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Chapter 14: Pantomimes as Hidden Transcripts: Tekum and Resistance

14.1. Introduction

Interpretations arising from both the preceding discussion of the performance of the *Baile de la Conquista* at Joyabaj and the following discussion on the *Conquista* at Momostenango consider the exceptional use of pantomime. In all communities, though to varying degrees, pantomime supplements the narrative contained in the early style texts, and even in some cases subverts that original narrative. A clear example concerns Part III, in which the text has Ajitz steadfastly refuse to accompany Tzunun on the embassy to Rey K'iche', yet invariably Ajitz does go to Q'umarcaaj. In the example of the Tzunun embassy, the text is unambiguous and the staged action is equally unambiguous in contradicting it. But many staged actions involving pantomime draw instead on aspects of the text that are either open-ended or ambiguous, in either case allowing for considerable latitude of interpretation.

Several such pantomimes were concretized by the addition of explanatory text in the dramatic alterations produced after 1870. Some examples are obvious, as with the intervention of Tekum in the first scene of Part I, wherein he announces his intention to take a nap. This text then accounts for a pantomime of the Princes having to wake Tekum in the second scene, in turn an interpretation of the Princes' criticism for Tekum's carelessness in not having already risen to defend the kingdom. Another example is the scene added in Part II in Tecpán lineage texts involving an interview between the Ambassadors and Tepe as he guards Rey K'iche's palace. This pantomime appears to have arisen from ambiguity concerning the location of the Ambassadors' encounter with the Princes and Malinches, interpreted by performers as having taken place in the Q'umarcaaj palace. The same sequence obtains: ambiguous text prompts pantomime which after 1870 is explained through added unambiguous text.

On the basis of the pattern demonstrated in the previous two examples other less obvious examples of text added to support pre-existing pantomime may be suggested. Some of these introductions may be understood as contributing some dramatic aspect that early style scripts lack. This applies particularly to the need for further bellicose confrontation between Tekum and the Spaniards, especially Alvarado, whose invasion Tekum resists. In early style texts, Tekum never speaks to Alvarado, even in the battle in which Alvarado kills him. Tekum's only verbal exchange with Spaniards takes place in the dramatic centre of the scripted action: the interview in which terms of surrender (taken from the *Requerimiento*) are delivered by the two Ambassadors and rejected by Tekum.

Cantel lineage scripts stand out in fulfilling this need for dramatic confrontation. Text introduced in the interview with the Ambassadors includes a violent response from Tekum that in Joyabaj is heightened through pantomime by violent physical attacks on the Spaniards. Cantel scripts also introduced texts in the battle scene for Tekum and Alvarado to challenge and demean each other, in encounters that are dramatically heightened by combat in the form of *cruzadas*. In Joyabaj, similar texts and *cruzadas* are

introduced for Tekum to confront Alvarado in the *Spanish* entrada that begins Part II. It is likely that these battlefield confrontations between Tekum and Alvarado were being performed in pantomime before text was added to supplement them, and also that before additional texts were introduced at Joyabaj, Tekum's defiant presence at the *entrada* was already customary in unscripted pantomime in that community.

Some pantomimes arising from open-ended aspects of the original text have not required additional text as they provide a clear narrative on their own. Two examples involving pantomimes for Ajitz are his divination and blindfolding the Spaniards. Ajitz's motions in divining with tz'ite seeds, or his attention to sharpening and straightening the Ambassadors' swords and making their blindfolds stink, as well as demonstrating that these cloths have been infested with pests from unwashed Spanish bodies, are all easily understandable without any words being spoken, the latter two also being hilarious.



Ajitz straightens the sword. Cunén, 2010.



Healing of Alvarado's leg. Joyabaj, 2009.

An example of an extended narrative pantomime involving Tekum that likewise does not require explanatory text concerns the doubled battle scene performed in Joyabaj and Cunén (also Nebaj), arising from Alvarado's mid-battle statement that Tekum has robbed him of his horse. From this single point, itself derived from the narrative of the duel between Tekum and Alvarado detailed in some 16th century *títulos* written in the Quetzaltenango region, *Conquista* performers have elaborated an extended narrative sequence. In these communities Alvarado is first wounded in the leg, stimulating the *Caciques* to celebrate anticipated victory, and perhaps providing the

audience a *frisson* of hope as it did for me the first time I saw it. Then the whole battle is replayed to climax with Tekum being mortally wounded by Alvarado.

In these communities the battle can become not only the moment of greatest excitement but also the longest and thus dominant segment of the whole performance. In this regard, the greatest elaboration of the doubled battle is performed at Joyabaj, with pantomime sequences including the sharpening of

weapons, hiding and being discovered on each of the four sides of the dance ground, praying for mercy, staggering under the blows, and finally Tekum's sequential loss of his weapons leading to his defeat. As a result, the *convivencia* depicted in the peaceful and respectful interchange of K'iche' and Spaniard in the elaborate choreography of the closing dance can become anticlimactic. Krystal (2012: 50) noted such a shift in sentiment, though he was referring to the performance in San Cristóbal Totonicapán, where reasons for decreased interest in the closing dance differ.¹

I do not mean to imply that all aspects of performance that are not indicated in the text must constitute resistance. In the *Baile de la Conquista*, there is no textual support for the development of a mask type for Rey K'iche' and his court that combines the light skin and blond hair of the Spaniards with the dark eyes of the K'iche' to express their role in the transition between paganism, represented by Tekum and his *Caciques*, and Christianity, represented by the Spaniards. While this treatment is meaningful in the development of the dance's narrative and particularly Rey K'iche's character arc, it is supportive of, rather than resistant to, colonial authority. In contrast, Tekum's challenges to Alvarado and Ajitz's constant harassment of the Spaniards, as well as Ajitz's specific attempts to humiliate the Ambassadors, are indeed subversive because they invert the colonial power relation. Those resistant pantomimes involving Ajitz will be discussed in chapter 16 following description of the *Baile de la Conquista* at Momostenango. This section will consider further those actions and text that enhance the depiction of Tekum's heroism to the extent that in *municipios* such as Joyabaj it becomes by far the dominant theme of the performance.

14.2. Diverse Transcripts: James Scott and the Arts of Resistance

James Scott's (1990) analysis of the "arts of resistance" provides a useful model for interrogating these shifting messages and the ways that they potentially subvert the original (early style) *Conquista* text. Scott uses the term "transcript" to identify not only distinct discourses but also their particular political content and the ways in which they may interact. The "hidden transcript" of subordinate populations that articulates their resistance to domination is his primary focus but in the process of analyzing this discourse of resistance he identifies four types of transcript. These are: 1) the public transcript of the dominant group; 2) the hidden or private transcript of the dominant group; 3) the public transcript of the subordinate group designed for submissive interaction with the dominant group; and 4) the resistant hidden or private transcript of the subordinate group. Each of these transcripts may be briefly explained in ways that facilitate application of this model to the relation of text and performance in the *Baile de la Conquista*.

¹ As detailed in a later section, almost all of the text following Tekum's burial scene has been lost at San Cristóbal, and the closing dance is reduced to a few minutes or less. Also at San Cristóbal folkloric accommodations have been made for a community that is more *Ladinized* than the others investigated for this study.

Scott (1990: 18) describes the dominant public transcript as: “the *self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen....It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule.” He notes that euphemisms help mask those “nasty facts of domination”. Instead domination is presented as involving unanimity among the ruling group and consent without coercion among the subordinated group, fostering an image of cohesion and shared belief. The dominant public transcript will go so far as to claim that the dominant group rules on behalf of their subjects, an argument that, because it risks obvious accusations of falsehood, must be continually repeated and reinforced. Prominent among the tools of this reinforcement are public ceremonial demonstrations of the ruling power in which the dominant public transcript is celebrated and dramatized. These include ritual forms that involve participation of the subordinate group in dramatizing their own supposedly voluntary submission. Such public events present the current system of domination as stable, effective, and just. At the same time, statements made in the dominant public transcript make the dominant group vulnerable to provable assertions that it does not fulfill its own stated obligations (Scott: 18, 45–50, 55–58, 66, 105).

Scott (1990: 51) describes the dominant hidden transcript as the discourse produced by the dominant group when they are not in public and are thus sheltered from contact with subordinate groups. In these times and places they can drop the pretense of serving their subjects or of unanimity among the ruling group. They can freely discuss all the nasty aspects of humiliation and exploitation of their subjects through which they hold on to power and appropriate labour and wealth—aspects that they cannot afford to discuss in public.

The subordinate public transcript comprises both everyday interactions and ceremonial dramatizations of the public transcript, in which subordinates are required to perform their subservience in order not to threaten the power of the dominant group and bring punishments upon themselves. Thus it is in the interest of subordinates to make a show of willing compliance and recognition of dominant authority. It does not matter that the dominant group might recognize the insincerity of this apparent willing compliance, but rather that it be publicly enacted, giving the appearance of consent and unanimity. These public performances of servility and consent also help draw distinct boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups, and thus also protect the subordinate group from discovery of their actual opinions concerning the relations of dominance to which they are submitted (Scott 1990: 18–19, 44, 87).

The subordinate hidden transcript that Scott argues is the primary basis for resistance against domination grows from opinions expressed by subordinate groups in private. These opinions form a response to the dominant public transcript and the ways in which the subordinate group is required to publicly perform subservience (the subordinate public transcript) or endure humiliating public punishments. The subordinate hidden or private transcript thus exemplifies the rule that exertion of power produces its own resistance. These opinions may only be expressed in conditions that shield the

subordinate group from surveillance by the dominant group. Such conditions might include a hidden meeting place or merely the use of linguistic codes or of a language that the dominant group does not understand. These conditions are made possible by the social division that the dominant group enforces between themselves and the subordinate group, stimulating the formation of a distinctive subculture shared by their subordinates. This subculture requires mutual protection against the possibility of discovery, fostering cooperation among subordinates and a shared resistance against the dominant group. The sheltered conditions of gatherings among subordinates allow them express or even act out their anger and aggression against the dominant group—actions that would be dangerous in public (Scott 1990: 37–38, 109–112, 118–121, 132–135).

These diverse transcripts interact in complex ways in public circumstances involving relations between dominant and subordinate groups. The rarest occurrence would involve open articulation to the dominant of the hidden subordinate transcript—speaking truth to power—a dangerous and revolutionary act that might bring tremendous consequences on the perpetrator unless a rebellion takes hold.

More commonly, the hidden subordinate transcript creeps into the expression of the public subordinate transcript as covert elements of resistance that colour the public performance of subservience and willing compliance. (Scott 1990: 18–19). Scott (1990: 86) explains that:

...domination...produces an official transcript that provides convincing evidence of willing, even enthusiastic complicity. In ordinary circumstances, subordinates have a vested interest in avoiding any explicit display of insubordination. They also...always have a practical interest in resistance—in minimizing the exactions, labour and humiliations to which they are subject. The reconciliation of these two objectives...is typically achieved by pursuing precisely those forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted.

This layered expression is in some cases almost inevitable, due to the artificiality of such public demonstrations, but it can also be carefully calculated. Resistance may be expressed publicly in ways that do not directly threaten the dominant group and may actually not even be recognized by them. Such calculated risks require that the hidden subordinate transcript be expressed ambiguously, with an overt meaning compliant with the dominant public transcript and its requirement of compliant subservience, and a hidden resistant meaning that can be denied if the dominant group suspects a threat. But if successful, the subordinate group may be able to force some shift in their relations with the dominant group (Scott 1990: 87–89, 96, 158).

Scott (1990: 157–62) signals what he considers popular—as opposed to elite—culture as amenable to the embodiment of meanings that undercut or contradict the official transcript. He specifies that oral traditions provide ideal vehicles of resistance in part because their performance is ephemeral, which

makes each enactment different and thus potentially responsive to issues of the moment, while at the same time leaving no concrete trace that might implicate the subordinate group in sedition. Scott also notes that the facility with which oral performance may be nuanced is useful for layering diverse meanings as well as potential deniability if the hidden intent is suspected (Scott 1990: 157–62).

14.3. Application of Scott's Transcript Theory to the Conquest Dance

Clearly the *Baile de la Conquista* lends itself to the methodology of analysis that Scott proposes. Written by a member of the dominant Spanish colonial society and performed by members of the subordinated Indigenous population, this ceremonial dance-drama represents “the encounter of the *public* transcript of the dominant with the *public* transcript of the subordinate” (Scott 1990: 13; emphasis in original). In addition, pantomimes that were noted to have subverted or contradicted the text are, like oral traditions, ephemeral, amenable to layered meanings, and deniable as to intent. Further, we can harness this methodology to better understand historical changes in the relation between dominant and resistant transcripts, especially as regards the impact of major textual changes after 1871 and the evidence that these were preceded by the development of those subversive pantomimes that they explain.

For the purpose of this discussion, colonial history in Guatemala may be loosely divided into three phases, though partially based on supposition. First is the *doctrina* phase of resettlement (*reducción* or *congregación*) and conversion, including introduction of *cofradías*, beginning with the mid-16th century establishment of monastic orders and continuing into the early 17th century. This phase of monastic expansion is characterized in part by the prominence of *cacique* families supported by their legally-recognized *títulos*. The second phase includes roughly the following century during which *Costumbre* likely crystallized as the dominant form of religious practice centred on the *cofradía* institution, at the same time qualifying as what Scott (1990: 51) refers to as the unofficial culture of the hidden subordinate transcript. During the same phase, the power and prestige of *cacique* families began to erode. Robert Hill II (1993: 153–57) notes that during this period, the 16th century *títulos* began to be translated into Spanish and entered into court records on behalf of communities rather than particular families. A third phase, from roughly 1760 to independence, is marked by the adoption of Bourbon reforms to administration and taxation as well as by the secularization of Catholic authority in Indigenous communities, replacing friars who had learned the local Indigenous language and tolerated *Costumbre* with priests who were antagonistic to Indigenous Guatemalans, their languages, and their version of Catholicism. I contend that enactment of the Conquest Dance as a link between a dominant public transcript and a subordinate public transcript would have changed as this history unfolded.

14.3.1. Early colonial conversion and *congregación*

I begin by looking at the original context of writing and performing the *Conquista* around 1570–1620 in the region of Quetzaltenango. In this context the Conquest Dance has been considered as an example of the theatre of conversion, but it also came to serve as a repeated public ceremonial event in which re-enactment of the defeat of the K'iche' kingdom and its incorporation into the Spanish empire enabled resulting relations of dominance and subordination to be enacted, justified, legitimated, and extended.

Max Harris, in his 2000 study of performances of both the *Moros y Cristianos* and conquest dance genres, shows that subversive pantomimes, which colonizers were intended to misread or misinterpret, were already evident in the earliest performances in the Americas in which Indigenous peoples participated. Analogous documentation of early colonial dances in Guatemala is non-existent, so use of a subordinate hidden transcript to subvert the intention of the text must rest on hypothesis. Instead, the early style *Conquista* texts and consistent aspects of choreography attest to the dominant public transcript and the apparent compliance of the subordinate public transcript.

The early style text may be analyzed as a dominant public (official) transcript both in terms of what it proclaims and in terms of what it hides. Spanish soldiers, representing the dominant group, are presented as capable fighters yet preferring peace, loyal to the empire and interested primarily propagating their religion for the benefit of a population worshipping idols and deluded by the devil. Defeat of the K'iche' kingdom and its incorporation into the empire is presented as the natural order of things, exemplified not only by the tragic death of Tekum but also by the narrative arc of Rey K'iche' who turns from the pagan religion of Tekum and Ajitz to the Christian religion of Alvarado.

This dominant public transcript hides the seamy underside of Spanish conquest and colonization, which would be admitted, discussed and strategized in private, away from the subordinate group. Concerning the conquest, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, in his 1542 condemnation of Alvarado and Cortés (published 1552), recognized that the overt justification for conquest as the spread of Christianity, arising from faith and piety, hid a covert policy of appropriating gold, land, labour and other resources arising from greed. The textual suggestion of *convivencia*, of peaceful, harmonious, and respectful co-existence of Spaniard and K'iche' that culminates the *Baile de la Conquista*, hides the devastating impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples. These include: the brutal *encomienda* system often operated as a form of slavery; the *congregación* process that forced peoples to leave the graves of their ancestors and resettle in new locations; the control of marriage through examination on the *doctrina*; humiliating public punishments; generalized racial discrimination, and much more. Further, Scott (1990: 48) alerts us to the possibility that the ceremonial display of Spanish power in the drama's conclusion may overstate colonial capacity to control the subordinated population, and in this case may mask the understaffed administration that in remote areas relied heavily on friars to discipline Indigenous populations and collect their tribute for the crown.

Though she does not apply Scott's terminology, in several publications Aracil Varón (e.g. 1998, 2008) argues for a subtler distinction involving what we may recognize as public and hidden dominant transcripts. In her analysis of evangelizing dance-dramas from New Spain/Mexico and Guatemala, Aracil Varón differentiates an overt theme in which conquest is legitimated by the introduction of Christianity, from a subtext of submission and obedience to the Spanish crown. Her argument for a separation between conversion and submission would seem to be supported by the *Requerimiento* which, although it requires submission to the crown and acceptance of missionary friars to preach Christian doctrine and attempt conversion, does not require such conversion. However, missionary friars did extend their requirements to conversion. Thus for friars of the 16th and 17th centuries, little distinction was made between these two colonizing aspects of submission and conversion. And indeed, Alvarado's version of the *Requerimiento* delivered to and refused by Tekum involves both submission and conversion. Similarly, in six verses that conclude his final monologue, Rey K'iche asks Alvarado for baptism and describes himself and his *caciques* as the king's vassals. I would therefore argue that in the Baile de la Conquista, both conversion to Christianity and submission to the Spanish crown represent the dominant public transcript.



Closing dance, Momostenango, 2010.

While *convivencia* is presented textually in the final lines of the script, it is further elaborated through the intricate choreography of the closing dance, based on parallel and united lines of K'iche' and Spanish personages. As this closing is not scripted, we may apply Scott's methodology to recognize the closing dance as an example of a subordinate public transcript. In it Maya dancers would fulfill a ceremonial obligation to perform a script of willing compliance with their subordinate position, thereby fostering the dominant public transcript's representation of social cohesion that naturalizes and legitimates Spanish power. Scott (1990: 70–90) cautions us to remember that behind such public displays of compliance lies a hidden transcript of resistance, and thus not to misread such demonstrations as evidence of false consciousness or an enthusiastic acceptance of submission.

Although direct application of Scott's methodology illuminates some aspects of the dance performance as likely intended by the Franciscan author and enacted by Maya performers, the simple dichotomy of dominant Spanish and subordinate Maya groups is insufficient to explain the origin and nature of the dance in the early colonial context. An indication of greater socio-political complexity appears in Ajitz's speech to the Ambassadors as he releases them. Though most of the speech is in the form of a riddle, it begins with a sombre commentary on discrimination against Indigenous peoples under the colonial Spanish regime. Ajitz points out that Indigenous people will never be more than beasts to the Spaniards, even when they are better educated than some of the colonists. Ajitz's outburst pokes a hole into the centre of colonial ideology in Guatemala, based on a racial distinctions legitimated by Spanish claims to superior civilization.

A greater social complexity than may be accommodated by a simple racial hierarchy is evident from the position shared by friars and *cacique* families. Though unequal in status within early colonial society, friars and *caciques* both acted as intermediaries between the Spanish administration and the majority of the Indigenous population which, to some extent, they also mutually exploited. Interchange between friars and *cacique* families centred particularly around monastic establishments. As elsewhere in territory conquered by the Spanish, Franciscan friars in the Quetzaltenango area were pioneers in forming schools in which the sons of Christianized Maya *caciques* were educated in accordance with monastic goals. The author's articulation of the condition of Indigenous subordination may be explained in part by Franciscan focus on education as evidence of, and transformation to, civilization. More specifically, the educated Maya to whom Ajitz refers would be the youths of *cacique* families who were educated by the friars, including the *fiscales* who at that time were likely responsible for producing performances of the *Baile de la Conquista*.

This linkage between friars and *cacique* families engendered by monastic education also produced the *títulos*, written in K'iche', that recounted histories of prominent families in order to maintain their lands and high status with respect to the remainder of the Indigenous population. Prominent among the *caciques'* claims in these *títulos* was that of leading the conversion to Christianity and submission to the Spanish crown, as well as offering to assist the Spanish in further conquests. On the basis of these claims, the crown could award privileges that advertised the *caciques'* special status. These K'iche' *títulos* thus constitute the *caciques'* dominant public transcript that legitimated their authority over the general Maya population.

These *títulos* may be connected with the *Baile de la Conquista* in several ways. First, as noted, the author of the *Conquista* used at least one of the *títulos*, the *título* of Huitzitzil Tzunun, as the source for the duel between Alvarado and Tekum. The claim for early conversion and submission of *Cacique* Tzunun is also significant in the *Conquista* dance-drama. Thus both the *títulos* and the conquest dances or spectacles made the same claims to achieve similar ends, and both media involved the

collaboration of friars and *cacique* families in both Mexico (New Spain) and Guatemala. A further though more tenuous link between conquest dances in general and claims made through composing *títulos* concerns the strategic advantage of performing an evangelizing dance-drama. As explained earlier, both Baumann (1987: 150) and Aracil Varón (1998: 42) suggest that *cacique* participation in evangelizing theatre would itself constitute a claim for faithfulness to the Catholic church and service to the empire, the same claims also made in the *títulos* for the same purposes of maintaining distinction and earning special privileges.

Such collaboration and shared intermediate status between friars and *cacique* families may also explain an important departure in *La Conquista* from the *Moros y Cristianos* genre: in the *Baile de la Conquista* there are no low-status persons included among the K'iche' personages, but only royals, *caciques*, and priests. The resolution of the drama thus presents an accord between two high-status groups. By this means, both monastic and *cacique* voices could be expressed through the early style text of the *Baile de la Conquista*: justifying conquest by the need for conversion to Christianity as the dominant voice of the monastic establishment; and portraying Tzunun as the proper leader, because he was the first to convert, as the dominant voice of *cacique* families. From the friars' viewpoint performance of the *Conquista* reenacts the defeat and submission of Maya K'iche' peoples that justifies Spanish colonial domination, while from the *caciques'* viewpoint it reenacts their conversion to Christianity and alliance with the Spanish invaders that justifies their current (ca. 1600) status above that of the general Maya population.² Early style texts may then be said to convey two dominant public transcripts, both idealizing conquest, submission, and conversion of the K'iche' nation.

Subjected to diverse forms of domination by the Spanish colonial administration, monastic orders, and *cacique* families, the majority Indigenous population naturally responded with a hidden subordinate transcript of resistance. By acting on this transcript, they found many ways to subvert regulations and taxations imposed upon them, but our concern here is with their insinuation of this hidden transcript into performances of the *Baile de la Conquista* through the development and use of pantomime. While there is no direct access to this process during the colonial period, it is possible to make some suggestions by linking two indirect forms of evidence: 1) evidence that post-1870 addition of textual supports for some pantomimes indicates prior usage; and 2) information on the impact of changing relations between Indigenous Guatemalans and the Catholic Church during the colonial period.

14.3.2. Mid-Colonial *Costumbre*

² Friars also had a stake in preserving the status of *cacique* families both for their support and because it experience had shown that the population often follows the example set by its leaders, in this case the example of Christian conversion and loyalty to the crown.

With conversion and resettlement largely complete by the middle of the 17th century, a phase may have begun that was largely characterized by a stable relationship between missionary friars and the communities they served. Because friars had preached in the local Indigenous language and attempted to represent Christian concepts by borrowing from Indigenous religious concepts, they had inadvertently contributed to the development and relative sophistication of *Costumbre*. Both friars and their Indigenous flocks likely thought of *Costumbre* as Catholicism, so that tensions between friars and communities would have been lessened. In this context the Conquest Dance was no longer needed as a theatre of conversion, so it is likely that friars ceded management of this and other dances to the community and perhaps primarily through the *cofradías*.

In the same period, with the decline of *cacique* importance, links between friars and *cacique* families would have eroded and the public transcript of the Conquest Dance may have devolved into a simpler dichotomy of dominant colonial powers and subordinated Indigenous peoples. The shift in the function of *títulos* from defense of family status to defense of community lands may also correlate with the notion of danced *primeros* as community rather than family ancestors, as argued previously. Further, as I will argue in more detail in a later section, Maya audiences would likely have understood and celebrated the *Baile de la Conquista* as a foundation story dramatizing the origin of *Costumbre* through the conversion to Christianity of these generalized ancestors.

14.3.3. Bourbon Reforms and Independence

These trends continued into the late 18th when Bourbon reforms to the economy and the Catholic administration began to severely impact Maya and other Indigenous communities of Guatemala. Some of the impacts included: increasing Indigenous tribute to the crown and insisting on cash payment rather than products; increased presence of Ladinos in Maya communities, in many cases taking over the municipal government; appropriation of revenue lands that had supported *cofradía* expenses; and replacement of more sympathetic friars with secular priests who allied with the *Ladinos* against the Indigenous community and began to persecute *Costumbre* (Carmack 1995: 98–100, 117; McCreery 1994: 43–44; Van Oss 1986: 126–52).

Considering that Maya communities were being subjected to increased outside domination and exploitation in this period, I suggest that a distinction was being made between conversion, which was to be celebrated as the origin of *Costumbre*, and submission to outside domination, which was to be resisted. This would mean that the earlier message applauding Tzunun for choosing the right path of submission and conversion, in contrast to Tekum's mistaken resistance and consequent expendability, would be reversed. Tekum would no longer be seen as entirely misguided in resisting the Spanish invasion. Instead the Maya community is likely to have considered Tekum's decision to fight entirely appropriate, and therefore would have enhanced Tekum's heroism as defender of his people. This

enhancement of Tekum's role as heroic defender would have been accomplished through development of pantomimes, some of which were later supported by those abundant speeches and *desafíos* exchanged with Alvarado supplied by Cantel authors in the period after 1870. Added pantomimes for Tekum likely also included the doubled battle sequence, as performed at Cunén and Joyabaj. In this expanded combination of pantomime and choreographed battle, the audience's sympathy for Tekum's heroism is increased by the prior wounding of Alvarado and the K'iche's celebration of their apparent victory, so that the reversal of fortune leading to Tekum's death in the second part seems all the more tragic and a cause for mourning.

Scott's (1990) caution to avoid a presumption of false consciousness, accepting submission, when reading a subordinate public transcript of willing compliance, would have become particularly important in this context. Indeed this misreading has been common among many authors (e.g. Kelsey and Osborne 1939: 107–08; Fergusson 1942: 267; Bode 1961: 232; Bricker 1981: 180; Perera 1995: 13) who question why Maya peoples would thereby “dance their own defeat.” The question exoticizes the Maya as a really odd sort of people, so it is not surprising that it first appears in the touristic literature on Guatemala of the 1930s and 1940s. Irma Otzoy (1999: 104) responds to this misreading by arguing that “the performance of the Conquest Dance is not an example of ‘false consciousness.’ Rather, it represents a conscious act to remember and sustain resistance.”³ Otzoy's argument is supported by the passage, quoted earlier, from the introduction that Francisco Javier García and Abraham Colop Robles wrote for the 1934 publication of the Cantel text for the *Baile de la Conquista*, celebrating “the resistance that our ancestors made against the invader.”

Charles Thompson (2001) also refutes the notion that Maya peoples dance their own defeat. The basis of Thompson's argument is a dance of the conquest genre performed in the annual *feria* in the Maya–Jakaltek *municipio* of San Marcos Huista. Though he does not indicate the story of the dance, mentions of Cortés as a character indicate a version of the Mexican conquest dances that became the *Baile de Cortés* in Guatemala. This genre of conquest dance lacks a resistant hero with the stature of Tekum, so Thompson's points are more general, and therefore may also be applied to the *Baile de la Conquista* of Guatemala.

Thompson notes that Maya peoples have gone through many cycles of conflict with outsiders, with new conflicts continuously emerging, and with no final resolution to the problem that began with Spanish

³ Otzoy cites Severo Martínez Peláez (1981: 612) for this assertion of false consciousness. Actually in this passage, Martínez Peláez was criticizing left-wing intellectuals because “they feign to disapprove of and denounce oppression, but they find satisfaction in listening to the *chirimía* and contemplating the conquest dance.” [*Fingen desaprobador y denunciar la opresión, pero experimentan satisfacción escuchando la chirimía y contemplando el baile de la conquista.*]. But Otzoy is right that Martínez Peláez also attributes false consciousness to the Maya performers of the dance because while rejecting conquest and oppression they accept and embrace Christianity—whereas he sees Christianity as an instrument of conquest.

invasions. Instead, Jakaltek and other Maya confront a layered history of conflicts including defeats that must be remembered for reasons of shared identity and resistance, particularly recognizing potential strategies in dealing with this conflict. Thompson argues further that the conquest dance exemplifies this lack of resolution, because the initial conflict with the Spanish invaders is annually renewed during the *feria*, likewise leaving open the matter of a final outcome. In response to Scott's focus on resistance through hidden subordinate transcripts, Thompson argues that a narrative of defeat and domination is nevertheless recognized, and that "because the dance conveys realities of unsettled clashes, it is highly appropriate as an interpretation of the situations in which the Maya find themselves today" (Thompson 2001: 85). He adds that: "the dance of the conquest tells a story of people who have lived through the tragedies and triumphs of overlapping histories, sometimes weathering, sometimes suffering from these layerings, and sometimes incorporating these new narratives into their own worlds" (Thompson 2001: 86).

However, the form of the *Baile de la Conquista* may have affected its meaning for Maya performers and audiences in ways the original author did not intend or foresee. As Diana Taylor (2004: 367) explains:

While the indigenous skits and farces had a clear beginning, middle, and end, they were part of a cyclical ritual practice that affirmed the continuity of existence. Never original, they were always reiterative, a re-creation of the original act of creation....So while an individual skit might be thought of in terms of linearity, it was embedded within another, circular, performance structure that resisted closure.

Although the *Conquista* script articulates a momentous social and religious transformation in linear terms as a one-time event, its cyclic repetition at annual religious festivals such as Corpus Christi and the *fiesta patronal* would have fairly quickly altered the understanding by Maya performers and audiences, inserting it within a longstanding framework and function of ritual performance as enacting cyclic regeneration.

Thus, as Cook (2000: 140, 205-06) pointed out for contemporary Momostenango, in the context of *Costumbre*, dancers and spectators are likely to have interpreted Tekum's death within the framework of Maya cosmology and its narrative on the destruction and renewal of the sun, which he calls the "sunrise cosmogony." Cook provides some alternate interpretations possible within this framework, of which to me the most likely would focus on Tekum's rebirth and renewal as a rising sun able to defeat Alvarado. Cook understands this paradigm of transformation and regeneration primarily through its dramatization in the saga of the Hero Twins and their underworld adversaries, the Lords of Death, in the *Popol Vuj*. As this argument is important, it is worth investigating in more depth and placing a slightly different slant on its interpretation.

The central *Popol Vuj* narrative of the Hero Twins' youth and adventures in Xibalba is set up to tell the story in different ways simultaneously, in terms of whether one considers the adventures of both set of twins or just the younger set. In the first instance, the elder twins, 1 Junajpu and 7 Junajpu, descend into the underworld and are defeated and killed by the Lords of Death who preside there. Even in death they are able to recreate themselves through a magical mating with Xquic, an earth "goddess." The second set of twins, Junajpu and Xbalanque are their reborn selves in stronger form, so that when they combat the Lords of Death, they are ultimately victorious and rise into the sky, bringing a new dawn. In the second instance, the younger twins are able to represent the entire transformation in their part of the story. Though they triumph over the various trials and defeat the Lords of Death in the Ball Game, they still know that they will be killed. So they arrange for treatment of their bones after death that will ensure their rebirth. When reborn, they meet the Lords of Death again and defeat them, likely through dismemberment,⁴ after which they rise into the sky as the Sun and Moon (or Venus).⁵

The same paradigm is annually dramatized in the *Costumbrista* performance of the antagonism between *Jesucristo* and Rilaj Mam (Maximon) during Holy Week at Santiago Atitlán. According to Christenson's (2001) narrative of this drama, with a few interpretive additions on my part, *Jesucristo's* descent into the underworld is signaled by opening the "navel" in the church floor and covering the image of Christ on the north *retablo*. Rilaj Mam then becomes the dominant figure, and when *Jesucristo* dies at the time of the candelabra ceremony (Thursday evening), it is said that Rilaj Mam orders his death. But that night, *Jesucristo* mates with María through the intervention of San Juan Carajo.



⁴ Rilaj Mam confronts Jesucristo in the urna. Santiago Atitlán, 2007.

Jesucristo's appearance on the cross on Friday is not his death but his resurrection as the Maize, a world-tree the growth of which raises the sky and begins the act of re-creation. Then Friday evening as the renewed *Jesucristo* is carried in an ark, he combats Rilaj Mam and ultimately defeats the underworld lord, sending him scurrying off to the Cofradía Santa Cruz where formerly he was disassembled until needed the following year, analogous to the dismemberment of the Lords of Death. *Jesucristo's* journey for the remainder of Friday night visits the location of the four chapels representing the four directions (only

remembering Junajpu and reviving him. Then the twins kill
 text does not say specifically that the Lords of Death
 context.

⁵ y as the Sun and Moon. This has been considered a possible accommodation to European belief, as in Mesoamerica they would normally rise together as the Sun and Venus. Indeed, Junajpu may be read as the calendric date, 1 Ajaw in Yucatec, associated with Venus, while the name Xbalanque incorporates that of two animals, the jaguar and the deer, who are both counterparts of the Sun.

one survives) in order to remake the world. His journey, and the *Costumbrista* Holy Week, end with the rising of the sun on Saturday morning.

Cook (2000: 140, 205–06) suggests that Momostecans would understand the death of Tekum in terms of this “sunrise cosmogony” as indicating that Tekum would ultimately be reborn to defeat Alvarado who is cognate with the Lords of Death. I take this in a slightly different direction, noting that the paradigm that structures cosmogony as well as the Holy Week drama of Santiago Atitlán is based on the annual renewal of the maize, personified as the Maize–Sun deity. For example, the youthful twins who ultimately bring the sunrise, also act as deities of the Maize, as demonstrated by their planting of maize in the house of their Grandmother, which withers when they are killed and revives when they are reborn. Similarly, classic period representations of the creation saga focus on the Maize deity as protagonist. And at Santiago Atitlán, the *Costumbrista* drama of *Jesucristo’s* renewal anticipates the planting of the Maize (Christenson 2001: 185). Viewing Cook’s interpretation of Tekum’s anticipated rebirth in this broader context would suggest that Maya understood Tekum not to be awaiting a final rebirth and victory but to be cyclically destroyed and reborn to resist any enemies who would oppress his people, a view more in line with Thompson’s analysis. Therefore beginning as early as the middle of the colonial period, it is likely that the hidden transcript of Tekum that was enhanced through heroic pantomimes would portray him as the hero who will always return to defend his people. This point was verbalized by Don Santos Quiacain of San Marcos la Laguna in 1989 (Brisset Martín 1991: 407). Such an emphasis on Tekum as defending hero would have increased in importance during the third phase, when the secular priests installed in the 1760s and 1770s worked to suppress *Costumbre*. This argument will be elaborated further in a later discussion of Ajitz as defender of *Costumbre*.

14.3.4. The Nineteenth Century

Little can be said of most of the 19th century, including the movement towards independence and the independent nation’s first half century, which saw a liberal, anti–church regime collapsing within two decades and replaced by the conservative, pro–church and pro–Indigenous regime of *mestizo* Rafael Carrera. That performance conventions of the *Baile de la Conquista* were continuing to evolve is evident from the adoption of military uniforms that date from around 1800, the period of growing independence movements. The first known mention of the *Baile de la Conquista* in print actually refers to this costume (Bricker 1981: 82). Transcripts of testimony in the trial of Totonicapense rebels in 1820 reveal that Atanasio Tzul was able to borrow a Spanish military jacket by claiming it was to dance the *Conquista*. He chose this jacket, supplemented with other elements of Spanish military costume and signs of authority, for his triumphal entrance into Totonicapán on July 9, 1820.



Spanish military costume.
Momostenango.

Tzul did not choose the costume of the resistant Tekum for this occasion, because his strategy was to appoint himself as the Rey Fiscal, the appointed representative of the Spanish emperor in Guatemala, in order to enforce the mandated suspension of tribute. The time was not right for an outright public rejection of imperial authority, though in fact Tzul was accused of doing so and therefore stood trial on charges of sedition. This suggests that the heroism of Tekum was still being presented as a hidden subordinate transcript within the safety of pantomimes that were inspiring to Maya audiences yet not so overt that they would threaten Spanish colonial authorities.

14.3.5. From the Liberal Revolution of 1870 forward

Shifts in Tekum's role after 1870 are signaled in part by the *Dioses* lineage re-writing of the script, and more particularly by the addition of extended passages in the Cantel lineage texts. These added passages elaborate on Tekum's heroism and, as may be most evident for the *desafíos* exchanged with Alvarado, likely catch up with pre-existing pantomimes. Continuing elaboration on this theme is evident from the Joyabaj text that uniquely jumbles and re-uses the Cantel-originated battle scene *desafíos* in the Spanish *entrada*. Here history and geography are ignored for the dramatic purpose of showing Tekum vigorously resisting Alvarado from the very moment he enters the K'iche' realm. Such texts complement innovative dramatization of Tekum's performance at Joyabaj, as evident from the jumping *cruzadas* that punctuate the *desafíos*, and the melodrama of Tekum's sequential loss of weapons in the final stage of battle.



Battle *cruzada*. Joyabaj, 2009.

As discussed in depth in the section on liberal period changes to the *Conquista* text, the liberal government shifted the meaning of Tekum's attempt to resist the Spanish invasion. After Los Altos liberals took over the national government in 1871 and made the quetzal the national bird, they linked it with Tekum as the ideal patriot who, like the quetzal, can never accept captivity and is thus willing to die to defend his liberty. For Maya communities, this nationalistic move opened up new means to express resistance within the context of the Conquest Dance. The Cantel and *Dioses Inmortales* lineage texts explicitly connect Tekum with the quetzal and include romanticized outbursts about defending "la patria." It is also likely that between 1870 and 1900 quetzal representations were added to Tekum's mask and headdress. In this context, despite enhanced surveillance and brutal repression of Indigenous peoples fostered by the liberal government, it would have been relatively safe for Maya communities to articulate a hidden transcript of resistance through Tekum. Non-Maya residents and administrators would read such resistance in terms of their own nationalist ideology in which Tekum was seen as defender of the Guatemalan nation, while Maya audiences would understand it to signify

continued resistance against oppressive *Ladino* society. The combination of the liberal government making Tekum a national hero, and the resulting relative safety in which the Conquest Dance could be exploited to articulate a subordinate hidden transcript of resistance, combined with the forced mixing of ethnic groups in their time as plantation labourers, likely contributed to rapid diffusion of the dance to Indigenous communities outside the western K'iche' region at least by the 1890s. Similarly, the greatly increased degree of government oppression of Maya and other Indigenous peoples under the liberals likely contributed to the diffusion of the Conquest Dance, with its easily-read expression of resistance, and to its becoming Guatemala's most popular festival dance until the genocidal conflict in the third quarter of the 20th century.

14.4. Conclusion

As Scott notes and as Harris (2000) demonstrates in his application of Scott's methodology to the *Moros y Cristianos* and conquest dance genres, uncovering hidden transcripts is a matter of speculation, since the archive, designed to legitimate the dominant public transcript, tends to exclude such evidence. For example, colonial government edicts and contemporaneous records of priestly *visitas* to local parishes or *doctrinas* only mention dances that are prohibited, not those that are permitted. For the *Baile de la Conquista*, the record is to some extent fuller and more concrete precisely because after 1870 covertly subversive pantomimes came to be publicly acknowledged through the addition of explanatory texts. But we learn from Scott the historical importance of raising awareness concerning potential resistance even if it cannot be proven. And we learn the importance not only of looking beneath surface appearances but also of weighing multiple forms of evidence in such circumstances. For me a significant moment that necessitates this methodology is the conclusion of the *Baile de la Conquista*, with the K'iche' request for baptism (and its enactment through pantomime in Joyabaj) followed by the abstract depiction of *convivencia* in the intertwining choreography of the closing dance, a conclusion from which Tekum is completely absent. The greatly extended battle scene in Cunén and Joyabaj, with tension built up to Tekum's ironic and tragic death, can make even this intricate dance seem anticlimactic. And this shifted weight alerts us that beneath the surface of this danced expression of unity, harmony and willing compliance lies a potential hidden subordinate transcript of Tekum's expected return in stronger form to defeat those who would oppress his people.

On the basis of her fieldwork in the K'iche' community of Santa María de Jesús, near Quetzaltenango, Irma Otzoy (1999: 151) affirmed the usefulness of Scott's methodology and remarked further that "The rural Maya dancers of the Conquest Dance, apparently accept and reenact an original colonial script. Yet, their acting contains a meaning which does not commemorate the 'conquest,' but rather their ancestors' historic 'resistance'. The Maya dancers' resistance, however, does not occur in direct form, but in an 'arms of the weak' style (Otzoy 1999: 151). However, as Otzoy realizes, this statement does not do full justice to the range of understandings that dancers verbalize nor the range of messages that viewers take away from the dance. While celebrating resistance, dancers are also

remembering the conquest and the impact it has had on their society (Bode 1961: 232). This act of remembering is intended in part to maintain historical awareness that can easily be eroded by the hunger for, and mass consumption of, globalized manufactures, the spectacle of which has become as important an aspect of the *fiesta patronal* as the traditional dances. In terms of attitudes towards the event of the conquest as portrayed in the dance, Cook (2000: 119–20, 136–37) found that different Momostecans had different opinions as to whether Alvarado or Tekum was in the right. Ernesto Alvarado Ixcayauh, the outstanding Ajitz in Momostenango, commented more fully on this issue. Responding to my query about whether Tekum was right or wrong to resist the Spanish, Don Ernesto admitted that people today might consider him wrong “but for the earlier people, Tekum was the defender of the nation and of the law.”⁶ I have also found in general that the message concerning the conquest that an audience member may take away from the performance can depend not only on the community’s particular text and performance conventions but also on how convincing and charismatic a particular dancer’s portrayal of Tekum, Alvarado, or Ajitz might have been. This wide range of possibilities in presentation and interpretation maintain the currency of the *Baile de la Conquista* through time and space as well as among many kinds of spectators with varying viewpoints.

⁶ “Bueno, la gente en esos momentos lo analiza, pero [para] la gente anteriormente, Tekum fue el defensor del pueblo... defensor de la ley” (Ernesto Ixcayauh, personal communication 2009).