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13

THE WAY BEHIND AND THE
WAY AHEADCartography and the state of Spain
in Cabeza De Vaca's *Relación*

Kathryn M. Mayers

Early in Volume II of *Don Quijote*, as the now-recuperated hidalgo shows signs of giving his niece and housekeeper a third slip, his housekeeper attempts to divert him from his ill-errant chivalry by suggesting that he be one of those who “a pie quedo sirviesen a su rey y señor, estándose en la corte” (Cervantes 1978, 80). Don Quijote refuses her advice with a reference to cartography:

[N]o todos los caballeros pueden ser cortesanos, ni todos los cortesanos pueden ni deben ser caballeros andantes . . . porque los cortesanos, sin salir de sus aposentos ni de los umbrales de la corte, se pasean por todo el mundo, mirando un mapa . . . pero nosotros, los caballeros andantes verdaderos, al sol, al frío, al aire, a las inclemencias del cielo, de noche y de día, a pie y a caballo, medimos toda la tierra con nuestros mismos pies; y no solamente conocemos los enemigos pintados, sino en su mismo ser . . . y . . . esta segunda, o, por mejor decir, primera especie de caballeros andantes . . . ha sido la salud no sólo de un reino, sino de muchos.

(80–81)

What is interesting about this passage is not just the bleeding of cartography into literature, which had become commonplace by the early seventeenth century, nor Cervantes' anticipation of Alfred Korzybski's notion to the effect that a map is not the territory it represents, but rather the way Don Quijote's speech here contrasts two different methods of cartography as a device to express dissatisfaction with the current political shape of Spain. In emphasizing that true knights save kingdoms with knowledge drawn not from (illusionistic, two-dimensional) paintings but from (first-person, directly experienced) measurements, Cervantes uses the contrast between knowledge derived from abstract projection on paper and knowledge derived from first-hand empirical investigation as a figure for Don Quijote's dissatisfaction with the increasing bureaucratization of the court that had occurred in the transition from a medieval to a Baroque state.

Studies of early modern Spanish cartography have often overlooked this reflexive, national-constitutive dimension of their discourse.¹ This is particularly the case with scholarship on cartographic writing on Spanish territories *overseas*,² the exploration of which played a central

role in re-shaping sixteenth-century Spain. Owing, perhaps, to the influence of postcolonial theory, studies of scientific writings on the Americas have largely focused on the way these early modern writings “map” the Amerindian Other. Studies of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s 1542 *Relación*, for example – a text whose author could serve as the gold standard for “suffering heat or cold, hunger or thirst” and “measuring the whole earth with his own feet” – have focused on conflicts between European and Amerindian ways of knowing, and the way the text’s ethnography of Amerindian peoples subalternized America and Amerindian orders of knowledge.

I would like to suggest in this essay, however, that the *Relación*, much like *Don Quijote*, uses a discourse of mapping to talk also about Spain. The author states in the early pages of the text that since he has been unable to conquer new lands, he will instead serve his King by “escribi[endo] este camino” (24), enabling the king to “saber y ver . . . tod[o] lo que en nueve años . . . pude alcançar y conocer” (18).³ Linking his *Relación* directly to contemporary projects of the Spanish monarchs to achieve a totalizing view of the nation, he then draws together a number of the cartographic genres most favored by the Crown and enhances them with non-European forms of knowledge and points of reference. Studying this interplay between diverse rhetorics of mapping, I suggest that, in this particular text, the author uses a discourse of cartography to distinguish Spain from European nations following other paths to modernity. Complicating a “monarch of all I survey” matrix that underlay both feudal and early modern rationalized views of the nation, I argue, Alvar Núñez redefines Spain less as some form of rationally delimited territory or juridically controlled people than as an evolving approach to actively negotiating competing epistemological frameworks and reordering cross-cultural contact.

At the time Alvar Núñez wrote, Spain was already suffering the shift from a feudal to a mercantilist state to which Cervantes would allude nearly a century later. The consolidation of Spain as a nation-state was troubling traditional ways of positioning oneself in national space. However, other changes beyond the political were also contributing to a more general sense of disorientation. Discoveries in geography, astronomy, and mathematics were invalidating previous concepts of space and necessitating changes in notions of man’s relation to totality. The rise of market capitalism was up-ending traditional ways of measuring the value of goods and services and of positioning oneself socially (Conley 1996, 1–2). And secularization of older forms of the sacred was producing a crisis in the narratives by which people understood the place of humans in history (Jameson 1988, 349). These broader developments across the political, economic, scientific and religious realms were producing an unprecedented sense of epistemological uncertainty across Europe and a need to cognitively map the new cultural space in which people found themselves caught as individual subjects.

In response to this sense of disorientation, the sixteenth century saw an explosion of mapping. The decades surrounding Alvar Núñez’s expedition saw a tremendous increase not only in the number of maps but also in the number of *types* of maps printed. Whereas during the Middle Ages, the field of graphic mapping had been dominated largely by portolan charts and sacred *mappaemundi*, the late fifteenth century saw a widespread return to map forms with classical and Medieval roots and their development into multiple, complex new genres. Local topographical maps originating in simple Medieval administrative diagrams developed into elaborately colored, realistically detailed, Albertian views of cities, districts, estates, and battle scenes. *Isolarii* with roots in first-century Greek geographical poetry developed into thematically or alphabetically ordered depictions of the islands of the world combining pictorial regional topographical views with prose or verse descriptions of islands’ history, mythology, ethnography, and archeology. And geographical maps with roots in Ptolemy’s second-century

use of Euclidean space developed into coherently measured, proportionately correct representations of the entire spherical earth, referencing space to a net of parallels and meridians.⁴

The purpose of these maps was to (re)orient the viewer in some coherent way to a changing reality. Their sum effect, ironically, was quite the opposite. For each of the genres that arose during this era constructed a different type of viewer, the particular “interests” of which led to conflicting conceptualizations of space. Topographical bird’s-eye-view maps, for example, situated an implicitly land-owning or militarily victorious viewer in an elevated position before a vivid but non-rationalized scene. Encouraging him to read the arbitrary proportions and contiguities of the region as a symbol of the natural shape of his dominion, they encouraged a feudal view of the nation as a group of independent realms or federation of *comunidades* or city states (Mundy 1996, 7). Geographical maps, on the other hand, fixed a detached, abstract viewer before a mathematically calculated, Euclidean rendering of three-dimensional space. Encouraging the viewer to read the measured regularity of each geographical region as a reflection of the homogeneous belonging of every part to a finite greater whole, this genre fostered an imperial view of the nation as a single, homogeneous whole under a remote and impartial God or king (Mundy 1996, 5, 7; Woodward 1991, 83–84). By implying distinct viewers or notions of what it is that counts as knowledge – contiguity versus congruity; adjacency versus algebraic calculation – different types of maps led to conflicting notions of the shape of space and thus conflicting ideologies of the individuals’ place within it.

In sixteenth-century Spain, this problem was particularly acute. In an effort to exert some form of control over how their realms would be understood, Spanish monarchs began sponsoring an array of large-scale, carefully detailed, mapping projects (see, e.g., Parker [1992] on these projects). The very diversity of their endeavors, however – maps that ranged from the *Padrón real* compilation of portolans begun in 1508 to the *Descripción y cosmografía de España* detailings of the particularities of some 7,000 villages of Castile begun in 1517 to the cross- and idol-adorned map of Tenochtitlán published with Cortés’s letter to the Crown in 1524 to the *plus ultra*-bordered tapestry map created to celebrate Carlos V’s 1535 conquest of Tunis – merely exacerbated a troubling opposition between Medieval and Renaissance notions of the state. Implicit in some of these maps is a notion of the nation as a form of juridical sovereignty over a particular people – “people” defined in some maps by religion and others by culture or history. Implicit in others is a competing notion of Spain as a form of territorial sovereignty over a particular place – “place” defined in some maps as a series of *comunidades* and in others as regions forming a larger whole.⁵

It is with an acute awareness of both the crown’s interest in mapping its realms and the tension between conceptions of Spain within those realms that Alvar Núñez reframes the account of his disastrous expedition as a map in service to the Emperor. In the opening paragraph of his 1542 edition – an edition, which, Ralph Bauer has pointed out, would eventually be printed not with the author’s family crest on the frontispiece but Charles V’s personal coat of arms (2003, 35–36) – Alvar Núñez sets forth the cartographic nature of his *Relación*:

Mas como ni mi consejo, ni diligencia aprovecharon para que aquello a que éramos idos fuesse ganado . . . no me quedó lugar para hazer más servicio de éste, que es traer a Vuestra Magestad relación de lo que en nueve años por muchas y muy estrañas tierras que anduve perdido y en cueros, pudiesse saber y ver, así en el sitio de las tierras y provincias y distancias dellas, como en los mantenimientos y animales que en ellas se crían, y las diversas costumbres de muchas y muy bárbaras naçiones con

quien conversé y viví, y todas las otras particularidades que pude alcançar y conoscer que dello en alguna manera Vuestra Magestad será servido.

(18)

To compensate for the failure of his expedition, the author explains, he will serve the King by providing an account that will allow the king to “see” what he himself saw as he wandered through foreign lands for ten years. This account will include his “route” (the province of sixteenth-century itinerary maps and portolano charts), the “disposition” of the lands he traversed (the province of geographical maps), the “forms of sustenance” and “diverse customs” of different lands and peoples (the province, today, of ethnography but, in the 1600s, of the widely popular *isolario*), and numerous “other particularities” (the province of *isolarii* and local topographical maps). Charting the space he traversed over the course of his journey, Alvar Núñez will contribute both to the knowledge of these peripheral regions of the empire so desired by the emperor and to the debate over different conceptualizations of the Spanish empire implicit in these very different forms of cartography.

Scholarship on the *Relación* has largely overlooked this spatial-discursive aspect of the text,⁶ instead focusing primarily on the way Alvar Núñez relates (to) the *people* in the text. Two features of this ethnographic map have been especially influential. The first is the degree of detail of Amerindian beliefs and practices. Unlike the majority of accounts at the time, Alvar Núñez conveys not just an understanding of native practices and points of view, but also, in some cases, a blending of these practices with his own. His intimacy and identification with Amerindian peoples has led a number of critics (e.g., Molloy [1993]; Spitta [1995]) to identify in him a process of transculturation, and to argue that, for the first time in what would become a long history of Latin American cultural fusion, a Spanish noble entered a “third space” and recognized the fallacy of essentialist notions of identity and hegemonic claims to universalism that underwrote the discourse of conquest. The second feature, on the other hand, is the text’s rhetorical objectivity. Alvar Núñez’s sympathy for native peoples notwithstanding, his process of “writing” them and their customs employs, at certain times, narrative techniques that lead him, intentionally or not, to control the Other and to imply its backwardness. The distance between Alvar Núñez’s first-person, transculturated observer and his third-person “objective” narrator has led other critics (e.g., Rabasa [2000]; Rojinsky [2006]) to identify a persistent coloniality, and to argue that, similar to Bartolomé de Las Casas, Alvar Núñez remained subject to a hubris of zero degrees⁷ from which he was incapable of recognizing his own subalternization of Amerindian orders of knowledge.

However, readings that see in the *Relación* only an anti-hegemonic transcultural or hubristic colonialist view on the world over-simplify the complexity of its contribution to Early Modern Spanish history. A transculturation interpretation overlooks the ways Alvar Núñez’s rendering of native codes mobilized asymmetrical power relations, while a hubristic reading leaves unexplored the manner in which his orchestration of native- and hybrid-self material into a coherent whole departs from other European traditions of organizing the reader’s and spectator’s gaze. Neither Alvar Núñez’s sympathetic elevation of native orders of knowledge nor his rhetorical-objective subalternization of natives and their beliefs fully explains the complexity of his point of view on the surrounding world – an orientation which, Ralph Bauer has recently argued, involves “not so much a conflict between European and (Native) American cultures and ways of knowing – between a European self and an American other – as a conflict between two different [*European*] ideas of empire and . . . orders of knowledge as they arose in the geo-political dialectic between European expansionism and centralizing monarchy” (2003, 33–34).

In the *Relación*, the way the text maps Alvar Núñez with reference to space can help us better understand the text's intervention in this debate over knowledge and empire. In this study, I examine two different stages in the *Relación*'s mapping of Alvar Núñez's trek, looking not just at the protagonist's orientation to land but also at the author's orientation to rhetorical orders related to the process of diagramming land. Identifying the way in which the *Relación* elaborates, first, an empirical, conquering eye/I that grows frustrated with certain scientific-rational developments in European cartography, and later, an embodied communal eye/I that becomes attentive to certain nomadic reference points suppressed in modern Spanish cartography, I show how, while the text absorbs certain indigenous ways of seeing and knowing, it neither inverts nor does away with colonial hierarchies, but rather alters them to take in and re-purpose foreign knowledge. By combining different map forms in a way that fashions a particular kind of cross-cultural knowledge, I argue, Alvar Núñez carries Spain ahead, past the conflict between juridical and territorial notions of the nation, toward a Spain defined by its "knowledge of its enemies [not] merely in painting, but in their very being" (Cervantes 1978, 80, my translation).

In the early chapters of the *Relación*, which relate the series of calamities that reduce the original expedition to only four survivors, Alvar Núñez charts the physical space between the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Spain, and Galvestan Bay in today's Texas. In part, this chart replicates the conventions of a narrative portolan. Describing the size, shape, and depth of rivers, coves, shallows, ports, and estuaries, it outlines the hydrographic reality of their route. Giving depths, distances, and orientation in the four cardinal directions, it estimates nautical distances covered and directions travelled. And noting types of winds and sounds of waves in different places, it suggests additional aids and hazards to future navigation. At times, this chart also replicates the generic conventions of the local topographical map. Describing certain views from an aerial perspective (e.g., a perch in a tree), it replicates the bird's-eye viewpoint typical of sixteenth-century regional maps. Detailing buildings' construction and design and noting varieties of animals, plants, and soil, it replicates local maps' focus on points of military significance and agricultural potential. And describing unusual types of trees and woods (e.g., the lightning-struck, fallen trees of the Everglades), it replicates local maps' attention to topographical singularity.

Portolans and topographical maps differed, of course, in the type of space they diagrammed, but they converged in some very basic ways in the forms of seeing they encouraged. Though the one charted hydrography and the other topography, they both included, as an essential part of their structure, combinations of landscape and the built environment (Mundy 1996, 4). Portolans used the names of cities and harbors where sailors might replenish their stores to anchor their representation of space as a series of connected points reducible by geometric means, while terrestrial topographical maps used views of buildings and other manmade constructions to define their representation of space as an area of land socially appropriated for use or exchange (Cosgrove 1998, xvi). Additionally, though portolans diagrammed progress along a route and topographical maps sketched stationary views, they both, by this point in the sixteenth century, also bore marks of increasing Euclidean rationalization. Portolans had begun to bear latitude scales derived from the idea of Ptolemaic coordinates to indicate the proportions of land and water masses with relation to a larger whole, and terrestrial topographical maps had begun to display scaled segmentation of the entire map into a grid of uniform spaces to represent cities in measured proportion (Woodward 1991, 84). Though different in content, therefore, these genres both implied an anthropocentric, scientific-rational gaze on a separate, measureable earth – in the case of the portolan, an earth available for trade and access and in the case of the Albertian topographical map, an earth available for conquest or seigniorial dominion.

However, while this early part of the *Relación* very clearly borrows from a stock of portolan and topographical commonplaces, it changes this model of seeing. For the geographical and cardinal referents with respect to which Alvar Núñez would designate “where he is” are, he finds, largely missing or unrecognizable. To begin with, in contrast to other recent portolans and topographical maps, the *Relación* finds scant and problematical instances of built environment in sixteenth-century North America. While Alvar Núñez does mention a few landmark Indian villages and routes, most of his points of reference take the form of relative clauses that refer to the actions or beliefs of his own men: “el río que primero avíamos atravesado que entrava por aquel mismo ancon” (48); “la vía donde avíamos visto la canoa la noche que por allí veníamos” (78); “un río muy grande . . . , a quien avíamos puesto por nombre el Río de la Magdalena” (64); or “la vaía que pusimos nombre de la Cruz” (72). On account of the Spaniards’ inability to identify humanly elaborated Indian fields, transportation routes, groves, villages, and burial grounds *as such*, the text omits reference, for example, to the many fire-controlled forests and mound-stippled maize fields that blanketed the Southeast (Mann 2005, 320). Furthermore, in those instances in which Alvar Núñez *does* incorporate views of villages and manmade structures, he sometimes openly suggests the Europeans’ inability to read these landmarks correctly. Describing the bird’s-eye view of Apalache gained by Lope de Oviedo from a tree, for example, Alvar Núñez reports that Lope “vio que la tierra estaba cavada a la manera que suele estar tierra donde anda ganado, y parescióle por esto que debía ser tierra de christianos, y así nos lo dixo” (94). This village, Alvar Núñez knew at the time he wrote the text, was not a Christian one, but an Indian one. But by including Lope’s obviously inaccurate reading of the (probably Indian-mounded) village as inhabited by Christians, Alvar Núñez relays that even where they were able to identify points of Amerindian built environment, these places did not orient them as they should. Where recent European maps constructed a viewer able to see space as an array of comprehensible, ethnically identifiable (and thus juridically governable) peoples, the *Relación* suggests, rather, a viewer blinded to crucial reference points and unable to read the nature of the nation(s) around him.

Additionally, in contrast to the Euclidean bent of recent portolans and local maps, the *Relación* includes imprecise and problematically self-referential measures of distance and direction. While the text does now and then mention cardinal directions of North, South, East, and West, it does not give precise compass readings, and as the expedition progresses, indications of direction increasingly take the form of verbs of motion modified by adverbs of direction (“entrar en la tierra *adentro*,” “ir . . . *adelante*”) or deictics (“allá,” “allí,” “aquellos,” “estos”) that indicate direction not in relation to an external referent but in relation only to the speaker himself. On account of the pilots’ inability to relate their progress to a larger whole, the text omits description of the proportionate size and orientation of the lands traversed by the expedition. Furthermore, where Alvar Núñez does include specific instrumental, mathematical measurements of distance, he frequently implies their inaccurate nature and their role in misleading them. Bemoaning the expedition’s disoriented “progress” along the Gulf Coast, for example, Alvar Núñez writes that, “a dicho y juramento de nuestros pilotos, desde la vaía que pusimos nombre de la Cruz hasta aquí anduvimos dozientas y ochenta leguas poco más o menos” (72). Opening this statement with the suspicious fact that the expeditions’ *multiple* pilots felt compelled to swear to their instrument reading, and closing it with a qualifying “more or less,” Alvar Núñez places an implicit question mark around ciphers of distance in the text, pointing out their inadequacy for locating them on a graticule and thus their inability to situate these lands within a picture of totality. Where recent European maps constructed a viewer who saw space from afar as an array of proportionate (and thus interconnectable and delimitable) territories, the *Relación* suggests, rather, a viewer trapped at close range, unable to “oversee” the territory around him.

Recognizing the ways these early chapters of the *Relación* depart from the conventions of ordinary sixteenth-century portolan and topographical maps complicates interpretations of Alvar Núñez as a transcultural hybrid or as a viewer from the hubris of zero degrees. While Alvar Núñez does question, repeatedly, the science of the expedition's pilots, he himself does not see key elements of the Amerindian-built environment and he certainly does not see as actual Amerindians do. The way he tries to situate himself in space – noticing, from a rational-scientific, bird's-eye view military resources and paths of access – is in no way Amerindian and is, in fact, frustrated by his inability to see as anything other than a European. At the same time, while Alvar Núñez does attempt to see as a European, his experiences with faulty instrumental measurements and readings of Amerindian built structures leads him, early on, to grow skeptical of the truth of an instrumentally calculated Euclidean view from afar or an empirically determined Albertian view from above. The way he abandons these methods of trying to situate himself in space – the way he increasingly identifies their position explicitly in relation to themselves – in no way situates the viewer “outside” or “before” the scene, in empirical inductive or non-empirical zero space.

In fact, if anything, the point of view on the world implicit in these initial chapters of the text suggests the limitedness of European modes of viewing and the need – both for the expedition's success and for the King's more accurate view of his whole nation – for an alternative model of viewing that could account for an entirely different (non-juridical, non-territorial) relationship between the individual and his/her surroundings. This view would “see” built environment, but the shapes it would recognize might not be stationary or urban; this view would “measure” the land, but distances might be more than physical-spatial; and this view would “situate” different areas in relation to a larger totality, but this totality might be something other than a grid of longitude and latitude. Beginning with the mix of genres it does, then, the *Relación* suggests the need for a type of science or knowledge that would make visible a nation for which there is no place in current European cartography.

The latter half of the *Relación* suggests one such type of knowledge. Following his stay on the Island of Malhado, Alvar Núñez relates the series of miracles by which he and his fellow survivors were able to locate a Spanish military outpost on the West Coast and eventually return to Spain. In the process, he charts the space between Galvestan Bay and the city of what is today, Culiacán, Sonora. As the terrain changes and he begins to travel with different Amerindian groups, the text gradually begins to take the form of two different but still European cartographic genres of the time. The underlying structure becomes that of a narrative itinerary. Adverbs of movement, measurements of distance between points, and markings of place names begin to trace the protagonist's progress along a terrestrial route. At the same time, chorographic detail that includes the ecological and epidemiological character of different areas and the alimentary and linguistic customs of different tribes overlays this itinerary structure with the encyclopedic, atlas-like qualities of later *isolarii*.

Like portolans and topographical maps, itinerary maps and *isolarii* differed with respect to their referents but converged in some of the basic ways they organized the spectator's gaze. Though itineraries focused primarily on distances between landmarks and *isolarii* focused more on the chorographic qualities of particular regions, they both structured the representation of space around the observations of an individual gazing on an object that was implicitly separate from that viewer: itinerary maps used a visual narrative of episodic places traversed by the mapmaker (Conley 2007, 406), while *isolarii* used an insistence (explicit in their prefaces, implicit in their style) on systematic personal experience of each area's singularities (Conley 2007, 401; Tolia 2007, 280). Additionally, though itineraries focused on the sequence of places between one point and another and *isolarii* focused on the particulars of randomly

or alphabetically ordered places, they both presented the mapmaker's observations as those of a timeless viewer: itinerary maps conflated multiple measurements taken sequentially over time into a single, synchronous view, while *isolarii* combined perspective views on cities and multiple views taken of islands into a single composite view. Thus while different in content both from each other and from portolans and topographical maps, these genres likewise promoted a monadic, eternalized gaze on a separate, knowable earth – in the case of the itinerary, on a collection of points reducible to a series of individually measured routes, and in the case of the *isolario*, on a collection of singularities made meaningful by an individual scheme of comprehension.

However, while in this central part of the *Relación* Alvar Núñez continues to adhere closely to the commonplaces of these popular European genres, he once again departs from some of their customary reference points. And here, rather than signaling the *lack* of readable reference points, he increasingly incorporates points of reference used by his Amerindian companions to organize their own migratory image of space. As he grows more sensitive to these non-European reference points, he does not find a space that he considers civilized. However, he does grow far more able to navigate and to identify peoples and territories that went unaccounted for in European current methods of mapping. This ability to map his surroundings seems to spring from three basic changes in seeing that this Amerindian migratory cardinalization implies.

To begin with, as Alvar Núñez increasingly marks his route by the gathering points at which he and his companions stopped, instead of reducing the representation of space to the viewpoint of an imaginary individual, he suggests the viewpoint of multiple observers. Commenting on some of the fruits that marked certain points along his route, for example, he writes: “Ay muchas maneras de tunas, y entre ellas ay algunas muy buenas, aunque a mí todas me paresçían así, y nunca la hambre me dio espacio para escogerlas . . .” (149); and, “allegamos a un río donde assentamos nuestras casas. Y después de assentadas, fuimos a buscar una fruta de unos árboles que es como hierros” (154). In the first example, the contrast between his own imperception of different kinds of prickly pear (“all very good”) and the perception of his companions (“some very good”) reveals the way the groups with which he traveled taught him to see differences between diverse landmarks which he alone was unable to perceive. In the second, use of a simile (“like [the fruit of] a vetch”) rather than a name to designate the fruit reveals that, because he himself was unfamiliar with this landmark before this experience, his ability to see it at all depended on the viewpoint of an Indian community that used it to structure their own migratory image of their lands. While this pluralized viewer does not imply an individually controlling, sedentary, feudal-monarchic, urban-agricultural, “civilized” relation to the earth, it does more effectively locate Alvar Núñez with relation to the land's botanical and social resources.

Secondly, instead of structuring his representation of space around the fiction of an eternal, temporal viewer, Alvar Núñez also begins to locate his observations in a specific time. In those same references to botany that mark his movement through space, for example, Alvar Núñez marks not only the plurality of his viewpoint but also its seasonal-cyclical temporality: “por [gran hambre] los indios que a mí me tenían se salieron de la isla, y . . . passaron a tierra firme, a una vahías adonde tenían muchos ostiones. Y tres meses del año no comen otra cosa, . . . Y assí estuvimos hasta el fin de abril que fuimos a la costa de la mar adó comimos moras de çarças todo el mes” (110–112). Inclusion of these markers of time and duration (“three months of the year;” “the whole month”) reveals that Alvar Núñez's own particular view of things – the fact that he saw these coves and coasts *as he did* – owed to being in those places *when* he was. The oblique reference to his captivity (“que a mi me tenían”) reveals, in addition, that as Alvar Núñez himself did not seek out those areas, his observation of them likewise owed to the gaze

of his companions, who used knowledge not just of spatial distance but also temporal distance between food-gathering seasons to structure their cyclical-migratory understanding of space. This temporally located viewer does not imply an outside-of-time, permanently vigilant, accumulative relation to the earth, but it does situate the viewer within the rhythms of the land for non-sedentary, cyclical gathering and exchange.

And finally, as Alvar Núñez also increasingly marks his route by the dietary customs of the peoples he encountered, instead of basing his representation of space on the observations of a detached eye witness, he begins to incorporate a broad range of sensorial data. Commenting on the eating practices of the Mariame Indians that marked a stopping point in his passage across the Texas coastline, for example, he writes:

Su mantenimiento principalmente es raíces de dos o tres maneras . . . ; son muy malas y hinchan los hombres que las comen. Tardan dos días en assarse, y muchas dellas son muy amargas, . . . Es tanta la hambre que aquellas gentes tienen que . . . comen tierra y madera y todo lo que pueden aver y estiercol de venados y otras cosas que dexo de contar; . . . Muchas veces estando con éstos, nos aconteçió tres o quatro días estar sin comer porque no lo avía.

(138–142)

The emphasis here on the desperate hunger Alvar Núñez suffered while with this tribe (“many times . . . three or four days without eating because there was no food”) suggests that his “observation” of this diet – the fact that he knew the bitter taste and bloating effects of roots, dirt, and deer excrement – owed to his own (non-ocular) experience of these foods. Furthermore, the tropes of inexpressibility that mark the passage (“all that they can find;” “and other things that I refrain from mentioning”) suggest that, as Alvar Núñez himself found these foods too abhorrent for words, his ability to see them as sustenance at all likewise owed to the gaze of his companions, who used non-ocular, embodied knowledge to gain a more total image of their environment. While this sensorially informed “viewer” does not imply the rational objectivity and physical separation prized in societies organized around hierarchical dominion over land and people (the separation, furthermore, that would become the foundation of Northern European Enlightened modernity), it does equip the viewer to more completely know the land that was actually there – to better map the total world available for human sustenance.

Recognizing these ways that Alvar Núñez incorporates non-European knowledge in this central part of the text further complicates interpretations of him as a “neither Spanish nor Native American” hybrid (Spitta 1995, 51) or a viewer from the hubris of zero degrees. On the one hand, while Alvar Núñez does learn to see referents to which he was originally blind – “built” environment that consists not just of buildings but also of sites constructed from layers of social memory; “measures” of the land that include not just spatial but also temporal distances; a “totality” to which lands relate not only in proportion and disposition but also in range of available sustenance – he still does not “see” as Native Americans do. Whatever his ability to identify these coordinates, he does not embrace the “unspoken, unanalyzed relationship to the order of creation” (Mundy 1996, xii) implicit in the use of these coordinates to structure spatial understanding. “Civilization,” for him, continues to be defined by a European ideology of man’s (singular and eternal) dominion over the earth and all that is in it. On the other hand, while Alvar Núñez does continue to prefer a colonial ownership and sedentary accumulative relationship to the environment, his experience of the utility of Amerindian modes of understanding space – and his utter disgust, when, upon finally reaching a Spanish encampment, a simple two-day journey guided by four Spaniards results in the death of seven

men from thirst – does lead him to view European modes of knowing space more skeptically. Whatever his gut-sense of European superiority, his closing condemnation of European scientific-rationalism demonstrates clearly that the hubris of zero degrees leads nowhere and is, for him and others, the way behind.

The way “ahead,” the *Relación* implies, must necessarily involve the re-purposing of non-European knowledge. Only the recognition of non-European (communal, seasonal-cyclical, embodied) knowledges *as such* will allow European travelers to correctly read the appearances of peoples and territories and successfully move between one route and another. And for Carlos V, only a cartography that incorporates this material will enable him to see the true totality of his realms. At this time when elite cartographers grappled with regional versus national views of the Spanish realm and religious versus cultural definitions of the Spanish people, Alvar Núñez points out that the “totality” of Spain exceeds any of these definitions. Whether regional or geographical, territorial renderings of the nation only “saw” sedentary, accumulative relations with the earth and not the transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation of land of certain nomadic populations in the Americas and on the Peninsula. And whether religious or cultural, juridical demarcations of the nation both “saw” only Judeo-Christian “peoples” and not Amerindian (or gypsy or Arab, for that matter) tribes. A cross-cultural mapping of the nation could account for the fact that the real and actual “shape of Spain,” increasingly, was not (just) a federation or nation-state made up of sedentary provinces or peoples with a common history or social structure, but rather an enormous, diverse interaction sphere with a constantly evolving exchange of symbols, ideas, and inventions. Like other royal mapmakers, Alvar Núñez does more than simply outline existing realms. He endeavors “to chart a state’s designs for future expansion and to enunciate, in cartographic form, hopeful programs of state building” (Kagan and Schmidt 2007, 662). In the *Relación*’s case, this design is principally scientific-epistemological. It involves a type of authority based on intimate and mobile knowledge of particularities, or as Don Quijote would put it, “knowing the enemies [not] merely in painting, but in their very being.” Situating himself (*avant la lettre*) as a “true knight” – “the salvation, not merely of one kingdom, but of many” – Alvar Núñez charts a scientific way ahead for the “heartland” of the nation as it transitions from the Medieval into the modern, global era.

Notes

- 1 Kagan and Schmidt: “the lack of comment goes in both directions: early modernists have not adequately made the case that nationalism and cartographic state building took place in the [Renaissance], while modernists have discounted the possibility that the mapping of the state might have taken place prior to the mid-eighteenth century” (2007, 662).
- 2 Notable exceptions are Ricardo Padrón’s (2004) *The Spacious Word* and Arias and Meléndez’s (2002) *Mapping Colonial Spanish America*, which complement recent work on graphic maps by scholars such as Dana Leibsohn, Walter Mignolo, and Barbara Mundy.
- 3 All quotations from the text are taken from the 1542 Zamora edition as transcribed by Adorno and Pautz (1999) and will be indicated by the page numbers as they appear in the Spanish version.
- 4 On the origins and evolution of these different genres in the Renaissance, see Woodward (1991) and chapters 8, 9, 19, and 20 of Woodward 2007.
- 5 On the historical transition from Classical to Medieval to Early Modern notions of sovereignty, see Kagan and Schmidt 2007, 662–664.
- 6 Studies have largely been limited to reconstructing Cabeza de Vaca’s route (e.g., Adorno and Pautz 1999), “mapping” the text’s cognitive spaces (e.g., Domínguez Castellanos 2004), and analyzing the way the journey motif structures the narrative (e.g., Nanfito 1994).
- 7 The hubris of zero degrees, as explained by Santiago Castro-Gómez, is the belief in a point of view (and capacity to know, measure, and determine universal values) independent of one’s ethnic and cultural center of observation (2008, 278–279).

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