

**THE IDEA OF NEUTRALITY IN
BRITISH NEWSPAPERS AT THE
TURN OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY, c.1898-1902**

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Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, Britain was the world's most powerful occasional neutral. Neutrality was an important component of the idea of warfare. It was a fundamental component of international diplomacy in a world characterised by concern for codification and regulation. This study uses text-searchable digital newspaper archives to investigate how understandings of neutrality permeated information presented to Britons through newspapers in reports that would not usually concern the historian of international law and war because they did not deal directly with law and conflict. It examines how the words 'neutral', 'neutrality' and 'neutralise' were mobilised to convey ideas in the contexts of domestic politics, sport, and science. Understanding the interaction between ideas informed by international diplomacy and ideas as experienced in broader domestic contexts is possible when these contexts are viewed as sites of conflict with the common feature of the possibility of third party mediation. By examining how ideas associated with neutrality as a mechanism for limiting warfare's destructiveness were constructed in newspapers, this study posits that the use of the idea of neutrality in popular turn-of-the-century British newspapers offers insight into how Britons were implicitly encouraged to understand the place of warfare and neutrality in their world.

I) The Idea of Neutrality in British Newspapers

*'Neutrality has always carried a variety of charges'*¹

The *Oxford English Dictionary* records words' definitions. Moreover, it lists the meanings that are constructed around words, providing information about the context in which they have been used. The entry for 'neutrality' in the 1989 edition of this dictionary indicates that the word has taken on multiple meanings over many years.² The entry begins with the suggestion that the word neutrality was first used in 1480 to refer to 'the neutral party in any dispute or difference of opinion; the neutral powers during a war... Now only *Hist.*'³ This particular definition and its relegation to 'only *Hist.*' explains neutrality's meaning in the context of international law and, simultaneously, confines it to a long-obsolete system of international diplomacy. The entry then moves on to offer seven further brief phrases to define 'neutrality'. Earlier definitions, for example that it described '[t]he neutral character *of* a place during a war', offer insight into how the concept developed and became more nuanced in the international legal context over the course of the nineteenth century.⁴ In 1745, 'neutrality' was first used to describe a physical

¹ Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen, and Sven Widmalm, "Introduction". In: idem (eds.), *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p.1.

² E. S. C. Weiner and J. A. Simpson (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.357.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Weiner and Simpson, p.358.

place's neutrality in wartime.⁵ Over the course of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, 'neutrality', 'neutral', and 'neutralise' developed more diverse meanings in multiple contexts. For example, the idea of 'neutralisation' was deployed in in the developing discipline of chemistry in 1808 to describe a chemical 'action' with 'an opposite nature or effect'.⁶ The word 'neutral' was used to explain colour as early as 1821 and was being used to denote phonetic sounds by 1874.⁷ The legal concept of neutrality did not exist in an international diplomatic vacuum. Instead, the idea of neutrality was debated and engaged with in the context of diverse and developing understandings of what the word 'neutral' could mean. This article seeks to consider how the many strands of meaning developing around the idea of neutrality at the end of the nineteenth century were woven into British newspapers in contexts beyond international diplomacy.

At the *fin de siècle* (c.1898-1902) neutrality featured prominently in Britain's international diplomacy.⁸ British newspapers dedicated a great deal of space to discussions of neutrality. This was true when Britain was neutral, for example during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5; when the codification of the international law of neutrality had implications for British

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. Spelt 'neutralization' in the original source. 'Neutralisation' was first used to denote 'the action of making neutral in time of war' in 1870. 'Neutrality' was first used in the context of Chemistry in 1880.

⁷ Ibid, p.356.

⁸ Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Neutrality and Great Power Politics 1815 – 1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.178.

interests, for example during the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907; and when Britain was concerned that other states remain neutral, for example during its time as a belligerent in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and in the Boxer Rebellion (1900).⁹ Furthermore, Britons understood that neutrality was a tool relevant to their own position in international diplomacy.¹⁰ The British government was completely willing to declare Britain's neutrality in any conflict when it perceived doing so to be in the nation's interests.¹¹ As Maartje Abbenhuis contends, Britain was the world's 'occasional neutral power *par excellence*' at the turn of the twentieth century.¹²

Neutrality did not have to be a permanent stance, nor did it carry modern connotations of 'morality and passivity' during the nineteenth century.¹³ Some small nations in strategically significant locations, for example Belgium and Switzerland, were permanently neutralised by great power agreement over the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Other states, notably the Netherlands, voluntarily adopted long-term neutrality.¹⁵ Crucially, powerful nations could also adopt neutrality in

⁹ Based on searches conducted in *The Daily Mail Historical Archive* (1898 onwards only); *The Economist Historical Archive*; *The Times Digital Archive*; and *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer*, and *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive* for articles using words beginning with 'neutra' between 1 January 1898 and 1 January 1903.

¹⁰ Maartje Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool for Diplomacy and Statecraft: Neutrality and Europe in the 'Long' Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914", *The International History Review* 35 (2013), pp.2-3.

¹¹ *Daily Mail*, 27 April 1898, p.5. C.f. Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool", p.3.

¹² Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.95.

¹³ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

¹⁵ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.15-16; Roderick Ogley. *The Theory and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970, p.3.

response to a specific conflict; they were then subject to the rights and duties of neutrality only for the duration of a specific war. Abbenhuis argues that nations, and particularly Great Britain, regularly adopted occasional neutrality during the nineteenth century because it ‘played a key role in keeping Europe at peace and its empires flourishing’.¹⁶ Over the course of the nineteenth century, British national identity was not tied to neutrality in the same way that small permanently neutralised states would construct their identities as neutrals after the First World War.¹⁷ However, British newspapers’ repeated engagement with the concept of neutrality invites consideration of the extent to which, at the close of the nineteenth century, occasional neutrality constituted part of Britons’ understanding of how their world worked.

However, when one conducts a search for neutrality using digital newspaper archives—resources which can search a publication’s entire text without bias towards where a researcher expects to find discussions of neutrality—it becomes apparent that the words ‘neutral’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘neutralise’ were also widely used in British newspapers in contexts outside of international diplomacy. The following study examines three specific contexts in which the idea of neutrality was invoked in British newspapers: domestic politics, sport, and science. It considers how use of the idea of neutrality in these contexts ran parallel to, and often drew upon, the contemporary

¹⁶ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.12.

¹⁷ Christine Agius, *The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality: Challenges to Swedish Identity and Sovereignty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, pp.5-6.

relevance of neutrality in international diplomacy. It relies primarily on examples drawn from popular newspapers, rather than specialist publications, including the *Daily Mail*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Observer*, the *Illustrated London News*, and *The Times* (London).¹⁸ This article argues that the ways in which British newspapers invoked the idea of neutrality as part of analogies constructed around warfare and conflict suggests that those who produced the newspapers understood neutrality to be a component of their audience's cultural construction of war and of Britain's willingness to declare occasional neutrality.

Michael Paris argues that, by the turn of the twentieth century, war constituted part of Victorian Britons' sense of self.¹⁹ He argues that 'the pleasure culture of war reflected national interest in war' and suggests that, whilst some Britons wished to believe otherwise, 'war impacted upon the mind of the nation and created the idea of the army as the instrument of the nation's will'.²⁰ However, an examination of Victorian Britons' newspapers suggests that their understanding of war was not confined to belligerency. Instead, neutrality was a component of how newspapers thought the public understood war. For example, in an 1898 feature article explaining 'the Etiquette of

¹⁸ Based on analysis of data gathered from digital searches as described in note 6. These publications were selected because they are popular newspapers and thus use language that the contributors assume a non-specialist reader will understand. In addition these publications were chosen because they have extensive digital archives which facilitate an exploration of the possibilities for digital historical research methodologies.

¹⁹ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000*. London: Reaktion Books, 2000, pp.8, 18-21.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp.21-32.

War' the *Daily Mail* reported that 'although warfare is a relic of barbarism, it must be waged between enlightened nations with strict adherence to many binding rules, prescribed from time to time by international law', including neutrality.²¹ British newspapers also actively discussed the proper place of neutrality in warfare and international diplomacy. For example, the jurist-cum-intellectual T.E. Holland wrote many letters to the editor of *The Times* in an attempt to explain to Britons the nuances of the international law of neutrality. In his letters, he often expressed the belief that 'it may be desirable for the general reader to be in possession of information accurate [with regard to neutrality], one may venture to hope, as far as it goes'.²² It is apparent that neutrality was an aspect of warfare which Britons were encouraged to discuss and understand.

Investigating the question of how Britons were presented with information about the nuances of the idea of neutrality requires this study to consider the intersections between three historiographical traditions. Historians have not previously analysed the idea of neutrality in British newspapers circa 1900 in large part because neutrality has not been considered an important component of British diplomacy in this time period.²³ However, considered together, the three historiographical traditions create an ideal framework. The first

²¹ *Daily Mail*, 20 April 1898, p.7. This publication's feature articles had a wide audience including both male and female readers.

²² *The Times*, 3 January 1900, p.6.

²³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992, pp.257; Paris, p.11; Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899-1914*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp.6-7, 43-45.

important tradition is the literature analysing the relationship between neutrality and its cultural ramifications. To this end, historians tend to focus on smaller neutral states and prioritise the post-first World War era in their analyses.²⁴ They identify signs that neutrality became part of permanently neutralised nations' senses of identity, particularly when it was in their interests to identify strongly with the positive moral connotations that the idea took on during the interbellum period.²⁵ Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen, and Sven Widmalm treat this as a process whereby national identity was constructed around external referents including science, culture, and politics.²⁶ Conversely, Christine Aguis focuses on individual experience of the links between Swedish neutrality and identity. She attempts to 'rethink neutrality as a concept and a practice, uncovering how norms and values become embedded over time, producing their own realities, frames of reference and myths'.²⁷ As she demonstrates, this process led to individuals situating themselves within a collective

²⁴ See Lettevall *et al.*, pp.9-13; Aguis, pp.1-57. C.f Maartje Abbenhuis, "In Fear of War: The First World War and the State of Siege in the Neutral Netherlands, 1914-1918," *War in History* 13 (2006), pp.16-41 for a discussion of neutrality in a small neutral state during the first World War.

²⁵ Aguis, pp.17-21; Lettevall *et al.*, pp.7-8; Ogle, p.1; Patrick Salmon, "British Attitudes towards Neutrality in the Twentieth Century". In Jukka Nevakivi (ed.), *Neutrality in History: Proceedings of the Conference on the History of Neutrality, organized in Helsinki, 9-12 September 1992, under the auspices of the Commission of History of International Relations*. Helsinki: SHS, 1993, pp.123-125; Edgar W. Turlington, *Neutrality: Its History, Economics and Law. Volume III: The World War Period*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936, p.vi; Pål Wrangé, *Impartial or Uninvolved? The Anatomy of 20th Century Doctrine on the Law of Neutrality*. Stockholm: Juridiska institutionen, Stokholms universitet, 2007, pp.31-32; c.f. Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.16-17.

²⁶ Lettevall *et al.*, p.2.

²⁷ Aguis, p.207.

culture defined by identification with neutrality. Regardless of the link they observe between neutrality and external cultural referents, both studies take as their point of departure the understanding that permanent neutrality pervaded a variety of popular understandings of identity and nationhood in a way that occasional neutrality did not.

This study, conversely, explores the question of whether the idea of occasional neutrality could also be expressed as a component of the cultural construct of war in British newspapers. It does so by considering how references to neutrality in contexts beyond war drew on understandings of neutrality as a component of international law. As the anthropologist Lawrence Rosen suggests, law constitutes one of the many ‘domains’ of human existence that members of a culture engage with in order to construct and understand their world.²⁸ The international legal usage of the word ‘neutrality’ intersected with the broader ideas that the word conveyed when invoked in domestic political, sporting, and scientific contexts. An examination of references to neutrality in broader cultural contexts in British newspaper articles published between 1898 and 1902 suggests that the word ‘neutrality’ was used to convey specific ideas which assumed Britons understood what it meant to be neutral in the international legal sense. The implications of being an occasional neutral were capable of permeating late Victorian cultural constructions of the nuances of war.

²⁸ Lawrence Rosen, *Law as Culture: An Invitation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.4-5.

The second historiographical tradition which forms the basis for this study concerns Britain's relationship with neutrality and with the concept of internationalism at the turn of the century. For Britain, the *fin de siècle* was a time when culture, internationalism and international diplomacy intersected.²⁹ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw the rise of cultural internationalist ideas.³⁰ As Akira Iriye argues, 'the new internationalism in the age of the new imperialism... inevitably called for cooperative undertakings among nations to promote a sense of global interdependence'.³¹ In the brief period between 1898 and 1900, Britain engaged with neutrality in three arenas. Firstly, as a declared neutral in the Spanish American War; secondly, as a key player in the diplomatic negotiations of the First Hague Peace Conference; and thirdly, as a belligerent concerned with other states' neutrality in the Second Anglo-Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion.

The rise of internationalist ideas coincided with a pervasive sense in Britain that the world could be regulated, codified and controlled. At the turn of the twentieth century, educated persons attempted to exert control over the world they inhabited by ascribing boundaries

²⁹ Grace Brockington, "Introduction: Internationalism and the Arts". In: idem (ed.), *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009, pp.4-5, 7-8.

³⁰ Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp.18-19; c.f. Brockington, pp.4-5, 7-8.

³¹ Iriye, p.27 notes that international relations included a strong cultural element; c.f. F. S. L. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe, 1815-1914*. Leyden: A.W. Sythoff, 1963, pp.205-207.

to time, space, and conduct.³² To that end, the First Hague Peace Conference was a high point of international law. As Arthur Balfour eloquently stated:

[the Hague Peace Conference], so far as I know, is the first instance in which the nations of the world have been asked to regard themselves as one family having a great common interest which, by mutual debate, they may have some hope of furthering.³³

It is no coincidence, then, that the Conference's major if 'quiet' achievement was progress towards codifying the international laws of war, particularly arbitration and neutrality.³⁴ It is also no coincidence that, as the three case studies explored below demonstrate, the term 'neutrality' went hand in hand with ideas about control and judicious restraint. In this context, neutrality's relevance informed how the British newspaper-reading public were encouraged to think about their world.

The third historiographical tradition which underpins this study is the literature investigating the place of warfare in British culture. For example, Michael Paris contends that ideas about war pervaded late Victorian popular culture, including periodical publications. He suggests that 'young Britons exposed to... a constant diet of propaganda could hardly fail to absorb the idea that the nation was

³² Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, pp.1-4, 9, 164-166; Nicholas Taylor, "The Awful Sublimity of the Victorian City: Its Aesthetic and Architectural Origins". In: H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2. Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1973, p.431; Wilkinson, pp.68-69.

³³ Arthur Balfour, reported in *The Times*, 30 March 1899, p.6.

³⁴ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.191

poised on the brink of disaster'.³⁵ Wilkinson also argues that war imagery was ubiquitous in British newspapers and that this imagery shaped how Britons thought about themselves.³⁶ Nevertheless, if war imagery and discussion was pervasive it remains important to consider all that was contained in that war imagery - including neutrality.³⁷ The relevance of neutrality in Britain in the pre-war era is often ignored by those who identify the nation primarily as the world's pre-eminent naval power.³⁸ However, many newspaper contributors recognised that neutrality was important for international diplomacy and carefully explained the concept to their readers.³⁹ For example, in an 1899 article explaining 'How War Begins' the *Daily Mail* explained that 'a declaration [of war]... is always made, but it is done in order to let neutral Powers understand thoroughly what the situation is'.⁴⁰

In order to examine how the word 'neutrality' was used in the British periodical press it is necessary to investigate where and when the word was used and the meaning that it was intended to convey.

³⁵ Paris, p.109.

³⁶ Wilkinson, pp.134-137.

³⁷ Ibid, p.10 identifies war as an important component of British culture, however, he does not engage with neutrality.

³⁸ See, for example, Jost Dülffer, "Changes and Limits of Armament Control 1898-1914". In: Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (eds.), *An Improbable War: The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture Before 1914*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, p.98; Shawn Grimes, "The Baltic and Admiralty War Planning, 1906-1907," *The Journal of Military History* 74 (2010), pp.408-409.

³⁹ *The Times* regularly published letters explaining the international law of neutrality, see for example Thomas Erskine Holland, *Letters to "The Times" upon war and Neutrality, 1881-1909: with some commentary*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914.

⁴⁰ *Daily Mail*, 22 July 1899, p.7.

Despite the potential pitfalls of the digital archive, it is an invaluable tool for such an endeavour.⁴¹ Text-searchable digital archives offer historians the ability to search through text for all examples of word usage.⁴² As a result, their research is not confined to where they expect to locate evidence. For example, a historian searching through hundreds of physical newspapers might search where they expect to find neutrality and thus find it in reports on international law and warfare. They would be less likely to read, for example, sports reports and articles about high society. However, it is in precisely these sections that newspaper reporters often used the word ‘neutral’ to convey a variety of nuanced meanings and it is here that historians can observe the diffusion of ideas across the permeable membrane of culture. Of course, as Amanda Goodrich notes, simply searching for and finding a word or phrase in a digital archive does not begin to answer questions about the word’s usage or applications.⁴³ It is therefore also necessary to consider the contexts in which ‘neutrality’, ‘neutralise’, and ‘neutral’ were used, and the meanings that these words were intended to convey. As Roy Harris and Talbot Taylor contend, ‘human beings... decide, collectively, what verbal distinctions it is useful to draw in order to exchange ideas with one

⁴¹ Dallas Liddle, “Reflections on 20,000 Victorian Newspapers: ‘Distant Reading’ *The Times* using *The Times Digital Archive*,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17 (2012), p.230; for a well-informed discussion of the dangers of the digital archive see Shafquat Towheed, “Reading in the Digital Archive,” *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15 (2010), pp.139-143.

⁴² Amanda Goodrich, “Neutral Nobility to Contentious Aristocracy; Changing Terms in Testing Times, 1700-1850” (paper presented at Open University, 7 March 2012); c.f. Amanda Goodrich, “Understanding a Language of ‘Aristocracy,’ 1700-1850,” *The Historical Journal*, 56 (2013), pp.369-398.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

another'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, newspapers are a particularly rich source of insight into early twentieth-century British culture due to the proliferation of written and printed periodicals.⁴⁵ An analysis of 'neutrality' in the British periodical press demonstrates the blurring of the lines between international legal, diplomatic and military contexts and the much wider and popular application of the idea of neutrality.

This study does not seek to replay the extensive and far-reaching postmodernist historiographical debate concerning the construction of language. Instead, it self-consciously accepts the contention that words convey information about culturally constructed meanings.⁴⁶ When members of a society use a word they invoke meaning(s) constructed around that word and attempt to convey socially specific ideas.⁴⁷ The analysis that follows thus asks what meaning(s) were constructed around words invoking ideas of neutrality. Its subject matter is the ways in which British newspapers discussed and constructed the idea of neutrality, rather than the political leanings of

⁴⁴ Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought 1: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1997, p.222.

⁴⁵ Scott Bennett, "Revolutions in Thought: Serial Publication and the Mass Market for Reading". In: Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, eds, *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982, pp.225, 235, 521; Ryno Greenwall, "Some Contemporary Illustrated and Satirical Periodicals which Portray the Anglo-Boer War," *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* 38 (1984), p.101; Kevin Williams, *Read all about it!: A History of the British Newspaper*. London: Routledge, 2010, pp.125-126.

⁴⁶ Gabrielle Spiegel, "The Task of the Historian," *American Historical Review* 114 (2009), pp.4-5; Gabrielle Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp.76-78, 84-85; c.f. Harris and Taylor, pp.209-214.

⁴⁷ Roy Harris, *Language, Saussure, and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words*. London: Routledge, 1988, pp.97-98; Harris and Taylor, pp.218-219.

individual newspapers which so often permeate histories of individual publications.⁴⁸ It is important to note that all of the newspapers examined in this study were published in England and, with the exception of the *Manchester Guardian*, all were published in London.⁴⁹ However, the term Britons is used here because it underlines that neutrality was presented as a position adopted by Britain (including Scotland and Ireland) as a nation. All of the newspapers aimed to achieve wide circulation amongst their target audience of literate Britons. British cities were home to a variety of demographics. While it would be unwise to claim that the content of newspapers is representative of how all Britons understood their world it is, nevertheless, appropriate to assert that the ways that ideas were presented drew on expectations of common understandings shared by a majority of the newspaper reading population.

The newspapers considered in this study discussed both domestic and international matters and, in doing so, invited Britons to imagine their world's international contours.⁵⁰ By examining how these sources treated the idea of neutrality, this study hopes to offer some

⁴⁸ For an example in the case of Punch see R. G. G. Price, *A History of Punch*. London: Collins, 1957, p.139; see also Michael Wolff and Celina Fox, "Pictures from the Magazines". In: H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (ed.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2. Boston: Routledge & Keegan, 1973, pp.559-582; c.f. Lettevall *et al.*, p.9.

⁴⁹ The *Daily Mail*, *Economist*, *Illustrated London News*, *Observer*, *Punch* and *The Times* were published in London. The *Manchester Guardian* was published in Manchester and circulated in Manchester and the North.

⁵⁰ See Aled Jones, "The *Dart* and the Damning of the Sylvan Stream: Journalism and Political Culture in the Late-Victorian City". In: Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.180 on the possibility of adding a spatial dimension to analyses of newspapers.

insight into the extent to which, and in what ways, neutrality was implicitly presented as part of Britons' worldview. Samuel Hynes notes that the political mood in Britain at the *fin de siècle* was characterised by a 'sense of the end of an epoch... [which gave] the Edwardian Age a touch of melancholy, and a touch of apprehension'.⁵¹ In this context, ideas which implied a sense of control and attempts at maintaining order found an audience.

British newspapers discussed neutrality in domestic political, sporting, and scientific contexts. The following sections treat these contexts as case studies and examine the ideas conveyed by reports discussing neutrality. Furthermore, a study of the meanings conveyed by neutrality suggests that the *fin de siècle* constituted a moment of closeness when contemporarily relevant ideas about neutrality intersected with the permeation of this idea into broader contexts. An examination of how these ideas intermingled suggests that neutrality formed part of a Victorian cultural understanding of war and its place in how newspapers understood Britons to imagine their world. Furthermore, it offers insight into the 'variety of charges' carried by neutrality at the turn of the twentieth century and the ways in which these meanings were relevant to Britons. Finally, it also offers some insight into the interaction between the usages of neutrality in international diplomacy and the broader cultural understandings of neutrality which are more readily recognisable in twenty-first century.

⁵¹ Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p.16.

II) 'No fewer than thirty-six remaining neutral'⁵²: Neutrality, Voting, and Domestic Politics

Historians often note that the international legal concept of neutrality was deeply founded in and shaped by practical concerns and experiences.⁵³ As Stephen Neff so eloquently argues, 'more than perhaps any other area of international law, neutrality has been moulded far more by the struggles of the real world than by the expositions of commentators'.⁵⁴ As a result, historians regularly situate neutrality within a discourse of diplomacy.⁵⁵ In late Victorian Britain, the domestic political world and the international diplomatic world were not mutually exclusive; similarly, the two political words were often described in similar terms. British newspapers contain hundreds of examples of the words 'neutral' and 'neutrality' invoked in reports concerning the domestic political sphere, including for example reports on local body elections, reports on votes cast by various local institutions, and discussions of the spaces in which political debates played out. The words 'neutrality' and 'neutralise' were as relevant to the context of domestic politics as they were to the international diplomatic and legal environment of *fin de siècle* Europe.

⁵² *Daily Mail*, 8 February 1898, p.5.

⁵³ See Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool", pp.2-4; Elizabeth Chadwick, *Traditional Neutrality Revisited: Law, Theory, and Case Studies*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2002, pp.2-3; Stephen C. Neff, *The Rights and Duties of Neutrals: A General History*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.7; Wrangle, p.129

⁵⁴ Neff, p.2.

⁵⁵ See for example Chadwick, pp.1-18; Wrangle, pp.129-135.

In order to assess how the idea of neutrality operated in domestic political contexts it is necessary to begin by considering the ideas that the term conveyed. British newspaper reports would not have written that a vote by the Birmingham City Council on an amendment to give a grant to the University of Birmingham ‘was lost by 15 votes to 38, seven members remaining neutral’ had this not conveyed specific, understandable, information to the public.⁵⁶ Many historians examine the threads of warfare in British society at the turn of the century.⁵⁷ Fewer, however, delve into the question of how ideas about war interacted with underlying currents of restraint.⁵⁸ To borrow Carlos Reijnen’s turn of phrase, ‘politics and culture merged in unique ways’ as British culture interacted with ideas informed by neutrality.⁵⁹ When they used the language of neutrality, British reporters drew on the assumption that those words would convey specific ideas. They also implicitly constructed neutrality as a component of the British political toolkit.⁶⁰ This is not to argue that the concept of a ‘neutral’ could not exist for Britons outside of the international context. In fact,

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 31 July 1901, p.11.

⁵⁷ Colley, p.6; Paris, pp.11-18; Rex Pope, *War and Society in Britain 1899-1948*. London: Longman, 1991, pp.1-8.

⁵⁸ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.156-166; Matthias Schulz, “Did Norms Matter in Nineteenth-Century International Relations? Progress and Decline in the “Culture of Peace” before World War I”. In: Afflerbach and Stevenson (eds.) pp.48-51; c.f. Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997, p.238.

⁵⁹ Carlos Reijnen, “A Castle in the Center: The First Czechoslovak Republic and European Cooperation, 1918-1938.”. In: Lettevall *et al.*, (eds.), p.182. Reijnen used this phrase to describe post First World War Czechoslovakian interactions with the idea of neutrality.

⁶⁰ Abbenhuis, “A Most Useful Tool”, pp.15-16; c.f. Wrangle, pp.49-50 for a discussion of how neutrality, as an international legal concept, was constructed through discourse.

it suggests quite the opposite. The way in which British newspapers wrote about neutrality demonstrates that, in a context where it was a particularly relevant international concept, the contours of neutrality in international law helped to shape what Britons meant when they utilised the idea in broader contexts.

The presence of the idea of neutrality in the context of domestic politics suggests that Britons were comfortable describing themselves as neutrals. For example, British newspaper reporters often used the word ‘neutral’ in reports on the distribution of votes cast by various bodies of representatives. These bodies ranged from small groups of representatives at an institutional level—for example the governors of Macclesfield Infirmary, who ‘passed by eight votes to one, two members remaining neutral and one leaving the room during the discussion’ a measure to allow medical professionals to nominate the candidates for senior and junior house surgeons⁶¹—to much larger groups of representatives—for example the Plymouth Town Council which voted ‘by forty-nine votes to one, nine remaining neutral’ to promote a Bill to Parliament asking for £660,000 ‘to construct docks in the Cattewater’.⁶² The case of the Macclesfield Infirmary also highlights that reporters deliberately chose the language of neutrality to convey taking an actively nonaligned position rather than abstaining. In contrast to his neutral colleagues, the member who did not want to vote abstained by leaving the room. Similarly, in response to an inquiry about the efficiency of the National Telephone Company

⁶¹ *The Times*, 14 January 1902, p.4.

⁶² *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1898, p.3.

in Glasgow, 146 of the 4,186 subscribers specifically chose to send neutral replies. The response, which elicited 2,700 complaints and 1,337 non-responses, was treated by the *Daily Mail* as evidence commensurate with a vote.⁶³ The common feature of reporting neutral votes prompts a consideration of the context of vote-casting and of neutrality's place within this context.⁶⁴ Voting ascertained consensus based on a majority opinion.⁶⁵ In other words, votes mediated between two or more mutually exclusive positions. When voting is understood as a form of competition between two or more alternatives, it becomes possible to understand a vote as a site of conflict. In the context of voting and taking a stance, Britons engaged with neutrality as an active alternative to abstention. By recording neutrality separately from abstention, it was possible to explain the position of those who did not support opposing parties in the context of conflict pertaining to a specific issue but did not want to remove themselves from the organised political system. This idea parallels the position of occasional neutral nations that declared neutrality in specific international contexts.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Daily Mail*, 10 August 1898, p.4. This information was collected in the context of a dispute over the Government monopoly on telephone service.

⁶⁴ See, for example the *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1899, p.12; 3 May 1902, p.10.

⁶⁵ On vote casting in Late Victorian Britain see Paul A. Readman, "The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late Victorian Britain," *The Historical Journal* 42 (1999), pp.467-493.

⁶⁶ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.15-16; Ogley, pp.3-4.

Newspaper reporters also used the idea of neutrality when reporting the results of votes cast by Britons in various domestic contexts. In other words, they described British citizens as neutrals.⁶⁷ For example, the *Daily Mail* reported in 1898 on the result of a plebiscite which sought to determine the attitude of Great Eastern Company employees toward a proposed pension bill. The reporter noted that while

[a] large majority of the employés [sic] remained neutral...The officials of the men's society [The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants] hold that the attitude of the "neutrals" suggests that the poll has been taken in a manner which could not reflect the true opinion of the employés.⁶⁸

It is significant that the reporter specifically put 'neutrals' in quotation marks because this choice suggests that they consciously borrowed the term in order to illustrate a broader point. The newspaper reporter who described numbers of voters as 'neutral' thus revealed their assumption that the enfranchised British public understood what it meant to be neutral and that such a position could be adopted when it suited their situation.⁶⁹

Britons did not only occasionally declare themselves neutral; they also discussed the implications of choosing to be neutral in domestic political contexts. Significantly, Britons critically engaged with what

⁶⁷ David Brooks, *The Age of Upheaval: Edwardian Politics, 1899-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, pp.30-33.

⁶⁸ *Daily Mail*, 16 April 1898, p.3; The G.E.R. was a Railway company.

⁶⁹ The British voting public was predominantly comprised on white males, women were not enfranchised until 1928, see Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.150.

it meant to be neutral and sometimes voted against the adoption of a neutral position. For example, when faced with the decision of supporting the Liberal or the Unionist candidate in the South Wolverhampton by-election of 1898, the Sedgley branch of the Independent Labour Party passed 'a resolution moved by one of the officials in favour of a state of neutrality being rejected'.⁷⁰ Newspaper reports on the discussions of the House of Parliament made similar assertions. For example, a report concerning the debate over the payment to be made for the Department of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, the *Observer* noted that '[w]ith eyeglass focussed upon Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman he [Mr. Chamberlain] insisted that there must be no neutrality [in the vote]. Nothing, he said, could be more contemptible in such a case than to run out of the House'.⁷¹ In this instance, Chamberlain conflated neutrality with abstention and thus found it undesirable.

As Chamberlain's assertion demonstrates, British politicians actively and critically considered the implications of adopting neutrality in specific contexts. Newspaper reports suggest that, in certain circumstances, equally critical cases were made to encourage British citizens to remain neutral. For example, the *Daily Mail* reported that after Rose Percival physically intervened in a verbal dispute between two other ladies

so effectively that... [the lady she struck] appeared with blackened eyes and a bandaged head.... The magistrate

⁷⁰ *Daily Mail*, 27 January 1898, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Observer*, 29 July 1900, p.4.; See also Robbins, p.73 for a discussion on how press reports on domestic debates regarding foreign affairs influenced public opinion.

counselled the amazon not to interfere in other people's quarrels, and, as an aid to the virtue of neutrality fined her 10s. or seven days.⁷²

The article presented neutrality as a desirable characteristic that the English legal system even felt that it could impose upon its citizens where desirable. It is important to note that the magistrate saw fit to punish a woman for failing to remain neutral, as this highlights that Britons were also exposed to the connotations of femininity that were associated with neutrality.⁷³ Britons could, therefore, be encouraged to view neutrality—in the right circumstances—in a positive light and that they understood the benefits of being neutral when doing so served their interests.

British newspapers even went so far as to discuss the role neutrals might play in specific instances of competition between two competing parties. By situating this discussion in the domestic political context they implicitly painted Britons as potential neutrals. Neutrality could be a somewhat problematic idea because a neutral party remained involved in the international system whilst simultaneously being removed from a specific site of competition.⁷⁴ However, because neutrals remained within the system, it was thought that a neutral might be uniquely suited to mediating between two competing parties. A neutral could, at least, offer a metaphoric or

⁷² *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1899, p.6.

⁷³ Petri Luntinen, "Neutrality in Northern Europe before the First World War". In: Jukka Nevakivi (ed.), p.111; Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: Virago Press, 1988, pp.4-12.

⁷⁴ Lettevall *et al.*, p.1; Wrangle, p.131.

literal neutral space for a competition to be played out. For example, the *Daily Mail* reported that:

the moon...pours a flood of amber light on ... groups of members consisting very often of political opponents – for, happily, the Terrace is neutral ground – discussing over a pipe and cigar and cup of coffee the latest development of the political situation, or what is more enjoyable, relating stories of amusing experiences in Parliamentary life.⁷⁵

This article presented the Terrace tea room as a neutral space which facilitated friendly discussion between domestic political rivals. The reporter's language drew on international diplomatic ideas to discuss the tea-room's benefits. The turn of phrase 'neutral ground', for example, plugged into the idea that entire nation-states could be declared neutral and that this neutrality rendered them ideal spaces for holding international negotiations unencumbered by concerns about advantages rendered by the location. The idea of neutral spaces thus diffused into the domestic political context.

The *Daily Mail* also liked to think of itself as neutral in its own engagement with domestic political debates. The newspaper repeatedly referred to itself as 'a neutral journal'.⁷⁶ It even printed an article claiming that:

Taking a handful at random from the communications which are deluging our office, we print the following selections, and we take this opportunity of urging upon those Liberals who avail

⁷⁵ *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1898, p.7.

⁷⁶ *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1898, p.4; see also 9 December 1898, p.4; 12 December 1898, p.4; 14 December 1898, p.4, 15 June 1899, p.5.

themselves of a neutral organ for expression of their opinions to send up postcards instead of letters.⁷⁷

Regardless of its actual political leanings, by making such claims the *Daily Mail* drew upon contemporary ideas about neutrals as legitimate arbiters.⁷⁸ At the turn of the century the concept of neutrality was being ‘moulded... by the struggles of the real world’ and newspapers were engaging in a discourse concerning the role of neutrals in international diplomacy.⁷⁹ However, practical applications of these ideas were not confined to the realm of international diplomacy. Instead, the language of neutrality appeared in domestic political discourse because it allowed reporters to explain the newspapers’ position in the conflict of domestic politics to readers.

Neutrality was an important part of the international diplomatic world, but it was also an idea that was pertinent in the domestic political landscape. British newspapers contained extensive reports on domestic politics at the *fin de siècle* and, as the above discussion demonstrates, neutrality featured widely in such reports. Although the meaning and significance of neutrality remained contested, Victorian newspaper audiences were often encouraged to understand that they could declare neutrality if it was in their interests to do so. Neutrality was thus constructed as an important and relevant facet of the idea of war; conflict could be thought of in terms both of the possibilities for disaster and of the potential to exhibit restraint. The diffusion of the

⁷⁷ *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1898, p.5.

⁷⁸ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.146-147.

⁷⁹ Neff, p.2.

language and concepts of neutrality into international diplomacy's sibling domain of domestic politics in newspaper reports demonstrates that Britons were implicitly encouraged to understand neutrality's relevance to their own lives.

III) 'A further meeting on neutral ground was rendered necessary'⁸⁰: Sport, war, and regulating neutrality

British newspapers' sporting reports reflected that the idea of neutrality was a fundamental component of warfare. Neutrality was regularly invoked as germane to sporting contexts. The words 'neutral' and 'neutrality' signalled important features of a competition or conflict, particularly in terms of umpires and the space in which the competition was played out. Newspaper reports also discussed neutrality's effect on the outcome of a competition.⁸¹ This section considers British newspaper reports concerning four sports—soccer, rugby union, lacrosse, and billiards—to investigate how references to neutrality in sporting contexts offer insight into Victorian understandings of the complex concept of neutrality. It examines parallels between the role of umpires and the ideas about neutral nations' potential role in arbitration proceedings. Furthermore, it considers the idea of neutral space as a place where competition might be played out and the extent to which this echoed neutrals' functions in international diplomacy. It also examines debates concerning the qualities ascribed to those who adopted

⁸⁰ *Daily Mail*, 29 April 1898, p.6.

⁸¹ See for example *Daily Mail*, 9 April 1898, p.6.

neutrality and argues that these debates reflected the reality that neutrality was a contestable, yet still significant, part of Victorian Britons' perception of war. The way in which the idea of neutrality was discussed in sporting contexts both highlights newspapers' assumptions concerning Britons' understanding of the concept and underscores that the idea could not have been subject to the same discursive construction in sporting contexts had it not been informed by the international diplomatic context.

Historians have long recognised an underlying link between war and sport.⁸² Sport is presented in the historiography as a site where boys and men were trained for battle.⁸³ However, as both Abbenhuis and Afflerbach argue, nineteenth century warfare was by no means one-dimensional.⁸⁴ Douglass Booth asserts that 'despite the pervasiveness of sporting language, its power to give meaning to social life... has been largely ignored by historians studying sport'.⁸⁵ However, the opposite is also possible: ideas discussed in sporting

⁸² Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: the British Armed Forces 1880-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.3-6.; Wilkinson, p.10.

⁸³ Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p.328; J. D. Campbell, "'Training for Sport is Training for War': Sport and the Transformation of the British Army, 1860-1914." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17 (2000), pp.22-28; J.A. Mangan, "Britain's Chief Spiritual Export: Imperial Sport as Moral Metaphor, Political Symbol and Cultural Bond," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (2010), p.329; J. A. Mangan and C. McKenzie, "Martial Conditioning, Military Exemplars and Moral Certainties: Imperial Hunting as Preparation for War," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25 (2008), p.1134; Mason and Riedi, pp.3.

⁸⁴ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.2-21; Holger Afflerbach, "The Topos of Improbably War in Europe before 1914". In: Afflerbach and Stevenson (eds.), pp.170-173. C.f. Chadwick, p.2, Tuchman, pp.xii-xiii.

⁸⁵ Douglas Booth, "Escaping the Past? The Cultural Turn and Language in Sport History," *Rethinking History* 8 (2004), p.104.

contexts could be informed by broader cultural understandings. A closer examination of the language used to describe sport in late Victorian British newspapers suggests that sport was not only discussed as a training ground for warfare. Instead, sport could serve as a far more nuanced analogy for warfare. The ways in which the place of neutrality in sport was discussed in British newspaper reports suggest that that neutrality was bound to late Victorian Britain's cultural construct of war. If war was part of British identity, so too was the capacity for occasional neutrality. The language used to construct sport as analogous to war drew on complex contemporary understandings of warfare.

A high level of interest in regulating and controlling the world framed neutrality's relevance at the *fin de siècle*. Similarly, historical enquiries reveal significant interest in regulating sport at the close of the Victorian era.⁸⁶ The historiographical literature usually links concern for regulating sport to ideas about civilising processes.⁸⁷ However, it is also useful to consider Aled Jones's argument that the very nature of how the Victorian press conveyed cultural understanding offers insight into how contemporaries engaged with their world. Jones suggests that periodicals functioned 'as instruments

⁸⁶ Campbell, pp.28-32 discusses the regulation of gymnastics and sporting games in the military context; Christiane Eisenberg, "The Rise of Internationalism in Sport". In: Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulman (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.376-379 stresses the importance of recognising that this shift occurred during the Victorian era.

⁸⁷ Birley, p.329; John Connolly and Paddy Dolan, "The Civilizing and Sportization of Gaelic Football in Ireland: 1884-2009," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 23 (2010), pp. 571-572.

for the ordering of geographical space, or as a form of territorial mapping' in the public consciousness.⁸⁸ Discussions about regulating neutrality in sport thus revealed the salience of the idea that neutrality could be codified and controlled. For example, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that, in the case of cricket, 'despite a recommendation from the specially appointed Committee that the M.C.C. [Marylebone Cricket Club] should be asked to appoint neutral umpires at a fixed rate of payment, it was resolved that no alteration should be made in the existing rules...'⁸⁹ Two years later, it reported on the 'strong feeling felt by the Marylebone Club and captains of first-class counties that neutral umpires should be provided for minor country matches'.⁹⁰ This time, the proposal was accepted.⁹¹ The language used by such reports demonstrated that Victorian Britons were concerned with regulating and controlling sport in much the same way as contemporaries were codifying international law, rather than because of an undefined 'civilising' mission.⁹² The articles were about setting boundaries rather than about sanitising sport. They were also discursive and thus engaged in divisive debates about the implications of introducing increased regulation. The debates about neutrality in sporting reports are understandable given that it was also

⁸⁸ Jones, p.180

⁸⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1898, p.10; also reported in *The Times*, 7 December 1898, p.11.

⁹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1900, p.9; also reported in *The Times*, 12 December 1900, p. 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² C.f Eisenberg, pp. 376-377.

a contested idea in contemporary discussions of international diplomacy.

In late Victorian Britain, sports were regulated sites of conflict between two or more competing parties. To win a sport one party bested the other by defeating them. The rules of the sport controlled what was defined as defeat. Therefore, the rules governing a sport functioned as a third party that defined and maintained the boundaries within which the competing parties could operate.⁹³ In many cases, particularly in team sports such as football (soccer), lacrosse, cricket, and rugby union, the third party was more than a disembodied shared agreement to obey a particular code. Rather, humans in roles such as umpires, linesmen, or referees, became the neutral third party. Turn-of-the-century sporting reports frequently debated the implications of the umpire's role as a third party.⁹⁴ Many commentators felt that neutral umpires were desirable as they would not favour either of the two competing sides. In a report on lacrosse, the *Manchester Guardian* argued that:

The duties of an umpire are reduced to a minimum with the now almost universal use of goal nets; but on the important rendering of the rule which precludes an attacking player from entering the goal crease before the ball does so umpires are frequently at fault, and their decisions usually lean to the interests of the team for whom they are acting.... it would be a decided advantage if neutral umpires were appointed to act in all competition

⁹³ On the cultural construction of shared ideas about sport and cultural buy-in see Mangan, pp.331-333.

⁹⁴ C.f. Eisenberg, pp.401-403.

matches.... Just as referees have proffered their services, so will umpires come forward to be neutral and impartial adjudicators.⁹⁵

While not all umpires were declared neutral, neutrality remained a pertinent concern in several sporting contexts.⁹⁶ The same publication later quite deliberately raised the question of whether lacrosse officials took up its suggestion to introduce neutral umpires.⁹⁷ That they did so demonstrated that their engagement with the implications of neutrality was deliberate and enduring rather than fleeting.

Newspaper reports also espoused the idea that neutral third parties could act as arbiters. For example, the *Daily Mail* made a point of reporting that the linesmen would be neutral in the case of a soccer rematch necessitated by unsportsmanlike conduct between Northfleet and Dartford.⁹⁸ Normalising the role of referees conveyed a degree of understanding that neutrals had a part to play in conflicts, though their exact place and role remained contentious. Neutrals offered a relatively objective third party opinion in the role of arbitrator. While neutrality's place in sports remained contested, its incorporation as a relatively normal part of sportsmanship also served to highlight a divergence in neutrality's treatment in the contexts of sport and diplomacy. At the close of the century, British newspapers often debated the means through which neutrals could be integrated into an international organisational system and the implications of neutral

⁹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1899, p.5.

⁹⁶ See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1898, p.10; *The Times*, 7 December 1898, p.11, and 12 December 1900, p.8.

⁹⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1899, p.5.

⁹⁸ *Daily Mail*, 8 April 1898, p.6.

arbiters for their own interests. While a neutral third party offering arbitration was an effective theory, late Victorian Britons often found the compromises that came with neutral arbitrators more troubling.⁹⁹

Spatial considerations were another important feature of the idea of neutrality which proved particularly relevant in the sporting context. In international diplomacy, neutrality related to the idea that a nation-state—a construct which is in part delimited by its spatial boundaries—could be declared neutral and thus be inviolable in time of war.¹⁰⁰ While the laws of neutrality formally applied in time of war, neutrality's significance permeated this boundary as cultural value was ascribed to the idea of neutrality. Permanently neutral nations were regularly chosen as the staging grounds for international diplomatic meetings; these physical spaces often appeared less contentious by virtue of their neutrality's continuity.¹⁰¹ Newspaper discussions of sporting matches also engaged with the idea of neutral space. *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Manchester Guardian* all repeatedly reported on soccer and rugby union matches scheduled to be played on neutral ground.¹⁰² Newspaper reports therefore offer

⁹⁹ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.190-191; see, for example, *The Times*, 31 May 1899, p.6.

¹⁰⁰ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.42-43; for the seminal work on nationalism and non-spatial aspects of its construction see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed., London: Verso, 2006.

¹⁰¹ On broader meanings of neutrality see Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.244. Numerous international meetings took place in neutral capitals during the late nineteenth century. Particularly famous examples include the Geneva Conference (1864), Brussels Conference (1876), and The Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907).

¹⁰² For some examples of reports of games played on 'neutral ground' see, *The Times*, 1 March 1898, p.7, and 15 January 1901, p.9; *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1899, p.6, 9

insight into how neutral spaces operated in the sporting context as unbiased physical spaces within which a competition fair to both competitors could take place. The perceived value of neutral space to facilitating a fair meeting thus paralleled one of the important roles of neutral spaces in international diplomacy.

An excellent example of the importance of ensuring that the field of play did not inherently favour one competitor can be found in the reports concerning an 1898 billiards match between two leading players, Charles Dawson and John Roberts. The up-and-coming 'sensation', Dawson, challenged the 'incomparable' champion of billiards, Roberts. Dawson 'challenged... Roberts to play him upon level terms ... with the further proviso that the match shall be played on a neutral table and in a neutral hall'.¹⁰³ A reporter for the *Daily Mail* emphasised the great public interest in the outcome of the match; they stressed that 'we all want to know ... how far the conditions imposed are likely to affect one player or the other'.¹⁰⁴ The concern for neutrality in this instance was based upon Roberts' position as a major manufacturer of billiards tables. A condition of the match was therefore that it be played on a table manufactured by a third party. More than eleven months later, the same match and details of the conditions pertaining to neutrality were still considered

April 1898, p.6 and 18 April 1899, p.6; *Manchester Guardian*, 9 October 1899, p.4, and 24 October 1898, p.7.

¹⁰³ *Daily Mail*, 3 January 1898, p.6; see also *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London, England) 8 January 1899, p.25.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Mail*, 3 January 1898, p.6. This was part of a broader debate regarding further codification of the rules of billiards.

newsworthy.¹⁰⁵ The idea of neutrality was a defining feature of the context in which this battle of the billiards titans played out because a fair match could only be held on ground literally constructed by a neutral party. Impartiality was an important part of the multifaceted idea of neutrality, and it is apparent that this idea diffused into the meanings that the word ‘neutral’ conveyed in the sporting context.

Discussions of neutrality in sporting contexts, as in international diplomatic contexts, thus often focused on how neutrality would affect competing parties’ interests. Neutrality was defined in terms of its opposition to belligerency.¹⁰⁶ British newspapers’ sports reports that engaged with neutrality repeatedly debated the consequences of neutral grounds for competing teams, which went beyond the suggestion that there might be a home court advantage. Instead, reporters actively encouraged the idea that a neutral ground was particularly better than a hostile alternative. For example, in reporting the outcome of a second division football match between Loughborough and Kettering the *Daily Mail* noted that, despite losing, ‘Loughborough gave a far smarter exhibition than their recent League performances would suggest, and had the tie been on neutral ground a drawn game would probably have been the result’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Mail*, 29 November 1898, p.3. This reporter notes that the two competing parties must mutually agree on the location and table for the game. Roberts eventually won the match. Roberts eventually won the match.

¹⁰⁶ Neff, p.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Mail*, 7 March 1899, p.6.

Furthermore, in the case of an international athletic contest between leading British and American Universities, *The Times* reported in 1900 that:

It is officially stated that Yale and Harvard Universities will not challenge Oxford and Cambridge to a return athletic meeting this year. Yale maintains that the games should be held on neutral ground while the Harvard Athletic Committee has decided not to allow the Harvard team to compete unless the games are held at Newhaven or Cambridge [MA.].¹⁰⁸

In 1899, an international collegiate athletic meeting between Cambridge-Oxford and Harvard-Yale teams was held on neutral ground in England.¹⁰⁹ Yale, Cambridge, and Oxford refused to compete 'on any but neutral grounds' for a return meeting in 1900 in the United States; Harvard refused.¹¹⁰ The implication of Harvard's attitude was that holding the games on neutral ground would be detrimental to their athletes' interests because it would be more difficult for them to triumph. Conversely, the British universities' recognition of the value of meeting on neutral ground suggested a recognition that a consistent and fair application of principles of neutrality could function to protect interests. Contemporary ideas and anxieties about neutrality and the consequences when it was not consistently observed underpinned this attitude. For example, the British press presented the neutrality of Delagoa Bay during the

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 23 April 1900, p.11.

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 22 May 1899, p.5; *New York Times*, 11 April 1900, p.10.

¹¹⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1900, p.13. Bascom Johnson (Yale) explained to leading publications in the United States that Harvard's position had made holding the games untenable.

Second Anglo-Boer War as harmful to British interests because their opponents were able to receive supplies via the neutral Portuguese port.¹¹¹ Furthermore, it suggests that Britons understood that a relatively fair outcome could be achieved if neutrality could be applied consistently. These two understandings clearly drew on the international diplomatic context. It is no coincidence that the turn of the century also witnessed the First Hague Peace Conference, during which nations attempted to codify the rights and duties of neutrals in a way that protected their own underlying interests.¹¹² Ideas about neutrality were contestable and malleable and it was in this context that newspaper contributors assumed that Victorian Britons possessed some understanding of neutrality's potential value.

The diffusion of the idea of neutrality into the sporting context and the debates about how it operated within this context provide strong evidence that neutrality was an important and dynamic component of the late Victorian Britons' understanding of their world. In the sporting context the idea of neutrality regularly drew on international diplomatic considerations and also, in many cases, began to ascribe more contextually specific relevance to neutrality. Neutrality was a relational idea which required the construction of a neutral 'other', be it an individual in the role of arbiter or a neutralised physical space. While not directly involved in a competition, neutral components

¹¹¹ *The Times*, 3 January 1900, p.3; Thomas Gibson Bowles to the Editor, "Prize Law and Delagoa Bay". *The Times*, 4 January 1900, p.7. The Portuguese were repeatedly accused of pushing the boundaries of, or even violating, their neutrality on the basis of allowing supplies to pass through their neutral port to a belligerent party.

¹¹² Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.178-179.

could be constructed as an integral element of the competition's context.¹¹³ The intersections between ideas about neutrality's relevance in sport and in international diplomacy further suggest that ideas about neutrality in sport could not have developed in the same way if they had not been informed by an understanding of the ways in which neutrality was being debated and codified in the international arena. Victorian Britons were encouraged by newspapers to engage with neutrality both on the sporting field and around the conference table. In both contexts, they actively discussed the implications of regulating neutrality.

IV) 'To entirely neutralise the latter's harmful effects':¹¹⁴ Neutrality and science

The idea of neutrality also made appearances in discussions of science in British newspapers. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that by 1880 the word 'neutrality' could describe 'the fact or state of being neutral' in a scientific context.¹¹⁵ However, invoking the word 'neutrality' alluded to more than a fact or state. It drew on the complex construct of neutrality, an idea that, as the preceding sections argue, was heavily informed by neutrality's relevance in international diplomacy. Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus argues that historians must temper 'the popular (and still widespread) image of the pre-war, turn of the century period as the golden age of scientific internationalism' with the realisation that distinct nationalistic rivalries remained a

¹¹³ C.f. Booth, pp.121-122.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Mail*, 26 June 1899, p.3.

¹¹⁵ Weiner and Simpson, pp.356-358.

prominent feature of the international scientific community.¹¹⁶ In particular, she has convincingly demonstrated that natural scientists were committed ‘to disengaged objectivity and unconcern with national boundaries’.¹¹⁷ The self-conscious demonstration of ‘unconcern with national boundaries’ implicitly required recognition of those national boundaries’ existence. In the public context, newspapers drew not only on ideas of science as something that transcended borders, but also on the idea that the international concept of neutrality could be invoked the idea to help Britons come to terms with the evolving discipline of science. The ways in which newspaper contributors mobilised the idea neutrality thus implied an assumption that neutrality was part of how Britons understood their world.

The idea of neutrality permeated late Victorian Britons’ discussions of science in newspapers in two ways. Firstly, newspaper reports drew on the cultural international context within which neutrality underpinned science’s place in international society.¹¹⁸ Secondly, British newspaper reports used the idea of neutrality to construct explanations and metaphors designed to help Britons understand scientific concepts. The idea of neutrality could not have been used

¹¹⁶ Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, “Probing the Master Narrative of Scientific Internationalism”. In: Lettevall *et al.*, (eds.), pp.20-21.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.21. Schroeder-Gudehus’s analysis focuses on scientific internationalism (or the lack thereof) in the immediate post-first world war era and on the processes that shape the historiographical debate by emphasising unity over disunity.

¹¹⁸ Andreas W. Daum, “‘The next great task of civilization’ International Exchange in Popular Science: The German-American Case, 1850-1900”. In: Geyer and Paulman (eds.), pp.287-290.

metaphorically if those producing newspaper content did not intend to draw on a shared cultural understanding of its meaning. The ‘layers of meaning’ associated with neutrality in the scientific context drew partly on the development of the idea of neutrality in science in the context of early modern European natural philosophy.¹¹⁹ However, the idea of neutrality in the turn-of-the-century scientific context also drew on shifting understandings of neutrality and neutralisation in international diplomacy.

At the *fin de siècle*, some Britons saw science as a neutral sphere which could facilitate the advancement of international cooperation. It is important to acknowledge that perception does not necessarily correlate with reality.¹²⁰ However, as Geert Somsen points out, ‘while the reality of scientific universalism has been rejected, there has been no denial of its power as self-representation’.¹²¹ British newspaper reports therefore offer insight into how neutrality interacted with juxtaposed national and international interests. For example, the following excerpt from an editorial published by *The Times* presented science to the public as an inherently neutral sphere in an increasingly internationalised world. *The Times* reported that:

Mr. Balfour and Mr. Bryce are not only able to meet on friendly terms on the neutral ground of literature and science, but they rejoice to recognize the fact that, from different points of view, they are working for the same high and noble objects. In our public life, happily, we may exclude the notion that policy, right

¹¹⁹ Lettevall *et al*, p.7

¹²⁰ Schroeder-Gudehus, p.20.

¹²¹ Geert J. Somsen, “A History of Universalism: Conceptions of the Internationality of Science from the Enlightenment to the Cold War,” *Minerva* 46 (2008), p.362; c.f. Daum, pp.313-316.

or wrong, prevents men of knowledge and culture of joining together in the heartiest social intercourse or from co-operating in the work of enlarging the sphere of human enlightenment...¹²²

This report suggested that science offered the opportunity to rise above petty quarrels. As the sociologist Elizabeth Crawford suggests, the idea of internationalism in science was not confined to epistemological understanding. Instead, contemporaries saw internationalism as an active process which pushed together science and culture ‘for the betterment of the human condition’.¹²³ The link between science and neutrality was, therefore, commensurate with the turn-of-the-century interest in promoting peace.¹²⁴

Newspaper discussions concerning the neutralisation of the *fin de siècle*’s key strategic technological developments offer an ideal first site for examining the intersection between the idea of neutralisation and science. When newspapers aimed at a public audience turned their attention to science they focused primarily on technological achievements.¹²⁵ The idea of neutrality operated at two levels in newspapers’ discussions of technological achievements. Firstly, the idea that scientific developments could be neutralised drew on the evolution of neutralisation as an active diplomatic tool. From the 1815 Congress of Vienna onwards, the great powers developed and

¹²² *The Times*, 22 November 1902, p.11.

¹²³ Elizabeth Crawford, “Internationalism in science as a casualty of the First World War: Relations between German and Allied scientists as reflected in nominations for the Nobel prizes in physics and chemistry,” *Social Science Information* 27 (1988), p.179.

¹²⁴ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, p.157; Lyons, pp.19-20.

¹²⁵ Peter J. Bowler, *Science for All: The Popularization of Science in Early Twentieth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp.185, 193.

codified neutralisation's place in international law.¹²⁶ This term referred to the act of imposing permanent neutrality on a nation, a place, or a piece of infrastructure. Although a specific declaration of neutrality remained contingent on war, neutralisation could be imposed at any time.¹²⁷ The act of neutralisation itself directly influenced the international diplomatic arena by promoting stability on the basis of an understanding that a particular place would be neutral in the event of war. Secondly, the act of neutralising technological developments strengthened the link between ideas about neutralisation, internationalism, and science. British newspaper reports in this vein focused predominantly the neutralisation of major technological developments including undersea telegraph cables and the proposed Central American Isthmian Canal.¹²⁸ For example, *The Times* wrote that the neutralisation of the Panama Canal was a 'matter... of deep importance to the whole world'.¹²⁹ British newspapers' engagement with neutrality in the scientific context therefore extended beyond explaining science's place in the international system. Newspapers explained to Britons the ways in

¹²⁶ Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool", p.5.; c.f. Nils Ørvik, *The Decline of Neutrality 1914 – 1941. With special reference to the United States and the Northern Neutrals*, 2nd ed. London: F. Cass, 1971, pp.28-29.

¹²⁷ Ogley, pp.33; Ørvik, pp.28-29.

¹²⁸ See, for example, *The Times*, 26 September 1902, p.11; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1901, p.7. C.f. Daniel Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.27.; Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p.150.

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 6 February 1900, p.5.

which the international law of neutrality could protect and enhance the benefits offered by technological developments.

Beyond explaining its relevance in relation to science's place in the international community, newspapers also mobilised ideas about neutrality as a way of explaining emerging scientific concepts. In allowing the idea of neutrality to permeate their explanations of scientific concepts, British newspapers actively chose to draw on shared cultural understandings of neutrality. By doing so they implicitly strengthened the connection between science and international diplomacy. Peter Bowler challenges the assumption that science easily penetrated the popular press in early twentieth century Britain. Instead, he contends that 'there was relatively little popular science on offer, and much of it would be (then as now) sensationalized to a level that would drive the professional scientist to despair'.¹³⁰ Thus, when science did feature in the British press, it required explanation. Doctor Andrew Wilson, who wrote the 'Science Jottings' column in the *Illustrated London News*, made several attempts to explain science to Britons.¹³¹ In a 1901 column, Wilson explained E. Metchnikoff's challenge to the popularly held idea that all microbes carry disease. He wrote that

... if an animal falls a victim to any ailment, we may regard its leucocytes as having been defeated by the germ-invasion. Such, at least, is one view of why we escape infection in some cases and succumb to it in others... Dr. Metchnikoff showed that we harbour quite a small population of microbes, some of which are

¹³⁰ Bowler, pp.2-9. Bowler's criterion for popular science is 'what was offered to those ordinary readers in the cheaper newspapers and magazines'.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.194-5.

not only friendly to us, but necessary and useful, while others are at least neutral, and if not actually pressed into our service, at any rate do us no harm.¹³²

Wilson thus invoked the international diplomatic idea of neutrality as a metaphor. In doing so, he assumed that Britons possessed a sufficiently strong understanding of neutrality to understand the roles of friendly, harmful and neutral microbes.

Newspapers often utilised the term ‘neutralise’ to describe scientific matters. As suggested above, neutralisation was an active tool that European powers strategically applied to spaces and technological developments, often outside of sovereign states.¹³³ Newspaper reports which sought to explain science often drew on the idea of neutralisation as something which could be imposed; it was a pertinent idea in scientific contexts because it implied an active process. For example, the manufacturers of Kutnow’s Powder’s repeated insistence that their ‘excellent preparation ... thoroughly neutralises the acidity...created in the system’ is an understandable advertising strategy only when ‘neutralise’ is interpreted as a culturally relevant term which connoted an active process.¹³⁴ Britons understood what neutralisation meant, and they understood how neutrality related to science. The idea of neutrality did, of course, develop contextually specific meanings and relevancies through its

¹³² Andrew Wilson, “Science Jottings,” *Illustrated London News*, 11 May 1901, pp.686. Dr. Metchnikoff posed this challenge in a lecture before the Manchester Literary and Philosophical society.

¹³³ Malbone W. Graham, Jr., “Neutralization as a Movement in International Law,” *The American Journal of International Law* 21 (1927), pp.79-85.

¹³⁴ *Daily Mail*, 24 October 1898, p. 7.

repeated use in popular explanations of science which were not solely related to neutralisation in international diplomacy. While the relationship should not be seen as absolute or unidirectional, it is nevertheless apparent that the shared terminology at the very least invited consideration of the evolving meanings of ‘neutralise’ in both contexts.

The repeated use of the idea of neutrality in purportedly scientific advertising constitutes strong evidence that it was mobilised because it conveyed an easily understandable meaning. British newspapers contained many examples of soaps and medicinal remedies which claimed to neutralise something detrimental to the body. For example, an advertisement in *The Times* claimed that ‘Vinolia Soap is neutral, keeps well, and is good for the complexion’.¹³⁵ Similarly, an advertisement in the *Daily Mail* for Lithia Salts (a treatment for Gout and Gravel) claimed that ‘the value... is based, first, upon the great neutralising power of the alkali arising from the low equivalent of this metal’.¹³⁶ Gout was far from an international legal concern, but the language of neutrality could still convey the idea that it was possible for the presence of a third party to bring the belligerent disease into line. The advertisers clearly believed the term would make sense and appeal to the diverse readerships of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*.¹³⁷ These advertisers thus used the term ‘neutralise’ to ensure that a

¹³⁵ *The Times*, 11 August 1902, p.4; see also the *Illustrated London News*, 11 January 1902, p.67.

¹³⁶ *Daily Mail*, 15 June 1899, p.2; *The Times*, ran the same advertisement on 9 May 1899, p.4.

¹³⁷ For example, the *Daily Mail*, 10 August 1898, p.4, claimed circulation above one million.

public with limited access to scientific knowledge would understand their product's purported efficacy.¹³⁸

The term 'neutralise' in scientific contexts also often implied an act of negation. The process of 'neutralising' rendered something else impotent. The term therefore implied that a pressure in one direction could be made inert. This idea paralleled the international diplomatic assumption that neutralisation would make stable something or somewhere that might otherwise prove advantageous (or disadvantageous, depending on perspective) to a future belligerent.¹³⁹ The *Daily Mail* invoked the idea of neutralisation as negation when investigating a claim that gold could be extracted from sea-water using electricity. The inventors attempted to improve an earlier methodology which failed because 'so much organic matter was contained in the water passing through his tubes that the effect of the electricity was neutralised'.¹⁴⁰ While the idea of extracting gold from seawater appears far-fetched to the modern reader, the article is significant because it demonstrates that Britons were exposed to the idea that neutralisation's stabilising effects could also serve to limit the potential benefits of belligerency. The reporter implied that the organic matter's neutralising properties could be removed to serve the interests of another party - if that party possessed the tools and power to do so. Similarly, in the international legal context, neutralisation remained viable only whilst maintaining this facet of the international

¹³⁸ C.f. Bowler, pp.185-193.

¹³⁹ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.34-35.

¹⁴⁰ *Daily Mail*, 4 December 1899, p.3.

system was perceived to be the best way of protecting various parties' interests.¹⁴¹ If a power was unwilling to respect neutrality and possessed the resources to fight for strategic control of, for example, a crucial waterway, they could in theory do so. Furthermore, it is likely that the idea of impermanence featured so prominently in British cultural constructions of neutrality particularly because Britain's own occasional neutrality was, by its very definition, transient.

The most fascinating feature of British newspaper reports which discussed neutrality and science is the ways in which these ideas interacted and intertwined to produce complex yet understandable meanings. Newspapers presented Britons with ideas about science as a potentially neutral discipline, albeit one which they could utilise to further their own national position within the global system.¹⁴² However, newspaper reporters also recognised that Britons' understandings of neutrality's place in their world could be mobilised to aid comprehension of science.¹⁴³ The idea of neutralisation, an active process, took on particular relevance in the scientific context. It also held particular relevance in the British context because it drew on ideas of power and impermanence. Ideas about neutralisation and science were thus pertinent to Britons because they dovetailed with the understanding of occasional neutrality as a tool of British diplomacy at the close of the nineteenth century. Newspaper reports

¹⁴¹ Lyons, pp.27-28; Ogley, pp.8-10.

¹⁴² Daum, pp.302-305.

¹⁴³ Bowler, pp. 185-189.

therefore encouraged Britons to understand that neutrality was an important part of their world's workings.

V) Conclusion: Britons as Occasional Neutrals

The word neutrality certainly did 'carry a variety of charges' in Britain at the close of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁴ This variety of charges offers insight into how newspaper reports drew on Victorian Britons' understanding of how the world over which they were increasingly trying to exert control worked.¹⁴⁵ The language of neutrality diffused into British newspapers' discussions of domestic politics, sport, and science at the *fin de siècle*. By examining how the idea of neutrality diffused across contexts in British newspapers, the disjuncture between diplomatic and cultural histories of neutrality can begin to be bridged by reorienting focus away from international diplomacy and onto how the idea permeated discussions in broader contexts. Britons could not have discussed neutrality's relevance in seemingly innocuous contexts in the way that they did had their understanding not been informed by the international diplomatic context. As Bennett points out, 'mass markets', particularly those for newspapers, 'can exist only where widely shared interests or values exist or can be created'.¹⁴⁶ British newspapers actively engaged with the meaning of neutrality and with the implications of their own neutrality.

¹⁴⁴ Lettevall *et al.*, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.148-149; Bennett, pp.225-226; Kern, pp.1-4, 9, 164-166.

¹⁴⁶ Bennett, p.251.

The evidence that the idea of neutrality had implicitly become part of British understandings of how their world worked and could be controlled also suggests that the place of occasional neutrality as in British cultural constructs of war may deserve more attention than current historical literature indicates. As Abbenhuis argues, and as the section on domestic politics demonstrates, occasional neutrality was an important diplomatic tool which states could utilise to protect their own interests without disengaging from the international community. It was not the option that they always chose in a time of conflict, but it was always an option that they could choose.¹⁴⁷ Studies of the link between cultural identity and neutrality have, previously, primarily been confined to smaller permanently neutral states.¹⁴⁸ However, this study suggests that occasional neutrality was an aspect of the British worldview which existed in tandem with an identity constructed around imperialism and power.¹⁴⁹ These constructions further support the recent historiographical turn to understanding neutrality as much more than tool used by smaller states seeking security in an international system dominated by the powerful.¹⁵⁰ While this article has focussed on popular understandings of neutrality, further research considering how ideas about neutrality were expressed in specialist texts could serve to further develop and nuance historical understandings of how different strands of the idea of neutrality

¹⁴⁷ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.15-16, Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool," p.3. Ogley, p.3 uses the term '*ad hoc* neutral' to describe occasional neutrality.

¹⁴⁸ Agius, pp.39-50; Lettevall *et al.*, pp.4-9; Ørvik, pp.25-27; Wrangle, p.244.

¹⁴⁹ Colley, p.291; Paris, pp.7-8; Stuchtey, pp.167-168; Wilkinson, pp.29-39; c.f. Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool," p.15; More, pp.3-4.

¹⁵⁰ Brockington, pp. 22-23.

interacted and developed contextually specific as well as complementary meanings beyond the confines of international diplomacy.

Reconsidering British newspapers' engagement with the idea of neutrality challenges the historiographical tendency to focus on war and peace as absolute categories and thereby exclude examinations of neutrality as a valid and pragmatic tool for the limitation of warfare.¹⁵¹ Instead, it suggests that the press accepted that Victorian Britons understood and engaged with the idea of neutrality as a concept which could usefully be deployed to protect their interests and remain aloof from specific conflicts. The cultural mobilisation of neutrality is significant because it suggests that British constructions of war in the period immediately before the First World War did not draw on a legacy that was solely defined by an understanding of stability based on might.¹⁵² The ways in which newspapers appealed to neutrality as a concept indicated that Britons were exposed to ideas of war and the limitation of war as points lying on the same continuum. They were therefore encouraged to understand that strategically declaring neutrality in certain contexts could prove beneficial.¹⁵³ Most importantly, Britons were widely exposed to the idea of neutrality and were made aware that it was mutable. It was an idea borne from pragmatic concerns and it was thus one that was

¹⁵¹ Colley, pp.6-9, 378-379; Paris, pp.7-9; Pope, pp.1-3, 19-20; Wilkinson, pp.11-14; c.f. Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool," pp.8-9.

¹⁵² Colley, pp.xxvii.

¹⁵³ Abbenhuis, *Age of Neutrals*, pp.15-16; Abbenhuis, "A Most Useful Tool", pp.8-9; Chadwick, p.20; Grimes, p.418; Luntinen, p.112.

malleable and subject to discussion. Newspapers' discussions of neutrality in the contexts of domestic politics, sport, and science, suggest an underlying assumption that Britons were aware of occasional neutrality's place in the Victorian world.

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