

Paradoxes of the Museification of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Chile: The Case of the Coloniaje Exhibition of 1873

PAULINA FABÁ*

Abstract. The Coloniaje Exhibition, held in September 1873 in Santiago, Chile, represents a milestone in the history of Chilean museums. As the first retrospective display of the history of the Chilean nation, it was an important precedent for the collections that led to the construction of the National Historical Museum in 1911. By examining the ideas associated with the history of the colonial era and the museography related to the exhibition, this article analyses the ambiguous ways in which the Coloniaje Exhibition mobilised the colonial past in the context of the ascendancy of liberalism and the transformation of Santiago's urban social life. Situated between alienation and identification – between critiquing the colonial system and celebrating its imprint on Chilean society – the Coloniaje Exhibition is important for the understanding of post-colonial societies in Latin America.

Keywords: Coloniaje Exhibition, museography, nineteenth century, Chile

During the second half of the nineteenth century in Latin America, various national and international exhibitions were organised to showcase the modernity and progress of the continent's nations. These events were complex and heterogeneous. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, in his study of Mexico 'at the world's fairs', notes that the Latin American exhibitions generally featured diverse displays: 'From art to science, from commercial advertising to statistics, from landscape paintings to architectural structures'.¹ Aiming to capture the idiosyncrasies of the new-born republics, international exhibitions offered important occasions for highlighting and legitimising new national images. For instance, Álvaro Fernández Bravo observed that in Argentina exhibitions constituted true 'laboratories where the nation's iconography was deployed' to

Paulina Fabá is Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department at the Universidad Alberto Hurtado. Email: pfaba@uahurtado.cl

* I would like to thank FONDECYT-CONICYT (Project 11160445) and the Universidad Alberto Hurtado for supporting my research.

¹ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 8.

rewrite ‘the national legends, reinventing history and observing specific forms of self-representation’.²

For Latin American elites, the undertaking to represent their countries as bastions of economic and social progress co-existed with the desire to project and review their pasts. Events such as Argentina’s National Exhibition of Córdoba in 1871,³ Peru’s National Exhibition of 1872⁴ and Chile’s National Exhibition of Arts and Industry in 1872 included specific sections in their miscellaneous exhibition settings dedicated to the display of objects, documents and images that were used to evidence the republics’ origins, thereby enabling citizens to trace the nations’ descent from ‘infancy’ to the present.

Against this backdrop, in September 1873, Santiago’s old Palace of the Colonial Governors, located in the Plaza de Armas, was the site for a unique spectacle. Named the ‘Exposición del Coloniaje’, this event set an important precedent for the establishment of the historical collections that would eventually lead to the construction of the National Historical Museum in 1911.⁵ Unlike the heterogeneous international and national exhibitions studied by authors such as María Silvia di Liscia and Andrea Lluch,⁶ Beatriz González Stephan and Jens Andermann,⁷ and Tenorio Trillo,⁸ the Coloniaje Exhibition was fundamentally a retrospective exercise that sought to reconstruct the colonial era. It adopted a critical perspective of the colonial period while celebrating the nation’s origin and shaping citizens’ sense of belonging.

The event, promoted by politician and historian Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1831–86) during his tenure as mayor of Santiago (1872–5),⁹

² Álvaro Fernández Bravo, ‘Ambivalent Argentina. Nationalism, Exoticism, and Latin Americanism at the 1889 Paris Universal Exhibition’, *Nepantla: Views from South*, 2: 1 (2001), pp. 115–39, here p. 121.

³ See *Boletín oficial de la Exposición Nacional de Córdoba en 1871*, vol. 6 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta, Litografía y Fundición de Tipos a Vapor de la Sociedad Anónima, Belgrano, 1873).

⁴ See Francisco A. Fuentes (ed.), *Catálogo de la Exposición Nacional de 1872. Edición oficial* (Lima: Imprenta del Estado, 1872).

⁵ Various scholars have explored the origins of the National Historical Museum’s collections, notably Hernán Rodríguez, *Museo Histórico Nacional* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1982); Juan M. Martínez and Leonardo Mellado, *100 años, mil historias. 1911–2011* (Santiago: Dirección de Bibliotecas Archivos y Museos, 2011); Luis Alegría and Gloria P. Núñez, ‘Patrimonio y modernización en Chile (1910): La Exposición Histórica del Centenario’, *Atenea*, 495 (2007), pp. 69–81; and L. Alegría et al., *Manejo integral de colecciones en el Museo Histórico Nacional* (Santiago: Museo Histórico Nacional, 2005), available at http://www.dibam.cl/dinamicas/DocAdjunto_110.pdf (last access 16 Nov. 2017).

⁶ María Silvia di Liscia and Andrea Lluch (eds.), *Argentina en exposición: Ferias y exhibiciones durante los siglos XIX y XX* (Seville: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009).

⁷ Beatriz González Stephan and Jens Andermann (eds.), *Galerías del progreso: Museos, exposiciones y cultura visual en América Latina* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2006).

⁸ Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs*.

⁹ Following a decree passed by the municipality of Santiago in March 1873, a steering committee was formed to organise the exhibition. Among the members of this committee were

was unique among national and international exhibitions in Latin America, both in its retrospective focus and in its development of narratives and forms of visual representation of the colonial past, as this article will show.

Through the study of the Coloniaje Exhibition and its resonance in the public sphere, the article argues that the exhibition played an important role in the organisation of objects and ideas about the Chilean colonial past. The collections of the ancient objects were supposed to ‘speak’ publicly, describing the history of the nation and revealing the character of the Chilean *pueblo*. Cultural undertakings such as the Coloniaje Exhibition embody cultural ideas and aspirations and, at the same time, shape them. The intention in this article is to show how the forms of ownership of the past promoted by the Coloniaje Exhibition reveal the ambiguous attitudes of Chilean society and liberal intellectual elites towards their colonial heritage.

The assessment of the ideas, objects and images that the Coloniaje Exhibition reproduced for the colonial era required the analysis of different types of sources.¹⁰ The most important were handwritten documents, such as letters sent to the regional municipalities requesting objects for the

numerous high-profile political and religious figures, artists and collectors of art and antiques. The committee was presided over by the priest José Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre (1817–75) and its secretary was the lawyer Horacio Pinto Agüero (1846–1921). Preparations for the exhibition took five months and, according to the press of the time, it was held to coincide with Chile’s *Fiestas Patrias*, the national independence celebrations that take place on 18 and 19 September. The display contained approximately 600 objects, and was visited by 3,000 people a week. See *El Mercurio*, 23 Sept. 1873.

¹⁰ Documents relating to other exhibitions of the time offer a broader context for the Coloniaje Exhibition. See for example *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872. Memorias premiadas en el certamen y documentos que les sirven de antecedentes. Publicación oficial* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República de Jacinto Núñez, 1873); Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *El Álbum del Santa Lucía. Colección de las Principales Vistas, Monumentos, Jardines, Estatuas y Obras de Arte de este Paseo. Dedicado a la Municipalidad de Santiago, por su actual Presidente: Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna* (Santiago: Imprenta de la Librería del Mercurio, 1874) and the *Catálogo del Museo Histórico del Santa Lucía* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República de Jacinto Núñez, 1875). The *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872* provides insights into the status and function of exhibitions during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a direct antecedent of the Coloniaje Exhibition, the museography of this earlier National Exhibition offers insights into the signification of the establishment of museum collections of the colonial period. The *Álbum del Santa Lucía* contains photographs of the permanent exhibition of the Museo Histórico Indígena del Cerro Santa Lucía (Historical and Indigenous Museum of Santa Lucia Hill) in Santiago, providing a good representation of what visitors might have encountered in the Coloniaje Exhibition: a series of busts of the Roman emperors, pieces of armour from the seventeenth century, and cornucopia mirrors, among other objects. Newspaper articles, primarily from *El Ferrocarril* and *El Mercurio*, are also key sources for reconstructing the objects and activities that accompanied the opening of the Coloniaje Exhibition. The study of these sources was crucial for reconstructing the exhibition’s organisation as well as for uncovering the reactions of the Chilean public to the display.

exhibition, invitations drafted by the Exhibition Board, and correspondence by donors and influential personages of the period. Among the printed documents examined were the exhibition's catalogue, the *Catálogo razonado de la Exposición del Coloniaje* (1873), written by Vicuña Mackenna.¹¹ This catalogue allows the reconstruction of much of the exhibition's display, of which no visual record exists. Furthermore, a large proportion of the collections that featured in the exhibition are on display at the National Historical Museum, thus enabling us to study the objects and images from the Coloniaje Exhibition that were acquired by that institution in 1911.¹² Finally, I also examined academic articles, photographs, and literary and historical works of the period to reconstruct the genealogy of the Coloniaje Exhibition, including the ideas that the exhibition reproduced about the Chilean colonial past.

The Rise of Historical Collections

A certain taste for the Fine Arts has recently awoken among us. It has forced us to confess that not all the luxury items that decorated the halls of the colonial era deserved to be transformed into firewood or left for the moths in a filthy corner.¹³

Miguel Luis Amunátegui, 1849

In 1849, Chilean historian and politician Miguel Luis Amunátegui (1828–88) described the emergence of the historical value of colonial relics as the unprecedented appearance of a 'true taste' among his contemporaries. This new passion for collecting objects from the Independence and colonial eras stimulated the formation of the first historical collections in the country. The agents of this transformation, motivated by the need to exhibit national history, were generally perceptive collectors of art objects, relics and historical documents. Two such were Pedro Palazuelos (1800–51) and José Larraín Gandarillas (1810–53). Larraín Gandarillas was described as a 'traditional' man who was interested in the ideas of the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and who combined a love of Gothic architecture with a taste for 'adobe and traditional techniques';¹⁴ for Vicuña Mackenna, Palazuelos was 'a man whose instincts revealed a notable preference for the ideal and the resurrection of the old in

¹¹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado de la Exposición del Coloniaje. Celebrada en Santiago de Chile en Setiembre de 1873. Por uno de los miembros de su Comisión Directiva* (Santiago: Imprenta del Sud-América, de Claro i Salinas, 1873).

¹² Among these objects are portraits of the colonial governors, furniture, musical instruments, handwritten documents, weapons, pottery and everyday items.

¹³ Miguel Luis Amunátegui, 'Apuntes sobre lo que han sido las Bellas Artes en Chile', *Revista de Santiago*, 3 (1849), p. 38.

¹⁴ Eugenio Pereira Salas, *La arquitectura chilena en el siglo XIX* (Santiago: Ediciones de los Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1955), p. 8.

its diverse plastic forms ... more an amateur than an artist, who made efforts to collect antiques and furniture'.¹⁵

Opened in 1838, the first National Museum of Chile, now known as the Museum of Natural History, and generally referred to simply as the 'Museo Nacional', was set up to create a 'Cabinet of Natural History with vegetable and mineral specimens from the Chilean territory'.¹⁶ For some time following the opening of the museum, the natural history specimens were displayed alongside relics from the colonial and Independence eras, considered the fundamental periods for the historical constitution of the nation.¹⁷

Although the collection of historical artefacts significantly increased from the 1840s, efforts to group and display a national heritage did not occur until the 1870s. In 1875, Amunátegui expressed a desire to make these collections available to the public at the National Museum before they were dispersed into private collections and public institutions: objects from the Independence era, along with portraits and busts of notable figures of the nation and of America, could be housed in the Palace of the International Exhibition of 1875 following the National Museum's relocation there.¹⁸

Another important event in the establishment of the national historical collections in Chile is the Santa Lucia Historical and Indigenous Museum. Inaugurated in 1874, a year after the Coloniaje Exhibition, it hosted the first permanent historical exhibition in Chile. Some of its collection was brought together during the Coloniaje Exhibition of 1873 and donated by representatives of the most influential families of the time. Later, in 1882, after the closing of the Santa Lucia museum and the start of the War of the Pacific (1879–83) between Chile, Peru and Bolivia, Vicuña Mackenna asked the Chilean government to safeguard part of the display at the Museum of Natural History. He noted that many colonial objects, such as the portraits of the colonial governors and the Spanish regimental flags of Burgos used in the Battle of Maipo (1818; one of the crucial battles in the struggle for

¹⁵ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, 'La Exposición del Coloniaje. Carta familiar a Monseñor J. Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre a propósito de la exposición de objetos de arte, utensilios domésticos y artefactos pertenecientes a la época del coloniaje que tendrá lugar en Santiago en setiembre de 1873', *Revista de Santiago*, vol. 32 (Santiago: Librería Central de Augusto Raymond, 1872–3), pp. 341–55, here, p. 346.

¹⁶ The French naturalist Claude Gay was required to create said Cabinet of Natural History under the terms of the contract he signed in September 1830 with the government of Chile and particularly as specified in Subsection V. See Diego Barros Arana, *Don Claudio Gay. Su vida y sus obras* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1876), and Rodolfo A. Philippi, 'Historia del Museo Nacional', *Boletín del Museo Nacional*, 7: 1 (1914), pp. 13–47, here p. 14.

¹⁷ See Hernán Rodríguez Villegas, *Museo Histórico Nacional* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1982), p. 18.

¹⁸ Miguel Luis Amunátegui, 'Creación de una galería histórica de pintura y escultura y de un Museo de Bellas artes en el Palacio de la Exposición Internacional Chilena de 1875', *Anales de la Universidad* (Oct. 1876), pp. 420–3.

independence from Spain), ‘were exposed to the rapacity with which the common people pursue this kind of objects in the museum, or rather the former museum of Santa Lucia’.¹⁹ Examples of colonial era artefacts displayed in the Museum of Natural History were ‘ancient carved stones from Arauco, a piano, some tables, a portable oratory, mirrors, etc.’²⁰

An important development in historical exhibitions in nineteenth-century Chile was the opening of the Exhibition of Arts and Industry in September 1872 held at the Central Market of Santiago. At this event, works of Chilean artists were exhibited in association with agricultural and industrial products and machinery. With the aim of providing a chronological contrast between sections and groups of objects, the organisers included, in addition to contemporary paintings and sculptures, samples of colonial art. The exhibition was consciously eclectic. In the words of Ramón Subercaseaux Vicuña, secretary of the exhibition:

With all haste a varied exhibition of Chilean industries and arts, as well as of foreign manufactured objects, was assembled under the ornate structures [of the market hall] and within a few days, while an orchestra on the stage played Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, at the other end of the [market hall], amongst the paintings, one could gaze at the *cuecas* [national folk dances of Chile] painted by [Manuel Antonio] Caro [1835–1903] in Valparaiso, which drew the attention of the public.²¹

Another well-visited work at this Exhibition of Arts and Industry was an iconic statue of Saint Sebastian, originally exhibited in the church of Bucalemu and subsequently transferred to the temple of Santa Rosa de Los Andes.

The display of historical objects at the Coloniaje Exhibition endeavoured not only to narrate the history of the young Chilean nation, but also to establish awareness of what were deemed past mistakes. As stated in the Coloniaje Exhibition catalogue, this event sought to be ‘a useful and systematic catalogue’, through the chronological contrast of objects, so as ‘to study colonialism in its innermost depth and darkest gloom’.²²

¹⁹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, “‘Trofeos tomados al ejército aliado en combates librados durante la guerra. Santiago 8 de octubre de 1882”, Carta al Señor Ministro de Guerra y Marina de Chile’, in Pascual Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico. Tomos I y II. Documentos inéditos* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1982), p. 370.

²⁰ Philippi, ‘Historia del Museo Nacional’, p. 46.

²¹ Ramón Subercaseaux, *Memorias de ochenta años. Recuerdos personales, críticas, reminiscencias históricas, viajes, anécdotas (1881–1886)*, vol. 1, 2nd edn (Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1936), p. 238. Ramón Subercaseaux Vicuña (1854–1927) was a painter and Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna’s cousin and brother-in-law.

²² Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. vii.

Redeeming the Colonial Past

Ah, gentlemen! Nothing can sweeten the feeling caused by contemplation of the colonial legacy and meditation on the colonial history of Spanish America. The Kingdom of Chile was perhaps one of the most advanced societies in the Americas and yet, when we try to put it before our eyes, we see only furniture, tapestries, portraits, genealogies, costumes!²³

The review of the colonial past through historical reconstruction is an important feature of the discourse of liberal intellectuals in different parts of Latin America. Francisco Colom González notes that, during the second half of the nineteenth century, many liberal intellectuals and politicians in Latin America – Juan Bautista Alberdi in Argentina, Francisco Bilbao and José Victorino Lastarria in Chile, José María Samper in Colombia and Carlos María Bustamante in Mexico – evinced hostility towards their Spanish heritage.²⁴

In Chile, liberal intellectuals such as Francisco Bilbao (1823–65), José Victorino Lastarria (1817–88), Amunátegui and historian Diego Barros Arana (1830–1907) were concerned that the Independence project had not flourished during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to these intellectuals, the colonial ‘plague’ of Latin American countries was still alive in society and could be seen in the proliferation of ignorance, superstition and sharing of influence between the political powers and the educational and religious elite. For instance, in a letter to Amunátegui, Barros Arana averred: ‘It is essential that from now on, each of us contributes with all his might to fight the reign of superstition and error and we must do it frankly and with resolution.’²⁵

According to Lastarria, it was important to judge the colonial era through its own artefacts and documents. The purpose was to deploy the historical relics in an ‘objective’ manner, enacting a retrospective exercise and respecting an ‘order of events’.²⁶ During the second half of the nineteenth century, many intellectuals and members of the liberal elite had experienced voluntary or enforced exile in Europe, and they saw it as their role to educate and disseminate what were considered true ‘ways of civilisation’. This experience was

²³ *El Ferrocarril*, 9 Oct. 1873.

²⁴ Francisco Colom González, ‘El hispanismo reaccionario. Catolicismo y nacionalismo en la tradición anti-liberal española’, in Francisco Colom González and Ángel Rivero (eds.), *El altar y el trono. Ensayos sobre el catolicismo político iberoamericano* (Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos, 2006).

²⁵ Diego Barros Arana, ‘Carta de Diego Barros Arana a Miguel Luis Amunátegui’, Santiago, 1873. Biblioteca Nacional, Sala Medina. Archivos Documentales, Caja 56, Doc. 821.

²⁶ José Victorino Lastarria, ‘Investigaciones sobre la influencia social de la conquista y del sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile. Memoria presentada por J. V. Lastarria el 22 de septiembre de 1844 en cumplimiento del artículo 28 de la ley de 19 de noviembre de 1842’, *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* (1843–4), pp. 199–271.

often contrasted with popular traditions such as folk dances and entertainments associated with the colonial past and relegated to peripheral, rural and urban contexts such as *chinganas* and *ranchos*.²⁷

In the eyes of the elite, popular entertainments were retrograde ‘colonial customs’. The durability of such ways of life showed how important it was to ‘regenerate the Chilean People’ to support the aims of civilisation and moral improvement.²⁸ Chilean writer Alberto Blest Gana (1830–1920) provides noteworthy testimony that reveals how the elite were supposed to differentiate themselves from other members of society through their manners, namely by

contact with European people, the study of their literature, the influence of trade with Europe, the ease of travel to the old world and a repeated communication with it [which] have brought about a radical revolution in our habits, while remarkable vestiges of the customs of colonialism are still present in some spheres of society.²⁹

The exhibitions were seen as displaying the path to civilisation and contributing to the regeneration of civic customs. Thus, a primary purpose of various exhibitions during the second half of the nineteenth century in Chile was to ‘give to civic festivals their true character’. In this respect, the ‘reminiscence of the glorious deeds’ of the ‘ancestors’ was inextricably linked to ‘the significance of progress and prosperity’ that had reached the nation.³⁰ As Monseñor José Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre noted in his opening speech at the Coloniaje Exhibition, this event sought to awaken ‘in cultured society the fruitful impression of the triumph of intelligence’, while inculcating ‘in the heart and the feelings of the people an awareness of the beautiful and the monumental, which is innate in man, whatever their social or political status’.³¹ Meanwhile, popular festivities (such as donkey racing and folk dances) were referred to as

²⁷ *Chinganas* and *ranchos* were precarious structures, made of branches, wood and leaves, located in the peripheral and rural sectors of Santiago. The *chinganas* were places for drinking, dancing and playing music; the *ranchos* were where people lived and slept. In his plan to transform Santiago, Vicuña Mackenna moved and closed down many *ranchos* and *chinganas* to concentrate the ‘popular’ events in a ‘Fonda Popular’: temporary venues for the meals, dances and music that formed part of the *Fiesta Patrias*. Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *La transformación de Santiago. Notas e indicaciones a la ilustre Municipalidad, al Supremo Gobierno y al Congreso Nacional* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta El Mercurio, 1872).

²⁸ Sergio Grez, *De la regeneración del pueblo a la huelga general. Génesis y evolución histórica del movimiento popular en Chile (1810–1890)* (Santiago de Chile: Ril Editores, 2007).

²⁹ Alberto Blest Gana, ‘Literatura chilena, algunas consideraciones sobre ella. Discurso de Don Alberto Blest Gana en su incorporación a la Facultad de Humanidades, leído en la sesión del 3 de enero de 1861’, *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* (1861), available at www.anales.uchile.cl/index.php/ANUC/article/viewFile/3177/3089 (last access 17 Nov. 2017).

³⁰ *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872*, p. vii.

³¹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (ed.), *Discurso de Monseñor Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre; de don Horacio Pinto Agüero en la inauguración de la exposición del coloniaje en septiembre de 1873* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta del Sud-América, 1873), p. vii.

‘ephemeral’ and ‘grotesque’.³² The Chilean exhibitions of the second half of the nineteenth century were designed to reveal the ‘progressive development’ of the productive forces of the country and the transformation of urban forms of sociability in relation to culture, art, history and the city of Santiago.

The exhibitions were often organised to celebrate the Chile’s *Fiestas Patrias*, the national independence celebrations that take place on 18 and 19 September, alongside other activities of collective significance. For instance, among the activities linked to the historical displays, there were concert performances, fireworks and military parades staged at different places in Santiago. The locations involved were significant urban sites, such as the Plaza de Armas, the Cathedral, the Plaza de la Moneda and Santa Lucia Hill, and all were on the routes leading to the Coloniaje Exhibition itself.³³

According to the newspaper *El Ferrocarril*, the celebrations of 18 September 1873 opened with a march by the National Guard and continued with the celebration of a mass of thanksgiving.³⁴ Then, in the Plaza de la Moneda, a military parade took place before the President of the Republic, and a new ‘people’s theatre’ was established, followed by one of the most popular events: the grand fireworks above Santa Lucia Hill. These grand occasions were a prelude to more exclusive and elitist events, such as a performance of Verdi’s opera *Un ballo in maschera*, with the characters dressed in Chilean national costume.³⁵ Finally, there was a great parade with floats, electric lights and fireworks. The newspaper trumpeted that everyone could end the celebration with a visit to the Coloniaje Exhibition.

In his analysis of the development of exhibitions, fairs and museums in Britain, north America and Australia, Tony Bennett observes that these institutions are involved in ‘the practice of “showing and telling”’; they ‘regulate the performative aspects of their visitors’ conduct’.³⁶ Visits to the Coloniaje Exhibition invited spectators simultaneously to ‘contemplate’, to ‘study’ and to ‘enjoy’ a ‘moment of pleasure and instruction’. The importance conferred on these experiences was related to the need to show the extent to which the country possessed its own history. In this respect, the Puerto Rican philosopher and essayist Eugenio María de Hostos (1839–1903), who lived in Chile for ten years, highlighted that, through the

³² *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872*, p. vii.

³³ See Recaredo Santos Tornero, *Chile ilustrado: Guía descriptiva del territorio de Chile, de las capitales de Provincia, de los puertos principales* (Valparaíso: Librerías i Agencias del Mercurio, 1872), for descriptions of all these sites.

³⁴ *El Ferrocarril*, 18 Sept. 1873.

³⁵ The political significance of the opera will not have been lost on the audience. *Un ballo in maschera* originally depicted the assassination of King Gustav of Sweden; Verdi was obliged by the Italian censors to change the setting so that the version that was performed in Santiago in 1873 would have been the one set in colonial Boston.

³⁶ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

Coloniaje Exhibition, ‘Chile learned how little she owed to the Colonial system, and how far she had come from it since Independence and thanks to Independence.’³⁷

Inside the museum spaces, the theme of the colonial era was developed through contrasting diverse objects. These objects were exhibited as indexes of technological and moral development, which supposedly marked the transition from the era of ‘slavery’ to the beginning of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom’. Writer, politician and president of the 1872 Exhibition of Arts and Industry Guillermo Matta (1829–99) stated that, through the contrast of artistic, industrial and historical objects, ‘the last vestiges of colonialism have disappeared’: ‘By glorifying the arts and industry, we have emancipated the citizen and glorified the Republic.’³⁸

Following an evolutionary principle of organisation, namely from the very simple to the highly complex, from the ancient to the modern, the Coloniaje Exhibition presented an historical tour from the Conquest (1541) to the government of Manuel Bulnes (1849). It aimed, on the one hand, to create a path through time and, on the other, to critique the Coloniaje – the colonial era – emphasising the transformation of society as it advanced towards ‘progress’.

Part of the redemption of the past prompted by the Coloniaje Exhibition was based on the idea of a general lack of memory of the people with respect to the achievements of Independence. According to a speech by Horacio Pinto Agüero, Secretary of the Board of Directors of the exhibition, the event sought to imprint ‘in the memory of the people some lasting impressions of their culture and progress to revive in their spirit a real enthusiasm for the development of the motherland’,³⁹ whilst Vicuña Mackenna highlighted the need

to group these little known treasures, to classify these humble but significant tools, in a word, to rearrange the outer life of the colonial world in its own clothes, to use research and classification in order to bring it back to life for a short time and display it before the eyes of an intelligent but all too forgetful people.⁴⁰

As stated above by Vicuña Mackenna, the organisation of the exhibition was designed to exhibit the colonial era ‘in its own clothes’: the organisers hoped that it would reflect the forms of sociability of the colonial era, so as to reveal

³⁷ Eugenio María de Hostos, ‘Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna’, in *Moral social. Sociología* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1982), p. 282.

³⁸ Guillermo Matta at the opening ceremony. *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872*, p. xxiii.

³⁹ Monseñor Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre and Horacio Pinto Agüero, *Discursos* (Santiago: Imprenta del Sud-América de Claro y Salinas, 1873), p. 8.

⁴⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, ‘La Exposición del Coloniaje. Carta familiar’, p. 343.

the ‘true character’ of the young Republic and its founders. As we shall see, this entailed contradictions and paradoxes.

The Coloniaje Exhibition as the Character and Childhood of the Nation

Following a timeline from the Conquest to the first year of the government of Manuel Bulnes, the Coloniaje Exhibition was based on approximately 600 objects classified into the following groups: (1) historical and family portraits; (2) furniture and carriages; (3) costumes and tapestries; (4) antique objects of worship; (5) civil ornaments; (6) household items; (7) jewellery, brooches and decorations; (8) numismatic collections; (9) pre-conquest indigenous tools, exhibited as scientific specimens; (10) objects of Chilean colonial industry; (11) weapons; and (12) manuscripts, autographs from the colonial era up till 1820, family trees. Specimens that arrived late and for which space could not be found ‘in other sections’ were grouped under the category of ‘miscellaneous objects’.⁴¹

The catalogue of the exhibition states that the former Palace of the Colonial Governors of the Plaza de Armas was specially prepared to host the exhibition. The palace was built between 1709 and 1716 by Governor Juan Andrés de Ustáriz (1656–1718) and located beside the Real Audiencia (Royal Audience, or highest appellate court). In a ‘resurrection from the dead’,⁴² the building, which had gathered considerable dust since the Colonial Age, was to be ‘dressed in exquisite finery’ for the *Fiestas Patrias*.⁴³ Seeking to reproduce the colonial past of the nation, the façade of the palace was restored for the occasion with government funds,⁴⁴ and the interior was ‘painted in the [Spanish] colours, red and yellow’.⁴⁵ Through a tour of the halls of the palace, the museography of the exhibition aimed ‘to transport the visitor from the colonial period to the first days of the Republic’.⁴⁶

In his inaugural speech, printed in *El Ferrocarril* on Thursday, 18 September 1873, Monseñor Eyzaguirre emphasised that the exhibition reflected the different phases that the nation had experienced, showing specifically how

⁴¹ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. viii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. iii. This building (now known as ‘Correos de Chile’), adjacent to the Intendencia (Government Palace of the City) of Santiago, now the National Historical Museum, is also referred to as the Palace of the Captains General.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Un año en la Intendencia de Santiago. Lo que es la capital y lo que debería ser. Memoria leída a la Municipalidad de Santiago en su sesión de instalación el 5 de mayo de 1873* (Santiago: Imprenta Tornero y Garfias, 1873), p. 148.

⁴⁵ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. iv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the humble tableware pottery, sent from Spain at great cost, was replaced by rich gold and silver utensils made in the country. The simple paintings from Quito or Cuzco were replaced by family portraits that were hung in the reception rooms. Coaches and carriages came to replace the mules and horses on which colonial officials and gentlemen took their walks on high days.⁴⁷

Vicuña Mackenna proclaimed the exhibition to be representative of the ‘cultured governments and the advanced peoples of Europe’, evoking admiration in the same way as the great historical museums, such as the British Museum and the Royal Armoury of Madrid. It was a foundation event launched to show the advances achieved by the nation through the historical contrast between what was described as the ‘inertia’ of the past and the ‘vigorous’ vitality of the present.⁴⁸ In the words of the historian, the organisation of the exhibition was comparable to the work of a naturalist, who

with wisdom and patience, [and working] with mutilated remains [that have been] reduced to dust and [the] fragments of beings from other times, manages to create a perfect skeleton and to deduce from this jumble of bones the organic life, the activities and even the peaceful and ferocious habits of the beast to which they belonged. In this way might we resurrect the colonial era with its narrow-mindedness and its generous opulence, its moral nostalgia and its poverty of means, and to exhibit its skeleton clothed in its own clothes and shabby rags in the light of the civilisation that today vivifies and magnifies us.⁴⁹

As with the Exhibition of Arts and Industry of 1872, a main aim of the Coloniaje Exhibition was to reflect the national character through a revision of national history. How, however, was the idea of character understood? In 1853, during his trip to Mexico and North America, Vicuña Mackenna defined the notion of ‘character’ as the manifestation of an identity and an origin that persist over time, thereby marking the present and the future of a community. Thus, referring to the National Museum of Mexico, the Chilean historian affirmed: ‘On Thursday the museum was opened [...] in one of the wings of the apostolic university. It is an interesting place, where, between the dust and the neglect in which a hundred precious objects lie, one can read the character, the situation and the destiny of this country.’⁵⁰

Eugenio María de Hostos, the Puerto Rican philosopher and essayist referred to above, further developed the link between the notion of character and the exhibitions in his analysis of the Exhibition of Arts and Industry of 1872. He argued:

⁴⁷ *El Ferrocarril*, 18 Sept. 1873.

⁴⁸ Vicuña Mackenna, ‘La Exposición del Coloniaje. Carta familiar’, p. 344.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

⁵⁰ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Páginas de mi diario durante tres años de viaje 1853–1854–1855. Obras completas de Vicuña Mackenna* (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1936), p. 74.

The exhibitions of the industrial and artistic progress of a people reveal to this people their creative power, the instruments of their creation, its periods, the distance separating those periods, the characters that distinguish each distance travelled, the concentration of all the manifestations of its life, the unity of its being and the personality that brings with it that unity.⁵¹

For both Vicuña Mackenna and de Hostos, the ‘character’ of a nation referred to the representative features of the country, manifested in the customs and the personality of its inhabitants and the technological and material elements that revealed their identity in the present, in the past, and for future possibilities of development. The use of this concept thus reflected a process of selecting and defining the representative features of a collective and emerging national identity in the context of Chilean exhibitions.

Notably, the sensory experience developed by the exhibitions had as its fundamental objective the synthesis of the history and character of the nation. Hippolyte Taine, one of the most influential French art critics and philosophers of the nineteenth century, underscored the close relationship between the ‘character of nations’ and the truth and ideal of artistic production in his *Philosophie de l’art* (first published 1865):

The greater the artist, the more deeply he manifests the character of his race. He grants, like the poet, the most fruitful documents to history, extracts and amplifies the essential of the physical being, as the other extracts and amplifies the essential of the moral being and as the historian clarifies, through pictures, the structure and the bodily instincts of a people, as he also clarifies, through written texts, the spiritual structure and aptitudes of a civilisation.⁵²

Thus, for Taine, a work of art constituted an account of the ‘essential character’ and truth of an object. Every artist should aspire towards this goal in constructing the visible, based on the relationship between race, milieu and moment. Understanding the notion of character in these terms is impossible without defining the recurrent and transcendent elements over time, that is, without recognising the ‘stable’ characters that define a nation.⁵³

The recognition of the character of the nation in the Coloniaje Exhibition fluctuated between identifying an origin and unveiling the vices and customs that were not yet ‘civilised’ in Chilean society. The ‘resuscitation’ of the colonial era prompted by Vicuña Mackenna presented an inconsistency: although the exhibition’s museography initially sought to construct a critical account of

⁵¹ Eugenio María de Hostos, ‘En la Exposición’, in *Obras Completas*, vol. 11: *Crítica* (Havana: Government of Puerto Rico, 1939), p. 56.

⁵² Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l’art*, 6th edn (Paris: Hachette, 1893), vol. 2, pp. 323–4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

the colonial era, it also expressed the idea of a common origin and a collective character.

During the exhibition, the reference to certain ‘past customs’ made through the presence and arrangement of colonial objects and their ties to the paintings of Manuel Antonio Caro produced at once nostalgia and recognition of a collective history. Vicuña Mackenna, for example, asserted that the objects constituted ‘the most Chilean, the most national, the most *lacho* [characteristic of a ladies’ man] and the most *roto* [indicative of a popular mestizo personage, an icon of national identity] [objects] ever painted’.⁵⁴ This *costumbrismo* was present in the exhibition not only through the paintings of Caro, but also through the colloquial language that accompanied the portraits of the chief personages of the colony, as well as the sale of food, particularly ‘sweets’ that seemed to respond to a certain nostalgia for the old colonial customs: ‘Ladies sell, at moderate prices, *alfajores*, *hojarascas*, *coronillas*, biscuits, chocolate, *mistela*, all products of colonial industry.’⁵⁵

Notably, the exhibition developed forms of identification with colonial images and the popular traditions of Chilean society, considered by the elite as remnants of a society not yet adapted to urbanisation and civilisation. The images of the Chilean *pueblo* portrayed in Caro’s paintings reproduced a central element of the character of Chilean society, an element that retained associations with certain ways of life and popular traditions of the colonial era. For instance, a critical perspective of the exhibition published in *El Ferrocarril* on 24 September 1873 highlighted: ‘It is well known that people – apart from the really interested – look at the costumes, then laugh at the Quito School paintings,⁵⁶ and pass by without reading the inscriptions of those images ...’⁵⁷ According to the Chilean painter Pedro Lira, the lack of the development of good taste during the colonial period ‘accustomed [individuals] to look directly at all sorts of defects and no beauty, [and so] we ended up losing all feeling and sense of artistry’.⁵⁸

The testimonies of Ramón Subercaseaux, Eugenio María de Hostos and the press articles in *El Ferrocarril* on the Coloniaje Exhibition show how Caro’s folk scenes and the colonial paintings of the Quito School were often described as coarse representations, laughable ‘*mamarrachos*’. Viewing these paintings

⁵⁴ Vicuña Mackenna, “‘El arte nacional y su estadística ante la Exposición de 1884’”. Revista retrospectiva (1858–1884). Dedicado a Ramón Subercaseaux Vicuña’, *Revista de Artes y Letras, Año I*, 2: 9 (Nov. 1884), pp. 418–48.

⁵⁵ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. vii.

⁵⁶ The Quito School refers to the output, mostly religious, of painters who worked in the Real Audiencia de Quito during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁵⁷ *El Ferrocarril*, 24 Sept. 1873.

⁵⁸ Pedro Lira (1845–1912) taught at the Fine Arts academy in Chile and translated Taine’s *Philosophie de l’art* into Spanish: *Filosofía del arte* (Santiago: Imprenta Chilena, 1869). The quotation is from Pedro Lira, ‘Las Bellas Artes en Chile’, *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*, 28 (Feb. 1866), pp. 276–92, here p. 277.

provoked smiles in spectators because they were images in which Chileans recognised the idea of a ‘collective experience’, despite the obvious defects that exposed the ‘childhood of the nation’.

In his book *El evangelio americano* (‘The American Gospel’), Francisco Bilbao clearly expressed the ambivalent place of the colonial past in nineteenth-century Chilean society:

We can therefore establish that the despotic monarchy, in all its deformity and with all its vices, was the political form under which our society was born and has developed. This was its constitution and its way of being during the entire colonial period. This political form developed its corrupting influence in our society with so much energy, since it alone reserved the right to create, to inspire and to direct our customs.⁵⁹

In the same vein de Hostos, in his consideration of the feeling provoked by the retrospective effects of the objects of the colonial era alongside Caro’s depiction of popular customs, expressed the ambiguity that these works revealed, arguing that they showed the existence of ‘a people in their national childhood, whose customs still reflect their double [colonial and republican] origin, in whose pleasures there is a mixture of reserve and abandonment, in whose character the dissolving element of mockery and the resistant element of gravity are fermented’.⁶⁰

Although the objects’ temporal setting led to a critical perspective on the colonial past, the Chilean elite found much to criticise in the exhibition. As discussed in the next section, not everyone considered the Coloniaje Exhibition a true revisiting of the past. *El Ferrocarril* directly accused Vicuña Mackenna of being a ‘false liberal’, alleging that the arrangement of the exhibition objects constituted a framework for rehabilitating the old ‘aristocratic vanities’.⁶¹

The Genealogical Dimension of the Coloniaje Exhibition

The Palace

At the time, the Palace of the Colonial Governors that housed the exhibition was part of the fire station adjacent to the Intendencia (the Government Palace of the City of Santiago). The interior space of the building was organised to reflect the original structure of the establishment, the goal being to convey the experience of travelling into the past. The design of the hall interiors was the main vehicle used to transform and develop ideas about the

⁵⁹ Francisco Bilbao, *El evangelio americano*. In Manuel Bilbao (ed.), *Obras completas de Francisco Bilbao*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Buenos Aires, 1865), pp. 368–9.

⁶⁰ Eugenio María de Hostos, ‘En la Exposición’, p. 85.

⁶¹ *El Ferrocarril*, 24 Sept. 1873.

colonial era and the history of Chile. Descriptions from the late eighteenth century represent the building as composed of an apartment with two large rooms, a treasury, a chapel, the study and the governor's bedroom. The apartment also featured a kitchen with a patio, stables for twelve horses, a barracks in an annex and a room described as 'the room of the canvases', where a collection of portraits of the colonial governors was displayed.⁶² According to the English explorer George Vancouver (1757–98), this space corresponded to the antechamber of the courtroom, where the governor typically received his guests. Vancouver reports that the walls, which were covered with glazed tiles, exhibited 'the portraits of the several presidents of Chile, from the first establishment of the Spanish authority' to Ambrosio O'Higgins, the governor who welcomed Vancouver to Santiago.⁶³

Vicuña Mackenna commissioned students from the Chilean Fine Arts Academy to follow Vancouver's descriptions and to reproduce the governors' portraits and the arrangement of the room. However, Vicuña Mackenna's account of the exhibition indicates that the vestibule described was rebuilt differently from Vancouver's description. 'Painted in red and yellow', the roof of this space boasted a large Spanish shield, painted by 'Campusano', the man described as the 'painter in oils' of the exhibition. A wall was set up to display a tapestry under the light of a lantern from the colonial period; it was arranged as a playful and 'elegant' barrier for the visitors, marking a temporary passage to the remaining halls.

Contemporary photographs and descriptions of salons of the elite show how the museum evoked these spaces. This effect was consistent with the process of assembling collections, whereby objects were part of the interiors of the halls and spaces where the main donors of the objects resided. Although the arrangement attempted to reproduce the social environment of the colonial era, the design of the exhibition – with its set of mirrors – reconstructed the atmosphere of the salons of the nineteenth century.

The interiors and architecture of these spaces exhibited different styles, which indicated the emerging cosmopolitan spirit and good taste of the privileged sectors.⁶⁴ In this regard, the photographs taken by the French photographer Emilio Garreaud (1835–75) for the publication of the *Álbum del*

⁶² Carlos Peña Otaegui, *Santiago de siglo en siglo* (Santiago: Editorial Zig-Zag, 1944), pp. 133–4.

⁶³ George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World*, vol. 3 (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), pp. 428–9.

⁶⁴ Jens Andermann observes a similar phenomenon for the Continental Exhibition held in Argentina in 1888. Jens Andermann, 'Reshaping the Creole Past: History Exhibitions in late Nineteenth-Century Argentina', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 13: 2 (2001), pp. 145–62; see also Álvaro Fernández Bravo, 'Memorias materiales: Tradición y amnesia en dos museos argentinos', *Anclajes. Revista del Instituto de Análisis Semiótico del Discurso*, 6: 6, Part 2 (2002), pp. 329–58.

Santa Lucía (1874) are noteworthy.⁶⁵ These images did not arrange the exhibited objects in showcases, as in art galleries or in museums of natural history, where a relatively detached and contemplative relationship with objects was established. In the Santa Lucía Historical and Indigenous Museum a theatrical logic predominated, whereby the interiors of the Castle Hidalgo, which housed the museum, seemed to reproduce the atmosphere of another era, connecting objects from different periods.

The Objects

The display of the objects in the *Coloniaje* Exhibition sought to establish a genealogical link between the ‘great men’ of the past and those of the present. In fact, many of the objects donated to the exhibition were marked with the name and surname of the donors. These objects showed not only how the elite lived, but also what they felt to be worthy of collection and hence their taste in antiques and art. Through their inclusion in the exhibition, the objects helped construct Chilean national history.

The Board of Directors were delighted by the success of their appeal for artefacts. According to Ramón Subercaseaux, objects arrived

in greater quantities than expected, antique furniture and carriages, seventeenth-century maps, clothes and dresses of women or men in the fashions of yesteryear, portraits, weapons, services, jewels, carved boxes, religious images of all sizes and I do not know how many more things. Many of the objects had not only archaeological but also artistic value, and not a few that were brought to the exhibition had historical merit because they belonged to the eminent men or families of our antiquity.⁶⁶

According to their provenances in the *Catálogo razonado de la Exposición del Coloniaje*, most of the objects collected by the event were authentic pieces that evoked the early days of the Chilean nation. Thus, the exhibited objects included ‘the first pianoforte’ and the ‘first ceramic tableware’ to reach Chile. Many of the donated artefacts were accepted by the Steering Committee as items representative of recent national progress, as exemplified by the objects from the first settlement to exploit the Caracoles mine, in the Atacama Desert, which, during that period, was located in Bolivian territory.⁶⁷

To represent a territory, some collections exhibited were put together from searches and requests to the Intendencias (regional governments). An example is the request by the exhibition’s Board of Directors to the Intendencia de Arauco (in southern Chile) to provide indigenous objects through impromptu excavations. Pinto Agüero and Eyzaguirre presented their request as follows:

⁶⁵ Vicuña Mackenna, *El Álbum del Santa Lucía*, pp. 13–18.

⁶⁶ Subercaseaux, *Memorias de ochenta años*, p. 237.

⁶⁷ *El Ferrocarril*, 27 Sept. 1873.

‘Take as much interest as you can in the gathering of some of the objects that are included in the classification proposed ... carry out some excavations in the ruins of the old cities of Angol, Imperial, Cañete and other places, where it is believed that some objects worthy of display can be found.’⁶⁸ This would ‘ensure to a large extent the authenticity and origin of those objects’.⁶⁹

Certain important artefacts were displayed in the exhibition because of their link with famous (and notorious) characters, such as ‘The Shackles of Diego Portales’, the Chilean Minister of State killed by soldiers in 1837, or ‘The Sword of the Lisperguers’, the family name of Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer, known as *La Quintrala* and described by the Chilean writer Vicente Grez as the Chilean ‘Lucrecia Borgia’ because of her fearsome reputation for cruelty.⁷⁰

‘Objects of worship’ were also important pieces in the exhibition because of the precious materials from which they were made, silver and gold. They were considered to be evocative of a colonial society frequently described as a world of ‘cloisters and convents’.

The Portraits

Portraits of the colonial governors and of the ancestors of the influential families of Santiago constituted crucial objects for organising the museography of the Coloniaje Exhibition, and were described as ‘objects of affection and beloved relics of the home’.⁷¹

The following three groups of portraits were displayed in the Coloniaje Exhibition: (1) portraits of families and pictures of political and religious personalities from the colonial period; (2) a series of portraits of the kings of Israel, property of the Fathers of La Merced;⁷² and (3) pictures of the colonial governors commissioned by Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna from students of the Fine Arts Academy. The original portraits and the portraits completed for the exhibition showed a genealogical approach to the past, in which the figures of the colonial era were portrayed as the founders and representative characters of Chile. For the organisers of the event, the portraits were images that could give ‘life to the past’, as if they were the ambassadors and representatives of the main families of the country; the portraits appear as complex images with different layers of meaning. Consistent with the goal of staging the past, the

⁶⁸ Carta al Intendente de Arauco, 22 April 1873. Fondo Intendencia de Arauco, Archivo Nacional de Chile.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Vicente Grez, *La vida santiaguina* (Santiago: Imprenta Gutenberg, 1879), p. 20.

⁷¹ Eyzaguirre and Pinto Agüero, *Discursos*, p. 11.

⁷² This series of paintings is currently exhibited at the Museo de la Merced in Santiago. They have been tentatively attributed to Francisco Javier de Goríbar. The existence of this artist and the precise dates of the portraits are uncertain (Rolando Báez, p.c.).

portraits were grouped and arranged as a pillar of the exhibition, making the life of the great men a model for narrating the history of the nation.

The works made expressly for the event sought to constitute true historical reconstructions, relying on available colonial iconographic material and historical sources. For example, the portrait of Diego de Almagro by Domingo Meza was based on the chronicles of Antonio de Herrera and a 'lithograph portrait' made in Mexico.⁷³

As with the great mansions of the time, the pictures of 'notable' characters were arranged in the main hall of the palace, building a densely populated centre of personalities linked to national history. According to the exhibition catalogue, the grouping of these images seemingly positioned the figures from the colonial era facing those from the time of Independence, almost as a tableau of different sets of individuals grouped together by rank and institution of belonging:

To the left, covering the windows of the room that leads to the Correos [the building alongside the palace], portraits from the real colonial period: counts, marquises and grandees with dazzling costumes. In the corridor opposite, the great figures who contributed to the downfall of the colonial era: Infante, Eyzaguirre, Las Heras, O'Higgins, Cruz and the first seven governors of Santiago: all of these works by Chilean artists.⁷⁴

It should be noted that the second group comprises generals who won independence for Chile and who formed the first government junta. These characters represent the establishment of a new institutional order that 'officially' announced the constitution of the Chilean nation.

The French writer Alphonse de Lamartine highlighted that literary and historical forms of narrating, in the same way as museography, had the purpose of showing 'the history of a small number of men who, led by Providence to the centre of the greatest drama of modern times, summarise in themselves the ideas, the passions, the faults and the virtues of an era'.⁷⁵ In a similar way, the narrative strategy of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the United States shows how the visibility of famous characters constituted a form of historical reconstruction that paid particular attention to the bodies, clothing and gestures of the characters: great men always manifest a 'pictorial or representative quality'.⁷⁶

⁷³ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. 1; Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano que llaman Indias Occidentales*, 4 vols. (Madrid: Juan Flamenca and Juan de la Cuesta, 1601–15), known as *Las Décadas de Indias*.

⁷⁴ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. v.

⁷⁵ Alphonse Lamartine, *Histoire des Girondins* (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1847), p. 3.

⁷⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men. Seven Lectures by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1884), p. 14.

In nineteenth-century Chilean society, portraits had a genealogical function, constituting images that linked ancestors with the living members of a family. They were also supposed to manifest the very ‘presence’ of the ancestors and founders of the nation, constituting important visual agents of diverse social contexts. In the description of the colonial hall of the Coloniaje Exhibition, Vicuña Mackenna notes: ‘The stateroom is at the front. It is the room that was occupied by O’Higgins, Prieto, Bulnes and by the Marquis of Baidés. It is the grand hall of the colonial period.’⁷⁷ In this sense, the display of the portraits of the exhibition was a way of bringing the colonial era into the present. The reproductions of the portraits of the governors adhered to a format similar to that of the colonial paintings. The posture, ornaments and facial expressions of the ancestors represented embodied various aspects of their characters.

The personages represented are established first as part of the construction of the national character in terms of their particular personality and link with a topos of history. If we establish a parallel between the portraits and the accompanying texts of the Coloniaje Exhibition, we find that the latter allow us to understand the extent to which the problem of character is also a problem of the construction of subjectivity. Thus, the description of the figures of the past presented by the exhibition catalogue and the chronicles of the display that appeared in the newspapers, and the places of origin, proper names and historical events associated with the characters, mark them with a personality and a rank. The portraits were founding images from which a family lineage down to the present could be traced. In the museography of the exhibition, these images were presented so that they would create a particular ambiance and justify an ‘aristocratic’ view of the colonial period. This approach was harshly criticised in an anonymous text that appeared in an editorial in *La Opinión* of Valparaíso, published in *El Ferrocarril*: ‘In that old museum that smells like a tomb from the front door, the genealogical trees are right up front, while the *golilla* [a very high starched collar associated with the court of Philip IV of Spain] portraits, and the coats of arms from the old mansions demolished by the revolution, overwhelm the walls, which are upholstered with the Spanish colours.’⁷⁸

Thinking about the portrait and how it is exhibited involves questioning both the functions of the image and its connection with other objects. Every portrait displayed in the Coloniaje Exhibition expresses the close relationship between body and ornament. Both the objects associated with the represented character and the objects that surround and construct the character through museography play a role as a historical subject related to a task or an event. Simultaneously, as if they constituted a new extension of the pictorial representation, diverse objects of the Coloniaje Exhibition entered into a new

⁷⁷ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. vii.

⁷⁸ *El Ferrocarril*, 24 Sept. 1873.

relationship with the portrait. Art historian Julius von Schlosser observes, in respect of the eighteenth-century act of collecting and cabinets of curiosities, ‘the close relationship that binds the collector’s instinct to the notion of personal possession and to that, no more complex, of the ornament of his own body. We touch here, in short, on one of the deepest sources of all plastic art.’⁷⁹

Through a distinct visual configuration and forms of interpretation, the portrait participates in a contemplation of the body, ornament and identity, establishing a parallel with literary and historical accounts, and through the relationship between gesture and physiognomy, clothing and objects, it seeks to restore certain qualities that invite spectators to recognise the subjectivities and the ‘soul’ in the character. Physical objects – costumes, furniture and pianoforte – though they could be directly linked to the images of the governors or personages in the family portraits, were also artefacts that indirectly helped to characterise a spatial prototype, namely that of the room and the entourage in which the portrayed personalities lived.

In this sense, the remark by Vicente Grez about the relation between luxury objects and celebrated personages of the republican era is pertinent: ‘As well as famous painters, sculptors and poets, also walking through the halls, through the rich porcelain and the fine bronze statues, are those elegant and fine men who are living objects and who symbolise the customs of their time.’⁸⁰ The objects of the collections of the colonial era and the costumes and jewels both projected the bodies of celebrated figures through their ornaments and visually expressed their characters. Thus, it is unsurprising that Grez referred to colonial dress as an ornament that was ‘in harmony with the social habits and the aristocratic spirit that dominated in the context of the rigorous etiquettes of the salons’.⁸¹

Conclusion

The Coloniaje Exhibition placed the colonial period at the heart of the nation’s history, consecrating it, through the language of its museography, as a starting point for constructing narratives of identity and collective memory. Accordingly, later exhibitions, such as the exhibition staged at the Santa Lucia Historical and Indigenous Museum (1874), the Centennial Exhibition (1910) and the permanent exhibition in the Chilean National Historical Museum in 1911, reflected how Santiago’s museographic narratives

⁷⁹ Julius von Schlosser, *Les Cabinets d’art et de merveilles de la Renaissance tardive. Une contribution à l’histoire du collectionnisme* (Paris: Éditions Mácúla, [1908] 2012), p. 70.

⁸⁰ Grez, *La vida santiaguina*, p. 58.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

continued to approach the colonial past in a way analogous to the approach initially proposed by the 1873 Exhibition.⁸²

Being one of the earliest efforts to produce an entirely retrospective exhibition in the country, the Coloniaje Exhibition condensed an important portion of the ideas and imagery associated with the colonial period. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the liberal project aiming to regenerate the ‘people’ initially saw these events as a genuine chance to orient civic life towards the ‘forms’ considered appropriate to civilisation. In this context, most arts and industry exhibitions sought to educate and ‘regenerate’ the people through the contemplation of artworks and the remembrance of the historical experience of the nation.

The exhibitions in Chile not only sought to transform the popular ‘customs’ at the heart of Santiago but also suggested the possibility of redeeming the colonial past, associated as it was with slavery and moral stagnation. It was largely this objective that signified one of the fundamental purposes of the Coloniaje Exhibition of 1873. Although the founding discourses of liberal thought, such as the speech by Francisco Bilbao, raised the idea of ‘forgetting’ and freeing the Latin American countries from the chains of the ‘past’,⁸³ the Coloniaje Exhibition proclaimed the need to resort to the colonial era to portray it in all its dimensions, even ‘the depths of its darkness’.⁸⁴

The initial objective of criticising the past was displayed in the chronological exercise that showed the technological progress of the nation in contrast to the ‘poverty of means’ and ‘moral stagnation’ of the colonial era. However, as Tenorio Trillo notes for the nineteenth-century Mexican exhibitions, during the Coloniaje Exhibition elite Chilean liberal intellectuals aspired to ‘reorganise the graphic representations and memory’⁸⁵ in order to give dominance to the bringing to life of the phantasms and the genealogical imaginary of the colonial period.

The pursuit of this aim resulted in an ambiguous positioning of the colonial period, an ambiguity clearly evidenced in a chronicle of the Coloniaje Exhibition that appeared in *El Ferrocarril*:

⁸² Two important examples of the imprint of the 1873 exhibition on later historical displays are the Coloniaje Exhibition held in 1929 in the Museum of Fine Arts and the transfer of the National Historical Museum to the restored Real Audiencia of the Plaza de Armas (1982) during the military dictatorship (1973–90). The transfer of the Historical Museum, the choice of exhibition space (adjacent to the former Palace of the Colonial Governors), the date of its reopening (September) and the classification and exhibition strategies of the collections reaffirmed the forms of agency initially developed in 1873 by the Coloniaje Exhibition.

⁸³ Bilbao (ed.), *Obras completas*, vol. 2, p. 316.

⁸⁴ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado*, p. vii.

⁸⁵ Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, p. 250.

Now that the magic wand of labour has arisen and spread the colonial era before our eyes, now that we can consider it in its most secret details, today, at last, when we are in the presence of this incredible legacy, it would be impossible to review it without reflection, just as it would be impossible also not to look back in judgment on the arrogant nursemaid of our early years.⁸⁶

Similar examples of the paradoxical reactions to the Coloniaje Exhibition of 1873 appeared in diverse Latin American contexts, particularly in Argentina. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–88), one of the pre-eminent thinkers of nineteenth-century Latin America and president of Argentina (1868–74), displayed a similar dichotomy in his consideration that ‘our fathers’ were not the Indians, but rather the Conquistadores.⁸⁷ However, in respect of the National Exhibition of Cordoba in 1871, Sarmiento himself stated: ‘This exhibition of our industry could be the beginning of a social regeneration that shows to the present and future generations where we have gone astray in order that they may carefully avoid it.’⁸⁸

The Coloniaje Exhibition differed from other national and international Latin American exhibitions – in which raw materials, art and technological development were exhibited along with historical objects, seeking to create excitement over the promising future of the new nations – in that its museography focused on developing the idea of a ‘we’ with references to the figures of the great men as reflections of the character of those who considered themselves the founders of the nation.

The exhibition emphasised certain folk images, simultaneously granting central importance to the portrait of the figures of the governors and the way of life associated with the luxury and the aristocracy of the colonial period. Some paradoxes related to the enhancement of what the liberal perspective criticised result largely from the exhibition’s developing a museographic language that emphasised the experience of the past and the performative quality and theatricality of the objects in the ‘present’ of 1873. The logic of the museographic language established forms of identification between the social configuration of the past and that of the present. The display exemplified a form of ‘presentism’,⁸⁹ expressed mainly by its resonance – ‘the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal

⁸⁶ *El Ferrocarril*, 9 Oct. 1873.

⁸⁷ In Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native. Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America 1810–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 5.

⁸⁸ In *Obras de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Discursos populares*, ed. Augusto Belín Sarmiento, vol. 21 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Litografía Mariano Moreno, 1899), pp. 318–19.

⁸⁹ François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003).

boundaries to a larger world'⁹⁰ – that the exhibition rooms created in their arrangement as interiors resembling the spaces of the great mansions of the nineteenth-century elite. However, beyond the visual and expository strategies, it is interesting to note, as does Rebecca Earle for the Latin American context generally,⁹¹ that the Coloniaje Exhibition demonstrated how the project of consolidating the Chilean nation during the nineteenth century was, to a large extent, entangled with the postcolonial situation and the reaffirmation of a hierarchical social configuration. Thus, the exhibition of 1873 represented a paradoxical combination of denunciation of and nostalgia for certain colonial customs, while celebrating luxury and stately opulence. Luis Pradenas, in his discussion of the development of *costumbrismo* in the nineteenth-century theatre,⁹² emphasises 'the uncertainties provoked by the transition from a social *habitus* of semi-feudal character' to a new urban and 'capitalist' sociability; in the same way, the Coloniaje Exhibition sought to legitimise the privileges of an unequal society, thereby aiming to configure the 'contours of the national',⁹³ starting with the celebration of the colonial period as a fundamental topos of national identity.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. La Exposición del Coloniaje de septiembre de 1873 en Santiago de Chile representa un hito en la historia de los museos chilenos. Siendo el primer despliegue retrospectivo de la historia de la nación chilena, fue un precedente importante para las colecciones que llevaron a la edificación del Museo Histórico Nacional en 1911. Al examinar las ideas asociadas con la historia del periodo colonial y la museografía relacionada con la exposición, este artículo analiza las formas ambiguas en las que la Exposición del Coloniaje movilizó el pasado colonial en el contexto del ascenso del liberalismo y la transformación de la vida social urbana de Santiago. Situado entre alienación e identificación – entre criticando al sistema colonial y celebrando su marca en la sociedad chilena – la Exposición del Coloniaje es importante para el entendimiento de las sociedades postcoloniales en América Latina.

Spanish keywords: Exposición del Coloniaje, museografía, siglo XIX, Chile

Portuguese abstract. A Mostra Coloniaje, ocorrida em Setembro de 1873 em Santiago no Chile, representa um marco na história dos museus chilenos. Foi a primeira retrospectiva da história da nação chilena e estabeleceu um importante precedente para as

⁹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', in Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p. 42.

⁹¹ Earle, *The Return of the Native*.

⁹² Luis Pradenas, *Teatro en Chile. Huellas y trayectorias. Siglos XVI–XX* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2006), p. 182.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

coleções que levariam à construção do Museu Histórico Nacional em 1911. Através da análise das ideias associadas à história da era colonial e da museografia relacionada à exibição, este artigo explora a maneira ambígua com a qual a Mostra Coloniaje mobilizou o passado colonial no contexto da ascendência do liberalismo e da transformação da vida social urbana de Santiago. Situada entre alienação e identificação – entre críticas ao sistema colonial e celebração de sua marca na sociedade chilena – a Mostra Coloniaje é importante para o entendimento das sociedades pós-coloniais na América Latina.

Portuguese keywords: Mostra Coloniaje, museografia, século dezenove, Chile