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Review/Reseña

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***¿Quiénes somos? ¿De dónde venimos? ¿Para dónde caminamos?* Visual Cartographies and the Idea of Mexico in the Nineteenth Century**

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“Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” These questions, articulated in 1835 by historian and statesman Carlos María de Bustamante, lie at the heart of Magali Carrera’s new book about mapping and visual culture in nineteenth-century Mexico. Carrera’s thoughtful, well-researched and copiously illustrated study traces how mapmakers sought to articulate a vision of an imagined Mexico linking together the present and the past. She argues that this process displayed a complicated relationship to colonial and neocolonial visuality, as Mexican

cartographers alternately appropriated, repudiated or refracted visual tropes produced by European and American visitors. The interplay of these images reflects shifting social and political circumstances echoing the broader contours of nineteenth-century Mexican history.

Carrera's book rests on a firm theoretical foundation grounded in the new cultural history of cartography and interdisciplinary approaches to visual culture. Since Brian Harley first interrogated the objective veneer of cartography over two decades ago, historians have sought to deconstruct power relations embedded within mapping practices. This pursuit has reinvigorated the discipline, resulting in a panoply of studies underscoring cartography's role as a bulwark of state power. This has been especially emphasized in studies of colonialism and nation building, including important works by Walter Mignolo and Raymond Craib with which most Latin Americanists are doubtlessly familiar. Carrera merges such analyses of cartographic power relations with a sustained engagement with visual culture. Her attention to "inventories of visual objects" affords the possibilities of situating mapping practices in the constitution of what John Pickles terms "scopic regimes," wherein vision and visibility produce specific layerings of meaning that transform space into place. Her emphasis on a restricted spatial framework—pursuing images of "New Spain" or "Mexico"—underscores the specificity of these imagist meanings without sacrificing the *longue durée* framework of scholars like Deborah Poole or Mary Louise Pratt.

Carrera's commitment to tracing the circulation of images across seas, continents and times is reflected in the book's structure as well as its thematics. Following a masterful introduction that successfully synthesizes the varied literatures she is engaging, from Mexican cartographic history to visual culture studies and the new cultural history of cartography, the book oscillates between what could be termed internal and external imaginings of Mexican space and society. This is particularly evident in the first four chapters, which pursue these images from the Conquest to the mid-nineteenth century. Having established the cavalcade of locally and globally produced Mexican vistas sets the stage for the final three chapters. These telescope upon Antonio García Cubas, a fascinating figure whose

multiple national atlases successfully integrated visual tropes at times centuries old while firmly linking Mexico within the Porfirian project of modern nation building.

The first two chapters introduce the visual dynamic that framed the *pas-de-deux* between New Spain and the European gaze. During this three hundred year history, Carrera argues that maps and other visual texts played an integral role in crafting a legible description of a world at first inconceivable, in effect “[making] visible to Europeans a territory that was initially conceived of as invisible” (xv). While this was decidedly a homogenizing effort often eliding indigenous perspectives, Carrera is careful to distinguish between the mapping practices from within and without the Spanish empire. Chapter 1, “Making the Invisible Visible,” therefore emphasizes the gaze of French, Dutch and English while Chapter 2, “Locating New Spain: Spanish Mappings,” focuses specifically upon Spanish views. Because of tight Spanish control over specific geographic knowledge of its empire, the former images tend to the allegorical, as in the images of America as an often-nude female in the work of classic atlas producers such as Abraham Ortelius or Gerard Mercator. Carrera demarks the reiteration of these sixteenth-century images through the eighteenth century, an era that also saw an expansion of interest in natural history. This facilitated a schematic reading of an America transformed into “a hybrid domesticated space” while also interrogating the heroic civilizational clashes of conquistador narratives that had dominated earlier mapping practices.

In Spanish mapping, however, administrative needs and greater access to information produced practical maps to be deployed in the service of empire. These endeavors also produced some of the more idiosyncratic mappings of New Spain, particularly through the creation of indigenous cartographic efforts in response to the great sixteenth-century *Relaciones Geográficas* of which Barbara Mundy has written eloquently. As in the case of French, English and Dutch views, the eighteenth century saw an increase in Spanish efforts to depict New Spain visually and cartographically in a manner commensurate with the new Bourbon monarchy’s broader set of administrative reform. A key moment came in

1741 when Philip V directed his viceroys to produce detailed reports about the state of his holdings, which resulted in a comprehensive survey of New Spain directed by a priest named Juan Francisco Sahagún and the contador general del Real Azogues, José Antonio de Villaseñor y Sanchez, who finished the study. While the resulting *Teatro Americano* incorporated new forms of data including a catalog of geographic facts, Carrera argues that it builds upon the “questionnaire traditions of earlier centuries” (51). Moreover, the ancillary nature of New Spain is further demonstrated through images like the frontispiece, which turns the globe on its side to present Europe at an equatorial core and includes Philip IV striding above the colony, in a traditional display of imperial power. The closing pages of the chapter concern the development of casta paintings and the incorporation of the Aztec calendar stone into local maps.

The next two chapters echo the structure of the first two, beginning with the temporally overlapping cases of nineteenth-century travelers’ accounts of Mexico followed by endogenous nationalist imagery from 1810 to 1860. Carrera argues that the former attempted to domesticate Mexico by attending to a heroic and invented past removed from nineteenth-century modernity. Seeking to destabilize imagery inherited from Spanish rule, Mexican mapmakers incorporated aspects of this visual production in order to locate a new geobody. However, internal divisions, ongoing external conflicts and especially a weak state structure limited the efficacy of these nationalist efforts through 1860.

Chapter 3, “Touring Mexico: A Journey to the Land of the Aztecs,” features visual technologies deployed by European and American travelers. She begins with the quintessential *voyageur* Alexander von Humboldt, whose celebrated journey across the Spanish Empire made him the best-known intellectual of the first half of the nineteenth century. Carrera telescopes her analysis upon his *Political Essay of the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811). While acknowledging the important political overtones of his work, Carrera emphasizes the integration of text, graph, image and statistics in Humboldt’s text, innovations that would shape the atlas form during the rest of the century. In considering these strategies, she not only includes well-known examples such as his views of Chimborazo and

Andean plant life but less heralded graphs including population statistics of New Spain. Humboldt's genius, according to Carrera, rested on "[inverting] rhetorical strategies of travel to manifest a familiar New Spain out of unfamiliar data" (81).

Humboldt's methodological commitment to familiarizing the exotic was manipulated in subsequent editions and also reflected in future traveler's accounts. The litany of examples Carrera cites in her tour of travelogues is too numerous to cover fully in this review. Highlights include well-known figures like the historian William Hickley Prescott, who edited descriptions of central Mexico in letters sent him by Fanny Calderón de la Barca in his account of the conquest, along with esoteric cases like the British showman William Bullock who developed a massive Mexican panorama after a six-month visit in the 1920s. As did Mexican mappers, Carrera subsequently returns frequently to the Italian painter Claudio Linati de Prévost who in 1826 created an image of nubile indigenous women making tortillas that was echoed in the eroticism of German designer Karl Nebel. The plethora of images she identifies, which frequently replicate or subtly alter each other, successfully bolsters her contention that the international vision bore little resemblance to reality, but instead reflected "only a fabricated, in-between place situated in this circulating inventory of images" (108).

Carrera notes that the cavalcade of externally produced images of Mexico fed both an international and a national clientele. In Chapter 4, "Imagining the Nation and Forging the State: Mexican Nationalist Imagery, 1810-1860," she takes on the herculean task of disentangling the myriad visual tropes produced by Mexican state actors eager to define the new nation's identity. These included somewhat truncated attempts to emulate the statistical accumulation of Humboldt's studies as well as the development of what Carrera terms an "exhibitionary complex" with minimal impact on the development of national visual culture, a phenomenon partly due to Mexico's extreme instability in the first half of the nineteenth century.

One of the more successful elements in this chapter is Carrera's continued treatment of the place of women in allegorical imagery. While

not devoting a specific section to the topic, she cites several examples that readily demonstrate the tangled skein of nationalist frameworks. These begin with an early example in an anonymous painting from the 1820s (117) that depicts an allegorical female Mexico, flanked by Independence heroes Father Hidalgo and Agustín Iturbide. No longer nude, she instead sports a classical gown, quiver of arrows and Phrygian cap in a nod to Mexico's joining the pantheon of civilized nations. Carrera develops this trope in her treatment of disillusionment following the Mexican-American war, in which allegorical women appear in shredded clothes and stripped of distinguishing attributes. By the middle of the century, in Julio Michaud's *Album Pintoresco de la República Mexicana* (1849-52), Linati and Nebel's images of oversexed *tortilleras* make an appearance for the first time in a volume intended for both European and Mexican audiences, ushering in an era in which such domesticated images of women would appear regularly in ethnographic texts depicting Mexican "types." Carrera aptly notes that this presence of women's images does not represent an opportunity for discursive participation in her concluding remarks to the chapter, a soundbite repeated regularly through the rest of the book.

Instead, Carrera pivots to a somewhat less dialogical analysis of the *oeuvre* of Antonio García Cubas, whose vibrant career indeed merits this close attention. Though never formally trained in cartography or geography, García Cubas dominated Mexican map production in the second half of the nineteenth century. Carrera works diligently to deconstruct García Cubas' own self-mythologizing—in his memoirs he notes that the state of geography was that of a "girl deformed and wasted away" prior to his entry into the field (147-48)—by tracing his successful maneuvering of various government ministries and transition from mundane mapping projects into the splendid atlases of his later years. What emerges is a portrait of a perspicacious innovator whose sought to transcend clichéd mid-century visual culture with the help of Porfirian positivism and remarkable technical acuity.

In Chapter 5, "Finding Mexico: The García Cubas Projects - 1850-1880," Carrera introduces García Cubas' early works. A central theme in this chapter concerns his ability to integrate discrete elements of the

mapping tradition described thus far as well as new technologies of data display. Besides images taken from figures like Humboldt, Nebel or Catherwood, García Cubas took great pains to add an historical dimension that would challenge the isolated perspective of the individual traveler prevalent in earlier depictions of Mexico. For example, in his early *Atlas geográfico, estadístico e histórico de la república Mexicana* (1858), he includes hieroglyphic maps depicting Aztec migration from lifted from an eighteenth-century travelogue by Gemelli as well as the sixteenth-century *Codex Boturini*. A similar strategy can be seen in the 1863 *Carta General de la República Mexicana*, which incorporates title blocks depicting landscapes painted by local artists E. Landesio and H. Iriarte as well as several cartouches demonstrating foreign influences, such as maps of ports or lengths of rivers—likely taken from Colton’s atlases—and an image of vegetation evoking Humboldt’s Andean altitudinal cross-sections of the Andes (162-4). By the 1870s, García Cubas began exploring the expanded possibilities of hybrid historical-geographical scholarship in *The Republic of Mexico in 1876*, which included an English text translated by George F. Henderson that challenges the veracity of earlier travelogues. Besides incorporating photographic images borrowed from Mexican scholars like Vicente Riva Palacio, Manuel Payno or Manuel Rivera Cambas, García Cubas also shifts the conceptual organization of this work away from the individual experience of travel by focusing on data and statistics in a manner commensurate with the emerging positivist fascination of the Porfirian period.

Carrera’s final expository chapter, Chapter 6, “Traveling from New Spain to Mexico—1880-1911,” frames García Cubas’s masterwork, the 1885 *Atlas pintoresco é histórico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, within the contours of a culture of visual display and consumption under Porfirio Díaz. She attends particularly to the atlas’ place amongst concurrent attempts to provide a comprehensive history of Mexico. Her attention to visual-spatial analysis proffers a refreshing engagement with rather well known histories like Manuel Rivera Cambas’s *México pintoresco, artístico y monumental* (1880-1883) and Vicente Riva Palacios’ *México a través de los siglos* (1883-1889). As such, she considers the importance of

Humboldtian themes and a myopic focus on Mexico City for Rivera Cambas and underscores the central role of allegorical imagery in Riva Palacios. For Carrera, however, these pieces pale before García Cubas's visual poem demarcating a national pageantry "revealed as deep and continuous" (215).

This saga unfolds in thirteen atlas pages depicting the spectrum of Mexican history. Each plate incorporates a central thematic map (mostly delineating the post Guadalupe Hidalgo borders of Mexico) buoyed by internal statistical cartouches *à la* Humboldt. A cavalcade of images frames these centerpiece maps, images that locate the particular plate's subject within historical or geographic specificity. The recursive persistence of this graphic structure bolsters a claim to a totalizing national space and history, a claim made all the more potent because of the subject matter depicted therein. The plates—most of which are reproduced in the book—depict nationalist portraits of Mexican politics, its indigenous populations, ecclesiastical centers, transportation networks, educational institutions, mountain systems, water resources, minerals, archaeological monuments, the vice-regal period, the central valley and a colorful depiction of Mexico City itself. This dance between repetitive designs and individuated elements that each acknowledge the shifting currents of history—the map of the vice-regal era, for example, includes the northern expanse of colonial New Spain though not its southern territories—serves to provide a collective sense of continuity associated with a national geobody only recently constructed. While an accompanying text would eventually be penned and published in a separate volume, the genius of this atlas lies in its ability to integrate the contours of visual culture that had marked Mexico from its "exotic" past and present within a clear and yet monumental presentation merging history and geography with a sense of future possibility.

This future potential, derived from history and geography, represents the crux of Carrera's concluding chapter, Chapter 7, "Performing the Nation." In it, Carrera traces the evocation of García Cubas' atlas in the allegorical floats constructed for the 1910 centennial of Mexican independence. She represents the centennial as a synthetic moment where a traditional form—such carriages had been in use since the vice-regal era—

presented a panorama of new graphic imagery self-consciously attempting (somewhat unsuccessfully) to represent the totality of the social body of the Mexican state. She particularly emphasizes the *desfile histórico*, which deploys García Cubas' imagery in an assertion of the centrality of the time of the nation to its identity. For Carrera, these displays provide at least one answer to the questions that animate her book—¿*Quiénes somos?* ¿*De dónde venimos?* ¿*Para dónde caminamos?*

This conclusion, however evocative, remains somewhat unsettling because of the Revolutionary elephant about to destroy García Cubas' genteel and holistic Mexico as certainly as it dealt a deathblow to the *Pax Porfiriana*. Carrera does not address the imminent failure of this worldview in her conclusion, a decision likely driven by the drastic alterations to political and visual culture it inspired. While it would have been impractical to trace this history, an acknowledgment of the fragile nature of the positivist nationalist vision would enable Carrera to provide a bridge to the next epoch of Mexican history.

This missed opportunity raises the question of others that appear periodically through the book. These tend to be shaped by the disciplined geographic focus that enables Carrera to navigate the complex waves of four centuries of mapping history. However, the at times myopic emphasis on images of Mexico obscures the colony and nation-state's relationship to other political cum geographic areas of the Americas with similar mapping histories. This is apparent even in her discussion of the pre-1850 colonial landscape, which could have benefited from sustained situating of the exploration and representation of New Spain within hemispheric contours of exploration. Simply noting Humboldt's debt to the French academician Charles Marie de La Condamine's travels through the Andes or his ties to Colombian geographer Francisco José de Caldas, for example, would have provided greater texture and depth to her analysis. Similarly, it would have been worth parsing the relationship of Mexican national visual culture to that produced by other "new nations" like the United States, Germany, Italy or France. As Susan Schulten has shown for the United States, for example, the "geographic imagination" proved critical in establishing popular and metaphorical views of citizenship concurrently with the Mexican search for

a national geobody. The use of allegorical liberties might be one way to approach this comparison, particularly with regards to the French Marianne who appears to be evoked in the allegorical Mexico dressed in classical gown and Phrygian cap while flanked by Father Hidalgo and Agustín Iturbide discussed in Chapter 4.¹ It would be remiss of me not to mention that this particular painting also demonstrates a dark ribaldry that surely forms a critical component of nineteenth-century Mexican visual culture that Carrera does not explicitly address. In this case, it is the image of Father Hidalgo crowning the allegorical Mexico to his left while unceremoniously kicking a prostrate Spaniard in the groin to his right, an image worthy of the grotesquerie of Goya or José Guadalupe Posada. Attending to this incorporation of trans-Atlantic ideas of nation building with a Rabelaisian carnivalesque would have made possible further connections with this darker side of Mexican nineteenth-century visual culture.

These criticisms, though, should be understood as quibbles that lie outside the main thrust of Carrera's analysis and should not detract from the great successes of this volume. Indeed, the book is a tour de force precisely because it successfully navigates the still substantial gulfs between the complex literatures of nation-state construction, visual culture analysis, and cartographic history. And it is precisely the disciplined focus on the representations of the geobody of New Spain and Mexico that enable this successful navigation to occur. Coupled with her theoretical sophistication, meticulous research, and extremely rich visual archive, the book provides a model of *longue durée* scholarship in which specificity is not sacrificed for scope.

¹ See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789–1880*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.)

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