

Portrayals of Nationhood within a Post-Colonial Environment: The Ibero-American Exhibition: Seville, 1929

INTRODUCTION:

In the early 20th Century Spain was suffering from a blow to her prestige after losing her last overseas colonies. In this context, Spanish artillery commander Luis Rodriguez Caso put forward the idea of the Ibero-American exhibition, in order to promote union links with the former colonies of Latin America. Gradually, and with numerous delays, many Latin American countries agreed to take part as they shared Caso's vision, and wanted to exploit Europe's lucrative markets. In order to do so, each country needed to produce a pavilion which would reflect their people's culture, identity, resources and products. The results of their building projects reflect the extent to which Spanish colonisation had dictated the ways in which Latin Americans' defined and represented themselves. I aimed to evaluate this extent based on my findings.

METHOD:

My research consisted of a number of methods. Firstly, I studied the exhibition's buildings and the site itself by taking close up photographs in order to analyse them for pre-Spanish and post-Spanish elements. Secondly, I visited Seville's Municipal Archive in order to consult primary source material (usually presented on microfilm), such as correspondence between both the Spanish and Latin American delegates and committees. This included details regarding the level of enthusiasm for the exhibition, motivation for participating, costs and reasons for absence. Finally, I spent time in Seville's University library and public library in order to locate supplementary information produced by local, national and international writers. This process often required me to slowly translate text from Spanish into English, allowing me to present it here.

FINDINGS:

The countries involved in the exhibition produced a wide range of results. Records of correspondence demonstrated that some countries were much keener to participate than others. On one hand, delegates from countries like Mexico stressed that they were Spanish at heart, whilst still heavily emphasising their indigenous roots in the pavilions they produced. On the other hand, Argentina produced a pavilion which made little reference to her indigenous past (a small mural at the rear of the building, out of sight from the main road being the only indication), instead adopting much clearer European influences. Thus, when given the opportunity to truly choose how they were viewed by people from other nations, Latin Americans chose to include Spanish influences to greater or lesser degrees. The extent to which Spain's influence is seen in each pavilion allowed me to evaluate how strongly the effects of colonisation have been felt in each country.



The Argentine Pavilion: With Martin Noel's direction, this pavilion was conceived as an exaltation of the Hispanic race (without a doubt the reason for its enhanced location and size in comparison to other pavilions). It adopts a Neo-Baroque style, closely reminiscent of colonial architecture. This was believed to represent Argentina because even after becoming independent from Spain, much of Argentina's colonial architecture was conserved, allowing it to become Argentina's 'style' in the early 20th century. Thus, Spain had heavily influenced the way Argentinians wanted to be represented on the world stage.



The Colombian Pavilion: A perfect example of how Spain has influenced Latin American identity formation, whilst not fully extinguishing indigenous elements. The façade resembles the San Luis de Potosi Cathedral – a colonial church in Colombia. However, it is decorated with Romulo Rozo's sculptures of indigenous idols – a reference to Colombia's pre-Columbian past.



CONCLUSION:

This research carries relevance today as identity in the former Spanish colonies is still a contentious issue. Therefore, the way Latin Americans view themselves today can be compared with how they felt a century ago. It is interesting that by taking part in the Expo, Latin American nations were acknowledging the cultural heritage of their former mother country, whilst also portraying a national identity, within, but separate from, Spain. This did not bring tension (which perhaps would have been understandable given the controversy of Spanish treatment of native American peoples), but instead, it brought recognition of what has survived since the pre-Columbian period, and what has changed due to, and since, Spanish colonisation. The pavilions also exhibit how keen each nation was to demonstrate its own specific modern identity, as opposed to merely belonging to a collective Latin American one. The likes of Colombia, Mexico, and Peru were clearly (and may still be) unwilling to relinquish their ties to their indigenous past. Nevertheless, other countries like Argentina, Chile and Cuba (due to a variety of historical reasons) found it harder to draw on their pre-Columbian traditions, instead more fully adopting the trends of their conquerors. The research into this culturally amalgamated architecture encourages further study into the other effects of Spanish colonisation of Latin America.

Affection for Spain remains alive in the heart of all Colombians, of whom we're profoundly linked by spirit and blood.

Claim made by Roberto Pinto Valderrama, member of the Special Coffee Mission in Europe, in *El Liberal* newspaper, Seville, 09/05/1929