

Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero y Alberto Baena Zapatero (coords.), *En compañía de salvajes. El sujeto indígena en la construcción del otro*, Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2021, 200pp, ISBN 9788491922117. Price € 29.80.

In the midst of a changing and uncertain world like ours, many societies deposit their most irrational feelings of fear and permanent threat on the imaginary subject of “the other” and in everything that seems “different” for them. Faced with the search for lost identities and feelings of belonging and contention, many people seek to build on an exclusive “us”. Such an exclusive “us” tends to be based on feelings of superiority, which make it possible to deal with those others who might be discriminated against, excluded, made invisible or subjugated for the sake of feeling safe and protected. The construction of otherness, or that foreign and external subject who embodies all the risks and dangers for “us”, gives the feeling of having greater control over those evils that, in reality, are born from the internal fears of societies.

*En compañía de salvajes* is a book that presents ten stories that show different ways and human strategies with which Spaniards and the Portuguese, principally, dealt with difference over time. Within a long timeframe that extends from the 16th to the 19th century, and in such diverse geographies as Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, the Philippines and Morocco, the authors of this volume offer different methodologies, sources, and interdisciplinary perspectives to look at the history of the encounter between cultures. In the pages of this work, the reader will find a universe of symbolic representations, power relations, and cultural elements of distinction and prestige useful for European peoples in creating new hierarchies that distinguished between “the civilized” and “the wild”. As the different chapter authors of this book explain, from the 16th century onwards, these Eurocentric categories served as the axis of the colonialist, imperialist and Western cultural codes with which the world was interpreted by those who understood themselves as part of a white, superior, and European “us” and as different from the indigenous, black and inferior “otherness”.

The ten specialists in history, art history and anthropology who contribute chapters to *En compañía de salvajes* bring together their expertise to explain the nature of the ambivalent reactions towards American, Asian, and African otherness among the Spaniards and Portuguese of the 16th and 19th centuries. Across 292 pages, these stories show prejudices and abusive relationships but also the many experiences of cultural negotiation, appropriation and cultural translation that gave sense to the worldview of global societies during early modern and modern times.

This book undertakes the debates of otherness in which classic historians and anthropologists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tzvetan Todorov, Alfredo López Austin, Marshall Sahlins, Clifford Geertz, Roger Bartra or Edmundo O’Gorman, have participated along time. Through the analysis of material culture, paintings, royal documents, literature and private documents, the authors of *En compañía de salvajes* raise interesting questions about the body, identities, racism, cultural intermediaries and geographical borders, topics which are central when studying the relationship with otherness from the Western perspective and the encounters of Europeans with “other” “sauvages”.

Thus, for example, Óscar Muñoz explains some ways in which the Western meanings of soul and body came into tension with American body mutilation practices. Arsenio Dacosta, for his part, narrates stories of principal Indians who sought their own place within the societies of the conquered New World, where power relations and privilege systems were disrupted by the arrival of the Spaniards. For Izaskun Álvarez, the focus is on the emergence of Creole identities, where the enlightened, scientific, and medical debates of 18th-century Europe gave new meanings to what was properly understood as “American”. Álvarez shows the way in which European disqualifying notions and negative prejudices gave life to difference and to imaginary otherness.

Also interested in Creole American societies, Víctor Mínguez explains the construction of a historical memory whose principal purpose was to recover the past of the indigenous kings, in order to find a place for the New World in the history of salvation of Christianity and in Western global history. Along the same lines, Alberto Baena Zapatero analyzes representations of America and its inhabitants on screens painted in New Spain between the 17th and 18th centuries to show the hybrid cultural manifestations that emerged not only in new artistic products, but also in the sensibilities and cultural codes used to interpret reality and exchanges within that global world.

Focusing on the 18th century, Emilio José Luque Azcona discusses the role of poverty in the context of Enlightened otherness. Luque Azcona explains how new cultural views made blacks, mulattoes, mestizos, zambos and Chinese synonymous with crime. According to this author, within the Bourbon reform, “the others” became a repository of imaginary threats to the modernizing order proposed by the new Monarchy.

In the last chapter dedicated to the Hispanic New World, Scarlett O’Phelan focuses on one of the central themes and articulating axis of cultural meaning within Hispanic colonial societies: *mestizaje*. Beyond the controversies that this concept has aroused in the new historiography of colonial societies, the phenomenon of cultural intermediation, dialogue and the hybridity of cultures

is essential in any explanation of how otherness gave rise to new realities all over the world.

The final three chapters move away from early modern Spanish America to venture into Brazil, the Philippines and Morocco to explore other symbolic universes of alterity. José Manuel Santos Pérez introduces the importance that skin color had in the construction of “others” in 17th-century Brazil, while Ana Ruiz Gutiérrez weaves her story around the Luzon mountains where the Spanish met the Igorots “headhunters”. In her chapter, prejudice, racism and tensions between “primitiveness” and “progress” came to the fore in those universal exhibitions where Western societies had the opportunity to peer into the “showcase” of a reality built, invented, and recreated by discriminatory stereotypes and by practices of the European white world at the end of the 19th century. The last chapter, by Camilo Herrero, describes that same historical moment of Spanish imperial decline, when paradoxically, or perhaps because of a nostalgia for greatness, Spaniards sought to imagine a new nationalism based on a heroic society fighting against “Moors,” “barbarians” and Moroccans.

The only weakness of this book may be the absence of the “others” voices; in further works it would be extremely interesting to incorporate these groups’ visions of their own European “others”. This incorporation is very important to complete the full view of the complex relationships between peoples whose historical encounters meant the emergence of many new cultural hierarchies and power relationships – relationships that orient many unequal, xenophobic, and discriminative relationships between peoples of different regions of the globe even today.

Inserted in the most relevant discussions for our current world, *En compañía de salvajes* is a book that sheds light on the history of encounters, disagreements, abuses, submissions, dialogues, and cultural negotiations between different peoples eager to understand and interpret who was “the another” in front of them. The good pen of the authors, as well as the beautiful images that accompany several of the chapters, make reading this book a very pleasant experience for the lay reader and an interesting and enriching opportunity for academics to reflect from numerous points-of-view on the cultural history of otherness.

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