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Chapter 1: General Introduction

1.1. Setting the Stage

It is late morning on a day in early August, five hours into the performance of the *Baile de la Conquista* or Dance of the Conquest.¹ The audience is increasing for the climactic battle, wandering into the street outside a residence in Joyabaj, Quiché Department. A leafy arch over the entrance identifies this residence as the headquarters for the year of a *cofradía*, a religious confraternity dedicated to the devotion and upkeep of a particular saint. Newcomers struggle for positions sheltered by a bit of shade from the broiling sun in a cloudless sky. The audience engages informally, chatting, moving about, sipping drinks, leaving small children free to engage with the ceremonial space in their own, playful manner. This is a time of celebration, with an eight-day festival celebrating Joyabaj's patron saint, the Virgin of the Assumption, and children are given the opportunity to play games in the arcades, take rides in the amusement park, indulge in sweet treats as well as watch dances in the church plaza and *cofradías*. Other dances are being performed in these streets outside this *cofradía*, their amplified marimba melodies often drowning out the melancholy *Conquista* accompaniment, played on the ancient *chirimía*, a shawm flute, and *tambor*, a parade drum.

But for most of this informal audience, attention centres on the action of the battle. As they have now for more than an hour, the Spanish and K'iche' troops line up on opposing sides of the makeshift dance ground. Their leaders take turns haranguing each other in memorized texts delivered in a stylized sing-song. Pedro de Alvarado leads the Spanish invaders, while Tekum, heir to the K'iche' throne, leads the Maya defenders. Their harangues are punctuated by *cruzadas*, virtuosic outbursts of aggression in which, after stabbing the ground in challenge, the two leaders run at each other from opposite corners of the dance ground. As they meet in the centre, they jump, and in midair they revolve around each other as they clash weapons. Earthbound once more, each continues running to the opposite corner. Music then begins with a simple melody and insistent beat to accompany a choreographed expression of battle. Three times Spanish troops advance towards the K'iche', then retreat and advance again. They chase the K'iche' in a circle, and all line up again for a choreographed sequence of *cruzadas* in which each leader battles each of his enemy fighters.

¹ For the sake of variety, I will be referring to this specific dance with several related terms: In Spanish, *Baile de la Conquista*, *La Conquista*, or *Conquista*; and in English, Dance of the Conquest, or Conquest Dance.

The drama now intensifies, as does the comedy. After two Spanish soldiers, whose role is primarily comic, pantomime the sharpening of the Spanish flag that serves as his symbolic sword, Alvarado sets off to pursue Tekum once more. But Tekum has hidden behind dancers embodying the roles of the K'iche' ruler and his younger children. Their capital, Q'umarcaaj, lies a day's march from the battlefield at El Pinar, south of present-day Quetzaltenango. But this disruption of spatial logic becomes irrelevant to the pantomimed narrative. Shielding their eyes from the sun, the same two Spanish soldiers spy out where Tekum is hiding, while Ajitz, who is Tekum's priest and plays a both a comic and a serious role, tries to obscure their view. But his soldiers have alerted Alvarado to Tekum's hiding place, so he advances confidently. The K'iche' ruler does his best to protect his son from Alvarado, giving Tekum a



Battle scene in Joyabaj, 2009. At right, beneath the post, Tekum in dark mask hides behind Rey Kiche in light coloured mask. In front, dressed all in red, the priest Ajitz and his young apprentice try to block the view of Alvarado and the soldier who helps him search for Tekum.

a chance to escape to another side of the dance ground. This game of cat-and-mouse circulates among all four sides of the dance ground, completing a cosmological cycle.

All avenues of concealment finally exhausted, Tekum is repeatedly assaulted by Alvarado wielding his flag sword. The two soldier-clowns taunt Ajitz, using their swords to mime the act of digging a grave, and Ajitz responds by whipping their ankles. Tekum defends himself with whatever is at hand, but loses each of his attributes sequentially. As Tekum launches his flag-weapon, then his shield-rattle, and finally his scepter toward Ajitz, the Spanish

soldier-clowns rush to intercept him. Finally, as Tekum defends himself bare-handed, Alvarado and his two soldier-clowns attack him together, piling on his back, as Alvarado pierces his heart with his flag-weapon.

After this excitement there is still an hour to go. As Alvarado leads his troops to occupy Tekum's palace headquarters, Tekum's corpse will be carried in a funeral procession, viewed by his grieving father and king, then buried. The two remaining princes will invite Alvarado and his men to Q'umarcaaj, where Alvarado will embrace the K'iche' king with friendship and baptize all K'iche' present. Ajitz will resist but he will be baptized anyway, and will happily join the Spaniards and other K'iche' as they weave their forces together in an intricately choreographed closing dance.

The dance will end after nearly seven hours, after which the dancers will enter the *cofradía* to pray to its saint and receive a cigarette and a drink of brandy, then take a brief lunch break in order to begin all over again, at another *cofradía*, in the afternoon. I will watch the afternoon performance as well, taking notes, photographs, and occasional video, then work into the late night to type my notes and back up the video, to begin the process again at 5 am on the following day.

I begin with this vignette, extracted from seven seasons of attending performances of the Dance of the Conquest in four communities, because at the time I was watching it seemed to me that this moment encompassed all of the important topics that must be taken up in a volume exploring the dance's history and current performance styles. These themes may be briefly identified.

1.1.1. Social Context

Today the Dance of the Conquest, where it is still performed following the depredations of the civil war that ended in 1996, forms part of the annual patron saint festival in Maya communities. Once perhaps the predominant popular entertainment, festival dances now compete with markets and many other amusements. The early colonial period Conquest dance, before the war the most appreciated in Guatemala, has now lost ground to more recent festival dances with brighter music and less necessity for a lengthy text. And now all the traditional festival dances are losing their audience to the enormous appeal of the recently introduced *Disfraces* dance with characters that seem to have stepped out of science fiction movies or video games, accompanied by ensembles playing contemporary Latin American dance music. Audiences for the *Baile de la Conquista* are often sparse except for scenes that involve heightened comedy or drama, particularly an extended scene of Ajitz humiliating two Spanish messengers and the battle scene just described. Potential dancers are fewer these days, due to the number of Maya who have acceded to pressures to convert to formal Catholicism or Evangelical Protestantism, and others who have migrated for work to Guatemala City or the US.

1.1.2. Religious context

Dancers are not professionals. They commit to dance, at great sacrifice in funds and time, often for seven or nine years. They make this commitment as a devotion to the community's patron saint, in the hopes they and their families will be rewarded with health and prosperity. Those that dance adhere to a religion, called *Costumbre* by outsiders, involving a syncretic mixture of Maya and Catholic elements that was formulated in the mid-colonial period, and until perhaps the 1870s was the only religion to which Maya people adhered. One Indigenous element still prominent in *Costumbre* is the reverence for ancestors and the necessity to preserve the world by maintaining traditions laid down by those ancestors. Performing the Conquest Dance and reciting the Spanish text, a language until recently unfamiliar to most of them, are some of the ways they accomplish these goals. In the context of

Costumbre, dance teams are closely allied with the *cofradías* as well as being devoted to the community's patron saint, so they perform not only in the church plaza but also in the *cofradías*.

1.1.3. Performance conventions

The vignette above also touches on the four main components of the Conquest Dance. These are: 1) staging, with three sides of the court representing three different locations (the royal court at Q'umarcaaj, Tekum's headquarters in Quetzaltenango, and the Spanish Camp near Palajujnoy) and the centre becoming the battlefield of El Pinar; 2) choreographed dance to musical accompaniment, to introduce characters or demonstrate their journey from one location to the other; 3) declamation of a text, originally composed in *siglo de oro* style Spanish poetry but heavily modified in the last century and a half; and 4) pantomime, used to construct narrative action that is not indicated in the text and often subverts or even contradicts it. While the text is almost completely tragic, pantomime is often played for comic effect. The degree to which comic and tragic elements intertwine differs according to traditions that evolved in each community. While the dance and text recitation strictly follow the temporal and spatial logic of the staging, pantomime instead takes the dance ground as a single interactive space in which time is also collapsed, since by embodying ancestral characters, the ancient event being enacted is fully conflated with the present of its performance. Two distinct chronotopes (space-time constructs) thus intersect to compose a multi-layered narrative.²

1.1.4. Changing meanings

The different layers of this narrative performance enabled by pantomime inventions serve to convey multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings. The original author of the dance script, likely a Franciscan missionary stationed in or near Quetzaltenango, focused on promoting conversion to Christianity and submission to the Spanish empire, two processes that for him and his time were indivisible. But as the dance became more an expression of shared Maya K'iche' history and identity, exploitation, discrimination and other forms of oppression wedged these concepts apart, rendering the narrative ambivalent. Performers developed pantomimes that contrasted humiliation of the Spaniards with Tekum's heroic defense, using comedy perhaps to avoid threatening the colonial overlords with a too-strident resistance. Pantomimes continue to be introduced and evolve, always keeping the dance fresh and responsive to current socio-political situations.

1.1.5. Transcultural History

² Defining chronotope as an intersection of space and time, Bakhtin (1981: 84) applied the concept to literary analysis, using it to define distinct premises of different genres.

The original author collaborated with his K'iche' congregation, from whom he obtained historical information and on whom he relied for staging, music, dance steps and participants. Though no documentation on the dance has been found that dates before 1820, it is possible to suggest some of the stages through which it evolved and to relate these to the socio-political and religious circumstances of their time. Much more information is available from the period of liberal dictatorships from 1871–1944, thanks to researcher Barbara Bode, demonstrating that transcultural interchange continued to characterize the dance's evolution.

1.1.6. Reciprocity

Learning from Pierre Bourdieu that researchers do not stand outside the subject of their research, but affect it as it affects them, I realize that my presence in these communities as a researcher since 2008 may also in some way affect those communities to which I annually returned, thus continuing a history of transcultural exchange. Though always an outsider, I was brought willingly into the kind of reciprocal relationship on which Maya society is based. In my case this meant sizable monetary donations to the dance team, usually to pay for the musicians during the eight or fifteen days of the festival, in return for permission to collect and use information on their dance. I believe I became more acceptable to members of the dance group when I stopped asking questions, for which the common answer was “because that's the way it is done,” and started just listening to what the dancers, teachers and sponsors decided they wanted me to know. Many also expressed their gratification that a foreign researcher would be interested in their traditional dance. Some went past tolerance to offer sincere friendship, and this might have also had the effect of raising their own stature in the eyes of their compatriots. Thus we have all changed through this collaboration, but it remains to be seen whether such changes it may have affected the evolution of the dance. Certainly I worried that once my research was over and I had stopped making contributions, would they still be able to carry on? Has my aid hurt rather than helped?

1.2. The Story and the Dance

Very briefly, the Dance of the Conquest tells the story the invasion in February, 1524, of what is now Guatemala, led by Pedro de Alvarado. In addition to the Spanish conquistadores, Alvarado's army largely consisting of Nahuatl-speaking Indigenous Mexicans, the major part Tlaxcalans. Alvarado's forces met and defeated the army of the K'iche' empire, commanded by Tekum, heir to the throne. After Tekum was killed and his army massacred, Alvarado was invited to the K'iche' capital city, Q'umarcaaj, known to the Tlaxcalans by the Nahuatl name Utatlán, in order to accept the K'iche' surrender.

The author of the Conquest Dance based his narrative on two sources that hardly overlap, as their aims and viewpoints differ considerably, as does the dance text drawn from these documents. The author's primary source was the letter Alvarado wrote to his superior, the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés, on 11 April, 1524, two months after the decisive K'iche' defeat, and nearing the end of his stay in Q'umarcaaj.

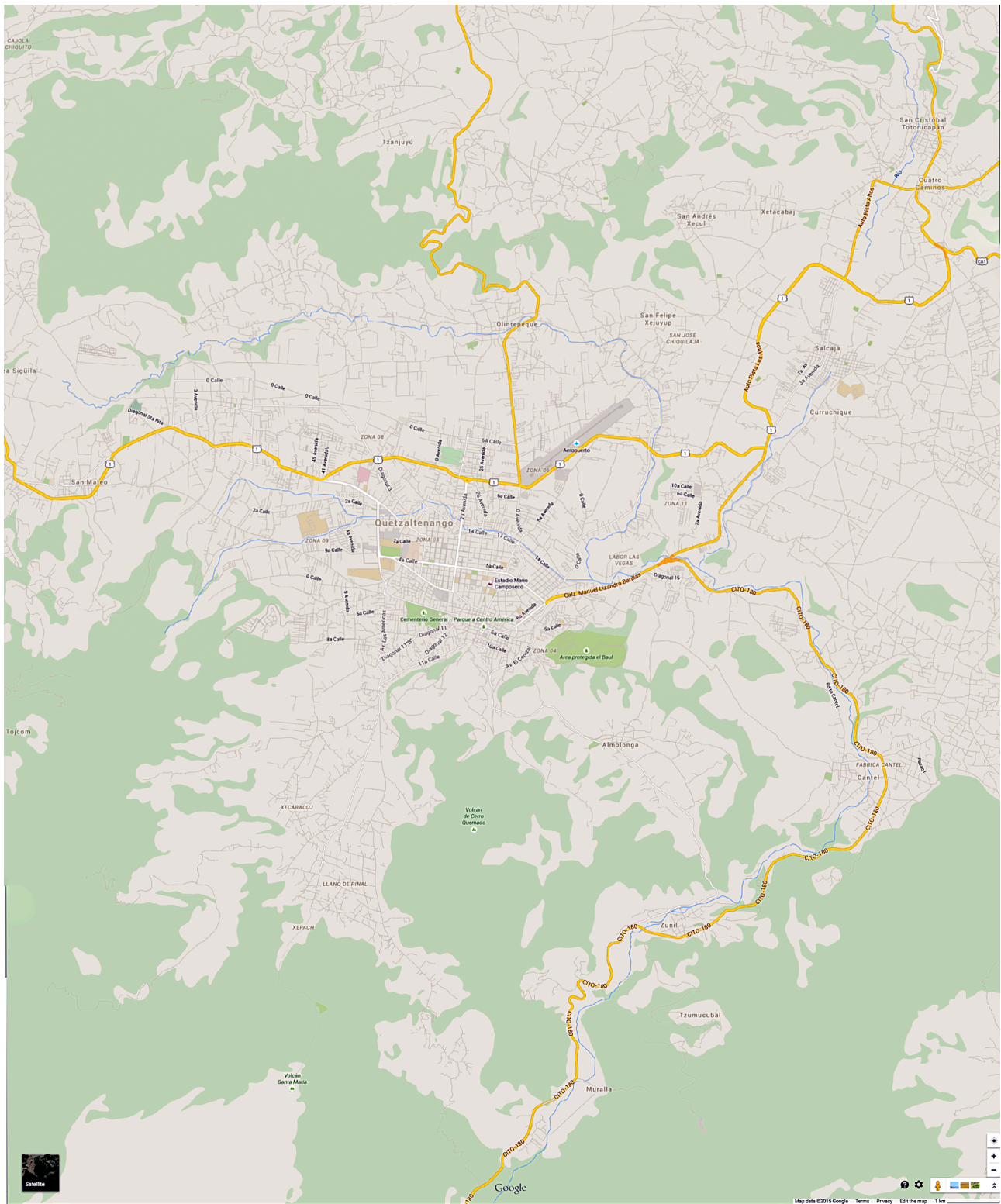
The letter was soon published and thereby available to the author. His secondary source was a 1567 document of the type called a *título*, composed in the K'iche' language but in European script. Several such *títulos*, written in K'iche' and other Indigenous languages, were produced in the 16th century for *caciques*, Indigenous leaders of high ranking families, in order to maintain hereditary rights to status, land and tribute. The Spanish crown encouraged such activity, hoping that strengthening the power of some Indigenous leaders would help balance the growing power of *encomenderos*, the *conquistadores* who were granted land and the labour of its inhabitants as a reward for service in the Spanish invasions.³ To ensure continuation of *cacique* privileges, *títulos* had to demonstrate through historical narrative a right to land and status prior to the advent of Europeans. The particular *título* used as a source by the *Conquista* author narrates the history of Huitzitzil Tzunun, and in the process also tells the story of Tekum's leadership of the resistance and death at the hands of Alvarado. Unfortunately, the original K'iche' document has not been recovered, so the narrative is known only from a later Spanish translation (Gall 1963). The *Título Nijaib' I*, on which the author did not draw, also includes an extensive narration of this invasion, the death of Tekum, and the defeat of the K'iche' army. The following brief narrative of the historical events and their meanings to different groups is drawn from these and other sources.

1.2.1. Narratives of the Invasion

In December of 1523, Pedro Alvarado left Mexico with his force of Spaniards and Tlaxcalans under orders of Cortés. Cortés' plan was for Cristobal de Olid to take a northern route by sea to Honduras, and for Alvarado to take a southern route by land to meet Olid. In February, 1524, after several successful battles along Pacific coastal Oaxaca and Chiapas, Alvarado's army entered what is now Guatemala, first marching along the coast from Soconusco. Alvarado's first major battle after turning inland took place on the piedmont below the high mountain range, at Xetulul, now known as Zapotitlan, then under K'iche' control. As part of the K'iche' nation, Xetulul's army was increased with soldiers from farther north. Alvarado managed to take Xetulul, defeating its army and capturing some of its leaders who, according to the *Título Nijaib' I*, he took with him as he traveled upward to the north, torturing them for information on locations and availability of gold (Recinos 2001: 88).

The defeat of the K'iche' at Xetulul and in later battles was partly due to the weapons technology, of which the most devastating was the mounted cavalry. Also decisive was the prior loss of about half the Indigenous population due to Spanish-introduced diseases (measles and small pox) that travelled faster than the army.

³ The 17th century Guatemalan chronicler Fuentes y Guzmán (1969-72: III, 291) includes one example of a royal *cedula*, dated 1558, that would to stimulate submission of such *títulos*.



Samalá River Valley from Google Maps. The progress of battles by which the K'iche' under Tekum attempted to resist the Spanish invasion under Alvarado may be traced through this map. At the bottom centre is where Alvarado diverted from the Samalá River, moving north and west through the pass of Palajujnoj to the Llanos de Pinal. The invaders were attacked while drinking at a location at the southern edge of present-day Quetzaltenango. They drove the K'iche' north to Olintepeque where slaughter took place and Tekum perished. The next day, Alvarado occupied Tekum's headquarters in Salcajá (then called Quetzaltenango). East of Salcajá is the beginning of the flats of Urbina where the second massacre took place. © Google

Some of those who escaped from Xetulul hurried north to the Samalá Valley and northeast to the K'iche' capital, Q'umarcaaj, to warn of the Spanish advance. The primary K'iche' ruler or Ajpop, K'iq'ab' 3 Deer, recalled his heir and military captain, Tekum. Tekum was stationed in the territory called Otzoyá, taken in battle from Maya Mam peoples by the K'iche' in the 15th century under the rulership of Tekum's grandfather, also known as K'iq'ab'. In this region, the city that the Mexicans called Quetzaltenango functioned as Tekum's headquarters and as a regional capital. The location of this pre-Hispanic community is the present Salcajá. When the Spaniards appeared on the scene, Tekum may have been staying on the fortified hilltop of Tzibachaj, within the community of Chwi Mek'ina (San Miguel Totonicapán).

At Q'umarcaaj, Tekum, whose calendric name is not known, was ceremonially invested with the defense of the kingdom. He and his subordinates gathered an army and marched down the main road through Chwi Mek'ina and into the Samalá Valley to Quetzaltenango. Tekum ordered defenses to be built, including walls at entrances to the valley.

From Xetulul, Alvarado led his forces upland along the narrow canyon of the Río Samalá. After two days marching, Alvarado's army turned away from the Samalá river and into a route that leads to the Cuesta de Santa María. At the end of this passage, where it enters the valley lands of Palajujnoj (now Palajunoj) the invaders encountered the defensive wall and a fierce resistance by an advance contingent of K'iche' forces. Despite being at a disadvantage on broken ground difficult for cavalry maneuvers, the invaders managed to successfully break through, entering into the more advantageous flatlands of the small valley.

On the other side of Palajujnoj the invaders reached the flat lands called the Llanos of El Pinar (Pine Flats) or Pachaj where they were beset by a larger K'iche' defense force, led by Tekum. Again the invading force skillfully used the cavalry to break through the K'iche' lines and surround the defenders, winning this battle as well, at which the K'iche' forces retreated.



The Battlefield at El Pinar

The invading army then descended into the main part of the Samalá Valley where, at the edge, at a point on the outskirts of the present location of Quetzaltenango (Xela), they found springs. While they were drinking, the K'iche' attacked again. In this third battle, the cavalry chased the K'iche' for a league and into the hills, probably at Olinstepeque. As the hilly area is disadvantageous for the cavalry, the Spaniards pretended to retreat, drawing the K'iche' back down into the open flat area adjoining the river, then charging the K'iche', surrounding and slaughtering them. Without naming him, Alvarado notes concerning Tekum that "In this [battle] one of the four chiefs of the city of Uilatan [Utatlán], who

came as the Captain General of the whole country, was killed” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007: 30). Though the three battles on this day took place in different locations, in Maya accounts they are collectively referred to as the Battle of El Pinar.



The river below the hills of Olinstepeque, possible site of Tekum's death. The river is now called Xequikel but this was probably the name for Olinstepeque.

Though meriting only a passing comment from Alvarado, Tekum's death forms a climactic episode in several *títulos*, including the *Título Huitzitzil Tzunun*. These *título* accounts are internally consistent in their description of Tekum taking flight three times as a bird, in which form he decapitates Alvarado's horse, and on his third flight is pierced by Alvarado's spear. In the 20th century it has become common to read a point made in the *título* account of this incident, that the death of Alvarado's horse did not lead to the death of Alvarado himself, as evidence that Tekum and

other K'iche' could not fathom the horse and rider to be separate beings. This racist accusation has even been required curriculum in public elementary schools in Guatemala. In contrast, Alvarado gives evidence that their greatest military advantage was the mounted cavalry which successfully broke through K'iche' ranks (Restall and Asselbergs 2007: 30), and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who was not involved in this battle but participated in many others at this time, noted that their Indigenous adversaries astutely focused their attacks on the horses, in some cases collaborating in trying to pull a horse down (Díaz del Castillo 2009: 335). In addition to the size, weight, and strength of the horse, Guillermo Paz Cárcamo (2006: 143) explains that the military advantage was also due to the lances carried by mounted Spaniards, which were three times the length of the K'iche' sword, rendering defense nearly impossible. But when the soldier is brought to the ground, the lance becomes unwieldy and the adversary has a better chance of surviving the attack.

After the slaughter in the third battle, which may have been at Olinstepeque, the K'iche' forces vanished from the field. The Spaniards camped that night but the next day moved into Quetzaltenango to occupy Tekum's headquarters. But after six days they saw that the K'iche' army had regrouped and was advancing toward them. Alvarado quickly ordered his troops out of the city to the flat lands that were advantageous to his cavalry. The invading force met the K'iche' defenders and drove them to the plains of Urbina, where an even greater slaughter was carried out than in the battle at Olinstepeque.

After this second massacre, at Urbina, the K'iche' could no longer mount an effective open resistance, so several of the K'iche' leaders, thereafter referred to as *caciques*, came to Alvarado and offered their submission. They may or may not have been baptized as Christians at this time. While these *caciques* turned their forces to aiding Alvarado's troops in quelling any dissent in the region, messengers arrived from Q'umarcaaj, inviting Alvarado and his army to the capital to accept the K'iche' surrender. The army marched the next day and were well-received by the two K'iche' rulers, the Ajpop 3 Deer and Ajpop K'amja 9 Dog. Alvarado did not keep his army within the city, considering it disadvantageous should there be resistance. He moved it to a flat area outside, and at the same time captured the two rulers and tortured them to encourage their subordinates to surrender all of their gold. When insufficient amounts were turned in by these other nobles, though actually due to a general lack in the region, Alvarado became convinced that the K'iche' were holding out on him and as punishment he burned the two elderly K'iche' kings to death and burned the city of Q'umarcaaj. To defend his actions, he later wrote that the K'iche' rulers had actually planned to burn him and his army, a ruse which he had used before in Oaxaca and which, shortly later, Indigenous rights advocate, Bartolomé de las Casas, would recognize as false. Nevertheless, in his *título*, it is claimed that Huitzitzil Tzunun was the one to advise Alvarado of the trap being set to destroy him.



Samalá River Valley with flats of Urbina in foreground. At back is the cone of Volcán Santa María, in front of which is the broken silhouette of Cerro Quemado.

Alvarado next sent word to the Kaqchikel leader, the Ajpop Tzotzil, Sinacam Kahi Imox, for reinforcements designed to test the latter's loyalty as well as help clear pockets of K'iche' resistance. After the birth of his daughter, Leonor, by the Tlaxcalan princess Luisa Xicotencatl, Alvarado moved his army to the Kaqchikel capital Patinamit, now known as Iximche. From there his armies set out on a journey of conquest that included the Tzutujil of Lake Atitlán and extended to Cuzcatlán, now San Salvador.

1.2.2. The Dance

The script for the *Baile de la Conquista* follows some of these events closely but also effects radical changes, introducing elements not found in either Alvarado's account or the K'iche' *títulos*. In this Franciscan author's version, there is only one K'iche' ruler, and story begins with him recounting a letter received from the Aztec emperor Motecuhzoma, now imprisoned, warning of Alvarado's advance and mission. When the king explains the reason for his despondence to his younger children, the

princes offer to go to Quetzaltenango/Salcajá, referred to as Xelaju, to bring Tekum to the court and empower him to lead a resistance. After this plan is fulfilled, Tekum returns to “Xelaju” and orders the building of fortification walls.

As the Spanish invaders arrive, Alvarado decides to postpone battle and instead offer Tekum terms of surrender: submission to the Spanish crown and conversion to Christianity. Two of Alvarado’s officers are chosen to carry this message, and are thus referred to as “the Ambassadors.” Tekum, believing he can defeat the invaders, refuses these terms. After sending Tzunun to advise the king of the coming battle, Tekum leads his forces to meet the Spaniards at El Pinar. The battle goes very badly for Tekum as his troops are being slaughtered, so he seeks to defeat Alvarado in single combat. Tekum is stabbed by Alvarado, he gives command of the troops to Tzunun and expires. Tzunun immediately changes course, determined to obey the terms of surrender in order to stop the slaughter.

When Tzunun presents the corpse of Tekum to the king, the king asks that he take charge of an immediate burial. This accomplished, the king sends the Princes to invite Alvarado to the capital. Alvarado arrives and embraces the K’iche’ king in a show of friendship—a complete reversal from Alvarado’s brutal treatment of the K’iche’ kings described both in Alvarado’s letter and the *Título Huitzitzil Tzunun*. The king relates a dream in which he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, then asks for baptism, as do the *Caciques*. To conclude the drama, Alvarado invites the king and *Caciques* into “the church” to formally submit to the Spanish emperor and receive baptism.

1.2.3. Fuentes y Guzmán

Subsequent to the composition of this dance–drama, the story of the Spanish defeat of the K’iche’ empire was radically and irrevocably altered through the writing of the late 17th century chronicler of Guatemala, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán. Fuentes worked to create a single narrative by combining the accounts of Alvarado and of the K’iche’ *títulos*. He sought to make sense of this narrative in terms of the historical logic of his day by making unsubstantiated claims. For example, Fuentes greatly exaggerated the size of the K’iche’ forces under Tekum’s command, perhaps to increase Alvarado’s glory for defeating them. Fuentes also incorrectly used the name phrase under which Tekum is known in the *títulos* in order to provide him with a surname. Due to Fuentes, Tekum is now almost universally known as Tecún Umán. Finally, Fuentes apparently could not imagine the K’iche’ army regrouping after the first day of battle, so he insisted that Alvarado’s statement referred to another military leader, and that Tekum had died instead during the final battle at Urbina.

1.3. Previous and Present Studies of the Conquest Dance

This study builds on outstanding previous research and hypotheses concerning the Dance of the Conquest. I would like to introduce several studies that focus on this dance, whether as an article, a chapter in a book, a whole book or thesis. As none of these represents a comprehensive study, they will be briefly discussed according to the particular aspect or theme they choose to investigate among many possible in this rich and complex subject. I will also introduce the ways that I have tried to extend their work in each of these aspects.

1.3.1. Text analysis

Investigation of the text for the *Baile de la Conquista* has engaged the largest number of authors and with the widest variety of approaches and goals.

José Barrientos Castillo, Quetzaltenango resident, published a volume on the Conquest Dance in 1941, possibly to commemorate Alvarado's death or the foundation of Santiago de Guatemala. Barrientos had access not only to the text used in Cantel, which had been published in a booklet in 1934, but also to at least one unpublished text. Based on detailed geographical knowledge of the region, Barrientos argued that the text was written in or near Quetzaltenango, and likely in the 16th century, near the time of the events it narrates. As will be seen in part II, chapter 8, he is thus disputing the widely accepted claim by Victor Miguel Díaz that the dance text was written near Santiago de Guatemala (Antigua) in 1542, for a performance to honour Bishop Francisco Marroquin. Barrientos also used the dance script, in combination with Alvarado's letter describing his battles and victories, to dispute some of the inventions on this topic by Guatemala's most celebrated early chronicler, Fuentes y Guzmán, in his late 17th century *Recordación Florida*. The first half of Barrientos' book is particularly concerned with Tekum, and he argues, indeed contrary to the *Conquista* text, that Tekum was king of an independent K'iche' kingdom centred in Quetzaltenango. Although the *Título Nijaib' I* had been published in the previous century, and its content is used by Fuentes y Guzmán, Barrientos surprisingly did not consider it as a source for his arguments.

The next scholar to take up the study of the dance text was Barbara Bode, in her masters thesis for Tulane University, researched in 1957 and published in 1961. Bode's concern was not the historical content of the text but its style, including variations among several she saw and especially those she copied and/or collected. For each text examined, for and some that were just described, she worked to ascertain elements that had been changed or added from earlier versions, the approximate date at which this had occurred, and the person or persons responsible, thereby providing an unmatched wealth of information which she detailed in an appendix. In her analysis, she specifically identified four common variants of the script, some of which she was able to date shortly after 1900. Bode also included in her publication the earliest of the texts she encountered, from Cobán, dated 1872, which provided an important contrast to the Cantel 1934 text, in contrast one of the most heavily altered.

Bode's investigation of the text is dedicated to hypothesizing an origin date for the dance. As will be discussed in Part II of this volume, her interpretation of its origin was guided by a theoretical framework involving folk culture—a framework articulated for the Maya region by Robert Redfield (1941) through his investigations in Yucatán. Applying this model, Bode divided Guatemalan society into three cultural categories, the urban, tribal primitive, and folk. In this model, the urban and tribal primitive represent artistic quality and authenticity, while the folk represents a hybrid of the two, arising from a process in which tribals take on aspects of urban culture but degrade it into popular forms. She understood the *Conquista* text as a vulgarized folk version of the urban theatre and literature of the 19th century and thereby argued that the dance must have been written in the mid-19th century.

In her 1963 thesis for the Universidad de San Carlos, published in 1970, Guatemalan Matilde Montoya instead investigated the literary content. She analyzed and published the previously available Cantel and Cobán scripts along with two others (San Andrés Xecul and Sacapulas). In her detailed recounting of the narrative, Montoya divides the script into 23 scenes and an epilogue. She provides astute characterizations of major personages and groups through their speeches and interactions, and she investigates several specific themes including religion, death, and dreams. Montoya also includes and analyzes a script from the *Baile de los Moros y Cristianos* (Dance of the Moors and Christians) genre but does not investigate its relationship to the *Conquista* text.

Sharonah Fredrick devotes a chapter to the *Baile de la Conquista* in her 2000 dissertation *Maya Civilization and the Spanish Conquest: Skepticism and Rebellion—Doubting God's Word*. Considering that the script author was a Spaniard who was also familiar with Indigenous Maya religion and their experience during the invasion led by Alvarado, Fredrick argues that one can read through the text a Maya viewpoint on these events and the subsequent early stage of colonization. Using the Cobán 1872 text, she finds in the characterizations of Tekum and Rey K'iche' an understanding of Maya viewpoints on their own religion, on the Spaniards and their religion, and on the experience of the Aztec peoples during the fall of their empire to forces led by Cortés. These analyses involve a view of dramatic contrasts between the three groups. For Fredrick, the Spaniards are brutal, rapacious and hypocritical, feigning a concern with religion when power and wealth were the real goals. The Aztec are instead fatalistic, docile and gullible, paralyzed by their religion so that they welcome Cortés as a god. In contrast to her denigration of these two groups, Fredrick exalts the conquest-era Maya. She suggests that during the classic period, the Maya would have been just as susceptible as the Aztec to overthrow by the Spaniards, because they were living in an equally brutal society, equally constricted by their religion and equally led by despotic rulers. But, she argues, by the post classic period, Maya rulership lost most of its power and the hold of Maya religion on peoples lives also diminished. She asserts that the Post classic Maya who met Alvarado in battle were skeptical about the power of their gods. Thus, Fredrick argues, Alvarado was disappointed when he expected the Maya to greet him as the god Tonatiuh just as the Aztec (Mexica, in this case) had greeted Cortés as Quetzalcoatl (Fredrick 2000:

62). But Maya skepticism led Tekum, Rey K'iche' and their followers to meet the Spaniards in a practical fashion as men with armaments that the Maya did not possess. From this characterization, Fredrick extracts a broader view that Maya skepticism allowed stronger and more prolonged resistance to the Spaniards, and that this resistance has characterized their relationship with their non-Maya oppressors to the present day.

Drawing on Frederick's interpretations, especially of the dance author's knowledge and divided sympathies, Nelson González-Ortega (2006) cites evidence for the *Baile de la Conquista* text as a hybrid work that arose from asymmetric socio-political relations between Spaniard and Maya—relations that engendered many other kinds of hybridity in Guatemalan colonial society. González-Ortega identifies hybridity in three areas within the text: 1) hybrid ethnicity or *mestizaje* seen in naming, for example the name Chávez for one of the K'iche' *Caciques* or the title of Don for the K'iche' king; 2) hybrid language, involving mainly Spanish but also some local words like *jiquipil* (8000), *chompipe* (turkey), or *masegual* (commoner); 3) hybrid rhetoric, seen in the construction of the script in terms of the opposition of Tekum and Alvarado, whose speeches involve some noticeable parallels. González-Ortega argues that this hybridity allowed both Spanish and Indigenous communities to realize their ideological, political, and religious goals through the dance, but with Spanish goals predominating. Thus, following Bhabha, he sees the work as speaking from an intermediate third space of enunciation promoting and disseminating the conqueror's view of the conquest.

I will be focusing on the dance text in part II of this volume, considering it from all the approaches introduced above. Using a much larger sample than was available to Bode, I will be organizing the variants into specific lineages. I will argue that the 1872 text from Cobán and other similar texts dated to the late 19th century are changed very little from original composition in the late 16th or early 17th centuries, and I will be contrasting this early style with three separate lineages that developed through modifications of the early style text in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the period of liberal dictatorships (1871–1944). Part II will also consider elements of narrative including plot and characterizations, how these changed in the liberal period, and in response to what larger social, economic, and political changes were occurring in the relationship of Maya and other Indigenous Guatemalans to the state. Finally, evidence will be provided to dispute both Bode's mid-19th date for the dance's origin and Díaz's 1542 date, instead supporting the assertion of Barrientos and others for an origin around 1600 in the Quetzaltenango region. I will argue further that in this region and time, the author was likely a Franciscan missionary collaborating with the high ranking K'iche' family descended from Huitztzil Tzunun, and examining how each of their agendas was expressed through the composition of the drama. I will be situating this collaboration, as well as larger issues of hybridity such as the formation of the syncretic Maya-Catholic religion known as *Costumbre*, within the framework of transculturation.

1.3.2. Teamwork

A second important strand of discussion concerning the *Baile de la Conquista* treats the activities of the dance team, including: 1) organization, involving leadership by the *autor* (sponsor), the *maestro* (teacher of the text and dance movements), and the *chuchkajaw* (ritualist); 2) ritualized recruitment and initiation of dancers; 3) ritual offerings or *costumbres* performed by the *chuchkajaw* for the benefit of the group; 4) nature of the *ensayos* (rehearsals); 5) relations with the *morería* (costume rental shop); and 6) religious motivations for participation.

In addition to her study of the text, Barbara Bode (1961) collected information on these dance team activities to provide an ethnographic foundation for her characterization of Guatemalan Maya society as a folk culture. In the same interview context, she also asked for opinions on the importance of the dance, on why, as so many authors suggest, the Maya willingly “dance their own defeat.” She received responses that articulated ritual obligations as well as the need to remember and identify with their past, but she chose to emphasize the second rationale, instruction in history, as well as the entertainment aspect.

In 1989, during the last decade of the Guatemalan civil war, Demetrio Brisset Martín engaged in ethnographic fieldwork focusing on the Conquest Dance, which he published in 1991 and 1995. Like Bode, Brisset appears to have used a set list of questions, including when the dance was last performed, and on what date within the year it is normally performed. He found that many communities were forced to suspend the dance during the war. He also asked about the makeup of the dance team, recruitment of dancers, rehearsals, and associated *costumbres*. Appropriate to information received, he put much more emphasis than Bode on the dance as a ritual offering to the patron saint along with other powerful supernaturals. Brisset uncovered information that in a few communities, a dance team may be tied to a particular *cofradía* (religious brotherhood). In these cases, the team rotates participation among different dances.

In the next chapter (2), I will briefly introduce background information on the *Costumbre* religion including participation in *cofradías* and dance teams. In part III, chapter 9, some information will be included on dance team rehearsal and ritual activities that support and surround their performances at the annual patron saint festival (the *fiesta patronal* or *feria*). I will not be investigating this topic in much more depth than Bode and Brisset have already provided. For more information on *Costumbre* and dance teams, the reader is also referred to Garrett Cook’s 2000 volume on religious beliefs and practices in Momostenango.

1.3.3. Music

Musicology is a specialized discipline requiring particular training and a specific series of research questions and vocabulary with which I am not familiar. Thus I cannot judge or even fully understand the few sources available that discuss the music of the *Baile de la Conquista*.

Only Matthias Stöckli has focused specifically on the music of the Conquest Dance, but his 1999 dissertation is even further out of my reach due to my inability to read German. Stöckli's research concerns the dance as it is performed in Rabinal, which involves a different tradition than in other Maya communities, in part because it has been a largely *Ladino* (non-Maya) production.

Two contributions dating a generation earlier than Stöckli's have proven useful for this study. Glen Horspool researched dance music in Momostenango in 1977–1978 for a dissertation defended in 1982. As Horspool was particularly interested in sorting out Indigenous from European musical elements, he focused on the music of the two dances that were composed earliest, close to the first arrival of Europeans. These are the Dance of the Moors and Christians and the Dance of the Conquest. Mark Howell (2004) also investigated differences between European and Indigenous elements in dance music, focusing on Rabinal, and contrasting the music of the *Rabinal Achí*, which originated in the pre-Hispanic period, with that of the *Moros y Cristianos*. In addition, note that Bode included but did not discuss sheet music for several *sones* that Jacinto Amezquita transcribed in 1957 from his familiarity with the dance in the Maya-Kaqchikel community of Sololá. In the chapter on conventions that begins part III of this volume, I will summarize some of the points made by these authors without adding any original observations or interpretations.

1.3.4. Costumes and Masks

Matthew Krystal took a very different approach in his dissertation on the Conquest Dance, which he defended in 2001, and which was, in fact, my inspiration to pursue this research further. Krystal apprenticed at a state supported *morería* in San Miguel Totonicapán, where was able to participate in the manufacture of masks and costumes. His most detailed analysis in this regard is of the formal qualities of the masks, which he sees as closely related not only to the character but also that the dramatic function of the personage represented. Krystal also investigated the pre-Hispanic motifs decorating three masks, characterizing for the dance as a whole as a repository for pre-Hispanic beliefs. While Krystal was involved with masks and costumes for different dances, his choice to explore the Conquest Dance as a medium of Maya resistance against outside domination is likely due in large part to the activist leanings of his *morería* mentor.

My experience certainly bears out Krystal's assessment on the importance of the *Baile de la Conquista* as an expression of resistance, though generally for quite different reasons. I found that pantomimes that have been introduced and refined over the centuries enable the dance to articulate messages of resistance that often undermine or even contradict the text. Applying James Scott's theory of hidden

transcripts (1990), I will argue, in chapters on Tekum and Ajitz in part III, that some of these pantomimes may be designed to be misinterpreted by the dominant non-Maya population as evidence of compliance and therefore non-threatening, whereas they would be understood by the Maya to be clear articulations of resistance.

Matthew Krystal returned to the *Baile de la Conquista* in his 2012 volume. In comparing performances in Guatemala with North American Powwows and other Native American dances, he constructs a useful scheme for differentiating traditional from folkloric dance performances. I take up his argument in part II, showing how the *Conquista* dance group in San Cristóbal manages to both separate and integrate traditional and folkloric elements in their performances.

1.3.5. Performance

Like Krystal, Charles Thompson includes a few elements of performance in order to generate a broader analysis of the political content and potential messages of the Conquest Dance. Though he calls his subject “The Dance of the Conquest,” his reference to Cortés might suggest that he is considering the *Baile de Cortés*, a variant of the conquest dance genre narrating the defeat of the Aztec emperor, Motecuhzoma. Even so, his argument may be usefully considered in relation to the *Baile de la Conquista de Guatemala*. Thompson theorizes that the Maya are willing to annually “dance their defeat” because the dance depicts the complexity of clashes between peoples, with varied responses and outcomes all discernable in the dance’s layered messages.

Lastly, I want to pay particular homage to Garrett Cook’s 2000 study of *Costumbre* at Momostenango. Considering the amount of literature on the text, rituals, and music of the Conquest Dance, it is surprising that until this publication, the actual dance performance had never been described in detail. Bode might have planned to do so, but she did not have much occasion to watch the dance, due to a ban on festival dances to show respect for president Carlos Castillo Armas, who died in July of 1957.

Cook undertook anthropological fieldwork in Momostenango in 1974–1976 for a dissertation he defended in 1981 and then revised for publication in 2000. Cook’s study encompasses much of *Costumbre* as practiced at that time in Momostenango, though leaving aside the practice of divination which was simultaneously under intensive study by Barbara Tedlock. Thus Cook focused on *cofradías* and dance teams. The *Baile de la Conquista* occupies only about ten percent of his book but represents a significant building block in his overall argument concerning the similarity of several dances and other rituals, the shared structure of which is also prominent from pre-Hispanic visual imagery, particularly of the Lowland Maya of the Classic Period. Thus Cook enters his argument into the debate concerning whether Maya identity is based on cultural continuity between pre-Hispanic and colonial populations or whether what we understand as Maya culture is a product of colonization. Cook does not argue that the Maya or their religious practices are frozen in time, but rather that the colonial

period relation of Maya peoples to the state instilled conservatism which became most prominent in religious practices designed to bring stability to the world (Cook 2000: 13).

The structural element that Cook finds to be shared by the Holy Week ritual drama, the dance of the Monkeys, and the Conquest Dance, is what he calls the millenarian myth or sunrise cosmogony, a cyclic structure involving death and renewal, whether of deities, ancient heroes, or the Maize, the sacred and staple crop. To understand the symbolism of these three practices and establish continuity with the symbolism of pre-Hispanic lowland Maya imagery, Cook draws on studies of classic Maya imagery by Linda Schele and David Freidel, such as their volume *Maya Cosmos* (1993). With this agenda, there was no need to study the Spanish-originated dance text. Instead Cook carefully described the dance as he observed it in 1976 and drew out of it symbolic references that could be compared with the Holy Week drama and Monkeys Dance. For example, the transformation and renewal of Jesucristo at Holy Week could be compared to the erection of a symbolic world tree for the acrobatics of monkeys along with a lion and tiger, and with the death of Tekum that likely presages his rebirth, since each year he appears again to confront the Spanish invaders. Collaboration with Cook during times that we were both in Momostenango for the patron saint fair led us together to apply this cosmological symbolism as well to an aspect of Ajitz's role in that *municipio*, as I will present in the chapter on Ajitz in Part III.

Because my research focuses on the *Baile de la Conquista* rather than the whole range of *Costumbre* practices, I have been able to observe literally dozens of performances of this dance at Momostenango. In addition, I expanded this research to include three other *municipios*, all of them K'iche'-speaking: Cunén, Joyabaj, and San Cristóbal Totonicapán. In all four communities I have made large monetary contributions to the dance team in return for being included in team activities, having a privileged place in the audience, and acquiring rights to publish numerous photographs and some video. Part III of this volume is largely concerned with detailed descriptions of the Conquest dance in these four *municipios*, alternating with more intensive investigations of particular aspects of the dance that are closely related to each.

I also extend Cook's analysis of symbolism in ritual action but in a different direction. In part III, I devote a chapter to the symbolic interrelationship of dance teams and *cofradías* in the Cunén feria. In order to understand the iconic qualities of both the patron saint and costumed dancers that are central to this interdependence, I apply Alfred Gell's (1998) understandings of the relation between distributed personhood and iconism.

1.3.6. An Ethno-Historical Approach

While the different studies introduced above have taken up different approaches to and aspects of the Conquest Dance, they nevertheless fall into three larger frameworks: musicology, literature and anthropology. The musicological framework has already been mentioned. The text, when seen apart

from performance, has inspired analysis of its literary qualities, historical content, and articulations of resistance. On the other hand, an anthropological framework has guided studies of dance team organization, ritual and other activities as well as the symbolism and politics of public performance. My analysis combines some of these but does not stick to either a literature or an ethnology framework. Many readers will thus likely be disappointed that ethnographic information does not dominate this work. Instead of interrogating members of the dance team or audience for quotable opinions, a procedure with which I am uncomfortable, my method was generally to observe and record dances and related activities and to engage with whatever information or opinions team members or leaders chose to share.

As an art historian, I became acutely aware that what is missing from the existing literature is *history*. Yes, there have been attempts to place the origin of the dance in one historical period or another, and contemporary performance has been related to contemporary conflict between Maya peoples and the state, but studies of both the texts and the performance context have been largely synchronic. Whether perceived as a 16th century or a 19th century work, the text is studied as if it relates to a single time period, and performance has been studied as if the *Conquista* had not been danced for four centuries.

My studies of both text and performance are designed not only to bring these two aspects together but also to use their juncture to attempt to reconstruct a 400-year history of this dance from its origins to the present. When I showed Garrett Cook some of the different historical layers that could be discerned in 20th century versions of the text, he pointed out that this study is like an excavation, since it draws so much on the present but looks to penetrate the layers of history that that present encloses. Judith Armas (1990: 45–46) makes the same point about Guatemalan festival dance choreography, suggesting the ability to tease apart the medieval, renaissance, colonial and recent elements. While I like this archaeological analogy, I want to point out that the intent to treat the history of a non-Euro-descendant society otherwise relegated to the atemporality of anthropology is not new. In 1972, Robert Carmack reviewed the theory and recent contributions of a disciplinary meeting ground called Ethnohistory, at one point defined as “a means for combining the generalizing aspects of ethnology with the careful evaluation of sources and interest in time sequence of history (Carmack 1972: 230).

In contrast to the definition Carmack cites for the ethnohistorical method, my analysis must be considered more historical than anthropological, as I am much less concerned with generalizations. Instead, I follow Richard Rogers’ argument for grounding in the particulars. Rogers (1998: 7) asks:

How can the interventionist critic’s role in uncovering, (re)articulating, and promoting resistance to various social orders be enhanced instead of undermined by perpetuating existing structures of sense-making? One answer, I believe, is to make greater efforts to historicize interpretations and criticisms of cultural and communicative processes, to examine them in their particularity—not to support grand generalizations and reinforce rigid binaries, but to understand cultural

processes in a more grounded fashion. Such an approach would, I believe, allow for a better sense of how various cross-cultural articulations (exchange, sharing, conflict, domination, resistance) can and do come into existence through positioned communicative performances; such knowledge can, in turn, be used to further a critical project of potentiating resistance.

Rogers' concern with differing articulations of cross-cultural exchange resulted in a subsequent theorizing of transculturation and an argument for discerning the contributing micro political relations that account for and shape such transcultural exchanges. This method will form the framework for a speculative four-century history of the Guatemalan *Baile de la Conquista* presented in part IV.