

## *Narrating Cuba: The Chronicles of Manuel Serafín Pichardo at the World's Columbian Exposition (1893)*

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Narrando Cuba: Las crónicas de Manuel Serafín Pichardo en la Exposición Colombina de Chicago (1893)

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This article analyzes the Cuban national narrative that emerges from the book *La Ciudad Blanca*, by the Cuban journalist and intellectual, Manuel Serafín Pichardo. The book constitutes a collection of chronicles that illustrates Pichardo's visit to the Chicago Columbian Exposition, which took place in 1893.

**Methods:** The contents of the book are analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis, situating the construction of national identity as the result of a dialogic practice between the Cuban narrator and the encounter with the US American «other».

**Results:** Through a process of negotiation with the hegemonic postulates of the fair, by which the United States traces itself as the new imperial power, Cuban identity is constructed as essentially agricultural and independent, capable of belonging to the concert of the «civilized» world.

**Conclusions:** The discourse of *Cubanness* that Pichardo exhibits in his chronicles is a result of a process of negotiation of the place that Cuba ought to occupy in modernity, reflecting practices of submission and resistance to the dominant ideologies circulating at the fair.

**KEYWORDS:** Cuba; World's Columbian Exposition; national identity; *La Ciudad Blanca*; discourse analysis

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Este artículo analiza la construcción discursiva que Manuel Serafín Pichardo, un periodista e intelectual cubano, hace de la identidad cubana, a través de sus crónicas publicadas en el libro *La Ciudad Blanca*. Las crónicas narran la visita de Pichardo a la Feria Colombina de Chicago, que tuvo lugar en 1893.

**Métodos:** Se exploran los contenidos del libro a través del Análisis Crítico del Discurso, situando la construcción de la identidad nacional como resultado de una práctica dialógica entre el narrador cubano y el encuentro con el «otro» estadounidense.

**Resultados:** A través de un proceso de negociación con los postulados hegemónicos de la feria, por la que los Estados Unidos se traza a sí mismo como la nueva potencia imperial, la identidad cubana es construida como esencialmente agricultora e independiente, capaz de pertenecer al concierto del mundo «civilizado».

**Conclusiones:** El discurso de Cubanidad que Pichardo exhibe en sus crónicas representa un ejercicio de negociación del lugar que a Cuba le toca pertenecer en el mundo moderno a través de procesos de sumisión y resistencia a la ideología de la feria.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Cuba; Exposición Universal de Chicago; identidad nacional; *La Ciudad Blanca*; análisis del discurso

## CONTRIBUCIÓN DE AUTORÍA

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## INTRODUCTION

In the year 1893 one of the most prominent universal exhibitions of the nineteenth century took place: the Chicago's Columbian Exposition. This fair, held to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas has been widely perceived as a great symbolic act, signaling «America's new position on the world stage, and its role as the burgeoning economic and political superpower» (Domosh, 2002: 181). The Columbian exhibition and the Cuban participation in the fair were documented in the writings of Manuel Serafín Pichardo, a Cuban journalist and intellectual, who described his impressions of his visit to Chicago in a series of chronicles that would later be collected in a book entitled *La Ciudad Blanca* (1894) and made available to a Cuban readership. Finding himself in a spatiality foreign to Cuba and through his encounter with US American culture, Pichardo engages in a dialogic practice between the US American «other» and himself, through which he constructs his own version of Cuban identity in his writings. Despite the fact that the hegemonic discourse of modernity circulating at the fair was that of a world dominated by the figure of the United States, Pichardo is able to negotiate with these ideological imperatives, at times subduing, adapting or resisting US American representations of reality in the unfolding of his own vision of modernity and *Cubanness*.

With the latter in mind, this paper aims to answer the following question: What is the national narrative that emerges from the book *La Ciudad Blanca* and how does this discursive identity arise from a dialogic practice with the US American «other»? To

achieve this, this work aims to draw parallelisms and dissonances between the national discourse enunciated by Pichardo in *La Ciudad Blanca*, and the imaginaries of modernity that the United States attempted to expose at the fair.

The chosen methodology is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As Meyer and Wodak observe due to its constitutive capacity, the discourse «helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo» and in the same way «contributes to transforming it» (2009: 6). Due to the implicit power relations in world fairs, this methodological approach is highly relevant to the topic, for universal exhibitions were scenarios in which host nations discursively produced and legitimated their own versions of reality. Certainly, these visions were marked by hierarchical ways of perceiving the world, in which industrialized countries and their populations were portrayed as superior to peripheral nations. When analyzing the contents of *La Ciudad Blanca* from a critical perspective, it is possible to identify the ways in which the book's national narrative reproduces and legitimizes the power relations of the fair, or rather resists to assume the subordinate position attributed to Cuba in the modern world.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **World's Fairs as Arenas for the Construction of National Identities**

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century, universal expositions were major events that attracted representatives of virtually all nations of the world to celebrate the latest advances in science and technology, art and culture, and ideological notions such as free commerce and progress. Countries from every continent came to these gatherings to flaunt their national state of «progress», their natural resources, the history and skills of their people and their expectations for the future. But beyond being mere displays of material culture, universal expositions were sites of contestation in which the elites of the participating nations engaged in a heated ideological competition to define the shape of the modern world and the position they would occupy in it.

Universal expositions were platforms for defining modernity, which in turn emerged from modern ways of perceiving the world. One of these modern ways was the belief that the whole world could be conceived as an objective truth, capable of being represented in its entirety as if it were a «picture», or in the words of Timothy Mitchell «the world was to be grasped as if it were itself an exhibition» (as cited in Macdonald, 2010: 10). Thus, world fairs were considered «to be a miniature but complete version of modern totality» and reinforced the idea that for the first time the complexity of the world had been resolved and could be simulated (Tenorio-Trillo, 1996: 3).

One of the most important means by which elites inscribed their visions of modernity at world's fairs was the enunciation of nationalist and imperialist discourses. Expositions were «stages on which nations put on display not only manufacturing goods, industry and technological achievement, but also strategic and ideological conceptions of national and

imperial identity» (Smits and Jansen, 2012: 173). Certainly, these discourses were far from being a neutral and objective representation of the «national self», but rather were built on the economic and political interests of the participating elites, as ethnologist Sharon Macdonald has noted, exhibitions of material culture «are never, and have never been, just representations of uncontested facts. They always involve the culturally, socially, and politically saturated business of negotiation and value judgement; and they always have cultural, social, and political implications» (2010: 1).

Since world's fairs were sites for the contestation of power, «colonial and imperial ideologies were pervasive at these events» (Schuster, 2018: 72) and «almost without exception the major international exhibitions were sponsored by nations with colonial dependencies» (Benedict, 1991: 5). Colonized peoples were put on display for the world at large to contemplate, «they were tokens in the festivals of competition which world's fairs became» (Benedict, 1991: 5) In this way, the world's exhibitions were participating parties which could engage in a process of construction of the national-self, and in which, the tensions between imperial and colonized tensions were clearly visible.

### **Travel Chronicle as a Means of Identity Construction**

During the heyday of universal expositions, although the vast majority of attendees belonged to a national audience, visitors from around the world, especially the economic and intellectual elites of the invited countries, embarked on long international and transcontinental journeys to visit these meccas of progress and admire their wonders in person. Thus, fair-goers «inhabited a space between locality, nationality and globality» (Geppert, 2018: par. 2). Although visitors depended on the existing transportation technologies of the time, the universal expositions themselves constituted spaces from which these technologies were perfected and produced, for which world's fairs played a crucial role in the processes of globalization and the creation of international entanglements (Geppert, 2018: par. 2). Many visitors recorded their impressions in a multiplicity of formats that were produced in the context of these mega-events, such as catalogs, reports, nationalist propaganda books and chronicles.

A popular format that emerged in the context of world's fairs were the travel stories, through which the chronicler narrated extraordinary events of their life, intended to entertain the audience. These narrations were naturally permeated by the subjective position of the author and the authority of experience. Universal fairs, being events full of novelties that brought together multiple cultures in the same place, were the perfect sites for the formulation of exciting chronicles and for the encounter with multiple «others» to be described and «produced [for] the rest of the world» in the author's narrative (Pratt, 2008: 4). However, beyond being the chronicle a means of encountering and producing foreign cultures, they also constitute spaces for the encounter with oneself, for «the experiences of the outer world can be transferred to the self that is being scrutinized, thus converting the journey into a mode of introspection» (Blanton, 2002: 3).

The distance of the traveler from home and the exposure to the unknown unleash in the traveler a sense of insecurity and a process of comparison, through which the difference of the «other» tries to be interpreted and given meaning in the language of the «self». As Vallejo argues «travel writing is a dialogue – between the self and the other, between the here and there – relations which during the traveling process may become reversed and will be constantly questioned and (re)negotiated» (2004: 116). For Latin American chroniclers, the journey to the fair implied situating themselves in an alien space and a racialized body, in a constant negotiation of their position in that new setting. Such negotiation occurred not only on an individual, but on a collective level. As literary theorist Mary-Louise Pratt observes, in the nineteenth century, a time when most American nations had gained independence as former colonies, writing turned into a process of invention of the national-self. Since no other region had gone through the same colonial experience, in their writings Latin American elites with access to public platforms were «challenged to imagine many things that did not exist, including themselves as citizen subjects of republican America» (2008: 173). Therefore, world's fair travel chronicles were a means for the construction of collective national identities, which were shaped by the experience of distance and encounter of the author to their homeland and with the foreign.

#### **THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION: A FAIR OF WONDERS**

The World's Columbian Exposition opened on May 1st, 1893 with the attendance of President Grover Cleveland, who inaugurated the fair by pressing a key that activated the electrical current that set in motion the engines, machines, lights and fountains of the exposition. The fair lasted until October 30<sup>th</sup>, closing before the planned date due to the assassination of Chicago's mayor, Carter Harrison. Despite the economic depression of 1893, more than twenty-seven million people visited the fair, half of them US. Americans (Whitfield, 2014: 92). It is estimated that approximately one every five US citizens visited the fair, making the Columbian Exhibition «the most successful American fair ever staged» (Böger, 2010: 109).

La Ciudad Blanca section, a group of fourteen white neoclassical buildings «housing displays of industry, art, science – the 'high' culture of American achievements» was the main attraction of the fair and the event's most relevant visual symbol of the US rise as a world power (Domosh, 2002: 184). This section, built by the most renowned architects, engineers and artists of the time epitomized the US ideals of high civilization and its future. The dream visions of modernity at the Columbian Exhibition did not lie only on the facades of La Ciudad Blanca, but in the exhibitions contained in them. These exhibitions paid homage to the modern universal faith in progress and transmitted the message that science, technology and corporate enterprise were the key aspects that would redeem humanity from all its afflictions (Ibid). Progress was rendered visible at the fair

through the dazzling expositions of advances in electricity, agriculture, transportation technology and the display of US consumer products (Bennett, 2013).

Moreover, US American power was not only exemplified in the showcase of the great advances of civilization, but also in the representation of non-white people. The representation racialized bodies took place mainly in the Midway Plaisance, «a mile-long strip of land [...] devoted to live, supposedly authentic ethnological shows – i.e. reproductions of foreign villages and towns – as well as to cafes, restaurants, and various forms of entertainment» (Buonomo, 2014: 23). Sections like the Midway were common attractions of universal exhibitions and were the space where organizers accommodated all those elements that did not conform to their definition of «civilization». The inclusion of non-western subjects in the great celebration of progress, was a fundamental part of the narratives of world's fairs in order for Western countries to measure themselves against and assert their dominance. As Osterhammel points out: «the less civilized are a necessary audience for this grand theatre, for the civilized need the recognition of others, preferably in the form of admiration, reverence and peaceful gratitude» (2014: 826). This way, civilization is constituted not only from what is part of it, but also from what exists beyond its limits, that is to say, «barbarism» and «savagery».

Modern perceptions of the world as a resolved truth, allowed for attractions like the Midway to exist, in which the complexity of all forms of social organization outside European and US American societies could supposedly be replicated in a realistic manner. Besides being mere entertainment, these sites were perceived as educational exhibits, which conveyed a sort of «teaching» about human nature, evolution, and ethnology. This lesson was certainly the narrative of human societies organized in hierarchical evolutionary stages by which the «superior civilized white races» were in the lead, while the «barbaric non-white societies» followed behind (Rydell, 1984). This was the prejudiced view on themselves that Latin American travelers faced when attending the fair, and which they had to navigate in order to claim their place in the modern ordering of humanity.

## **CUBA IN THE ERA OF UNIVERSAL EXHIBITIONS**

In the nineteenth century, after the wars of independence that exploded throughout Latin America, Spain's most valuable colonial possession in the western hemisphere was Cuba. Besides being the remaining of a decaying empire, the island was a place offering many expectations for the future: «Cuba attracted royalists from former Spanish colonies, military personnel, and merchants, who hoped to launch campaigns to recover the empire; and in Cuba the Spanish crown hoped to recoup some of its lost revenues» (Cruz-Taura, 1998: 91). This project involved the expansion of the world's largest sugar cane production industry, which would require the constant importation of slaves to keep it going. Thus, the enslaved population turned into a substantial part of the demographics of the island as in 1840, Cuba

was inhabited by approximately 430,000 slaves, and about 60 percent of the population were black or mulatto (Hernandez, 2011).

The sugar industry in Cuba was a profitable market in the hands of a minority Creole elite, which controlled the island's economy and politics. However, the economic benefit was not without fears and risks: Cuban elites grew weary of despotic Spanish colonial measures that increased taxes and allowed them limited political representation; likewise, the growing slave population brought with its reminiscences of the 1790s in Santo Domingo and fueled fears of a slave uprising. In this context, Cuban elites began to nurture the notion of independence, some in pursuit of self-government and others with an eye toward annexation to the United States, in order to protect the institution of slavery as was the case in the southern states (Hernandez, 2011).

Although none of these projects could be concluded, since Cuba failed in its attempt to overthrow Spanish rule in the Ten Years' War (1868-1878) and the southern United States abolished slavery in 1865, the independence and annexationist factions continued their debates and fueled their ideologies on the island until the end of the nineteenth century. The failed war of independence implanted a strong nationalist sentiment among Cubans, and, as the Cuban economy became increasingly dependent on the United States, annexationism was a position from which various groups argued to maintain economic stability. This was the atmosphere on the Caribbean island at the time of the fair's inauguration in 1893.

## **MANUEL SERAFÍN PICHARDO AND LA CIUDAD BLANCA**

Little is known about the poet, journalist, diplomat and passionate Francophile, Manuel Serafín Pichardo (1865-1937). Trained as a lawyer, Pichardo belonged to the limited intellectual elites who had access to international mobility and were able to visit the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The impressions of Pichardo's first visit to the United States were collected in the book *La Ciudad Blanca*, which is the compilation of a series of chronicles that were published in the Havana newspapers *La Lucha* and *El Fígaro*; the latter, a prestigious literary magazine of which Pichardo was a co-founder (Pichardo, 1894, p.15). Evidently, Pichardo was a fervent anti-annexionist, and presumably through the pages of *La Lucha* he found a wide and receptive audience for his critical views on the United States' interest in Cuba. The newspaper *La Lucha*, founded in Havana in 1883, constituted a main channel for the critical position of the anti-annexionists towards the influence of the United States on the island through the publication of articles of an autonomist character written by local intellectuals and Cuban residents in Washington and New York (Rodríguez, 2014: 184).

## ANALYSIS

In order to carry out our analysis, it is important to bear in mind that national identities «are discursively produced, reproduced, transformed and destroyed, through language and other semiotic systems» (De Cillia et al., 1999: 153). The formulation of discourses on national identity is usually in the hands of influential actors, who compete in the political arena for the formulation of symbolic universes consistent with their own agendas. Manuel Pichardo can be considered as one of these actors, whose descriptions, far from being neutral reports about his experience in the exhibition, are charged with a strong political component. *La Ciudad Blanca* offers a narrative, in this case not for the audience of the host country as the national catalogs and other written documents that circulated at these events used to be, but rather it is addressed to a Cuban readership. Pichardo describes the intentions of his book as follows:

En medio de la atención que exigía preferentemente el gran Certamen, propúseme apuntar algunos rasgos, siquiera fuesen borrosos, del carácter, sentimientos y costumbres del pueblo norte americano, para contribuir, en la escala mínima de mis fuerzas, al conocimiento que nos importa tener de la vida y organización de un país con el cual está unido hoy el nuestro por fuertes ligaduras económicas y que puede estarlo mañana por peligrosas trabas políticas. Importa que no nos engañemos, que conozcamos íntima y profundamente á nuestros vecinos, para que en ningún caso procedamos con la alucinación que causan los dorados optimismos (1894: 17)

The discursive production of national identities «always runs hand in hand with the construction of difference/distinctiveness and uniqueness», which requires to distinguish oneself from what one is not (De Cillia et al., 1999: 153). Thus, the national narrative in *La Ciudad Blanca*, begins with an attempt of constructing an US American «other» from which *Cubanness* can be invented, differentiated and measured against. While recognizing his own limitations and the hasty and imperfect character of his notes, Pichardo offers his Cuban readership a more reliable and truthful account on US American culture than the reports of annexationists fail to convey. By discrediting the credibility of these discourses, Pichardo suggests that the United States is not the dream nation that annexationists profess, and therefore establishes a persuasive style aimed at convincing the reader that annexionism does not constitute the best option for independent Cuba. The author's antiannexationist ideology underlies the whole content of the book and is made visible in multiple occasions. Likewise, the notion of the United States as an antithesis against which *Cubanness* can be measured against is well established from the beginning of the narrative, when Pichardo lands for the first time in the United States and observes that it seems to him impossible «que pudieran existir en aquel exiguo espacio de terreno, elementos tan opuestos como los que constituyen los inmigrantes cubanos y la población yankee» (1894: 19).



As modern phenomena, universal exhibitions «turned the abstract idea of progress into a visual and corporeal experience» (Böger: 144). US American progress was made visible at the fair in the impressive architecture of La Ciudad Blanca, and the technological and industrial exhibitions contained in it. The idea of progress went hand in hand with evolutionary assumptions about the nature of humankind, by which humanity was ordered in a linear timeline, with industrialized nations at the lead and non-industrialized nations following behind. The magnificence of the spectacle of progress is the first scenario that Pichardo finds when he arrives in the United States, and which he describes in the following way:

Ya estamos en el corazón de los Estados Unidos, ya nos ensordece el ruido de esta inmensa nación mercantil é industrial, ya nos asfixia el humo de sus potentes chimeneas que elevan sus bocanadas negras sobre casas de 18 y 20 pisos; ya atruenan el martilleo de millares de fábricas y los silbidos de incontables locomotoras; ya nos arrastra el vértigo de una suma de fuerzas potentes que nos traen la conciencia de que pisamos un pueblo libre y grandioso. (1894: 22)

As the above quote reveals, upon observing the spectacle of industrialization in the United States, Pichardo falls into a sort of enchantment before the promises that industrialization and commerce paint before his eyes, provoking even a bodily reaction such as vertigo. Industrialization, far from being a material condition, is accompanied by moral notions such as freedom and greatness. Pichardo's observations go hand in hand with the mentality of the time, for as Paul Greenhalgh points out, the nineteenth century was marked by the veneration of free trade: «the idea of trade was transformed from the relatively simple exchange of goods for profit, to a concept that has metaphysical dimensions» (as cited in Tenorio-Trillo, 1996: 4). This is also reflected in the following fragment, in which Pichardo refers to industrialization and mass production as a transforming force, capable of perfecting the spirit to a higher degree, and evoking new sensations, having inhabited until then a space foreign to civilization:

Efectivamente, el hombre se siente más dueño de sí, más digno de la vida, más vigoroso, al respirar este aire sano que no tiene límites, que sube al infinito. Yo me he sentido otro sér superior, mi espíritu ha creado potencias que no conocía, y se alza con vuelo de alcón, con metimiento de gigante, capaz de tocar sin esfuerzo la cúpula del Capitolio (Pichardo, 1894: 22).

However, after admiring the industrial and mercantile capacity of the United States, Pichardo reflects on his own condition as an «other» in the host country and reflects on his own identity as follows:

Ay! pero después descendo al pensar que esto no es mío, que soy un extranjero, y vuelvo la memoria á aquel mi hermoso país de las palmas, tan favorecido por la naturaleza y tan mal tratado por los hombres .... A cada nueva impresión que me

asalta, en presencia de las maravillas que en tan breve tiempo ha realizado esta nación, me acuerdo de Cuba y lloro su atraso en todos los órdenes, excepto en el intelectual (Pichardo, 1894: 22)

Pichardo's fragment clearly reflects the colonial relations that prevailed in the exhibition. According to the postulates of the fair, Pichardo constructs the «poor» and backward Cuba behind the rich and industrialized United States in the scale of progress. Likewise, it is worth noting that being situated in a space foreign to his homeland, Pichardo evokes the vision of a distant and tropical Cuba, highlighting the exoticism of his place of origin and with which colonial powers tended to represent non-Western nations and their people.

Another way in which Pichardo makes his first encounters with progress and builds *Cubanness* is through his arrival at the transportation building and his admiration of the railroad systems on display at the fair. During the nineteenth century, railways were the ultimate symbols of modernity throughout Latin America as they «served to integrate export regions with the world market, which was thought would guarantee prosperity in the late nineteenth century model of export-led development» (Clark, 1998: 41). The notion that the railway was a key tool for achieving progress was also emitted and reinforced from the centers of imperial power. For instance, La Ciudad Blanca counted with a Transportation Building in which the Transcontinental Railroad, that connected a large portion of the United States, and which was referred to as «the greatest of all means of transportation», was celebrated as one of the most outstanding achievements of humanity (Flynn, 1893: 109-110). The exhibits contained in the Transportation Building conveyed the message that the United States had achieved its current prosperity thanks to the advantages brought by connectivity between its regions. Admiring the exhibitions of transportation technologies, Pichardo falls prey to the visions of grandeur that these exhibits convey and points out:

Chicago, centro ferroviario, tenía que descollar en punto tan culminante de progreso. Sus vías prolíficas le han dado la importancia que tiene; ellas le pusieron en el casco de su estatua el ave fénix que renace y perdure. Da grima pensar que de esas delicadas amazones, tiren, brutos fogosos. ¡Y me estremezco cuando pienso que pueden rodar sobre los adoquines de la Habana! (1894: 71)

As Yegoyan's argues «since the exhibitions were structured around secular rituals based on the belief in progress, the conviction emerged that other means of salvation existed, and that they were more immediate and attainable» (1994: 79). Pichardo's formulations clearly echo this thinking in his portrayal of the railroad as a kind of «magic formula», or «a mystical force» that if introduced in the Caribbean island would be able to change the Cuban reality miraculously and effectively. By inscribing Cuba as a country capable of belonging to the concert of «civilized» nations, Pichardo performs an exercise of resistance, as he refuses to accept the inherent condition of inferiority afforded to non-industrialized

nations at the fair, but rather seeks to build a cosmopolitan Cuba, negotiating Cuba's position in the modern world.

Certainly, world's fairs were places from which the place that nations ought to occupy in the new emerging global economy was symbolically represented and negotiated. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Second Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States, shifted global dynamics as the demand for raw materials increased and new markets expanded abroad. World's fairs were places where this modern order was constituted; however, it should be kept in mind that such orderings were strongly marked by unequal power relations between host and participating countries. Thus, universal exhibitions recreated a small-scale world divided between «civilized» and «uncivilized» nations, the former being those in possession of the means of production and the latter the suppliers of raw materials.

One of the clearest examples of the United States' demonstration of imperial power were the agricultural exhibitions. Agriculture was one of the central themes of the fair, to the extent that this activity had its own building in La Ciudad Blanca. The exposition's exhibits highlighted what had been identified as the United States' «significant gifts to the twentieth century» and certainly part of these gifts were the technological advances made in farm machinery (Domosh, 2002: 184). The hegemonic message of the Agriculture Building was that US technology had been the key enabler for the completion of the Manifest Destiny, and now, with the westward expansion accomplished, the United States was ready to embark on the same venture overseas. By attending the fairs, Latin American elites had to negotiate with these hierarchical world orderings and the subordinate role that was attributed to their countries in the modern global economic system. As Vilella argues, «faced in most instances with a lack of adequate national infrastructures, the solution for many countries in Latin America was to highlight their respective participation into the world's economy as suppliers of raw products to the metropolis» (2004: 82). This was precisely the case of Cuba, which attended the fair as an essentially agricultural country, and which occupied a place in the Spanish pavilion of the agricultural palace, where its farming products competed for space with other Spanish colonies such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines. On glimpsing the Cuban pavilion, Pichardo writes the following:

ESCRIBO desde Cuba, desde el gallardo pabellón que luce nuestro país en el edificio de Agricultura. Y á fe que me siento orgulloso, hinchado por todos mis paisanos; porque la instalación cubana, no ya compite, sino supera á las de su categoría é importancia. Parece á mis ojos el recinto de una nación, no el de una colonia combatida, explotada y casi exangüe. (1894: 111)

As has been explained in this article, universal fairs were sites of political power disputes, and this example clearly reflects the tensions existing between Cuba and Spain in economic and political matters: «Trade was still a contentious issue for Spain, Cuba, and

the United States, with the Spanish government working to maintain control over Cuban trade and Cubans seeking to trade directly with the United States, its neighbour immediately to the north» (Boone, 2011: 95). Despite the fact that Cuba constituted another territory of the Spanish crown, Pichardo constructs the figure of an independent country by referring to the island as «nuestro país» (our country) and «nación» (nation). The narrator not only denounces the tyrannical character of Spain over the island, but questions its authority by referring to Cuba as possessing a pavilion capable of competing with other *nations* in terms of agriculture; that is, of having an independent economy, untied from Spanish rule. The dispute over Cuba occurred not only at the level of the Spanish empire and the independentists, but the United States also had no qualms about showing its interest in the island and belittling the imperial authority of Spain. As Boone points out, the United States circulated pamphlets in the fair which promoted Cuban and Puerto Rican products, however, omitting Spain's name, as if they were independent nations with which direct negotiation was possible (2011: 95). Cuba's economic independence is supported by its role as a leading supplier of raw materials, for which Pichardo builds an essentially agricultural Cuba, whose export products *par excellence* are sugar and more importantly, tobacco:

Nuestra más importante producción es el azúcar; pero el tabaco nos da la personalidad como pueblo agrícola. - Tobacco! - exclaman los millones de yankees, y piensan simultáneamente en Cuba. Ellos no conocerán nuestros habaneros ilustres, pero sí nuestros habanos insignes. (1894: 115)

In his passage Pichardo not only proudly constructs the image of Cuba as an agricultural country, but symbolically outlines the commercial relations that his country has or could have with the United States in the future. However, Pichardo soon reveals his ambivalent feelings about Cuba's role in the world capitalist order, calling for the industrialization of the land. As Vilella observes, the participation of Latin American countries in universal expositions was characterized by a sense of urgency to occupy a privileged place in the modern world, so each country sought to highlight the state of progress in their respective nations (2004: 82). Thus, nations strove to show off their imperfect and, in some cases, almost nonexistent industries, hide the poverty of their territory and even disguise the black or indigenous racial component of their people in order to give the image of being «civilized» places. In the case of Cuba this urgency is also evident, as the author reflects that the performance of the island in the fair as a provider of raw materials is at odds with the prospects of Latin American countries to be accepted as part of the civilized world:

Y después de examinar nuestros productos, ¿qué deducimos? ¿Podremos estar satisfechos? De la instalación, sin género de duda; del pabellón de Cuba, muy halagados. Pero no de la forma en que hemos concurrido [...] ¿Qué presentamos a la postre? El tabaco, un vicio; el azúcar, casi otro vicio; y ambos, productos naturales del

suelo, en los que entra poco la inteligencia, el ingenio y el saber del hombre. Para seguir nosotros [...] tenemos que exhibir ante el mundo riquezas de nuestras industrias, de nuestras manufacturas, de nuestras ciencias y artes. Con tan pocos años de vida como nosotros, lo han hecho los Estados Unidos. Pero ¡ay! nos encontramos en tan diferentes condiciones... (1894: 122)

From a process of comparison with the United States, Pichardo reflects on Cuba as a land devoid of the necessary elements to have a deserved place in the «civilized» world. However, through the admiration of the agricultural technology in the United States, our narrator seeks to turn Cuban destiny around, through a call for the importation of technology exposed in the Agricultural Palace to exploit the industry:

Tan extraordinarias como las muestras de la producción agrícola, son las de la maquinaria aplicada á la tierra. ¡[...] Aquí, el campesino, no es ya el obrero de ruda labor, que tiene que sacar á brazo partido el fruto de la tierra, sino el conductor inteligente de los aparatos que le hacen más provechosa y rápida la faena. Y yo vuelvo el pensamiento á Cuba, y pienso en el emporio de riqueza que sería nuestro amado país, si, con las modificaciones que las necesidades exigieran, se aplicasen á aquellas vírgenes tierras abandonadas á su savia fecunda, las máquinas que hacen producir á las rocas estériles. (1894: 173)

Positivism was widely celebrated at world's fairs, through which the organizing countries tried to serve both their economic and scientific interests. The motivation of the organizers to count on the participation of Latin American countries derived from the fact that the region was perceived as a «tierra de misión», where the transformation of nature through science was still pending (López-Ocón, 2002: 116). For their part, Latin American elites saw world's fairs as places for the exchange and circulation of knowledge, from which they could take useful lessons back to their countries:

los diferentes comisionados de los gobiernos latinoamericanos tuvieron los ojos abiertos para observar las innovaciones que en todos los órdenes del saber y de la producción se presentaban en los recintos expositivos con el fin de aplicarlas en sus países de origen. (López-Ocón, 2002: 121)

With this in mind, La Ciudad Blanca conveniently constructs Cuba as an empty territory, lacking the necessary technology for its cultivation. Pichardo seeks to persuade his readers that US technology constitutes a civilizing agent through whose importation could allow the improvement of Cuba. Likewise, the description of Cuba as a virgin and abandoned land lacking in labor is noteworthy. This can be interpreted as an attempt by Pichardo to construct a modern Cuba, stripped of the presence of the black rural inhabitants. While not directly alluding to the notion of an essentially white Cuba, the enunciators of national discourses had reservations about including non-whites in their narratives, in an attempt to exclude those «uncivilized» subjects from their carefully

constructed national imaginaries. This was also the case of the United States in the World's Columbian Exposition, in which African-Americans were systematically excluded from the organization processes, exhibition halls and discriminated against in the staff-hiring process (Paddon and Turner, 1995: 22).

Although in many ways, as has been demonstrated in the above passages, Pichardo admires the prowess of US industrialization, his chronicles do not lack a sense of criticism and constantly challenge the position the United States sought to claim in the world as the new leading light of modern society. As Vallejo explains,

[...] in Latin America, and especially in Cuba, there was great ambivalence towards the economic, political and cultural power of North America on the one hand, and on the other, great admiration for what was seen as a model of progress and democracy. (2004: 118)

Although the United States is often portrayed by Pichardo as a mirror of the wonders of industrial society, the author has no qualms about exposing the shortcomings of the new imperial power and using them as a point of reflection on *Cubanness*.

The Columbian Exposition was a stage on which the United States sought to displace the political and economic authority of the Old Continent and to position itself as the new pinnacle of civilization, through the performance of newness and progress. In touring the industrial exhibits of the United States, Pichardo recognizes the incomparable productive capacity of this nation, but questions the role that the United States seeks to attribute to itself as a paradigm of civilization:

Ahora bien, esa totalidad de industrias ¿se halla á la altura de las extranjeras? Ni con mucho, y la razón es obvia: el progreso viene al compás del tiempo. La desgracia de los jóvenes, son los viejos, á quienes siempre parece que copian, sin llegar a la maestría que da á éstos la experiencia. El joven es rapsoda, imitador ó plagiario, por vigorosas que sean sus facultades creadoras. Todo está andado y tan difícil es descubrir un derrotero original, como nacer con la perfección mecánica que sólo ofrecen la constancia y los años. Procurar ser viejo antes de tiempo, es decir, consagrado de autoridad, anticipando los lapsos fatales con el estudio y el esfuerzo, ese es el camino del joven, y esa es la ruta de los Estados Unidos, cuyas manufacturas aspiran briosamente á contender, en porvenir cercano, con los dechados de las antiguas civilizaciones (1894: 146).

Through a metaphorical image, Pichardo equates the United States with the figure of a young man who, lacking experience, is unable to reach the level of perfection of the old, representing the figure of Europe. Interestingly, the representation of the United States as a nation in its infancy, which still has a long way to go to reach true progress, is the subversion of one of the most sedimented metaphors in the fair. According to the evolutionary postulates of the Chicago Columbian Exposition, non-white peoples were

commonly represented as the embodiment of an infantile state of the human race, which had yet to be guided towards civilization, as Rydell points out, the Midway Plaisance provided «a quasi-scientific basis for the American image of the nonwhite world as barbaric and childlike» (1984: 67). In Pichardo's chronicles, this narrative is subverted and applied against the United States as the infant party, conveying a practice of resistance and refusal to portray Cuba as a nation that had to submit to US imperial power.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented the argument that universal expositions of the nineteenth century constituted privileged places for the projection of national discourses and the legitimization of hierarchical world orderings. The Chicago Columbian Exposition was a platform through which the United States sought to construct its national-self before an international public and to situate itself as the pinnacle of modern civilization through the advantage of being the organizer of the exposition and the enunciator of the hegemonic discourses that would circulate in it. The invited nations and the different visitors encountered this discourse, with which they had to engage in dialogue and negotiate their own national identities.

The processes of construction of national discourses are closely linked in a dialogic and comparative process with that which resides outside the national being. In the case of the fair, the United States sought to establish itself as a paradigm of civilization by situating itself in comparison to the «uncivilized»; that is, the non-white nations that were confined to occupy peripheral spaces at the fair and to incarnate «the savage». As demonstrated in the article, in his narrative, Manuel Serafín Pichardo carries out the same practice of «othering» by framing his journey to Chicago as an encounter with the «foreign» and from which he reflects on and invents the Cuban national-self.

Clearly the encounter with the other takes two forms, one of admiration and the other of contempt. Upon encountering the spectacle of progress, which was the ideology underlying all the exhibitions, Pichardo aligns himself with the postulates of the fair and traces the figure of the United States as a model to be admired and pursued, in relation to which the image of a peripheric Cuba is constructed, destined to occupy a subordinate position due to its non-existent industry. However, what seems to be a mere resignation to the dominant discourse of Chicago, is frequently reversed, insofar as Pichardo constructs before the reader the image of an idealized Cuba, capable of belonging to the concert of «civilized» nations through the insertion of technology.

The location of Cuba as a peripheral country is a resource that Pichardo uses to his advantage to persuasively inscribe, in the Cuban reader, his political interests. The idea of Cuba as an agricultural country allows Pichardo to construct in his chronicles the image of an independent Cuba, free from the imperial pressures of Spain and the United States, in control of its own economy and with an equal role with respect to other nations in the world

order. This narrative also functions as a means of manipulating the reality of the nation, through which Pichardo discursively constructs the picture of a Cuba devoid of the black inhabitants that make up a large part of the island's population. Finally, the hegemonic discourse exhibited at the fair is not only subverted in the way Pichardo constructs *Cubannes*, but also in the discursive narration of the US American «other». Through his chronicles, Pichardo questions the ability of the United States to position itself as the new world economic and political power, thus resisting to the overall message of the fair.

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