations

- 54 To conclude this work, we propose a re-examination of the two basic ideas that have guided this research. First, that the central state, operating out of Buenos Aires, implemented a series of strategies for the Argentinisation of the NT. Here we have focused on the strategies that are symbolic in nature. Secondly, that within the National Territories emerged several initiatives that supported and fomented these policies of Argentinisation, re-signifying nationally-dictated processes to reshape the dynamics of local identity. In order to emphasise these ideas, we took the NT of Río Negro as a case study to analyse the nationalisation strategies apparent in the local press. We have investigated the ways in which national identity was constructed, transmitted and implemented, seeking to determine how it was generated, objectified and negotiated.
- 55 We have demonstrated the fundamental importance of the regional press in the consolidation of national identity in Río Negro, highlighting the active involvement of the local and regional spaces in the formation of the NT of Río Negro's own identity as distinct from the nation-state.
- 56 Through the analysis of the three main newspapers, we can see the role they played not only as social agents but also as social actors, producing and reproducing discourses of nationalisation, and their functioning as pedagogical actors in the task of Argentinisation. These politics were even supported by the Salesian press; this

congregation not only supported the nationalist doctrine, but also promoted its principles, although always in conjunction with the teaching of religious values.

- 57 Furthermore, thanks to the reports of correspondents from different localities, this study confirms the participation of various towns in the NT of Río Negro in patriotic festivities. Hence, we can witness the representation of an active society that is committed to the propagation of patriotic principles and feelings.
- 58 Finally, we demonstrate that the role of press was fundamental in helping to build parallel processes of regional and local integration via strategies of conformation and Argentinisation, as well as in strengthening the sense of a national community. Being a source of information about national celebrations, the press gave the festivities visibility across the dispersed towns and, in most cases, publicised their protagonists and participants. This publicising in particular often underlined the peculiarities of the places from where reports were gathered. In this regard, we consider that there is no other way to approach the history of the construction of the nation in Argentina than from the viewpoints of different realities and situations. Today, we understand that the state-centric vision is obsolete and that it is necessary to re-examine the logic and scale of this approach by, among other things, regionalising the research, which we intended to achieve in this article.

NOTES

1. For the current state of research and relevant historiography on the subject of nation and nationalism in Latin America see Nicola Miller “The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America”, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 201-222. See also Charles A. Hale “Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870– 1930”, in Bethell, L. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986, vol. IV, pp. 367-441. On the origins of Argentine nationalism, see David Rock “Intellectual Precursors of Conservative Nationalism in Argentina, 1900–27”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 67, nº 2, 1987, pp. 271-300. For a similar view, see also Jean H. Delaney “Imagining El Ser Argentino: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 34, nº 3, 2002, pp. 625-658. On the alternative view of national and regional Argentine identities that challenges the Buenos Aires-centered focus and offers a different perspective on the country’s modern history, see Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (ed.), *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America*, London, Routledge, 1996.

2. Joaquín Víctor González, *La tradición nacional*, Buenos Aires, Hachette, 1957 [1891].

José María Ramos Mejía, *Las Multitudes Argentinas*, Buenos Aires, Editorial de Belgrano, 1922 [1899]
Ricardo Rojas, *La Restauración Nacionalista*, Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, 1909.

3. After successive military campaigns, spaces considered “vacant” (Chaco, Patagonia and Misiones) were incorporated into the state by the laws sanctioned in 1862 and 1872. Finally, in 1884, by the law number 1532, the National Congress created nine new administrative units called National Territories (NT) or Governorships under the control of the national state. As a result of this political-administrative restructuring, the following NT were created: Chaco,

Formosa, Misiones, La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro (our case study), Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. A few years later, in 1900, the National Territory of the Andes was incorporated.

4. Susana Bandieri, “Cuando crear una identidad nacional en los Territorios Patagónicos fue prioritario”, *Pilquen*, nº11, 2009, pp. 1-5.

5. Mary Kay Vaughan studied the implementation of education policy in Mexico during the 1930s. What is most remarkable in her work is the analysis of state-building and national identity formation together. Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1997.

6. Carlos Escudé, *El fracaso del proyecto argentino*, Buenos Aires, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1990.

7. Carlos Altamirano & Beatriz Sarlo, “La Argentina del Centenario: campo intelectual, vida literaria y temas ideológicos”, in *Ensayos argentinos: de Sarmiento a la vanguardia*, Buenos Aires, CEAL, 1993, pp. 1-27; José Luis Romero, *El desarrollo de las ideas en la sociedad argentina del siglo XX*, México, FCE, 1993.

8. Hipólito Yrigoyen, *Documentos*, Buenos Aires, Comisión de la Ley de Homenaje a Don Hipólito Yrigoyen, 1949, pp. 115-116.

9. The following works approach the Argentinisation strategy from the political and symbolic point of view, emphasising the use of diverse national and local sources, and naming the regional press as an outstanding social actor: Marta Ruffini, “Autoridad, legitimidad y representaciones políticas. Juegos y estrategias de una empresa perdurable: Río Negro y La Nueva Era”, in Leticia Prislei (dir.), *Pasiones sureñas. Prensa cultura y política en la frontera norpatagónica (1884–1946)*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2001, pp. 101-126; Leticia Prislei, “Imaginar la Nación, modelar el desierto: los '20 en tierras del Neuquén”, in Prislei, *Pasiones sureñas...*, pp. 77-99; Mirta Kircher, “Miradas, relaciones y prácticas: la construcción de la política en Neuquén (1884–1904)”, in Prislei, *Pasiones sureñas...*, pp.19-38; Norma García, “Pensar y hacer la política”, in Prislei, *Pasiones sureñas...*, pp. 189-223; Brígida Baeza, “Las prácticas sociales de conmemoraciones en el espacio fronterizo de la Patagonia Austral: las fiestas aniversarios de localidades”, *Espacios*, vol. 26, 2003, pp. 106-122; María Teresa Varela, “La prensa como dinamizadora del espacio público: el periódico *La Nueva Era* en Viedma, capital del territorio nacional de Río Negro, durante el primer Yrigoyenismo”, *Revista Escuela de Historia*, vol.1, nº6, 2007, pp. 105-132; Gladys Elvira & María Teresa Varela, “Prensa y sociedad civil: la trama de la ciudadanía política en Viedma, capital del territorio de Río Negro, en la encrucijada de la década de 1930”, in Marta Ruffini & Ricardo Masera (coord.), *Horizontes en perspectivas. Contribuciones para la Historia de Río Negro, 1884–1955*, vol. I, Viedma, Editorial Fundación Ameghino, 2007, pp. 307-334; Liliana Luseti & Cecilia Mecozzi, “Obra patriótica, sembrar de escuelas la cordillera y la frontera: un análisis desde la prensa territorialiana. 1910–1945”, in *Jornadas de Historia de la Patagonia*, Santa Rosa, Universidad Nacional de la Pampa, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, 2010 pp.1-19; Pedro Navarro Floria, “La nacionalización fallida de la Patagonia Norte, 1862–1904”, *Quinto Sol*, nº7, 2004, pp. 61-91; Cielo Zaidenweg, “Un proyecto patriótico y ‘argentinizador’ para los Territorios Nacionales. Educación y efemérides en la región patagónica y rionegrina durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX”, *Unisinos*, vol. 17, nº2, 2013, pp. 237-247; Cielo Zaidenweg, *Amar la Patria. Las escuelas del Territorio rionegrino y la obra argentinizadora en el sur*, Rosario, Prohistoria, 2016, p. 218.

10. Susana Bandieri, *Historia de la Patagonia*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1965, p. 165.

11. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.; Pierre Bourdieu, “Espacio social y espacio simbólico. Introducción a una lectura japonesa de la distinción”, in Isabel Jiménez (comp.), *Capital cultural, escuela y espacio social*, México, Siglo XXI, 1997 [1995], pp. 23-40.

12. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983.

13. Alejandro Grimson (comp.), *Pasiones Nacionales. Política y cultura en Brasil y Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2007, p.27.

14. Nicola Miller, "The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America", *Nations and Nationalism*, vol.12, n° 2, 2006, pp. 201-221.
15. Ruffini, "Autoridad, legitimidad y representaciones políticas...", pp. 101-126.
16. Gilbert Joseph & Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1994.
17. Prislei, "Imaginar la Nación, modelar el desierto...", pp. 80-83.
18. Elvira & Varela, "Prensa y sociedad civil...", p. 315.
19. *Flores del Campo* was a weekly newspaper edited by the Salesian Congregation in Viedma. It was published for more than forty years (until 1947) and was disseminated across the entire Territory. The writings glorified the fatherland, the flag and the Argentine character, demonstrating the relationship between the Salesians and the Argentine Nation.
20. *La Nueva Era*, 24 December 1903, p. 1
21. Varela, "La prensa como dinamizadora...", p.110.
22. *La Nueva Era* was published for almost seventy years and had correspondents across the entire Territory, in places such as Nahuel Niyeu, Choele Choel, Allen, San Antonio Oeste, Arroyo Blanco, General Roca, Lluís Beltrán, Lamarque, Río Colorado, Sierra Grande, Bariloche, Arroyo Maitén, Corral Chico, El Bolsón, Maquinchao, Chichigüao, Colonia Frías, Pringles, Cerro Alto, Fortín Mercedes, Villalonga, Villa Galense. According to María Teresa Varela, the use of correspondents was not an unavoidable necessity, rather, they provided a highly credible source of information and were a signifier of prestige for the publication. The correspondent was normally an inhabitant connected to the press who had been assigned to work in one of the places where the newspaper concentrated its efforts. Their task was to provide information, comment on events and represent the editor's views. Most of them worked in collaboration with other correspondents (Varela, "La prensa como dinamizadora...", p. 110).
23. There were also correspondents from Choele Choel, Allen, El Cuy, Colonia 25 de Mayo, Río Colorado, Cura Lauquen, Picún Leufú (Neuquén) and Médanos (Buenos Aires). In 1913, other collaborators were added from Bariloche, San Antonio, Villarino (Buenos Aires) and Las Lajas (Neuquén), and from Buenos Aires, Viedma and Contralmirante Cordero post-1914. In 1925, the newspaper expanded its influence to other cities and towns with readers in Cervantes, Colonia Rusa, Catriel, Kilómetro 1.156 and Fernández Oro, Villa Regina, Cinco Saltos and San Martín de los Andes (Neuquén). Juan Carlos Bergonzi et al., "Río Negro: una historia comunicacional", in J. C. Bergonzi et al., *Periodismo en la Patagonia. Cambios en la presentación escrita y visual del diario Río Negro 1980-2000*, General Roca, Publifadec, 2004, pp. 39-60.
24. "Educación Popular", *Río Negro*, 1 January 1913, p. 1.
25. *La Nueva Era*, 26 December 1909, quoted in Ruffini, "Autoridad, legitimidad y representaciones políticas...", p. 101.
26. The sections in *La Nueva Era* were: Editorial, La semana social, Juzgado Letrado o Notas judiciales, Literarias, Varias, Policiales, Ecos del Territorio Informaciones del Territorio. *Río Negro* had the following sections: Redacción, Notas sociales, Del Territorio o Ecos del Territorio, Comerciales, Educativas, Vitivinicultura, Municipales, Literarias.
27. Gladys Elvira & María Teresa Varela, "La prensa periódica viedmense: los movimientos de opinión, 1916-1930", in *IV Jornadas de Historia de la Patagonia*, Santa Rosa, Universidad Nacional de la Pampa, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, 2010, pp.1-21.
28. Elvira & Varela, "La prensa periódica viedmense..."
29. Ruffini, "Autoridad, legitimidad y representaciones políticas..."
30. Ruffini, "Autoridad, legitimidad y representaciones políticas..." p.102
31. Varela, "La prensa como dinamizadora..."
32. Lusetti & Mecozzi, "Obra patriótica, sembrar de escuelas la cordillera y la frontera..."; Ernesto Bohoslavsky & Susana Yappert, "Rituales, fiestas patrias y nacionalismo en el Alto Valle del Río Negro y Neuquén, 1910-1943", in *Jornadas de Historia e Identidad Cultural de la Provincia de Río Negro*.

Por la actualización historiográfica rionegrina, Bariloche, Universidad FASTA, 2000; Cielo Zaidenweg, "Difundiendo y afianzando la argentinidad. La prensa local rionegrina en las primeras décadas del siglo XX", *Boletín Americanista*, vol. LXII, n°64, 2012, pp. 181- 200.

33. Prislei, "Imaginar la Nación...", p. 99.

34. We understand discourse as a social practice that constructs textual media and forms of communication in order to achieve certain goals, while also offering representations of real and/or imaginary worlds. Calsamiglia Blancafort, Helena & Tusón Valls, Amparo, *Las cosas del decir. Manual de análisis del discurso*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1999, p. 15.

35. Zaidenweg, "Difundiendo y afianzando la argentinidad..." has undertaken a preliminary work on the role of the regional press as a producer of national identity.

36. *Libro copiadador de resoluciones municipales de Viedma, 1905-1930*, 22 May 1912.

La Nueva Era, 23 May 1912, pp. 1-4.

37. "Centenario de la Independencia", *La Nueva Era*, 16 and 17 January 1916, pp. 1-4.

38. *El Imparcial*, 21 May 1908, p. 1.

39. "La Bandera de la Patria", *Río Negro*, 8 June 1929, p. 1.

40. From these two newspapers, we selected the following issues for examination: *La Nueva Era* 731 (1 June 1916) 739 (23 July 1916), 941 (25 July 1920), 942 (1 August 1920), 1089 (8 June 1923), 1146 (12 July 1924), 1186 (12 June 1925), 1406 (4 January 1930), *Río Negro* 447 (27 May 1920).

41. Melisa Pesoa highlights the importance of a town's main square as a space for social integration, but also as a locale for the diffusion of national identity, as was the case in new towns in the province of Buenos Aires. We can also witness this in the new towns in Río Negro. Melisa Pesoa, "La plaza republicana como escenario de cambio social: La conformación del espacio cívico en las ciudades de nueva fundación del siglo XIX en la provincia de Buenos", *Registros*, 10, 2013, pp. 60-74.

42. "El próximo aniversario patrio. Su celebración en Colonia Stroeder", *La Nueva Era*, 14 May 1916, p. 1.

43. *Río Negro*, 27 May 1920, p. 1. In the same chronicle, it was recorded as a complaint that in the town of General Roca no celebration had taken place; the reasons were explained.

44. *La Nueva Era*, 8 July 1917, p. 2.

45. "El día de la Patria", *Río Negro*, 25 May 1929, p. 1.

46. In this vein, *La Nueva Era* published a piece by Claro Felix Barbieri about the historical events of 9 July that stated the following: "The son abandoned his maternal guardian because he had come of age. The right to be free that History grants to the people capable of directing their own destiny assisted us, but Spain could never allow its children to substitute the two-coloured flag for another one without having its glorious name diminished. So began that clash of titans. Maipú, Carabobo and Ayacucho were the *coups de grâce* for Spanish power. [...] Six years after that glorious day in May, the sun of freedom seemed to have paled; [...] our troops had been defeated along with Belgrano in Vilcapugio and Ayohuma. It was at that moment that the Congress of Tucumán was established. It was the last hope for the salvation of an exhausted population and he [Artigas], realising his mission, swore before the Holy Gospels on 9 July 1816 the independence of our country, and now on the 110th anniversary of that day the children will sing the National Anthem and raise to the ethereal regions of morality the thanks given by their pure souls to the Fathers of the Fatherland." "Las fiestas patrias en Patagones y Viedma", *La Nueva Era*, 10 July 1926, pp. 1-4.

47. *Flores del Campo*, 15 July 1905, p.1.

48. "Idea de Patria y amor a la Virgen", *Flores del Campo*, 15 July 1905, p. 1.

49. "25 de mayo", *Flores del Campo*, 21 May 1904, p. 1.

50. "Después del centenario. Ecos de tristeza" *La Nueva Era*, 7 August 1910, pp. 1-4.

51. After the military campaigns, and once the lands originally inhabited by indigenous tribes were seized by the State, the tribes became an obstacle for the "civilising" ideas of the national

government. After the Conquest, not even the Metropolitan Church, which had the National Territories of the South under its jurisdiction, was interested in undertaking missionary work in those distant lands. Thus, emerged the alternative of putting the South's future into the hands of a religious congregation like the Salesians. María Andrea Nicoletti, "Controversias y enfrentamientos ante la formación del ciudadano: los informes 'Escuelas del Sud' del vocal J. B. Zubiaur y 'Los Salesianos del Sud' de P. Marabini, sdb (1906)", *Archivum*, vol. XXIII, 2004, pp. 105-117.

52. The expenses detailed by the Commission of Celebrations for 9 July 1912 in Patagones can give us an idea of the cost that this service entailed. The amount paid for food, for the Mass of the Te Deum ceremony (officiated by the Salesian Society), and for the band (also Salesian Society members), plus "other" expenses, totalled 260 pesos. "Balances de gastos. Comisión de festejos", *La Nueva Era*, 9 July 1912, pp. 1-4.

53. "El aniversario patrio", *La Nueva Era*, 27 May 1908, pp. 1-4.

54. "El aniversario patrio", *La Nueva Era*, 27 May 1908, pp. 1-4.

55. "Argentinización de la Patagonia", *Río Negro*, 1 October 1925, p. 2.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyses the aspects of the so-called "Argentinisation" process in the National Territory of Río Negro during the early twentieth century. Using examples from the regional press, an essential actor in development, we examine two key facets of the nation-building process. These include the regional particularities of the process designed for the whole Argentine territory, and the intrinsic exchanges that take place between discourse, theory and practice in the construction of a regional space.

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América... Barcelona, Ed. UB, 2017, pp. 169-194; *Amar la Patria. Las escuelas rionegrinas y la obra argentinizadora en el Sur*, Rosario, Prohistoria, 2016.

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