



INTRODUCTION

Writing a Spatial History of Modern Mexico

Geography is not an immutable thing. It is made, it is remade
everyday; at each instant, it is modified by men's actions.

—Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la terre*

In 1985, on the cusp of signing on to the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), Mexican president Miguel de la Madrid proposed an ambitious undertaking: the creation of a comprehensive rural *cadastre* (property register) complete with maps of land plots, each at a scale of 1:50,000. The project, in part intended to clarify the boundaries and holdings of Mexico's many *ejidos* (inalienable concessions of land granted to communities by the state), proved to be more ambitious than he imagined and was quickly abandoned. Mexico's dire economic circumstances played some role in the undertaking's demise but so too did the complicated agrarian reality that, in part, had been the impetus for the project in the first place. Like previous administrations, federal officials found a significant disparity between what appeared in surviving land grant records and what existed on the ground. Over the course of the previous seventy years, ejido lands had been illegally sold, rented, divided, and occupied; different petitioners had been granted the same lands; ejidatarios had migrated away and others had assumed possession of their lands; and lands assigned to a community in one municipality were located on land under the jurisdiction of another.¹ An array of everyday acts, a relentless underground economy, had foiled his adminis-

1 Cambrezy and Marchal, *Crónicas de un territorio fraccionado*, 133–34, 157. See also Nuijten, *Power, Community, and the State*.

tration's efforts to carry out one of the most fundamental tasks of the modern state: to account for and regulate landed property and assume control over the space of the state.

The failure of de la Madrid's efforts are all the more remarkable given that the manner in which the granting of ejido land took place after Mexico's revolution had itself been, in part, an attempt to overcome such proprietorial opacity. Those postrevolutionary administrations, in turn, had sought to overcome the kind of spatial ambiguity that had plagued *their* predecessors: the nineteenth-century liberal state-builders who attempted to divide communal lands, institute a regime of simple fee-hold property, attract foreign investment, and resolve land conflicts between villages, municipalities, and states. Although de la Madrid may not have known it, when he ordered the creation of a comprehensive cadastre he was reenacting a drama all too common in Mexican history: a spatial drama of state fixations and fugitive landscapes.

I. STAGE SPACES

The history of the modern Mexican state is inextricably entwined with the space it has not only occupied but actively produced. This study examines one particular dimension of that history and relationship: the contested, dialectical, and social (not merely technical) processes by which explorers, surveyors, and cartographers attempted to define, codify, and naturalize space in cooperation and struggle with the people they encountered in the field. In their *longue durée* analysis of English state formation, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer argued that the creation of the modern abstraction of the political state is a process of normalizing and naturalizing "what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order."² In other words, they suggested, the process of state formation is in part one of "defining, mapping, [and] naming 'reality.'"³

In what follows, I take this final observation literally, by analyzing the cartographic routines through which both the Mexican state and the space it occupied were produced and rendered natural. Spatial and car-

2 Corrigan and Sayer, *The Great Arch*, 4.

3 *Ibid.*, 141–42.

tographic metaphors (“mapping” and “space” are conspicuous examples) have gained widespread prominence in an array of academic disciplines. Their application is laudable in as much as it *may* reflect an increased sensitivity to space in critical theory. However, there is a very real danger that a proliferating and metaphorical promiscuity may give such words little more than a trendy banality, sapping them of any critical meaning. Even worse, such uncritical usage may inadvertently imply that both space and cartography are themselves transparent and neutral.⁴ There is more than a little irony here, given the concerted efforts made by scholars in recent years to overturn such positivistic notions of space and maps. As they have sharply observed, a consuming concern with process and progress privileges *time* (and its institutional manifestation, history) as the dimension of critical engagement rather than *space* (and its institutional manifestation, geography).⁵ Space tends to be perceived as a static and neutral category, a prepolitical object, and little more than a passive stage upon which historical subjects play assigned roles. “Our gaze,” Paul Carter writes, “sees *through the space of history*, as if it was never there.”⁶ Such a lack of perspective is problematic.

In the first place, stage spaces deny certain kinds of agency: the places people have actively created—the transformations of *space* into *place*—appear preformed and preordained, detached from meaning and experience.⁷ In reality of course, people make their own geography as well as

4 For cautionary remarks, see Smith and Katz, “Grounding Metaphor,” and Mitchell, “Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity.” See also Turnbull, *Maps Are Territories*. The conscious and strategic, if still problematic, use of spatial metaphors is typical of much of the writing of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. See Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, and Foucault, “Questions of Geography.”

5 See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, esp. part 3; Massey, “Politics and Space/Time”; Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*; and Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*. Soja’s oft-cited call for the reassertion of space in critical theory is meant to suggest that space has been left out of the equation by being too readily accepted as unproblematically *already there*. There is a venerable radical tradition in geography upon which these authors build, running from Reclus’s *L’Homme et la terre* and Kropotkin’s “What Geography Ought to Be” to Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and Harvey’s *Social Justice and the City*. Structuralist studies of spatial production are complemented by the humanist tradition in geography which in its own way denaturalized space. See the classic work of Tuan, *Space and Place*.

6 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xiv. My emphasis.

7 The distinction between “space” and “place” is a common one, and the liter-

their own history.⁸ On the flat field of the coordinated grid, they do neither: place is timeless; history is staged. Agency, when it appears at all, returns as an apologetic for the exercise of power, such as in the settler discourses so trenchantly unsettled by Frantz Fanon: “The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning:

ature is vast. While a variety of definitions exist, a basic one would be that “place” is space to which meaning has been ascribed and endowed with value. For this definition see Tuan, *Space and Place*, and Carter, Donald, and Squires, eds., *Space and Place*. Space and place have served as foundational points of departure for much of the new literature in cultural geography. For overviews, see Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, and Mitchell, *Cultural Geography*. Anthropologists’ careful thinking about place making can be found in Gupta and Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place*; Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*; Feld and Basso, eds., *Senses of Place*; and Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*. Excellent place-sensitive historical studies that I have found useful include Denning, *Islands and Beaches*; Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*; Faragher, *Sugar Creek*; Richardson, *Possessions*; Roldán, *Blood and Fire*; and Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters*. The prominence of space and place as organizing units of analysis in recent years is not surprising given the transformations wrought on social, political, cultural, and economic life by globalization, the Internet, and flexible accumulation. Concerns with the uneven development of capitalism and a perceived spatial and cultural homogenization (even if globalization rarely flattens differences between places to the degree some lament) has generated a dynamic literature on the relationship between the global and the local. For particularly astute and careful discussions of the relationship between space and place and the (often uncritical) use and application of the terms in battles over globalization, see Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” and Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*. Compare her analysis with Harvey, “Between Space and Time,” who sees the fetishization of place and the local as complicit with late capitalism. Massey suggests quite convincingly that place-based rather than place-bound social movements need not fall prey to the reactionary, exclusionary forces that Harvey fears. For a sweeping philosophical survey of space and place, see Casey, *The Fate of Place*.

8 A comprehensive bibliography is not possible here, but the point is emphasized with particular force in two works straddling the twentieth century: Reclus, *L’Homme et la terre*, and Said, *Orientalism*. Said consistently located geography at the center of his analyses of colonialist thought and practice. The unifying premise of the array of practices that Said identified as orientalism was geographic: the collapsing of over half the globe into a single unit of analysis, understood as having a coherence and essence. See *ibid.*, esp. 49–72; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. For a superb social, as well as literary, analysis of the making and workings of vernacular geographies, see Pred, *Lost Words and Lost Worlds*. Obviously the work of Fernand Braudel is seminal, yet for all his sensitivity to geography Braudel suggested repeatedly that human history was in the last instance *determined* by geography. See esp. Braudel, *La Méditerranée*.

‘This land was created by us’; he is the unceasing cause: ‘If we leave, all is lost, and the country will go back to the Middle Ages.’”⁹ On the stage space, *only* the settler makes history. In other words, as space becomes a stage, history becomes teleology. The ambiguities of (and struggles in) history are reconciled and suppressed through spatial order as the open-ended yields to the inevitable. The complexity, contingency, messiness, and irony that *is* human history; the struggles for, and alternative visions of, a better social life; the myriad ways of organizing and conceiving space; the spatial practices and relationships that were transformed in the process of primitive accumulation and state formation; and, not least of all, the techniques and technologies of domination—all are flattened and neutralized in the teleological quest for legitimacy, foundational coherence, and the naturalization of the social world.

Thus, an overweening emphasis on history at the expense of space is, ironically enough, ahistorical. Space does not merely display itself to the world, as if it were somehow ontologically prior to the cultural and semiotic codes through which its existence is expressed. Such myths of mimesis turn the historical into the natural, concealing its social, cultural, and political underpinnings. “Space,” remarked Henri Lefebvre, “is produced [and] if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*.”¹⁰ And with power: “[T]o talk in terms of space,” Michel Foucault observed, “to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power.”¹¹ Yet by freezing the spatial axis this historical process of production and its link to power is rendered invisible.

The very understanding of space as a stage *has* a history, one inextricably linked to the social abstraction of commodity exchange and the political abstraction of the modern, territorial state.¹² A fundamental stage in capitalist development was the development of the idea of the

9 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 51. For more recent attempts to skewer such legitimization histories, see Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, and Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, esp. chap. 4.

10 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 46. Emphasis in the original.

11 Foucault, “Questions of Geography,” 70.

12 The following paragraph draws upon Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Landscape Idea”; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, esp. part 3; Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*; and Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

stage itself. The sixteenth-century application of Euclidean principles of geometry to spatial representation in order to create a “realist illusion” of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface gave artistic expression to a developing new “way of seeing.” The geometry that structured perspectival space was itself critical to the growth of activities intimately linked to modern capitalism such as double-entry book-keeping, land surveying, and the production of real property.¹³ Just as crucial, because perspectival space was founded upon geometric principles, it was assumed to merely reflect inherent properties of space itself such that a new way of seeing, inextricable from political, economic, and social transformations of the time, became *the* way of seeing.¹⁴ Space—now subject to the universal laws of science, statecraft, and political economy—acquired a scientific and factual existence as an observable object detached from meaning, experience, and politics. Situated within a web of uniform and mathematically configured coordinates, space became self-evident, a socially and historically flat surface amenable to circulation, possession, and control.¹⁵ All the world was now a stage, as William Shakespeare proclaimed while his players performed at the aptly named Globe Theatre.

The connection between the stage space and cartography is an intimate one. The orderly system of linear coordinates is modern cartography’s graticule—the epistemological and methodological geometric grid of longitude and latitude imagined to envelope the globe. Once coordinated, all space became *already there*, its reality predicted by the global coordinates that posited its very existence. Modern cartography, founded upon the same geometric and mathematical principles as perspectival space, took form as a supposedly objective science mediating

13 Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Landscape Idea”; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 245. See also Rotman, “The Technology of Mathematical Persuasion.”

14 Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Landscape Idea,” 51. More broadly on these transformations, although still with a sense of the spatial revolution they both required and facilitated, see Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*.

15 Paul Carter has in fact argued that the “very idea of invasion and colonization presupposed a theatrical conception of space.” See Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, 365. See also O’Gorman, *The Invention of America*; Hillis, “The Power of the Disembodied Imagination”; Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*; and Agnew, *Worlds Apart*.

between spatial reality and human perception of that reality. Its products—maps—acquired a disembodied purity, functioning as transparent windows onto a preexisting space. Yet, as Nietzsche sarcastically reminded his readers, there is no “immaculate perception.”¹⁶ Maps are no more transparent than language which, *pace* the literary realists, carries with it an array of normative assumptions and ideological premises.¹⁷ The power of the myth of mimesis is its capacity to obscure such assumptions and premises—such interests—behind a facade of both objectivity and neutrality.¹⁸ But if a map reflects anything, it is the relationship between modes of representation and the material practices of power.

II. A SPATIAL HISTORY OF MEXICO

While students of modern Mexican history have devoted relatively little attention to mapmaking, surveying, and exploration, the same cannot be said of the various administrations that have ruled (or aspired to rule) Mexico since its independence in 1821.¹⁹ State officials, bureau-

16 Quoted from Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 191.

17 For critiques of literary realism, see Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, and White, *The Content of the Form*.

18 This has been most persistently articulated in the work of the late J. B. Harley. See his collected essays in Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, and his “Rereading the Maps of the Columbian Encounter.” For a useful critique of Harley and his use of Foucault and Derrida, see Belyea, “Images of Power.” For excellent works that historically ground, and complicate, Harley’s theoretical articulations, see Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*; Edney, *Mapping an Empire*; Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed*; and Michael, “Separating the Yam from the Boulder.”

19 Exceptions include Holden, *Mexico and the Survey of Public Lands*; García Martínez, “La Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora”; Rebert, *La Gran Línea*; Mendoza Vargas, ed., *Mexico a través de los mapas*; Mendoza Vargas, “Historia de la geografía en México”; and Tutino, “Agrarian Social Change and Peasant Rebellion.” The colonial period has attracted more attention. For a sampling, see Acuña, ed., *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI*; León-Portillo and Aguilera, *Mapa de México-Tenochtitlán*; Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*; Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico*; Trabulse, *Cartografía mexicana*; Mignolo, “Colonial Situations, Geographical Discourses, and Territorial Representations”; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, esp. part 3; and Aguilar Robledo, “Land Use, Land Tenure, and Environmental Change.” For an overview of this work, see Craib, “Cartography and Power in the Conquest and Creation of New Spain.”

crats, and military personnel in independent Mexico relied heavily upon sets of cartographic routines—exploration, surveying, place-naming, and mapmaking—in order to rule more effectively. More than mere instruments of statecraft, such cartographic routines constitute a significant point of reference for understanding an entire modality and methodology of rule. The activities of, say, the Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora (CGE), Mexico's first federal mapping and exploring agency and the subject of chapters 4 and 5, reveal as much about the culture of rule as do policy statements and legislative decrees. Indeed, their consuming preoccupation with spatial order, scientific rigor, and visibility were part of a broader rationale of rule premised upon a principle basic to the art, theory, and practice of modern government: universal fixity.

Cartographic routines held a simple but significant promise: they would give space a stable signification, permitting it to be more effectively appropriated, transformed, and regulated. They would, in the parlance of the time, fix [*fijar*] the land as a stable, visible, and readable stage. On the one hand, cartographic practices produced material texts *about space* in the form of maps, titles, deeds, and descriptions that could be archived and given the force of law. At the same time, they produced space itself *as a text* through the inscription of lines, points, plots, and place-names. In fact, agrarian bureaucrats, development experts, and an array of federal and regional officials in modern Mexico verily obsessed over spatial fixity of this sort. In order to stress this obsession with permanence, I refer to the various cartographic projects they promoted—the privatization of communal lands; the delineation and archiving of village, municipal, state, and national boundaries; the determination of watercourses and riparian rights, to name only a few—as *state fixations*.

Representational fixity, particularly at the national level, had significant symbolic value. The cumulative effect of practices of mapping and surveying gave an otherwise fragmented polity an aesthetic and visual unity and an imagined entity a very material tangibility.²⁰ The symbolic potential of cartographic representation, I argue in chapter 1, pushed various administrations to persistently pursue the creation of a *carta*

20 On the state as the structural, metaphysical effect of a multitude of disciplinary formations (many of which are spatial), see Mitchell, "The Limits of the State," and Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*. See also Philip Abram's classic statement in "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State."

general (national map) of the Republic in the immediate aftermath of independence. As territorial loss and foreign invasions punctuated the passage of time, national maps acquired even more importance as a means to set the bounds of territorial sovereignty and to provide a textual tangibility to an otherwise metaphysical entity, effectively helping to create that which they purported only to represent. They also functioned to legitimate a newly ascendant elite's claims to rule: "to represent," after all, "conflate[s] politics and poetics" in that it signifies both to speak *of* and to speak *for*.²¹ National maps did not simply imagine the nation-state into existence, but they did function as a means through which such an object could be more effectively imagined, propagated, and circulated; circulated, as I suggest in chapter 5, not only to one's purported subjects, but to foreign investors eager to see an image *representative* of the political stability and spatial predictability necessary for profitable investment.

On a more practical level, exploration, mapping, and surveying became the means by which to identify and assume control over resources, to reconfigure property relations, and to generate knowledge of the territory. These activities were instrumental to the process of territorial integration, to the degree that one could plausibly argue that the state and cartography are reciprocally constitutive.²² In Mexico, cartographic projects multiplied rapidly in the wake of the Mexican-American War and the promulgation of the Constitution of 1857. After decades of *pronunciamentos*, invasions, territorial amputation, and internal wrangling, the liberal state sought to centralize control and attain some modicum of stability. Mundane activities such as exploration and surveying assumed paramount importance: the information they provided would help produce the kind of mapped, official knowledge so essential to the effective rule of disparate regions. Such activities, for example, would enable agencies to locate and manage resources, mediate claims over land and water, and establish control without depending upon local knowledge.

For these reasons alone, the absence in the historiography of modern

21 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1:15; see also Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, 102.

22 See Wood, *The Power of Maps*; Escobar, "Exploration, Cartography, and the Modernization of State Power"; and Kain and Baigent, *The Cadastral Map in the Service of the State*.

Mexico of sustained analysis of surveying and mapping is remarkable; even more so if one considers the pivotal role ascribed to such practices as causal factors in Mexico's twentieth-century revolution.²³ The significance of the figure of the surveyor in modern Mexican history cannot, in my mind, be stressed enough. As I argue in chapters 3 and 7, legislative decrees and gubernatorial speeches did not divide lands prior to the revolution, nor did they create ejidos after it. Surveyors did. Surveyors were neither passive extensions of objective instruments nor an homogeneous and transparent group of lackeys in the service of the state or landlords. Be that as it may, they did have one thing in common: they often appeared in rural areas as intermediaries between an abstract state (and its policies) and local populations who were affected by those policies. People experience "the state" as they experience "the market" or "capitalism," not as a broad abstraction but as a series of manifestations with a very human face: judges, notary publics, police squads, tax collectors. And surveyors. In rural Mexico, both before and after the revolution, surveyors were among the most prominent figures through which villagers *experienced* something known as "the state."

At the same time, if villagers often experienced the state in the form of the surveyor, federal officials and a burgeoning bureaucracy "saw" or came to know the countryside through the surveyor. This was particularly the case with the federal military traverse surveyors (examined in chapter 4) who combined surveying with exploration. Much of Mexico, as both topographic space and natural "resource," resided far beyond the horizon of official knowledge. The need to explore these realms appears with mantric regularity in official rhetoric throughout the nineteenth, and well into the twentieth, centuries. Mexico's infamous nineteenth-century dictator, Porfirio Díaz, assigned this task to the military surveyors of the CGE. Charged in part with creating a "perfect map" of the Republic, the CGE surveyors traversed the countryside gathering the data necessary to produce *structured knowledge* of the physical

23 An exception is Holden's *Mexico and the Survey of Public Lands*, which demonstrated what could be gained from such investigations. His work revealed that the standard narrative of land-hungry survey companies uniformly dispossessing villagers, with the support of President Porfirio Díaz, needs to be revised. A recent call for more attention to be paid to the process of land division is Kourí, "Interpreting the Expropriation of Indian Pueblo Lands." A good start is his "The Business of the Land," on land divisions in late-nineteenth-century Papantla, Veracruz.

topography in the form of maps. As I suggest in chapter 4, the dynamic and radically *unstable* activities of CGE surveyors and explorers created a very *stable* image of the topography, reducing a complex world to manageable proportions and quantifiable configurations. Their grounded views became *overviews* that permitted state officials to see at the proper scale and administrate more effectively.²⁴ However, to stop the analysis there would miss a key, if initially unintended, consequence of their activities: through their explorations and interactions CGE surveyors simultaneously garnered an enormous amount of *situated knowledge* of the social and political, as well as the physical, topography of the countryside. The deeply contextualized understandings they acquired of the specific regions and localities they mapped made them prime candidates for positions of political power in those very areas.

The surveyor is a necessary protagonist in this story but not the only one. A mapped Mexico did not result solely from the labor of military and civilian surveyors or the meticulous work of metropolitan cartographers. Throughout this book I explore the fundamental role that local people (primarily rural cultivators in the state of Veracruz) played in the surveying and mapping of the countryside. Local people were not fleeting mirages on the surveyor's horizon but agents in their own, and Mexico's, spatial history. They did not stand idly by when surveyors came into view; but nor can their roles be reduced to something as stereotypically simplistic as romantic resisters of some cartographic juggernaut. Not only did they consistently engage the surveyors responsible for stabilizing the ground on which they stood, but their agrarian practices, conceptions of history and geography, and local politics all radically complicated and reshaped the projects surveyors had been assigned.

In point of fact, state fixations all too often ended up as state frustrations. *On* the ground, fantasies of fixity *ran* aground. Regional officials, surveyors, and military mapmakers did not encounter (nor did they expect to) the blank spaces so typical of the imperial imagination. They encountered the kinds of places their own work was designed to both

24 The process of reducing a complex world through such state simplifications has been analyzed with great insight by James C. Scott in his *Seeing Like a State*. My study is significantly indebted to Scott's book, although I would note that the modern Mexican state was at no time in its history a "high modernist" one of the kind that garners Scott's attention. See also de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, esp. part 3, and Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed*.

reconcile and supersede. They confronted what I will call *fugitive landscapes*.²⁵ In their traverse and property surveys, they frequently found themselves in lands characterized by multiple political jurisdictions and use rights, indeterminate borders and inconsistent place-names, and highly contextualized systems of tenure and property. These were intensely local settings—not landscapes at all, in fact, but places created and recreated through the prisms of memory, practical wisdom, use, and collective decision making rather than the lens of instrumentation.²⁶

Yet, to suggest that such landscapes foiled the dream of universal fixity sought by the liberal state—one which would make property rights, laws and identities in any given place precisely like those in any other and thus, like the market, utterly placeless—is not to argue that villagers had little or no sense of fixity in their own right. Villagers in central Veracruz, for example, were not the prescient antecedents of our contemporary champions of “third” or “in-between” spaces, reveling in antiessentialist counternarratives. They proffered their own fixations regarding property, territory, identity, and history. Indeed, this is precisely why those being “mapped” did not simply ignore or acquiesce and why surveys were so often very charged encounters. Surveying may be a scientific practice, but it is not carried out in an empty or controlled environment. Surveyors, before and after the revolution, quickly became enmeshed in the local histories, conflicts, and contexts that were theoretically to remain extraneous to their work. And they found themselves to be the objects of intense scrutiny, constantly subject to the influences, pressures, and threats of an array of rural inhabitants. Large landowners, for example, feared formal titling procedures and sought to limit the power of a surveyor’s report. Villagers, meanwhile, were rarely mystified by the first person they encountered carrying arcane instruments. They knew all too well that objective instruments wrought political and social consequences. More to the point, as I show in chapter 3, in many instances village officials *were* the surveyors, a useful reminder that “the state” and “the local” were hardly mutually exclusive

25 On “fugitivity,” see Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900*; Berger, *Ways of Seeing*; and Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, esp. chap. 12.

26 On the powerful asymmetries involved in the term “landscape,” see Williams, *The Country and the City*. I thank Aldo Lauria-Santiago for his comments on these issues.

domains. But even when the surveyors came from without, villagers did not necessarily either comply with or resist the various projects these individuals had been charged with completing. At times, of course, they did, but in many instances they appropriated and rearticulated various aspects of these projects for their own purposes. At the same time, surveyors were dependent upon the very vernacular images and conceptions their projects were designed to replace, and their work was frequently characterized by the very traits they attributed to the villagers: localism, petty politics, and self-interest.²⁷ The spatial creation of Mexico was a much more ambivalent and dialectical process than one of some state juggernaut imposing its visions upon an either quiescent or intransigent countryside.²⁸

In sum, it was through an array of everyday activities and processes, through struggles and accommodations played out on multiple levels and registers, that a spatial history of the state *took place*. Activities such as property surveys, the explorations of the CGE, or the boundary delineations conducted by village officials may lack the narrative force of the rebellions and revolutions that attract so much scholarly attention; they may have been less *extraordinary*, but they were no less dramatic. Part of “an epic of the ordinary,” they were fraught with far-reaching consequences.²⁹ It was, after all, through these bureaucratic encounters, quotidian interactions, and documentary exchanges that spaces were (re)assigned meanings and names, ordered and divided, naturalized and signified, and, at least theoretically, constituted and regulated. Little wonder that as conflicts over land and political autonomy progressed in stride with liberal state formation, surveyors rather than soldiers appeared as the most troubling (or promising) figures on the horizon; measuring chains, as well as rifles, became talismans of power; and titles and maps became potent weapons.

27 For a powerful critique of science’s claims to objectivity and rationality, to being somehow less contextual and contingent than the local knowledges it claims to supersede, see Feyerabend, *Against Method*. See also Latour, *Science in Action*, and Lenoir, ed., *Inscribing Science*.

28 The vibrant literature on Mexican state formation has been an obvious source of inspiration. See esp. Joseph and Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation*; Escalante Gonzalbo, *Ciudadanos imaginarios*; Nugent, *Spent Cartridges of Revolution*; Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*; Guardino, *Peasants, Politics and the Formation of Mexico’s National State*; and Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.

29 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2:29.

III. METHOD AND STRUCTURE

This is not a history of maps, nor of landscapes. It is a history of human beings, and I have sought throughout this study to ground my analysis in stories from national, regional, and local archives that seem illustrative of the larger trends that interest me. The focal point is the state of Veracruz, a state whose strategic, agricultural, and industrial importance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave it a particular geographical preeminence in the minds of national administrations. Not surprisingly, it also figured prominently in the wide array of cartographic projects that punctuated, lined, and named the Mexican landscape.

What follows is not a singular, unified narrative. It is, rather, a series of relatively independent yet related and chronologically overlapping essays that address different federal and regional projects concerned with spatial fixity and thus contingent upon exploration, mapping, and surveying. I chose such a strategy in part because the amount and diversity of cartographic material produced in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico preclude any exhaustive examination.³⁰ At the same time, I wanted to move beyond an analysis of any one project in order to capture the sheer breadth, heterogeneity, and pervasiveness of cartographically based, state-promoted projects of the period. Finally, I wanted to emphasize that a mapped Mexico resulted from a variety of loosely related and relatively diffuse projects rather than from some coherent, unified plan. This is not to suggest that such dispersed and fragmentary processes did not have powerful and systematic effects.³¹ While not all of a piece, cartographic projects did nonetheless have a cumulative effect, one that propagated the idea, increased the presence,

30 I do not address, for example, the surveying and mapping of Mexico's public lands. An excellent study on the subject already exists in the form of Holden's *Mexico and the Survey of Public Lands*. Nor do I look at the surveying and mapping of Mexico's national borders, an intentional omission on my part because national borders have been overly fetishized in much of the literature on surveying and mapping. Rebert, *La Gran Línea*; Hall, ed., *Drawing the Borderline*; and de Vos, *Las fronteras de la frontera sur*, offer useful studies of Mexican national boundary formation.

31 This is a basic premise of Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality. See Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect*. See also Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

and buttressed the weight of the state: on the ground, by providing officials with both structured and situated knowledge of the regions they were assigned to administer, and on paper through the production of maps and hefty tomes of geographic and statistical data.

Rather, the point is that *product* should not be mistaken for *process*. The unitary and smooth facade of any image can serve to sever it from the multitude of conflicts, confrontations, and contingencies that went into its very construction. As a consequence, the final image—and, importantly, a *self-image*—appears to simply confirm the inevitability of a given historical moment and spatial expression. To see some master plan (some invisible hand) behind it all is to confuse intention with effect and serves to remove the final image from the quotidian historical and social (not merely technical) processes which conditioned its creation. More to the point, it is to privilege and perpetuate a reified and teleological *stage* space, and in this case, *state* space, one that was always in a process of becoming.

In chapter 1 I examine issues of representation and national sovereignty in nineteenth-century Mexico through the perspective of the first published national map of independent Mexico, Antonio García Cubas's 1858 *Carta general de la República Mexicana*. I suggest that national cartographic projects such as García Cubas's—and the ways in which they connected history and geography—played a critical role in the search for legitimacy and order in the wake of the Mexican-American War.

The next two chapters shift the emphasis from national to individual sovereignty and move from the stuffy halls of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística to the temperate slopes of the *sierra veracruzana* in eastern Mexico. I turn my attention to the state's attempts to survey and divide communal lands in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before lands could be divided, village and municipal borders had to be determined. In chapter 2 I focus on those attempts to delineate and map boundaries, emphasizing two issues that made this task extremely difficult for officials: a lack of practical and textual knowledge of the ground and the ways in which new attempts at border fixity conflicted with agrarian practice and custom. In chapter 3 I move to the process of land division itself. A close examination of interactions among surveyors, villagers, and landlords suggests that resistance to the land divisions, when it existed, was not the result of an innate antiliberalism on the part of vil-

lagers but rather of their experiences with practical issues of implementation.

Chapters 4 and 5 oscillate between national and regional levels of analysis by examining the works of the Comisión Geográfico-Exploradora (1877–1914), based for most of its existence in Xalapa, Veracruz. Chapter 4 looks at the institution's first two decades of life. I emphasize the dominant role the federal military played in the agency and draw attention to the critical importance that traverse surveying and exploration, and the resulting “structured” and “situated” knowledge they produced, played in the consolidation of Porfirian rule and statecraft. Chapter 5 follows the agency through the last decades of its existence, focusing on the relationship between spatial order and ideas and representations of Porfirian progress.

In chapter 6 I examine a single conflict over water rights between a foreign mine owner and a village council in a remote canyon of Veracruz. I analyze how both parties used conflicting names on state maps, including those of the CGE, to lay claim to a contested waterway. By analyzing the way in which federal officials mediated the dispute, and the ways in which the disputants themselves relied upon various images and names to make their claims, I show *why* the fixing of place-names proved basic to the centralization of state power. But, more important, I demonstrate how the very process of fixing place-names and waterways further legitimated the power of federal bureaucracies whose very legislation had initially spurred such disputes.

Chapter 7 moves the discussion into the postrevolutionary era to trace the continuities and disjunctures in state projects and agrarian relations. I analyze the process of agrarian reform as it developed from the issuance of various decrees during the revolution to the consolidation of the state under Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. The ejido has rightly come to be understood as one of the primary means by which the postrevolutionary state achieved stability and attached the peasantry to it in a vertical relation of reciprocity. But consequences are not the same as intentions. The ejido, and the postrevolutionary state itself, were entities shaped gradually through multiple levels of conflict over both history and geography.

I conclude the book with a short epilogue in which I suggest that the broader arguments contained in this study have some relevance for contemporary issues in Mexico. I return to Miguel de la Madrid's cadastral

fantasy and connect it to larger changes shaping the Mexican state, including former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's recent reforms to the ejido system, which appear as yet another effort in the time-honored quest for the spatial transparency, predictability, and fixity necessary for profit and rule. In an age of "globalization" and neoliberal "integration"—both eminently spatial metaphors—the politics of space, place, and history are as charged as ever.