

6-21-2011

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### Recommended Citation

Metcalfe, Jessica Z. (2005) "Multiple Histories: The Archaeology, Ethnohistory, Oral History, and National History of Iximche', Guatemala," *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 9.  
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol13/iss1/9>

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## Keywords

oral history, ethnohistory, Iximche', Guatemala, Maya

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## Multiple Histories: The Archaeology, Ethnohistory, Oral History, and National History of Iximché', Guatemala

*Jessica Z. Metcalfe*

### Introduction

Whether or not the politics of research are made explicit, archaeology is political (Silberman 1995, Tilley 1989, Wylie 1992). The influence of politics on research can occur in different ways and to varying degrees. Researchers' political orientation and other biases influence their research designs and interpretations, or the results of research can be used politically. Often archaeologists do not foresee the possible political implications of their research. However, this does not absolve them of the responsibility to consider the ways in which their research may be used, and to speak out when archaeology is used as a tool of oppression.

Archaeology is conducted within a variety of theoretical frameworks. For example, there have been nationalist, colonialist, imperialist, Marxist, positivist, relativist, processualist, post-processualist; feminist, and indigenous archaeologies. All of these forms of archaeology have had negative impacts on human lives in one way or another. Even supposedly objective post-processual archaeologies have, in their emphasis on universal processes, served to devalue local cultures and serve the interests of global capitalism (Trigger 1995). Despite these theoretical divisions, I feel that most archaeologists today would agree that one thing we need is rigorous, systematic, and serious research. From my perspective, the best way to present rigorous historical (including archaeological) research is to consider alternative histories; in particular, indigenous histories. When we use indigenous histories in our research, we also acknowledge the views of people who have often been systematically devalued and marginalized. However, in the search for alternative histories we must be aware that these histories can become defined by, and indeed, reproduce, the categories and themes of the dominant discourse (Wylie 1995).

Victor Montejo, a Jakalteq Maya from western Guatemala, has written, "It is only if we are actors in and creators of our own history that

we will reaffirm our Mayan ethnic identities within the context of the modern world" (1991:18). Indigenous peoples can construct their own histories; archaeology is not a necessary medium for their expression. However, given the relationship between Western countries and "developing countries," and the privileged position of Western archaeologists interpreting non-Western pasts, I would argue that archaeology must necessarily be informed by indigenous histories. This is not to say that every archaeological project must explicitly consider oral histories, but rather that the adoption of this approach will allow the biases and limitations of archaeology as it is currently practiced to be acknowledged.

The scenario I envision for oral history and archaeology is similar to one that has already begun for feminism and archaeology. In an influential review of the relationship between evidence and political interests in archaeological research, Alison Wylie has convincingly shown that the explicit political agenda associated with feminist archaeology does not undermine archaeology's commitment to neutrality and scientific vigour, but "may well enhance the conceptual integrity and empirical adequacy of archaeological knowledge claims" (Wylie 1992:15). Feminist archaeology has taken women and gender relationships into account, exposing untested assumptions and giving women a voice in prehistory. Similarly, considering modern Maya oral traditions and views could bring a modern Maya "perspective" into archaeology, leading to revisions of Western assumptions and giving the Maya a voice in a new medium.

Venezuelan archaeologist Iraidia Vargas Arenas has argued for a new kind of archaeology in Latin America: social archaeology (Vargas Arenas 1995). She calls for a reconceptualization of history as a continuous process, without pre-Hispanic and post-Hispanic divisions. Further, she argues that it is necessary for archaeologists to work with communities and to expose the contradictions between various historical narratives, in order to challenge the simplifications and distortions of 'official' versions of history, which work to disempower indigenous people and legitimate the current social order. Maya scholars, such as Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Luis Enrique Sam Colop, and Victor Montejo have already begun to write their own histories to oppose official histories (Montejo 2002). American historian David Carey, Jr. (2001) has written a book on Kaqchikel

historical perspectives, in order to identify ethnocentrism and gaps in Western and Ladino histories. Why should archaeologists join in this process?

According to anthropologist Kay Warren, many Maya are concerned that some anthropologists do not consider it an obligation to enter into a reciprocal relationship with Maya communities (Warren 1998). Sam Colop identified several ethical failures of anthropologists in Guatemala, including not consulting with the community, not presenting a final report to the community, not making the large body of knowledge about the community available to them, hiding other agendas, and taking the service of the community for granted while only being concerned with fulfilling their university requirements (Warren 1998:82). Although Colop's comments were in response to the research of socio-cultural anthropologists and linguists, it seems logical that archaeologists should also be responsible to the people whose past they study. Since archaeological research does not actually require interaction with indigenous people, it may be easier for archaeologists than for other researchers to neglect their responsibilities to local communities. Certainly, some archaeologists realize the political aspects of their work and strive to give back to the communities they work in. However, the Maya challenge to social scientists, according to Warren (1998:84) is to "decentralize the production of scholarship about and for Mayas." In other words, Maya people want to actively participate in knowledge production, not just as informants, but as partners. Carey's study of the Kaqchikel reiterates these ideas: "they [Kaqchikels] refuse to be viewed as passive participants in Guatemala's history" and they "insist that their contributions to its past and present be recognized" (Carey 2001:25). There is every reason to believe a partnership between Kaqchikels and archaeologists would be useful to both; moreover, since archaeologists are in a position of "power" relative to local communities, I would argue that it is an ethical responsibility.

This paper will focus on the histories of one specific, and rather special, locale: Iximche'. Iximche' is located in the highlands of Guatemala between Guatemala City and Lake Atitlán, only five kilometres from the modern town of Tecpán Guatemala (Carey 2001). Iximche' is an archaeological site, national park, ancient capital of the Kaqchikel Maya, first

capital of Guatemala, and modern Kaqchikel sacred site.

This paper will compare the multiple histories of Iximche': national, Ladino, Kaqchikel, and archaeological. Following Wylie (1995), I do not endorse a completely relativistic perspective, but neither do I hope to find a single "master narrative" or "real" history. Indeed, no attempt will be made here to assess the "accuracy" of the various histories. Rather, I will describe the alternative histories and discuss some of the possible motivations and biases behind them, and potential uses of them. The purpose of this paper is to juxtapose different histories of Iximche' in order to determine what kinds of things each form of history is missing, and to evaluate the possibility of combining various histories within the context of a 'social' archaeology.

### Ethnohistory

Ethnohistoric accounts of Iximche' were summarized by Carey (2001) and Nance et al. (2003). They were derived primarily from the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, a history of the city written by Kaqchikel people between A.D. 1524 and 1605, in the Kaqchikel language but using the Spanish alphabet (Carey 2001, Nance et al. 2003). Various Spanish colonial accounts were also used (Nance et al. 2003). I chose to analyze the ethnohistoric account presented by Nance et al. (2003), which purports to be the first comprehensive summary of Kaqchikel ethnohistory, rather than any of the primary sources. It should be noted, then, that biases and omissions may be derived from either the original account or the more recent interpretation.

Ethnographic sources have various perspectives due to the different authors and historical contexts in which they were written. *The Annals of the Kaqchikels* was composed during a period of colonial domination and conflict (Nance et al. 2003). Unlike the *Popol Vuh* of the Quiche Maya, *The Annals* focus on political and military history rather than mythological tales. This is obviously a deliberate choice, and does not mean that prehispanic Kaqchikel society lacked a spiritual or religious aspect. *The Annals* were written by two direct descendents of the ruler of Iximche', who were apparently motivated by the Spanish Crown's offer to award special *cacique* privileges to indigenous people who could demonstrate royal descent (Nance et al. 2003:331).

### Oral History

A detailed account of Kaqchikel oral histories was presented by David Carey, Jr. (2001). Carey spent four summers and one full year in Guatemala, living with Kaqchikel families and conducting over 400 interviews in the Kaqchikel language. The bulk of his research was conducted in the towns of San Juan Comalapa, San José Poaquil, Tecpán, San Antonio Aguas Calientes, and Santa Catarina Barahona. Of particular interest to me are the 44 interviews he conducted in Tecpán Guatemala, which is very close to Iximche'.

It should be noted that written versions of oral histories lack a great deal of content and context that were present in the oral tellings. The way that oral histories are arranged and interpreted within a publication affects the interpretation and understanding of these histories. Thus, my interpretations of Kaqchikel oral history are inherently limited to my understanding of what Carey (2001) has presented.

In general, Kaqchikel oral histories are told with the understanding that the past is relevant to the present (Carey 2001). The Kaqchikel are aware that they generally lack a voice in official Guatemalan histories, and they resent the inaccurate and sometimes racist portrayals that occur in those histories. Although Maya people constitute the majority of Guatemalans (Warren 2002:150), they nevertheless occupy a subaltern position in Guatemalan society.

### Official/Ladino History

Interspersed between oral histories, Carey (2001) includes accounts from Ladino historians as well. Although all Ladino histories are not 'official' histories, all official histories in Guatemala are Ladino. Official histories are those published by the government in public media like monographs and school books. Since I have relatively few specific descriptions of them, both Ladino and official histories will be considered together.

Most Ladino histories from the past 500 years construct the Maya as lazy, childlike, uncivilized, and lacking the ability to take meaningful and significant action (Carey 2001). The Maya are not ascribed any significant role in the development of the nation, and have even

been denied a role in their own history (for example, a university vice-chancellor claimed that the *Popol Vuh* is a mestizo rather than a Quiche Maya document). Despite this exclusion, Maya symbols are systematically employed as representations of the Guatemalan state: in 1975 Miss Guatemala (a Ladina) won the national costume division of the Miss Universe pageant wearing Maya traditional clothing (Hendrickson 1995); a national holiday celebrates the heroic death of Tekun Uman, a Quiche Maya warrior (Hendrickson 1995); in 1972 the *Popol Vuh* was declared the national book of Guatemala (Museo Popol Vuh, n.d.). The appropriation of indigenous symbols to construct national identities is a common theme worldwide (Silberman 1995).

### Archaeological History

Archaeological work at Iximche' was conducted by George Guillemin between 1958 and 1972, but he died before publishing a full report. In a recent book, Roger Nance, Stephen Whittington, and Barbara Borg (2003) summarized Guillemin's work and added their own skeletal and ceramic analyses. This book will be my primary source for describing the archaeological history of Iximche'.

Archaeological interpretations were made by Western scientists from an economically privileged, Western standpoint. They can be characterized as post-positivist in that they represent a search for an objective, accurate past but do acknowledge that other interpretations may be valid. Nance et al. (2003) acknowledge that their interpretations are limited, but they blame this on the lack of provenience of the material remains and the relative scarcity of ethnohistoric documents directly related to the Kaqchikel and Iximche'.

### Historical Themes

A single, linear, chronological history is a Western form of organization. Kaqchikel oral histories are generally organized thematically, and exact dates are unimportant (Carey 2001). The content of the histories described in this paper will be presented thematically, because such a structure is amenable to all the types of history that will be presented. It would be impossible to summarize the complete content of each type of history within this paper, but in the following sections I will describe histories

related to the origins of Iximche', conflict and ethnic relations, and politics and religion.

#### *Origins of Iximche'*

The ethnohistory of Iximche' described by Nance et al. (2003) is a tale of conflict and conquest. Immediately prior to the founding of Iximche', the Kaqchikel were part of an alliance with the dominant Quiché kingdom. At least one group of Kaqchikel distinguished themselves as fearless (yet subordinate) warriors, and aided in the expansion of the Quiche kingdom. The Quiche ruler Quicab elevated the status of four Kaqchikel warriors, causing jealousy among Quiche nobles who pressured the king to have the warriors killed. Instead, Quicab advised the Kaqchikel warriors to leave Uvatlán (the Quiche capital) and establish their own capital at Iximche'. This was done around A.D. 1465.

Ethnohistoric accounts also explain that the modern nation of Guatemala was named after Iximche' (Nance et al. 2003). When Pedro de Alvarado first visited Iximche' he was accompanied by Nahua speakers from central Mexico. In Nahua, the name for Iximche' is *Cuauhtemallan*, and Alvarado referred to it as Guatemala in a letter to Hernan Cortés. Alvarado considered Iximche' to be the capital of one of the most important empires in Central America, and therefore Guatemala came to refer to the larger region, and eventually the modern nation.

Carey (2001) discusses at length oral histories related to the ancient site of Iximche'. Iximche' is generally regarded as the centre from which the Kaqchikel people originated. The word Iximche' is derived from *ixim* (maize) and *che'* (tree). Trees are considered to be givers of life, while maize is a dietary staple and the material from which the first true people were made, according to the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1996). One Kaqchikel oral history tells of a tree at Iximche' which bore corn cobs as fruit, and fed the first people to settle at the site when an early frost killed the farmers' own corn (Carey 2001). While the details of other accounts differ, all the variations of the etymology of Iximche' emphasize that it is life-giving and sustaining (Carey 2001).

Kaqchikel oral traditions recognize Iximche' as the capital of the first civilization in Guatemala, and also the first capital of the Guatemalan state (Carey 2001). The location of Iximche' was selected for its militarily strategic location (surrounded by canyons) and for its spiritual significance (related to the four cardinal points). The origins of Iximche' are important to

modern Kaqchikel people because they play a role in shaping local Kaqchikel identity and connections with the ancestors. According to Hendrickson (1995:xiv), the Maya revitalization movement has even attempted to change the name of Tecpán to Iximche'.

The official monograph of Tecpán described by Carey (2001) does not address the origins of Iximche', although it mentions the archaeological centre, or ruins. It describes Tecpán as the first capital of Guatemala, while Iximche' is acknowledged to have been the capital of the Kaqchikels. Nothing important is deemed to have happened at Iximche' until the arrival of the Spanish in 1524; thus, it is unnecessary to describe the historical origins of the site. Carey argues that this document denies any relevance of Iximche' to the present and "writes the Kaqchikel people out" of local history. I would argue that it sets the arrival of the Spaniards as the beginning of Guatemalan history. In line with this interpretation, one Ladino historian from Tecpán considered Iximche' to be the site of fusion between the Old and New Worlds, and the origins of the Guatemalan national identity (Carey 2001:47). However, according to Carey, some Ladino histories do emphasize the importance of Iximche', recognizing the sophisticated culture that flourished there and the link between the ancient inhabitants and modern Kaqchikel people.

Archaeological investigations of Iximche' rely primarily on ethnohistoric accounts for information about the city's origins, and assume that these accounts are essentially accurate (Nance et al. 2003). One reason for the lack of archaeological information about the site's origins is the lack of provenience for much of the archaeological material, due to the excavation methods and Guillemín's untimely death. Ceramics from the site were presumed to be Late Post-classic, and a comparison with other sites supported this designation. Based on past studies of directionality and ancient Maya cosmology, Nance et al. (2003) suggest that the east-west orientation of the major canyons surrounding the site was an important factor in the choice of location. This supports, or is supported by, one of the oral histories described above.

#### *Conflict and Ethnic Relations*

Conflict and warfare is a central theme of the ethnohistoric accounts described by Nance et al. (2003). They describe conflict between the

Kaqchikel and Quiche Maya groups, within the Kaqchikel of Iximche', between the Iximche' Kaqchikel and other Kaqchikel groups, and between the Kaqchikel and the Spanish. I will describe the ethnohistoric accounts of conflict (from Nance et al. 2003) in some detail.

According to the ethnohistoric accounts, conflict with Quiche nobles led to the founding of Iximche' (as described above). There was peace between the Kaqchikel and Quiche until King Quicab died in A.D. 1475, after which continuous warfare ensued. The Kaqchikel always repelled Quiche attacks on Iximche', and the Quiche were forced to pay tribute after being defeated in A.D. 1491. The Kaqchikel of Iximche' also began their own campaign of military domination, fighting rival Kaqchikel groups in the area (there were three) and eventually controlling all of them. In A.D. 1493, internal conflict at Iximche' over land ownership led to a revolt and subsequent expulsion of the Tukuiche' clan from Iximche. This event was so significant that Kaqchikel history, as recorded in the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, was dated from that day.

When the Spanish arrived in Mesoamerica, the Kaqchikel formed an alliance with them against the Quiche. However, after Kaqchikel warriors fought with the Spanish and helped them defeat the Quiche, the Spanish betrayed them. Alvarado established absolute control over the Kaqchikel kingdom, forcing large crews of Kaqchikel to pan for gold and assigning them weekly quotas. Eventually the Kaqchikel abandoned Iximche' and revolted against Alvarado; Iximche' was burned. The Kaqchikel king, Kaji' Imox, was captured in A.D. 1530 but was released and required to pay tribute "like a commoner" (Nance et al. 2001:36). In A.D. 1540, after leading subsequent uprisings, Kaji' Imox and many other Kaqchikel lords were hanged. Kaqchikel communities were dispersed into Spanish-style towns and many Kaqchikel fled to remote areas.

The archaeological account of conflict at Iximche' fits well with the ethnohistoric (Nance et al. 2003). According to the authors, the defensive position of the site reflects the "bellicose behaviour of the citizens of Iximche'" (Nance et al. 2003:44). Skeletal evidence from skulls and cervical vertebrae indicate a high degree of interpersonal violence. Out of 69 total burials, at least 29 (and possibly 50) decapitations were identified, which were presumed to be sacrificed prisoners of war or captive non-combatants. Lesions, fractures,

puncture wounds, and perimortem cuts provide further evidence of violence. Both males and females had these wounds. All the damage associated with warfare seemed to have been caused by stone weapons, indicating that they represent injuries from battles between Maya groups. No evidence of trauma from metal (i.e. Spanish) weapons was found, but other artifacts associated with the Spaniards were found.

In contrast to the ethnohistoric and archaeological accounts, many modern Kaqchikel oral histories construct the pre-Hispanic world as idyllic and peaceful (Carey 2001). Production was efficient and communal ownership of land meant there was no need for money. People were intelligent and used organic medicines to cure the sick. There were no foreigners or Ladinos, and everyone treated others with respect. A special place at Iximche' was reserved for the Quiche leader Tekun Uman. Exploitation and abuse only began when the Spanish arrived.

Other Kaqchikel oral histories do describe conflict between Maya groups (Carey 2001). Individuals from Tecpán describe war between the Iximche' Kaqchikel and the Quiche due to differences in customs or desire for resources or military superiority. Kaqchikel from the towns of Aguas Calientes and Barahona describe a history of antagonistic relations with each other, in relation to land ownership disputes that began in the 1700s or earlier. Kaqchikel oral histories from the town of Poaquil assert that Kaqchikel from Comalapa infringed on their rights and violated their dignity when the Comalapans initially refused to grant permission for the town of Poaquil to be established. Nevertheless, most oral histories emphasize current amicable relations between Maya groups.

The conflicts described in oral histories are mostly between the Maya and the Spanish (Carey 2001). Spaniards are portrayed as corrupt, abusive, dishonest criminals, who were unable to produce the beauty, wealth, and resources of Iximche' for themselves and therefore resorted to violence and deception. Relations between the Spaniards and the Kaqchikels were distrustful and unequal. The Kaqchikel believe that their ancestors acted with honour, intelligence, and dignity despite the Spaniards' debasement. They emphasize Maya resistance to Spanish domination, and rarely if ever mention an alliance between the Kaqchikel and the Spanish. According to Kay Warren (1998), the Kaqchikel "betrayal" of the Quiche to the Spanish is well-known and a source of great stigma. This

suggests that the omissions in the oral histories described by Carey reflect deliberate efforts of avoidance rather than any lack of knowledge.

Some Ladino authors tell similar stories of Kaqchikel bravery and persistent resistance of the Spanish, also de-emphasizing conflicts between the Kaqchikel and Quiche (Carey 2001). According to Carey (2001:78), Ladino historians believe that living conditions at Iximche' were "praiseworthy and productive" prior to the arrival of the Spanish. They glorify the ancient Maya, but consider them to have been wiped out by the Spanish. They believe that modern Maya belong to a different culture from that of the ancients, and that since the time of the conquest, the Maya have not played a significant role in Guatemalan national history.

The official attitude toward Maya resistance to the Spanish may be typified by an anecdote taken from the 'official' history taught in Guatemalan schools (Carey 2001, Hendrickson 1995, Warren 1998). According to this story, the heroic Quiche leader Tekun Uman was killed because he did not understand that a horse is an animal. Thinking that the horse was an extension of Pedro de Alvarado, Tekun attacked the horse, giving Alvarado ample opportunity to kill him. Thus, the Maya warriors were brave in their resistance to the Spanish, but less intelligent and technically advanced. Tekun Uman is venerated as a national hero and the symbol of the Guatemalan nation, and a national holiday is set aside to honour him (Hendrickson 1995).

The Kaqchikel response to this story is complex. Carey (2001) identifies several versions of the story in Kaqchikel oral history. Some oral histories tell the identical story to the official version. Others explain that Tekun Uman was defeated not because he did not know the difference between a man and a horse, but because Alvarado's army had guns and shields while Tekun Uman's had bows and arrows. Warren (1998) states that the story triggers instant resentment among Maya from small towns to national meetings. Further, she describes Mayan scholars' search for alternative heroes, such as Kaji' Imox.

#### *Politics and Religion*

As mentioned above, *The Annals of the Kaqchikels* emphasizes politics and warfare to the exclusion of religious matters. In contrast, the sixteenth century priest Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote more about religion than about any other aspect of Maya life (Nance et al. 2003:47).

Although he was not writing about the Kaqchikels in particular, Nance et al. (2003) use his descriptions to structure their interpretations of material remains at Iximche'. Broken incense burners, bird effigies, a depiction of auto-sacrifice, and quadrilateral symbolism provide evidence that religious ritual at Iximche' was important and resembled that at other ancient Maya sites.

In terms of political structure, *The Annals* clearly state that there were two primary co-rulers of Iximche' (Nance et al. 2003). During the time of contact with the Spanish, the first king was Kaji' Imox and the second was Beleje Kat. There were also two additional rulers with considerably less power. These four rulers may be correlated with the four Kaqchikel lineages. In his original interpretation of the archaeology of Iximche', Guillemin interpreted the two 'Great Palaces' at the site as residences of the two rulers (Nance et al. 2003). However, recent analyses of the architecture and ceramics led Nance et al. (2003) to argue that only one of these structures was a royal residence while the other was a religious centre.

Carey (2001) states that the Kaqchikel who live near Iximche' today have extensive knowledge of historical Kaqchikel leaders. However, different oral traditions describe different numbers of rulers at Iximche'. Kaji' Imox is the most frequently mentioned ruler. Beleje Kat was described as his secretary, who became king when he died. One man stated that when Tekun Uman arrived at Iximche' there was already a Kaqchikel leader. These accounts seem to imply a single ruler. However, other oral histories described as many as ten different 'kings' ruling the site simultaneously.

Unfortunately, Carey (2001) does not describe any oral histories that relate to pre-Hispanic religion. Kaqchikel oral traditions do discuss early Spanish Catholicism, and are generally highly critical of it (Carey 2001). One elder stated that "Pedro Alvarado was a fine Christian; he raped young women and had children with them. . . [and took] their fathers' supply of gold and silver" (Ka'i Aq'ab'al, quoted in Carey 2001:49). The same elder also stated that priests made no effort to understand Maya religion; indeed, they aided soldiers in attempts to subdue the Maya. Other stories tell of the Spanish forcing Maya to build churches and learn their language. The oral histories overwhelmingly focus on negative aspects of priests' roles. Kaqchikel also recognize that religious competition is one source of conflict



within their communities today. Unfortunately, Carey does not expand on this point either. Both Hendrickson (1995) and Fischer (2001) describe religion as an important aspect of modern life in Tecpán, with several different Christian and traditionalist groups coexisting. Several authors (Carey 2001, Fischer 2001, Nance et al. 2003) mention traditionalist Maya ceremonies taking place at Iximche', but unfortunately none describe the ceremonies or peoples' views of them.

Fischer (2001) does describe one ceremony performed in Tecpán in the context of a town festival. Ladino viewers appeared initially amused and subsequently bored, but showed no visible malice. Aside from this brief mention I have been unable to find reference to official or Ladino views of Maya religion, ancient or modern.

### Discussion

None of the histories described above deny that Iximche' originally belonged to the Kaqchikel Maya; indeed, the connection seems abundantly clear. However, there are differences in what each history focuses on, and especially in what each history leaves out.

Ethnohistory emphasizes the role of conflict in the origins of Iximche', and in relations between Maya groups and between the Maya and the Spaniards. As suggested by Nance et al. (2003), the authors of *The Annals* may have been writing for a Spanish audience who would have been more impressed by tales of military might than by mythological stories. Since *The Annals* were written during and immediately after the most significant battles between the Kaqchikel and the Spanish, the authors may also have desired to highlight their former military strengths, in response to their position of weakness vis-à-vis the Spanish invaders.

In contrast, oral histories focus on the opposite of taking lives; that is, the life-giving aspects associated with Iximche'. This can be related to Kaqchikel attempts to maintain their distinct culture by highlighting its positive aspects, and the strength that can be drawn by connecting with ancestors and places of origin. In other words, the emphasis on life-giving aspects can be seen as a form of resistance against forces (Spanish and Ladino) that have attempted to take away the lives of the Kaqchikel people through physical violence, disease, exploitation, and cultural assimilation. Victor Montejo, a Jakalteq Maya and academic, argues

that the current political environment in Guatemala is similar to that of the early colonial period, in which the Maya were struggling to maintain their distinct identities by relying on tradition, especially origin myths (Montejo 2002).

Oral histories vary in their descriptions of conflict and warfare. Many construct a kind of pre-Hispanic utopia, in contrast with the chaos and corruption brought by the Spanish. However, some acknowledge conflict between Maya groups. All the oral histories emphasize conflict between the Maya and the Spanish, paying particular attention to the criminality of the Spaniards' actions. With Carey (2001), I would argue that this focus on Spanish corruption is both an act of resistance and a way of using past relations (Kaqchikel-Spanish) to inform the present situation (Kaqchikel-Ladino). Stories of corrupt Spaniards function as a way to remind people to be wary of exploitation. They also function as explanations of the current unbalanced social order.

Montejo (2002) argues that the primary goal of Maya activists is not to romanticize their past, but rather to revitalize their Maya identity. While romantic notions do figure into some of the oral histories described above, I would argue that the goal of identity revitalization is paramount. Creating romantic versions of the past can also be seen as a form of resistance to domination, first by the Spanish and later by Ladinos. As Ortner (1996) has discussed, resistance is full of complexities and contradictions that reflect the reality of lived experience. Oral histories of Iximche' reflect the background and lived experiences of each teller as well as the complex motivations of asserting a unique local identity, a pan-Maya identity, and possibly a national identity. Minimizing historic conflict between Maya groups has clear implications for pan-Maya solidarity, which is particularly important within the modern context of promoting indigenous rights in Guatemala (Warren 2002).

The revitalization of Maya identity is taking place in opposition to official histories which have appropriated important Maya symbols (historical figures like Tekun Uman, archaeological sites like Iximche', and even traditional clothing) to create a Guatemalan national identity. Archaeology has been involved in this process since the foundation of the Guatemalan state, when the government sponsored archaeological explorations of Iximche' (as well as Copán and Utatlán) in a

conscious attempt to construct a national identity based in part upon the achievements of the ancient Maya (Chinchilla Mazariegos 1998). Their explicit agenda was to learn about an ancient civilization which could be constructed as the predecessor of the modern Guatemalan state. The irony in this is that while ancient Maya civilization is glorified and Maya symbols are ascribed national significance, modern Maya culture and Maya people are devalued, delegitimized, and denied relevance.

Most oral histories describe Iximche' as not only the capital of the ancient Kaqchikel state, but also the first capital of Guatemala. This may be an attempt by modern Kaqchikel to assert their relevance, and that of their ancestors, to the present nation. In support of this argument, Carey (2001) states that the Kaqchikel identify with the state, believe they have made significant contributions to it, and wish to increase their involvement with and ownership of the state. Maya identify with their community and language group but also consider themselves Maya, indigenous, and part of the Guatemalan nation (if not the national Ladino identity) (Carey 2001). The official government monograph of Tecpán dismisses the pre-Hispanic origins of the Iximche' as historically irrelevant. However, Iximche' is universally recognized in Guatemala as the source of the country's name, and as such is linked with the origins of the Guatemalan state. This is another example of writing the Maya out of their own history while usurping one of their important places as a national symbol. According to Wylie (1995), this process has occurred in post-colonial contexts throughout the world.

Archaeological interpretations of Iximche' acknowledge the link between the ancient inhabitants of the site and the modern Kaqchikel, but are not informed by Kaqchikel oral traditions. Archaeology has little to say on the theme of site origins, aside from asserting the ideological and militaristic reasons for choosing the location of Iximche'. Archaeological interpretations do offer some information about conflict: skeletal analysis has shown that most of the trauma in the Iximche' burials resulted from stone weapons; thus, there is more evidence of conflict between Maya groups than between the Kaqchikel and the Spanish. Although this is in contradiction to most of the oral histories, it corroborates the ethnohistories which detail extensive conflict and warfare prior to contact with the Spanish. Nevertheless, there is no independent archaeological evidence suggesting

who the Iximche' Kaqchikel were fighting. Archaeological interpretations highlight the importance of religious ritual at Iximche', but unfortunately there is little mention of religion in the other histories.

It is evident that each form of history is concerned with some topics at the expense of others. *The Annals* focuses on politics and warfare. Official Ladino histories focus on events that occurred after the arrival of the Spanish. Oral histories focus on conflicts with the Spanish and other stories that have relevance to their present lived experiences. Archaeological histories focus on oppositions between ritual and secular activities and on interpersonal violence, health, and disease.

There is clear potential for these stories to be combined as complementary accounts of the history of Iximche'. None of the histories alone provides a balanced story of the origins of Iximche'. Although life at early Iximche' does not seem to have been as peaceful and idyllic as oral traditions suggest, it is just as unrealistic to imagine that it was entirely consumed by war, politics, or religion. After all, the early inhabitants of Iximche' had the time and resources to build temples and ballcourts, and doubtless participated in feasting and ritual as well as the more mundane tasks of everyday life.

### Refusal

The purposeful omission of certain aspects of description or analysis is sometimes referred to as refusal. "Thickness," or the consideration of the complexities and contradictions of lived experience, could be considered the opposite of refusal. Discussing ethnography, Sherry Ortner (1995) argues that "thickness" is the only way to appreciate how resistance is a creative and transformative process. She argues that many ethnographies refuse to include "thick" descriptions but rather sanitize politics (romanticize internal conflicts, ignore gender politics), minimize the importance of culture, deconstruct subjects, and ignore the "lived worlds" of those who resist. The histories of Iximche' described above include several examples of refusal, which take place in multiple, complex contexts. I will highlight refusals that are not based on any lack of evidence, but rather on what is chosen for inclusion or omission in a given history.

In relation to the archaeology of Iximche', I believe the most serious omission is the authors' refusal to provide a "thick"

description of the relevance of their research to the Kaqchikel people. While they should be commended for mentioning the modern Maya at all (most Mayanist archaeologists do not), their comments are idealistic and romantic. They mention positive aspects of Kaqchikel culture, Kaqchikel participation in the national government, a thriving market economy, folk art, and entrepreneurial ventures, and Kaqchikel willingness to share Iximche' with visitors (Nance et al. 2003). Moreover, they cite modern Kaqchikel use of Iximche' as part of the motivation and justification for archaeological research, and they explicitly advocate the use of oral histories, but do not do so. In short, they refuse to engage with Kaqchikel histories. There are many potential reasons for this refusal: the current research climate, assumptions about what constitutes "valid" history, traditional inter/intra-disciplinary boundaries, time and money, and a lack of precedent for collaboration of this type. In my opinion, this "thinness" is both unfair to the Kaqchikel people and harmful to archaeology, because it only gives lip service to the relevance of archaeological research in the present.

One of the most obvious omissions in both the ethnohistories and oral histories presented here is a serious discussion of Maya religion. This refusal is undoubtedly related more to the bias of the recorders and the specific audiences they are addressing than an actual lack of Kaqchikel religion. Hendrickson (1995) clearly states that both politics and religion are serious concerns for modern Kaqchikel in Tecpán, and non-Kaqchikel ethnohistories suggest that it was probably important for all Maya groups in the past. The lack of religious references in these histories is particularly unfortunate from the perspective of archaeology, since religion (along with conflict) is one of the few topics the archaeologists were able to investigate. In my opinion, religion may be a particularly fruitful topic for collaboration between archaeologists and oral historians. Archaeology can suggest the existence of religious rituals at Iximche, while Kaqchikel oral history can suggest some of the meanings and contexts related to the rituals.

The most glaring example of refusal in official histories is the exclusion of Maya people from historical accounts, by situating the beginning of history with the arrival of the Spanish. Among other things, this legitimates the history of Spanish domination and the current unequal relationship between Ladinos and

indigenous people. The refusal of the official Tecpán monograph to attribute any significance to pre-Hispanic activities at Iximche' may also suggest that either most Ladinos know little about the origins of Iximche', or that they do not care. Combining evidence from ethnohistories, archaeology, and oral histories could both counteract ignorance and contribute to an understanding that history did not begin with the arrival of the Spanish, but extends both farther back in time and farther forward in time, through its relevance to the Kaqchikel present.

### Social Archaeology

My discussion above suggests that a collaboration combining different forms of history, especially archaeology and oral history, would be beneficial in the case of Iximche'. However, it is also important to consider whether such a collaboration would be desirable to the parties involved. Despite their "thinness" with respect to oral traditions, Nance et al. (2003) are enthusiastic about combining ethnohistory and archaeology, and explicitly advocate the use of oral history as well; clearly, they should be willing to collaborate.

Despite the extensive discussion of oral histories of Iximche' in his book, Carey (2001) provides no indication of Kaqchikel attitudes towards archaeological research at the site. However, when describing oral histories related to a gold and silver mine near Iximche', for which there are no written records, Carey indicates that a group of Kaqchikel men asked him to contact an archaeologist who might be willing to excavate the site and verify its ancient use as a mine. This brief comment indicates that, at least for these men of Comalapa, archaeology is seen as an acceptable means of validating local histories. Certainly, archaeology is not *required* to validate local histories, but it seems that these Kaqchikels view it in a reasonably positive light; they actually made a request for archaeological work to be done. The probability that Kaqchikels would be interested in collaboration with archaeologists is supported by Carey's comment that the Kaqchikel "do not claim exclusive rights to the country's riches" but they do "insist that their contributions to its past and present be recognized" (Carey 2001:25).

Given that some kind of collaboration between archaeologists and Kaqchikel people would be beneficial and desirable to both, what form should this collaboration take? Is a social archaeology of the type described by Vargas

Arenas (1995) an appropriate model in this case? Two of the main goals of Vargas Arenas' social archaeology are to oppose official versions of history and to break down the traditional divisions of history into pre- and post-Hispanic periods. I will address each of these goals in turn.

First, should the archaeology of Iximche' oppose 'official' histories? I would answer yes. One of the themes of official histories in Guatemala is "writing the Maya out" of local and national history. This is totally unjustifiable. Archaeologists participate in the process of writing the Maya out of history when they create histories without considering the present reality of the Maya people. Although archaeologists may acknowledge the relevance of their work to the modern Maya, if they do not incorporate discussions of context and relevance into their work it can very easily be used to perpetuate official discourses of discontinuity between ancient and modern Maya culture. In addition, attempting to formulate alternatives to official discourse can aid in identifying biases and limitations in the original work. In the words of Pakal B'alam, a Kaqchikel scholar, "do not argue the opposite of official histories for their own sake but rather seek truths that have not been fully aired" (quoted in Warren 1998:149).

Second, should the division between the pre- and post-Hispanic periods be broken down? Again, based on the histories of Iximche', Guatemalan attitudes towards history, and the current situation of the Maya people, I would argue yes. This division, referred to as the Spanish conquest, figures prominently in both Ladino and Western histories. It is seen by Ladinos as the beginning of real, significant, nationally relevant history, and it also represents a divide between the noble ancient Maya civilization and the less developed, modern Maya cultures. Why is it damaging? It promotes the exclusion of the Maya from national history, the devaluation of modern Maya culture, and the simplification of what was really a complex and continuous series of events, not a single "conquest". Western archaeological histories are guilty of perpetuating this conceptualization, most likely because it is a convenient temporal reference point. Reconceptualizing history, without a pre-Hispanic period or a conquest, would be a starting point in the process of validating Maya histories and the Maya role in history in Guatemala.

It may be useful at this point to consider some potential problems with social archaeology. Alison Wylie (1995) has argued that many so-

called alternative histories actually reproduce the themes and structures of the histories they mean to oppose. Wylie identified two main ways in which attempts to implement alternative histories have failed. The first is that colonial ties persist, and the West remains in control of the direction and disposition of research. The second is that ethnicity, race, and culture are romanticized, essentialized, and dehistoricized, allowing for an inversion of the former social order in which oppressed becomes oppressor, but the fundamental form of the history remains unchanged. That is, history is considered to be "dead", static, and disconnected from the present.

Wylie's analysis suggests that a useful social archaeology would have to include balanced, reciprocal relations between archaeologists and indigenous people, and would require the production of a history that is complex and dynamic. While it may be impossible to overcome the asymmetry of a collaboration between Western archaeologists and Kaqchikel townspeople, oral history does hold great potential to highlight the ways that the history of Iximche' was dynamic, changing, contradictory, and most of all, relevant to the present.

One problem with this vision of social archaeology is that it is predicated on the idea that a more complete, balanced, detailed history is a better history. But is this an ethnocentric assumption? One could ask the same question about Ortner's concept of "thickness." Is it ethnocentric or unrealistic to expect archaeology, ethnohistory, and oral history to be "thick"? According to Warren (1998), many high profile Maya scholars have consciously used essentialism as a tool to resist Spanish and Ladino domination. These Maya argue that core aspects of Maya culture have been retained, unaltered, since before contact with the Spanish; this is evidence of Maya cultural genius. This essentialism, however, portrays a static culture that is counter to anthropological thought and a complex portrayal of multiple histories. It is clearly not "thick." In contrast, archaeology may strive for "thickness," but ultimately it will be unattainable. The material constraints of the archaeological record will always preclude "thick" interpretations; there is simply not enough evidence to archaeologically reconstruct all the complexities and contradictions of lived experience.

How can archaeologists, who would like to produce "thick" interpretations but

cannot, collaborate with indigenous people, who may consciously reject thickness and prefer "thin" essentialism? Can archaeologists create complex historical accounts in collaboration with indigenous people even if indigenous histories are to a greater or lesser extent essentialized?

Victor Montejo (2002) identifies two reasons that the Maya essentialize their culture: first, they are proud of their ancient heritage, but Ladinos consistently deny their relationship to it; second, they want to write their own histories. If archaeologists affirm the continuity between ancient and modern Maya culture and work in partnership with Maya people to create alternative or multiple histories, the need for essentialism should begin to break down. One of the most important values in Kaqchikel culture is respect (Carey 2001, Warren 1998). I would argue that the first steps for archaeologists who are willing to consider the political relevance and context of their work are to attempt to employ multiple histories through respectful partnerships with indigenous people, and to consider the complex motivations and biases behind every form of history.

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