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Chapter 19: Towards a Transculturation History of Guatemala's *Baile de la Conquista*

19.1. Introduction

In many ways, previously published discussions of the Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista* have extracted the dance from history. Both currently prominent hypotheses on the date of origin, the 1542 date invented by Díaz (1924–1925, 1933, 1934) and the mid-19th century date proposed by Bode (1961), attempt to place it initially in an historical period, but neither reconstruction interrogates the historical context that would have led to its origin, nor do they question how and why it has evolved from the time of its origin to the present. Both of these hypotheses imply some sort of transculturative adaptation and even collaboration with Spanish colonizers, but fail to investigate the shifting micropolitics involved. The previous study of texts for the dance (Montoya 1970) likewise neglects to consider historical change. By extracting the *Baile de la Conquista* from its historical context, all earlier studies have diminished its significance.

In contrast, the present study of *La Conquista* has attempted not only to arrive at a more realistic span of dates for its origin but also to hypothesize its evolution through various historical periods, particularly as related to changes to the text and invention of pantomimes. Aspects of this evolution that have been brought into various discussions in previous chapters will be summarized in this chapter in a more strictly chronological format. It is important to note at the outset that while evidence favours an origin through Franciscan authorship in the late 16th or early 17th century, appropriation by K'iche' *Costumbristas* around the late 17th century, and successive modifications to the text under the liberal dictatorships of 1871–1944, the evidence is all indirect and thus circumstantial. The historical reconstruction presented here must then be considered speculative at best, while at the same time better fitting the changing historical context than any previous interpretations of the dance's origin and subsequent evolution.

19.2. Frameworks for Analysis

In order to postulate a series of likely modifications to the *Baile de la Conquista* through different historical periods in Guatemala. I propose to use the theoretical frameworks of transculturation, hegemony, and popular culture.

As transculturation has already been introduced in relation to the synthesis of *Costumbre*, a few points may be re-emphasized before beginning this historical reconstruction. First, while transculturation theory has dealt primarily with circumstances of colonization, we now recognize that the interchange that fosters adaptation of external ideas actually takes place in the context of any type of contact between different societies. Thus no society is ever “pure” in the sense of being free from

transculturative adaptations from outsiders. All societies are always already “hybrid.” Second, transculturative adaptation involves varied actions that take place in politically charged situations in which different groups not only collaborate but also compete with each other to improve their position. Opposing colonizer and colonized as dominant donor and resistant receiver is too simplistic a model, both because colonizers adapt from the colonized as well as the reverse, and because the micropolitics of each instance of exchange differ and may at times involve a reversed relation of power, as when the colonized group controls knowledge that the colonizer requires. Further, transculturative adaptation of certain external elements or institutions can be a strategic method of maintaining internal elements or institutions. And third, the mechanism of intercultural adaptation may be considered a form of *bricolage*, in which elements at hand are selected, combined in novel ways, and repurposed. Attention to these points helps clarify the processes that produced the Conquest Dance and that continue to affect its evolution and analysis.

As noted earlier, Rogers (2006) emphasizes the importance of analyzing the micropolitics of the transcultural exchange rather than assuming an unalterable and all-controlling relation of dominance of colonizer over colonized. However, even this overarching relation needs to be nuanced, since it cannot always be classified as domination. To make such finer distinctions, hegemony theory proves useful. Antonio Gramsci makes important distinctions between domination and hegemony as coercion versus leadership, but Sandra Destradi (2008) has separated hegemony from leadership to compose a three-step progression.

Destradi’s three categories may be briefly summarized. The category that others might refer to as domination is called “empire” by Destradi. In this political system, the dominant group is entirely concerned with its own interests and ambitions. This group maintains dominance through coercion involving force or threat of force. Those groups it subordinates are seen by the dominant group not only an opposition but also an enemy whose resistance must be met with repression. At the other extreme is “leadership,” in which various groups pursue goals that benefit all. The leading group may seek allied groups that share its values and share in its successes, or various groups may choose a leading group among themselves. To the same extent that subordinate groups are enemies under domination, allied groups are “friends” in a system of leadership.

Hegemony occupies the intermediary position in Destradi’s scheme. Destradi argues that a hegemonic order may progress from a “hard” hegemony involving sanctions and coercion (though not with military force), to a “soft” hegemony in which ideology has reshaped the norms and values of the subordinated groups so that they share in those promulgated by the dominant group. As with domination, the leading group pursues its own interest and ambitions, but in a hegemonic regime it does not make enemies of all subordinated groups. Instead it provides enough incentives of inclusion, whether economic, political, ideological, or a combination of these, so that a majority of subordinate groups remain allies of the dominant group. Ideology is particularly important for maintaining such alliances,

often employed to present the goals of the hegemonic group as collective goals (Storey 2003: 48; Destradi 2008: 14). In Gramscian theory, intellectuals are particularly important in formulating ideology, promoting it as universal values and upholding these as collective morality. Intellectuals thus provide a moral authority to the hegemonic order (Storey 2003: 50).

In hegemonic regimes, relations between the hegemonic and its subordinated groups are always in the process of negotiation (Storey 2003: 49). Subordinated groups strategize a path between resistance to the hegemonic order and incorporation into that order. Choices made by leaders of subordinated groups may be designed to benefit the group as a whole or to benefit the leaders at the expense of the group. Because subordinated groups also develop ideologies, negotiations between hegemonic and subordinated groups will involve a struggle among these contesting ideologies. As ideology is materialized through symbolic forms, often referred to as “culture,” this contestation takes place as a struggle over the proper meanings of such forms.

As John Storey demonstrates, Gramscian theory, and particularly notions of hegemony, have been particularly useful in understanding what is known as popular culture. Storey unpacks terms such as high culture, mass culture, and folk culture in order to arrive at a workable definition of popular culture that does not assume a hierarchy of value or quality but is instead identified as the symbolic forms produced and used by the largest socio-economic groups. The antithesis would be non-popular culture, made and used by a small group, particularly those of the highest socio-economic level (Storey 2003: 106). Thus negotiations for place in a hegemonic regime involve contestations between the non-popular culture of the dominant group and the popular culture of subordinated groups (Storey 2003: 49–51).

Storey (2003: 49) notes that popular culture can emerge in a dialogue or negotiation between dominant and subordinate groups. His example, pidgin language, demonstrates the usefulness of this model to circumstances of transcultural interchange arising from colonization and its aftermath. Again, the point is made (Storey 2003: 52) that the resulting popular culture will be fabricated from the repertoire available on both sides: in other words, *bricolage*. As the group involved in borrowing elements from another society is also in a sense consuming those elements, we may include the related notions of agency involved in consumption, both in the choices made of what elements to adopt, and the ways in which their form and meaning will be modified to suit the new purpose. Using this model one could characterize *Costumbre* as a form of popular culture or popular religion that emerged in Guatemala among the subordinated Indigenous population from the dialogue between Roman Catholicism and Indigenous religion. Evangelizing theatre may be said to have begun the process of creating a popular culture phenomenon from a dialogue between Spanish and Indigenous religious theatre and other forms of ritual performance, especially dance.

In relation to information and arguments presented throughout this volume, we now have a further series of questions we can pursue in this speculative historical survey of the Conquest Dance. These include: 1) instances of transculturation involving adaptation of external elements; 2) macro- and micro-politics involved in relations between Indigenous and settler populations in these transcultural interchanges as they operated on the continuum from domination through hegemony to leadership; 3) construction of moral and intellectual authority and their location in particular individuals and/or groups; 4) strategies of resistance or incorporation, which I will also refer to as accommodation, evinced by these political negotiations and transcultural borrowings; 5) changes in form, function and meaning of transculturated elements; and 6) the process by which the *Baile de la Conquista* became an aspect of K'iche' popular culture.

19.3. Chronological Review

I will be looking at this history in terms of several heuristic divisions for which only a few may be approached with extensive information and arguments. These phases are: 1) early colonial, ca. 1520–1620; 2) middle colonial, ca. 1620–1770; 3) late colonial, ca. 1770–1812; 4) early independence, ca. 1812–1840; 5) conservative period, 1840–1871; 6) liberal dictatorships, 1871–1944; 7) post 1944. Given Guatemala's regional and ethnic diversity, and given complex processes of change, dates applied to these “phases,” especially the colonial ones, must be quite loose and in some ways are less important than the overall trajectory of change.

19.3.1. Early Colonial

The first half of the century here allotted to an early colonial phase precedes the origin of the *Baile de la Conquista*. As well, conditions for the Indigenous population of highland Guatemala at the beginning of the colonial regime were likely harsher, before laws and directives were issued that helped protect Indigenous populations from the cruelest and most exploitative *encomenderos*. Even within this beginning period, it appears that *encomienda* conditions were more harsh in central highland Guatemala, as in the regions of Chimaltenango and the two capitals, Santiago de los Caballeros and, after 1542, Santiago de Guatemala (Antigua).

In other regions, including the K'iche' region, the number of colonists was smaller and there was insufficient military force to ensure complete domination, so the missionary friars who infiltrated these regions had to construct a hegemonic macro-political relation with Indigenous populations. In the new social formation of the colony the missionary orders in vanguard locations operated as its intellectuals, undertaking a variety of tasks as teachers, administrators, ritual leaders, grammarians, tribute collectors etc. Friars had to rely on Indigenous leaders (*caciques*) for assistance in carrying out their programs of conversion and resettlement as well as ensuring their own support (labour and financial) and tribute for the Spanish crown. This would have been a particularly hard hegemony, as friars would

need to rely on the threat of military force to pursue these programs in Indigenous communities. However as military and missionary establishments were likely considered separate, friars could soften this relationship by taking on the role of protecting their Indigenous “flocks” from colonial repression and force, as well as becoming members of the community by learning and preaching in the Indigenous language. As teachers and protectors in these Indigenous communities, friars commanded the moral and intellectual authority of the hegemonic order, propagating the imperative of becoming a Christian subject of the Spanish crown.

In the mid-16th century, the crown supported this hegemonic macro-political relation by providing opportunities for *caciques* to maintain status, privileges, exemptions from tribute, and indeed some profit from the tribute of their subordinates, by encouraging the submission of *títulos*. Indigenous *caciques* also exerted agency through their choices in acquiescing—and therefore allowing incorporation into the colonial regime—or resisting demands of the friars and other colonial authorities. *Caciques* also sought the right to dress in Spanish clothing and ride a horse. Friars and *caciques* placed themselves in analogous positions between the crown and the general Indigenous population, sharing an interest in profiting from their elevated positions in political, social, economic and moral spheres, and thus collaborating in the administration of the colonized community.

Education was an important component of the missionary orders’ civilizing project, thus by the mid-16th century also, schools were being established in monasteries in Guatemala. Friars strengthened alliances with *caciques* by inviting their sons into these monastery schools to be given a European-style religious education, thus assimilating intellectuals of pre-invasion regimes. *Caciques* also profited from this relation, as their literate youths now had the tools to transcribe their Indigenous languages into European script for the production of *títulos*.

Monastery schools also provided a corps of Indigenous *fiscales* who assisted in carrying out the tasks of religious education and ritual. Thus while friars learned Indigenous language terms and concepts in order to translate Christian theology into a form accessible to the Indigenous populations, *fiscales* and other high status young men educated in the monastery learned Spanish as a means to deal with the colonial administration and produce *títulos*. As they matured, these relations between friars, *caciques* and *fiscales* provided the basis for micro-political relations contributing to the origin of the *Baile de la Conquista* in the late 16th or early 17th centuries.

As with evangelizing theatre in central Mexico, creation of the dance-drama that we now call the Guatemalan Dance of the Conquest involved transculturative collaboration between Indigenous and settler communities, likely in the western K’iche’ region in or near Quetzaltenango. The dance text in Spanish poetry was certainly written by a Franciscan friar in one of the monasteries of that region. Adopting *siglo de oro* theatrical text construction and Spanish poetic forms constituted a demonstration of this friar’s intellectual authority in the hegemonic regime of a colonial outpost. His

agendas were also to promote conversion to Christianity, to justify the Spanish invasions in general, and to rehabilitate the reputation of Alvarado specifically. Concerning the first of these agendas, the author includes basic elements of the *doctrina* as explained by Alvarado and his Ambassadors. The author draws on precedents that when a ruler or *cacique* accepts baptism and Spanish sovereignty, then his subjects and dependents will follow his example. Through the burlesque treatment of Ajitz, he also depicts Indigenous religion as not only vile and doomed but also bogus and inconsequential. Concerning the second agenda, the author relies on the moral and legal authority of the *Requerimiento*, which forms the basis of the second part of the drama and provides the pivotal choice that determines all subsequent action. And apropos of the third agenda, for the Alvarado of the *Baile de la Conquista*, war is a last resort if the K'iche' refuse the terms of surrender, and victory allows him to baptize the survivors as Catholics under Spanish rule. This characterization fits Franciscan policies, and thus the situation, experience and perspective of the author, better than it does the historical Alvarado's acts and intentions.

To fulfill these the latter agendas, this author drew on historical information on the Spanish invasion probably from multiple sources, including Pedro de Alvarado's letter narrating his defeat of the K'iche' army, published in 1525, and perhaps descendants of Juan de León y Cardona who was awarded the old settlement of Quetzaltenango (now Salcajá) as his *encomienda*. But much of the plot derives from the story of the invasion as told in several *títulos* composed in the Quetzaltenango region between 1542 and 1568. The most extensive of these relate the same story of Tekum's battle with Alvarado, taking the form of his eagle *nawal*, decapitating Alvarado's horse, and then being pierced by Alvarado's lance. The author's most important written source was the *Título* of Huitzitzil Tzunun from which he adapted several aspects of his dance text, though some of this information might have come from direct contact with the Tzunun family. In either case, the Tzunun family had the advantage in this relation as they controlled information that the Franciscan author needed to plot his narrative. The family seems to have pursued their leverage to influence the author to shape the plot around their interests. While the Huitzitzil Tzunun *título* foregrounds Tzunun's actions in rendering vassalage to the Spanish, the relevant passage makes clear that he is one of several who submit as a group.¹ By contrast, in the dance text Tzunun is single-handedly responsible for stopping the war and accepting Alvarado's terms of submission and conversion.

Following the composition of this text, the staging of the work would also have required intensive collaboration. A *fiscal*, already skilled in coaching the memorization of texts in a foreign language through promulgation of the *doctrina*, was likely responsible for teaching the performers the dramatic text. A *fiscal* or perhaps *maestro de coro* was likely instrumental in the composition of music and choreography of the dance, as well as other matters of staging. The music and dance for the first staging are likely to have already synthesized European and Indigenous elements. For example, it is

¹ "... y visto pr. Su gente del Dn. Tecun como ya era muerto se empezaron a recoger, y a pacificar la maquina de gente que le seguian, y acompañaban, mostrandose entoses todos los principales y

possible and perhaps likely that the arrangement of opposing forces in parallel lines, drawn from European dance tradition, and the *vueltas* at the corners, derived from Indigenous cosmology, were combined in the initial choreography. I suspect that the intricate movements of the opening and closing dance were also part of the original production. Similarly while the instruments used, the *tambor* and *chirimía*, were brought by the *conquistadores*, they music likely combined Indigenous and European musical elements in a manner very similar to that used today in the *Baile de la Conquista*, in contrast to the music for dances that originated later. Costumes and masks had to be created for the performance. Costumes of the *conquistadores* might have been adapted from those already in use in the performance of a small-scale version of the *Moros y Cristianos* dance drama, whereas those of the K'iche' would have been drawn from Indigenous regalia including the use of jade beads and quetzal feathers. Local carvers would have produced contrasting masks for the two opposing forces as well. In all these necessities, the friar, committed to staging the play he had written, had to rely on the knowledge and compliance of Indigenous persons indoctrinated within the monastery for the fulfillment of his objectives. He might further have had to rely on the influence of *caciques* to fill out the ranks of the dancers among their subordinates. These assimilations and accommodations that gave rise to the first performance of the *Baile de la Conquista* exemplify the process of transculturation in relation to the production of a negotiated hegemony in K'iche' communities in early colonial times.

19.3.2. Middle Colonial

For the purposes of this study, what may be called the middle colonial phase begins when the goals of resettlement (*reducción* or *congregación*) and conversion have been accomplished by the friars, and ends when the missionaries are replaced, largely in the 1770s, by secular priests. There is less information on this phase pertinent to this project, so arguments are more speculative. Politically the situation was likely a softer hegemony than previously, with religious ideology as a support for the dominant monastic authority. Further, both the monastic/church establishment and leaders of the Indigenous population would be engaged in continual negotiation between accommodation and resistance, each side offering many concessions to the other. Friars were working to maintain Indigenous communities separate from those of settlers, preaching in the Indigenous language, and in some areas defending these communities against the colonial administration.

For this study the most significant aspect of this middle colonial phase would be the synthesis of *Costumbre* as an integrated and popular religion, understood by its adherents to be an orthodox Catholicism, operating in an interdependence with Roman Catholic ritual and thus tolerated but not validated by the friars. This separation of *Costumbre* from church ritual would have relied on an increasing autonomy of the *Cofradías* that had been introduced in the early colonial phase and were being adapted to Indigenous religious practices and beliefs. *Cofradía* officers would have then usurped some of the moral authority from the friars through their control of the knowledge required to perform *cofradía* rituals.

Rejecting friars' tolerance, the secular priesthood, especially through the institution of the *visita*, attempted to control *Costumbre* and the *cofradías*. By the late 17th century, *visita* records insist on elimination of church icons with animals or demons and prohibition of dances in which a devil appears. They reject taking idols to homes (*guachibales* and/or *cofradías*) and decry the *zarabandas*. We do not really know how closely these night social/religious dances conformed to priestly descriptions as drunken debauchery and violence, but we can argue from these records that these secular priest-visitors were threatened by the autonomy the *zarabandas* represented in their direct contravention of church-controlled ritual procedures.

This middle colonial phase also witnessed an outpouring of synthesis on the history, environment, and ethnography of Guatemala composed both by monastics and lay persons. These include the histories of the Dominican order in Guatemala by Antonio de Remesal (1619) and of the Franciscan order by Antonio Vasquéz (1716), and the history of the Spanish invasion of Guatemala by the anonymous author of the *Isagoge Histórica* (1710–11). The much broader *Recordación Florida* by Fuentes y Guzmán (1690s) and the volume by Ximenez that incorporated a paraphrase of his translation of the *Popol Vuj* (1720), all provide historical information on the conquest and colony as well ethnographic information on Indigenous populations including festival dances. As discussed earlier, Gage's travel narrative from the 1620s – 1630s provides detailed information on the *fiesta patronal* and its dances.

Several of these chronicles provide short narratives concerning Alvarado's defeat of the K'iche' in February, 1524. Most important of such narratives is that written by Fuentes y Guzmán, who drew on Alvarado's third letter, the conquest history by Bernal Díaz del Castillo which was based on that letter, and several Quetzaltenango area *títulos* that have not been located. To these sources Fuentes added a significant amount of invention that has remained tied to the legend of Tekum particularly among non-Indigenous Guatemalans, including providing him with the nonsense surname of "Umán" and postponing his death to the battle of Urbina. While Ximenez disputes the aspect of Tekum flying as an eagle, other chroniclers beginning with the anonymous author of the *Isagoge* have tended to rely primarily on Fuentes y Guzmán and thus repeat his fabrications.

No longer needed as theatre of conversion, friars would have likely ceded control of the *Baile de la Conquista* (along with the *Baile de los Moros y Cristianos*) to the K'iche' population who celebrated it as a means to honour the patron saint and their ancestors. For this reason, they would continue to honour and recite the text. *Fiscales* would have taken on roles similar to that of the contemporary *maestro*, possessing a copy of the text and teaching performers to recite it as well as transmitting the proper choreography. Though now in Indigenous hands, friars would have still approved of such dances of conquest and conversion, since they continue to instill Christian doctrine and the necessity of loyalty to the Spanish empire. Possibly also the increasing autonomy or Indigenous control of religion through *Costumbre* led to decreasing emphasis on the church-dominated *Corpus Christi* festival and increasing

emphasis on the *fiesta patronal*, with some dance-dramas like the *Conquista* migrating from the former to the latter. This is the situation described by Gage for the 1620s–1630s. Now in the control of the Indigenous majority population rather than the Spanish minority, but arising from their transcultural interchange, these dances became a form of popular culture, just as *Costumbre* had become a popular religion.

Costumbrista ritual takes the *fiesta patronal* as a rite of passage, enacting the annual renewal of the patron saint and the community. In its contribution to this festival, the *Baile de la Conquista* (along with the *Baile de los Moros y Cristianos*) would have been understood not solely as narrating an historical event from the past but as itself a form of cyclic renewal. The *Conquista* in particular would be understood as narrating not only events that led to Spanish presence in Indigenous communities but also the origin of *Costumbre* and with it, perhaps, the origin of the *fiesta patronal*.

19.3.3. Late Colonial

The late colonial phase in Guatemala may be considered to comprise the period from around 1770. with its intensified imposition of the Bourbon reform, until the Cortes de Cádiz issued its constitution in 1812, setting in motion a rapid series of changes and challenges to the monarchy that would lead to Mexican and Guatemalan independence in 1821. The Bourbon reforms were partly aimed at increasing wealth for the monarchy, including the imposition of a higher tribute on Indigenous Americans to be paid in cash rather than product. Because these reforms were also directed more generally at modernizing social, economic and political systems, Indigenous peoples, Indigenous languages, and the monastic orders that accommodated them all came to be considered as backwards, belonging to the past, resisting progress, and thus deprived of moral or intellectual authority.

The relationship of Indigenous hierarchy to colonial administration also changed with the decline of importance of *cacique* families and rise of new patriarchs who were accommodating the new policies and intrusive settler populations by becoming tribute collectors and *repartimiento* administrators and by making a display of donating costly ornaments to the church and attending Sunday mass. Rifts thus opened up in Indigenous communities between the *principales*, those new patriarchs who accommodated the new regime, and the declining *cacique* families who resisted its changes.

The relationship of Indigenous communities to its priests was in many ways reversed. Where friars hoped to protect Indigenous communities through isolation from colonists, the new policy was assimilation, especially through education and language. Colonists moved into Indigenous communities in much greater numbers, appropriating lands, community chests and other resources. These intrusive colonists took over the municipal government positions of mayor and town council, constituting an auxiliary Indigenous council with little authority. Friars were replaced by secular priests and *fiscales* were replaced by scribes. Where friars befriended communities by communicating in its

Indigenous language, secular priests allied with the Spanish settlers and refused to communicate apart from Spanish, a policy that was supported by the crown in 1770. Where friars tolerated *Costumbre* and the autonomy of *cofradías* from the church, the secular priests persecuted *Costumbre* as pagan idolatry and undermined the *cofradías* by ordering that their ceremonies take place within the church and by confiscating the lands and flocks that provided the *cofradías'* economic resource to support their ritual activities. Thus in political, economic, and religious spheres, the political relationship of dominant settler to subordinate Indigenous populations changed from a soft to a hard hegemony, bordering on domination.

Despite the greater degree of outside domination, accommodation to pressures generated by the *Ladino* minority led to an innovation generated from within Maya communities. While *Ladinos* were taking over the *municipio* government, relegating Indigenous leaders to the Indigenous *cabildo* or *auxiliatura*, they were also confiscating *cofradías'* economic support, requiring members to make private contributions to fulfill the *cofradía* mandates. These processes became linked and thereby generated a prestige system that formed *principales* through their ability to take on tasks and expenses that would allow them to rise through the ranks of both *cabildo* and *cofradía* in a series of alternating steps (Cook 2000: 9, 32). Cook (2000: 50, 102) argues further that while the role of mediating between the Maya community and the dominant outsiders was fulfilled by *caciques* in the early and mid colonial periods, the *auxiliatura* came to take over this mediating role. Cook also suggests a parallel with the *cofrades'* duty to mediate between the community and sacred powers. In contrast to documentation on the increasing integration of *cofradía* and *cabildo* in the late 18th and 19th centuries, it does not seem possible to speculate to what extent dance teams were also integrated with *cofradías* at that time, or whether they formed a separate and temporary institution collaborating with *cofradías* on ritual occasions as they generally do today.

Whereas secular priests attempted to ensure that *cofradía* ceremonies take place inside the church, they simultaneously insisted that festival dances be removed from the church interior to the atrium, plaza, or cemetery. While attempting to strictly control *cofradías*, they were divorcing themselves from control of any festival dances that were not under prohibition, and indeed the brief mention by archbishop Cortés y Larraz of dances at Corpus Christi in Totonicapán suggests almost complete disinterest. Lack of any mention of the *Baile de la Conquista* demonstrates that it was not considered a threat to the new regime, which supports the notion that its hidden transcripts of resistance went unnoticed by the authorities under its guise of a dominant public transcript of accommodation.

The nature and messages of the Dance of the Conquest appear to have altered greatly in reaction to increased oppression and attempts to stifle *Costumbre*. The consistent and widespread nature of its resistant pantomimes suggest considerable age and certainly this period of reversal is likely to have fostered such introductions. At this point the earlier linked notions of conversion to Christianity and submission to the Spanish crown would have been separated by disparate attitudes, with conversion

celebrated by *Costumbristas* but subjection rejected for its increasing oppression and exploitation. Rejection of Spanish domination would have been expressed by a changed attitude toward Tekum, no longer pitied for his inability to adjust to a new regime leading to his doom, but now celebrated for his heroic resistance to invasion and domination. I have suggested that the ironic doubling of the battle scene, with Alvarado first wounded nearly to death and then Tekum ultimately killed, likely dates from these times and this intent to present resistance towards the colonists. At the same time, rather than celebrating an invasion that brought European Christian “civilization,” narrating the K'iche' defeat could be used to better understand the origin and nature of current domination as well as to forge community through shared identity in history.

On the other hand, I have argued that celebration of Christianity, in the form of *Costumbre*, is now expressed in the dance through pantomimes and other inventions that enact a dramatic transformation in the character of Ajitz. No longer representative of a pagan religion destined to rapid demise, Ajitz now embodies *Costumbre* in its survival and continued importance in the face of the secularization threat. The change from idolatrous devil-worshipper to *Costumbre* priest or *chuchkajaw* was also likely accompanied at this time by the invention of Ajitz Chiquito. This smaller replica of Ajitz, despite not acquiring spoken lines until the 20th century, nevertheless accomplishes two important goals at once. By his youth, he demonstrates that *Costumbre* will not disappear but will instead be passed on to future generations. And by changing Ajitz from a single figure to a pair, he achieves the complementary balance that seems to pervade Maya cosmology and ritual practice. Introduced pantomimes likely included Ajitz's divination, a process in which most of the audience had themselves participated and with which they could identify as *Costumbristas*. Additional pantomimes involved Ajitz's harassment of the Spaniards with chili smoke or traps, his humiliation of the Spaniards over the dull and bent swords or in preparing reeking blindfolds, his prayers for the team involving both Catholic and Indigenous postures and movements, and perhaps also his re-sanctification of the divination table as seen currently in Momostenango. Perhaps the custom of having Ajitz and Chiquito accompany Tzunun to the court of Rey K'iche' in Part III also began during this period as part of Ajitz's more heroic stance of resistance. Ajitz's change in character from coward to hero was also likely linked to his identification with the powerful Red K'oxol, as both elements are prominent in same geographic region of the western K'iche'. Although the *Baile de la Conquista* constructs history in a linear fashion focusing on a moment of transition, these changed attitudes towards both Tekum and Ajitz appear to have been framed within Indigenous cosmology in terms of cyclic return, thereby demonstrating resistance that is ongoing through perpetual renewal. This understanding, along with an increase in both the depiction of battle and the comic antics of Ajitz in humiliating the Spanish Ambassadors, would have greatly amplified and extended the popularity of the *Conquista* among its audience, thus furthering its position as a form of popular culture.

More difficult to explain in terms of this historical context are the alternating dedications added to the end of the *Conquista* text. Due to their similarity in form to the *loas* to the Virgin and reference to the

context of the *fiesta patronal*, these dedications may date to the late 18th century phase of secularization or perhaps to the preceding, middle colonial phase. One could pose arguments for both chronological placements. In relation to the middle colonial phase, their seemingly unproblematic praise of the Virgin and lack of resistant content might suggest that they were composed by *fiscales* at that time largely in control of the Conquest Dance and its text. On the other hand, their similarity to the *loa* form and their greater spread and institutionalization in the late 18th century as popular theatre would suggest their origin in the secularization period. Their reference to the *fiesta patronal* context in which the dance–drama is performed also parallels both the Spanish form of the Deer Dance, likely originated in the middle colonial phase, as well as the *Torito* group dances, likely originated during the secularization or early independence phases.

19.3.4. Early Independence

The early independence phase comprises the independence period that began with the Cortes de Cádiz constitution of 1812 as well as the short period of liberal rule from 1821 to the 1838–1840 uprising that brought down the Central American Republic and the liberal regime.

Factionalism dominated in this time of turmoil leading up to independence, with both conservative monarchists and liberal constitutionalists seeking Indigenous support. The new *principales* generally took the side of the monarchists since they gained prestige and financial benefit by accommodating the dominant authority as collectors of tribute and used these boons for political power within the *cabildo*. Those who were neither *principales* nor *caciques*, and were referred to as *macehuales* (the Nahuatl term for commoners), generally sided with the constitutionalists in order to avoid the heavy burden of tribute. Complicating this issue was the policy of the colonial government of the Kingdom of Guatemala, headed by José de Bustamante and the royal *audiencia*, that refused to implement the tribute reform guaranteed by the constitution and agreed upon, under pressure, by the Bourbon king Fernando VII (Pollack 2005: 114–15).

Some of the impact of these struggles on the history of the Conquest Dance may be judged best through well documented events in what was then Totonicapán province. When the Cortes de Cádiz issued the 1812 constitution, the provincial governor or *alcalde mayor*, Narciso Mallol, began a process of educating the Indigenous community in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, through speeches and public readings by scribes (Pollack 2005). Atanasio Tzul, Indigenous *alcalde* of San Miguel Totonicapán in 1816, was affected by this education and refused to authorize collection of tribute in that year, which had been ordered because the king, Fernando VII, had returned to the throne, rejected the constitution in place since 1812, and reinstated tribute. Then in July, 1820, word circulated that Fernando had agreed to obey the constitution and would swear to this publicly. When Bustamante refused to conform to this new situation and continued to insist on tribute, resistance broke out in Totonicapán among the *macehuales* and some of the *cacique* families, while the

principales continued to support the colonial administration. This resistance has been well-documented through interrogations connected with the trial of its leaders, housed in the Archivo de Centroamérica in Guatemala City, and recently posted online in transcriptions by Victoria Bricker.²

The political leader of this resistance was Lucas Aguilar, a *macehual* who had worked his way up through the civil-religious hierarchy to become the *alcalde* of a *cofradía*. Atanasio Tzul named himself as the delegate or proxy of the king (*Rey Fiscal*) in order to use that symbolic authority to bypass the oppressive and intentionally obstructive colonial administration of Guatemala and appoint himself as the proper intermediary between the Indigenous community and the now constitutionally-regulated monarchy. In this role, Tzul could bolster Aguilar's political status as a leader, naming Aguilar the *gobernador*. Tzul performed this proxy role symbolically in three contexts: 1) in the triumphal entry on horseback into Totonicapán on the day, July 9, that Fernando VII was to swear allegiance to the constitution, including a circuit of the shrines at the four corners of the plaza, symbolically remaking the world according to the new order; 2) daily for the next week at the front of the *cabildo*, facing the plaza where bullfights and other entertainments were performed for Aguilar and Tzul seated side by side; and 3) in the evening on Friday, July 14, in Tzul's house, when he and his helpers constructed an elaborate tableau to visually explain and demonstrate his claims to authority as the *Rey Fiscal*.

The tableau focused on a crown set on a chair that was draped with curtains. This tableau and crown was likely designed to construct in three-dimensional form a portrait of Fernando VII in the style of royal portraits at that time, shown next to a throne in military uniform. Indeed, a print of such a royal portrait became part of this tableau. Fernando VII's was made present, through both the portrait and the enthroned crown, to confer authority on Tzul as his *Rey Fiscal*.

The tableau was a *bricolage*, composed of elements that had disparate origins, functions, and meanings, re-purposed in the process of composition to meet this political exigency. The throne was an elaborate *anda* from the *cofradía* of Santísimo Sacramento. The crown was from a church icon. The *anda* and crown, used to construct sacred status in the church and *cofradía* processions, were taken from earlier signs of royal status, so Tzul could easily re-purpose them again to highlight their royal connotations. The portrait print was likely taken from the *cabildo*, where it conferred political authority to the mayor and town council, so it was easily re-purposed to confer authority on Tzul and through him on Aguilar.

These re-purposings conform to Lévi-Strauss' discussion of *bricolage*, in that they involve elements of which both the *bricoleur* and the audience have prior knowledge so that the message intended by the new juxtapositions is more likely to be received clearly (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 11-12). John Clarke (1976: 150) adds that with this prior knowledge, the audience can also understand, judge, and appreciate the transformation in meaning and function that the *bricolage* has accomplished. Messages can be mixed

² <http://www.famsi.org/research/bricker/Totonicapan/Totonicapan1820.pdf>

however, and it appears that the placement of a crown on the “throne” in this tableau was misinterpreted by some as denoting a coronation, hence the claims that Tzul had himself crowned as an “Indian King” –an act that, since it denoted sedition, contributed most to subsequent interrogations and trial. Clarke adds that to be accepted the *bricolage* should also embody shared values of the relevant community, and that it should be framed within a particular set of activities that take place within a characteristic set of institutions (150–51). Indeed the week-long celebration involved a series of practices associated with the colonial administration of Guatemala in service of the emperor, including the ceremonial procession, reading of official pronouncements, as well as bullfights and musical entertainments in the setting of the *cabildo* enjoyed by Aguilar and Tzul.

The costume that Tzul assembled for the procession, entertainments, and final tableau was also a *bricolage*, framed within practices associated with the colonial administration. This costume purposefully combined two themes: political authority and military power. For political authority, Tzul



Atanasio Tzul in Totonicapán, Rodolfo Galeotti Torres, 1972.

wore a medal and carried the staff of office confiscated from the Indigenous *gobernador*, a symbolic position of great honour but little power, filled by a man appointed by the Spanish governor who functioned as liaison between the concurrent Spanish and Indigenous Governments. For martial authority, Tzul wore military style boots and pants and attached a sword to his belt. He attempted to use a military hat but the closest he could accomplish was a tricorne, initially military in function but by then in common use among the public. The most important element of his costume, and the one that generated the most questions and information in the interrogations, was the military jacket. In order to convince the *Ladino* named Valentin Alvarado to lend Tzul the uniform jacket, he was told that it was needed for performance of the Conquest Dance.

The *Ladino*-originated legend of Atanasio Tzul that has been propagated, along with that of Tekum, in the years of military dictatorship in Guatemala, is quite different. In this legend, Tzul is the proto-revolutionary and the “Indian King.” The legend, rather than the historical man, is materialized in a plaza in Totonicapán in the 1972 sculpture by Rodolfo Galeotti Torres, the same sculptor who in the just a few years earlier created two statues of Tekum (in Santa Cruz del Quiché and in his home town, Quetzaltenango). Galeotti Torres was likely unaware of details concerning the events of July, 1820, so he portrayed Tekum as the legend would have him, wearing a cape and loincloth over his pants and shirt, and wearing on his head the *tzute* wrapped in the fashion associated with Maya priests and *cofradía* officers, both marking him as quintessentially Indigenous, rather than wearing the military uniform along with the *gobernador*’s medallion that actually served him in the insurgence. The statue now rests on a masonry base designed

to represent a Maya pyramid and decorated with imitations of Maya hieroglyphic writing, furthering the romantic notion that in becoming a king, even for less than a month duration, he was returning his people to the supposedly glorious condition of the pre-Hispanic K'iche' kingdom. While Galeotti Torres would have likely been surprised to learn that Tzul dressed in Spanish military uniform, we know now that Tzul chose to appear in such garb to symbolically reinforce his claims to authority conferred by the monarch.

Valentin Alvarado did not suspect such use for his jacket. When told that it was to perform the Conquest Dance, he would likely not have been surprised, considering Tzul's stature in the Maya community of Totonicapán. Furthermore, it was likely not more than a few decades earlier that costumes for the Conquest Dance had been updated by adapting more current European fashions. The military costume that is still worn by the Spanish personages and by Ajitz (hat and jacket) dates from around 1800, so in Tzul's time the uniform in the dance and the uniform worn by imperial soldiers would have been very similar. The way in which it would be read, however, would be different. By comparison, sixty years later, the prominent Maya K'iche' of Cantel, Antonio Colop Estrada, was also performing as a Spanish *conquistador* in the *Baile de la Conquista* when he left the dance to deal with an emerging political conflict, as discussed earlier. But the point that needs to be made here is that one cannot assume a singular meaning for the Spanish military uniform. For example, when Colop Estrada strode up to the *cabildo* in his *conquistador* costume, he demanded the surrender of the *Ladino* soldier who had stabbed José Yxcot. When his demand was not met, he threw a rock at the soldier, rendering the man unconscious. Thus Colop Estrada in a soldier's uniform attacked a man also in a soldier's uniform, and indeed the ensuing riot was quelled by further soldiers from the nearby garrison. We can understand from this context that whereas soldiers' uniforms in the everyday political life of the community were associated with oppression and injustice, the Spanish soldiers' uniforms in the Conquest Dance had more positive connotations. These costume uniforms functioned in a symbolic mode to represent some of the old ones, long gone, who were considered responsible for re-forming the world and laying down the rules that must always continue to be followed. The situation was similar for Tzul, who would have seen and indeed may have performed the symbolic role of a Spaniard in the *Conquista*, in contrast to colonial soldiers who would soon put down the insurgence that he helped to lead. But in wearing a Spanish uniform, Tzul called on a third symbolic meaning and function, representing the intermediary position of authority of the *Rey Fiscal* that would provide the Indigenous community with direct access to the Spanish monarch and constitution.

In addition to updating military uniforms, modification of the K'iche' cape into the format of the European ermine robe and introduction of *passemonterie* may also date to that time, but this cannot be established. In part, this choice to modernize costumes conforms to the Enlightenment spirit of modernization embodied in the Cortes de Cádiz and the transformation of the Spanish emperor into a constitutional monarch. But it also serves to update the Conquest Dance in a way that calls upon the audience to relate events of the Spanish invasion in the past to current oppression by Spanish colonial

administrators and Guatemalan *criollos*, fomenting a more acute political consciousness and perhaps enhancing the ability to react to new threats from the politically dominant *Ladino* communities. In other words, these new costumes update the contrast between a public transcript of accommodation or compliance and a hidden transcript of resistance.

With independence came liberal rule of Guatemala within the Federal Republic of Central America. Modernizing policies involved an attack on the church as a bastion of conservatism. Liberal ideology required erasing of caste distinctions, leading to an interest in the advancement and assimilation of Indigenous populations, particularly the *macehuales*. For similar reasons, the dual town councils, *Ladino* and Indigenous, were discontinued in favour of a single council dominated by *Ladinos* (Pollack 2005: 217–19). These policies, along with insistence that the dead be buried outside of town rather than in the church in the time of a cholera epidemic, were understood in Maya communities in the western highlands as an attack on tradition and its upholders, including the *principales*. In contrast to Hutcheson's (2003: 131) claim that the *Baile de la Conquista* was likely written as a celebration of Guatemalan independence, I would argue that in these two decades of liberal rule, with its attacks on the church and the *principales*, that this dance and other festival dances would not be in favour by the new leaders of Guatemala and such dances might actually have had a difficult time surviving.

19.3.5. Conservative Regime: 1840-1870

With the fall of the Central American Republic and rise of Rafael Carrera as the dominant political figure in Guatemala, liberal policies were reversed and a political arrangement of soft hegemony linked the national government with the Maya community. This took place, however, within a regime made unstable by the growing power and attempts at cessation by the liberal stronghold in Los Altos, centred in Quetzaltenango. Thus one has to consider two different forms of political relations in the K'iche' region: relations between the Indigenous community and the conservative national government; and relations between the Indigenous community and the liberal leadership of Los Altos.

Mestizo Carrera relied on Indigenous fighting power to overthrow the liberals and he continued to rely on this support throughout the periods of his leadership in order to counteract the secessionist forces of Los Altos. The Carrera regime was also pro-church, which helped to earn and maintain Indigenous loyalty. To further court their allegiance, the Carrera regime granted many concessions. By a decree of 1847, it became legal to decline joining or contributing funds to a *cofradía* (Grandin 2000: 106). This and other decrees were published not only in Spanish but also in Indigenous languages. Also, the regime permitted Indigenous ceremonies to be performed in the open, which would have enhanced the prestige of *principales* and *chuchkajaw* and celebrated the knowledge they possessed for maintaining ancestral religious traditions. This more permissive relationship between the state and Indigenous communities was configured in paternalistic terms.

Relations between the Indigenous community and the Los Altos liberals was the opposite. According to Aaron Pollack (2005: 198, 228), during the period of antagonism to the conservative national government, the Los Altos liberals lost their commitment to the core of liberal ideology, instead focusing on aggrandizing their wealth and power. As these goals could be better met were they to be independent of the Guatemalan state, liberal ideology shifted towards demands for freedom, as symbolized by the quetzal, and by celebration of Aztec and Inka rulers who had resisted the Spanish invasions, not the local K'iche'. Rather than seeking Indigenous advancement, they saw Indigenous communities as a source of alienable land, unpaid labour, and extractable wealth. The combination of liberal conceptions of contemporaneous Indigenous communities as backwards and against progress, and Indigenous loyalty to the church and the Carrera government, led to a polarization between the Los Altos ethnic communities. Where the Carrera government sought Indigenous peoples as allies, the Los Altos liberals configured the Indigenous community as an enemy. Were it not for Carrera's support, a situation of domination would have prevailed in Los Altos.

There is no recovered documentation on the *Baile de la Conquista* for the conservative period, so any suggestion of continued change is pure speculation. First, with the more permissive environment to open performance of Indigenous-based *Costumbre* rituals, festival dances like the *Baile de la Conquista* would likely be danced under circumstances of much greater interest and support than in the previous liberal regime of the early independence period. In particular, Ajitz's performance of divination might have become more emphasized and realistically detailed. Also, the fact that Maya communities were involved in two contrasting relationships with non-Indigenous communities—alliance with Carrera conservatives and antagonism to Los Altos liberals—likely impacted on how audiences understood the relevance of *Conquista* performances to their contemporaneous circumstances. For example, if the Spanish personages led by Alvarado were associated with dominant non-Maya forces, then their actions would be subject to potentially opposite meanings. On the one hand, if the *Conquistadores* were read as representing the conservative regime of Carrera, then they would be celebrated as benevolent bringers of Christianity and protectors of Maya peoples. If, on the other and, the Spaniards were read as representing the Los Altos liberals, then they would be condemned as having come to stamp out Maya religion, appropriate Maya lands, and exploit Maya labour. This would give the extended episode of Ajitz humiliating the Spaniards a heightened flavour of resistance directed at the Los Altos liberals.

19.3.6. Liberal Dictatorships 1871-1944

As discussed extensively in the analysis of textual changes, the liberal dictatorships that began in 1871 nationalized the ideology and dominating practices of the Los Altos liberals who succeeded in overthrowing the conservative government. Thus forced labour, surveillance, brutal discipline and configuration of Indigenous people as the enemy of the state all spread and intensified under hardline liberals, while the softer branch emphasized Indigenous progress through education, assimilation and

privatization of resources. The church also came under more concerted attack, both for its wealth in land and goods and for its control over Indigenous education. Universal liberal-slanted public education was thus planned but not accomplished for lack of funding. The liberal ideology of progress served to further enrich the already-wealthy, including oligarch families and the new breed of coffee plantation owners. Inevitably, some members of the Indigenous community collaborated with the liberal administration and *Ladino* population, helping to ensure sufficient labour for the coffee plantations. Despite the situation of general domination, there was room to maneuver, as Grandin shows in his study of Cantel near the beginning of this period, through the community control of resources needed by the growing *Ladino* population of Quetzaltenango. Also, the Liberal regime did not launch a significant attack *Costumbre*, perhaps in part because it was not a threat, and in part because raising funds for *cofradía* participation motivated Maya communities to perform labour for plantation owners. Thus attacks on *Costumbre* by the Catholic church proved unsuccessful in diminishing its importance to Maya communities.³

Transculturation, as relevant to Tekum and the Conquest Dance, was decidedly bidirectional, though the micropolitics involved differed greatly. The liberal state, exercising its dominance and thus with no consideration for Indigenous interests, carefully cultivated nationalist sentiments based in part on Indigenous culture as precursor. Thus the quetzal, symbol of the nationalist desire for liberty, was immediately made the national bird. These nationalist sentiments combined with romanticism in literature, poetry and music to follow Martí's 1878 advice and dramatize Tekum's resistance to Alvarado's invasion, a theme also possibly stimulated by publication of the *Título Izquin Nejaib I*, with the most extensive narrative of the Tekum-Alvarado duel, two years previous (Carmack 1973: 33). In this process, by 1888, Martí and other authors in diverse media had firmly linked Tekum with the quetzal as the lover of liberty and ideal patriot who defends the freedom of his nation. These ideas were equally current at the end of the liberal regime, when Guatemalan Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias published his poem Tecún Umán, in which the K'iche' leader is pictured as perpetually active and strong.

In this process of nationalizing and romanticizing the story of Tekum, authors began drawing directly on the text for the *Baile de la Conquista*. Silva adapted elements of the story and actual lines of text in his undated *La Conquista de Uatlán*, and Carranza and Amezquita used the story to support liberal views of nationalism and progress by simultaneously celebrating Tekum's patriotism as defender of his nation's freedom and attacking the church for its supposed conservative agenda of maintaining the backwardness of the Indigenous population. The inspiration, traced to Martí, that produced literature such as the Silva plays, was reinvigorated in Quetzaltenango in the early 20th century by a group of 'artists' calling themselves "Americanistas," including painter Carlos Mérida, sculptor Rafael Yela Günther, and composer Jesús Castillo. In 1925, composer Castillo finished an opera on a K'iche' theme

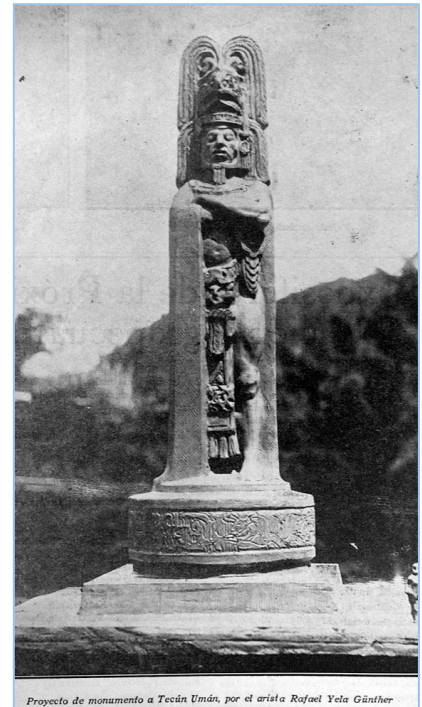
³ As an example, Christenson (2001:62) reports that in 1912 a Catholic bishop tried to burn the image of Rilaj Mam of Santiago Atitlán but was driven off by a mob of *Costumbristas*.

(the *K'iche' Winaq* dance described by Fuentes y Guzman as well as Ximenez). Earlier he had written a “Tecún Overture” (1899)⁴ and a “Symphonic Poem Tecún Umán.”⁵ Castillo also published a book in 1924 on K'iche' music.

Also in 1924–25, Miguel Angel Díaz published his first version of the fictive origin of the *Baile de la Conquista*, nationalizing the story of Tekum and Alvarado by placing the dance-drama’s origin in 1542, near the first colonial capital, in Sacatepéquez, central Guatemala. Díaz may have been inspired to create this origin account by the celebration of 400 years since Tekum’s death, an anniversary announced on January 7, 1524 in the article “*Héroes sin gloria*” in Díaz’s *Diario de Centro América*.

One result of the regional Los Altos liberal elite taking over the government of Guatemala was thus the nationalization of the story of Tekum. In this new country-wide context, the K'iche' nation came to stand for the independent nation of Guatemala, so that Alvarado’s defeat of Tekum became the story of Guatemala’s origin. These notions came to a climax under the final liberal dictator, Jorge Ubico, president from 1931–1944.

The 1924 article referring to the 400 year anniversary of Tekum’s death, likely written by Victor Miguel Díaz, suggested that a monument should be raised to honour Tekum who had died defending his fatherland. It was not until 1933 that such a monument was proposed, by the governor of Sacatepéquez, to be erected (presumably) in the departmental seat and Guatemala’s old capital, Antigua Guatemala. As discussed earlier, Yela Günther produced a stela-like model for such a monument, which Díaz published in 1933, in his reworked discussion of the 1542 Sacatepéquez origin of the *Baile de la Conquista*. Quetzaltenango countered with a plan to have this Yela Günther monument to Tekum erected on Cerro El Baúl (then Cerro Tecún Umán) outside the city, and the image of the model was again reproduced on the cover of the Cantel script for the *Baile de la Conquista* prepared for the Quetzaltenango fair in 1934 and sold to help raise funds for the monument. Ultimately a different monument design was chosen, of a nameless pre-Hispanic Maya man celebrating the liberal regime instituted by Justo Rufino Barrios.



Yela Günther model for Tekum statue (Díaz 1933: 5)

⁴ Castillo’s Tekum Overture is listed in Worldcat:

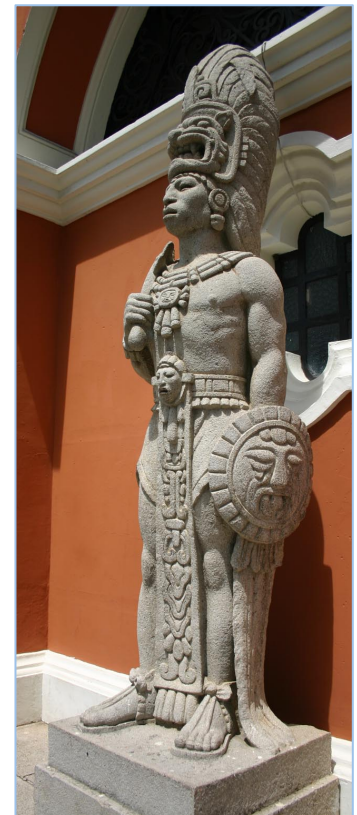
<http://www.worldcat.org/title/tecum-overture/oclc/45206115>.

⁵ According to an article in the *Diario de Centro América*, February 25, 1924, Julián Paniagua Martínez composed a symphony on Tekum in 1900, though Lehnhoff’s (undated) article instead credits him with a waltz written in 1910.



Monument on Cerro El Baúl, dated 1935, and dedicated to Justo Rufino Barrios.

Díaz's 1933 version of his fabricated 1542 Sacatépequez origin of the *Baile de la Conquista* linked with the performance of this dance by a Momostenango team through the context of the *Pueblo Indígena* in Ubico's national fair, a display of Indigenous culture designed in part to promote tourism to Guatemala. This linkage was continued in two touristic guidebooks to Guatemala (Kelsey and Osborne 1939; Fergusson 1942) published in English in the US (New York City). Both guidebooks also introduce, as an exoticizing allurements, the notion that despite the heroism of Tekum, in the Conquest Dance the Maya demonstrate a "puzzling willingness to play their own downfall" (Fergusson 1942: 267). This concept ensures that Tekum's status as a national hero will always be tempered by notions of Indigenous inferiority to Euro-descendants. The monument to liberalism on Cerro El Baúl makes the same point, representing Indigenous civilization, in the form of a Tekum-like warrior, giving way to the modernity of the liberal revolution. The Cerro El Baúl monument was



Tekum statue at National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

supposedly designed by sculptor Rodolfo Galeotti Torres, who is also credited with undated statues of Atanasio Tzul and Tekum that now flank the entrance to the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología in Parque La Aurora in Guatemala City, in a museum complex planned under Ubico.⁶

⁶ <http://wikiguate.com.gt/museo-nacional-de-arqueologia-y-etnologia-de-guatemala/>

Galeotti Torres was also one of the visual artists who participated in the design of the National Palace, constructed from 1939–1943, in the last years of Ubico's presidency. Galeotti's contribution is a series of bas reliefs decorating the front of the building platform. These reliefs depict Spanish *conquistadores*



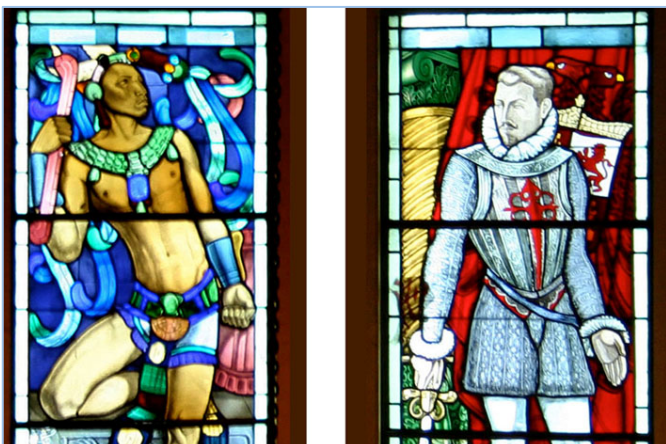
Rodolfo Galeotti Torres, Detail of National Palace façade, 1939–1943.

and their weapons; the Indigenous nations with whom they battled or made alliances appear only as a design on their shields, especially the two directly flanking the central entrance steps in which a mounted and dressed Spaniard spears a fallen nude native. This program thus glorifies the Spanish invasions as the foundation of Guatemala while marginalizing and denigrating Guatemala's original inhabitants to an amazing degree, producing a binary of extreme asymmetry.

This asymmetric binary is pursued through a modernist dichotomy of Indigenous pre-modern and European modern in the stained glass windows of the main reception hall in the National Palace, designed by Julio Urruela Vásquez. The pre-Hispanic era, represented by Maya peoples, is located on the left or west side, while the Conquest era is represented on the right or east side, suggesting a progression. Each of the two main window zones consists of five framed windows each further divided into a large and small panel. For several of the panels, direct parallels are evoked between what are constructed as a limited Indigenous achievement and a superior European colonial achievement that displaces it: a scribe painting a codex is paired with José de Pineda Ibarra's printing press, founded in 1660, the first in Central America; a pre-Hispanic sculptor making a simple deity idol is paired with Quirio Cataño in 1595 carving the miraculous Black Christ of Esquipulas; the building of Tikal temple 1 is paired with the construction of Antigua's *cabildo*; and a Maya astronomer showing an apprentice the night sky is paired with lectures in a colonial university. Thus the arts and sciences are called upon to demonstrate how Indigenous achievements were superseded and replaced by the superior achievements of the European colony. In other examples, non-historical tradition is contrasted with

historic changes wrought by heroic Spaniards. Thus a hunter is paired with Columbus and a farmer with Jorge de Alvarado, founder of the first capital, Santiago de los Caballeros of Almolonga. One of the most curious pairs has to do with relations between men and women. For the pre-Hispanic side, an event in the Popol Vuh is chosen in which young women of an enemy group are sent to bathe where the K'iche' gods live in order to seduce them and reduce their power. For the colonial side, Beatriz de

la Cueva, wife of Pedro de Alvarado, is shown with a man who is likely her brother, Francisco de la Cueva, who served as Guatemala's governor after the death of his sister and Alvarado, both in 1541.



In addition to these large five-window panels there is a single window on each side that features a full figure. These have been identified as Tekum on the pre-Hispanic side and Pedro de Alvarado on the colonial side. At the head of the



Alfredo Gálvez Suárez, "The Clash of Races," East Stair, National Palace, 1943-44.
 Courtesy Rich Polanco/OKAntigua.com

room, they portray the moment of conflict that will lead to the transformation of Guatemala's leadership from Indigenous to European. The encounter of Tekum and Alvarado is thus fully represented as a foundation of the nation and not just of colonial K'iche' society or the Los Altos region.

The most widely pictured decorations of the National Palace are the mural paintings by Alfredo Gálvez Suárez, completed in 1943-44, that decorate the divided main stairway. A trio of paintings is associated with each stairway: two smaller paintings appear on the side wall and a 10 meter long painting is mounted over the stair. These two larger paintings again form an opposition that animates a nationalist narrative.

The large panel over the east stair is called “The Clash of Races”. This scene depicts the battle of El Pinar between Spanish and K’iche’ forces. Alvarado and Tekum appear in the background in the level of deities, demonstrating that their confrontation is symbolic and spiritual as well as physical. While Tekum has his quetzal overhead and the painter’s idea of sun and moon deities next to them, behind Alvarado are a radiant cross carried by monks, Santiago mounted on his horse, and the Virgin. In front, a Spanish soldier on foot spears a Maya fighter in a direct parallel to the posture of the speared Tekum above. These two foreground fighters are not only represented as anonymous but on equal footing, so it perhaps the pair are meant to suggest that the Maya fighter loses because of his own inferiority rather than the Spaniards’ weapons advantage. Furthermore, while the Spanish soldiers at the left are naturally male and shown brave (one pulls an arrow from his shoulder, showing how ineffective Maya resistance is), on the right the visible foreground Maya figures are terrified women with children, which partakes of the feminizing of the Indigenous typical of modernist and racist ideology.



Alfredo Gálvez Suárez, “The Fusion of Races,” West Stair, National Palace, 1943–44.
Courtesy Rich Polanco/OKAntigua.com

The west stairway panel was named “Technology and Spirit” but is also known as the “Fusion of Races,” as it is designed to represent a positive aftermath of the previous clash. The image is influenced by the style of Mexican muralists and the Mexican ideology of *mestizaje*. The centre shows the creative hands of God cupping the flower-like foundation of Guatemalan society: repeating the same gendering of ethnicity, it shows the marriage of a Spanish soldier and an Indigenous woman, creating the modern *mestizo*. This *mestizo* is an industrial worker, represented below by a much larger man with a motor. In subsidiary scenes, the Spanish appear as active teachers and bringers of civilization while the Indigenous people are shown as passive learners and accepters of foreign civilization and knowledge.

Gálvez Suárez (Sagastume de Paz 2003: 55) stated that his goal with these paintings was to show both recognition and love for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous races that he saw blending to create modern Guatemala. He said he had always felt an urgency to make a concrete message that will dignify and exalt rather than disparage Indigenous peoples. But one could say he did the opposite because, like the stained glass windows, his paintings carried a clear message that the time when Indigenous society contributed anything original to the world ended at the conquest. The painter has not shown the dignity and equal contribution of Indigenous people to modern Guatemala, but rather argues for their inferiority. This point is made in the stained glass windows as well. The very concept of parallels between Maya and European which two artists explore in different media is part of the ideology that the Maya and Spanish had parallel histories but also that one replaced the other, arguing that Maya and other Indigenous peoples of Guatemala had nothing worthwhile that the Europeans lacked. Erased are the contributions of maize to Guatemalan subsistence or cacao to the early colonial economy, both developed by Indigenous peoples.

Many other absences from these works demonstrate a narrow ideological message. Particularly revealing is the absence of any contemporary evidence of Maya or other Indigenous traditions. The artists who designed these images and the public who viewed them would actually be exposed to this evidence of continuing Indigenous identity and vitality on a daily basis, whether it is in clothing, dances, playing the marimba, or even weaving on the iconic backstrap loom. But all such evidence of contemporary Indigenous peoples is completely erased from this decorative program to maintain the racist ideology that Indigenous peoples' contribution to history must be limited to the period before the arrival of a more advanced European civilization. Instead, the message is of a non-Indigenous definition of progress in which the only contribution an Indigenous person can make is as an assimilated labourer. That the battle of Tekum and Alvarado, taken from the K'iche' *títulos* by way of the *Baile de la Conquista*, is central to this nationalist argument is evident from its prominence in two of the three most important visual programs in the national palace.

Academic study of the *Baile de la Conquista* begins in this period with the book by José Barrientos, designed to demonstrate the historical information contained in the text and attributing its origin to the Quetzaltenango region. In an article written in 1959, Victor Manuel Anleu noted that Barrientos published this book in 1941 to coincide with the 400 year anniversary of the founding of the second capital, Santiago de Guatemala.⁷ This would also have been the 400 year anniversary of Alvarado's death.

Just as the liberal revolution brought the greatest political, economic and spiritual changes to Guatemalan society since the early colonial period (McCreery 1990: 104–05), so to it brought the greatest changes to the *Baile de la Conquista* since that time. And as before, this transformation was

⁷ The article, dated December 21, 1959, "El Baile de la Conquista como elemento de investigación histórica," was consulted in the *Archivo Histórico* of CIRMA in Antigua Guatemala.

likewise characterized by intensive transcultural exchange, adapting elements originating in *Ladino* society to update scripts for the dance. Due to the polarizing separation between Indigenous and *Ladino* beginning at this time, changes made to the Conquest dance, while under a macro-political system of domination, took place in a micro-politics of relative freedom to innovate, though limited by the danger of overt resistance.

Maya *maestros* (predominantly K'iche' and Kaqchikel) freely modified the text that had been so carefully maintained over three centuries. As discussed in detail in an earlier chapter, these modifications varied from the addition of scenes, as in the Tecpán and Cantel lineages, to the complete re-writing in a different poetic form in the *Dioses* lineage. Transcultural adaptations included identification of Tekum with the quetzal and treatment of the story of Tekum and Alvarado as a national, rather than just K'iche', history, thus leading to its spread outside the K'iche' area, throughout Guatemala, and even taken up by non-Maya groups. Abundant use of the terms quetzal, liberty, and fatherland, especially in the Cantel group texts, also borrow from liberal state nationalism. The quetzal may also be incorporated into Tekum's mask and headdress at this time. Perhaps nationalist concepts also lie behind the striking emphasis on military armaments and battle locations in the Cantel and *Dioses* lineage texts.

Many other changes involved addition of texts to catch up with established pantomimes. These included the Tecpán lineage text for the Ambassadors' ambiguous visit to the court of Rey K'iche' on their way to confront Tekum, the Cantel lineage texts for Ajitz accompanying Tzunun to Rey K'iche' in Part III as well as for lengthy dialogues during the extended battle scene, and some text for Ajitz Chiquito. New scenes were added as well, such as the Tecpán lineage scene of a Malinche's alliance with the Ambassadors derived from the *Moros y Cristianos* group, the Cantel lineage scene for the Lacandón messenger (also called Azteca or Jicaque), and the Cantel lineage prologue for Ajitz and Tekum. Without any evidence other than general tenor, I would speculate that the dance of *despedida* that sends Tekum and his *Caciques* off to battle, for which text was added in a later period in San Cristóbal, may have been introduced in this liberal period. In addition, the nature of narrative changes in both of the radically altered lineages (Cantel and *Dioses*) with Tekum's knowledge of the Spanish invasion and its disastrous result known from the beginning rather than being gradually revealed, and with his character made perpetually steadfast and heroic. The nationalistic construction of Tekum as the ideal patriot who, like the quetzal, can never accept captivity and is thus willing to die to defend his liberty thus opened up new means for Maya peoples to express resistance within the context of the Conquest Dance.

Grandin's (1997) study of Cantel in the early decades of liberal rule demonstrates some of the varied potential for resistance. Cantel's particular strength in negotiating with the *Ladino* majority of Quetzaltenango helps contextualize this community's exceptional promotion of the *Baile de la Conquista* and its production of the most radical and defiant *Conquista* texts. Cantel lineage texts

contain several new and overtly heroic, decisive and selfless speeches for Tekum, which may be considered to respond not only to nationalist romanticizing literature but also to the increased need for resistance against an intensely repressive state. While *Ladino* promotion of Tekum carried nationalist sentiments of Guatemalan patriotism, Maya promotion of Tekum through the Conquest Dance was repurposed to convey messages of resistance to *Ladino* oppression. *Ladinos* viewing the dance would be expected to interpret Tekum's defiance of the Spaniards as Guatemalan patriotism and even liberal resistance to church-oriented conservatism, while Maya participating in and viewing the dance would read it as resistance to *Ladino* domination with its *mandamiento* laws and brutal discipline. The fact that in *bricolage* gathered elements are repurposed and resignified entails a notable potential for masking a hidden transcript of resistance behind a public transcript of compliance, and the nationalist construction of Tekum proved the ideal vehicle for this purpose. Similarly, Ajitz's renovated character of defiance against the Spaniards, along with greater emphasis on his spiritual powers and devotion to Tekum might be read by liberals to conform with their rejection of the Catholic church although it was likely designed to exalt *Costumbre* and its Indigenous roots.

Through updating of its text and its diffusion throughout Guatemala, the *Baile de la Conquista* became a paramount example of Indigenous popular culture in celebration of its past and resistance to outside oppression. The dance may have been aided in this process by what Cook and Offit (2013: 2–3) see as a *Ladino*-led centralization of civil and religious institutions in the *cabecera* encouraged by greater emphasis given to the *fiesta patronal* in which the *Baile de la Conquista* is now most commonly performed.

19.3.7. 1944-present

In many ways too much could be said about Guatemalan history, society, and relations of Indigenous to the state over the last 70 years, and at the same time too little may be speculated concerning how the *Baile de la Conquista* might have changed in response. I will thus make only a few points, focusing first on the period of military dictatorships that began in 1954 and culminated in the horrors of the civil war, and second on the subsequent restructuring to a neo-liberal political economy. Again we will look at changing *Ladino* constructions of Tekum and academic studies of the Conquest Dance as well as changes to the dance that likely occurred during this period.



“Tecún Umán”, Guatemala City, 1963.
Roberto González Goyri

The period of military dictatorships began with the CIA supported overthrow of the Arbenz government, terminating the so-called “decade of spring” which had been characterized by reforms aimed at improving the prosperity of all Guatemalans at the expense of foreign corporate control. Naturally then, the military government-by-coup required legitimacy, and very quickly Tekum became central to this purpose, constructed not only as the paradigmatic patriot but also the ideal soldier. Government sponsorship led to researching and reconstructing Tekum’s life and death, detailed in several publications from the late 1950s through the early 1960s. As part of this emphasis on recovering information to glorify Tekum, in 1963 the *Título Huitzitzil Tzunun* was published, making possible a comparison with the already-familiar Ixquin Nejaib version of the Tekum-Alvarado duel, published several times beginning in 1876 (Carmack 1973: 33). Fixing the day of Tekum’s death allowed the declaration of a national holiday in honour of Tekum for February 20, celebrated in part by

having school children

sing a newly composed hymn to Tekum as well as memorize and recite Asturias’ poem (Otzoy 1999: 81–82; Paz Cárcamo 2006: 13–14). Roberto González Goyri was commissioned to produce a large 7.5 meter monument to Tekum erected in 1963 in Guatemala City, and in response Galeotti Torres was commissioned to produce a pair of Tekum statues, erected in the late 1960s in Quetzaltenango and Santa Cruz del Quiché. Also, the government changed the name of the community of Ayutla to Ciudad Tecún Umán against local protest (Otzoy 1999: 83–84), and the head of Tekum, patterned after one of the Galeotti statues of Tekum, appeared on paper currency. At the same, and in the familiar grain of denigrating even the most glorified Indigenous person in order to proclaim white superiority, school children have been required to learn that Tekum was so ignorant and naïve that he could not recognize Alvarado and his horse as two different beings, so he thought that decapitating the horse would defeat his enemy.⁸



Tecún Umán”, Santa Cruz del Quiché, 1960s. Rodolfo Galeotti Torres.

⁸ This racist claim arises out of a simplistic reading of passages in two *títulos*: in the *Título Izquin Nejaib I* the passage reads “Y como vido que no había muerto el Adelantado sino el caballo, tornó a alzar el vuelo para arriba, para desde allí venir a matar al Adelantado” (Recinos 2001: 90); and in the



"Tecún Umán", Quetzaltenango, 1960s.
Rodolfo Galeotti Torres

This exaltation of Tekum as national and patriotic symbol intensified during the civil war, with its enormous need for propaganda to deflect attention from the evident horrors. Otzoy discusses a 1991 pamphlet composed by the military and issued by them to communities around lake Atitlán following a massacre at Santiago Atitlán. Otzoy (1999: 133) presents a significant passage in this booklet in her English translation:

For all Guatemalans, the figure of our courageous warrior Tecún Umán should represent: a) a lesson in patriotism; b) an example of authentic nationalism; c) a symbol of national identity; d) an example of the defense of freedom, foundation for national unity; f) champion of sovereignty; g) the honour and courage of the Guatemalan soldier; h) principle of dignity for the Guatemalan army.

An academic backlash against the militaristic glorification of Tekum developed through the discourse aimed at denying such a person ever existed, beginning with the article by Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache (1993). Paz Cárcamo (2006) further argued that the invention of Tekum should be traced to the *Baile de la Conquista*, which he believes also gave rise to the parallel stories of his duel with Alvarado in the K'iche' *títulos*. Also from this period is Irma Otzoy's penetrating thesis on the meanings of Tekum to diverse groups within Guatemala.

Academic study of the *Baile de la Conquista* has lagged far behind such analyses of Tekum through history. Barbara Bode's groundbreaking study, based on fieldwork in 1957 and published in 1961, analyzed the text to determine an origin date and considered associated rituals. Bode's publication includes sheet music for several *sones* from the *Baile de la Conquista* transcribed in 1957 by Jacinto Amezcuita, band master in Solola. In Guatemala, interest in the dance grew out of studies of folklore as well as the military government's promotion of Tekum as national hero. Three texts for the dance were published in the early 1960s, at the same time that Tekum's life was being reconstructed. Also the

Título Huitzitzil Tzunun the relevant passage is "*derribo y arranco la cabeza del caballo del dicho Dn. Pedro Alvarado, juzgando averlo matado...*" (Gall 1963: 27).

early 1960s, Matilde Montoya prepared a comparative study of four texts for a thesis defended in 1963 and published in 1970. In 1965, Montoya also introduced and narrated performance of sections from the dance by a group from Patzicia as part of a folklore festival at the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala City.⁹ In contrast, Matthew Krystal, who in 2001 defended a dissertation on the Conquest Dance as seen from the viewpoint of an activist, state supported *morería*, returned to the subject in his 2012 volume to demonstrate the dance as a dramatic opposition to folklore. In the late 1970s, Momostenango became a centre for anthropological study. Ethnomusicologist Horspool focused on its music for the *Baile de los Moros y Cristianos* but also discussed music for the *Baile de la Conquista*. Garrett Cook's study of *Costumbre* at Momostenango included an extended discussion of the Conquest dance. As the war was winding down at the end of the 1980s, research on the Conquest Dance resumed. Demetrio Brisset Martín pursued ethnographic fieldwork on the Conquest Dance in 1989, traveling to various communities. Like Bode he presented a standard set of questions to informants concerning organization of the team and rituals involved. The late 1990s saw Stöckli's investigation of *Conquista* music at Rabinal and the aforementioned study by Krystal of the Conquest Dance, masks and the *morería* at San Miguel Totonicapán. Thus research on the *Baile de la Conquista* has continued somewhat sporadically from the mid-1950s fieldwork by Bode to late 1990s research by Krystal and Stöckli, but in a fragmented fashion, not tying together the various strands to compose a complete picture nor intersecting noticeably with the distinct literature on Tekum.

The government program to glorify Tekum as the ideal Guatemalan soldier in the late 1950s and 1960s does not appear to have been embraced by Maya communities. Rigoberta Menchú Tum (1984: 204) rejects the notion that the day of Tekum's "death" should be celebrated. She argues that for Maya communities, Tekum cannot be dead, as the struggle against oppression continues. By this time, however, I suggest that such views of Tekum's recurring struggle had likely been part of the message of the Conquest Dance for centuries, and that the government program to glorify Tekum had little effect on the nature of its performance. However, as in the late 19th century, government promotion may have indirectly led to a renewed Maya interest in Tekum understood not only as the heroic defender of his people but also and increasingly as an *encanto* like Ajitz/K'oxol and Rey K'iche'. Examples from Momostenango would include the importance of these three *encantos* in the story of the origin of *Costumbre* recorded and analyzed by Cook (2001). In the same era, the carved bust of Tekum as an *encanto* was carved to decorate the gateways to the *Costumbrista* complex on Momostenango's sacred Paclom hill.



Detail of Paclom gateway, Momostenango.

⁹ This information derives from two articles, dated September 17, 1965, available in the Archivo Histórico of CIRMA in Antigua Guatemala. I do not have the source of these articles.

In contrast, the clearest evidence of change to the *Baile de la Conquista* related to contemporary trends appears to be resistance against greatly increased pressures for *Costumbristas* to abandon their religion and thereby assimilate into Guatemalan *Ladino* society. In the 1950s, this pressure came primarily from the Catholic Church, especially through the fundamentalist Catholic Action movement. This is also the period when Santiago Atitlán's Rilaj Mam was brutally attacked by a priest from Sololá and two of his masks were stolen (Christenson 2001: 62). During the civil war, which followed the disastrous earthquake of 1976, even greater pressure began to be exerted by Evangelical Protestant missionaries from the United States, and later from Mormon missionaries. I have argued that these pressures intensified the message of the *Baile de la Conquista* as a defense of *Costumbre* against religious assimilation into Catholicism or Protestantism, and that this message appears most strongly in the elevation of Ajitz to become the central character in the dance at Momostenango. Diane Nelson (1999: 16) also recorded that in a performance of the Conquest Dance in Nebaj during the war, the death of Tekum unleashed the audience's grief at the torture, disappearance and death of so many of their loved ones, indicating that the Spaniards in the dance may have become identified with the national army and its scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign that was recognized by the UN as genocidal. In 1989, Demetrio Brisset Martín surveyed communities to reveal that while the *Baile de la Conquista* had been the most popular festival dance before the war, the majority gave up performing the Conquest Dance during this conflict (Brisset Martín 1995).

The post-war period, after signing the peace accords in 1996, has seen a neo-liberal restructuring and increased solicitation of foreign investment in Guatemala. Maya and other Indigenous communities have had to resort to migration for work, whether to Guatemala City or as undocumented labourers in the US. Also government policy has ignored Indigenous rights to land in granting of mining licenses, which causes deforestation leading to mudslides, drastically reduces the available water, and poisons the earth causing widespread illness. Hydroelectric projects and expansion of palm oil plantations for biofuel have also caused the displacement of many Indigenous communities. Protests against these depredations have led to violent clashes with the national army, local police forces, and mining company security forces manned by mercenaries from other countries. Perhaps the greatest impact of neo-liberalism on the *Baile de la Conquista* has been an increasing lack of funds for renting *traje* and other expenses, as well as the necessity of persons, mainly men, to travel for work. This has made it difficult to schedule rehearsals, and as a result in some communities very little of the text has been memorized. In Momostenango, the text has become virtually absent, partially replaced by Ajitz's ribald adlibs in K'iche'. In wealthier San Cristóbal Totonicapán, more subject to commercial crosscurrents, folklorizing elements have entered, including a greater focus on the dramatic recitation of the text, sometimes providing microphones to ensure the audience will hear it clearly. As part of the folkloric drive for authenticity among San Cristóbal team members, further text has been added in the form of a song in K'iche'. Stark differences between the dance presentation in Momostenango and San Cristóbal provide an example of what may be increasing local distinctiveness in post-war years. The trend to

give up the difficult dance also continues: of the four communities studied for this project, only San Cristóbal has continued reliably to mount the Conquest Dance, while Joyabaj, Cunén, and Momostenango have faltered in some recent years, though they continue to mount less difficult dances like the *Baile del Venado*, *Baile del Torito*, and *Baile de los Mexicanos*. Also, with exposure to globalized entertainments, it has become very difficult to encourage young men to take up the *chirimía* and *tambor*, which threatens continuation of the dance in its traditional format. Indeed communities like La Reforma in San Marcos department have taken to substituting marimba accompaniment used for most festival dances.