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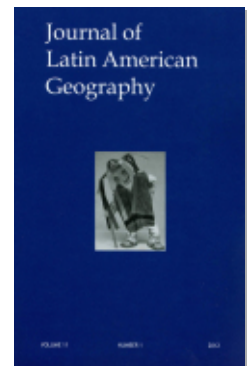
*Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala:  
Coloniality, Modernity, and Identity Politics* (review)

W. George Lovell

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deals with one of the most significant instruments, the *relaciones geográficas*--reports prepared based on detailed questionnaires completed by colonial authorities or local residents who had the required facts. Now maps and detailed statistics became more common in reporting. For geographers and historians alike these reports provide some of the most detailed information available. The Council of the Indies steadily began to dedicate time to ensure that the chief administrators in the colonies completed their duties regarding information collection; empiricism and imperialism became a single collective goal.

From the middle of the sixteenth century, a more professionalized systematic information collection system produced enough material that natural history scholars could begin to theorize and frame the discoveries in multi-volume treatises. Chapter Five provides us with details of the case of José de Acosta and his *Historia natural y moral de la Indias*. Based on the accumulated information, Acosta was asking questions about natural causes and principles governing distributions and processes.

Private initiatives and state sponsorship had set in motion a process of expanding the empirical knowledge that was to reverberate through, and gather speed in, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spain and Portugal alike were to lose their empires, but their gifts to science were the most far-reaching in modern history: they triggered an information revolution. We should compliment Antonio Barrera-Osorio for providing such a succinct and elegant introduction to a subject that can only grow in importance in the future. This is a book that all Latin Americanists will need in their collections.

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*Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala: Coloniality, Modernity, and Identity Politics*. Emilio del Valle Escalante. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2009. x + 211 pp. Notes, references, index. \$34.95 paper. (ISBN 978-1-930618-13-8).

The indigenous turn that has marked much of Latin American politics in recent years, from the Zapatista uprising in Mexico to the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia, affords Emilio del Valle Escalante a continental backdrop within which to frame, illuminate, and subject to incisive scrutiny the emergence of the Maya movement in Guatemala. Himself of K'iche' Maya origin, belonging to one of twenty-some Maya groups who make up roughly half the national population, Valle Escalante (a professor of Latin American literatures and cultures) eschews the vicissitudes of "insider views" for the vantage of a postcolonial perspective that propels his inquiry, and allows him to critique his complex subject to positive effect. Theoretical musings rarely obfuscate empirical findings, the author guiding readers through a murky labyrinth to a place of tempered light. Fiercely contested issues, literally matters of life and death in Guatemala, are confronted and dealt with nimbly, even though they may never be resolved.

A clear sense of purpose is evident at the outset: "I am interested in examining the Maya movement's efforts toward revitalizing and affirming indigenous cultures through a study of the discourses of literature, journalism, testimonial narratives, educational projects, and other cultural texts about or produced by the representatives of the movement." He declares his primary interest to reside "in exploring how, since the

1970s, indigenous peoples have been challenging established, hegemonic narratives of modernity, history, nation, and cultural identity as these relate to the indigenous world.” The origins of the Maya challenge are rooted in a long political struggle that, to the present, has coincided with a period of profound, generalized economic crisis and the failure of the models of development of the Guatemalan nation-state. Consolidated in the 1990s –Valle Escalante rightly sees the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 to Rigoberta Menchú as a landmark event– the movement subsequently bifurcated into two ideological tendencies that embrace “two complementary and, at times, contradictory paths,” the “cultural” and the “popular.” The former promotes “the revitalization of a Maya (not ‘Indian’) identity, Maya traditional dress, and indigenous languages and religion,” whereas the latter is driven by a more overt political agenda in which questions of class take precedence over expressions of ethnicity. As is often the case, differences led to divisions and eventually to ruptures, a fissure that endures, as the distant finish of Menchú in two general elections (the first in 2007, the second in 2011) sadly attests.

The book is structured in two parts. In the first, he grapples with depictions of Maya life as articulated in works of literature and *testimonio*. Both genres provide him with plentiful examples upon which to deliberate, but he prefers to focus attention on a handful of exponents and an equal number of emblematic works. Chapter Two, sees him play off Miguel Ángel Asturias, Guatemala’s most famous novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1967, against Luis de Lión, “the first Maya Kaqchikel writer,” who in fact was not himself a native speaker of Kaqchikel, a conundrum that Valle Escalante acknowledges but chooses not to elaborate. He concludes that de Lión “deemed it necessary to criticize Asturias and his version of the indigenous world because Asturias was the Ladino [non-indigenous] author par excellence in Guatemala.” Valle Escalante does not doubt the genius of Asturias “to create a new aesthetic language,” nor disputes “his valuable and necessary critique of capitalism” in novels such as *Hombres de maíz*. He questions, however, the Nobel laureate’s “limited representation of the indigenous world,” contrasting it with de Lión’s “profound insight into the coloniality of power” in *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*, regarded by many as “the first Maya novel.” The same strategy of point/counterpoint applies to Chapter Three, where Valle Escalante provides his opinion on the surgical dissection by David Stoll of the *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchú.

The second part of his book engages discussions of modernity, identity politics, and the role of education in creating “intercultural citizenship” in Guatemala. Chapter Four features more a stand-off than a dialogue between two spokesmen on either side of the Maya-Ladino divide, with the arguments of Mario Roberto Morales’ *La articulación de las diferencias* faring better when read against those of Estuardo Zapeta’s *Las buellas de B’alam*, a collection of his newspaper columns from 1994 to 1996. Valle Escalante is at his discursive best in Chapter Five, in which he tackles the thorny business of the Educational Reform implemented in 2002, “to teach Maya languages in various kindergarten and elementary public schools in rural and urban areas.” The program, in its own words, seeks not to “divide the country and the State but accomplish a new social pact that takes into account Guatemala’s diverse realities [and] recognizes and respects their expressions, rights, and necessities, without the mediation of violence and polarizing confrontations.” Valle Escalante argues that “interculturality in the educational discourse should confront the coloniality of power” and insists that the Maya movement, “instead of spreading the idea of a biological cultural identity should emphasize Mayaness as a political positioning that implies, more than a geographic place or a specific language or how one dresses or acts, a historical experience and an affective and political cultural relationship from which we think and act.” His assessment, which strikes me

as grounded and reasonable, is not one with which all key players, whether of Maya or Ladino stripe, would agree.

The battle for Guatemala – “from a country for a few to a country for all,” as Severo Martínez Peláez memorably put it in *La patria del criollo*, his still controversial treatise on national identity and development – rages on.

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*Traveling from New Spain to Mexico: Mapping the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico.* Magali M. Carrera. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. xxi + 325 pp., maps, figures, tables, photos, notes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95 paper (ISBN 978-0-8223-4991-4).

The newly independent nations of Latin America imagined themselves in ways that linked specific pasts to new, national identities. While each emerging nation-state did this slightly differently, Magali Carrera shows that Mexican intellectuals did this by visually constructing—mapping, drawing, photographing, exhibiting and even performing—idealized narratives of Mexican history and geography that defined what it meant to be Mexican. And, Carrera does this in a well-written and visually profuse book that should interest Latin Americanist geographers working with questions of visual culture, national identity, or cartographic intention.

The author is a member of the department of Art History at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, and many readers will know that she is also the author of *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Texas, 2003). As with this earlier work, her new book makes a concerted effort to be interdisciplinary and to appeal widely. Carrera situates her study at the intersection of the history of art, the history of cartography, and visual cultural studies of the nineteenth century. She makes use of several theoretical works by geographers, for example highlighting scholarship by Duncan and Gregory on travel writing. Unfortunately, she overlooks Alfred Siemens' *Between the Summit and the Sea*, and, in general, tends to neglect relevant geographic scholarship on Latin America or Mexico. I do not see this as a problem, however, since she is not reinventing the wheel nor making claims that geographers are uniquely situated to make. Indeed, the keen and deconstructivist eye of the art historian can contribute to our own research on landscape interpretation, representation, and meaning.

At the heart of the book is the argument that older forms of representing New Spain were refashioned to emerging conditions and practices of nineteenth-century visuality—themselves affected by new technologies of lithography, the daguerreotype, photography, and methods of display—to produce a coherent and inspiring nationalist narrative of the Mexican nation. At the center of this story is the life-work of the Mexican geographer Antonio García Cubas, and especially his pre-Porfiriato *Atlas geográfico, estadístico é histórico de la República Mexicana* (1858) and his post-Porfiriato *Atlas pintoresco é histórico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (1885). Through the illustration of her thesis in seven chapters—and I mean this literally too, as the book includes 91 black and white illustrations—Carrera does much more than provide a biography of García Cubas.

The first two chapters cover mapping and visual practices of the colonial New World in general and New Spain in particular. The second chapter builds off work by