In situations of contact between two peoples, such as those intertwined in a colonial encounter, one of the most important aspects of interaction is the congruence of their spaces. Spatial interactions are crucial in colonial settings because the social relations of power are diffused through space and exerted in places where people come together. There is an inherent geography in power relations, seen in attempts either to dominate or to resist control (Sharp et.al. 2000). The current project reports on an example of colonial interaction in New Mexico’s Rio Grande River Valley between the 17th and 18th centuries. In the case considered here there are two important ways to perceive the relationship between Spanish and Pueblo peoples. First, is the degree to which colonizer and colonized occupy the same physical space, and second, following on the first, is in the similarity of construction in their cognitive landscapes. Archaeologists traditionally focus on spatial information, looking at the ways in which past peoples used the land, but it is essential to go beyond that information to examine the layered meanings of space and place. Landscape analysis is related to what archaeologists have typically called settlement pattern analysis, but a focus on landscape requires projecting a more “emic” (internal) view of how a group of people perceived and constructed their own space and their mental maps. These cognitive maps would include immaterial aspects such as feelings about the land, and physical features, important activities carried out on the land, forms of transportation available and other occupants of the land.

Landscape construction is informed by many aspects of the map-makers’ culture, including notions of equality or social hierarchy, gender, the presence of a local or global perspective, and the relative values assigned to activities. Landscape structures are established by the kinds of journeys people make, the frequency, purpose and season of these journeys, but the understanding of meanings is not simple, as elegantly presented by Basso in his work with the Apache (1996). Some insight into indigenous landscape may be recovered from oral history and contemporary mythology; a number of southwestern peoples reveal perspectives on important places through these means. Among the Tewa and the Navajo, for example, there are ideas about the bounding of their space by four sacred mountains. The Zuni Atlas (Ferguson, Hart, et. al. 1985) suggests the complexity of Pueblo landscapes
by mapping the variable and overlapping, but distinctive, distributions of crucial resources, both economic and spiritual, among the Zuni. Edmund Nequatewa, a Hopi, in recounting a series of myths from Shungopovi, indicates the importance of the four directions, but also notes elevated places and boundaries, and the locations of water, plants, birds and animals (1936). The Pueblo landscape would have been populated by spirits, totemic figures, elders and enemies, including other Hopis, Navajos, and, by the late 16th century, the Spanish.

In this region, the Spanish made a deliberate attempt to invade Pueblo space, moving their missions into Pueblo settlements; the Pueblos used effective geographical mechanisms of avoidance and resistance even before the Pueblo Revolt in 1680. The Spanish landscape was different than the Pueblos’; it began as a narrow and linear corridor along the Rio Grande, but over time as more colonists arrived and many of the Pueblos succumbed to disease, the Hispanic landscape gradually expanded, while the Pueblos’ shrank. The two landscapes also remained different in significant ways. For the Spanish, the landscape was structured by social hierarchy, religious and economic demands and power as well as military force. Their perception of land and its features implied a sense of control: over nature and non-Spanish peoples. Land was categorized by type and divided and apportioned, as were water rights. Their perspective was very different from the Pueblos’ whose social structure was more egalitarian, while landholding was corporate and held by lineage groups and clans. The Pueblo attitude towards nature was similarly cooperative rather than control-oriented, and the earth was depicted as a mother (Ortiz 1969:21). Cognitively the Spanish had a more extensive view, informed by the knowledge of a world across the ocean, other European peoples, and European ways of doing things. Some of the letters of Vargas and others refer to absent powers such as the King, the Council of the Indies, religious leaders, as well as their families (Hackett 1923; Kessell et al. 1992). It is likely that the Spanish saw New Mexico as an unwelcoming and difficult place. In Death Comes to the Archbishop, Willa Cather describes the young priest:

“pushing through an arid stretch of country somewhere in central New Mexico. He had lost his way, and was trying to get back to the trail . . . The difficulty was that the country in which he found himself was featureless–or rather, that it was crowded with features, all exactly alike. . . . They were so exactly like one another that he seemed to be wandering in some geometrical nightmare . . . an interminable desert of ovens” (1990: 285–87).

While this is a fictional account, it may well capture a sense of how the land was perceived by Spanish settlers.

Changes in Settlement Pattern in the Southwest

Settlement and landuse are best represented in a series of maps that show the locations of known Pueblo and Spanish sites over time. They focus on that portion of the Pueblo culture area centered on the Rio Grande River valley. This includes