

3. HISTORIA Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES: AMÉRICA LATINA

Jaime Marroquín Arredondo: *Diálogos con Quetzalcóatl: humanismo, etnografía y ciencia (1492-1577)*. Madrid / Frankfurt: Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2014 (Nuevos hispanismos 19). 254 páginas.

The last decade has seen a growing interest in the Iberian origins of modern science. Much work has emerged on the circulation of knowledge in the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic, and the role of transatlantic interactions in the formation of a culture of empirical, experimental, and practical knowledge gathering that, according to authors like José María López Piñero and Antonio Barrera-Osorio, led to the eroding of the authority of classical sources and thus set the conditions for an early Scientific Revolution. In *Diálogos con Quetzalcóatl: humanismo, etnografía y ciencia (1492-1577)*, Jaime Marroquín Arredondo examines the emergence of early traces of this modern scientific culture in the context of the conquest of Mexico and the formation of New Spain. In a brief but challenging study, Marroquín Arredondo, an assistant professor of Spanish at Western Oregon University, analyzes the history of colonization as an “epistemological process” driven by the transcultural dialogues between Franciscan friars and learned Nahuas.

Marroquín Arredondo argues that these interactions form a neglected chapter in the history of modern science. To realize their utopian ideals of transforming the colonized according to the political, economical, and religious interest of the Spanish monarchy and an emerging capitalist system, the friars created new em-

pirical methods to gather, organize, and purify native knowledge about their culture and religion and the natural resources of the Americas. They transformed history from the rhetorical genre it had been in the scholastic tradition into a field of study characterized by an increasingly empirically driven methodology for the investigation and description of reality. The natural history and “ethnographical history” that developed from these dialogues were also defined by efforts to desacralize and rationalize nature, to search for universalities in natures and cultures, and to integrate the knowledge bases of distinct cultures. Thus, Marroquín Arredondo contends, friars and Nahua intellectuals contributed toward the shaping of a “key paradigm of modernity” (p. 15).

The book elaborates this argument in seven chronologically ordered chapters. Chapter 1 traces the origins of the methodologies undergirding early modern natural history and historical ethnography to the *studia humanitatis*. Additionally, it argues that the veneration of language, verbal mastery, and eloquence in Mesoamerican cultures was used by Franciscan friars to involve Nahuas in realizing their utopian ideas. Chapter 2 further examines the relationship between these utopias and the emergence of the ethnographical method in the Caribbean, focusing on an ambiguous attitude that would be typical of the friars who sought to establish an ideal Christian Republic in New Spain. Marroquín Arredondo argues that utopian narratives produced by Christopher Columbus, Peter Martyr, and Thomas More oscillated between, on the one side,

a recognition of the qualities of the indigenous population and, on the other, a sense of European intellectual superiority, the desire to benefit from American nature, and efforts to transform the cultural “Other.” Chapter 3 contrasts the Spanish experiences with the inhabitants of the Caribbean with those they had with the more advanced Mesoamerican cultures. Its principal thesis is that the colonizing rhetoric used by men like Juan Díaz and Hernán Cortés reflects a tendency that would become characteristic of a modern ethnographical and natural historical method to unify two cultures that were deemed both comparable and different.

The book then moves attention to its actual protagonists: five Franciscan friars, who each made valuable contributions to the shaping of ethnography and natural history. Chapter 4 considers Pedro de Gante’s achievements in acquiring knowledge of the indigenous cultures through the study of their languages, as well as Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal’s efforts to confirm through empirically obtained knowledge about their history, politics, and society the true qualities of indigenous cultures. Chapter 5 studies the role of Andrés de Olmos in systematizing transcultural dialogues with the help of newly developed questionnaires, the careful selection of interviewees, and the use of complementary sources. It goes on to discuss how Toribio de Benavente Motolinía’s empirical investigations shaped a utopian project that aimed to demonstrate the equality of Europeans and Nahuas and that, at the same time, stressed the Mexico City’s potential to become the religious, political, and economical center of the world. Chapter 6 covers Bernardino

de Sahagún, who, in Marroquín Arredondo’s opinion, brought the ethnographic method to its full fruition. Sahagún’s use of philology and historical studies for the investigation of the moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and natural history of the Nahuas is described as the “epistemological key to the Iberoamerican ethnographical history” (p. 31).

Chapter 7, ultimately, studies the work of the Spanish protomédico Francisco Hernández de Toledo as being, simultaneously, a highlight and a sign of the waning predominance of the humanist epistemology in Iberoamerican science. Marroquín Arredondo argues that Hernández united medical humanism and European natural history with the humanistic ethnography that had been developed in New Spain to study, classify, and use nature for human objectives. Still, his inability to recognize the equality between Europeans and Amerindians heralded the end of this tradition.

Diálogos con Quetzalcóatl is a book that itself is the result of a dialogue between two strands of literature: one on the development of early modern science, the other on the knowledge that was produced in the interactions between missionaries and indigenous informants. As Marroquín Arredondo rightly observes, the ethnographic method that was developed in these intellectual exchanges has been almost completely neglected by traditional accounts of the history of science, as well as by more recent studies that have sought to revise this story from an Iberian and transatlantic point of view. The book successfully bridges this gap. It heightens awareness of the contribution of clergymen and non-Europeans to the develop-

ment of empirically informed and methodologically organized scientific methods. Not only does it ascribe agency to two groups that have often played but a small part in the history of science, but it makes their dialectic interactions part of the epistemological transformations that occurred in early modern scientific thinking.

In spite of this achievement, the book also has its weaknesses. Paradoxically, these partly originate in the way in which Marroquín Arredondo himself shapes the dialogues in which he is involved. From the outset, it becomes clear that he searches within the transatlantic context for criteria that constitute a scientific ethnographical method; a method that in his view was defined by the same search for “the universalities of culture” as the ethnography that developed from the nineteenth century (p. 33). The disadvantage of this approach is that Marroquín Arredondo interprets developments through a lens that has relatively little to do with the actual concerns of the actors that he is studying and more with the connection of two historiographical narratives. The consequences of such a method are reflected, for example, in his characterization of the efforts of the Franciscan friars to remove deities from indigenous understandings of nature as reflections of the “first systematic dissociation of the sacred and nature” (p. 206), or in the recurring suggestion that empirical methods led to more truthful accounts of American nature and cultures. Such ideas betray a classical understanding of science that neglects the religious significance of nature and tends to draw attention away from the more important questions about the function of empirical methodologies and,

in particular, the discourses about them in different early modern institutional and communicative contexts. Unfortunately, Marroquín Arredondo devotes little attention to the changing struggles in which the book’s protagonists were involved over precisely the question of the nature of the utopian or colonizing project. He also does not address the specificities of the genres in which these men wrote about the world they encountered, which possessed their own rules for blending rhetoric and description.

Diálogos con Quetzalcóatl could have benefited from engaging a wider scholarship on early modern ethnography. The trends that Marroquín Arredondo describes for New Spain have also been described for printers in early modern Germany or Qing officials in early modern China. Such a comparative perspective would have helped to place the phenomenon of ethnographic writings into a larger historical context of changing social practices and the production, consumption, and circulation of this type of knowledge around the globe. It could also have offered a more convincing narrative scheme as the rise and fall story of the ethnographical method in New Spain around which the book now revolves. It is unclear why this story needs to start in the Caribbean and not in the Canaries where Spanish encounters with a cultural Other actually commenced, while neglecting entirely the significance that the ethnographical method continued to play in New Spain and other parts of the Indies after the 1570s. Specialists looking for a state-of-the-art project on the fascinating history of early modern science, ethnography, or the dynamics of trans-

cultural translations will find in *Diálogos con Quetzalcóatl* mostly familiar ideas. Readers would therefore do better to approach the book as an explorative essay on the history of science; it will draw the attention of scholars who traditionally have had little interest in what occurred outside of Europe to a region, and the interactions occurring within it, that was far from peripheral to the development of early modern scientific discourse.

NINO VALLEN
(FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN)

Olaf Kaltmeier: *Konjunkturen der (De-) Kolonialisierung. Indigene Gemeinschaften, Hacienda und Staat in den ecuadorianischen Anden von der Kolonialzeit bis heute*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016. 393 páginas.

Desde los años noventa del siglo xx, los movimientos indígenas representan para los latinoamericanistas un vasto campo de estudio. La aparición y, ante todo, la percepción de los indígenas como actores políticos es considerada un hecho histórico que provocó una dinámica que no se ha observado anteriormente, algo que también se percibe. Eso es cierto también para el caso de Ecuador. A pesar de haber entrado en crisis a principios del siglo xxi, el movimiento indígena, por su fuerza organizativa y movilizadora, es considerado el movimiento social más impactante del país. Esta área de interés es uno de los ejes del presente libro.

En su monografía, el historiador Olaf Kaltmeier, profesor de Historia Iberoamericana en la Universidad de Biele-

feld, detecta antecedentes y momentos críticos para este tipo de organizaciones, concentrando su análisis en una región paradigmática en los Andes ecuatorianos, el cantón Saquisilí, en la provincia de Cotopaxi. No obstante lo concreto del foco, sería inoportuno interpretar su libro principalmente como un estudio sobre el movimiento indígena ecuatoriano. Lo que el autor presenta, desde la óptica de los estudios postcoloniales, es un análisis extenso de la continuidad histórica del fenómeno de la colonialidad en Ecuador, abarcándolo desde la época de la colonia hasta los inicios del siglo xxi.

Para su propósito, Kaltmeier propone llevar a la superficie las diferentes coyunturas de colonización y descolonización que se detectan en un espacio constituido por entrelazamientos de discursos, valores, prácticas y por actores como, por ejemplo, administradores coloniales, instituciones del Estado postcolonial o diferentes sectores de la sociedad. En el continuo de la colonialidad, los actores subalternos, en este caso los campesinos indígenas, abandonan en diferentes momentos su “estupefacción subalterna” (p. 108) y su espacio social y geográfico que les fue concedido por lo que el autor denomina la “matriz colonial del poder” (p. 29).

El trabajo está dividido en cuatro capítulos. En la primera parte se analiza la dinámica de la toma de tierras por los colonizadores, el surgimiento de una “geopolítica de colonialidad” (p. 93), así como la lógica de las luchas indígenas. En este capítulo se realza el papel de los caciques que, en su posición intermedia entre poder colonial y población indígena, lograron fundar elementos de resistencia política y cultural a través de su comunicación con la admi-