

The Spanish Conquest?

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Abstract and Keywords

The Spanish conquest is a highly mythologized historical moment of profound consequence. For some, it represents the launching of a global Catholic empire—perhaps with lamentable violence, but ultimately as part of an inevitable, proud march of Euro-Christian progress. For Indigenous populations, the meaning of Spanish conquest is decidedly more somber: the invasion of their lands, the criminalization of their customs, the loss of sovereignty, and, indeed, the closest they have ever come to total extermination. In between these two poles of interpretation, scholars have sought not only new sources and information beyond published Spanish works but also new perspectives from less famous actors. Central America features prominently in this recent scholarship, which has ended up questioning all three parts of the phrase “the Spanish conquest.” Indigenous Central America’s sixteenth-century experience of military invasion and colonization—made worse by a brief but intense period of legalized Indigenous slavery—was brutal, and more complex than the mythology usually admits. It was not a single sweeping event, it was not militarily won only by Spaniards or even Europeans, and ultimately, it was incomplete.

Keywords: conquest, Central America, Indigenous peoples, Africans, Tekum Umam, warfare

Introduction

The Spanish conquest is a historical moment of epic proportions, the consequences of which are difficult to overstate. It is also highly mythologized. For some, it represents the launching of a global Catholic empire—perhaps with lamentable violence, but ultimately as part of an inevitable march of Euro-Christian progress. For Indigenous populations, the meaning of the Spanish conquest is decidedly more somber: the invasion of their lands, the criminalization of their customs, the loss of sovereignty, the closest they have ever come to total extermination, and despite the fact that they survived, the beginnings of a deeply persistent lie that they did not. In between these two poles of interpretation, scholars have sought not only new sources and information beyond published Spanish works but also new perspectives from less famous actors. Central America features prominently

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in this recent scholarship, which has ended up questioning all three parts of the phrase “the Spanish conquest.” Indigenous Central America’s sixteenth-century experience of military invasion and colonization—made worse by legalized Indigenous slavery—was brutal, and more complex than the mythology usually admits. It was not a single sweeping event, it was not militarily won only by Spaniards or even Europeans, and ultimately, it was incomplete.¹

The Spanish Conquest? Pedro de Alvarado, 1524-1540

In popular culture, the demise of the Triple Alliance (Aztec) and the Inka empires commonly stands in for all eventual Native American encounters with Old World peoples, technologies, and diseases. Likewise, Pedro de Alvarado’s iconic invasion in 1524-1525 of what is today Guatemalan territory is often *the* Spanish conquest of Central America that comes to mind. This oversimplification obscures a longer, more complicated process of confrontation, subjugation, and resistance throughout the region. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to dwell on Pedro de Alvarado, including his aggressiveness, his leadership of an influential network of Spanish conquistadors, and the extraordinary violence of the early conquest period in Central America sparked by his original campaigns.

Alvarado’s expedition was an extension of both Mesoamerican and Spanish imperialism. After the fall of the Aztec capital city Tenochtitlan in 1521—the result of an alliance between the Spanish and the Aztecs’ most powerful enemies, the Tlaxcalteca—the Indigenous leaders of central Mexico and the Spanish aimed to assert control over and beyond the vast expanses of Aztec tributary provinces. The Soconusco of Chiapas, an important trade corridor along the Pacific coast and a rich source of cacao, feathers, and other luxury items, was a major target. Control of this corridor would also open the way into the independent Maya kingdoms of Guatemala. Unsurprisingly, the Nahua allies of the Spanish pointed the Europeans in this direction in the wake of Tenochtitlan’s defeat.² In 1522, Nahua and Spanish forces cleared the coastal route to the Soconusco by making a strategic alliance with the Tenochca ruler of the coastal Zapotec city of Tehuantepec, Xolotl, against the Mixtec confederation of Tututepec to the northwest. This Nahua-Spanish-Zapotec alliance then attacked the eastern land route to the Soconusco along the Coatzacoalcos River from the Gulf Coast to Chiapas, held by independent polities of mostly Mixe-Zoque and Popoluca speakers who had successfully held the Triple Alliance at bay.³ By 1523-1524, the way was clear for military incursions through the Soconusco into the mountainous highlands of what is today Chiapas, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

The swift trajectory of Pedro de Alvarado’s first invasion of Maya territory in 1524 is well known and deservedly so, although its success is sometimes exaggerated. Following the coastal plain from Tehuantepec, the invaders first engaged K’iche’ warriors at Xetulul (Zapotitlán) and subsequently in the valley of Xelajúj (Quetzaltenango), where the K’iche’ warrior Tekum was killed in the battle. Tekum’s feathered costume, indicative of his powerful quetzal bird *nahual* or spirit animal, is widely understood to have given Quetzalte-

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nango (“place of the feathered wall”) its alternative, Nahuatl name which has endured ever since. The invading forces then entered the K’iche’ city of Qumarkaj (Utatlán, near modern-day Santa Cruz del Quiché), preemptively torched it, and hanged its leaders Ajpop 3 Deer and Ajpop K’amaja 9 Dog.⁴



Map 1: Pedro de Alvarado and the Conquest of Guatemala

Xelajú’s and Qumarkaj’s destruction sent a powerful signal to the K’iche’ confederation’s greatest rivals in the region, the Kaqchikel of Iximché with whom they had fought a series of bitter wars since the 1470s. We have few documents that indicate the Kaqchikel leaders’ thinking at this moment. It was surely prudent to leverage Qumarkaj’s defeat to their advantage, and to position themselves favorably as they ascertained a quickly changing situation. There is significant discrepancy regarding the numbers of warriors sent from Iximché to join the invading forces; the *Anales de los Kaqchikeles* says that four hundred Kaqchikel were sent to help subdue Qumarkaj, while Alvarado claimed there were thousands. In any case, the leaders of Iximché subsequently welcomed the Nahua, Spaniards, and Zapoteca into their city. From there, new campaigns that now included both Kaqchikel and some K’iche’ warriors were launched against other peoples against whom the Kaqchikel of Iximché had recently fought: the Tz’utujil of the Lake Atitlán region (who quickly capitulated) and the Nawat-speaking peoples of coastal Escuintla in modern Guatemala and Cuscatlán in modern El Salvador (who successfully resisted).⁵

Upon his return to Iximché, however, Pedro de Alvarado’s demands on his hosts—especially for gold—became intolerable. The Kaqchikel abandoned their city, and the alliance. Suddenly surrounded by hostile locals intent on driving them out, and with many of their mostly Nahua allies dead or returned to Mexico, the remaining Spanish and Nahua split themselves between a small defensive force at Iximché and a separate military camp at Olintepeque in K’iche’ territory. From there, they launched military campaigns into the Cuchumatán Mountains that although fleeting, caused significant destruction. Dozens of *probanzas* (notarized testimonies of service to the Crown made by the conquistadors, in expectation of compensation) and lawsuits left not only by various members of the extended Alvarado family (Pedro, Jorge, Gonzalo, Gómez, Diego) but also by less well-known

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Spaniards like Hernando de Chávez, Juan Durán, Andres de Rodas, Diego de Rojas, Cristóbal Lobo, Pedro González Nájera, and Gonzalo de Ovalle attest to multiple expeditions against the Mam near Huehuetenango and the Poqomam near Mixco, Petapa, and Lake Amatitlán, as well as continuing battles with the Kaqchikel, Nawat-Pipil, and Xinka, during this time period, periodically reinforced by Spanish-led forces from Mexico and Honduras.⁶

Relief came in the form of a major re-invasion from Mexico in March 1527 led by Pedro's brother Jorge de Alvarado. By November of that year, the first successful Spanish cities in Central America were established in the heart of restive Nawat-Pipil and Kaqchikel territory: San Salvador at the abandoned site of an earlier attempt at Spanish settlement in 1525, near Cuscatlán, and Santiago de Guatemala in the valley of Almolonga near Comalapa and Chimaltenango. Additional campaigns penetrated Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Guatemalan highlands of modern-day Huehuetenango, El Quiché, and the Verapaces. Slavery, mining, and tribute payments were violently established.⁷ By the mid-1530s, most of what is today El Salvador had also been at least nominally pacified. In 1540 the leaders of the Kaqchikel resistance at the time, Kaji' Imox and Kiyawit Kawoq, were imprisoned in Santiago and later hanged.⁸ While Pedro de Alvarado held the position of lieutenant governor of Guatemala, during most of this period his time was spent traveling to Spain and Mexico to assert his position and preparing for costly and ultimately wasteful expeditions to far-flung places like Peru and the Spice (Maluku) Islands. As Wendy Kramer first noted in 1994, and Florine Asselbergs's analysis of the Nahua *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* in 2004 plus the recent re-discovery of Santiago's city council books from 1530–1541 have confirmed, Jorge de Alvarado's role as both conquistador and acting governor in his brother's absence was decisive for establishing a permanent Spanish presence in what is today Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.⁹

Nevertheless, it is Pedro de Alvarado who continues to personify the Spanish conquistador in Central America. In the nineteenth century he was heralded by the Guatemalan intelligentsia as a national if blemished hero: the ancestral, Hispanic father of Spanish-American independence and Guatemalan nationhood. As Adrian Recinos put it in his 1952 biography, while Alvarado's "faults have not been pardoned by history ... in Mexico and Guatemala it cannot be forgotten that, with a soldier's roughness, he was one of the men who most helped to sow in this land the fields in which the ideas of Christianity and Western civilization flourished."¹⁰

Most academicians since the 1960s have viewed the Christian civilizing project as less celebratory and Alvarado as pure villain. He was "bloodthirsty" even by the standards of his own day, according to Severo Martínez Peláez in his classic work: described by Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas as an "unhappy and unfortunate tyrant" and by Bernal Díaz del Castillo as an "impulsive warrior" whom Hernando Cortés had to restrain from the most "cruel blunders and abuses."¹¹ In the wake of Guatemala's brutal counterinsurgency civil war of the 1970s–1990s, many directly compared the Spanish conquest with the Guatemalan military's campaign against the Maya. The ladino-dominated state claims that "if we would only just say 'thank you' to Pedro de Alvarado, we would be at peace,"

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wrote Luis Enrique Sam Colop on Guatemalan Independence Day in 2004, but “what must be recognized is that Alvarado’s practices were continued by the Guatemalan military with scorched earth and genocide.”¹² W. George Lovell and Christopher Lutz agree. Alvarado’s “clout was heavy, his authority incontestable ... [N]ever one to miss an opportunity for self-aggrandizement,” he had “an explosive temperament,” they write. “Corruption, impunity, deceit and subterfuge, ruthless exploitation, intimidation by terror, and blatant disregard of the rule of law, hallmarks of Guatemala today, have in Pedro de Alvarado a fertile progenitor” who “set the parameters within which subjugation would unfold.”¹³

For the Maya, Pedro de Alvarado also symbolizes the transition to a new historical era. The Dance of the Conquest, an annual dance-drama with local variations performed in Maya towns throughout the Guatemalan highlands since at least the nineteenth century, reenacts the confrontation between Alvarado and K’iche’ warrior Tekum, or Tecum Umán. Tecum’s death in battle after refusing to submit to Alvarado is understood in different and overlapping ways: as a personal sacrifice on behalf of his people, a misguided refusal to give up power in the face of inevitable change, and a necessity for the rising of a new “sun” personified by Pedro de Alvarado, who is called Tonatiuh (Nahuatl for “day” or “sun”) in colonial-era Indigenous documents. But Tecum’s transformation into a revered ancestor who resides in the sacred cave where he was buried, and the survival of his aid, diviner, and son Aj Itz—whose disorderly conduct during the play provides comic relief, and who acts as a messenger between Tecum and the Spanish and later guards Tecum’s body—suggest that Alvarado’s triumph was incomplete. At the end of the play the K’iche’ leaders accept conversion to Catholicism and subordination to the Spanish in the name of peace, but Aj Itz escapes to the mountains to continue practicing divination and transmitting traditional knowledge to the living community. Like other Maya dance-dramas that emphasize the cyclical nature of history, the Dance of the Conquest holds forth the possibility of resistance in the present and the promise of Indigenous resurgence in the future.¹⁴

From Panama to the Petén

The weight of Pedro de Alvarado’s legacy obscures the fact that his invasion was only one of many such expeditions, and not even the first. Rodrigo de Bastidas and Christopher Columbus landed on the eastern islands of the Gulf of Honduras in 1501 and 1502, respectively. Spanish ships explored the coastline of what is today Belize as early as 1508.¹⁵ Santa María la Antigua, the first Spanish outpost along the Caribbean coast of what is today Panama, was founded in 1510, and Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (the first European to see the American Pacific), Pedrarias Dávila (governor of Castilla del Oro, the first Spanish territory on the American mainland), and others had gained a permanent foothold on the Panamanian isthmus by 1515.¹⁶ Exploration of the Pacific coast of what is today Costa Rica and Nicaragua began in 1519. The Spanish settlements of Villa de Bruselas in modern-

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day Costa Rica, León and Granada in Nicaragua, and Trujillo in Honduras were all founded in 1524, the same year that Alvarado was entering Maya territory from Oaxaca.¹⁷



Map 2: From Panamá to the Petén. (NOTE: Cities and Regions with a triangle instead of a dot are places with notable Indigenous resistance; European settlements have dates of foundation.)

In the wake of Alvarado's 1524 invasion, Honduras in particular became a battleground of internecine warfare between Spaniards who entered Central America from all different directions: Hernando Cortés from Mexico versus Cristobal de Olid and Gil González de Ávila from the Caribbean in 1524, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba and Hernando de Saavedra from Mexico versus Pedrarias Dávila from Panama in 1526, a series of Crown-appointed governors of Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras fighting against each other into the early 1530s, and Pedro de Alvarado in Guatemala versus the governor of the Yucatán Francisco de Montejo from 1533 until Alvarado's death in 1541.¹⁸ At the same time, in 1526–1527, an alliance of hundreds of distinct Indigenous communities destroyed the mining settlement of Villa Hermosa near Trujillo, killing scores of Spaniards including the well-known explorer and conquistador Juan de Grijalva.¹⁹ In the late 1530s significant resistance was coordinated by the Jicaque leader Cicimba in the northwestern Ulua Valley and the Lenca leader Lempira deep in the southwest at Cerquín, until both were killed. In the midst of it all, the Spanish were only able to penetrate as far as Gracias a Dios, Comayagua, and the Olancho valley in a west-to-east line through central Honduras (which nonetheless continued to experience significant uprisings) and to defend the vulnerable Atlantic port towns of Puerto de Caballos (now called Puerto Cortés after Hernando Cortés who founded it in 1525) and Trujillo.²⁰

What made Central America worth fighting over? Control over important pre-Columbian trade, communication, and transportation routes allowed the invaders to insert themselves into well-established regional economies. Traditional products like cacao and resins as well as imports like cattle and indigo promised riches especially along the Pacific coast of Central America from the Soconusco to Lake Managua, placing increasingly onerous demands on local and migrant Indigenous workers and contributing significantly to their demographic collapse, discussed in "Biological Killers".²¹ Areas of dense popula-

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tion promised significant tributary revenue, although this proved difficult to implement due to Indigenous resistance and, once again, the impact of epidemic disease.²² The search for a trans-isthmian crossing engendered conflicts between conquistadors eager to cash in on the Crown's desire find a direct route to the Spice (Maluku) Islands, and placed significant burdens on thousands of Indigenous people forced to cut and haul enormous quantities of wood, in addition to cotton woven for sails, across Chiapas, Guatemala, and Honduras. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, central Panama was the only functioning transoceanic route south of the Veracruz-Mexico City-Acapulco corridor, and was the main passageway to Peru. Goods were transported by water and mule train along the Chagres River, or along the Camino Real from Nombre de Dios (abandoned in 1597) and later from Portobelo, both of which ended on the Pacific side at the fortified port of Panama City.²³

True to stereotype, gold and silver mining ventures abounded. In Chiapas and Guatemala, a brief but intense blitz of mining activities drew attention from many quarters. References to the kidnapping and enslavement of Indigenous to form mining *cuadrillas* (gangs), as well as heavy tribute demands to supply mining camps, are littered throughout the early *residencias* (judicial reviews) and *probanzas* of the first generation of Spanish conquistadors. Three trunks of gold transported from Guatemala to Spain by Spanish conquistador Juan Rodríguez de Cabrillo in 1532, for instance, were recorded as a result of investigations into seven missing bars from the Crown's portion; Cabrillo's mining venture at Cobán was closed down five to six years later, due to local resistance.²⁴ In Honduras, alluvial deposits of gold and the discovery of silver near Comayagua in 1539 and gold in the Olancho valley in the 1540s kicked off a mining boom that lasted into the mid-1560s, powered by Indigenous labor. Thousands of Maya, Xinka, and Nawat-Pipil from Guatemala and El Salvador were compelled to work in the Honduran mines and transport precious metals to the coast, alongside a smaller but significant number of Lenca, Chorti' Maya, Jicaque, and other Indigenous people from the western and central regions of Honduras.²⁵ Some fled into unconquered Pech and Tawahka/Mayangna territory in eastern Honduras to escape this fate.²⁶

In southern Central America, Spaniards exploited an already-existing trade in gold nuggets and objects that mediated political relationships throughout Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, as well as relations with peoples further north and south in Meso- and South America. Gold was traded for prisoners of war, salt, cacao, cotton, and shell beads. Finely worked gold objects were collected for ritual purposes and prestige value. Control of gold deposits and large collections of objects with important civic and sacred functions increased a group's political, economic, and cosmic power. The Spanish entered into this trade eagerly and immediately in the first decade of the 1500s. They bartered gold for cotton ropes and iron axes, stole gold from plundered villages, and demanded it as tribute when the situation allowed. By 1515 the Spanish had established a foundry at Santa María la Antigua in Darién and another was established at León in Nicaragua in 1527, where nuggets were smelted and finely worked pieces destroyed. As historian Eugenia

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Ibarra puts it, as they converted ritual items and markers of prestige into gold bars, “[t]he crucibles and furnaces of the Spaniards literally melted the “soul” of a society.”²⁷

Equally attractive, and devastating, was the business of capturing and enslaving Indigenous peoples for sale overseas. Thousands of Indigenous from Chiapas to Costa Rica were kidnapped, branded, and forcibly removed from Central America throughout the 1520s–1540s. Most were sent south to Peru, passing through newly established shipyards built along the Pacific coast at Itzapa (Guatemala), Acajutla (El Salvador), Realejo (Nicaragua), and Nicoya (Costa Rica). Others went east to the Caribbean islands, and even across the Atlantic to Europe.²⁸ To a great extent, the imperial New Laws of 1542 outlawing the enslavement of Indigenous people—shaped by the Dominican Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas, who had most recently served as bishop of Chiapas and supervised a non-military evangelization project in the Guatemalan Verapaces—responded to this extreme violence of the extended conquest period in Central America. Despite its prohibition, slaving of Indigenous Central Americans in nominally Spanish territories continued into the eighteenth century, especially due to raids by Afro-Indigenous Miskitu who instigated conflicts in order to capture war prisoners and sell them into the mostly African slave trade of the Caribbean and North America.²⁹

The interior of Costa Rica, the lowland Maya regions of Chiapas and Tabasco in Mexico, and the Petén in Guatemala were the last Central American provinces to be colonized by the Spanish. (The Atlantic coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua as well as parts of Panama and coastal Costa Rica were claimed by Spain but never successfully subjugated.) By the second half of the sixteenth century, Spanish-led forces faced fierce attacks from Indigenous people who now had significant prior knowledge of Spanish strategies and tactics. After their first contacts with Franciscan missionaries in 1604, the Tawahka of Honduras threw out the intruders in 1611–1612 and 1623, deterred further attempts until the 1670s, and again attacked and forced the abandonment of missions in 1724 and 1750.³⁰ The invasion and settlement of Costa Rica did not begin in earnest until the 1560s. Vásquez de Coronado founded the interior Spanish town of Cartago in 1563–1564 and Governor Alonso Anguiciano de Gamboa (1573–1577) managed to establish the first Spanish *encomiendas*, but only in the central valley. Military expeditions to pacify unconquered areas continued in Costa Rica into the eighteenth century.³¹ Likewise, the Spanish did not manage to take control of the independent Maya kingdom of Tah Itzá (Tayasal) on Lake Petén Itzá—today, the city of Flores where thousands of tourists come to visit the nearby ancient Maya ruins of Tikal—until 1697, while the more dispersed and isolated groups that would come to be known as the Lacandon Maya of the lowland rainforest of the Petén and Chiapas were not truly threatened by outsiders until the nineteenth century.³² Spanish conquest was not a single event but a centuries-long process that continued throughout the colonial period.

The *Spanish Conquest?* Allies, Auxiliaries, and Slaves

Ironically, the Alvarado expeditions have received outsized attention in recent years because of a historiographic turn since the 1990s seeking new and especially Indigenous perspectives on the Spanish conquest. Going beyond published sources like conquistador letters and Spanish historical chronicles, scholars have delved deep into the manuscript *probanzas* or affidavits of lesser-known conquistadors, have reconsidered Indigenous histories of the period, and have brought to light two unique documents: the painted *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* depicting Jorge de Alvarado's 1527 invasion and the *probanza* of the Nahua and Zapotec allies who remained as colonists in Central America, both dating to the mid-sixteenth century.

The Central American subject matter of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, an enormous painted cloth measuring 2.35 by 3.25 meters currently on display at the Museo Regional de Cholula, Mexico, was identified in 2002 by Dutch scholar Florine Asselbergs. Quauhquechollan, a frontier city in the Basin of Puebla-Tlaxcala, was Jorge de Alvarado's *encomienda* and contributed hundreds if not thousands of warriors to his 1527 re-invasion of Guatemala. The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* depicts this campaign from the Quauhquecholteca perspective, for a Quauhquecholteca audience. It shows a warm embrace of alliance with Hernando de Cortés (Figure 1), and the Spanish led by Jorge de Alvarado as honored and noble companions. It also shows extraordinary moments of violence meted out by the Spanish, for instance, in setting mastiff dogs to attack Maya opponents (Figure 2). But the Quauhquecholteca are the main actors of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, filling every scene with their elaborate warrior costumes and brandishing Spanish swords against the Maya (Figure 3). The *Lienzo* depicts the spoils of conquest not as Christian churches, Spanish cities, or boats filled with gold and slaves bound for Europe but as new Nahua colonies and access to trade routes and natural resources like cotton and cacao. Like the Spanish conquistadors in their letters and chronicles, the Quauhquecholteca emphasized themselves.³³

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Figure 1. Embrace of Quauhquecholteca leaders and Hernando Cortés with translator Malintzin Detail of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*. Digital restoration Universidad Francisco Marroquín/Banco G&T Continental.

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Figure 2. Battle between Quauhquecholteca and Maya at Tecolotlán in the Cuchumatán mountains, Guatemala. Detail of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*. Digital restoration Universidad Francisco Marroquín/Banco G&T Continental.

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Figure 3. Spanish dogs attack Kaqchikel Maya at Pochutla while a Spaniard watches. Detail of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*. Digital restoration Universidad Francisco Marroquín/Banco G&T Continental.

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The same prideful tone is evident in an over eight-hundred-page *probanza* produced between 1564 and 1572 by the Nahuatl and Zapotec allies who remained in Central America as colonists—a group that included Tlaxcalteca, Cholulteca, Tenochca and Tlatelolca Mexico, Xochimilca, Huejotzinca, Acolhua, Quauhquecholteca, Zapoteca, and Otomí from Otumba. In this document held at the Archivo de Indias in Sevilla, Spain, the Indigenous allies from central Mexico and Oaxaca requested royal recognition and reward as equal allies—not subordinate subjects and certainly not slaves—of the Spanish conquistadors of Central America. Indeed, they presented themselves as *yndios conquistadores*, or “Indian conquistadors.”³⁴ Spanish and Nahuatl conquistadors alike detailed the Indigenous allies’ contributions to specific campaigns. Hundreds of “Indian conquistadors” and their sons now living in or near Santiago, San Salvador, and Valladolid (Honduras) were individually named. For seventy-five years, the leaders of Ciudad Vieja, Guatemala, the largest Nahuatl and Zapotec colony in Central America, spearheaded the campaign insisting on legal recognition of the Indigenous allies’ nobility and high status within Spanish colonial society. In the end, they were rewarded with partial exemption from tribute for them and for their descendants, a ruling that was respected for the entirety of the colonial period.³⁵

These two sources, together with lesser-known Spanish *probanzas*, have sparked an academic conversation full of political and emotional sensitivity. Should scholars take the self-interested posturings of the Nahuatl and other allies at any more or less face value than those of the Spanish? Should we rethink partnerships that have traditionally been seen as either unequal (i.e., facing Spanish technology and violence, the Indigenous had no choice) or traitorous (i.e., in making self-interested alliance with the Spanish, the Indigenous betrayed their own people)? Given the consistent presence, guidance, and numerical

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superiority of the Indigenous allies, was the Spanish conquest of Central America really *Spanish*?

The questions deepen when we acknowledge the variety of Indigenous experiences in conquest expeditions over space and time. The central Mexican Nahua nobility and warrior class, including the defeated Tenochca Mexica, appear to have participated in the Central American conquests with considerable autonomy, authority, and Spanish favor well into the 1540s. Thousands of new allies from Oaxaca, Guatemala, Chiapas, Honduras, Tabasco, and elsewhere were also recruited with promises of recompense and an eye toward their future settlement as pacifying colonists. As conquest, slavery, and disease shattered communities throughout southern Meso- and Central America, however, to resist such recruitment surely became more difficult. Many thousands were violently forced to fight or carry supplies on long, dangerous expeditions as *encomienda* “Indians” or as slaves. Even the Quauhquecholteca, for all their self-fashioning as equal allies, were nonetheless part of Jorge de Alvarado’s *encomienda*—and as former tributaries of the defeated Tenochca, doubly obligated to contribute to conquest campaigns. More vulnerable still were the Lenca and Jicaque from Honduras, the highland Maya of Chiapas, and the Chontal and other Indigenous of the Tabasco region who were all essentially harvested by the Francisco de Montejo clan (father and son) in the 1540s and forced to serve as slaves and porters in the Montejos’s third and only successful military campaign against the Maya of the Yucatán peninsula.³⁶

Similar questions of power and agency attend to another oft-neglected group of conquistadors in Central America: Africans, both free and slave. While Spanish conquistadors tend to be villainized, African participants in conquest expeditions are often heralded as part of the recovery of a forgotten history.³⁷ Africans rarely appear in *probanzas* or *lienzos*; the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* depicts what is surely an inaccurate count of one lone African among scores of Spaniards and hundreds if not thousands of Indigenous. Nevertheless, bureaucratic documents reveal a significant African presence from the earliest years of Spanish conquest and settlement in Central America.³⁸ In Santiago de Guatemala at Almolonga, for example, city council books from 1530 to 1541 identify enslaved and free Africans as owners of real estate, town criers, barbers, bakers, supervisors of Indigenous labor, and guardsmen. Africans in Santiago were repeatedly forbidden from carrying weapons independently or entering the Indigenous marketplace, and were threatened with mutilation and death if they attempted to escape slavery.³⁹ As colonial settlement spread, free Africans and even slaves often had significant possibilities for social mobility.⁴⁰ Like the wide range of Indigenous participants in the so-called Spanish conquest, these Africans cannot be adequately described by the either/or terminology of victors and vanquished.

The tendency to treat all conquistadors as Spanish, all Indigenous participants as subordinated auxiliaries fully under Spanish control, and all Africans as powerless slaves has thus given way to a more complex discussion. Not all conquistadors were Spanish. Not all slaves were African. Not all Africans were enslaved, some presumably fought in conquest battles, and from an Indigenous point of view they were unambiguously invaders. In Cen-

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tral America, so were many if not most of the Nahua or “Mexican” and other Mesoamerican warriors from central Mexico and Oaxaca who came from the highest military and social ranks of their societies, and who were treated with necessary if sometimes grudging respect by their Spanish allies. Other Indigenous, however, were forced to participate in conquest expeditions and violently removed from their homelands forever.

A proper discussion of the sixteenth-century invasions of Central America must admit and contextualize all these experiences through the lens not only of European expansion but also of Mesoamerican and African patterns of warfare, diplomacy, trade, and empire-building. Just as the Atlantic World cannot be understood without Africa, it is impossible to understand why thousands of central Mexican Nahua joined the Spanish and advised them to travel southwest toward Central America after the fall of Tenochtitlan, or why the Spanish turned toward the Nawat-Pipil Pacific coast after defeating the K’iche’ and being welcomed by the Kaqchikel, without first understanding the geopolitics of the Triple Alliance, the importance of the Soconusco trade corridor, the competition between the Mixtec and Zapotec kingdoms of Oaxaca, the independence of the Mixe-Zoque, and the geographical directions of K’iche’ and Kaqchikel expansion in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. This is not a matter of blaming the victims of European conquest for their own subjugation but of rejecting simplistic narratives that treat Indigenous actors as if they were primitive and easily dominated peoples who acted without any historical precedents or context of their own. The Spanish conquest of Central America was shaped by Mesoamerican politics and history, in ways that the initial waves of invading Europeans and Africans barely understood.

English and Other Imperialisms

Nor were the Spanish the only “European conquistadors,” though rarely is this term used to describe the British, Dutch, French, Scots, Swedish, Danish, and others who almost immediately sailed west to take over Spanish ships loaded with American exports, raid Indigenous territory for slaves and booty, and set up their own colonies.⁴¹ French corsairs were the earliest new arrivals to Central America, sacking Nombre de Dios in Panama in 1537. The Dutch appeared as a major threat in the mid-sixteenth century and the English soon thereafter. While privateers such as Francis Drake, Thomas Cavendish, and Pieter Esaiasz also raided along the Pacific coast, Spanish Central America’s biggest vulnerability during the sixteenth century was the Atlantic. Beginning in the 1630s, however, the range and intensity of attacks by other Europeans expanded considerably, affecting not only major ports cities like Portobelo (Panama), Nicoya (Costa Rica), and Realejo (Nicaragua) on both the Atlantic and the Pacific but also riverine towns deep in the interior such as Granada, Nueva Segovia, and Matagalpa in Nicaragua.⁴²

These other European challengers needed Indigenous and Africans to help them establish a foothold on the mainland of Central America just as much as the Spanish did. Conversely, Indigenous and Africans leveraged competing European interests to their own advantage. When the short-lived English colony of Providence Island was sacked by the Spanish

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in 1641, hundreds of African slaves of the English escaped to the mainland. The result was the independent Afro-indigenous society of Mosquitia, which controlled much of the Honduran and Nicaraguan Atlantic coastline throughout the colonial period. Alliance with the English allowed the Miskitu to launch inland attacks on Spanish-held territory. They also recruited the English to fight on various sides of their own disputes, often between Indigenous and Afro-descended factions. For their part, the English were happy to support the Miskitu's contraband and raids on Spanish territory from the Yucatán to Costa Rica in exchange for permission to colonize the mainland coast. As piracy diminished in the eighteenth century, the English navy and especially the Afro-descended "Zambo Mosquitos" constituted the main military threats to Spanish Central America. Mosquitia and England would maintain their close relationship until the territory's still contested incorporation into Nicaragua in 1894.⁴³

Belize, too, became an English colony. Its shallow shores, complex mangrove ecology, and inhospitable climate discouraged most privateers and joint stock companies from venturing onto the coastline. But the cayes were a different matter. By the mid-seventeenth century, countless islands off the shores of Belize and Honduras bore names suggestive of the frequent though often ephemeral activities of French, Dutch, and especially English actors.⁴⁴ Such incursions opened the door to English logging on the mainland beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century, and intensified after the Spanish ejected the English from the Yucatán in the early eighteenth century. Unable to prevent English loggers from entering the lightly colonized and relatively unguarded territory of Belize, the Spanish resorted to frequent military attacks on "Baymen" camps, legalization and regulation of English logging through treaties, and, when all else failed, local participation in contraband. For Maya and Africans, the Yucatán-Belize frontier became a buffer zone. While inland Maya found refuge in Belize from Spanish colonization and missionization, African slaves of the Spanish and English sought freedom by escaping into the other's domain.⁴⁵

Panama provides a final illustration of how conquest unfolded in areas not fully under Spanish control, and of the ways Indigenous and Africans simultaneously served, manipulated, and suffered because of European ambitions. The ill-fated Company of Scotland landed in the Darién in 1698, only to abandon its settlement Caledonia within two years after the vast majority of its colonists died due to poor planning, malnutrition, and disease. They had joined a crowded field of Europeans attempting to control this potentially valuable passage to the Pacific.⁴⁶ The Spanish held numerous port cities but controlled almost none of the interior. French buccaneers were attempting to colonize the nearby Gulf of Urabá. English pirates attacked regularly. The Tule and other Indigenous in the area of Darién tended to bargain with each group of intruders separately, be they Spanish turtlers from Cartagena, French pirates looking to settle down, African escaped slaves, Catholic friars hoping to evangelize, or Crown bureaucrats. Many Indigenous in the interior interacted with these foreigners infrequently or never, relying on intermediaries—sometimes of mixed heritage—who consolidated their own power in the process.⁴⁷

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These intermediaries were full participants in the Atlantic world: for instance, a Tule named Corbette who engaged with the Scots. Corbette's leadership role as a "go-between" derived from his prior experience with Europeans. He had been taken as a young boy to English Jamaica presumably during a slaving expedition, was rescued (stolen?) from the English by the French, raised on the island of Petit-Goave west of Hispaniola's French-held St. Domingue as a household servant, and later returned to the Darién. For Corbette, as for other Indigenous, contact with Europeans carried significant risks, as is also apparent from the interview with a European seaman who was summoned with him. A slave merchant, the European had met the Scots while searching the San Blas coastline for "Indians" to take back to the French governor of St. Domingue.⁴⁸ European imperial competition may have provided Indigenous Central Americans with opportunities for resistance, trade, and power, but never without danger.

Biological Killers

Spanish and other European conquest in Central America was pursued via invasion and warfare, advantageous alliances, and the violent imposition of long-term labor demands, forced resettlement, and militant Christianity. Ultimately, however, the single biggest killer of Indigenous Central Americans during the extended conquest period was epidemic disease brought over from Europe and Africa, exacerbated by the violence, hunger, and displacement of the era. This, too, can be seen as part of conquest, although the massive demographic collapse of the Indigenous population also frustrated Spanish goals.

Historical demographers have sought ways to accurately estimate the Indigenous population of the Americas and its precipitous drop as a result of early modern globalization since the late 1960s. Acrimonious debates between "high" and "low" counters that dominated into the 1990s have been replaced with a consensus, if not on exact numbers, then on the magnitude of the holocaust.⁴⁹ A great deal of detailed scholarship has confirmed that for Central America as elsewhere, the rate of decline of the Indigenous population in the first 150 years after contact was truly staggering—so much so that combined with losses across the Americas, it impacted the global climate.⁵⁰ Likewise, the false choice between mortality being driven primarily by lack of immunity versus European exploitation has been largely abandoned, in favor of an analysis that acknowledges both of these causes and adds other aggravating factors at the local and regional level such as locust plagues, drought, and crop failures.⁵¹

Reviewing a lifetime of scholarship, W. George Lovell and Christopher Lutz estimate that for the entirety of modern-day Guatemala, by the first quarter of the seventeenth century the population had fallen from around two million to 131,250 Indigenous, or by 93.4 percent.⁵² Linda Newson calculates even more precipitous declines of 95 percent by 1550 in the densely populated areas of central and western parts of Honduras and the Pacific coast of Nicaragua, which suffered intense internecine warfare between the Spanish as well as slaving. The less dense populations of eastern Honduras and central and eastern Nicaragua suffered similar but more protracted loss, reaching their nadir in the late six-

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teenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁵³ Epidemic disease often traveled ahead of the Spanish. The Kaqchikel suffered a new and mortal “sore-sickness,” likely smallpox, in 1520, four years before Pedro de Alvarado’s initial invasion. Likewise, when the Spanish first entered central Costa Rica in 1561 they wrote of recently emptied villages and sparse populations especially in the regions bordering Nicaragua, where repeated waves of death had already been recorded.⁵⁴

The seventeenth-century annals of the Kaqchikel Xajil lineage memorialize the emotional and political toll better than any academic prose:

First, people got sick, coughing, then their noses bled, and yellow urine.
The dying that happened long ago was truly frightening.
That was when the lord Waqaqi’ Ajmaq died.
Little by little a great darkness, a long night befell our fathers, grandfathers,
And us, you, my sons, when the sore-sickness came ...
There was no healer for it. Thus, the people were peeled.
Two twenty-day months after the sickness began was when our fathers, our grandfathers died.
On twelve Kamay died the lord Jun Iq’, your great-grandfather.
Two days later died our father, the rajpop achi B’alam, your grandfather, you, my sons!
They died almost together, your grandfather and his father.
Truly the people stank, were acrid, in death when our father, our grandfather died.
Other people were thrown down the ravine.
Just dogs, just buzzards ate the people.
The death was frightening; your grandfathers were being killed.
They were companions in death: the sons of the lords with their younger siblings, their elder siblings.
Thus we were left in orphanhood,
you, my sons!
We were still little boys when all of us were abandoned.
The pain of being born!⁵⁵

Historians dislike counterfactuals. But it is well worth contemplating how differently the Spanish conquest might have transpired had the Indigenous of Central America not simultaneously been experiencing the most destructive series of pandemics in recorded human history, made even deadlier by warfare, massacre, displacement, slavery, hunger, and despair.

The Spanish *Conquest*? Anticolonialism and Indigenous Survival

And there’s the rub, for despite everything, the Indigenous of Central America almost everywhere resisted, survived, and began to demographically recover by the eighteenth century. At between six and eight million, today’s Maya population spanning Chiapas, Guatemala, Belize, and also the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico—the highest concentration

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of Indigenous in Central America—approximates the pre-European contact population. In Guatemala, organizations such as the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, the Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas de Guatemala, and the Cholsamaj publishing house took root in the midst of the counterinsurgency war of the 1980s, developing institutionalized ways for Maya and other Indigenous to speak out against racism and exclusion and in defense Indigenous culture and lands.⁵⁶ In Chiapas, persistent poverty in the midst of state-sponsored modernization, cultural repression, and the corruption of the Mexican government led to the Zapatista uprising in 1994.⁵⁷ As migration to the United States has increased, vibrant transnational Maya associations have also developed.⁵⁸

Although they have not yet gained significant political or economic power within the nation-state, at the turn of the over five-thousand-year *oxlanh b'aktun* cycle of 2012 the Maya are forging what Victor Montejo has called an intellectual renaissance in prophetic times. "Racism in Guatemala is best understood by examining the problems that originated in the inequality established by the Spanish conquest," he writes. "Current processes of self-representation are enabling the Maya to emerge from under centuries of denigrating images as 'Indians' and second-class citizens. The shared Maya base culture draws upon the values and creative knowledge of the ancestors, and the new and powerful pan-Maya identity arising from the ancient Maya culture can shatter the stereotypes imposed in 1524."⁵⁹

The Maya are some of the most visible Indigenous of Central America today, but they are not alone. The Xinka and Afro-Indigenous Garífuna also survive in Guatemala and Belize, as do the Nawat-Pipil, Ch'orti' Maya, Lenca, and Kakawira in El Salvador; the Lenca, Ch'orti' Maya, Pech, Tawahka, Jicaque, Rama, Paya, Tolupán, Nahua, and Garífuna in Honduras; the Rama, Mayangna, and Miskitu in Nicaragua; the Cabécar, Bri Bri, Boruca, Ngöbe, Chorotega, Huetar, Maleku, and Teribe in Costa Rica; and the Kuna, Ngöbe, Buglé, Emberá, Wounaan, Bokota, and Naso Teribe in Panama, among others. In Honduras, Lenca leaders like Berta Cáceres, Nelson García, and Lesbía Yaneth Urquía—all of whom were assassinated in 2016—have been at the forefront of attempts to stop environmentally destructive dams and mines in Indigenous territories.⁶⁰ Plurinationality, respect for Indigenous law, and the common struggle of Indigenous people in the Americas and internationally have been cornerstones of new approaches to the nation-state.⁶¹ Some groups have secured a degree of autonomy and official recognition of their own territories, for instance, in Panama where groups like the Kuna have been negotiating treaties with the Spanish, Colombian, and Panamanian governments since 1789.⁶² Today, there exist five Indigenous territories in Panama for the Kuna, Embera, and Ngöbe, and similarly, though more weakly protected, twenty-four Indigenous territories in Costa Rica.⁶³

At the same time, the liberal nation-state, industrialization, and global trade, as well as continued Christian missionization by both Catholics and Protestants, have all taken a heavy toll on Central America's Indigenous since 1824. National boundaries artificially divide Indigenous territories. National unity has hinged on assimilationist, state-sponsored programs that celebrate and privilege mixed Spanish and Indigenous *mestizo* culture. National economies have continued to exploit Indigenous land and labor for export-oriented

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agriculture and mining. In El Salvador, by the beginning of the twentieth century the Nawat-Pipil of El Salvador constituted a majority population only in the country's western highlands. After the government massacred thousands in reprisal for a regional peasant uprising in 1932, Nawat-Pipil culture went underground. For generations afterward, survivors avoided being identified by external ethnic markers such as language or dress and were subject to the Spanish-centric, monolingual policies of national education programs and prejudice against being too "Indian" in the workplace. As a result, today fewer than five hundred native speakers of Nawat-Pipil struggle to pass their language on to the youngest generations.⁶⁴ Likewise, in Nicaragua Indigenous communities faced extraordinary pressure from the coffee industry and the Hispanizing impulse of both the liberal and the revolutionary state. Despite significant Indigenous organizing into the mid-twentieth century, by the 1980s Indigenous survival beyond the Mayangna and Miskitu Atlantic coast was widely denied.⁶⁵ In 1992, the Federation of Indigenous Communities of Nicaragua declared:

Not only have we lost our language, but we have also disintegrated as communities through the destruction of our values such as: communal unity, solidarity, respect for the elders as community authorities, the transcendental role of the woman ... Because of our resistance we have not disappeared, they wanted to assimilate (absorb) us so that we would think like the colonizers ... so that we would reject our culture and our Indigenous consciousness would be erased. At the beginning of this century, many Indigenous communities existed in the Pacific, Central, and Northern regions [of Nicaragua], many of which have disappeared, others have been assimilated into the rest of society. WE ARE HERE, HOLDING ON-TO OUR ROOTS TO SURVIVE AGAINST THIS POLICY OF CULTURAL ETHNOCIDE.⁶⁶

The term "conquest" is therefore controversial. On the one hand, it succinctly marks a critical moment in which everything changed for Central America's Indigenous peoples and captures a violence that was and remains ongoing. On the other hand, the mythification of the Spanish conquest has long implied Indigenous Central Americans' total and permanent subjugation, successful Christian conversion and Hispanization, and relegation to a distant past: death by many generations of Eurocentric history. Academic archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists—whose scholarship over the centuries has helped build the edifice, unwittingly or not—now face the difficulty of uprooting what Matthew Restall calls the "myth of Native desolation."⁶⁷ The notion that Indigenous Central Americans all died or "end[ed] their culture" is pervasive.⁶⁸ "Conquest" stands for defeat, and the persistent use of the term cannot help but reinforce this idea. "At an ideological level, colonialism is manifested through a discourse that idealizes the sixteenth-century invader and justifies his aggression, a discourse that rationalizes the extinction of Maya culture and languages," writes Luis Enrique Sam Colop. "1 B'aqtun, 5 K'atuns, and 7 Tuns (500 solar years) after the beginning of European expansion on this continent, colonialism continues in force. It is part of the dominant ideology: 'We are the conquista-

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dors.”⁶⁹ In a bid to change the discourse, Colop, Demetro Cojtí Cuxil, and other Indigenous academics have purposefully replaced the term “conquest” with “invasion.”

Conclusion

Or perhaps we should speak of invasions in the plural. By stepping slightly to the side of the weighty myths of the Spanish conquest, the term “invasions” directs us away from the tendency, after hundreds of years of repetition, to oversimplify this important series of events. It invites us to speak of particular expeditions rather than collapsing many different military encounters into one. It does not imply success in every instance. It leaves more space for discussing the great complexity of actors that made Spanish efforts viable. It also avoids conflating the sixteenth century with the present. The earliest invasions of Central America brought the region’s Indigenous people into contact with the rest of the globe for the first time, with truly dire consequences. The conquistadors’ claims of success were often exaggerated, but the long-term effects were all too real. In order to understand how the past has led to the present, and also to build up the historiography of Central America without artificially dividing the pre- from the post-Columbian, we must first understand the many experiences of sixteenth-century invasion and encounter on their own terms. We also need to build up the historical record beyond the centers of colonial-administrative and academic power reflected in the Guatemalan, Maya-centric, and English-language bent of this article. There is still much to discover about the earliest global invasions of Indigenous Central America, in archival corners, local traditions and knowledge, and archaeological sites that have hardly been explored.

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) Throughout this article I use the names of modern nations that did not exist during the conquest period in order to orient the reader geographically. Similarly, I label groups of people using commonly accepted names that are often based on linguistics, but which mask a great deal of diversity and do not necessarily reflect the way that Indigenous people have organized their societies or thought about their identities, in either the past or the present.

(2.) Janine Gasco, "The Politics of Xoconochco," in *The Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, edited by Michael Ernest Smith and Frances Berdan, 50–54 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003); Carlos Navarrete, "Elementos arqueológicos de mexicanización en las tierras altas mayas," in *Temas mesoamericanas*, edited by Sonia Lombardo and Enrique Nalda, 347–348 (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1996); Michel Oudijk and Matthew Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," in *Indian Conquistadors: Mesoamerican Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel Oudijk, 28–64 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

(3.) Joseph Whitecotton, *Zapotec Elite Ethnohistory: Pictorial Genealogies of Eastern Oaxaca* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, 1990); Michel Oudijk, *Historiography of the Benizaa: The Postclassic and Early Colonial Periods (1000-1600 A.D.)* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Research School CNWS, 2000); Alonso Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier, "Cien años de guerras mixas: territorialidades prehispáni-

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cas, expansión burocrática y zapotequización en el istmo de Tehuantepec durante el siglo xvi," *Historia Mexicana* 57, no. 2 (2016): 347.

(4.) Irma Otzoy, "Tekum Umam: From Nationalism to Maya Resistance" (PhD diss., University of California-Davis, 1999); Ruud van Akkeren, *La visión indígena de la conquista* (Guatemala: Serviprensa, 2007), 55-74. Luis Enrique Sam Colop published a series of columns on Tekum in the Guatemalan newspaper *Prensa Libre*, available at the digital archive *Ucha'xik*. <https://uchaxik.wordpress.com/?s=tekum>.

(5.) Jorge Luján Muñoz and Horacio Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," in *Historia General de Guatemala*, Vol. II (Guatemala City: Asociación de Amigos del País/Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarrollo, 1994), 50-55; Judith Maxwell and Robert M. Hill, eds., *Kaqchikel Chronicles: The Definitive Edition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 258-269.

(6.) Wendy Kramer, *Encomienda Politics in Early Colonial Guatemala, 1524-1544: Dividing the Spoils* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), ch. 2; Adrian Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado, Conquistador de México y Guatemala* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952), 107-127.

(7.) Wendy Kramer and Jorge Luján Muñoz, eds., *Libro Segundo del Cabildo de la çibdad de Santiago de la provinçia de Guatemala començado a XXVII de mayo de MDXXX años* (Ciudad de Guatemala: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 2018); W. George Lovell and Christopher Lutz, *Strange Lands and Different Peoples: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), provide an excellent overview of the earliest campaigns throughout Guatemala, including the intentional burning of Mam settlements near Huehuetenango in 1530. One of these settlements, Chiantla Viejo, was briefly reoccupied and has been a significant site of religious ritual into the present day; see Victor Castillo, *Informe Proyecto Chiantla Viejo* (Ciudad de Guatemala: 2018). https://www.academia.edu/36846374/Informe_Proyecto_Chiantla_Viejo.

(8.) Francis Polo Sifontes, *Los Cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala* (Ciudad de Guatemala: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1986).

(9.) Kramer, *Encomienda Politics*, 63-68; Florine Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors: The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan: A Nahuatl Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008).

(10.) Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado*, 238.

(11.) Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo: Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad colonial guatemalteca* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011), 43-45.

(12.) Luis Enrique Sam Colop, "La patria de ellos," *Prensa Libre*, September 15, 2004, archived at <https://uchaxik.wordpress.com/2004/09/15/la-patria-de-ellos/>.

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(13.) Lovell and Lutz, *Strange Lands*, 251; W. George Lovell and Christopher Lutz, "Unsung Heroes: Cahí Ymox, Belehé Qat, and Kaqchikel Resistance to the Spanish Invasion of Guatemala, 1524–1540," in *Faces of Resistance: Maya Heroes, Power, and Identity*, edited by S. Ashley Kistler, 37, 43 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018).

(14.) Kay Warren, "Reading History as Resistance: Maya Public Intellectuals in Guatemala," in *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, Edward Fischer and R. McKenna Brown, 96–98 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Garrett W. Cook, *Renewing the World: Expressive Culture in a Highland Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 118–141; Matthew Krystal, *Indigenous Dance and Dancing Indian: Contested Representation in the Global Era* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012), 73–81; Irma Otzoy, "Tecún Uman and the Conquest Dance," in *The Guatemala Reader*, edited by Greg Grandin, Deborah Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby, 51–61 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun: Mesoamerican Cosmogony and the Conquest of Guatemala," *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 4: 693–719; Victoria Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Robert Hill, *Colonial Cakchikeles: Highland Maya Adaptations to Spanish Rule, 1600–1700* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 1–9.

(15.) Elizabeth Graham, *Maya Christians and Their Churches in Sixteenth-Century Belize* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 122; Victor Bulmer-Thomas and Barbara Bulmer-Thomas, "The Origins of the Belize Settlement," *TEMPUS Revista en Historia General* 4 (2016): 137–160; Matthew Restall, "Creating 'Belize': The Mapping and Naming History of a Liminal Locale," *Terrae Incognitae* 51 (2018): 5–35.

(16.) María del Carmen Mena García, *El oro de Darién: Entradas y cabalgadas en la conquista de Tierra Firme (1509-1526)* (Madrid: Consejo superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2011).

(17.) Linda Newson, *The Cost of Conquest: Indian Decline in Honduras Under Spanish Rule* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986); Jorge Díaz Ceballos, "New World Civitas, Contested Jurisdictions, and Inter-Cultural Conversation in the Construction of the Spanish Monarchy," *Colonial Latin American Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 30–51.

(18.) Robert S. Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of Honduras, 1502–1550* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966)

(19.) Antonio Herrera de Tordesillas, *Descripción de las Islas y Tierra Firme de el Mar Oceano que llaman Indias Occidentales* (Madrid: Nicolás Rodríguez Franco, 1730), 27; Rodolfo Pastor, *Historia mínima de centroamérica* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2011), 81.

(20.) Newson, *Cost of Conquest*, 96–97.

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(21.) Murdo MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520–1720* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Noa Corcoran-Tadd and Guido Pezzarossi, “Between the South Sea and the Mountainous Ridges: Biopolitical Assemblages in the Spanish Colonial Americas,” in *Post-medieval Archaeology* 52, no. 1 (2018): 86–89.

(22.) For example, in Chiapas: see Tadashi Obara-Saeki and Juan Pedro Viqueira Alban, *El arte de contar tributos: Provincia de Chiapas, 1560–1821* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2017), 42–48.

(23.) Gudrun Lenkersdorf, *Genésis Histórica de Chiapas, 1522–1523: El conflicto entre Portocarerro y Mazariegos* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), esp. 144–148; Kris Lane, *Colour of Paradise: The Emerald in the Age of Gunpowder Empires* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); John W. Hopes and Oscar M. Fonseca Z., “Goldwork and Chibchan Identity: Endogenous Change and Diffuse Unity in the Isthmo-Colombian Area,” in *Gold and Power in Ancient Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia*, edited by Jeffrey Quilter and John Hoopes (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003); Hall and Pérez Brignoli, *Historial Atlas of Central America*, 124–125.

(24.) Wendy Kramer, *El español que exploró California: Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo (c. 1497–1543), De Palma del Río a Guatemala* (Córdoba, Spain: Diputación de Córdoba, 2018), 47–48, 89–94; Kramer, *Encomienda Politics*, 217–220; Barros, “Cien años de guerras mixas.”

(25.) Newson, *Cost of Conquest*, 111–114.

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(63.) “Diagnóstico de la Población Indígena en Panamá con base en los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010,” Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo, 2010, http://www.contraloria.gob.pa/inec/archivos/P6571INDIGENA_FINAL_FINAL.pdf; “X Censo de Población y VI de Vivienda 2011, Territorios indígenas: Principales indicadores demográficos y socioeconómicos” (San José, Costa Rica: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2011), https://www.uned.ac.cr/extension/images/ifcmdl/02._Censo_2011._Territorios_Indigenas.pdf;

(64.) Aldo Lauria-Santiago and Jeffrey Gould, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Jorge Lemus, “Un modelo de revitalización lingüística: el caso de náhuat/pipil de El Salvador,” *Identità delle Comunità Indigene del Centro America, Messico e Caraibi: aspetti culturali e antropologici*, edited by Antonio Luigi Palmisano, 127–149 (Rome: IILA, 2010).

(65.) Jeffrey Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

(66.) Jeffrey Gould, *El mito de “la Nicaragua mestiza” y la resistencia indígena, 1880–1980* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1997), 17. Capitalized section in the original: “No sólo hemos perdido nuestra lengua, sino que nos hemos desintegrado como comunidades a través de la destrucción de nuestros valores, tales como: la unidad comunicacional, la solidaridad, el respeto a los ancianos como autoridades comunales, el trascendental papel de la mujer ... Debido a nuestra resistencia no hemos desaparecido, nos quisieron asimilar (absorber) para que pensáramos igual que los colonizadores ... para que rechazáramos nuestra cultura y se borrara nuestra conciencia indígena. A comienzos del presente siglo, existía en la Región Pacífico, Central y Norte una cantidad de comunidades indígenas, muchas de ellas han desaparecido, otras se han asimilado al resto de la sociedad. NOSOTROS ESTAMOS AQUI AFERRANDONOS A NUESTRAS RAICES PARA SOBREVIVIR CONTRA TODA ESA POLITICA DE ETNOCIDIO CULTURAL.”

(67.) Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 6.

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(69.) Luis Enrique Sam Colop, “The Discourse of Concealment and 1992,” in *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, edited by Edward Fischer and R. McKenna Brown, 105, 112 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

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