

The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain

By **Ricardo Padrón**

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The Spacious Word is a book about the early history of Spanish territorial expansion into the Americas. It is constructed through a careful analysis of maps and literary works from sixteenth-century Spain, exploring various conceptualizations of space and the origins of European colonialism and rationalization of empire.

The book is divided in five parts. Part one - "The Invention of America and the Invention of the Map" - provides the context for the book. It starts with Cervantes epic travels of magical lands, moving on to the construction and attempts to encompass the world by the Hapsburgs, and the analysis of the beginnings of the construction of ideas and feelings of the New World. Part two - "Tracking Space" - is devoted to the analysis of the idea and concept of map. The author analyses iconographic cartography, and argues and illustrates how a notion of space quite different from the abstract, isotropic expanse of the gridded map, existed well beyond the rediscovery of Ptolemy. The work *Suma de geografía*, of Martín Fernández de Enciso (1519) is analysed as an example of a hybrid text where two different spatialities coexist.

In part three - "Mapping New Spain" - there is a turn to discursive cartography, and it is argued that the discourse of the history of space in sixteenth century Spain can be understood as a type of mapping. To contend to this point it is shown how Hernán Cortés' *Second Letter*

from Mexico (1520) is an example of how linear spatiality inherited from the late Middle Ages was worked into a robust rhetorical weapon that could map Mesoamerica into a novel, trans-Atlantic, imperial space.

Part four - "Charting an Insular Empire" - is concerned with the analysis of the first volume of *Historia general de las Indias*, from Francisco López Gómara, a work from the mid sixteenth century that attempts to construct a condensed vision of all Indies, in a nationalistic and imperialistic tone.

The final chapter - "Between Scylla and Charybdis" - turns to the final part of the sixteenth century and to the analysis of a traditional discourse represented by the literary work *Araucana* of Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, which can be located in a long line of epic works such as those of Virgil, Ariosto and Camões. The geography and the representation and construction of the New Spain is here analysed through what Cervantes has considered the finest epic poem ever written in Spanish.

The Spacious Word is an elegant piece of work of great interest to cultural and historical geography. Inspired by Lefebvre's ideas of the production of space and following the work of Brian Harley and others, Padrón illustrates the ways in which maps are formidable sources of knowledge and power, and points to the importance of maps as weapons of imperialism, in the context of the Iberian

expansion. In Padrón's words "Maps – in the invention of America, the Orient, Australia, or any other such entity – join history, literature, painting, architecture, and many other kinds of cultural endeavour to create a mutually reinforcing, albeit partially fictional, geography, one that locates and characterizes both self and other" (p. 21). *The Spacious Word* looks at maps and cartography in a broader sense, understanding them as texts, as cultural productions that need particular and careful readings in relation to other texts, which are in turn embedded in various discourses.

For cultural geographers the value of this work lies in the rigorous use and analysis of a variety of iconographic and discursive cartographical literature (different places, audiences, modes of historical writing and purposes), in order to understand how the mapping of the world opened new ways of appropriating space, imagining empire, celebrating power, or even questioning it.

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