The Movable Center: Geographical Discourses and Territoriality During the Expansion of the Spanish Empire.

Recognition

There are books whose title alone is quite striking. Aristotle and the American Indians (1959), by Lewis Hanke is one such book. As soon as I read it I began to think about the possibilities of using a similar alternative title. Ptolemy and the American Indians was a tempting possibility and a guiding expression when I began to think about geographical discourse and territorial representations. I am not a historian, however, but a literary scholar and a semiotician who believes in interdisciplinary dialogues. What follows began as a reflection about Ptolemy in America, although it became a metaphor for the exploration of meaning in territorial representation. I am honored and pleased by this opportunity to contribute to a book that celebrates the scholarly achievements of Lewis Hanke. I would also like to thank him for his contribution to the understanding of colonial Latin America, and especially for writing Aristotle and the American Indians.

Introduction

Several years ago I was impressed by what I began to call “Father Ricci’s move,” referring to his making of what is known today as the Ricci world map as well as to his decision to transfer the center of the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean (d’Elia 1938). I began to ask myself why Ricci’s world map made such an impression on me. The following account provides part of the answer. I say part—
of it, because this particular case became a piece of a larger puzzle I am trying to put together under the title of colonial semiosis: the production and interpretation of meaning in colonial situations. Colonial semiosis is the general term to indicate a network of semiotic processes in which signs from different cultural systems interact in the production and interpretation of hybrid cultural artifacts. In colonial semiosis the meaning of a sign no longer depends on its original cultural context (for instance, Castilian, or Amerindian, or Chinese), but on the new set of relations generated by communicative interactions across cultural boundaries.

I would like to explore a particular aspect of colonial semiosis illustrated by the mobility of the center in territorial representation. My purpose is to underline one striking although overlooked detail in a specific colonial situation: the coexistence of territorial representations that have been and are concealed by official geographical descriptions, either in verbal discourses or in map forms. During the sixteenth century, mapping as a cultural practice and the map as an object became powerful instruments of territorial representation in the West and signs correlated with the true shape of the earth (Harley 1988, 1989). My analysis rests on the belief that while territorial representation is a human need and, consequently, could be identified in every human community, geographical discourse and mapping during the modern sixteenth-century colonial expansion asserted itself as the only true representation of the earth in a way unseen before then. Thus, Father Ricci’s strategy speaks for the moment European men of letters realized that the geographical center of the earth was movable, although the religious, economic, and political one was being established in Rome and in what was beginning to emerge as Western Europe.

My study is divided into three parts. In the first, I will comment on what I have already called “Father Ricci’s move.” In the second, some observations will be made on territorial representation before 1500 and on Guamán Poma de Ayala’s world map from the first years of the seventeenth century. Finally, I will explore the implications of López de Velázco’s map of the Indies and of the pinturas collected in the Relaciones Geográficas de Indias (Geographical accounts, 1982–89), an impressive number of administrative reports planned by Juan de Ovando and López de Velázco and executed by the latter in his role as official cosmographer of the Council of the Indies. López de Velázco was mapping the Indies during the same years that Ricci was trying to convince the Chinese mandarins that the world was not exactly as they thought it was.
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Father Ricci's Move

Toward 1584, according to the story told by Father Ricci himself and recently repeated by one of his biographers (d'Elia 1938; 1961), the Chinese mandarins visited the first Jesuit mission established at Shao-king. On a wall of the mission-room the Chinese saw what was for them an astonishing territorial representation. Although it is not certain which map Father Ricci took with him to China, it is presumed that it was a print of Abraham Ortelius's Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1570) (fig. 1). The Chinese mandarins seemed to be astonished by the fact that the earth looked like a sphere, and that it was mostly covered by water; they were still more astonished when they realized that the Chinese Empire, which up to then they had believed was not only at the center of the earth but also occupied almost its entire surface, was reduced to a small portion of land in the upper right corner of the map. D'Elia reconstructed this crucial moment in the following narrative:

Ricci had observed that his guests, before looking at the world map in the European language, displayed on the wall of his residence in Shao-King, complained when they saw their China on the right-hand side, at the end of the known world, and near the corner, instead of at the center of the world as until then they had believed it was, in the belief that the world was square. Ricci thought it inopportune to be angry at the pride of the Chinese and afterwards, without getting any closer to the geographical truth, he saw no other alternative than merely to change the layout adopted by the European cartographers. This in fact undermined their world map from that time on by putting the two Americas on the left of the observer, Europe and Africa in the center, and Asia on the right; naturally China and Japan were represented at the extreme right of the map. Ricci, wishing to have a legitimate account of the susceptibility of his guests, placed Europe and Africa on his world map on the observer's left, with Asia in the center and the two Americas on the right. (fig. 2) (d'Elia 1938, 25)

According to scholars of Chinese culture and civilization (Needham and Wang 1959), Chinese conceptualization of space was based on a confederation of five directions: north, south, west, east, and middle, with "China" meaning, in fact, "the Middle Kingdom." The Chinese universe was sometimes diagrammed as a grid of nested rectangles with the center occupied by China, as we can see in figure 3. In this "map" from about the fifth century B.C., the center stands for the imperial palace. Reading outward, the next rectangle represents the imperial domains. Then come the lands of the tributary nobles, the zone of pacification
Figure 1. How the world looked to European eyes toward the second half of the sixteenth century. The world map is from Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, which, supposedly, Ricci took with him to China. This and figure 2 come from the redrawing of Lopez de Velasco's original maps in his 1574 manuscript and are reprinted in Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas de Tierra Firme del mar océano*, 1601–1615. (Courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago)

where border peoples were adjusting to Chinese customs, the land of friendly barbarians, and, finally, the outermost rectangle that separates Chinese civilization from the lands of savages who have no culture at all.

Although Father Ricci was in China almost two thousand years after the date this Chinese diagram of the world was drawn, it could be assumed that the surprise expressed by the gentry of the Ming dynasty when they saw the Ortelius-like map on the wall of the mission-room was due to the fact that their conceptualization of space, as well as of the place they assigned to China in the configuration of the earth, remained attached to the rectangular matrix with China in the center. It may be difficult to believe that the kind of territorial
Figure 2. Ricci's redrawing of the Western *mapamundi*, placing China toward the center. Indirectly, Ricci's world map shows that notions such as East and West to identify cultures and countries are contingent on the position of the observer. In this map, the Americas are the "Orient" (unless we accept that this map is incorrect). (Biblioteca Vaticana)

representation prevalent in the fifth century B.C. was still relevant in China toward the end of the sixteenth century. However, the Italian traveler Gemelli Carreri claimed to have seen, circa A.D. 1700, a Chinese "map" very similar to the center-oriented representation in rectangular form shown in figure 3. This long tradition of territorial representation makes the moment Ricci showed his world map to his Chinese guests very special.

Father Ricci's move consisted in redrawing an Ortelius-like map with the projection in the Pacific Ocean and China close to the center (fig. 2). Ricci was able to detach the ethnocentric perception and conceptualization of space from geometric and arithmetic calculations, projecting the surface of the earth from different and equally valid centers of observation. However, the Chinese mandarins were not yet in a position to understand this move, and their natural reaction was to see without understanding how their ethnic center could have been de-centered. Their astonishment showed, furthermore, that the power of the center does not depend on geographical representations but, on the contrary, geographical representations are built around the power of the center. Once the ethnic perspective is detached from the geometric one, the authoritative center becomes a matter of political power rather than of ethnic subjectivity.

Although the history of Father Ricci's map in the cartographic history of the East is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Wallis 1965; Ch'en 1939;
Heawood 1917), it is illustrative of the struggle between coexisting territorial representations during the economic and religious expansion of the West. While Ricci’s map encountered strong opposition and resistance in China, it was more readily accepted in Japan. Current world maps printed in Japan (fig. 4) show the location of lands and water introduced by Ricci’s redrawing of Western world maps. A Japanese map from the eighteenth century (fig. 5) shows the same distribution, although its drawing style is quite distinct from the European history of cartography. The Japanese cartographic tradition based on Ricci’s world map began with the Shoho world map of 1645 (Wallis 1965, 42–43). In China, however, the situation was not as smooth as Ricci and the Jesuits pretended it was. Ch’en (1939) has shown that some of the people who reported to have met Ricci did not make a distinction between the traditional “western regions” in Chinese cartography and Europe. The official history of the Ming dynasty, written while Ricci was still in China, does not follow Ricci’s map. In some cases, criticism of Ricci has been quite harsh, as can be appreciated in the following evaluation:

Lately Matteo Ricci utilized some false teachings to fool people, and scholars unanimously believed him. . . . The map of the world which he made contains elements of the fabulous and mysterious, and is a downright attempt to deceive people on things which they personally cannot go to verify for
Figure 4. A world map printed in Japan in 1988

themselves. It is really like the trick of a painter who draws ghosts in his pictures. We need not discuss other points, but just take for example the position of China on the map. He puts it not in the center but slightly to the west and inclined to the north. This is altogether far from truth, for China should be in the center of the world, which we can prove by the single fact that we can see the North Star resting at the zenith of the heaven at midnight. How can China be treated like a small unimportant country, and placed slightly to the north as in this map? This really shows how dogmatic his ideas are. Those who trust him say that the people in his country are fond of travelling afar, but such an error as this would certainly not be made by a widely-travelled man. (Chang Wei-hua 1934, 161–62, qtd. in Ch’en 1939, 348).

It is tempting (at least for me) to read the preceding paragraph as a complaint from someone who defends his rights although he is utterly in the wrong. The temptation comes from the natural tendency to judge colonial situations from the point of view of what Fabian (1983) called the “denial of coevalness.” The impression the reader gets from Ricci’s account is that the
Chinese cartographers and intellectuals were “behind” in time, not yet quite as developed as their European counterparts. Such an impression emerges from the dictum of serious and outstanding modern scholars who are able to say, describing Ricci’s contribution to Chinese cartography, that “it gave the Chinese a true picture of the world as it was then known.” Such generalizations are based on a denotative concept of sign and on a correspondence theory of truth, which disregard the locus and the subject of enunciation as well as the needs and functions of territorial representation. Instead, a universal knowing subject is presupposed and identified with the regional European cartographic perspective. If instead of saying “a true picture of the world as it was then known,” we say “the true picture of the world as it was then known by Europeans and Chinese,” the statement would do justice to colonial situations in which at least two
perspectives on the world coexist and the attribution of true value depends on the perspective taken by the speaking subject—as can be seen in Ricci’s as well in the Chinese scholars’ respective accounts. We know today that toward the end of the sixteenth century the Jesuits were not aware of or ignored the changes in the image of the cosmos introduced by Copernicus. They lived in a universe whose center was the earth and not the sun. There was a difference between the Jesuit and the Chinese scholars, nonetheless, and the difference was relevant not at the level of true correspondences between maps and the world but at the level of power. Ricci’s territorial representation was more powerful than the Chinese on two accounts: first, because it went together with an economic and religious expansion that allowed Ricci to promote the European conception of the world in China while the Chinese were not in a position to promote their own territorial view to the Europeans; second, because it had the power of transcending the ethnic concept of the center and replacing it with a geometric one.

To explore this dimension of Ricci’s move it is necessary to pause for a moment and review some of the constants encountered in territorial representations before the era of exploration and the mapping of the entire surface of the earth.

Human Body, Ecology, and Territorial Representations

When I began to read about the history of cartography in order to understand Ricci’s move, I soon learned that the omphalos syndrome governing territorial organization, both in its spatial aspects (people believing that they are at the center of the world) and its religious one (people believing that they have been divinely appointed), was widespread, rather than a peculiarly Chinese feature. It became apparent that the ethnic center had to be grounded on some basic experience of the subject and the community such as the human body, the east-west movement of the sun and the moon (as one of the most fundamental features of spatial orientation), the place in which the human body is located as fundamental reference for territorial representation, or a combination of these factors. Arnheim’s assumption that some fundamental principles of spatial organization are deeply rooted in human nature (1988, 2) and that particular concretizations take place in specific historic conditions and under the rules of enduring traditions, supports my intuitions. Lumsden and Wilson’s plea for a new human science (1983, 167–84) deserves to be considered from the perspective of territoriality (see also Mark Johnson 1987).

It is well known, for instance, that the correlation between micro and
macrocosmos was a shared belief among certain intellectuals of the Middle Ages and that the correlation was influential in depicting the earth and the universe. The micro-macrocosm theory holds that a man (or human being) is a miniature world, and that the world had the form of an immense man (or human being). The Christian version modeled this theory with the body of Christ, as illustrated in figure 6 (Wolf 1957, 1989, 66–67; Gurevich 1985, 41–92). While the human body suggests the four horizontal directions (head and feet; left and right) and the movement of the sun and the moon mark the East-West orientation (Marshak 1972), in Christian cosmology the East (sunrise) coincides with the head of Christ and with Paradise and the center with the navel, which gives rise to the metaphor "the navel of the world" and coincides with Jerusalem. The Ebstorf map (fig. 7) provides a paradigmatic illustration of territorial representation in Christian cosmology. The power of the center exemplified in such maps is very similar in conception to the rectangular Chinese world map shown in figure 3, in which the Middle Kingdom has the same function as Jerusalem in Christian representations. Thus, the geographical center appeared to be correlated both to the human body as an abstract reference point for the four directions, and to the moment in which the body becomes part of a community; consequently, the foundation of an ethnic identification.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the well-known medieval T-O maps systematically placed Jerusalem at the center. The map shown in figure 8
was used to illustrate the *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville, a writer who lived between A.D. 560 and 636. The map, oriented toward the east, contains the names of the three continents and identifies each with one of Noah's sons: Asia with Sem, Europe with Japhet, and Africa with Ham (spelled Cham). The Medieval T-O map was in vogue well into the sixteenth century. In several fifteenth-century woodcuts from Ravenna, for instance, the world was divided into three parts; Jerusalem was in the center, and that choice was governed by either religious order or religious cosmology. Figure 9 shows St. Francis and St. Dominic in friendship sharing the possession of the world. A similar territorial representation has been printed in a 1494 edition of the encyclopedia of the English Franciscan Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Bartholomew de Glanville) (fig. 10). His
encyclopedia (De proprietatibus rerum, 1220–40) was very influential in the work of the Spanish Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún (Robertson 1966; López Austin 1974). In the Florentine Codex (Dibble and Anderson 1982), a bilingual version of the material collected during a life-long project written around 1578, Sahagún drew the earth in the form you see in Figure 11 (Sahagún [1578], 1979). Although it would be difficult to ascertain when between 1540 and 1585 Sahagún drew this T-O map, there is enough evidence to believe that as early as 1540 world maps were produced in which the surface of the earth was depicted with the Atlantic Ocean, rather than the Mediterranean and Jerusalem in the center. However, T-O maps survived at least until the sixteenth century, as illustrated by the T-O map shown in figure 12, with the New World shown in the bottom left corner.

That the Middle Kingdom and Jerusalem as the navel of the world were regional and historical representations of a more fundamental pattern rooted in human nature seems to be supported by the example of Cuzco, capital of the Inca Empire, whose name means “navel of the world” (Sullivan 1985). It would
be a mistake to think that the coincidence between Jerusalem and Cuzco exemplifies Christian influences in colonial Peru. It would be more satisfactory to think that if both Jerusalem and Cuzco are assigned a central place in territorial representations, it is because there were common features in both Christian and Inca cultures long before European explorers and men of letters changed the image of the world and the mobility of the center. Guamán Poma's world map (fig. 13) looks, at first glance, like a product of modern cartography in which parallels and meridians have been used to indicate distances and to locate places.
Upon closer inspection it becomes evident that parallels and meridians are ornaments rather than basic tools of territorial representation. In the first place, the confederation of the four different directions of space (east, west, north, south) and the center can be recognized. As in the Chinese map shown in figure 3 and the T-O map shown in figure 8, Cuzco occupies the center. In contrast with the Chinese map and the social distribution correlated to it, the spectrum from the “civilized” to the “barbarian” is not represented as an increasing distance from the center to the periphery, but as opposition between “high” and “low,” on the one hand, and on the other, within “high” and “low.” Following the works of Zuidema (1964), Watchel (1971) has summarized the double spatial structure of the “high” and the “low”—high: Chinchaysuyu (I) + Antisuyu (III); low: Collasuyu (II) + Cuntinsuyu (IV)—the four quarters of the world, and the correlation between spatial distribution and social organization. Chinchaysuyu
is the privileged quarter for Guamán Poma, to which he attributes nobility, strength, and dominant position. The other pole of the “higher” division is the Antisuyu, and its people are the opposite of the Chinchaysuyu. They are barbarians, they are hostile, and they eat human flesh. The inhabitants of the Collasuyu, the quarter of the lower part, opposite the Chinchaysuyu, like their counterpart of the higher part, the Antisuyu, are amoral, lazy, and corrupt, although they are also rich. Guamán Poma located the Spaniards in this quarter of the world. Finally, the Cuntinsuyu is the exact opposite of the Collasuyu in terms of economic values: the inhabitants of the Cuntinsuyu are extremely poor. In modern terminology, civilization and barbarism distinguished the inhabitants of the two upper quarters while riches and poverty characterized the people living in the lower quarters. On the other hand, the poor but virtuous and the civilized are opposed to the rich and to the barbarians.
What seems to me still remarkable in the move made by Ricci (who was
drawing his world map in China about the same time that Guamán was drawing
his in Cuzco, although for different purposes), is the fact that a system of
territorial representation has been achieved in which the center no longer needs
to be fixed. Or, to put it another way, the power of the center has been displaced
from a fixed to a movable position. If we take into account, for example, that the
human body was not only the point of reference of the organization of space but
also of the letters of the alphabet, the science, and the cosmological order
(Dubois 1970, 92–110; López Austin 1980, 1:171–95), then the passage from a
system of territorial organization in which the concept of space depends on the
coordination of the body with cosmogeographical markers (sunrise and sunset,
for instance; human perception of the horizon; etc.) to one that depends on the
eye and on arithmetic calculation, acquires a specific significance during the age of the discoveries and the expansion of the Spanish Empire. For, although the coordination of the eye and arithmetic calculation goes back to Ptolemy, the confrontation during the process of the economic and religious expansion of the West between persons and institutions who were concerned with expansion and conquests on a grandiose scale and those who were not (like the Aztecs, the Chinese, the Maya, or the Incas), not only put Ptolemy into good use but also exemplified the transition from the fixed to a movable center in territorial organization.

Even if it could be said today with common sense that the center is determined by the position of the observer, it should also be possible to detach the arithmetic calculation (numeracy) from the ideological and political manipulation (literacy) of territorial representation. The world map shown in figure 4 suggests that while in Ortelius's map the observer was placed in the Atlantic, the observer in this contemporary Japanese map is placed in the Pacific. But such a reading will conceal the fact that beyond this contemporary Japanese map there is a history of colonization of space that goes back to Ricci and the effort to spread Christianity in the East. A similar argument can be made by contrasting an Arabian map from the seventeenth century, representing the Americas when the projection places the observer at the North Pole (fig. 14), with a map of the Americas (shown in fig. 15) in which it is not so much the projection that situates the observer at the South Pole, but an emphasis on the political and ideological meaning of territorial representation. If territoriality cannot be achieved without a center, its fixity or mobility is a sign of the position of the representing agency rather than of the space represented.

Mapping the Colonies: Centers, Peripheries, and Hybrid Cultural Production

I am still fascinated by the consequences of reflecting on territorial organization from the premise of an ambulatory center. Thus, if the second part of my essay took me from Ricci's adventure with his world map to the omphalos syndrome and the body as a reference point of territoriality, the replacement of the body as a reference point and of calculation as geometric projection, prompted the mobility of the center and became an instrument for spatial colonization. However, while the geometric projection allowed for the mobility of the center, the economic, political, and religious center was being construed by and attached to the ethnic group in expansion (Rome or Spain, depending on the
Figure 15. An ideological inversion of the Americas
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The particular moment and the institutions supporting the act of enunciation. The expansion of the Spanish Empire coincided with the historical moment in the West when Christianity, after losing its religious center (Jerusalem), created another from which the campaign of Christianizing the world began. Paradoxically enough, the mobility of the religious center seems to have had some indirect consequences in the transformation of geographic discourse and of territorial representations. Although I am not in a position to prove a causal connection between the loss of the original religious center (Jerusalem) and the creation of a new one (Rome), it would be less risky to suggest a connection between the expansion of Western Christianity, its role in the colonization process after 1492, and Ricci’s move.

Toward 1574, López de Velazco, who was appointed cosmographer of the Council of the Indies in 1571, was fulfilling his duties and writing the Descripción y demarcación de las Indias Occidentales (Description and demarcation of the West Indies) (1574), a detailed account of the Spanish possessions from what are now called the Caribbean islands to the Philippines. He divided the Spanish territories into three parts: “Indias Septentrionales” (Northern Indies), which comprised the area from Florida to the Panama Canal; “Indias Meridionales” (Southern Indies), from the Panama Canal to Patagonia; and “Indias del Poniente” (Western Indies), which included the Philippines, Moluccas, and so on (fig. 16). López de Velazco’s report came as one of the consequences of a visitation to the Council of the Indies ordered by Philip II, and the recommendation of Juan de Ovando, in charge of such an evaluation, to have a systematic way of collecting information about the colonial possessions (Carbia 1940, 109–49).

If López de Velazco’s verbal description and the fourteen maps attached thereto were the first step toward a systematic organization of information about the New World being construed in the colonization process, the second step was the Instruction and Memorandum, a list of fifty questions distributed to every corner of the Indies in which an Alcalde (Mayor) or a public notary was available to collect information and answer each of the questions. One specific question asked for a pintura (drawing) of the location being surveyed. As a result of this request, we have several pinturas attached to the Relaciones Geográficas (Geographic accounts), which were the written report and the reply to the Instruction and Memorandum (Cline 1964, 1972). Thus, we have in some of the maps drawn by the “indios viejos” (older Indians), the testimony of coexisting and conflicting territorial representations similar to the reaction of the Chinese mandarin to Ricci. Resistance to colonization of space among the Amerindians did not have the force of resistance that it had in China.
Figure 16. López de Velasco’s *Indias occidentales y del poniente*

López de Velasco provided a verbal description of the information complementing the map (fig. 16):

The Indies, the islands and *terra firma* in the Ocean which are commonly called the New World, are the lands and seas which lie within the boundaries of the kingdom of Castile, which is a hemisphere, or half of the world, beginning at 180 degrees west from a meridian circle which passes through 39 degrees longitude west of the meridian of Toledo. (1574, 5)

He believed, or at least suggested, that Nature had divided the northern and the southern parts of the West Indies at the Isthmus of Panama. Concerning the third part of the totality of the West Indies, he coined the expression “Islas del Poniente” to designate the complex of the Spanish possessions which he describes as follows:
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The West Indies are all the islands and terra firma which lie within the boundaries of the kingdom of Castile, to the westernmost point, whose frontiers, as I have said, extend to the other side of the world, to the city of Malaca, whence to the East and New Spain; there is a large gulf consisting of many islands, big and small, and many coastlines and much dry land, which form the Spice Islands (also called the Malucan Islands), the Philippines, the Coast of China, the Lequias and Japanese Islands, the Coast of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Thieves Islands. (1574, 5)

However, while in his own geographical discourse López de Velazco concealed native territoriality, in his massive plan to gather information implemented through the Instruction and Memorandum, he opened the doors—unintentionally, of course—to a kind of discourse (The Geographical Accounts of the Indies) that allowed for a reading of native (or subaltern) conceptualization of space. Native territoriality, which had been disregarded in López de Velazco’s report as well as in the subsequent history written by Herrera y Tordesillas (1601–15) and printed in several editions between 1601 and 1730, emerged, however, in the Geographical Accounts (GA). Although the GA—like many other colonial writings—did not reach the printing press until the end of the nineteenth century¹ (and during the colonial period they did not have any particular force or effect other than providing information for the official chronicler or historians), they allowed—in retrospect—for the mobility of the center fixed in López de Velazco as well as in Herrera y Tordesilla’s official territorial representations.

Unlike Ricci, López de Velazco was not a Jesuit with the mission of converting the Chinese to Christianity, but the Geographer of the Council of the Indies with the charge to gather and organize all relevant information about the Spanish territory in the New World. Although I am comparing López de Velazco with Father Ricci because they were both active during the same years and dealing with the mobility of the center, the cases per se are quite dissimilar. As cosmographer of the Council of the Indies, Velazco was mapping the Spanish possessions in the West Indies and not making a world map, whereas Ricci was transforming Ortelius to carry on the Jesuit mission in China. Furthermore, López de Velazco was not on a mission of conversion but in charge of mapping the territories and gathering information about the native population. Because the dialogue between the missionaries and the natives was of a nature different from that of the dialogue between geographers and public notaries (letrados, juristas), reading the Description and Demarcation of the West Indies as well as the Geographical Accounts of the Indies is quite interesting. López de Velazco’s report
was written with the conviction that the lands and coasts being mapped were just lumps to which no human conceptualization had been applied before the arrival of the Spaniards. He contributed to the knowledge of the periphery and to its incorporation into the ethnic center invented by those who were in a position to carry on the expansion of imperial Spain and Western Christendom. This is why we can conclude that while Father Ricci—with his world map—disdained Chinese cartography and space conceptualization, López de Velasco—with his map of the West Indies—repressed Amerindian territoriality. However, the stronger tradition in Chinese cartography and narrative of the past allowed for a stronger (or at least more visible) resistance to Western territorial organization. On the contrary, the liquidation of Amerindian nobility and culture left few traces of Amerindian resistance to Western territorial conceptualization. Most of them can be found in the pinturas of the Geographical Accounts or in the documents of land concession or litigations. Guaman Poma de Ayala has also left an outstanding example of resistance to territorial representation, as we will see below.

In order to understand better what the Instruction and Memorandum and the Geographical Accounts represent for interpreting the mobility of the geographical center, let me begin by counting the social and communicative situation in which the fifty questions of the Instruction and Memorandum were answered and by describing the context in which pinturas or maps were requested and subsequently drawn. At the beginning of every Account, the place, date, and people gathered together had to be explicitly stated. The beginning of the Relación de Chimalhuacán Atoyac (Account of Chimalhuacán Atoyac), from the Valley of México is as follows:

In the town of Chimalhuacán, at the holding of Jerónimo de Bustamante, on the first day of the month of December in the year 1579, this report was made by order of His Majesty the King, in accordance with the Instrucción y Memoria contained above, written in print. The knight commander Cristóbal de Salazar, his Majesty’s chief magistrate for the town of Coatepec and its environs, was present in order to see that this was done, and with him, Francisco de Villacastrín, clerk and interpreter of his court, and the chiefs were asked of their language, and of the elders who were in this said town, and of their subjects. (Acuña 1985, 155)

Although several of the fifty questions requested geographical information, it was only question number 10 that specifically asked for a pintura or map of the place. The verbal answer to this question, in the above-mentioned Account of Chimalhuacán, is the following:
As has been said, this town is located at the foot of the said Hill of Chimalhuacán and it is located in the direction of the west; it is not laid out in the form of a town. In the town there is a monastery of monks of the order of Saint Dominic, as can be seen in the painting. (Acuña 1985, 159)

The verbal description does not render what the pintura does. A large percentage of the pinturas in the Accounts were presumably done by the hands of the “principales indios viejos” mentioned at the beginning of each relation. The painting attached to the Account of Chimalhuacán requested in question 10, is the one in figure 17.

Where is the center in this pintura? The organization of the space is somehow alien to a Western observer. What we see are, indeed, two well-delineated spaces facing each other. The bottom half is monopolized by the hill (el cerro), more often than not a sacred place. At the top of the hill you can see the design we have learned to identify with Aztec or Mesoamerican architecture. The caption reads: “antigua casa de idolatria” (the old house of idolatrous practices). The upper half is dominated by the monastery. The caption says: “El monasterio.” In between the houses of Aztec and Christian religious practices we see roads with footsteps, a common sign to distinguish roads from rivers as well as to indicate direction in narrative “maps” of Amerindian origins. As Western observers, we might have the impression that the monastery is more important than the hill because it is right side up and because it is located toward the upper
left corner. Since in the West reading moves from left to right and from top to bottom, such a pattern could also be applied to the interpretation of the picture. However, we know that codices were usually (or also) read from bottom to top, starting at the right hand corner and moving up in a boustrophedon movement. Following this pattern will change the interpretation of the picture, since it gives the hill a more significant position than the church.

The *pintura* of Chimalhuacán provides a good illustration of colonial representation of space from the point of view of the colonized on two accounts. First, the map or painting has two centers and each center is marked by a religious place (the hill and the monastery). In that regard, the map is a paradigmatic example of a colonial hybrid cultural product in which one symbolic space is organized around two centers. Second, the map illustrates a larger domain of semiotic interactions in a colonial situation in which colonized territorial representations were possible and available, although often these were negated and silenced by the intimidating “true” territorial organization offered by those who held the power in the Council of the Indies, the religious missions, or professional cartographers and cosmographers.

Similar kinds of paintings or maps can be found from the second half of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, attached to land disputes or land claims. The *pintura* shown in figure 18 has a disposition somehow inverted when compared to the *pintura* of Chimalhuacán. In fact, both the church or monastery as well as the native place for religious practices are right side up. Contrary to the previous
pintura, the church is in the bottom right corner while the Aztec temple is in the upper-left corner. There is, however, a feature in common with the Chimalhuacán painting that should claim our attention: the center could be conceived as an intersection of circles whose centers are the Aztec and the Christian temples. The pintura of the town of Huaxtepeque (State of México), from the Geographical Account of the same town, illustrates the persistence of the pattern although in a slightly different distribution (fig. 19). The monastery or the church share the center with the hill, which is marked at the intersection between the signs of two cultures: the glyph of Huaxtepeque (“in the hill of guajes”) and the church or monastery.

Such radically different organization of the “same” space by the cosmographer of the Council of the Indies and by representatives of the Amerindian cultures could be explained by looking into the Spaniards’ colonization of
Amerindian territories, the conflicts between ways of perceiving and representing space in Amerindian and Spanish cultures, and the power relation established between those who were in a colonizing position and those who had to accept a new spatial organization. Related to the first aspect was the substitution, in México, of the local *altepeme* by the economic and religious organization of space introduced by the colonizers. The *altepeme* (from the náhuatl *Altepētl* = alil [water] and *tepēl* [hill]), is a territorial concept in the sense that while the hill and the water indicate geographical boundaries, they could also be taken for a sacred place, as we saw in the *pintura* of Chimalhuacán-Atoyac. Among the many meanings attributed to the word *altepeme*, one of the most relevant for the present discussion is the one related to territoriality, *Altepeme* means, on the one hand, the land as a place as well as a living force and, on the other, the genealogy and the traditions of the people inhabiting the land (García Martínez 1987, 77ff). The *altepeme* was a concept whose corresponding precept was represented in the *pinturas* or maps. The *encomienda* was one of the pillars of economic production, distribution, and consumption of goods and of the political organization of communal life in the Spanish colonization, and it was established “on top,” so to speak, of the *altepeme*, albeit keeping its structure alive. The *encomienda* and the *altepeme* coexisted, whereas the power was in the hands of the “*encomenderos.*” Parallel to the economic and political colonization centered on the *encomienda*, the church and the convents were the locus and the foundation of the colonization of the religious imagination. Churches, convents, and monasteries were sometimes placed literally on the top of a hill (the native sacred place), and sometimes in a different although prominent location. The *pintura* of Huaxtepeque (fig. 19) illustrates the first case; the *pintura* of Chimalhuacán-Atoyac (fig. 17) the second.

The explanation of the second aspect (e.g., different perception of space), is related to the fact that alternative spatial representations are historical constructions rooted in basic human relationships within the environment (space, living systems, natural and human-made objects). In Amerindian cultures the representation of space was less relevant than time-reckoning and was subordinated to it (León-Portilla 1986, 65–94; 119–62). The three main pre-Columbian cultures have left impressive documents of their concern with the organization of time, but nothing similar survived apropos the organization of space (Guzmán 1939). On the contrary, in modern Europe cartography acquired a life of its own that detached more and more spatial representations (maps) from chronological ones (chronicles, history). Territorial expansion increased the need for spatial organization, a need that was not strongly felt among Amerindian
communities during the same period. Finally, Western desire for economic and religious expansion not only generated more visible means of territorial representation but also produced cartographic results that expanded the perceptual image (Randles 1980) of the world and contributed to the practical control of space (Sack 1986).

Beyond the pinturas attached to the Geographical Accounts and those attached to land litigation in México, Guamán Poma de Ayala in Perú documented the hybrid representation of space from the point of view of the colonized, not only in his curious and famous world map (Kusch 1970), but also in the pintura of the pontifical world, a representation of a coexisting Cuzco and the Kingdom of Castile (fig. 20). In this pintura, the familiar four-corners-of-the-world pattern common to numerous cosmological traditions (Blacker and Loewe 1975; Wheatly 1971) before the spread of Western cartography, and still existing in cultures and communities that have survived on the margins of the Western world (Gossen 1986), has been maintained. The patterns have been duplicated in
order to represent Castile in the same way that Cuzco’s territory is represented. Furthermore, Cuzco has been placed in the upper half, next to the sun and therefore in a privileged position, and the center has been emptied, as in the pinturas shown in figures 17, 18, and 20.

A preliminary conclusion can be drawn from these four alternative examples to López de Velazco’s fourteen maps of the Indies: whereas the space is perceived from the point of view of the colonized as coexisting territorial organization—for reasons the example of the altepeme, the encomienda, and the monasterio illustrate—the point of view of the colonizer conceals (or attempts to, as in Ricci’s example) native non-European territorial representations. Although there is no indication in López de Velazco’s map that alternative territorial representation may have existed, we cannot ignore this when looking at the pinturas in which space is represented by means of coexisting symbolic structures.

Chinese reactions to Western territorial representations described by Father Ricci were more visible than their Amerindian counterparts and they lasted longer. In the New World all the examples known today are from the last quarter of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth century. It is tempting to formulate the hypothesis that the hybrid territorial representations seen in figures 17–20 are related to the Instruction and Memorandum, although there is no clear evidence, to my knowledge, that Guamán Poma was directly addressing question 10 of the Instruction and Memorandum when he drew his pontifical world map representing Cuzco and the Kingdom of Castile. Several of his drawings in which Peruvian cities are depicted resembled so many of the pinturas attached to the Geographical Accounts that one suspects that the official requests of the Council of the Indies transmitted via Instruction and Memorandum (or perhaps some examples of the Geographical Accounts) were not completely unknown to Guamán Poma. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the economic and religious expansion of the West produced—between approximately 1580 and 1620—a moment of tension in territorial representation that turned around the mobility of the center. Although by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, Western cartographers had displaced the geographical and ethnic center from the Mediterranean (which means, incidentally, “the middle of the earth”!) to the Atlantic, and Rome began to be more centrally located than Jerusalem, Ricci’s move consisted of disjoining the geographical from the ethnic centers. This move certainly did not convince the Chinese, who could live with the way their own cartographic tradition had solved the problems and satisfied the needs of territorial representations. It convinced the Japanese, however, as they saw in it the possibility of displacing the geographic and ethnic center from
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the Atlantic to the Pacific. The situation was different in the European expansion to the New World. López de Velasco’s map of the West Indies presupposed the Atlantic as the geographical and ethnic center. Its successful reprints in Herrera y Tordesillas’s Descripción de las Indias Occidentales (1601), also indicates that López de Velasco’s map was highly satisfactory to those who charted and controlled the administration of the Indies. The Amerindian pinturas suggest that, contrary to the Chinese reaction, toward the end of the sixteenth century the native populations were losing their own patterns of territorial representation.

Concluding Remarks

A few concluding remarks are in order:

First, at the beginning of the sixteenth century the merging of map making and the printing industry took place. Travel and exploration awakened the curiosity of a large European audience, which the printing industry was in a position to satisfy.

Second, naturally, world maps were drawn with the Atlantic and Europe at the center, combining both the ethnic and the algebraic position of the observer. Father Ricci’s move, certainly not very well known in European cartographic history, was adopted in Japan in exactly the same terms: the combination of the ethnic with the position of the observer determined by algebraic calculation. However, while this merging was ethnically “natural” for a person belonging to a community dwelling near the Pacific, it was not “natural” for Father Ricci, whose ethnic place was near the Mediterranean. In his case, the need to satisfy the audience he was attempting to convert led him to the realization that the ethnic and algebraic observer could be detached in territorial representation without losing the central religious and ideological center that was determined by political power.

Finally, when it comes to the New World, in which the encounter between missionaries and geographers with native civilizations was of a nature distinct from the experience missionaries and geographers had in China and Japan, it appears that mapping the West Indies was not contested in the same way that Ricci’s world map was contested in China. It also appears that the silenced territorial representations of native populations emerged, among other cultural products, in the pinturas attached to GA or to land litigations.

Both the Jesuit experience in China and Japan and the geographer and public notary experiences in the West (Indies), illustrate one aspect of colonial semiosis: colonial cultural artifacts read in its context always reveal their hybrid
dimension, even in the case in which the colonial point of view is explicitly concealed. To read the silence of European territorial representation is, perhaps, one way of reaching subaltern territoriality. I have attempted to illustrate only one case of colonial semiosis by inquiring into some of the changes in territorial representation produced during the age of exploration and expansion of the Spanish empire.

In Latin America today there are communities still living like the Chamulas of southern Mexico (fig. 21), not yet reached by Western patterns of territoriality. In cases like this, Ricci’s move comes to mind. Should they be taught to look at the world as Ortelius or López de Velazco did or should they be encouraged to develop their own alternative spatial perceptions? Can we today still hold our beliefs that a “true” territorial organization shows how the world really is or should we accept their diversity as we accept linguistic diversity (Coulmas 1984), which in an ideal or science-fiction world could lead to coexisting and equally valid organization of space, to a plural epistemology not necessarily dependent on a fixed center? The movable center would then become a metaphysical
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metaphor for an ideal world that resembles the state of affairs before rather than after the economic and religious expansion of the West and the consequent mapping of the earth. It could also be a methodological metaphor to understand what colonial semiosis entails. I am not proposing a romantic return to a premodern world, but rather using the image of the pre-modern world as an example of a de-centered epistemology that had been radically transformed during the sixteenth century.³

Notes

1. Jiménez de la Espada published several GAs of Peru. Since then the GAs have received more attention from scholars. Acuña (1984–1989) published over one hundred and fifty “relaciones” of México, all of them from the sixteenth century. Solano (1988) edited a considerable number of GAs from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

2. We should keep in mind that the etymology of “map” is quite close to “pintura.” The original meaning of “map” denotes a piece of cloth or paper in which a depiction of space is drawn. In the Middle Ages, descriptio was a term often used to refer to what today one calls “map.”

3. I recently read Hodgson’s “In the center of the map: Nations see themselves as the hub of history,” an article published in 1956 (UNESCO Courier) that advances a thesis very similar to mine here. (See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 29–35.) I am grateful to Bruce Lawrence for calling Hodgson to my attention.