

**A Global Moment in Buenos Aires' Periodical Press:
Enrique Gómez Carrillo and the Russo-Japanese War¹**

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Introduction

As a result of the general review sparked by its centennial, in recent years a significant body of work has sought to highlight the profound echoes of the events of the First World War in Latin America. In contrast with the predominant view of the great conflict initiated in 1914, which focused its analysis on the European theater, these approaches sought to take the concept of the war as a “world” event seriously, noting how Latin American economies, societies, politics, cultures, and intellectuals were significantly affected by its many vicissitudes.² With good reason, the Great War has been consecrated as a turning point, the event that distinguishes the long nineteenth century from the twentieth century. But its profound impact on Latin America and other continents did not come out of a vacuum. Given its vast global repercussions, the conflict can be seen less as an inaugural moment than as the culmination of the globalization of intercontinental connections that had developed over the preceding decades. As numerous studies have shown, the telegraph played a key role in this process, and its gradual expansion into different regions of the world, beginning in the last third of the

¹ Translated into English by Rebecca Wolpin.

² See, among other works, Compagnon (2014); Rinke (2017); Garcíadiego (2017); Tato (2017); Sánchez (2018); Compagnon, Foulard, Martin, and Tato (2018).

nineteenth century, enabled virtually instantaneous communication with an increasingly global reach.³

This paper focuses on an armed conflict that predates the First World War by ten years: the war between Russia and Japan (February 1904 to May 1905). Due to its effect on public opinion in various cities around the world, the conflict has been termed a “global moment.”⁴ This study explores these effects by examining the case of Buenos Aires. Specifically, it examines the remarkable development of the city’s periodical press, which had experienced a vigorous transformation in the preceding decades, including the development of strong cable sections and international telegraphic dispatches.⁵ This essay is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the new role of international news in the newspapers and especially in the illustrated news magazines of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, in order to examine the impact that the Russo-Japanese conflict had on the city’s public sphere. The second section focuses on one of the ramifications of that presence: the journey to Japan by the Guatemalan writer Enrique Gómez Carrillo (1873-1927), then a star correspondent of the newspaper *La Nación*, a leader in the modernization of the Buenos Aires press. Gómez Carrillo was dispatched to satisfy the curiosity of the readership regarding the emerging Asian power. This act marked the beginning of one of the most intense relationships between a Latin American writer and the so-called “Orient.” Yet these ties must be understood within the context of the changes that affected the new informational ecosystem of the papers and the physiognomy of public opinion in the great Latin American metropolises.

The Russo-Japanese war: A global moment in the era of telegraphic communication

In a book of memories of Buenos Aires in the early twentieth century, writer Bernardo González Arrili offered insights into the transformations that had recently taken place in urban public conversations:

³ Winseck and Pike (2007); Britton (2013); Wenzlhuemer (2013); Hampf and Müller Pohl (2015).

⁴ Aydin (2007). On the nature and impact of newsworthy phenomena characterized as “global moments” in the era of telegraphic communication and the modernization of newspapers in Buenos Aires, see the recent dossier coordinated by Martín Bergel and Martín Alborno “Prensa periódica, intelectuales y mundialización: ‘Momentos globales’ en la esfera pública de Buenos Aires (1870-1940),” *Prismas. Revista de historia intelectual*, no. 25, 2021 (particularly “Introducción”).

⁵ See Caimari (2016); and Bergel (2017). As Adolfo Prieto noted in a groundbreaking book on periodical publications in Buenos Aires, “the number of titles, their variety, and the number of copies printed are evidence of the mobility of the Argentine press during those years, an almost unparalleled expansive wave in the contemporary world” (1988: 14).

They used to say that before the 1890 revolution, the two central pages of *El Quijote*, the weekly in which Sojo drew his “topical” caricatures, were often hung in the windows of stores and beaneries. The drawing was sufficiently ingenuous as to allow everyone to decipher its double or triple meanings, whether or not they coincided with the prose or verse caption that accompanied it. With those drawings, the opposition to the “unicato” government grew [. . .] In the days of Corrientes Street, the “unicato” was a mere memory and the festive weekly had ceased to appear in Buenos Aires. However, the custom of displaying the pages or covers of the illustrated magazines in the shop windows of the corner stores and the mid-block lunch counters remained. *The tastes of the public spectator had changed to some degree.* He no longer smiled at the distorted faces of national politicians; the zoological designations attributed to major figures in politics had been set aside; Roca was no longer a fox, nor Pellegrini a giraffe, nor Juárez a donkey; *the public must now be embittered by learning of distant tragedies* [. . .] We lads watched those multicolor drawings with varying degrees of interest. We were hardly convinced of the photographic accuracy of the Italian engravings, although this or that maritime or war scene might catch our attention. *Episodes of the Anglo-Boer War were always of interest to the young and old and those of the Russo-Japanese War as well.* (1952: 95-96, emphasis added)⁶

Even if not all of the reminiscences of the memoirist, born in 1892, prove accurate (a revamped version of the satirical magazine *Don Quijote*, for instance, continued to appear until 1905), they nevertheless offer a general indication of a substantive change in the dynamics of urban public opinion in Buenos Aires that has not, until recently, attracted the attention of scholars. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and particularly in the last decade, the rise of telegraphic communication and the worldwide development of international news agencies fostered a new logic of information that had a strong impact on the vigorous process of modernization taking place in the city's periodical press. From then on, almost every newspaper included a “Telegrams” column, a regular and timely section providing the previous day's news from around the world. Of course, this

⁶ “Contaban en casa que, antes de la revolución del 90, en las vidrieras de almacenes y fondas se acostumbraba a colgar las dos páginas centrales de *El Quijote*, semanario donde Sojo dibujaba sus caricaturas ‘de actualidad.’ El dibujo era suficientemente ingenuo como para que todos le hallaran su doble o triple intención, concordara o no con el epígrafe en prosa o verso. La oposición al gobierno ‘del unicato’ crecía con aquellos dibujos [. . .] En los días estos de la calle Corrientes, ‘el unicato’ era un recuerdo y el semanario festivo había dejado de aparecer en Buenos Aires, pero subsistía la costumbre de exponer en las vidrieras de los almacenes de esquina y en las cantinas de la media cuadra, las hojas o tapas de las revistas ilustradas. El gusto del espectador gratuito había cambiado un tanto. Ya no sonreía con la cara deformada del político nacional; ya se habían dejado de lado las denominaciones zoológicas aplicados a los principales actores de la política; ya Roca no era el zorro, ni Pellegrini la jirafa, ni Juárez un burrito; ahora el público debía amargarse enterándose de las tragedias lejanas [...] Los muchachos veíamos aquellos dibujos coloreados con diferentes grados de interés. Dificilmente se nos convencía de la exactitud fotográfica de los grabados italianos, aunque nos llamaba un poco la atención ésta o la otra escena marítima o guerrera. Los episodios de la guerra anglo-bóer siempre tuvieron su interés para chicos y grandes; volvieron a tenerlos los que se referían a la guerra ruso-japonesa.”

complex movement of accelerating global connectivity had its internal hierarchies and preferred topics. As Lila Caimari pointed out in a seminal study on the rhythms and formats guiding this process, “the new global news market granted primacy to war news” (2018: 93).⁷ This is not surprising given that during the period described by Eric Hobsbawm as the “age of Empire,” the spread of telegraphic communication was in large part stimulated by international skirmishes and the advancement of colonial enterprises, while from the standpoint of the rapidly expanding field of news consumers, news stories of war aroused particular interest. All of this helps explain why, when evoking the “topical” events he remembers from his childhood, González Arrili mentions the impact generated by the Anglo-Boer (1899-1902) and Russo-Japanese (1904-1905) conflicts in Buenos Aires.

Throughout the twentieth century, and particularly in the second half, the nineteen-month war between Russia and Japan in 1904-1905 generated limited retrospective interest. Overshadowed by the two great world conflicts that followed and silenced for a number of reasons in the national narratives of the dueling countries, it was not unusual for historical accounts to feature only a few brief lines regarding this major event of the twentieth century (Kowner 2007: 2-4).⁸ This marginal positioning was profoundly re-examined in the historiographic field on the occasion of its centennial. And although the term “World War Zero” may be problematic,⁹ it is unquestionable that, due to its spectacular overtones and the various mechanisms it triggered on different scales and dimensions, the war represented a conflict of profound national and global repercussions. To begin with, it was the armed confrontation of two countries that had developed tensions as a result of their respective expansive imperial tendencies, in an area that in the following decades would become the scene of geopolitical disputes of global relevance. But while Japan’s resounding victory in the war exacerbated its militaristic impulses and hegemonic ambitions over an extensive area of the Pacific, in Russia the war hastened the social and political breakdown of the tsarist monarchy, sparked in 1905 by revolutionary episodes that foreshadowed those that would follow twelve years later. The Russian war debacle also had a serious impact on the balance of power in Europe and fostered the hegemonic expectations of Germany, a ramification that, although not unambiguous, would come to fruition

⁷ This primacy, the author adds, challenged the Eurocentric tendency of the news insofar as it resulted in “an unprecedented decentralization of the geography of international news, with information from the Balkans, Asia, Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines” (98).

⁸ The war, according to Rotem Kowner -one of its most renowned historians-, underwent long decades of “historiographic amnesia” (2007: 3).

⁹ Menning et al. (2005-2007).

in 1914.¹⁰ On the other hand, the war offered an opportunity for the United States to gain ascendancy in the region, thanks to its leading role in peace negotiations through the Treaty of Portsmouth (which earned American President Theodore Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906). Nevertheless, the outcome of the confrontation marked the beginning of an era of diplomatic intrigue and competition over the dominance of the Pacific, which decades later would culminate in Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima. Additionally, the conflict was followed by a legion of military correspondents and observers from various locations who sought to draw useful lessons from the weaponry and tactics employed by the warring forces (particularly from the veritable sensation caused by the Japanese conquests in successive battles, especially naval ones) (Kowner, 2006: 17).

Yet it was in the public opinion of the colonized countries of Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa, that the worldwide effects of the war were to be felt most acutely, as much in terms of contemporary perceptions as later reflections on its significance for world history. The unexpected Japanese military triumph was immediately seen as the first victory of an Asian people (the “yellow race”) over a country that in the East was associated with Europe, in an event that in the midst of the age of Empire provided a significant practical refutation of established cultural hierarchies and standards of civilization. In countries such as India, China, Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Turkey, the conflict’s resolution was received with enthusiasm and sparked nationalist, anti-colonialist, and/or pan-Asianist sentiments (Aydin, 2007; Mishra, 2012: 1-11). In the years that followed, Tokyo became a mecca for thousands of young Chinese, Muslim, and Southeast Asian students and intellectuals, attracted by Japan’s successful modernization and the new respect it enjoyed on the international scene (Jansen, 1967: 107-130).¹¹

But if the momentous impact of this war is now acknowledged, its significance as a “global moment” often appears detached from the material conditions that enabled it. If its outcome produced such a stir, it was because from its outset each of its incidents occupied a prominent place in the recently emerging global news network. The surprise attack of the Japanese fleet commanded by Admiral Togo Heihachiro on Port Arthur (under the Tsar’s domain at the time) that initiated the conflict on February 8-9, 1904; the fall of that coveted port on January 2, 1905, after long months of siege; and the decisive naval battle of Tsushima at the end of May that wreaked havoc on the Russian maritime squadron, sealing Japan’s triumph in the war, were some of the events that, through

¹⁰ See Seligmann (2007).

¹¹ See also Laffan (2007).

telegraphic communication, astonished readers of the press in cities around the world. This last and defining confrontation, for example, simultaneously led: German Kaiser Wilhelm II to compare it to the famous Battle of Trafalgar exactly one century earlier; President Roosevelt to call it “the greatest phenomenon the world has ever seen”; and the future leader of Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, an adolescent at the time, to celebrate the news ecstatically in his provincial hometown. As Pankaj Mishra noted, “excited speculation about the implications of Japan’s success filled Turkish, Egyptian, Vietnamese, Persian, and Chinese newspapers” (Mishra, 2012: 2).¹² Nor were reactions to the incidents of the war limited to the elite. In Turkey, there was a surge of newborn babies named Togo in honor of the suddenly famous Japanese admiral (Esenbel, 2004: 1140). Echoes of Tsushima surprised the Chinese nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen while passing through the Suez Canal, where he was spontaneously feted by Egyptian workers believing him to be Japanese. In short, the news of the Russo-Japanese war bore witness to the maturation of a global public sphere that was simultaneously inundated by the same events. However, although recent historiography has highlighted the reverberations of this conflict, especially in Asia, the ways in which its events and protagonists found their way into the daily commentary of a bustling southern capital at the other end of the world have not been analyzed.

In fact, Buenos Aires kept a close watch on the military skirmishes in the North Pacific seas, as well as on the debates they sparked in different parts of the world. For example, concepts with transnational circulation, such as that of the “yellow peril” (popularized in the West following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95), are frequently encountered in the city press. On the other hand, the concept of an “awakening of the East,” which, as a result of the Japanese triumph could already be anticipated in several Asian regions subject to colonial rule, would only take hold in Argentina and Latin America near the end of the First World War.¹³ In any event, for almost two years the increasingly robust Buenos Aires newspaper circuit presented daily news of the conflict and along with it, in regular columns in the “Telegrams” sections, a motley assortment of brief reports from various sources, generally under the same broad headline: “La guerra ruso-japonesa” [The Russo-Japanese war] (image 1).

¹² The citations and references to Wilhelm II, Roosevelt, and Nehru are also from Mishra (2012: 1-2).

¹³ For more on the topic, see Bergel (2015).

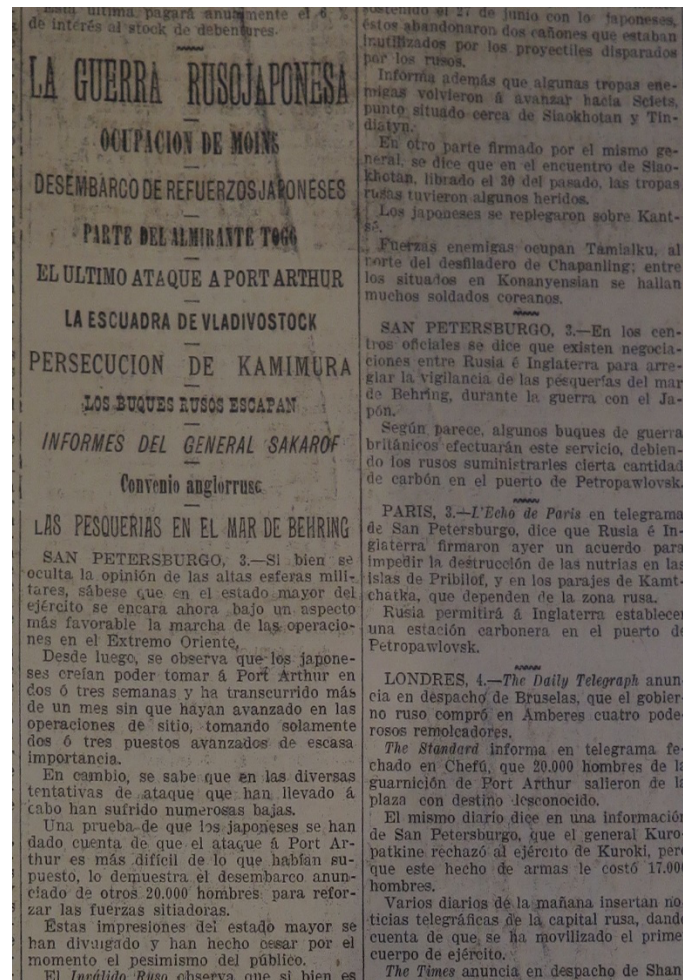


Image 1. *La Nación*, July 4, 1904. A sample of the daily telegraphic information that flooded Buenos Aires newspapers throughout the war.

The sustained presence of this conflict led to a variety of inscriptions and ramifications in the newspapers. This essay explores one of these involving Enrique Gómez Carrillo. First, however, it is important to examine the space dedicated to military disputes in the illustrated news magazines, another popular graphic publication in Buenos Aires' urban scene (as we saw above in González Arrili's recollection). In recent years, a series of sophisticated works have painstakingly reconstructed the multidimensional history of this genre of publications, particularly the effects associated with the new technical possibilities of the industrial and mass printing of images that gave them their distinctive style. In that sense, the appearance in 1898 of *Caras y Caretas*, the flagship publication of the new magazine format, marked a break in the trajectory of Argentine print culture, both by fostering a profound renewal in the relationship between images and text and by effectively ushering in the era of photojournalism in Argentina.¹⁴ Curiously enough, however, that group of works failed to consider a significant feature of this

¹⁴ See Romano (2004); Rogers (2008); Tell (2009); Szir (2010); Cuarterolo (2017).

type of publication: namely, the weight international news held in its pages (starting with photographs of events in faraway places), an aspect that owed much to the global news dynamics progressively established since the advent of the telegraph. In particular, the vicissitudes of the major military conflicts, supplied daily by the newspapers, provided illustrated magazines an opportunity to highlight a “colossal detail” or a subjugating image of these skirmishes coming from remote places within this constant murmur of news.¹⁵

Thus, in its first years, *Caras y Caretas* persistently featured snapshots of conflicts such as the Anglo-Boer War and the Boxer War in China. When proudly reviewing the reasons for its vertiginous popularity (based on a “mature study of the psychology of the Buenos Aires reader”) in the special edition celebrating its first anniversary, the magazine underlined its commitment to “art and ingenuity insofar as they can be achieved, in the service of the most extensive universal information.”¹⁶ This cosmopolitan vocation was even more pronounced in *PBT*, another successful expression of the genre launched in 1904, which promptly boasted the publication of “84 photographs of foreign current events,” while providing ample space to sections devoted to international events such as “De todas partes” [From Everywhere], “Lo raro y lo curioso” [The Strange and the Unusual], and “Cosas del planeta” [Matters of the World]. In light of the above, it is not surprising that these magazines paid constant attention to the scenes of the Russo-Japanese conflict. The fall of Port Arthur was even featured on the cover of *Caras y Caretas*, while *PBT* considered it a “great event [. . .] that deserves to be illustrated with a wealth of materials.”¹⁷ In the same issue, a photoengraving of General Anatoly Stoessel, leader of the heroic Russian defense of the disputed port, accompanied a full-page advertisement of the Lázaro Costa company, located in Buenos Aires’ Once neighborhood. “Who does not know the name of this illustrious man?”, the ad asked. The caption described a fictionalized future visit of

¹⁵ This subsidiary relationship of the magazine to newspapers was highlighted early on by Rubén Darío, for whom “the advances in photography and the desire for information fostered by the daily press have generated a need for those unusual notebooks that periodically present before the eyes of the public a vision of events accompanied by an instructive text” [“los adelantos de la fotografía y el ansia de información que ha estimulado la prensa diaria, han hecho precisos esos curiosos cuadernos que periódicamente ponen a los ojos del público junto al texto que les instruye, la visión de lo sucedido”] (“La cuestión de la revista. ‘Magazines’ e ilustraciones: La caricatura en España”, in *La Nación*, June 20, 1899, cit. in Rogers, 2008: 60).

¹⁶ *Caras y Caretas*, no. 53, October 7, 1899. A few issues later, when presenting a series of images of the Anglo-Boer War, as it did in every issue, the editorial commentary noted that it was “impossible” not to publish them “given the interest aroused by the bloody conflict” (*Caras y Caretas*, no. 56, October 28, 1899).

¹⁷ *Caras y Caretas*, no. 328, January 14, 1905; “Información extranjera: La caída de Port Arthur”, *PBT*, no. 17, January 14, 1905.

the famous military man to the city, which he would tour in the company's comfortable carriages (image 2).



Image 2: *PBT*, no. 17, January 14, 1905.

In short, the illustrated magazines were both a steady vector for the dissemination of the salient events of the war and a sounding board that reflected its effects on urban public opinion. This was especially true with respect to Japan, considered the Cinderella story of the war. An edition of *Caras y Caretas* shortly after the capture of Port Arthur included a note on kimonos. According to the article, this type of attire “has become fashionable lately” thanks to the “furor for things Japanese sparked by the current war with Russia.”¹⁸

Gómez Carrillo and the Japanese Enigma

While illustrated weeklies were an important medium for increasing public interest and reveling in the phenomena associated with the war, the pulse of the news was set by the newspapers. For example, in late May 1905, the cable sections of the major newspapers quickly gave ample space to news about the decisive naval battle of Tsushima. From the outset, there was a certain degree of confusion in the information provided, stemming from a series of partial and speculative reports that at the same time reflected journalists' own anxiousness to clarify what had happened in the battle. It soon became clear that the clash had produced unprecedented losses in the Russian squadron, which lent the air of accomplishment to the actions of the Japanese. A dispatch from London reprinted

¹⁸ “Una moda de origen japonés: El kimono,” *Caras y Caretas*, no. 329, January 21, 1905.

by *La Nación* reported that “people are snapping up editions (of the newspapers) and there is talk everywhere of nothing other than the complete sinking of the Russian naval power.”¹⁹ This news frenzy was soon followed by editorials and articles analyzing the causes of the resounding Japanese triumph. An interpretative perspective focusing mainly on the military aspects of the dispute emerged from the outset of the war through the contributions of an extensive cohort of analysts (and would later fascinate military historians). In that sense, Tsushima served as a final chapter that more than fulfilled the expectations of the swarm of followers who relished the tactics of combat and the technical advances employed in the confrontation. Along the same lines, in a series of articles evaluating the conflict, Argentine colonel Eduardo Oliveros Escola argued in the newspaper *La Prensa* that

In war—as we have stated many times—there is no ethnic superiority, nor is there better gray matter or pigment. There are superior cannons and rifles, more discipline and organization, numbers and direction. Everything else is candid lyricism whose genesis is in the heads of conversationalists and *causeurs*, unfortunately quite common.²⁰

The commentator’s tone allows us to infer that, on the one hand, discussions concerning the reasons for the Japanese victory were commonplace in public conversations at the time. On the other, it suggests that racialist and/or culturalist arguments held a privileged position in these debates. In fact, as soon as the events of Tsushima were known, an unsigned article in *La Nación*, which began by stating, “the public continues to be astonished by the magnitude of the disaster and the way in which the Russian squadron was annihilated,” ended up resorting to national characterological traits when it came to explaining the outcome. Thus, while alluding to the “irresistible courage of the Japanese,” it also mentioned the lack of “poise and leadership” of the Russian troops, who were believed to be “demoralized.”²¹

¹⁹ “Guerra ruso-japonesa: El desastre de la escuadra de Rodjestvensky. Buques hundidos, capturados y dispersados,” *La Nación*, May 30, 1905.

²⁰ “En la guerra -como lo hemos constatado múltiples veces- no hay superioridad étnica, ni mejor substancia gris, ni mejor pigmento. Hay superior cañón y fusil, más disciplina y organización, número y dirección. Todo lo demás es lirismo cándido, cuya gestación está en cabeza de conversadores, de *causeurs*, desgraciadamente muy comunes”. *La Prensa*, June 18, 1905. In cultivated public opinion of Buenos Aires, that line of analysis had been fueled from the beginning of the conflict in a succession of articles by the Frenchman Jean de la Peyre published under the title “La guerra ruso-japonesa y sus enseñanzas” [The Russo-Japanese War and its Lessons] in the prominent intellectual and diplomat Estanislao Zeballos’ prestigious *Revista de Derecho, Historia y Letras*. Decades later, in 1933, the details of the conflict would be subject to scrutiny in the military history classes of the then Army Major and later President Juan Domingo Perón. His notes on the war between Japan and Russia later resulted in a lengthy volume of his *Obras Completas* [Collected Works].

²¹ “La destrucción de la escuadra rusa,” *La Nación*, May 31, 1905.

All of these issues opened up a field of investigation that transcended the strictly military and delved into the respective state of affairs of the warring societies. And while the conflict had already generated great interest in “things Japanese” (as indicated in the aforementioned article on the kimono trend in *Caras y Caretas*), its spectacular outcome sparked even more interest in the victorious country. Soon *La Nación*, one of the most prestigious and powerful Spanish-language newspapers, would provide the means to satisfy this desire to learn the secrets of Japan. On June 20, 1905, three weeks after the final battle of Tsushima, the Buenos Aires newspaper made the following announcement:

The Russo-Japanese war did not create Japan's importance, but it has revealed the value of this ancient country [. . .] suited for the triumphs of war and the conquests of civilization. As a community still in search of its path with so much to do and to learn, we find everything concerning this thrilling example extremely interesting [. . .] For this reason, and without the slightest hesitation at the magnitude of the efforts involved, we have decided that a special envoy of our newspaper will travel to the Japanese empire to study their customs, habits, systems, and the means that have enabled them to take such an enormous leap into the future.²²

The newspaper's emissary was none other than “Don Enrique Gómez Carrillo, one of our correspondents in Paris.” By 1905 the Guatemalan writer had been living in the city for fifteen years (with occasional intervals in Madrid). There, he excelled as one of the shining names of literary modernism, both for having achieved a prominent leading role in the city's intellectual bohemian circles and for his work as an excellent chronicler and critical disseminator of French literature in Latin America and vice versa.²³ But the war intensified the path that had now opened up to him as a result of the readership's interest in Japan, leading him to become an acclaimed travel narrator and portraitist of the “Orient” in the Americas.²⁴ This distinctive trait would lead to an extensive series of books. On Japan alone, he published three volumes of his chronicles written for the press: *De Marsella a Tokio* (1906), *El alma japonesa* (1907), and *El Japón heroico y galante* (1912).

²² “La guerra ruso-japonesa no ha creado la importancia del Japón, pero ha puesto en evidencia el valor de ese viejo país [. . .] apto para los triunfos guerreros y para las conquistas de la civilización. A nosotros, como colectividad que busca todavía su camino y que aun tiene tanto que iniciar y que aprender, nos interesan en grado sumo todo cuanto se refiere a ese ejemplo palpitante [. . .] Por eso, y sin vacilar ante la magnitud del esfuerzo, hemos resuelto que un enviado especial de nuestro diario se traslade al imperio de los nipones, para estudiar sus costumbres, sus hábitos, sus sistemas, los medios que les han servido para dar tan enorme salto al futuro.” “*La Nación* en el Imperio del sol naciente: Nuestro enviado especial en viaje,” *La Nación*, June 20, 1905.

²³ See, among other works, Torres (1956); and Ehrlicher (2015).

²⁴ The Sino-Japanese conflict ten years earlier had already prompted Rubén Darío to explore some Japanese customs and rites in *La Nación*. (“Viaje al país de los crisantemos: El folklore nippon,” *La Nación*, August 20, 1894). But his “viaje” [trip] consisted of little more than a gloss of several French books on the enigmatic country.

When Gómez Carrillo set out in mid-1905 to explore the country that had triumphed in the recently ended war that had kept world public opinion in such suspense, the clichés and images associated with its culture were a prominent part of the archive of modernist literati. In his second book, *Sensaciones de Arte*, published in 1893, the Guatemalan writer himself had already devoted several essays to the Japanese artists Hokusai, Utamaro, and Yosai. The privileged position of the aesthetic imaginary associated with Japan is underscored by Rubén Darío in his preface to *De Marsella a Tokio*: “In my view, a man returning from Japan is always interesting; and if, as in this case, that man is a poet, I find it enchanting. This poet, I tell myself, comes from the land of dragons, of strange things, of miraculous landscapes, and of people who appear to have fallen from the moon” (Darío, 1906: VII).²⁵

Mariano Siskind has shown how this prologue challenges the Guatemalan writer to comply with the protocols of Orientalist travel associated with the French romantic/exoticist canon above the journalistic demands of the newspapers. Darío shifts rapidly from the third to the second person to issue this warning:

Gómez Carrillo goes to Russia and goes to Japan. He fulfills his duty as a journalist and his obligation as an artist. Beware those who tell you: “Señor Gómez Carrillo, you have nicely tallied the sacks of wheat produced by Russia and the sacks of rice produced by Japan”. Believe those who tell you: “This page sparkles beautifully” (Darío 1906: XI-XII).²⁶

As the readers of his chronicles were well aware, Gómez Carrillo’s literary sensibility hardly needed that admonition from the prince of modernism (with whom he had both a long-standing friendship and rivalry). His travel writings do not deprive themselves from savoring the classic themes of *japonaiserie*. To the contrary, they are engrossed in it and exploit their potential in aesthetic, erotic (in the case of *musume*, unavoidable for the famous seductive attitude of the author), and mythological terms. But at the same time, as Siskind (2014: 223-228) warns, that fidelity to exoticizing preciousness and subalternizing orientalism is often interrupted in Gómez Carrillo’s writing by other factors that shaped his experience of traveling to the Orient (voices and critical portraits of colonialism, for example). It is also interrupted by the journalistic account that—contrary to Darío’s recommendations—is superimposed and blended with the literary portraits.

²⁵ “Para mí un hombre que vuelve del Japón es siempre interesante; y si, como en este caso, ese hombre es un poeta, el hecho me resulta encantador. Este poeta, me digo, viene del país de los dragones, de las cosas raras, de los paisajes milagrosos, y de las gentes que parecen caídas de la luna.”

²⁶ “Gómez Carrillo va a Rusia, va al Japón. Cumple con su deber de periodista y con su obligación de artista. Desconfíe de los que le dicen: ‘Señor Gómez Carrillo, usted ha contado muy bien los sacos de trigo que produce Rusia y los sacos de arroz que produce el Japón’. Crea al que le diga: ‘Esta página brilla hermosamente.’”

In fact, although literary critics have shown how the orientalist travel of modernist writers and Gómez Carrillo in particular, encouraged a style of ethnographic writing concerned with the details of the realities they visited (Tinajero, 2003: 24-49), little emphasis has been placed on the extent to which this tendency was stimulated by the dynamics of the news that unfolded in the press. Indeed, in a remarkable chapter of *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina*, Julio Ramos inscribed the modernist chronicle within the transformations that accompanied the late nineteenth century modernization of the press, in particular the recently developed news ecosystem that unfolded within newspapers following the advent of the telegraph. The figure of the Latin American literary correspondent thus found in the modern newspaper a device that, while granting new spaces for authorial affirmation in accordance with strictly aesthetic procedures, at the same time required journalistic capabilities (Ramos, 1989: 82-111). However, whereas Ramos perceived this dual role of the chronicle (to inform/to create literature) in terms of tension and even conflict, a “struggle between authorities and discursive subjects,” and ultimately in terms of limitations on the writer’s autonomy (Ramos, 1989: 110-111), in his travel writing Gómez Carrillo tends to dissolve this opposition. For starters, he does not appear uncomfortable taking on tasks indebted to journalism. From the early days of his career in Guatemala he was already able to combine his work as a reporter with his first forays into literary criticism (Torres, 1956: 48-54). Moreover, once established in Europe, one of his most steady means of economic support would be his continued collaboration in the press. While in Paris in 1899, he formed close ties with the Madrid newspaper *El Liberal*, to which he would contribute several times a week for over two decades. Significantly, the first continuous series of articles he published in that paper covered issues related to the Anglo-Boer War (Torres, 1956: 146). And it would be this newspaper that fostered Gómez Carrillo’s initial connection with the Russo-Japanese conflict, regarding the domestic social upheaval that broke out in the lands of the Tsar in early 1905 with the war as a backdrop. Affected by the news of the so-called “Bloody Sunday” that sparked the revolutionary agitation in St. Petersburg that would unfold over subsequent months, Gómez Carrillo headed immediately for the theater of events as a correspondent for *El Liberal*, along with its director Alfredo Vicenti.²⁷ His chronicles on the impoverished lives of workers and peasants under the yoke of the tsarist regime would be much discussed by his readers, both

²⁷ “‘El Liberal,’ en Rusia,” *El Liberal*, Madrid, January 26, 1905.

in Madrid and Buenos Aires, where they were also published.²⁸ Indeed, the main financial support for his exploratory trips to the warring countries would come from *La Nación*. In the previously cited announcement of his trip to Japan, the Argentine newspaper boasted of having promoted the successful work developed a few months earlier in Russia by its star correspondent (“also sent by us, and whose chronicles have had such a considerable impact”, it read).²⁹ Gómez Carrillo, for his part, never ceased to express gratitude for the paper’s support. It is no coincidence that *De Marsella a Tokio* is dedicated to Delfina Mitre de Drago, the eldest daughter of Bartolomé Mitre (former Argentine president and the newspaper’s founder). This recognition is also reflected in a letter to Darío that he included in the prologue to that book. “Ah! Dear Rubén, I am so grateful to our motherly *Nación* and my dear *Liberal* for having granted me the opportunity to experience life as a *byōbu!*,”³⁰ Gómez Carrillo wrote in reference to the vicissitudes of his unforgettable Japanese voyage (cit. in Darío, 1906: IX).

In short, the Guatemalan writer does not seem to have had major problems in achieving a harmonious balance between journalism and literature. The title of the opening article in *De Marsella a Tokio*, “Poesía y realidad” [Poetry and Reality], can be read as an indicator of Gómez Carrillo’s desire to establish links between the two spheres. Thus, for example, in his journalistic work from Japan, he could capture the intransigence of the intellectuals who mobilized national public opinion against the Portsmouth peace negotiations for ignoring the triumph obtained in its military headquarters. Or, in another contrasting piece, he could ponder the Japanese spirit of tolerance that in the midst of the war had respected the existence of the impressive Russian cathedral in Tokyo despite the fears of some.³¹ At the same time, aware that his well-established renown allowed him to approach his correspondents more freely, in other chronicles he was also able to stray into a prose that readily revealed his emotions or his delight in Orientalist motifs. In doing so, he sought to rediscover (in tune with a broader intellectual and cultural movement that sought to rescue the *Kultur* of Japan from the flood of *Zivilisation*)³²

²⁸ Gómez Carrillo would later gather these texts together in the volume *La Rusia actual*, which -as occurred from that point on with his travel books- reaffirmed and broadened the public’s interest in his writings for the press.

²⁹ “*La Nación* en el Imperio del sol naciente”, cit.

³⁰ “¡Ah! Querido Rubén, cuanto le agradezco a nuestra maternal *Nación* y a mi buen *Liberal* que me hayan proporcionado la oportunidad de vivir una vida de biombol!”

³¹ Enrique Gómez Carrillo, “En el Japón: Antes de firmarse la paz. Las palabras de los partidarios de la guerra: Los intelectuales intransigentes,” *La Nación*, October 12, 1905; and “En el Japón: La catedral rusa de Tokio. Una lección de tolerancia,” *La Nación*, October 22, 1905.

³² Renato Ortiz describes this process of recreating Japaneseness (which included the reception of the German debate on *Kultur*) in 2003: 36-49.

all the peculiarities that, escaping the homogenizing tendencies of Western modernization, made it possible to delve into the nuances of the “Japanese soul.” Sometimes he even juxtaposed his ethnographic gaze and poetic flair. An example of this is his sugar-coated analyses of the honor and heroism in samurai culture that, while yielding to literary exaltation, also conveyed elements illustrating the patriotic spirit that had proved capable of humiliating Russia in the war which months earlier had captured the world’s attention (Gómez Carrillo, 1906: 205-221).

By Way of Conclusion

Although at the turn of the century Gómez Carrillo had already achieved fame in literary circles as well as among the general public, the trips he embarked on as a correspondent to the Tsarist empire in early 1905—and particularly to Japan several months later—had a consecrating effect on his career. As mentioned above, the texts grouped in *La Rusia actual* received acclaim from readers in Buenos Aires as well as in Europe. A version of *El alma japonesa* was translated into French and garnered applause from a wide range of critics. *El Liberal* listed them, concluding that “from the *Figaro* to the publications of the Latin Quarter, the entire press praises this great artist” (cit. in Gómez Carrillo, 1907: 1). His first wife, Peruvian author Zoila Aurora Cáceres, was not exaggerating when she recalled that “the most celebrated French writers rarely have better press than *L’âme japonaise* (. . .) which contributes considerably to Enrique’s literary prestige” (Cáceres 2008 [1929]: 46).³³ In fact, the work led the Académie Française to award him the Montyon Prize and the French government to distinguish him with the Cross of the Légion d’Honneur. From that point on, his fame as a “wandering chronicler” (as his biographer Edelberto Torres refers to him), and as a subtle connoisseur and portraitist of things Japanese, accompanied him for the rest of his life and projected him as one of the most illustrious literary figures of his time in Latin America. Years later at a banquet held in his honor in Buenos Aires by the leading literary journal *Nosotros*, writer Álvaro Melián Lafinur praised him publicly, saying: “Very few writers have become so familiar to us as he has from the moment of our literary initiation. We used to read with true delight his charming chronicles in *La Nación* [. . .]. In his exotic depictions, [Gómez Carrillo] has no reason to envy other cultivators of the Orient.”³⁴

³³ “Los más celebres escritores franceses rara vez cuentan con mejor prensa que *L’âme japonaise* [. . .] que contribuye considerablemente a aumentar el prestigio literario de Enrique”.

³⁴ “Muy pocos escritores nos han sido tan familiares como él, desde nuestra iniciación literaria. Leíamos en *La Nación*, con verdadero deleite, sus crónicas encantadoras [. . .] [Gómez Carrillo] en sus cuadros exóticos nada tiene que envidiar a los demás

While this evocation from 1918 reflects the terms with which Gómez Carrillo's name has been associated, this essay has attempted to shed light on the much less visible debt these "charming chronicles" and "exotic depictions" owe to the broader phenomenon that enabled them: namely, the new global news dynamics that flooded Buenos Aires and the world's major cities in the early twentieth century.

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