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A Discordant Voice from the Trenches: Juan José de Soiza Reilly's War Chronicles

Abstract

The First World War represented a deep crisis of the European civilization that called into question the values and certitudes of the *Belle Époque* society. Trenches became the symbol of the dehumanization produced by a conflict that marked a watershed in modern history. As a global conflict, its impact was felt beyond the confines of Europe, involving even neutral countries, puzzled by that unexpected spectacle of violence.

In this new scenery, war correspondents were first-hand witnesses of the horrors of the battlefields, transmitted through their journalistic contributions to a public opinion profoundly shaken by this new kind of warfare. Non-European war correspondents were exceptional cultural mediators between the experiences of the theater of war and distant regions like Latin America, contributing to disseminate different understandings of the wartime crisis.

This article aims to explore the response of the Argentine war correspondent Juan José de Soiza Reilly (1879-1959) to the challenge of making the nature of the Great War intelligible to his readers. He embodied the new figure of the professional journalist-writer who contributed to establishing commercial mass press as the fulcrum of Argentine cultural life and as the field of convergence of literature and journalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The primary sources of this study are Soiza Reilly's war chronicles, published by two large circulation periodicals, the newspaper *La Nación* and the illustrated magazine *Fray Mocho*, from October 1914 to October 1916. Those contributions were the result of his more than two years' experience in the Western and Eastern fronts.

Soiza Reilly's perspectives on the First World War were clearly unconventional for his national framework, where most of the intellectuals and the press took sides early in favor of the Allies, due to the deep-rooted Francophilia prevailing in Argentine cultural field. As a result, they devoted themselves to arguing over the question of the war responsibilities and the belligerents' attributes. Unlike them, Soiza Reilly denounced the absurdity of the war, which he strongly condemned, and made a pacifist profession of faith. In addition, far from the Argentine social consensus, he was often critical of the Allies and sympathetic to the German Empire. However, since Italy's entry into the war in May 1915, Soiza Reilly adopted a belligerent attitude in favor of the Allies, expressing an intense admiration for Italy and a virulent anti-Austrian sentiment. These two last features were very unusual in the Argentine context, where the devotion for France was hegemonic as well as the vehement anti-German stance.

Through the analysis of Soiza Reilly's war chronicles and reportages, this article intends to shed light on the reception of the war in a neutral country, the general climate of public opinion, and its dissensions around the significance of the Great War.

Keywords

First World War, neutrals, war correspondents, Juan José de Soiza Reilly

A Discordant Voice from the Trenches: Juan José de Soiza Reilly's War
Chronicles

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The First World War represented a deep crisis of European civilization that called into question the values and certainties of the Belle Époque. The conflict also gave a privileged place to war correspondents, who as first-hand witnesses were responsible for transmitting to civil society the harsh experience of the battlefields. They had available to them the new technologies of cheap photography and even cinematography, the development of which had marked the beginning of the century.¹ This was a global war, whose impact was felt far beyond the confines of Europe, even in neutral countries, which were intrigued by the unexpected spectacle of industrial warfare. Non-European war correspondents were exceptional cultural mediators between the experiences of the theater of war and their countries of origin, and they helped to disseminate different understandings of the crisis.

This article will explore the war chronicles of the Argentine writer and journalist Juan José de Soiza Reilly (1879-1959), as published in two large circulation periodicals, the newspaper *La Nación* ('The Nation') and the illustrated magazine *Fray Mocho* ('Friar Mocho'), between October 1914 and October 1916. They were the result of his two years of experience on the Western and Eastern Fronts. Through the analysis of Soiza Reilly's contributions, this article will shed light on the reception and interpretation of the war in a neutral country, Argentina.

An Itinerant Correspondent in the European Trenches

Since the Crimean War of 1853-56, the war correspondent had been an important figure in the world of journalism, helping to supply the information that was being demanded by increasingly literate societies (Luckhurst 2). During the First World War, this thirst for news clashed with national security concerns, which led the belligerent states, in different ways, to restrict the access of war correspondents to the front lines, to harness them for propaganda purposes, and, through a system of censorship, to control the content of their reports. The severe limitation of the flow of information about events on the battlefield was necessary in order to avoid the spread of sensitive data on the position and combat capabilities of the various armies, information that could be useful to the enemy. Furthermore, it aided in keeping the home front fully behind the war effort, maintaining patriotic fervor and preventing its demobilization (Forcade 451). As a result, war correspondents found serious institutional obstacles preventing them from conveying to their readers the horrors of a conflict that were in any case difficult to

translate into words (McLoughlin 135-63). Self-censorship also played a role in the construction and dissemination of what was often an unrealistic and idealized image of the war (Luckhurst 11-12). Their commitment to their patriotic duty and to their countries' war efforts had an influence on both the tone and the content of their dispatches (Delporte 718-22).

Neutral countries also turned to war correspondents to satisfy the appetite of a readership anxiously interested in the vicissitudes of a conflict that was, at the same time, a distant spectacle. Although the main newspapers and magazines had correspondents in the capitals of the principal belligerent nations, they also recruited prestigious writers who could apply their professional talents and intellectual authority to narrating the war in a manner consistent with local cultural codes (González 4-5; Sux 23-31). In spite of the fact that correspondents from neutral countries encountered the same obstacles as their European colleagues, they also enjoyed a relative autonomy in expressing their impressions, inasmuch as they were not constrained by the restrictions imposed by patriotic duty.

In Argentina, a few weeks after the war began, a number of leading periodical publications decided to send their own correspondents to the war. The daily newspaper *La Nación*, the second most widely read in the country with a print run of 110,000 copies, and the weekly illustrated magazine *Fray Mocho*, with 96,000, both turned to Juan José de Soiza Reilly, who had achieved fame in the first decade of the century through his interviews with international figures published in the popular magazine *Caras y Caretas* ('Faces and Masks') (*Guía periodística argentina* 12, 63, 73-74).² He embodied the new figure of the professional journalist-writer helping to establish a commercial mass press at the intersection of literature and journalism, the core of Argentine cultural life at the beginning of the twentieth century (Rivera 337-384; Saítta 239-241). During the Great War, Soiza Reilly's war chronicles appeared under the headings "Panoramas de la guerra" ('Panoramas of the War'), in *La Nación*, and "*Fray Mocho y la Guerra*" ('*Fray Mocho* and the War'), in the weekly magazine. His contributions to the newspaper were longer and more detailed than those for *Fray Mocho*, but the latter made up for this with an abundance of photographs, many of them taken by Soiza Reilly himself. He was in fact one of the new breed of amateur photographers who flourished in the battlefields during the war, thanks to the availability of portable cameras (Beurier 53-58).

In August 1914, Soiza Reilly sailed for Europe with his family. His initial plan of getting accredited by the French army to visit the Western Front was foiled by the restrictions imposed by the government on journalists visiting the front lines (Delporte 723-24). As a result, Soiza Reilly's first visits were to the French hospitals in Biarritz, which housed *poilus* (French infantry soldiers) who were injured or suffering from nervous exhaustion. He gave a stark portrayal of the wounds caused by the new weapons, but also described the selflessness of doctors,

nurses, and stretcher-bearers, many of them Argentine volunteers (“Los hospitales de sangre” ‘Blood Hospitals’). These detailed descriptions of the concrete effects of the new techniques of warfare contrasted with the more cautious attitude of the war correspondents from belligerent nations, who avoided addressing those subjects in their chronicles (Luckhurst 8). Soiza Reilly also visited a camp for German prisoners of war in Lyon and reported on the good treatment they received in captivity (“Los prisioneros alemanes en Francia” ‘German Prisoners in France’).

Excluded from the battlefields, many journalists ventured into the war zone on their own, at the risk of being accused of espionage and executed (“Los periodistas en las líneas de fuego” ‘Journalists on the Line of Fire’). Soiza Reilly followed their example and went into the French countryside, in the area around Creil in Picardy, about eighty kilometers from the area forbidden to the press, where he could observe the devastation caused by the war (“Los periodistas en las líneas de fuego”). The limited perspectives he was offered in France prompted him to move to Germany, which seemed more willing to make concessions to war correspondents (Delporte 723-24). Soiza Reilly pointed out the different policies implemented by France and Germany in this respect and their effect on his journalistic work: “La imposibilidad en que se estrellan todos los corresponsales periodísticos para aproximarse a la línea de fuego por la parte francesa, y la novedad de una aventura peligrosa pero conveniente, me impulsan a internarme en las tierras del kaiser” (“Los prisioneros alemanes en Francia”)³ ‘The impossibility experienced by all journal correspondents of approaching the front line on the French side, and the novelty of a dangerous but convenient adventure, spur me on to advance into the lands of the Kaiser.’

Si los simpáticos francófilos me permiten hablar con honradez, confesaré, amargamente pero complacido, que en Alemania me han tratado mucho mejor que en Francia. . . . en el ministerio de guerra de Berlín, me bastó exponer mis deseos de ir a la línea de fuego . . . para que inmediatamente se me facilitaran los medios necesarios para la realización de mi proyecto. (“La censura periodística”)

If the kind Francophiles allow me to speak honestly, I shall confess, with bitterness but also satisfaction, that I was treated much better in Germany than in France. . . . all I had to do at the War Ministry in Berlin was to express my desire to go to the front line . . . to be immediately granted the necessary means to carry out my project. (‘Journalistic Censorship’)

In fact, the German government furnished him with a car and driver, an assistant, a free permit for public transit, and lodging; authorized him to collect objects from

the trenches abandoned by the enemy; and allowed him to witness a battle (“En la Polonia rusa” ‘In Russian Poland’).

The French government’s stance was based on the belief that defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 had been the consequence of indiscreet remarks made by war correspondents, who may have revealed in their articles sensitive information about the army’s strategy (“Los periodistas en las líneas de fuego”). On the other hand, the greater liberality shown by Germany responded to the need to make its own version of the war known to the world, and especially to the neutral nations, and thereby overcome the isolation to which the British control of cable information had condemned it since the beginning of the war (“Los prisioneros alemanes en Francia”; “La opinión argentina en Alemania” ‘Argentina’s Opinion in Germany’). Germany evidently discovered early on the propagandistic value of war correspondents’ work:

Insisto en destacar la deferencia con que se nos trata. . . . no veo solamente una demostración de la cultura de Alemania. Veo, escondido detrás de esa cultura, un fogoso interés y un ardiente deseo de que hagamos ‘réclame’ al gran imperio de Guillermo II. Los alemanes están empeñados en una guerra doble. Se defienden con balas y con letras de molde, porque los atacan con idénticas armas. (“La opinión argentina en Alemania”)

I insist on emphasizing the deference with which we are treated. . . . I do not see only a demonstration of the culture of Germany. I see, hidden behind that culture, a passionate interest and an ardent desire for us to “publicize” the great empire of Wilhelm II. The Germans are engaged in a double war. They defend themselves with bullets and in print, because they are being attacked with identical weapons.

The increasing awareness of the value of journalism for propaganda purposes encouraged France to reconsider its policy in 1915, to introduce a system of accredited correspondents (Luckhurst 6-7), and to organize meticulously planned and regulated visits of correspondents to the front, a policy also adopted by the British government (Delporte 725; Horvat 31; Sanders and Taylor 30). By virtue of that change, in August 1916 Soiza Reilly was able to witness *in situ* the second phase of the battle of the Somme, which he described with his usual liveliness (“La batalla del río Somme” ‘The Battle of the Somme’).

Soiza Reilly recognized that all states subjected journalists to censorship, be it the seizure of cameras and film, the need for prior approval to publish pictures, or control over the content of what was written, in order to prevent the dissemination of information regarding the location and preparedness of troops. In the event of infringement, the offending journalist could be subjected to a court

martial that could sentence him to execution by firing squad (“Espectáculos sombríos” ‘Dark Spectacles’; “La censura periodística”). Countless prohibitions meant that the press faced many difficulties in carrying out its mission of informing the public: “Los pobres cronistas de esta época amarga, tenemos que hacer esfuerzos de tecnicismo para no mostrar las verdades desnudas. Estamos obligados a oír, sin escuchar. Tenemos que mirar sin ver. . . .” (“La obra humanitaria de Suiza” ‘Humanitarian Work in Switzerland’) ‘We, poor chroniclers of this bitter time, have to make technical efforts to avoid showing the naked truth. We are made to listen but not to hear. We must look without seeing. . . .’ In spite of these difficulties, Soiza Reilly managed, as a peripatetic correspondent during the first two years of the conflict, to travel around different war locations on the Western and Eastern fronts and visit cities in both belligerent and neutral countries.⁴

A Pacifist in the Trenches

The Argentine readers to whom Soiza Reilly addressed his chronicles fell into two main groups according to their attitudes to the Great War. “Aliadophiles” (supporters of the Allies) and “Germanophiles” shared a belief in the suitability of Argentina’s neutrality while supporting different sides in the conflict. The debate focused on the question of responsibility for the outbreak of the war, which was frequently perceived in black and white terms (Tato 312-13). Soiza Reilly himself was not so much concerned with the question of responsibility as with the very essence of the war, which he strongly condemned. His rejection of warfare was grounded in his anarchist convictions, strengthened by the direct experience of the conflict.⁵

Soiza Reilly reported with dismay the new military techniques applied during the war, which meant the violation of the regulations established by international conventions. He drew attention to the 42 cm howitzers manufactured by Krupp, the new hand grenades, and other ammunition such as the dum-dum bullets and shrapnel used by both sides, the effects of which he described graphically (“Los hospitales de sangre”; “En la Polonia rusa”). He was also shocked by trench warfare, which avoided open field combat and cavalry action but extended the struggle and forced soldiers to endure inhuman living conditions:

Es, sencillamente, horrible esto de vivir, meses y meses, bajo tierra, encorvados, torcidos, enterrados, con la vista en tensión, siempre observando si en las trincheras enemigas se ve asomar una cabeza. . . . La ‘mauskrieg’—nombre que los soldados alemanes de Polonia dan a la ‘guerra de ratones’—economiza muchos hombres, pero, en cambio, aumenta la gravedad de los heridos. . . . - ‘En la guerra a campo descubierto . . . se inutiliza a los soldados sin tanta crueldad. Se les tira a las

piernas. Un herido en las piernas, o en los brazos, podrá quedar inútil para esgrimir nuevamente las armas, pero pocas veces quedará inválido para seguir viviendo, como los que reciben un proyectil en la cabeza. (“La estrategia de los ratones” ‘The Mice Strategy’)

It is simply awful to live for months and months underground, bent, twisted, buried, eyes strained, always watching to see if a head pops up from the enemy trenches. . . . The ‘mauskrieg,’ the name given by the German soldiers from Poland to this ‘war of rodents,’ saves many lives, but, in exchange, it aggravates the condition of the injured. . . . In open field war . . . soldiers are put out of action without so much cruelty. Their legs are what is aimed at. A soldier wounded in his legs, or in his arms, may be disabled to the point of never wielding a weapon again, but rarely will he be left disabled for life, like those who are hit by a projectile in the head.

In the trenches, which seemed to be “sepulcros abiertos que esperaran nuevos inquilinos” ‘open graves waiting for new lodgers’ (“Las cosas que se encuentran después de una batalla” ‘Things Found After a Battle’), a less heroic death awaited them, as a result of diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera, which found an appropriate breeding ground in the poor sanitary conditions of the ditches where they thrived (“Un almuerzo bajo la metralla” ‘A Luncheon Under Fire’; “El cólera en el ejército alemán” ‘Cholera in the German Army’).⁶ In his articles, Soiza Reilly described the war as “el estado normal del hombre salvaje. Entre la pólvora y la sangre, el soldado se vuelve troglodita. Ocupa su sitio en la naturaleza. Reivindica su origen de ilustre poblador de cavernas” (“Cementerio de cañones en Berlín” ‘Cannon Graveyard in Berlin’) ‘the normal state of the savage. Amid gunpowder and blood, the soldier becomes a troglodyte. He takes his place in nature. He vindicates his origins as an eminent inhabitant of the caves.’

Far from repeating the idyllic and idealized images of the war circulated in the press by the European war correspondents (Luckhurst 11-13), the Argentine writer demystified war and showed its human and prosaic facets:

El patriotismo que enmascaró su primer entusiasmo, se deslíe al influjo de la vida cruel de las trincheras. Una cosa poética es recorrer las calles en los tiempos de paz, vitoreando a la patria. Pero otra cosa es ir al campo de batalla, a defenderla con la propia epidermis. . . . ¡Pero es tan cómico pensar en frases literarias y suena tan a hueco el lirismo, cuando se tiene que matar, sin descanso, al enemigo! (“Cementerio de cañones en Berlín”)

Patriotism that disguised its initial enthusiasm fades out as an effect of the cruel life in the trenches. It is one thing to go through the streets in times of

peace, poetically cheering the fatherland. But it is another to go to the battlefield, and defend it with one's own skin. . . . Yet it is so ridiculous to think of literary phrases, and lyricism sounds so hollow when one has to kill the enemy, without rest!

Los imbéciles que alguna vez hemos hablado de 'la belleza de los combates' y de 'la poesía de las grandes batallas', estamos obligados a pedir perdón a la justicia. . . . Siempre hemos sentido temblar el corazón ante la romántica y dulce poesía de la guerra. . . . La verdadera guerra, la que yo veo, la que yo oigo, la que yo huelo, es la guerra común, es la guerra vulgar y sucia y hedionda de los seres humanos que se canibalizan entre sí. ("Opinión de los niños en Polonia" 'Children's Opinion in Poland')

We, the stupid people who have sometimes talked of the "beauty of combat" and the "poetry of great battles," are obliged to beg justice for forgiveness. . . . We have always felt our heart thrill to the romantic, sweet poetry of war. . . . True war, the one I see, the one I hear, the one I smell, is the common war, the vulgar, dirty, stinking war of human beings who eat one another, like cannibals.

In keeping with his anarchistic worldview, Soiza Reilly reproved nationalist passions, which he labeled as a "flagelo" 'scourge' or "enfermedad" 'illness' ("Los hospitales de sangre"). Under the influence of nationalism, Europe was destroying itself, denying its civilization, and regressing to barbarism.

El patriotismo europeo es una de las tantas locuras colectivas que, bajo los estragos de la guerra, convierte las naciones más cultas en verdaderos manicomios. . . . Ningún contemporáneo, por neutral que sea, podrá analizar con honradez y con justicia, la suma colosal de disparates que los pueblos cometen en nombre de la patria. [Desde] el 1º de agosto de 1914 . . . las naciones más civilizadas—las maestras del mundo—viven perpetuamente consagradas a destruir su propia tradición, sus viejas virtudes, sus grandes riquezas y hasta su moral . . . ("La correspondencia de los prisioneros" 'The Prisoner's Correspondence')

European patriotism is one of many collective follies that, in the ravages of war, turns the most cultured nations into true madhouses. . . . No contemporary, neutral as they may be, will be able to analyze honestly and fairly the sum of colossal absurdities that people commit in the name of their fatherland. [Since] August 1, 1914 . . . the most civilized nations, the masters

of the world, have devoted themselves to destroying their own traditions, their old virtues, their great wealth, and even their morality . . .

It was not only the soldiers in the battlefields who were affected. Soiza Reilly observed a “contagio de la guerra” ‘contagion of war’ (“Desde la Polonia alemana”) in civil society. The war culture and the normalization of violence were expressed, for instance, in the popularity of the war among children, who recreated it as a game (“Francia”); in the change of social habits and the profile of the big cities, which were turned almost into military barracks (“El alma de Berlín” ‘The Soul of Berlin’); and even in the militarization of women’s fashion (“La moda alemana” ‘German Fashion’). He also warned about the dangers that this war fever entailed for peacetime, anticipating the notion of brutalization that would be developed in the immediate postwar period and later theorized by the historian George Mosse (Alcalde 23-24).

In contrast to the decadence of European cultural values, Soiza Reilly promoted those of Latin America as the true embodiment of civilization in the face of the crisis:

Esta enorme carnicería europea a que se están dedicando con ensañamiento y alevosía las naciones más serias y más nobles del mundo, se observa con mayor frialdad y con mucha mayor filosofía desde lejos. . . . Cansados estamos de que a nuestras laboriosas repúblicas del sur se las llame salvajes. Pues bien: en esas revoluciones tan crueles y tan horribles que han assolado las provincias argentinas y los departamentos uruguayos, nunca se ha visto lo que se ve actualmente en Europa. . . . Lo horrible, lo espantoso, lo que me hace crispas los puños de rabia, es . . . esa negación de la belleza espiritual, esa falta de humanitarismo, ese refinamiento que tiene la barbarie de los pueblos civilizados. (“La obra humanitaria de Suiza”)

This tremendous European butchery, that the most serious and noble nations in the world are mercilessly and viciously devoting themselves to, is watched more coldly and much more philosophically from far away. . . . We are tired of having our industrious southern republics called savage. Well, in those revolutions, cruel and horrible as they were, that swept the Argentine provinces and the Uruguayan departments, there was never seen what can be seen in Europe at present. . . . What is horrendous, what is frightful, what makes me clench my fists in rage, is . . . that denial of spiritual beauty, that lack of humanitarianism, that refinement in savagery of the civilized peoples.

In sum, Soiza Reilly expressed a critical perspective on the conflict that stemmed both from his previous pacifist convictions and from his direct experience of the new industrialized warfare. The Great War seemed to have exacerbated the degrading and regressive effects intrinsic to the war, leading Europe to an unprecedented crisis of civilization. Soiza Reilly pointed out the reversal of traditional hierarchies produced by the war: the cradle of contemporary civilization had fallen into barbarism, while Latin America, its disciple, usually stigmatized as savage, emerged in comparison as the moral reserve in times of crisis, an analysis shared by other intellectuals of the subcontinent (Compagnon 2013).

Against Polarizations

In Soiza Reilly's opinion, the duty of Latin Americans, which he would follow in his own professional conduct, was to maintain impartiality and neutrality of opinion in order to appraise the veracity of the opposing interpretations of the conflict circulating in the press: "¿no sería más patriótico para los civilizados americanos del sud, que en vez de declararnos francófilos o germanófilos, nos declararíamos antibelicosos?" ("En las trincheras" 'In the Trenches') 'wouldn't it be more patriotic for us civilized South Americans, instead of declaring ourselves Francophiles or Germanophiles, to declare ourselves anti-war?'⁷

Although he placed himself in an avowedly neutral position, he nevertheless revealed his personal opinions about the nations at war. In the Argentine intellectual field, a favorable and often uncritical perspective predominated with respect to the Allied cause, but Soiza Reilly adopted a more nuanced view, often opposed to the general consensus. Thus, although he affirmed his admiration for his "abuela Albión" 'Grandmother Albion,'⁸ ("La censura periodística") it did not stop him from criticizing the naval blockade established by England against Germany, which was a "guerra silenciosa del hambre" 'silent war of famine' that doomed the enemy to commercial isolation and misery ("La policía inglesa en el mar" 'English Police on the Sea'). In fact, in his first chronicle as war correspondent he described in detail the requisitioning of the Spanish liner Barcelona that was carrying him to Europe, showing that British controls extended not only to the merchant ships of enemy countries but also to passenger ships of neutral nations ("La policía inglesa en el mar"). At the same time, although he praised French heroism, there were few indications in his articles of any particular affinity with Gallic culture. In addition, although he commended the courage of the Belgian people and authorities, and seemed to be moved by the tragedy of the refugees ("La batalla del río Somme"; "Los últimos belgas" 'The Last Belgian'), he questioned the truth of the atrocities they allegedly had been victims of, considering the reports to be "mentiras de los diarios" 'newspaper lies' and exaggerations of the refugees ("La pintura bélica" 'Warlike Painting'):

No es mi deber de cronista defender a tirios ni a troyanos. Pero, digamos la verdad: ¿no se habrá exagerado en Bélgica y en Francia la actitud de los oficiales alemanes? No puedo creer que el Estado Mayor haya mandado a Rusia los oficiales corteses y a Francia los ‘asesinos’ . . . Naturalmente que en Rusia como en Francia, el ejército alemán ha destruido pueblos y comarcas . . . Además, bajo el fuego de los cañones germánicos, han muerto muchas familias. Mujeres. Viejos. Niños. Todos inocentes . . . Pero de eso tiene la culpa la guerra. (“En las trincheras”)

It is not my duty as a chronicler to defend either Tyre or Troy. But let us speak the truth: have people in Belgium and in France not exaggerated the attitude of the German officers? I cannot believe that the General Staff has sent the polite officers to Russia and the “murderers” to France. . . Naturally, both in Russia and in France, the German army has destroyed towns and regions . . . Moreover, many families have died under the fire of German artillery. Women. Old people. Children. All innocent . . . But, it is the war that is to blame for that.

Este neurótico miedo colectivo de toda una nación embriagada de espanto, provoca, seguramente, algunas de las narraciones inverosímiles de crueldad y salvajismo que se cuentan de los alemanes. . . . El exceso de imaginación en los prófugos de Bélgica es una de las mejores armas de que los aliados se han valido para anonadar a su adversario. Yo puedo comprobar que no todo lo que nos cuentan es verdad. No niego la destrucción salvaje que las teorías de Moltke, encarnadas en Krupp, han hecho en Bélgica, y de cuyo delito se arrepiente la mitad de Alemania. Pero, es noble confesar que no todo lo sucedido, sucedió . . . (“Las sombras errantes” ‘The Wandering Shadows’)

It is surely this neurotic collective fear on the part of an entire nation intoxicated with dread that has provoked some of the improbable stories of cruelty and brutality that are told about the Germans. . . . The excess of imagination in the refugees from Belgium is one of the best weapons that the Allies have used to stun their opponent. I can confirm that not all that they tell us is true. I do not deny the wild destruction that Moltke’s theories, incarnated in Krupp, have caused in Belgium, crimes of which half of Germany repents. However, it is noble to admit that not all that happened, actually happened . . .

Sometimes he even admitted the crimes attributed to Germany, although he downplayed them: “aunque no nos guste lo que haya hecho con Bélgica, debemos admirar a esta nación” (“El alma de Berlín”) ‘although we dislike what it has done to Belgium, we have to admire this nation.’ His expressions of sincere esteem for the German Empire were constant, as a counterbalance to the monolithic, disqualifying image of that nation disseminated by Allied propaganda:

el pueblo germánico no es el pueblo salvaje e inculto que nos pintan en Francia. Hay que confesar, honradamente, que Alemania es digna de admiración. Yo quiero mucho a Francia, pero admiro a Alemania. . . . no han de creer en el ‘atilismo’, en la ferocidad, en el instinto sanguinario de estos buenos muchachos alemanes, que matan, como los demás, porque la mezquina astucia de la diplomacia y la inhumana aspiración patriótica, les obligan a destruir al enemigo. (“En Alemania”)

The Germans are not the wild and uncultivated people as depicted in France. It has to be fairly admitted that Germany is worthy of admiration. I am very fond of France, but I admire Germany. . . . There is no reason to believe in the Attila-like ferocity and bloodthirsty instinct of these good German boys, who kill, like the others, because the mean cunning of diplomacy and inhuman patriotic aspiration force them to destroy the enemy.

que el lector que aún no es francófilo ni germanófilo sepa que a los alemanes no se les debe juzgar como nos juzgamos a nosotros mismos, sino de acuerdo con sus tradiciones y de acuerdo con las necesidades de su raza. Y es, en verdad, una admirable raza llena de salud y de noble buena fe que podrá, sin duda, dominar a todos los países del orbe . . . (“En las trincheras”)

May the reader who is not yet a Francophile or a Germanophile know that the Germans must not be judged as we judge ourselves, but according to their own traditions and the needs of their race. And it is, indeed, an admirable race, full of health and noble good faith, that will undoubtedly be able to dominate all the countries in the world . . .

It is not plausible to attribute Soiza Reilly’s sympathies for Germany to the pressure of censorship, since they resurfaced persistently, even in articles written outside the areas controlled by the Empire, as did his doubts about the authenticity of the war crimes attributed to Germany.

It was to be another nation, however, that would capture his full support: Italy, where he had lived during his youth and where his son was born. Soiza Reilly had earlier praised the “destreza diplomática” ‘diplomatic finesse’ (“Suiza sobre las

armas”) of the Italian government’s neutrality; consequently, he deplored the militarism that led to that country entering the war in May 1915. However, at the same time he strongly condemned the subjection of the Italian populations of the “*terre irredente*” (the “unredeemed lands” that still formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) (“*La vigilia de las armas en Roma*” ‘Vigils of Arms in Rome; “*Los héroes de 20 años*” ‘Twenty Year Old Heroes’). In spite of these mixed feelings, he became a public supporter of the Italian war effort. While most Argentine intellectuals defended the Allied cause because of their devotion to France and adopted an enraged Germanophobia (Tato 312-16), Soiza Reilly’s pro-Allied stance derived from his sympathy for Italy and acquired an unusual anti-Austrian tone, parallel to his unwavering admiration for Germany. As he stated, “*Cualquier hombre libre se atreverá, a despecho de los crímenes del ‘Lusitania’ y de los ‘Taubes’, a rendir admiración al patriotismo de Alemania. Pero ningún latino se atreverá a defender el Austria, imperio formado con pedazos sangrientos de patrias robadas . . .*” (“*Hacia el triunfo de Italia*” ‘Towards the Triumph of Italy’) ‘Any free man will dare, in spite of the crimes of the [sinking of the] Lusitania and the German Taube bombers, to admire the patriotism of Germany. But no Latin will dare to defend Austria, an empire formed with bloody pieces of stolen homelands . . .’ Italian irredentism was at the heart of Soiza Reilly’s support for the Allied cause and was constantly present in his chronicles from 1915 onwards. After his return to Argentina, he gave many lectures extolling Italy, which were published in full by the Italian press of Buenos Aires, and he contributed actively to the work of the *Comitato Italiano di Guerra* (Italian War Committee) right up to the end of the war.

Some Conclusions

From its outbreak, the Great War constituted a global media spectacle that dominated public opinion all around the world. It was in this context that the newspaper *La Nación* and the illustrated weekly *Fray Mocho*, published in the Argentine capital, engaged the services of Soiza Reilly as a war correspondent. His skillful pen and his fondness for photography offered Argentine readers a vivid and stark portrait of the war that convulsed Europe. In what was a highly polarized cultural field, Soiza Reilly emerged as a complex and elusive figure, difficult to classify, adopting a position that was equidistant from the extremes of passion.

In the first place, while most intellectuals focused on the origins of the conflict and blamed one or other belligerent party, Soiza Reilly went beyond its immediate causes and severely condemned the war. Through a description that often bordered on a morbid account, he bluntly exhibited the horrors of the new methods of warfare and the erosion of Europe’s moral and intellectual guiding role. In the second place, in the face of the split between “Aliadophiles” and

“Germanophiles” that characterized Argentine society, he directed criticisms against all the belligerents, while not concealing a deep esteem for Germany, which placed him in diametrical opposition to the pro-Allied camp. However, Italy's entry into the war resulted in a notable shift from his initial alignment. Although he repudiated war, Soiza Reilly justified the abandonment of Italy's neutrality by emphasizing the justice of its irredentist demands. Through his support for Italy, he ended up joining the pro-Allied camp, but without exhibiting all of its characteristic features. He shared neither the Francophilia nor the Germanophobia that dominated the Argentine cultural arena. His struggle against the Central Empires focused, instead, on denouncing Austria-Hungary's oppression of the national minorities of the Empire. His admiration for Germany, however, remained unharmed.

The case of Soiza Reilly sheds light on the complexities of representations of the First World War. On the one hand, unlike the correspondents from belligerent countries, he enjoyed a certain liberty to narrate the disturbing realities of the war experience openly. He was not constrained by the sense of civic duty that led most war correspondents from the belligerent powers to pass over the more shocking and distressing aspects of the battlefields. On the contrary, his articles were rich in depicting the effects of warfare: material destruction, death, dehumanization, the erosion of moral values. His perspectives on the war were far from the idealistic and martial portrayal forged by the European journalists. At the same time, Soiza Reilly's articles contribute to a better understanding of the social reactions of a neutral country to an external conflict that nevertheless mobilized passions and cultural affinities. They show that in a social context in which dichotomous and often simplified interpretations of the war predominated, there were also voices that displayed ambiguities and disagreements with the socially constructed consensus around the war. This corpus reveals a richness of perspectives that is often overlooked by the standard hegemonic accounts.

Notes

1. See D'Almeida and Delporte, and Véray.
2. These interviews were later published together in *Cien hombres célebres* 'One Hundred Eminent Men' (1909), a bestseller at the time.
3. All translations of articles are mine.

4. Soiza Reilly's itinerary included: Bayonne, Biarritz, Paris, Bray, and Creil (France); Geneva, Vevel, Zürich, Aigle, Weggis, Biel, Leysin, and Basel (Switzerland); Berlin and Frankfurt (Germany); Lodz, Kutno, Łęczycza, Stryków, Jarocin, Posen, and Nowosolna (by then belonging to Russia); Rome, Verona, Cormons, Udine, Pinerolo, Turin, Florence, and Ancona (Italy).
5. For a characterization of Soiza Reilly's worldview, see Ludmer.
6. In Switzerland, the author visited several hospitals where he interviewed soldiers who suffered from various conditions resulting from war, from tuberculosis to blindness.
7. See also "Los hospitales de sangre" and "Los prisioneros alemanes en Francia"
8. The author's mother was Irish.

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