

Enrique Díaz Retg and *El Diluvio*: Reportages from the Italian frontline (1916).

Enrique Díaz Retg ed *El Diluvio*: Reportage dalle linee del fronte bellico italiano (1916).

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Abstract

In the year 1916 Enrique Díaz Retg, a staff journalist working for the Spanish newspaper *El Diluvio*, extremely popular among Barcelona's working class readers, was assigned to report from the Italian front. Following an invitation from the Italian Foreign Office, he was granted permission to visit war zones under the control of the Italian army. During this journey, which began on 5th September and concluded in Rome on 22nd, he travelled with two other famous Spanish reporters: Ramón Pérez de Ayala and Eduardo Gómez de Baquero. Comparing the articles produced by the three journalists allows us to perceive the main distinctive features of Enrique Díaz Retg's work. From an ideological point of view, his articles reveal a bias in favour of the Latin race and in them he calls for Mediterranean nations to unite, openly inviting the Spanish authorities to enter into war against the barbaric German enemy. In doing so, he contributed to widening the social gap that in the years to come would increasingly alienate the working class from the institution of monarchy and the Catalan elites.

Nel corso dell'anno 1916 a Enrique Díaz Retg, giornalista di punta del quotidiano *El Diluvio*, di grande popolarità fra i lettori delle classi operaie, fu assegnato il compito di inviare delle corrispondenze dal fronte bellico italiano. In seguito a un invito giunto dal Ministero Italiano degli Affari Esteri, fu a lui concesso il permesso necessario per poter visitare le zone in guerra sotto controllo dell'Esercito Italiano. Durante il viaggio, che ebbe inizio il 5 settembre e si concluse a Roma il 22 dello stesso mese, lui viaggiò in compagnia di altri due famosi giornalisti spagnoli: Ramón Pérez de Ayala ed Eduardo Gómez de Baquero. Nel mettere a confronto gli articoli scritti rispettivamente dai tre reporter, risaltano i tratti distintivi dei testi di Enrique Díaz Retg. Da un punto di vista ideologico, nei suoi articoli si avverte un netto orientamento in favore della razza Latina, al punto che in questi testi si auspica l'unione dei paesi del Mediterraneo e si incoraggia apertamente le autorità spagnola all'interventismo in favore degli alleati e contro il barbarico nemico tedesco. In questo modo favorì l'innalzamento del muro che in anni successivi tenne separati classi operaie da una parte e, dall'altra, istituzione monarchica e le élite catalane.

Keywords

Great War, Italy, journalism, propaganda

On 5th September 1916 three Spanish journalists arrived at the railway station in the French alpine town of Modane. They were Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Eduardo Gómez de Baquero (better known to his readers under the pseudonym Andrenio) and Enrique Díaz Retg. A few hours later they crossed the border into Italy and reached Turin, where they stayed just long enough to be able to interview General Vittorio Pittaluga (“El baluarte del Grappa.” *El Diluvio*, December 30, 1917a, 12). The latter had been admitted to the Mauriziano Hospital due to the wounds he had suffered several weeks before, in the victorious attack on the city of Gorizia during the course of the sixth battle of the Isonzo in early August 1916, when the Italian Army managed to capture the city from the Austrians. The journalists continued their journey as far as Milan and only the following day did they arrive at their final destination of Udine, the wartime headquarters of the whole Italian state. In the Friulian capital they were granted lodgings at Palazzo Caiselli (Gómez de Baquero 1918, 69), a residence for illustrious foreign guests, where they were accommodated during their visit to the area of military operations between 7th and 21st September.

The Spanish journalists granted such an honor were all professionals ideologically close to the Allied Powers. Despite being subjects of a monarchy which had declared itself to be neutral from the outset of the conflict¹, they followed with great interest the events of the Great War in which both France and Italy (Latin nations between whom there also existed an intense cultural affinity) had become belligerent countries and were enemies of the Central Powers. The Italian authorities had already noticed their influence on Spanish public opinion; it would appear so from the urgent telegraph dispatch dated 1st September 1916, by which means the Foreign Minister warned the heads of the Home office of the imminent arrival of special Spanish reporters and in which he underlined that ‘The Royal Ambassador in Madrid strongly recommends the aforementioned representatives of Spanish journalism to the courteousness of the Royal Authorities, and expects their journey will yield the best possible results for propaganda in our favor in Spain’².

Over the summer of 1916, at the hand of Count Lelio Bonin Longare (Gómez de Baquero 1918, 1), who at that time was the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Italy in Madrid, the official invitation was extended to all three Spanish reporters sent by the Supreme Command of the Italian Army. They were accompanied on this journey by Gustavo Pittaluga, full professor of parasitology and tropical diseases at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, whose family included high-ranking officials of the Italian Army. This fact certainly made it possible for him to play an active role in encouraging in Spain a positive attitude towards the Allied forces and especially towards his state of origin³.

The official visit ended in Rome on 22nd September 1916 (Tedeschi. “Los periodistas españoles que han visitado el frente italiano.” *El Imparcial*, September 23, 1916, 2) and the previous weeks had been ones of continuous movement during which the Spanish journalists trudged wearily along the Italian front. Each day they travelled through the trails and trenches of the Karst Plateau, where they were extremely moved by the all too visible effects of the war in Monte San Michele, and witnessed the military operations in course during the days in which the Seventh Battle of the Isonzo was fought (14-18 September 1916).

Occasional and very brief absences from Udine were recorded. The first was during 16th and 17th September when the group travelled to the alpine positions of Cadore and the Dolomites. The second is harder to date precisely (but presumably it must have taken place between 17th and 21st September, the date on which the party left Udine for the last time in order to head towards Venice and then conclude their official visit in

Rome), during which journey the group travelled to Vicenza in order to visit the Asiago Plateau the following day. This was the stage for the *Strafexpedition* (or Punitive Expedition) which lasted from May to June of the same year and where the Spanish journalists bore witness to the devastation caused by the violent clashes on that high plateau.

Ramón Pérez de Ayala, in a letter dated 16th November 1916 and addressed to his friend Miguel Rodríguez-Acosta, recalled the journalists' mission with these words:

During this period in which I have been absent from Spain I have been even busier than ever before. Almost every day I have risen at six in the morning, traveling here and there by car, riding a donkey or on foot. There have been days on which I have had to face over four hundred kilometers by car and then many others when I have done more than 15 to 20 kilometers on foot. (Pérez de Ayala 1980, 109)

During these movements the journalists were not allowed to take any initiative, being as they were always accompanied by officials from the military Press Office which had been set up in January that same year and since then under the control of Colonel Eugenio Barbarich [**Figure 1**]. His constant guide during the whole stay was Captain Piero Pirelli, who was in service at the Supreme Command Information Office (Albertini 1968, 655). Certain stages of the military itinerary had been shared with the historian Guglielmo Ferrero⁴ and with Giovanni Cenna, the latter being director of the periodical *Nuova Antologia* in whose pages references could be found to the Spanish journalists visiting the Italian Army frontline (Nemi 1917a, b). It was certainly a well-orchestrated operation of propaganda on the Italians' part, one which stirred up a media furor even among journalist colleagues in Spain, as Díaz Retg complained ("Comentarios a la guerra italiana." *El Diluvio*, December 9, 1916a, 9), upon returning to Spain in reaction to an article which he believed defamatory and which had been published in the daily newspaper *Euskadi*.

Diplomatic results were also reaped, judging from that which happened on 20th September 1916, the day before leaving Udine when the Spanish journalists threw a leaving party for their hosts at Palazzo Caiselli. Enrique Díaz Retg described it in detail in his account of that day (even if it was published much later in "Un té de despedida." *El Diluvio*, November 26, 1916f), nominating, amongst the many people present there, Lieutenant Colonel Javier de Manzanos y Chacón (Redondo Díaz 1985), who at that time was the military attaché assigned to the Spanish Embassy in Italy in whose company they were subsequently to travel to Venice and Rome where they concluded their official visit. His presence, but above all the content of the speech which the officer gave on that occasion and which Díaz Retg made a concise summary of, reveals a gradual shift on the part of the Spanish institutions towards the Allies' cause.

1. The name of Enrique Díaz Retg (1883-1963) is rarely cited in studies relating to the history of Spanish journalism, despite his significant role. Suffice it to say that he was one of the promoters of the Barcelona Press Association, the first of its kind, founded on 5th September 1909 (Arco 1959), an institution which contributed to the fight for professional dignity for reporters in Spain. From a young age he became an expert in international politics at a time when the Spanish press revealed itself to be largely impervious to that which was happening beyond its borders, the First World War being the first event which not only captured the attention of the daily papers but also unleashed a veritable media storm (González Calleja and Aubert 2014, 247-265).

At the time of his journey to Italy Díaz Retg was only 31 years old and was bound (also ideologically) to the editorial staff of *El Diluvio*, a popular Barcelona daily newspaper which he had become gradually involved in as a collaborator since the age of 17. *El Diluvio* was the oldest daily paper with republican tendencies among those which existed in Barcelona. It was also the most battle-hardened: founded in the month of November 1858 with the name *El Telégrafo*, the newspaper had been forced to change its name as a result of the numerous suspensions with which the authorities had aspired to bring about its downfall, which happened only in 1939 at the end of the Civil War. Indeed, it held the record for being the most heavily fined newspaper in the history of Spanish journalism (Seoane Couceiro and Saiz 1996, 106). Its design was unusual as result of the reduced page size, which had been altered in 1915 without ever conforming to the usual larger format. Precisely for this reason it aided its circulation among the working classes especially, as highlighted by Claudi Ametlla, one of the newspaper's regular collaborators in the early decades of the twentieth century, recalling that

there was not a single tavern, nor barbershop or shoe shiners, where it was not to be found. It was the daily newspaper which is bought on the street but not taken home, a daily which thanks to its smaller format [...] can easily be read while travelling by tram (cit. in Seoane Couceiro and Saiz 1996, 107).

Díaz Retg, from the start of his professional career in the field of journalism, remained bound to this type of newspaper⁵. Initially he was assigned to the crime news section, with some isolated collaboration as a theatre and entertainment critic; but within a few years he had managed to carve out a space for himself, which was subsequently to grow, in the pages of current international affairs, publishing stories and reportage which made him increasingly renowned among the readers of his city.

The outbreak of the Great War left an indelible mark on the professional fortune of Enrique Díaz Retg. Right from the outset this journalist warned of the historic relevance of a conflict which would revolutionize contemporary society. The editors of *El Diluvio*, a daily newspaper to which the United Kingdom generously bestowed the monthly sum of 1,000 pesetas⁶ (González Calleja and Aubert 2014, 265), dedicated significant column space to the victories of the Allied forces. And in fulfilling this task the name of Enrique Díaz Retg stands out. His activity went well beyond the obligations to which he was bound by *El Diluvio*, carrying out an intense work of documentation right from the start even before his first visits as a special correspondent to the Allied fronts. This interest of his was closely tied to a commercial vision that Díaz Retg managed to fully exploit and which persuaded him to draw up a series of writings, brought together finally in two volumes entitled *La guerra de 1914. La invasión*, which were printed in 1915 by the editor Miguel Seguí in Barcelona. That same year another sixty pieces were published under the title *Episodios de la Gran Guerra* [**Figure 2**], appearing over the course of the following year under Feliu y Susanna Editores, a project for which he received a modest fee on the part of the Italian propaganda services (González Calleja and Aubert 2014, 247). All of these were projects which aspired to satisfy the curiosity of Spanish readers, who despite being part of a state which managed to preserve its neutrality until the resolution of the conflict, observed with ever-increasing dread the developments of a brutal war taking place in an area very close to them geographically speaking. Moreover, both of these booklets were published with great typographical accuracy, containing a significant number of illustrations and photographs which, aside from their testimonial value, conferred a certain distinction to

the text with which they described the events whose outcome was still somewhat uncertain.

During the month of August 1916 Díaz Retg published the book entitled *¡Verdún!*, in which he reconstructs in precise chronological order the events which took place during the decisive Battles of the Meuse, in the period between 21st February and the end of March of that same year ([No author]. "Otra obra de Díaz Retg." *El Diluvio*, August 13, 1916).

The works which have just been examined are the result of a collection and selection of news which arrived at the editorial office during the first phase of the war, ordered in a linear way. There is scarcely any comment let alone clarification. The military events are simply presented in a very concise way. One might say with a textual form which reminds us of encyclopedic articles, containing lots of numbers and minute details which make the reading somewhat heavy-going, not facilitating the reader who wishes to form an adequate overall idea of what had been happening on the battlefields. They are texts which have been drafted by the editorial staff of the newspaper, which had become a container for news, bulletins and various official press releases; a miscellaneous medley of material which satisfied the demand for immediate information, but was entirely lacking in terms of the eyewitness character of the reportage sent from the frontlines by an experienced and erudite journalist capable of summarizing the importance and eventual consequence of a military event in just a few lines.

It was this that characterized the series of reportage by Enrique Díaz Retg, who was becoming a professional of certain renown, sent from the frontline over the course of 1916 as he moved between the frontlines of the war in France, Italy and Belgium. It was only later that he consequently managed to enter into the inner circle of Spanish language war correspondents accepted by the military authorities of the Allied forces, towards whom he always showed, without any hesitation, an extremely favorable attitude.

On several occasions Enrique Díaz Retg recalled the initial phase of his career as a special correspondent on the frontlines (Del Arco 1959, 25; Díaz Retg 1963, 68). Notwithstanding his baptism by fire during the months of May to June 1916 on the French frontlines, in successive articles there is no lack of explicit references to his stay in Italy in September of that same year⁷, which gives us an idea of the impact that Italian military resistance must have had on him.

2. When the group of Spanish journalists received the official invitation consenting them to travel to the Italian frontline, the military authorities of that country were finally achieving important victories over the enemy army. As regards the front in the Trentino region, a few months earlier they had managed to neutralize the *Strafexpedition* with which the imperial army had threatened to overrun the Venetian plain. After all in the middle of summer the Italians had by then managed to capture the city of Gorizia on the Karst Plateau, putting the survival of the crucial Adriatic port of Trieste into serious difficulty. Both operations, which had been undertaken at a cost of enormous human sacrifice, were exploited in a very effective way by those in charge of Italian propaganda who in front of the leaders of the Allied forces were finally able to boast of concluding their victorious actions. In this regard, the Press Office of the Supreme Command of the Army, firmly in the hands of Col. Eugenio Barbarich, made it possible for the group of special correspondents who represented foreign newspapers to have the possibility of visiting those decisive stages of the war, certain that the press, whether

that of allied powers or neutral states, would become a propaganda sounding board for the military victories achieved.

The laws governing the Italian military press office were very strict. The numbers of foreign special correspondents who could travel together was restricted to a maximum of no more than three accredited journalists. At the same time they were had to be citizens from those states the Department of the Interior (which, in its struggle with the high commanders of the army, expected this prerogative) admitted exclusively into areas of military operations (Fiori 2001, 327). The movements and actions of the reporters were under strict control and the supervision of the officials of the press office, not being able to move about freely and autonomously around the areas under military jurisdiction under any circumstances. The content of the reports had to abide by fundamental security rules and undergo checks on the part of the censors.

The Spanish special reporters felt this imposition was a burdensome limitation on carrying out their work. So much so that they had to wait until they had left Italian soil before being able to publish most of their reportage. From an overall thirty six articles which Ramón Pérez de Ayala wrote for *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires⁸, the Argentinian daily which accredited him officially in front of the Italian military authorities, only three saw the light of day during the author's stay in Italy. 91.6 per cent of the total reportage was consequently published once his stay had ended. It should be borne in mind that the percentage of articles published by *La Prensa* from 1st January 1917 onwards, when more than three months had passed since the end of the journey, constitutes no less than 61.6 per cent of the total number of articles written. It should be underlined that the last of the reportage tied to that visit was published as late as 2nd October 1917, just a few weeks before the disaster of Caporetto.

A very similar fate awaited the writings of Enrique Díaz Retg, who despite managing to carve out a space for himself in the pages of *El Diluvio* for a total of thirty nine reportages referring to that journey, only four of them were published at the time of the journey to the Italian frontline. Some 89.7 per cent of the articles written by Enrique Díaz Retg were instead published by *El Diluvio* after the date of 23 September 1916, the day when the official visit concluded in Rome; it should also be noted that the last reportage of the series entitled 'La guerra europea: Mi segunda visita al frente', which contains all the articles bearing witness to that which he had seen on different Italian fronts, was published on 6 November of the same year.

There is no need to dwell on the example of Andrenio, whose scarce production of finished articles regarding that journey does not even begin to compare with the sheer quantity produced by his colleagues. There are only nine articles concerning that visit which are to be found in the pages of *La Época* (5) and *La Vanguardia* (4). Andrenio's choice was, in fact, that of aiming to group together all the notes from his journey in a volume entitled *Soldados y paisajes de Italia. Impresiones de una visita al frente italiano* (Gómez de Baquero 1918), which was published just two years later, when the end of the conflict was in sight.

It is believed that the reason for such a delay between the moment of writing and the actual date of publication derives from the strict regulations governing military censorship and which hindered their journalistic efforts. Ramón Pérez de Ayala makes an explicit reference to this in his article published by *La Prensa* on 26 December 1916, when he describes with a certain air of annoyance the constraints that the Italian army imposed on him in carrying out his work. He felt they hindered him in fulfilling the editorial requirements he had negotiated with the Argentinian daily before his departure, namely the expectation that he would send his notes and impressions of what was unfolding on the Italian frontline by telegraph on a daily basis:

And so I arrive at the Italian general barracks, write my first report and at the moment of handing it to the telegraph clerk he tells me that given the state of war it is not possible to send any dispatch by telegraph unless it is written in the Italian language. And the difficulties don't end here, given that afterwards, so that the text can be sent from Italy to France, where the cable telegraph office is situated, all dispatches have to be written in French. In other words: my reports first have to be translated into Italian so they can then be sent to Genoa; translated then into French so they may be allowed to continue as far as Paris and finally reach Buenos Aires where the text will have to be retranslated into Spanish. But what will be left of these reports? My heart sank and I felt as if the wind had been taken out of my sails. ("Pequeño análisis psicológico de un corresponsal." *La Prensa*, December 26, 1916)

Despite the date of publication of these articles being so irregular, this did not affect the circulation of these eye-witness accounts which Spanish language readers of that time read avidly (given that the correspondence from the special reporters represented something quite extraordinary), albeit after the events themselves. They were oblivious to the fact that the episodes described had taken place further in the past and their significance might well have been overshadowed by the outcome of more recent fighting.

The delay in the appearance of the journalists' reports affected the way of writing and the re-worked version of the contents the author had decided to offer his readers. He was aware that the latter, via the official bulletins circulated on a daily basis in the newspapers, had by then acquired a certain degree of knowledge of the episodes of war presented in his articles. For this reason the journalist adapted his narration of events adding an extremely compelling eye-witness testimony while at the same time exploiting editing strategies which reinforced the subjectivity of that which was narrated. This trait was especially notable in the texts of Ramón Pérez de Ayala who, in a moment of reflection, would often go off on a tangent in his articles which style-wise were closely related to literary essays, so much so that the publication of this writer's reportage is largely limited to their successive compilation in the volume entitled *Hermann encadenado* (1917b). And this highlights to what extent the readers perceived in those notes from a journey an intention which went beyond that of mere information, and which were able to provoke a reflection on war and the military events in course.

3. The writings of Enrique Díaz Retg were created in an atmosphere of propaganda in which every eventual ideological opposition was neutralized. The journalists were allowed access to the frontline and were even offered the means of transport to reach it, but they were always under the surveillance of the military authorities. In addition, the latter applied strict censorship to the articles the journalists intended to send by telegraph to their editorial office. They could not expect to make contact with the enemy of military rank, except for those soldiers who were to be found in several prisoner of war camps around the Friuli region. In any event such contact was made in the presence of officers from the Italian Military Press Office. The constraints on their freedom of expression did not seem, however, to overly concern the Spanish journalists who were an integral part of that first official party. Since all of them had solid political convictions they empathized with their guests and consequently considered their work as journalists to be a necessary persuasive action to attract readers to the Allies' side.

For this reason, it should be underlined that the line of reasoning which Díaz Retg drew upon was that of the necessary defense and racial unity of all Latin peoples. The

journalist persistently makes reference to this cultural brotherhood which French, Italian and Spanish people shared in the same culturally well-defined race with ancient roots. In defense of the preservation of this Mediterranean culture⁹ the need asserted itself to overthrow the Germanic race, whose naturally barbarous instincts had for time immemorial incited them to annihilate the Latin peoples.

It is an argument that the military Press Office officers exploited for propaganda purposes, so much so that the stopovers along the itinerary which had been planned for the foreign correspondents presented the war offensive as a struggle not unlike that of a *reconquista*, whose transcendent meaning was not lost to the Spanish reporters. The group's first visit was not, as it might rightly have been expected, to one of the Italians' defensive positions or to a hospital in which soldiers wounded in combat were recovering and who would thus have been privileged witnesses to that which was happening on the frontlines. Instead the officials responsible for military propaganda felt the need for the reporters to first of all set foot in the town of Aquileia, captured by the Austrians when Italy had only just entered into the war [Figure 3]. And there was not even a strategic justification for this visit given that the town had been conquered (or better still, *reconquistada*) without having to fight the enemy army. For Enrique Díaz Retg this journey was the equivalent of visiting a place of undeniable Latin tradition where the Basilica, which had been the seat of the ancient Patriarchate of Aquileia and which was still standing, revealed excellent mosaics glorifying the sophisticated Latin culture those barbaric peoples from the other side of the Alps had tried to destroy:

[Friuli] —Díaz Retg went on to write— is one of the most far-flung territories ruled by the Empire of the Caesars (*Forum Iulii* hence, due to linguistic corruption, *Friuli*) and Aquileia is the imposing stronghold on the border, at the foot of the mountains from behind which the northern barbarians (today's Austrians and Germans) had periodically been appearing ever since the 4th century, fighting with the aim of opening a passageway which would allow them to reach the warm waters of the Mediterranean. ("En Aquileya italiana." *El Diluvio*, September 24, 1916c, 9)

A recurring story which was bound to repeat itself time and time again.

Increasingly in the articles by Díaz Retg as opposed to those written by his companions on the journey to Italy (despite Ramón Pérez de Ayala having been the author of one of the most far-fetched ideological contrivances, describing the English as 'the most powerful Latin people of the present day' [1917b, 13]), the idea gradually took form of the Latin race as the people who managed to leave a decisive mark on the history of mankind. He believed the Italians were the direct descendants of the Latin people and considered their military intervention to be a key element in bringing the Allied armies together and thus achieving victory. His articles strived to obsessively increase his readers' empathy in support of Italian military accomplishments in harsh geographical environments. He described the roads and mule tracks opened by teams of volunteer workers who went as far as the remotest mountain areas that hitherto had been inaccessible, where the detachment of alpine troops resisted with commendable perseverance. It was all very efficient and, at the same time, military discipline was upheld by the total respect of the officers towards a community of equals and not of inferior beings. Indeed the officials were able to go beyond divisions of rank and willingly encouraged a sense of camaraderie amongst those who risked their own lives

in order to defend the trench: '[the officers] —writes Díaz Retg— often stop and question them with familiarity and give them a pat on the head or back, as if they found themselves with their oldest and dearest comrades. The look on the soldiers' faces revealed that being touched that way really did comfort them' ("La primera línea de fuego (II)." *El Diluvio*, October 16, 1916d, 9).

There was also that cultural undercurrent immersed in the ancient past. When the group travelled to the newly liberated Gorizia and the journalists were granted the opportunity to interview General Giovanni Cattaneo, military governor of the city, Díaz Retg commented on how pleasant he was, praising his humanity and also his knowledge. Despite living under siege, seeing as the Austrian troops still occupied favorable defense emplacements in the hills surrounding the city, the general showed great concern for devising a way of guaranteeing the safety of those civilians who had remained in the city. Yet that which struck Díaz Retg the most, during the brief interview, was the concern General Cattaneo also showed towards the preservation of the architectural and artistic heritage. This had even led the Italian officer to consider drawing up a somewhat idealistic project in those difficult conditions: inaugurating the first museum the city of Gorizia had ever had.

Díaz Retg copied out these words on paper with great attention to details. At the same time, however, his curiosity was drawn to the bizarre objects piled up and spilling out of a corner of the military governor's office. He described them in his correspondence as 'terrible clubs made up of a sturdy wooden handle at the end of which an iron head had been fixed with menacing nails sticking out from it' ("Un día en Gorizia (III)." *El Diluvio*, November 2, 1916e, 9). They were, as General Cattaneo went on to clarify, interpreting the journalists curious gaze, the infamous *mazze ferrate* widely used by the barbarian enemy, the soldier who had remained on the margins of the refined evolution of the military art which the Italian soldier had instead assimilated ever since Renaissance times. The iron club was a tangible sign of barbaric people who still clung to the savagery of primitive man. Díaz Retg concluded with these words: 'Such refinement of hate and barbarity had been enough to brutalize this breed of troops who transformed warfare into a form of torture for the enemy' (9). If ever an iconic sign representative of the image of the Germanic enemy were to remain imprinted on the minds of the Spanish readers forever, it was certainly this club which defined the German infantryman as an individual on the margins of civilization. Any eventual humanity on the enemy's part can be gleaned from the intimate letters 'written in Hungarian and Slavic languages' ("Desde Monfalcone a Gorizia." *El Diluvio*, October 13, 1916b, 14), and significantly not in German, which the journalist collected on his wanderings around the trenches of Monte San Michele which had not long been abandoned by Austrian troops.

4. Conclusions: The articles by Enrique Díaz Retg, published by the daily newspaper *El Diluvio* and written during the course of the journey which the Catalan journalist undertook during the month of September 1916, provide us with extensive information on the Italian position in the areas of the Karst Plateau, Carnia and the Trentino Dolomites, thus amounting to a key source of information. His pieces compliment the writings of Ramón Pérez de Ayala and Eduardo Gómez de Baquero, his companions on that same journey who through their articles and subsequent collections of the same in book format, point towards a critical reflection on the cause and effects of the conflict.

Less significant information emerges from the texts of Díaz Retg. Thus the obsessive interest in describing in his notes the areas which they travelled through during the journey, including the place names, which enabled them to reconstruct with precision

each leg of the whole itinerary followed by the group from their arrival in Italy. The chronology of that journey is more defined in his version compared to that of his colleagues. Furthermore his writings reveal the identity of numerous interlocutors who in the articles of his travel companions (perhaps more mindful of the regulations imposed by military censors) mostly remained anonymous behind simple initials.

The value of the articles by Díaz Retg lies, however, above all in the fact that they were an effective channel through which he contributed to embedding a strongly critical vision of German power among Barcelona's republican and working classes. The latter adopted a stance which was opposed to the official neutralist position of the Spanish monarchy and one which a large part of the Catalan bourgeoisie shared to a certain extent¹⁰. Concealed within the correspondence by Enrique Díaz Retg was an ideology which sparked the later social and class conflict in Catalonia. This could also be considered ethnic conflict bearing in mind his constant appeal for the unity of all Latin peoples as recorded in his articles.

Considering the body of articles by Díaz Retg, we can conclude that the actions carried out by the Italian military and propaganda authorities were highly effective in encouraging empathy among the Spanish journalists towards the Italian cause and the pan-Latin brotherhood. This was especially true in the case of Díaz Retg, given that even after his visit the events of the Italian war remained very much with him, and to which he returned as a special correspondent even in some of the most tragic moments¹¹.

It is difficult to establish just to what extent his admiration for the war exploits of the Italians left a lasting mark on the later ideology of Enrique Díaz Retg, who over the course of time let himself be carried away by his enthusiasm towards fascism to the extent of encouraging the armed support of Mussolini's Italian Army to assist the troops of General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. This is a line of research which warrants further investigation in future.

(Translated by Jane E. Price)

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Figure 1: Col. Eugenio Barbarich, in the company of some Spanish journalists (Udine: 1916). At his right stands Ramón Pérez de Ayala. At his left: Eduardo Gómez de Baquero, Gustavo Pittaluga and Enrique Díaz Retg. Reproduced by permission of Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano [MCRR: S-18-0028].

Figure 2: *Episodios de la Gran Guerra*, n. 50 (1915). Frontpage illustration by Fortunino Matania.

Figure 3: "Hacia Aguileya" (*El Diluvio*, September 19). One of the three articles in which E. Díaz Retg describes his journey to Aquileia.

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¹ On 7 August 1914 King Alfonso XIII had proclaimed Spain's 'complete neutrality' and, in a decidedly threatening tone, had even hoped for the loss of the right to protection towards any subjects resident abroad who might have taken part in the conflict (Navarra Ordoño 2014, 25-26).

² This dispatch is still present in the Central State Archive (Rome): 'Category A5G First World War; file 76; folder 158; subsection 9'. It was Antonio Fiori who first reported this documentation which enables us to date the arrival of the Spanish journalists in Italy more precisely (2001, 338 [n. 72]).

³ A recent well-documented study by Eduardo González Calleja and Paul Aubert (2014, 247) places Pittaluga at the centre of the network of Italian propaganda services operating in Spain in that very period. Together with Enrique Díaz Retg he also participated in a public event which took place on 21st January 1917 at the Teatro Benavente in Madrid, property of the Institut français, and which the following day he gave detailed news thereof on the front page of the republican daily newspaper *El País* ([No author]. "Díaz Retg en Madrid: Una conferencia", *El País*, January 22, 1917c, 1). Afterwards, on 24th March 2017, Pittaluga made a presentation at the Ateneu Barcelonés entitled *La guerra entre el Adriático y los Alpes*, in which he described the mission carried out in Italy, ([No author]. "Conferencia del doctor Pittaluga", *El Diluvio*, March 25, 1917a, 11) and which was published in a rare booklet (Pittaluga 1917).

⁴ Ramón Pérez de Ayala shows ("Evocaciones de un campo de batalla en el Trentino." *La Prensa*, August 26, 1917a, 5) that he had read the work entitled *La guerra europea*, published the previous year.

⁵ During his journey around Italy he admitted to being a correspondent for the daily newspaper *Le Petit Journal* (Paris) as well a collaborator for *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), details also noted by Andrenio (Gómez de Baquero 1918, 56).

⁶ The cost of the daily newspaper *El Diluvio* was ten cents at that time.

⁷ See, for example, what is written in the preface (or 'Avant-propos') inserted into his book *Les italiens dans la guerre d'Espagne* (Díaz Retg 1939, 7-8) in which he considers the quality of Italian fighting which he had already witnessed on his first journey. Furthermore, we refer to an extremely evocative article which was published months later in the pages of *El Diluvio*, showing his growing admiration for the Italians' struggle ("La guerra de Italia." *El Diluvio*, May 11, 1917b, 10).

⁸ The prestigious Buenos Aires daily newspaper published them sporadically under different sections: «Ramón Pérez de Ayala en el frente italiano» (14 September 1916 – 31 October 1916) and «De Ramón Pérez de Ayala. El viaje en Italia» (16 December 1916 – 2 October 1917).

⁹ And which was extended also to the Spanish ex-colonies in America, as is strongly reiterated in an editorial article published by *El Diluvio* ([No author]. "Crónica diaria: Italia mater." *El Diluvio*, November 20, 1917b, 7).

¹⁰ Their position was as ambiguous as that of the daily newspaper *La Vanguardia*, despite their apparently being neutral. After all *El Correo Catalán* had no qualms about showing its Germanophile sympathies. For an overall vision of the contemporary Catalan press, please refer to a recent study by Navarra Ordoño (2014, 200-217).

¹¹ Thus it was that when the German troops broke through the Italian lines at Caporetto and invaded the Friulian and Venetian Plain pushing as far as the River Piave in just a few days. Díaz Retg reported the facts to the readers of *El Diluvio* in a series of reportage which were published between 8-30 December 1917.