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From Allies to Adversaries:

The Kaqchikel Dilemma during the Conquest of Guatemala

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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In a striking reversal that reshaped the conquest narrative of Guatemala, the Kaqchikel Maya, once formidable allies of the Spanish conquistadors, ignited a resistance that thwarted colonial ambitions for several years. Residing in the southern highlands from their capital of Iximche', the Kaqchikels initially joined forces with Pedro de Alvarado in 1524 to subdue other Indigenous polities, including their neighbors like the K'iche's, Tz'utujils, and Pipils. While the pact between the two sides proved successful, it disintegrated within mere months, marking the beginning of a prolonged resistance that significantly delayed Spanish conquest and colonization efforts. This thesis delves into the pivotal transition of the Kaqchikels from allies to adversaries, highlighting the strategic maneuvers that underpinned their alliance and subsequent resistance with and against the Spaniards. Furthermore, it critically examines the conduct and perceptions

of warfare during this dilemma. By intertwining narratives of strategy, resistance, and ideological warfare while employing Indigenous and Spanish sources, this study contributes to the nuanced reevaluation of the conquest of Guatemala, aligning with the revisionary New Conquest History.

The thesis of Cesar Jeovani Ovando is approved.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction....1

1.2 Definition of the Research Problem....5

1.3 Literature Review....8

1.4 Conflicting Perspectives....15

1.5 Methods....18

CHAPTER 2. BURNED BRIDGES

2.1 Chapter Introduction: The Face of Resistance....21

2.2 Duo Leaders in a Precarious Time....27

2.3 The Alliance....31

2.4 The Point of No Return....36

2.5 Casting the Kaqchikel Dilemma....45

2.6 The Resistance....53

2.7 More Resistance?....66

2.8 Chapter Conclusion: Reiterating the Face of Resistance....69

CHAPTER 3. CONCLUSION....72

BIBLIOGRAPHY....74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 *Kislak Conquest of Mexico Series*, 7th Painting. 10

Figure 1.2 “Quetzaltenāco” from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. 12

Figure 1.3 “Tecpan atitlan” from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. 13

Figure 1.4 “Quahtemallā” from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. 13

Figure 1.5 The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*. 14

Figure 2.1 “The Story of Tecun Uman.” 25

Figure 2.2 *Sitio Arqueológico* Iximché 28

Figure 2.3 Pedro de Alvarado. 38

Figure 2.4 Tonatiuh. 38

Figure 2.5 Stake Horse Pit; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan*. 51

Figure 2.6 Impact of the Staked Horse Pits; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan* 52

Figure 2.7 Staked Horse Pit as a barricade (center); *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan.* 52

Figure 2.8 Olintepeque and Jorge de Alvarado; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan*. 62

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

In the mountainous region of southern Guatemala in the year 1509, the Kaqchikel Maya ruling from their capital, Iximche', welcomed the "Yaki', those of Culhuacan," who presented themselves as "ambassadors of the lord Moctezuma," ruler of the Mexica Empire.[1] The presence of these emissaries was not hostile. Instead, this encounter between the two polities was diplomatic, given the commercial ties between the Mexica capital of Tenochtitlan and the major Maya capital cities. However, their presence in high numbers signaled a display of the Mexica's far-reaching influence, a subtle reminder of their expanding empire.[2] For the Kaqchikels and their neighbors, including their archrivals, the K'iche's, the Mexica's eastward expansion posed little immediate threat, buffered as they were by a patchwork of small-city states. Nonetheless, this balance of power was irrevocably disrupted a decade later by the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, whose arrival would not only challenge the Mexica's autonomy, but the Maya's too and reshape the sociopolitical landscape in Mesoamerica.

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[1] Judith M. Maxwell and Robert M. Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles: The Definitive Edition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 236-37; Simón C. Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá: edición facsimilar del manuscrito original* (Guatemala: Comisíon Interuniversitaria Guatemalateca de Conmemoración del Quinto Centenario del Descubrimiento de América, 1999), 183; and Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 112-113. Otzoy's precise words are "Fue hasta entonces que nosotros vimos a los yaki de Kuluwakan, en gran número vinieron los yaki en aquel tiempo."

[2] Matthew Restall and Florine Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala: Spanish, Nahua, and Maya Accounts of the Conquest Wars* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 1. The authors' introductory chapter led me to the Kaqchikel-Mexica meeting, which I later encountered in the *Memorial de Sololá*.

The Maya faced a new reality following the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521. Hernando Cortés, the Spanish conqueror of the Mexica Empire, attempted to contact the Kaqchikel and K'iche' kingdoms as word had reached him of "rich and strange lands with many very different peoples."[3] Cortés arranged for two Spaniards with some "natives of the city of Temixtitan [Tenochtitlan] and others from the province of Soconusco" to meet with these said members of the "cities called Uclaclán [Utatlán] and Guatemala [Iximche']."[4] This first encounter informed the two Maya kingdoms of the Mexica's downfall. Interestingly, the news of the Mexica's fate did not alarm either the Kaqchikels or K'iche's, despite previous warnings from Moctezuma about well-armed foreigners entering Mexica territory.[5] Opting to engage further, the lords of the Kaqchikels and K'iche's dispatched more emissaries to Mexico in Tuxpán, where Cortés reported in a letter to King Charles V that "some one hundred natives of those cities [Utatlán and Iximche'] were sent by their lords to offer themselves as subjects and vassals of Your Caesarean Majesty."[6] These messengers returned to their respective capitals with gifts and Cortés's assurance that "if they remained true to their promise they would be very well treated and honored," on behalf of the Spanish crown.[7]

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[3] Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, trans., ed., and intro. Anthony Pagden, and intro. essay J. H. Elliot (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 316.

[4] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 300. Utatlán was the capital of the K'iche' kingdom. Spanish accounts often refer to the Kaqchikel capital of Iximche' as "Guatemala," a Nahuatl placename. Throughout the conquest, conquered cities and territories with Maya placenames were given Nahuatl placenames.

[5] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala, 3*; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiqueles*, 18. The arrival of the Mexica ambassadors at Iximche' in 1509 likely served as a signal to the Kaqchikel leaders about Moctezuma's concerns regarding the impending arrival of the Spaniards.

[6] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 300.

[7] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 300.

Contentions emerged regarding the veracity of the Tuxpán meeting between Cortés and the two Maya kingdoms. Scholars like Jorge Luján Muñoz and Horacio Cabezas Carcache (1994) find it challenging to accept Cortés's claims alone since no major Indigenous sources like the K'iche's *Popol Wuj* or the Kaqchikel's *Memorial de Sololá* ever mention it.[8] J. Daniel Contreras (2004) contributes to this doubt, arguing for the improbability of both the Kaqchikels and K'iche's jointly approaching Cortés due to their long-standing rivalry.[9] Francis Polo Sifontes (2005), on the other hand, acknowledges only certain aspects of what Cortés had said, suggesting that only the Kaqchikels participated in the encounter.[10] Whether this meeting between the Spaniards and Mayas happened or not, Cortés ascertained that despite promises made by the representatives of the two Maya kingdoms, they "have not maintained that goodwill" by harassing his Indigenous Mexican allies in Soconusco.[11] According to Polo Sifontes, the Kaqchikels denied involvement in these hostilities and offered their apologies for any

[8] Jorge Luján Muñoz and Horacio Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," in *Historia general de Guatemala Tomo II: Desde la Conquista hasta 1700*, ed. Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar (Guatemala: Asociación de Amigos del País, Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarollo, 1994), 50. Their precise words are "Es difícil aceptar la veracidad de la embajadas indígenas ante Cortés, pues solo se tiene como referencia la carta de relación de éste y la fuentes españoles posteriors que no hacen sino repetirla." They continue by adding that "Resultado significativo que nada se diga al respect en las crónicas indígenas 'mayores,' especialmente el *Popol Vuh* y el *Memorial de Sololá*." In modern K'iche' orthography, the word book "Wuj" is spelled with a "w" and "j" not "v" and "h," which is commonly found in current publications as the Popol Vuh.

[9] J. Daniel Contreras R., "Sobre la Fundación de Santiago de Guatemala y la rebelión de los kaqchikeles," in *El Memorial de Sololá y los inicios de la colonización española en Guatemala*, ed. J. Daniel Contreras R., and Jorge Luján Muñoz (Guatemala: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, 2004), 51-52. His precise words are "parece difícil aceptar que hubieran ido juntos en ella k'iche's y kaqchikeles, que eran enemigos."

[10] Francis Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Editorial Cultura, 2005), 64. His precise words are "tenemos buenas razones para creer que fueron solo cakchiqueles y no quichés los que tomaron parte en esa visita."

[11] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 300.

misunderstanding, thus inadvertently casting blame on the K'iche'.[12] Since it was unclear whether the Kaqchikels or K'iche's were responsible for the hostilities, Cortés dispatched his lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado, to Soconusco to determine the source of the aggression.

Reports from Soconusco indicate that the Spaniards and Kaqchikels reencountered each other, with Alvarado receiving gestures of allegiance. These deeds included the support of "five thousand men" and various gifts.[13] However, such claims might be overstated, given that the Kaqchikel population experienced a steep decline due to the outbreak of a disease, as corroborated by the *Memorial de Sololá*.[14] W. George Lovell, Christopher H. Lutz, and Wendy Kramer (2020) ponder the rationale behind the appeasement efforts of the Kaqchikels, questioning whether their tributes were intended to persuade the Spaniards to accept their payment and leave Guatemala in peace, or to secure an alliance with them against their neighbors like the K'iche's and other Indigenous polities. The latter seems more likely given the eventual alliance with Alvarado in the early stages of the conquest. Nevertheless, Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer caution that any expectation by the Kaqchikels that Alvarado would be satisfied with their offerings, given his notorious greed and volatile behavior, would represent a severe misjudgment.[15] Indeed, Alvarado's interests in Guatemala intensified after he was greatly

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[12] Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*, 47. His precise words are "se apresuran a enviar disculpas ante los españoles, diciendo que no eran ellos los que hostilizaban a los de Soconusco, sino otros."
[13] Adrián Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado: Conquistador de México y Guatemala* (Guatemala: CENALTEX, 1986), 56. Recinos references the chronicler Fransisco Lópes de Gómara, who in turn bases his account on earlier writings by Peter Martyr d'Anghiera to support his claim that the Kaqchikels performed this specific gesture.

[14] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 246-247; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 184; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 115-116. The Kaqchikel account describes the outbreak of diseases, which is interpreted differently by various scholars. Maxwell and Hill refer to it as "sore sickness," Otzoy calls it "peste de granos" (literally, "plague of sores"), and Recinos and Goetz simply term it "plague."

[15] W. George Lovell, Christopher H. Lutz, and Wendy Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land: Pedro de Alvarado and the Conquest of Guatemala, 1524-1541* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 6. Most of the content in *Strike Fear in the* Land (2020) was derived from the first part of *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* (2013) written by

impressed by the wealth he had acquired. This prompted him to return to Tenochtitlan with haste to make final preparations before launching his armed campaign in the highlands.

1.2 Definition of the Research Problem

The conquest of Guatemala was a brutal and prolonged affair for the Spaniards marked by complex and daunting circumstances. A significant factor in this complexity was the Spaniards' encounter with a diverse array of politically and ethnically distinct Maya kingdoms, each governing its domain and competing against neighboring polities.[16] Unlike in Mexico, where the Mexica dominated and subjugated numerous city-states across the central valleys, the lack of a singular political entity in Guatemala meant that the Spaniards had to undertake multiple and separate military campaigns, further extending the duration of the conquest. While Alvarado had to face multiple groups, this was not a problem for him. According to Rudd Van Akkeren (2007), Alvarado was adept at employing the "divide and conquer" strategy, leveraging the regional tensions among the Maya groups in the highlands as strategic advantages.[17] Matthew Restall (2021) can attest to this statement as he highlights native disunity as a crucial element in the Spanish military successes during this period.[18] Florine Asselbergs (2004) echoes similar

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Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer with the addition of William R. Swezey. Following Swezey's death, the other authors revised and expanded this section into the new book, incorporating updated materials. For citation purposes, I will refer to this latest publication. I first learned the names and works of Jorge Luján Muñoz, Horacio Cabezas Carcache, J. Daniel Contreras R., and Francis Polo Sifontes, as well as the debate of the Tuxpán meeting in these books.

[16] W. George Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 55.

[17] Rudd Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista* (Guatemala: Serviprensa, 2007), 42-43. His precise words are "Ya había aprendido en la práctica la política de 'divide y vencerás.' He continues by adding that "Divide y vencerás fue la estrategia de los españoles, y quizás haya sido el punto clave de su victoria. La estrategia Española funcionó porque siempre hubo pubelos mesoamericanos dispuestos a aliarse con los invasores."

[18] Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 140-144. Restall posits that in addition to native disunity, other significant factors contributed to the Spaniards' successes in

sentiments, claiming that the Spaniards exploited local rivalries for reconnaissance and alliance-building.[19] Thus, Alvarado capitalized on this fragmentation by forming alliances, particularly with the Kaqchikels, as the early campaign in 1524 kicked off in K'iche' territory.

The first potential mention of Kaqchikel cooperation with the Spaniards can be found in one of Alvarado's letters to Cortés, written after the campaign against the K'iche's and the downfall of their capital, K'umarkaj, subsequently renamed Utatlán. In the letter, Alvarado claimed, "in order to hunt out these people [the K'iche'], I sent to the city of Guatemala [Iximche']" to "send me some warriors, doing this in order to ascertain their disposition, and they were well disposed and said it would be a pleasure."[20] The *Memorial de Sololá* further corroborates this, detailing Alvarado's order for the Kaqchikel lords to dispatch soldiers to "come here to [Utatlán] to kill the K'iche' men."[21] Bernal Díaz del Castillo also confirms this compliance as he notes how "the people of Guatemala [Iximche'] sent them [the warriors] to him [Alvarado] with their captains."[22] This cooperation likely marked the beginning of the

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the Americas. These include the outbreak of European diseases and the introduction of advanced European technology, specifically steel weapons. It is important to note other previous scholars made the same claims before Restall.

[19] Florine Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors: The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, A Nahua Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 95.

[20] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 33; and Pedro de Alvarado and Sedley J. Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524* (New York: The Cortes Society, 1924), 63. Pedro de Alvarado wrote four letters to Hernán Cortés, dispatched from Tehuantepec, Soconusco, Utatlán, and Iximche', respectively. Unfortunately, only the third and fourth letters are available, as the first two have been lost. The third letter from Utatlán details Alvarado's campaign against the K'iche' and specifically mentions the Kaqchikel capital later.

[21] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 105; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 258-259; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 120-121. Oztoy's precise words are "Pronto un mensajero de Tunatiw vino a los reyes [kaqchikeles], solicitando soldados: "Que vengan los guerreros de los Ajpop Sotz'il y Ajpop Xajil a la mantanza de la gente k'iche'."

[22] Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, ed. and intro. Davíd Carrasco (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 338; Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 105; and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524,* 111 (Appendix II translated by Alred P. Maudslay). Both

Kaqchikel-Spanish alliance. However, no definitive sources precisely pinpoint when this pact was formally established. Initially, this alliance proved to be successful, but it was short-lived. Alvarado's infamous greed and erratic behavior significantly deteriorated his ties with the Kaqchikels, turning their once-allied stance with the Spaniards into a strategic military resistance that profoundly reshaped the conquest narrative.

This thesis explores the pivotal shift in the dynamics between the Kaqchikels and the Spaniards during the sixteenth-century conquest campaigns of Guatemala. Specifically, the research focuses on the transformation of the Kaqchikels from allies to adversaries over a tumultuous period, which saw a brief six-month alliance dissolve into a strategic military resistance that thwarted colonial ambitions for six years. The following chapter, "Burned Bridges," delves into the interactions between these two groups, emphasizing the dual leadership of the Kaqchikel lords, Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at. This chapter not only examines the potential rationale behind the alliance and the Kaqchikels' response to their involvement with the Spaniards but also dissects the crucial transition to resistance. It identifies the catalyst for this shift and assesses the implications for Spanish objectives, closely observing the resistance movement itself and Kaqchikel warfare. Central to understanding this period is recognizing Pedro de Alvarado's significant impact. His decision-making authority profoundly influenced the outcomes of these confrontations. While Alvarado's methods aligned with broader colonial ideologies like "pacification", they were uniquely his own, demonstrating a distinctive blend of brutality and strategy. Therefore, by integrating narratives of strategy, resistance, and ideological

sources include excerpts from Bernal Díaz's account of the conquest of Guatemala, which obviates the need for me to access his entire manuscript.

warfare and by using Indigenous and Spanish sources, this study contributes to a significant re-evaluation of the conquest of Guatemala, aligning with the revisionary New Conquest History.

1.3 Literature Review

In the last few decades Mesoamerican conquest studies have reconsidered the roles and contributions of Indigenous allies. This historiographic shift is pivotal as it emphasizes Indigenous agency, countering the prevailing narrative of a swift Iberian triumph. Many scholars who have written on Indigenous allies sought to demystify Eurocentric fallacies, notably challenging the misconception that a small band of Spaniards solely achieved the conquest despite being vastly outnumbered by their enemies.[23] Scholars, instead, highlighted the substantial contributions of Indigenous allies in terms of their large numbers and military support. However, recent literature has introduced discussions on identity, revealing conflicting perspectives pertinent to this thesis.

Traditionally, the Spanish-Indigenous alliance was not perceived as a partnership, as historical depictions often emphasized Spanish leadership in the campaigns. Michel R. Oudijk and Matthew Restall (2007) illustrate this point by referencing the seventh painting of the Kislak Conquest of Mexico series, which prominently features Spanish figures like Cortés and Alvarado while marginalizing the presence of Indigenous allies and enslaved African soldiers (Figure 1.1).[24] However, a significant paradigm shift occurred as scholars recognized Indigenous-authored sources appropriating the term *conquistador* to describe themselves, portraying the

[23] Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 45.

[24] Michel R. Oudijk and Matthew Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, ed. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 28-29.

conquest as a collaborative effort with the Spaniards.[25] Scholars such as Restall and Oudijk (across Mexico and Mesoamerica as a whole), Laura E. Matthew, Florine Asselbergs, and Rudd Van Akkeren (in Guatemala), and John F. Chuchiak (in Yucatán) stressed the close and wholehearted cooperation with the Spanish.[26] Consequently, these scholars have redefined the roles of Indigenous allies, arguing that they too were conquistadors. This perspective suggests that Indigenous peoples considered themselves equals to the Spaniards, actively participating in the conquest to advance their political and economic interests by invading and subduing rival factions. As a result, there has been a growing advocacy for the designation of *indios conquistadores* (Indian conquerors).[27]

[25] Susan Schroeder, "Introduction: The Genre of Conquest Studies," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, ed. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 13-14, and 19-20.

[26] The works of Oudijk, Restall, Matthew, Asselbergs and Chuchiak are featured in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica* (2007), a collection of essays that reorients the study of the conquest in the Americas by emphasizing Indigenous agency. Additionally, Matthew, Asselbergs, and Van Akkeren have conducted further research that continues to highlight the roles of Indigenous allies.

[27] Schroeder, "Introduction: The Genre of Conquest Studies," 14.

Figure 1.1 *Kislak Conquest of Mexico Series*, 7th Painting.[28]
Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Guatemala, specifically the highlands, has been the subject of numerous scholarly discussions advocating for the recognition of *indios conquistadores*. In recent years, there has been a particular focus on analyses by scholars emphasizing Indigenous communities from Mexico that journeyed to Guatemala and participated in the conquest alongside Pedro de Alvarado and his entourage. Among these scholars, Laura E. Matthew (2007 and 2012) stands out for her comprehensive examination of this designation.[29] Her research primarily centers on

[28] Beyond figures like Cortés and Alvarado, the title "Conquista de México Por Cortés" of this painting also marginalizes the contributions of Indigenous allies and African soldiers.

[29] Laura E. Matthew, *Memories of Conquest: Becoming Mexicano in Colonial Guatemala* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Laura E. Matthew, "Whose Conquest? Nahua, Zapoteca, and Mixteca Allies in the Conquest of Central America," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, ed. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

Indigenous Mexican allies, including Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs, who settled in a highland town known as Ciudad Vieja following the conquest. She meticulously examines archival materials such as *probanzas* and other colonial records. One noteworthy source includes testimonies like that of Francisco Oçelote, a young Tlaxcalteca warrior who accompanied Alvarado to Guatemala and later testified in a 1564 court hearing. According to the testimony, the support of Tlaxcaltecas and other Indigenous allies was crucial, without which the Spanish conquest campaigns in the highlands would have faced significant challenges.[30] Through sources like these, Matthew demonstrates how these allies and their descendants vigorously defended their status as conquistadors and preserved this identity throughout the colonial period.

Scholars have also turned to sources beyond traditional alphabetical texts to support the recognition of *indios conquistadores*. Pictorial sources, such as Nahua *lienzos*, have been instrumental in illuminating the roles of Indigenous allies. Notably, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Figure 1.1) (Figure 1.2) (Figure 1.3) and the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* (Figure 1.4). are among the most recognized that vividly depict the conquest of Guatemala. Restall (2010) argues that these sources are "more significant than textual accounts in understanding the history of Nahuas and their contributions to the conquest."[31] Florine Asselbergs (2004 and 2007), who has thoroughly interpreted these *lienzos*, supports Restall's viewpoint, recognizing Indigenous allies

[30] Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 80, 88, and 90; and Matthew, "Whose Conquest?," 106-107. Oçelote's 1564 testimony can be found under the collection of Nahua sources provided in Restall and Asselberg's *Invading Guatemala* and in the appendix of Asselbergs's *Conquered Conquistadors*.

[31] Matthew Restall, "Perspectivas indígenas de la conquista de Guatemala: descrifrando relatos escritos por los nahuas y mayas." *Mesoamérica* 31, no. 52 (2010): 191. His precise words are "los relatos pictográficos y cartográficos de los nahuas son más importantes que los relatos textuales para la historia de los papeles que desempeñaron los nahuas en la conquista de Guatemala."

as conquistadors in her work.[32] Like Restall, Asselbergs asserts that the *lienzos* reflected the Nahuas' perspective on historical events, presenting this view in a format that was culturally familiar, comfortable, and fully utilized by the Nahuas.[33] Ultimately, these *lienzos* were crafted to solidify the status of Indigenous allies as conquistadors while preserving their distinct ethnic and cultural identities.

Figure 1.2 "Quetzaltenāco" from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.[34]
Image from Mesolore.

[32] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*; and Florine G. L. Asselbergs, "The Conquest in Images: Stories of Tlaxcalteca and Quauhquecholteca Conquistadors," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, ed. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

[33] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 11; and Asselbergs, "The Conquest in Images," 65.

[34] The campaign against the K'iche' at Quetzaltenango.

Figure 1.3 “Tecpan atitlan” from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.[35]
Image from Mesolore.

Figure 1.4“Quahtemallā” from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.[36]
Image from Mesolore.

[35] The campaign against the Tz'utujil Maya at Atitlán.

[36] The resistance by the Kaqchikels at Iximche’.

Figure 1.5 The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*.[37]
Image from the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin.

Asselbergs and other scholars like Laura Matthew and Rudd Van Akkeren, have uncovered the methods used by the Tlaxcalteca and Quauhquecholteca authors of these *lienzos* to represent themselves as conquistadors. An effective strategy was their use of the Habsburg Coat of Arms to elevate their status. Tlaxcaltecas embraced the symbol directly, while the Quauhquecholtecas adapted it in a syncretic fashion, resonating with Spanish and Indigenous

[37] The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, a Nahua painting on a cotton cloth created by the Quauhquecholteca of Central Mexico, records the story of their conquest and settlement of Guatemala in alliance with the Spaniards between 1527-1530. It is not only the first map of Guatemala but also the only firsthand Indigenous account of the conquest, presenting a unique perspective on certain events.

audiences, as illustrated in the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*.[38] Another intriguing tactic highlighted by these scholars involved the Tlaxcaltecas and Quauhquecholtecas, contrasting their depictions with those of Maya warriors and aligning themselves with their Spanish counterparts. For instance, in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, Tlaxcalteca warriors portrayed themselves in full war regalia while depicting their enemies as nearly naked. The Quauhquecholtecas, on the other hand, adopted features that mirrored the Spaniards, such as lighter skin tones and European-style weaponry, with some figures even brandishing European-steel swords.[39] The visual strategies have not only allowed Asselbergs, Matthew, and van Akkeren to illustrate how Indigenous allies and their descendants celebrated their role as equal partners with the Spaniards, but also served as a crucial testament to their recognition as *indios conquistadores*, thereby underscoring the importance of these historical representations.

1.4 Conflicting Perspectives

The examination of *indios conquistadores* has been transformative, however, it has also generated conflicting perspectives relevant to this thesis. Specifically, I allude to the conundrum of whether the Kaqchikels fit this designation. The most effective way to address this question is through a comparative analysis, considering different cultural contexts.

In the conquest of Mexico, Tlaxcala formed an alliance with the Spanish against their archrivals, the Mexica. Following their victory in Tenochtitlan, the enduring Tlaxcalteca-Spanish

[38] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 124; Asselbergs, "The Conquest in Images," 76-79; Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 98-99; Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 100-101. Van Akkeren's precise words are "Los indígenas locales [Mayas] son pintados—sin excepción—de color moreno, visten ropa indígena—de *maguey* o algodón—y manejan armas indígenas."

[39] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 238-242; Asselbergs, "The Conquest in Images," 74-76; Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 109; Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 100. Van Akkeren's precise words are "muchas veces se identifiquen a sí mismos como guerreros con trajes y armas españolas. Llama la atención cómo se pintan a sí mismos con piel blanca, parecida a la española."

alliance had far-reaching consequences that reached beyond Central Mexico. Their significant role in Alvarado's army in the Guatemalan highlands led to Tlaxcaltecas being exempted from the burdensome taxes and labor obligations imposed on the local Maya communities. Maintaining this privileged status, however, required continuous lobbying efforts. Some scholars like Matthew, van Akkeren, and Polo Sifontes have referred the Kaqchikels to the "Tlaxcaltecas of Guatemala," drawing parallels between their situations and motivations.[40] However, Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer have criticized this comparison as unflattering and inaccurate.[41] While the Kaqchikels and Tlaxcaltecas may have had similar concerns with their respective rivalries, their historical contexts differed. Unlike Tlaxcala's subordinate relationship with Tenochtitlan, the Kaqchikels were engaged in a more evenly matched rivalry with the K'iche's. Lovell (2015) supports this view, noting that the Kaqchikels actively pursued warfare against the K'iche's, significantly diminishing K'iche' control and influence by the time the Spaniards arrived.[42] This assertive stance by the Kaqchikels underscores the unique nature of their political landscape compared to the Tlaxcaltecas, further highlighting the complexities within the dynamics of Indigenous allies during the conquest.

The term "so-called Indian allies" also appears in discussions extending beyond the designation of *indios conquistadors*. Yanna Yannakakis (2011) provides a nuanced analysis highlighting the distinction between recognized Indigenous Mexican allies and the often-

[40] Matthew, "Whose Conquest?," 103; and Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 43-44; and Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*.

[41] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 20.

[42] Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial* Guatemala, 49.

overlooked ally status of Indigenous *naborías* in the barrio of Analco in Villa Alta, Oaxaca.[43] *Naborías* were essentially Indigenous individuals who served the Spaniards and existed in a grey area where they were neither enslaved nor free, often coerced into service or demanded as tribute.[44] Alvarado's correspondence suggests a parallel between the Kaqchikels and *naborías*, particularly in instances where the Kaqchikels were pressured to supply warriors against the K'iche'. However, since the *naborías* align more with a "Hispanized Indian identity," it does accurately apply to the Kaqchikels, especially considering their short-lived alliance with the Spaniards, followed by a prolonged resistance movement.[45]

The Kaqchikel-Spanish alliance lasted a mere six months, followed by a strategic military resistance that impeded colonial ambitions for six years. As a result of this transformative shift, the Kaqchikels have often been labeled traitors because their resistance has been characterized as a "rebellion", "revolt", or "insurrection." Such terms carry colonialist connotations that portray their justified and legitimate resistance to invasion as illegal acts. However, this assertion will be challenged as the thesis progresses. Therefore, I argue that the Kaqchikels do not exactly fall under the designation of *indios conquistadores*.

Only a few scholars have explored the Kaqchikels' shift from allies to adversaries during the conquest, as much of the history remains misconstrued and misinterpreted in Guatemalan historiography. Recent works examining this transformation include those by Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer. However, it is essential to recognize and commend the pioneering efforts of scholars

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[43] Yanna Yannakakis, "Allies or Servants? The Journey of Indian Conquistadors in the Lienzo de Analco," *Ethnohistory* 58, no. 4 (2011).

[44] Yannakakis, "Allies or Servants?," 656.

[45] Yannakakis, "Allies or Servants?," 657.

such as Contreras, Polo Sifontes, Luján Muñoz, and Cabezas Carcache. These scholars meticulously analyzed the dynamics of the alliance and subsequent resistance. They have notably highlighted the leadership roles of the Kaqchikel lords, Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, acknowledging them as unsung heroes for their significant yet overlooked contributions to the resistance against Spanish conquest and colonization.[46]

This thesis will delve deeper into the dynamics of the Kaqchikel dilemma during the early stages of the conquest. In my review of the existing literature, I have identified critical inquiries that I aim to address, which will contribute to advancing our understanding in this field. First, I will analyze the predicament the Kaqchikels, specifically Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, were placed upon when the Spaniards arrived and how they responded to their intrusion in the highlands. Second, I will closely observe the dynamics of the resistance movement itself, emphasizing Kaqchikel warfare, juxtaposed with perspectives of Indigenous and Spanish approaches to conducting war. Additionally, I will examine Pedro de Alvarado's influence, whose actions may have reflected broader colonial ideologies, but his decisions maintained a distinct individuality. This project, overall, seeks to amplify Indigenous agency within the complex conquest narrative of Guatemala providing a fuller picture of the Kaqchikels, including other Indigenous polities' role and resilience.

1.5 Methods

Revisiting the conquest narrative of Guatemala presents a challenging inquiry, primarily due to the complexities inherent in the source materials authored by both Spanish and Indigenous

[46] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*; Contreras and Luján Muñoz, *El Memorial de Sololá y los inicios de la colonización española en Guatemala*; Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*; and Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista."

writers. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer note that these sources, whether of "native or Hispanic concoction," tend to provide limited coverage of specific periods, places, and peoples, often exhibiting neglect or bias towards others.[47] Occasionally, they are so distorted or influenced by self-interest that they cast doubt on their reliability. Nevertheless, the dominant narrative often simplistically portrays the conquest as a clear-cut Spanish victory. Against this backdrop, scholars call for a nuanced reevaluation of the conquest of Guatemala, advocating for a reexamination of events and circumstances including the Kaqchikel dilemma. This reevaluation should consider new evidence and emphasize Indigenous agency.

This thesis aims to contribute to the revisionist New Conquest History. Over the last few decades, the New Conquest History significantly reshaped our understanding of the sixteenth-century conquest campaigns in the Americas. Scholars have effectively "thoroughly problematized, complicated, and replaced" traditional triumphalist narratives of the conquest with nuanced alternatives that "focus on multiple protagonists and accounts."[48] This shift has been facilitated in part by detailed analyses of archival materials, including Indigenous-language manuscripts. Therefore, the foundation of my analysis is based on a comprehensive review of existing research into the Kaqchikel dilemma. The interpretations I offer draw inspiration from scholars who have explored the dynamics of the alliance and subsequent resistance, thereby highlighting Kaqchikel agency and contesting the colonialist portrayal of their resistance as merely illicit rebellion.

[47] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 1.

[48] Matthew Restall, The New Conquest History, *History Compass* 10, no. 2 (2012): 151.

The methodological approach for this thesis is grounded in the careful close readings of primary sources authored by both Spanish and Indigenous writers, with particular emphasis on Pedro de Alvarado's letters to Cortés and the Kaqchikel's *Memorial de Sololá*. Additionally, I will consult other documents that provide further insights into the Kaqchikel dilemma. These include additional Spanish manuscripts such as travel accounts and chronicles, Mayan-language *títulos*, and the Nahua *lienzos*. To navigate these primary sources, mainly the alphabetical texts, I rely on the transcriptions and translations provided by respected scholars. Key sources include Matthew Restall and Florine Asselbergs's (2007) collection of conquest accounts from Spanish, Nahua, and Maya authors, which features both Alvarado's letters and the *Memorial de Sololá*. Sedley J. Mackie's (1924) translations offer additional contexts for Alvarado's letters. For interpretations of the *Memorial de Sololá*, I refer to works of Judith M. Maxwell and Robert M. Hill (2006), Simón C. Otzoy (1999), and Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz (1953). Additionally, I consult the Mayan-language *títulos* from Recinos's (1957) collection. For the Nahua *lienzos*, I utilize digital facsimiles from Mesolore for the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin for the *Lienzo de Quauhquehcollan*. These diverse sources are instrumental in developing a comprehensive analysis of the conquest period from multiple perspectives.

With this foundation in place, shall we embark on telling this narrative?

CHAPTER 2

BURNED BRIDGES

2.1 Chapter Introduction: The Face of Resistance

In Guatemala's turbulent history, no other figure holds a national psyche quite like Tekun Umam, the K'iche' military lord famed for his valiant stand and defeat by Pedro de Alvarado at the Battle of Pa Chäj near Quetzaltenango. His image has become a familiar symbol throughout the country, gracing everything from public monuments to the nation's currency. However, Tekun Umam has been a subject of historical debate from his participation in the conquest to his very existence. Scholars like Luján Muñoz, Cabezas Carcache, Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer have expressed skepticism regarding the notion that Tekun Umam was an actual historical figure, noting the absence of his name in both contemporary Indigenous and Spanish sources.[49] Van Akkeren, on the other hand, presents a contrasting view, using colonial documents like the K'iche' *títulos*, specifically the *Título K'oyoi*, to argue that Tekun Umam was not a "fictional character but a person of flesh and blood."[50] His position, however, is contentious, as many scholars remain skeptical of the historical existence of the K'iche' military lord.

[49] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 52; and Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 12-15. Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache's precise words are "Es necesario reconocer que ninguna fuente contemporánea o cercana a la Conquista, ni indígena ni española, menciona el nombre del jefe militar indio inmolado."

[50] Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 59. His precise words: "Analizaremos ahora estos temas a partir el Título K'oyoi, un texto k'iche'. Así nos daremos cuenta que hay suficientes evidencias de que Tecum [Umam] no fue guerro ficticio sino un personaje de carne y hueso."

Indeed, skepticism regarding Tekun Umam's existence stems partly from the scarcity of sources with only a few K'iche' *títulos* mentioning his name.[51] The *Memorial de Sololá*, which offers a brief passage on how "the K'iche's were dissolved before Xelajub' [Quetzaltenango]," does not mention Tekun Umam at all.[52] Pedro de Alvarado is not much help either, despite his letters from Utatlán being written immediately after the campaign against the K'iche's. Lovell and Lutz (2018) suggest that if Alvarado had indeed dueled Tekun Umam, he likely would have recorded it to bolster himself.[53] However, Alvarado's letter offers only a veiled hint, noting the death of "one of the four chiefs of the city of Utatlán, who was captain general of all this country," without specifying any names.[54] The potential link to Tekun Umam rests in this description, particularly considering his reputed status as the grandson of K'iqab', "whose counsel had led to the Kaqchikels splitting from the K'iche' nation to form their own kingdom in the mid-fifteenth century."[55]

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[51] Tekun Umam's name is recorded in three K'iche' *títulos*: the *Título Ixquin-Nehaib* (Recinos 1957), the *Título K'oyo'i'* (Carmack 1973), and the *Título de Ajpop Huitzitzil Tz'unun* (Gall 1963). There is fourth *título*, the *Título del Ajpop Kecham*, that was mentioned by the chronicler Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán in his *Recordación florida*, but that document is lost.

[52] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading* Guatemala, 105; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 257; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiqueles*, 119-120. Otzoy's precise words are "Luego vinieron a Xe Lajub' y allí también fue derrotada la gente k'iche'."

[53] W. George Lovell and Christopher H. 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*, ed. S. Ashley Kistler (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2018), 37.

[54] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 30; and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 58.

[55] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 12. K'iqab' ruled the K'iche' kingdom during the mid-fifteenth century, a period when the kingdom has reached its zenith. However, during his reign, relations deteriorated between the K'iche's and Kaqchikels, the latter originally being part of the K'iche' kingdom. This discord led to the Kaqchikel splitting to establish their own kingdom in Iximche'.

Although the debate over Tekun Umam's historical authenticity remains captivating and unresolved, it is not the central focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is important to introduce this chapter by discussing him due to his enduring impact on Guatemalan collective memory. In 1960, the Guatemalan Congress declared Tekun Umam a national hero, symbolizing resistance and the defense of Guatemalan nationality. Tekun Umam's inclusion is deeply rooted in the popular legend that ties him to Guatemalan nationalism and Maya pride and identity, primarily through the story involving the quetzal, Guatemala's national bird (Figure 2.1).[56] Judith M. Maxwell and Ixnal Ambrocia Cuma Chávez (2018) describe how, according to the legend, a quetzal hovered above Tekun Umam during his battle with Pedro de Alvarado. When Tekun Umam was defeated, the quetzal landed on his fatal chest wound, staining its breast with blood—a color that male quetzals still bear today, symbolizing the sacrifice of the K'iche' military lord. Maxwell and Cuma Chávez also note that the legend further emphasizes that a quetzal cannot live in captivity, symbolizing freedom and epitomizing Tekun Umam's resistance against Spanish conquest.[57]

Recent scholarship, including work by Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos (2013), have approached the narratives of Tekun Umam's death from a mythological perspective, utilizing colonial K'iche' manuscripts such as the *títulos* and the *Popol Wuj* to align his story with the Mesoamerican myth about the origins of the sun. He argues that these manuscripts, specifically the *títulos*, portrayed his death "as the downfall of a former sun," paving the way for a new order

[56] Judith M. Maxwell and Ixnal Ambrocia Cuma Chávez, "Tekun Umam: Maya Hero, K'iche' Hero," in *Faces of Resistance: Maya Heroes, Power, and Identity*, ed. S. Ashley Kistler (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2018), 25.

[57] Maxwell and Cuma Chávez, "Tekun Umam: Maya Hero, K'iche' Hero," 25.

and emphasizing the cosmic significance of his demise as a necessary precondition for the advent a new sun and a new era.[58] This interpretation suggests that Tekun Umam's fate should be viewed as a pivotal event that allowed Indigenous communities to frame the Spanish conquest within their historical and cosmological perspectives.[59] The *Baile de la Conquista* (Dance of the Conquest), a dance drama practiced in contemporary K'iche'-speaking regions of Guatemala, also perpetuates the memory of the conquest and Tekun Umam's death. However, it is important to note that this tradition was heavily influenced by Spanish popular culture.[60] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache suggest that the tradition likely played a significant role in shaping the narrative of Tekun Umam, as the dance's plot "demanded a personal confrontation between Alvarado and the K'iche' chief."[61] While this hypothesis is compelling, it remains speculative due to the lack of concrete evidence about the dance's early history.

[58] Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun: Mesoamerican Cosmogony and the Spanish Conquest of Guatemala," *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 4 (2013): 694, 699-700, and 704.

[59] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun," 693 and 712.

[60] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun," 708.

[61] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 53. Their precise words are "Los requerimientos de la trama de dicho drama-danza exigán un enfrentatmiento personal entre Alvarado y el jefe quiché [Tekun Umam]."

Figure 2.1"The Story of Tecun Uman."
Image provided by *Sangre Indigena Art* (with permission by the artist, José Flores Chamalé).

Tekun Umam's designation as a national hero is undoubtedly contentious, particularly given that several Indigenous groups in Guatemala do not remember him for his stand against Alvarado. Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache recognize this tension, noting that while Tekun Umam "has been chosen to symbolically represent all Indigenous peoples who died facing the Spanish conquistadors," this focus has inadvertently led to the neglect of other Indigenous leaders and their significant military actions.[62] Chinchilla Mazareigos concurs, noting that Tekun

[62] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 53. Their precise words are "En la actualidad, aquel jefe indio ha sido escogido para representar simbólicamente a todos los indios que murieron al enfrentar a los conquistadores españoles. De esta manera se olivda a otros jefes indígenas, así como otras importantes acciones bélicas, incluyendo la prolongada y heroica Resistencia de los cakchiqueles, que duró aproximadamente seis años."

Umam's death "did not determine the outcome of the invasion in the long run."[63] However, he also highlights that "no indigenous leader matches his legendary status," and "his death is still widely regarded as a turning point in the conquest of Guatemala".[64] This view, however, invites scrutiny, especially when considering the roles of the Kaqchikel lords, Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, who initially allied with the Spaniards but later reversed their decision, leading a strategic military resistance that significantly extended the duration of the conquest.

Hence, this chapter delves into the interactions between the Kaqchikels and the Spaniards during the early stages of the conquest, with a particular focus on the dual leadership of Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, known to the Spaniards as Sinacán and Sequechul. It begins by introducing these Kaqchikel lords and the challenges they faced upon assuming leadership in Iximche'. The narrative then transitions to the arrival of the Spaniards at the Kaqchikel capital following their campaign against the K'iche's. Subsequently, the analysis examines the rationale behind the Kaqchikels' alliance with the Spaniards and the ensuing reactions to this pact. The chapter further delves into the crucial shift toward resistance, identifying the triggers and assessing their implications for Spanish objectives. The goals of this chapter are threefold: 1) to elucidate the complex position of the Kaqchikels within the conquest narrative; 2) to highlight the significant yet overlooked roles of Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at in the broader narrative of resistance, contrasting their heroism with the mythologized heroism of Tekun Umam; and 3) to closely examine the dynamics of the resistance movement, emphasizing Kaqchikel warfare, juxtaposed with perspectives of Indigenous and Spanish approaches to conducting war. This

[63] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun," 694.

[64] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun," 694.

includes an analysis of Pedro de Alvarado's distinctive role, as his actions may have reflected broader colonial ideologies but were distinctly his own.

2.2 Duo Leaders in a Precarious Time

Ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence indicate that some highland Maya kingdoms, known as *tinamits*, operated a system of dual kingship to govern their densely populated urban centers. This governance structure is exemplified by the Kaqchikel capital, Iximche' (Figure 2.2), where dual kingship was established, as confirmed by multiple colonial Kaqchikel-language documents. The *Testamento de los Xpantzay*, a sixteenth-century Kaqchikel *título*, identifies two high-ranking titular rulers: the Ajpo Sotz'il and the Ajpo Xajil, representing the Sotz'il and Xajil amaq' (lineages).[65] Additional references to these lineages are found in the *Memorial de Sololá* and another Kaqchikel *título* known as the *Guerra communes de Quichés y Cakchiqueles*.[66] Although both positions were theoretically equal in rank, in practice, the Ajpo Sotz'il often attained the status akin to that of a king, while the Ajpo Xajil functioned more as an associate. Initially, many scholars believed that succession followed a direct paternal line, where a son from the Sotz'il lineage would assume to the role of Ajpo Sotz'il, and another from the Xajil would become Ajpo Xajil. However, Barbara E. Borg elucidates that succession for these titles was considerably more flexible and "not always passing from father to son."[67] Instead, succession

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[65] Adrian Recinos, *Cronicas Indigenas de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1957), 153-169. His precise words (based on translation) are "Estos fueron los primeros Señores, el Ahpozotzil, el Ahpoxahil, el Ahpotukuché, y el Ahporaxonihay." The Ajpo Tukché and Ajpo Raxonihay were two additional Kaqchikel who wielded considerably less power compared to the Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil.

[66] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*; Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*; and Recinos, *Cronicas Indigenas de Guatemala*, 132-149.

[67] Barbara E. Borg, "Iximché and the Cakchiqueles, ca. 1450-1540: An Ethnohistorical Perspective," in *Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Iximché*, by C. Roger Nance, Stephen L. Whittington, and Barbara E. Borg (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 22.

might fall to the most capable royal relative within a suitable age group, or, in some cases, an advisory council might select from several potential candidates, particularly when factors such as illness, conflict, or unsuitability due to youth influenced the decision-making process.[68]

Figure 2.2 *Sitio Arqueológico* Iximché
Photo provided by the author.

Indeed, the *Memorial de Sololá* details the unusual succession process during the ascension of the final Kaqchikel kings in the sixteenth century. The text notes the Kaji' Imox (Four Lizards) and B'eleje' K'at (Nine Lords of Corn) were elected as kings "On 1 Kan [August 11, 1521]."[69] Their election occurred during an outbreak of a plague described as "the great death

[68] Borg, "Iximché and the Cakchiqueles, ca. 1450-1540," 22.

[69] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 251, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiqueles*, 117.

by sores," that "none of our fathers had been spared," claiming the lives of numerous Kaqchikels, including the previous kings, Jun Iq' and Lajuj No'j.[70] This plague was likely to have been one of the many European diseases raging across Mesoamerica, such as smallpox, measles, or influenza; or a combination of two or more.[71] Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at found themselves in a precarious situation during this tumultuous period. In addition to the health crisis, Iximche' faced ongoing conflict with neighboring polities such as the Tz'utujil Mayas, who resided near the shores of Lake Atitlán, the Pipils, situated along areas near the Pacific coast, and of course, their longtime rivals, the K'iche's. Despite these adversities, Iximche' sought to extend its dominion, taking control of areas previously held by their adversaries. This aggressive strategy proved costly, exacerbating the effects of war and disease on the population.

Before examining the dynamics of the alliance and subsequent resistance, it is crucial to understand the political and social context in Iximche' prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, especially as we consult source materials. Borg points out that the Kaqchikels were not unified but were divided into four geographical divisions: Iximche', Tzololá, Jilotepeque, and Sacatepéquez. Among these, Iximche' held a dominant position, often placing it in a defensively hostile relationship with the others.[72] This fragmentation suggests that affiliation with the

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[70] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 248 and 251; Oztoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 184; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 114-115. Jun Iq' and Lajuj No'j held the titles of Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil, before Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' Kat assumed leadership. Throughout their reign, they were embroiled in continuous conflict with the K'iche', following the nation's split in the late fifteenth century. Notably, it was Jun Iq' and Lajuj No'j who received Moctezuma's ambassadors when they arrived to Iximche'. In addition, they ignored Moctezuma's warning about foreigners entering Mexica territory.

[71] One of the most notable Indigenous sources that vividly depicted European diseases is Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*. I believe the translations by Otzoy, and Maxwell and Hill's accurately capture the nature of the disease, paralleling descriptions found in the Nahuatl manuscript.

[72] Borg, "Iximché and the Cakchiqueles, ca. 1450-1540," 37.

Kaqchikels "did not mean being on good terms with Iximche'."[73] After establishing their capital, Iximche' elites managed to subdue Jilotepeque and Tzololá, whereas Sacatepéquez resisted until just before the Spanish conquest. Notably, Tzololá, though conquered, was governed by the second-ranking king, the Ajpo Xajil, who, along with the Ajpo Sotz'il, resided in separate royal quarters at Iximche'. The latter, however, was subordinate to the former. This hierarchy was reversed when it came to documenting colonial records.

While the *Memorial de Sololá* serves as a crucial record for the Kaqchikels, it is not without its biases. This becomes apparent even in the literal translation of the title, which indicates the specific lineage from which the manuscript originates. Intriguingly, the document is known by several names, most notably the *Anales de los Xahil*. Daniel G. Briton (1885), one of the earliest scholars to translate this manuscript into English, referred it as the *Annals of the Cakchiqueles, by a Member of the Xahila Family*.[74] Later scholars like Restall and Asselbergs and Maxwell and Hill refer to their translation of the Kaqchikel manuscript as *The Xajil Chronicle*.[75] This naming reflects the manuscript's strong association with the Xajil amaq', particularly emphasized by the scribes Francisco Hernández Arana and Francisco Díaz, who prioritized listing the accomplishments of their lineage over those of the Sotz'il. It is therefore noteworthy that the Ajpo Sotz'il, Kaji' Imox, receives less prominence in the manuscript during crucial events of the Kaqchikel dilemma during the conquest. This oversight is particularly

[73] Borg, "Iximché and the Cakchiqueles, ca. 1450-1540," 37.

[74] Daniel G. Briton, Francisco Hernández Arana Xajilá, and Francisco Díaz Gebuta Quej, *The Annals of the Cakchiqueles: The Original Texts with a Translation, Notes, and Introduction* (Philadelphia, 1885). As a preference, I do not use Briton's translation given that more translations have been written recently and within the late twentieth century.

[75] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading* Guatemala; and Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*.

striking given his significant actions and fate following the death of his counterpart, the Ajpo Xajil, B'eleje' K'at, who predeceased him.

2.3 The Alliance

Why did the Kaqchikels form an alliance with the Spaniards? It is clear that in the case of Indigenous Mexican allies, like the Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs, aligning with the Spanish was a calculated decision to gain privileges that were bestowed upon them "in return for their military and colonizing services."[76] However, for the Kaqchikels, the decision to side with the Spaniards is challenging to resolve. Van Akkeren proposes the alliance served two functions: 1) as a "strategic maneuver to emerge victorious in political battles;" and 2) as a means of survival.[77] This reasoning is plausible considering the Kaqchikel kingdom was a relatively young nation, having only recently broken away from the K'iche' in the mid-fifteenth century. Since establishing Iximche', the Kaqchikels had been politically active, finding ways to expand their authority in neighboring territories, including those along the Pacific coast controlled by the Tz'utujils and Pipils, as well as areas under K'iche' dominion. Nonetheless, with the Kaqchikel capital geographically at the center, the Kaqchikels were practically encircled by adversaries.

Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer delve into the strategic considerations of the Kaqchikels during the early stages of the conquest, posing the question "How did the Kaqchikels assess their rivals—the K'iche's, the Tz'utujils, and the Pipils—against the might of the Spaniards?"[78] The *Memorial de Sololá* may offer an answer to this question, recounting how the K'iche's "were

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[76] Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 111; and Matthew, "Whose Conquest?," 112.

[77] Van Akkeren, *La visión indígena de la conquista*, 43-44. His precise words are "la alianza con este nuevo protagonista en la arena política—los españoles—era simplemete una maniobra estratégica para salir ganador."

[78] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 20; and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 41.

destroyed by the Spaniards," with Alvarado, who showed no compassion, torturing and burning their leaders.[79] Hearing about this news likely provided the Kaqchikels with a clear warning of the consequences of opposing the Spaniards. It also implies that the Kaqchikels may have viewed an alliance with the Spaniards as a strategic move to avoid the fate of the K'iche' and to potentially leverage Spanish power to their advantage against other foes.

Another example that may illustrate how the Kaqchikels evaluated the Spaniards can be seen in what might have been their earliest interaction. In the introduction, I highlighted the first potential sign of Kaqchikel cooperation mentioned in Alvarado's letter from Utatlán, where he commanded the Kaqchikel lords, who happen to be Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, to dispatch reinforcements to eliminate the remaining K'iche' warriors.[80] The *Memorial de Sololá* confirms this compliance, noting that the Kaqchikel leaders fulfilled the directive as "warriors went to kill the K'iche's."[81] Further insights from the text show that Kaqchikel troops were also sent to Utatlán "to collect the tribute from the K'iche's," on behalf of Alvarado.[82] Lovell, Lutz, and

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[79] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 105; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 257-258; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 119-120. Otzoy's precise words are "Pero luego, la gente k'iche' pagó su tributo, porque en el mismo instante, los reyes fueron sujetados con grilletes por Tunatiw." He continues by adding "El día 4 K'at fueron quemados [vivos] el rey (Ajpop) y su adjunto (Ajpop Qamajay)."

[80] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala,* 33; and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 63.

[81] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 105; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 259; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 121. Restall, Asselbergs, Maxwell, Hill II and Otzoy state that 400 Kaqchikel soldiers went to battle the K'iche'. However, Recinos and Goetz suggest that 2,000 Kaqchikels were sent for this purpose, a number that Bernal Diaz also reports. Adding to the confusion, Alvarado states in his letters that 4,000 soldiers were deployed to combat the K'iche'. This discrepancy is documented in Restall and Asselbergs (p. 33 and p. 66), and in Alvarado and Mackie (p. 63 and p. 111).

[82] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 105; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 257-258; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 120-121. Otzoy's precise words are "Hasta la tercera remesa de guerreros se logró imponer el tribute a la gente k'iche'."

Kramer suggest that these acts offer clues to the Kaqchikels' possible expectations in allying with the Spaniards, even though their whole reasoning is not disclosed: "they would obey orders, negotiate terms, serve as accomplices, and function thereafter as collectors of tribute."[83] Although we may never fully understand all the reasons, it is evident that the Kaqchikels' alliance with the Spaniards proved to be a viable strategy for survival.

So, how did the Kaqchikels respond to the prospect of forming an alliance with the Spaniards? Oudijk and Restall provide insights by examining how local elites might have used traditional Mesoamerican practices of alliance-making in response to the Spaniards' arrival.[84] They draw on Ross Hassig's work on "preconquest political organization and imperial strategy," to discuss how alliances were typically formed around shared interests, functioning as a "special-purpose institution" that existed as long as it fulfilled a common need.[85] This framework seems apt for the Kaqchikels, who were keen to expand their political authority into territories controlled by the Tz'utujils and Pipils. Asselbergs concurs, suggesting that many Indigenous groups saw the arrival of the Spaniards as an opportunity to forge a new alliance that could reconfigure existing socio-political dynamics to their benefit.[86] Moreover, Oudijk and Restall highlight that Indigenous texts, including the *Memorial de Sololá*, reveal complex processes of alliance and negotiation. They argue that these documents show that colonial conflicts in

[83] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 40; and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 41.

[84] Oudijk and Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," 43-44.

[85] Oudijk and Restall (citing Ross Hassig, 1988), "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," 43-44.

[86] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 100.

Guatemala were an extension of pre-colonial strategies of conquest and governance, thereby enhancing our historical analysis.[87]

Certainly, the *Memorial de Sololá* supports these observations. When Alvarado and his forces arrived at Iximche', they were immediately greeted by Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, who allowed them to stay at the Kaqchikel capital. It was here that Alvarado inquired about the Kaqchikels' enemies to which the Ajpo Sotz'il and the Ajpo Xajil promptly replied without hesitation, "Our enemies are two, oh, Lord: the Tz'utujils and those of Atakat."[88] This response likely pleased Alvarado, in light of his earlier statement in his letter to Cortés about his plans to "stop briefly" at Iximche' due to the ongoing conflicts at Atitlán, where four of his messengers had been killed.[89] These accounts collectively imply a mutual benefit in forming an alliance, especially given the shared adversaries in the Tz'utujils and later the Pipils. Moreover, the Kaqchikels likely recognized the potential consequences of defying the Spaniards, as evidenced by the fate of the K'iche', who had suffered severely for their defiance. The *Memorial de Sololá* further verifies this as it records Alvarado's subsequent campaigns where "the Tz'utujils were conquered by the Spaniards," and "the Atakat died as he [Alvarado] passed through" on his way

[87] Oudijk and Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," 57.

[88] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 106; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 262; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 186; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 121-122. Otzoy's precise words are "Poco después, Tunatiw quiso saber de la guerras de los reyes. Respondieron los reyes: 'Nosotros tenemos dos guerras: una con los tz'utujile's y otra con los de Pan Atakat, oh Señor, así le contestaron los reyes." Atakat is a town on the Pacific coast of Guatemala that was inhabited by the Pipils. The Nahuatl placename that was given to the town was known as Izquintepec, which today many know the location as Escuintla.

[89] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 34; and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 65.

to Cuzcatlán, what is today western El Salvador.[90] Unfortunately, what followed after would lead towards a striking reversal that reshaped the conquest of the Guatemalan highlands.

To further understand the Kaqchikels' strategic positioning, it is essential to delve into Polo Sifontes's analytical perspective regarding the Kaqchikels' potential responses to Spanish intrusion. He outlines two possible reactions:

- Option 1: Voluntary acceptance of Spanish rule, potentially including payment of tributes and provisions to assist in further conquests.
- Option 2: Forced compliance following military defeat, which could lead to enslavement, heavy tributes, and seizure of goods.[91]

Polo Sifontes argues that the Kaqchikels ultimately endured the adverse outcomes of both options—they initially allied with the Spaniards but later faced severe consequences when they resisted. This scenario underscores a double penalty for the Kaqchikels, who, despite their initial strategic alliance, suffered significantly—perhaps more than any other Indigenous groups in Guatemala due to their initial cooperation and subsequent resistance.[92]

While the full complexities of the Kaqchikels' decisions may never be entirely understood, these analyses provide valuable insights into their initial motivations and the unfortunate consequences of their alliance with the Spaniards. These insights are crucial, given that the alliance was short-lived, leading the Kaqchikels to shift from allies to adversaries—a

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[90] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 106; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 263; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 121-122. Otzoy's precise words are "Solamente cinco días vino a permanecer Tunatiw en la ciudad y entonces fueron destruidos los tz'utujile's por la gente castellana." He continues by adding "luego se dirigió a Cuzcatán, pasando a destruir a los de Atakat."

[91] Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*, 44-45. His premises are outlined as "alternativa 'a' and alternativa 'b'."

[92] Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*, 13 and 45. His precise words are "el pueblo Cakchiquel cargo dos veces sobre sus hombros la cruz de la conquista."

transition documented in the *Memorial de Sololá*. It records that on "7 Ajmaq [August 26, 1524]", the Kaqchikels "abandoned the city of Iximche'" and "scattered under the tress" in order to fight Pedro de Alvarado, marking a significant reversal in their relationship with the Spaniards.[93] This shift prompts further investigation into what catalyzed such a drastic reversal and its broader consequences on the Spanish objectives of conquest and colonization.

2.4 The Point of No Return

There is a saying that nothing good lasts forever, and for the Kaqchikel-Spanish alliance, this was the case, as the pact between the two sides only lasted for a mere six months. What followed later was a strategic military resistance by the Kaqchikels that impeded colonial ambitions for six years. So, what catalyzed such a drastic turn-around? The answer is clear, as many accounts identify Pedro de Alvarado's notorious greed and volatile behavior as the primary reason that prompted the Kaqchikels to resist. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer note that Alvarado "had an explosive temperament," and "once provoked, he was quick to react, capable of committing or orchestrating acts of violence judge to be extreme even by the grim standards of his day."[94] He is a man of arms rather than a tactician, often acting rashly and considering the repercussions later. Adrian Recinos (1986) corroborates this characterization in his biography of Alvarado, recounting multiple instances when the conquistador's actions were detrimental to both Indigenous populations and the Spanish colonial agenda.[95] His ill-judged actions were

[93] Restall and Asselbers, *Invading Guatemala*, 108; Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 268-269; Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187; and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124-125. Otzoy's precise words are "El 7 Ajmaq due el día de nuestra salida, quedando desolada la ciudad de Iximche'."

[94] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 42.

[95] Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado*, 36-39, 40-44, and 72-78. Recinos documents multiple instances of Alvarado's brutal conduct. Noteworthy examples include from pages 36-39, which detail the Toxcatl Massacre; pages 40-44, which

particularly apparent while serving as Cortés's lieutenant man during the conquest of Mexico, and later while leading the armed campaign in the Guatemalan highlands.

It is critical to acknowledge the significant influence that Alvarado (Figure 2.3) exerted on the conquest, particularly given his determination to "strike fear in the land," an aim underscored by his alias, Tonatiuh (Figure 2.4)—a Nahuatl word used to designate the sun and the day, but most notably in this context, the sun god.[96] Recent scholarship has critically scrutinized the historiographic theme of apotheosis, which is the idea that Indigenous peoples viewed the Spanish conquistadors, especially their leaders, as gods or godlike beings, and how such perceptions shaped their responses. Much of this debate has centered on the Mexica and other Indigenous groups in Mexico, having linked Cortés with the feather-serpent deity, Quetzalcoatl.[97] However, historians have paid little attention to Alvarado, especially considering that various Nahua and Maya communities referred to him as Tonatiuh, which is corroborated by multiple colonial Indigenous-language documents, including the *Memorial de Sololá*.

recount the events of La Noche Triste; and 72-78 which describe the campaign against the K'iche' at Utatlán, including the torture and immolation of K'iche' nobility.

[96] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 33; and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 63. Interestingly, Alvarado's intent "strike fear in the land" as manifested through his behavior and actions, inspired Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer to title their monograph after this phrase.

[97] Oudijk and Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," 29.

Figure 2.3 Pedro de Alvarado.
Image from the Word History Encyclopedia.

Figure 2.4 Tonatiuh.
Image from PICRYL.

Unsurprisingly, few Spanish accounts mention Alvarado's association with Tonatiuh. Alvarado himself never referred to the name in his letters, and there is no evidence that he capitalized on this association during his campaigns. Cortés does not mention the name either. Bernal Díaz is among the few who do, describing in his account how Moctezuma's ambassadors "gave him [Alvarado] the name of Tonatio [Tonatiuh], which means the Sun."[98] However, little emphasis is placed on this designation.

Conversely, Indigenous scribes consistently used the name Tonatiuh (Tunatiuh in Classical Nahuatl; Tunatiw in Kaqchikel) in ways that "hinted at, endorsed, or questioned Alvarado's associations with the sun god."[99] Chinchilla Mazariegos (2022) argues that the name and its solar connotations significantly influenced how Indigenous communities interpreted Alvarado's characteristics, actions, and the broader context of the conquest.[100] In Central Mexico, Nahuas aligned Alvarado's physical appearance with the word *teotl*, which generally encompasses divinity, but also captures essences of unusual appearances and foreign origins.[101] As Chinchilla Mazariegos explains, Alvarado's "blond and ruddy" appearance, which resembled the red, yellow, or a combination of both skin colors and yellow hair attributed to Tonatiuh, inspired the Nahuas to assign the name to him.[102] Moreover, Alvarado's reported violent and

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[98] Díaz del Castillo and Carrasco, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 129.

[99] Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh: Reconsidering Apotheosis in Nahua and Highland Maya Narratives of the Spanish Invasion," Ethnohistory 69, no. 1 (2022): 53.

[100] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 53.

[101] The word *teotl* was assigned to all Spaniards. Chinchilla Mazariegos draws on James Lockhart's insights (1994) to explains that *teotl* was used to denote anything extraordinary, including oddities and monstrosities. Consequently, *teotl* did not necessarily connote glorification or worship. Nevertheless, these characteristics overlapped with those attributed to Mesoamerican deities.

[102] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 56-57.

aggressive nature aligned well with Tonatiuh's reputed need for "a constant supply of victims to keep moving and shedding warmth."[103] A vivid demonstration of Alvarado's embodiment of Tonatiuh's thirst can be seen in the Toxcatl festival and subsequent massacre, where he unleashed a reckless slaughter at the Temple of Huitzilopochtli in Tenochtitlan, an event that foreshadowed his later conquest in the Guatemalan highlands.[104] From the perspective of the Nahuas, Alvarado's actions as Tonatiuh seemed only to escalate in violence, solidifying his reputation as a figure synonymous with ruthless bloodshed.

When Alvarado arrived in Guatemala, his reputation for "brutality and brashness" had certainly preceded him.[105] Compared to other conquistadors, Alvarado was in a class by himself. Even Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Spanish fray and a fervent critic of Alvarado, indirectly described him as a "tyrant" and "butcher," holding him responsible for numerous atrocities.[106] One particular heinous act that Las Casas condemned Alvarado for occurred during the campaign at Utatlán, where he notoriously burned the K'iche' lords alive "without any due process."[107]

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[103] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 64.

[104] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh, 60-67; Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 43; and Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado*, 36-39. The Toxcatl festival, culminating in a devasting massacre, was a pivotal moment in the conquest of Mexico, sparking open warfare between the Spaniards and the Mexica. This event is thoroughly documented in various testimonies, accounts, and illustrations, including Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*. At the time, Cortés was absent, leaving his right-hand man, Alvarado, in command. Alvarado suspected that the festival, which was intended to honor the Nahua deity, Huitzilopochtli, was a cover for a planned assault. Feeling vulnerable amidst the large and animated gathering, he preemptively struck, targeting and attacking a group of key unarmed leaders just as they were about to perform the culminating ceremony. According to Recinos, this attack led to "death at the hands of Spaniards of the flower of Mexican nobility," which turned "the entire city population against the foreigners."

[105] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 56.

[106] Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffen, and intro. Anthony Pagden (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 57 and 60.

[107] Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 57.

Given his actions in the Toxcatl massacre and his assault on the K'iche', questions emerged about why anyone, specifically Cortés would entrust Alvarado with the campaign in the highlands. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer suggest that "perhaps he [Cortés] thought Alvarado so much a liability that having him operate farther afield was considered better" for his ambitions in Mexico.[108] Ultimately, Alvarado's violent reputation in the highlands was profound, even before his direct engagements with the Kaqchikels. Notably, his Nahuatl name, Tonatiuh, had also reached the Maya communities, influencing their perception of him and framing his role within the broader context of the Spanish intrusion.

According to Chinchilla Mazariegos, K'iche' scribes often framed their defeat to Alvarado by casting Tekun Umam's death as "the downfall of a former sun that gave way to a new order," which was marked by "their lords' acceptance of Christianity and the institutionalization of their rights and lands under the Spanish colonial system."[109] This interpretation allowed the K'iche' to contextualize the conquest within a Mesoamerican religious framework, marking it as the beginning of a new era for their people. The Kaqchikels, on the other hand, dismissed Alvarado's solar connotations. Instead, they portrayed him as "a fearful lord who presided over a dark age."[110] This perspective is reflected in the *Memorial de Sololá* where the authors invoke the term *tixib'in*, meaning frightening, next to Tonatiuh's name and the Spaniards.[111] Chinchilla Mazareigos observes that by describing Tonatiuh as *tixib'in*, the

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[108] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 45.

[109] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Tecum, the Fallen Sun," 704.

[110] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 67.

[111] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 260 and 281; and Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 124 and 126. Only Otzoy, and Maxwell and Hill have transcribed the *Memorial de Sololá* from Kaqchikel. The precise words in Kaqchikel from Maxwell and Hill II are "Qitzij tixib'in öq xe'ul; mani eta'm wi kiwäch," and "Qitzij tan tixib'in

Kaqchikels likely expressed an "understanding of the invader and the effects of his onslaught," particularly in light of what had happened to their rivals at Utatlán.[112] In sum, Alvarado wielded considerable influence, instilling fear and apprehension in all those around him to due to his violent and aggressive nature. Beyond this, he was notorious for his insatiable greed, particularly for gold. This greed was forcibly imposed on the Kaqchikels upon his return to Iximche' on July 21, 1524, following an unsuccessful campaign in Cuzcatlán.

The campaign of Cuzcatlán was probably the lowest point in Alvarado's first six months of conquest, culminating in a forced retreat to Iximche' empty-handed, a diminished force, and a wounded leg that left him greatly agitated.[113] However, his frustration was not just based on the events of Cuzcatlán alone. Since arriving in the Guatemalan highlands, Alvarado had been dissatisfied with the tributes furnished by the K'iche's and Tz'utujils. This combination of factors led Alvarado to turn on the Kaqchikels, demanding them to surrender their "precious metals" to make up for the "little return" and "little profit" he had made.[114] The *Memorial de Sololá* documents his ultimatum to the Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil: "Why won't you give me precious metals… Do you want me to burn you, to hang you?"[115] The text continues that the

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Tunatiw." The precise words in Kaqchikel from Otzoy are "Qitzij tixib'in toq xe'ul, mani eta'm wi kiwäch" and "qitzij tan tixib'in Tunatiw."

[112] Chinchilla Mazariegos, "Pedro de Alvarado, Tonatiuh," 70.

[113] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 47, and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 90. Alvarado's exact words are "I am lame in one leg, and of how little return I and these hidalgos that are in my company, have received up to the present and the little profit that we have made so far."

[114] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 47 and 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 264, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 123, and Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 90.

[115] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 265, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 123. Otzoy's precise words are

Kaqchikel lords "tried to have the amount reduced," but "Tunatiw did not want it any other way" and if they did not deliver it, they would know his heart.[116] This course perplexed the Kaqchikel lords, who were angered to be insulted, threatened, and imposed upon.

The *Memorial de Sololá* provides further details as events unfolded, describing a pivotal moment when, amidst the "delivering of the precious metals to Tunatiw", a mystical figure described as a "demon-warrior" known as "the k'axtok'" appeared before the Kaqchikel kings.[117] This figure proclaimed, "I am thunder; I will kill the Spanish people," and declared that they would "be drowned in fire."[118] The ominous message continued instructing that everyone should flee the city upon the sound of a drum. Indeed, influenced by the spectral figure's words, Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at heeded the warning, as recounted by the Kaqchikel account. "On 7 Ajmaq [August 26, 1524]", they executed their "flight [and] abandoned Iximche', after "the delivery of the precious metals was half completed," believing Tunatiw would perish, assuming "he will surely die," and that there would be no war in his heart given that they conveyed at least

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"'Debéis de traerme oro de Calidad dentro de cinco días. Y si no me lo traéis en ese término, entonces conoceréis cómo es mi corazón.'"

[116] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 267-268, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 123-124. Otzoy's precise words are "Los reyes por medio de súplicas trataron de obtener una rebaja, hasta derramar Lágrimas ante él. Pero Tunatiw no se conmovió." In Briton's (1885) translation of the Kaqchikel manuscript, additional details are provided regarding Alvarado's ultimatum to the kings, specifically his actions of cutting "the gold ornaments they wore in their ears" (refer to Alvarado and Mackie, Appendix I, p. 95).

[117] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 265-266, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124. Otzoy's precise words are "Cuando solamente habían entregado a Tunatiw la mitad del metal solicitado, se presentó un hombre poseído de K'axtok'."

[118] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 265-266, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124. Otzoy's precise words are "[el demonio] dijo: 'Yo soy el trueno, yo destruiré a los castellanos,' así dijo él a los reyes. 'Los destuiré con fuego, yo [lo] voy a descargar sobre la ciudad. Que salagan los reyes hacia el otro lado del río."

half of what he demanded.[119] Contrary to their hopes, the "demon-warrior's" promise did not materialize; Alvarado did not die, was unsatisfied with what was delivered, and his desire for conflict remained unabated. However, Alvarado's ability to retaliate was compromised. The failed Cuzcatlán campaign had weakened his forces, and many of his Indigenous allies from Mexico had returned northward, leaving him ill-prepared to counter the Kaqchikel resistance effectively. This did not stop him whatsoever as the *Memorial de Sololá* subsequent entries note that ten days after the Kaqchikels fled Iximche', "the war was begun by Tunatiw" and that "the whole kingdom was in a fight to the death with Tunatiw."[120]

Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer encapsulate the transition of the Kaqchikels poignantly: "Instead of being treated respectfully as partners who had pledged allegiance; furnished fighters; provided food, shelter, and the comfort of women; served as guides, translators, and go-betweens; offered support and sustenance in every way imaginable, the Kaqchikels were ignominiously slighted, made to feel like dirt. By insisting that they deliver an inordinate amount of bullion, or suffer the consequences for not doing so, impulsive and myopic Alvarado turned allies into enemies, made an asset into an adversary," igniting a prolonged and costly resistance that would endure for years.[121]

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[119] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 107, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 265-266, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124. Otzoy's precise words are "Los reyes creyeron que hablaba la verdad ese hombre y le obedecieron. Y así, cuando solamente habíamos entregado la mitad del metal, nos dispersamos."

[120] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 108, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 269-270, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187-188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124-125. Otzoy's precise words are "Entonces los kaqchikeles empezamos a batirnos con los castellanos." He continues by adding that "Todas las tribus nos batimos a muerte con los de Tunatiw."

[121] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 46.

2.5 Casting the Kaqchikel Dilemma

The Kaqchikel resistance is a notably complex and enigmatic chapter in Guatemala's historical narrative. Yet, due to the conflicting accounts and gaps in the source materials, it is often labeled as a "rebellion," "revolt," or "insurrection" by contemporary historiography. These labels impose colonial biases that unjustly brand the Kaqchikels as traitors and their actions as treasonous. Scholars like Van Akkeren critically challenge such interpretations arguing that the "concept of 'treason' implies that a nation was betrayed"—a context not applicable to the sixteenth century where "Guatemala did not exist as a political entity, nor the idea of an Indigenous nation."[122] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache further elaborate on this point, asserting that the Kaqchikels under Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at did not rebel but instead "waged a heroic but unsuccessful war of resistance."[123] Similarly, Restall advocates for a reevaluation of these labels, emphasizing that "rebellion" and "revolt" are "coded colonialist terms that turn justified and legitimate resistance to invasion into illegal acts."[124] This complex portrayal of the Kaqchikel resistance, mired in conflicting viewpoints, reflects the intricate socio-political dynamics of the time and is only further complicated by the varied and often contradictory accounts in the source materials.

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[122] Van Akkeren, *La visión indígena de la conquista*, 43. His precise words are "el concepto de 'traición' implica que había una nación a traicinorar. Como dijimos antes, en el siglo XVI no existía Guatemala como una entidad política, ni la idea de una nación indígena."

[123] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 59. Their precise words are "Al mando de sus dos reyes Cahí Ymox, el Sinacán de los cronistas, y Beleheb Qat, realizaron una heroica aunque infrustuosa guerra de resistencia."

[124] Matthew Restall, "Can the Conquistadors Be Decolonized?," YouTube, November 25, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVydiAHXvOM&t=2260s.

According to Mallory E. Matsumoto (2018), Spaniards often denounced Indigenous peoples as "treacherous rebels to be subdued," a characterization deeply rooted in the European cultural concepts they brought with them.[125] This perspective significantly influenced their portrayal of the Kaqchikels' resistance. For example, Spanish chronicler Francisco Vázquez ([1688] 1937), who likely consulted the *Memorial de Sololá*, depicted Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at as inherently deceitful, colluding with demonic forces. He recounts an instance where the "demon-warrior" known as the "Caxtok [k'axtok' in the *Memorial de Sololá*] appeared to them [the Kaqchikels kings]"—a figure representing deception or the devil—urging the Kaqchikel kings to reject subjugation and resist against the Spaniards, appealing to their sense of autonomy and cultural integrity.[126] According to Vázquez, this account comes directly from an Indigenous source he had access to and interpreted these events as the seeds of discord that led to "these untimely rebellions and disturbances," emphasizing that the Caxtok's seductive promises ignited the unrest.[127] However, Restall counters this portrayal, suggesting that such narratives perpetuate a recurring colonial motif: Indigenous leaders are often cast as inherently treacherous, "due to

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[125] Mallory E. Matsumoto, "'I Saw Their Evil Intent,': Positioning the Highland Maya in the Moral Hierarchy of a Just Conquest," *Ethnohistory* 65, no. 2 (2018): 281.

[126] Francisco Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España* (Tomo 1) (Guatemala, Centro América, 1937), 74. His precise words are "Estado en ella, y sus corazones alterados y calientes contra aquel Alvarado que les había dejado Tonatiúh, escriben ellos que les apareció un Caxtok, que es lo mísmo que engañador y en su frase e inteligencia, significa el demonio, y les dijo ¿Qué esperáis con esos pocos extranheros que han quedado en Almolonga? Ya Tonatiúh se fué a Castilla; y llevó consigo muchos de los extranjeros (así llamaban a los españoles) ¿qué teméis? Yo soy rayo, y los hare a todos polvo y ceniza, y si vosotros acobardáis, a vosotros y a ellos aniquilaré y fundaré siete pueblos allá detrás del río grande. ¿Queréis dejar la ley en que habéis vivido y vuestro antepasados se criaron? ¡Ea! prevenios todos, convocad los de vuestra nación pue son tantos y acabad con tantas desdichas."

[127] Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 40. His precise words are "Así lo escriben en sus relaciones los mismos indios, apellidándole Caxtok y engañador, pues sus falsas promesas los pusieron es estas rebeliones y alborotos intempestivos a que les obligaba con rigors que ejecutaba en ellos, y crueldades con que los amenzaba; temiendo el perro enemigo, el ser desposesionado de tantas almas de que se estuvo señoreado tan infelices siglos."

their duplicitous nature and the ease with which they were manipulated by the devil, they rebelled."[128] This tendency to attribute Indigenous resistance to demonic influences reflects a broader colonial strategy to delegitimize legitimate acts of self-defense and cultural preservation, mirroring other scenarios like the Mexica resistance following Moctezuma's surrender.[129] These portrayals not only distort historical understanding but also undermine the agency and rational motivations of Indigenous peoples confronting colonial imposition.

Further compounding the portrayal of the Kaqchikel resistance as a rebellion or revolt are medieval feudal traditions, particularly the perceived disrespect for the Spanish crown through the framework of the *señor natural* (natural lord), which Matsumoto argues deeply influenced Spanish interpretations.[130] If we refer to Spanish accounts such as Cortés and Alvarado's letters, they often elevated the monarch, referred to as "His Majesty," as the supreme *señor natural*, preordained by nature and God to govern "the New World and its morally and culturally inferior inhabitants."[131] Thus, when Cortés and Alvarado classified the Kaqchikels as vassals of "His Majesty," they demanded unconditional submission to royal authority, branding any form of resistance as insurgency. However, applying such a feudal framework to label the Kaqchikels as traitors or their resistance as treasonous is inappropriate, as it imposes an anachronistic and culturally insensitive interpretation on the complex socio-political dynamics of pre-Columbian societies. Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache support this view, noting that the Kaqchikel

[128] Restall, "Can the Conquistadors Be Decolonized?"

[129] Restall, "Can the Conquistadors Be Decolonized?"

[130] Matsumoto (citing Robert S. Camberlain, 1939), "'I Saw Their Evil Intent,'" 281.

[131] Matsumoto, "'I Saw Their Evil Intent,'" 281.

resistance "was not an uprising or rebellion…since they had not accepted vassalage, but had only negotiated an alliance with the Spaniards."[132]

If anything solidified the so-called treachery of the Kaqchikels, it was certainly their unique approach to warfare that baffled the Spaniards, who were accustomed to fighting in open battlefields. Matsumoto highlights that Spaniards heavily favored this style of combat for its chivalrous one-on-one confrontations, which provided opportunities for personal heroics.[133] In addition, Restall (2014) notes that engaging in open-field combat was strategically preferred by the Spaniards to effectively deploy their horses and use their Indigenous allies as expendable forces.[134] The Kaqchikels and other highland Maya groups, on the contrary, employed military tactics that were entirely foreign to Spanish methods, diverging significantly from the acts of chivalry expected by European soldiers. Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache point out that the Kaqchikels and other highland Mayas groups' style of warfare resembled modern guerrilla tactics, characterized by harassing enemies, launching surprise attacks in small groups, and retreating direct confrontation.[135] This approach is well-documented in both Spanish and Indigenous accounts, further illustrating the profound differences in military strategies.

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[132] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 59. Their precise words are "En realidad no se trató de un alzamiento o rebelión, como se dijo entonces y se dice todovía, puesto que no habían aceptado el vasallaje, sino solo habían concertado una alianza con los españoles."

[133] Matsumoto, "'I Saw Their Evil Intent,'" 274.

[134] Matthew Restall, "Invasion: The Maya at War, 1520s-1540s," in *Embattled Bodies, Embattled Places: War in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the Andes*, ed. Andrew K. Scherer and John W. Verano (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014), 103. This observation was made by James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz (1983).

[135] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 59. Their precise words are "utilizaron una tática que ahora se llamaría de guerrilla, hostilizando al enemigo, atacando por sorpresa en pequeños grupos, para luego retirarse sin dar frente."

Examples of Maya warfare tactics commonly encountered by the Spaniards included urban ambushes. Restall simply describes this tactic as Maya communities evacuating their urban centers, luring invaders in with food and invitations to stay as honored guests, and then ambushing them, often using makeshift fortifications to funnel them into the town center.[136] This approach was notably employed during the conquest of Guatemala, particularly the K'iche's of Utatlán. After defeating a contingent of K'iche' warriors near Quetzaltenango, the surviving K'iche' lords invited Alvarado and his men to Utatlán, under the guise of discussing surrender terms.[137] Alvarado recorded in his letters how the K'iche' lords sent an envoy to profess their goodwill and obedience to the Spanish crown, urging him to enter the capital.[138] However, this goodwill gesture was merely a tactical ploy to trap and ambush the Spaniards with plans to set the city ablaze. Restall explains that urban ambushes aimed to turn the Spaniards' horses "into a disadvantage" and transform urban centers into a "dangerous maze of unfamiliar streets."[139] For this reason, Spaniards often feared and ranted against urban ambush tactics, although they occasionally suspected and thwarted such plans.[140] Alvarado, in this case, recognized the threat

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[136] Restall, "Invasion," 103.

[137] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 16-17; Matsumoto, "'I Saw Their Evil Intent,'" 280-281; Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala*, 54-55; and Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 74. Van Akkeren's precise words are "Después de la derrota desatrosa en Urbina [Pa Chäj], los señores de Q'umarkaj mandarin mensajeros a Quetzaltenango para ofrecer la paz y obediencia a la Corona española."

[138] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 31-32; Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 60. Alvarado's exact words are "When the lords of this city realized that their people were defeated, they took counsel with all the land and called many other provinces to them, and giving tribute to their enemies and induced them to join them, so that all might come together and kill us. And they agreed to send an envoy to tell us that they wished to be good, and that once again they gave obedience to our Lord the Emperor; and that I should enter this city of Utatlán."

[139] Restall, "Invasion," 103.

[140] Restall, "Invasion," 103.

in time, noting that the K'iche's "evil plan would have come to pass but that God our Lord could not allow these infidels to be victorious," prompting him to evacuate his forces swiftly.[141] He later criticized the K'iche' for their "bad disposition toward the services of His Majesty," labeling Utatlán a "dangerous place that more resembles a thieves' den than a settlement."[142] This experience likely influenced Spanish expectations of future encounters, such as the Kaqchikels, weary of Alvarado's demands, and decided to wage a war of resistance.

Another example of Maya warfare tactics that confounded the Spaniards was the use of staked horse pits, a technique commonly employed by the Kaqchikels during the resistance. This tactic specifically targeted enemies on horseback by creating pits that were concealed with dirt and grass and filled with sharpened wooden stakes. When enemies unwittingly fell into these hidden traps, both the rider and horse were fatally impaled. [143] Indigenous accounts from Guatemala, particularly the *Memorial de Sololá* highlight the Kaqchikels' strategic use of these pits, recording how "trenches were dug, pitfalls for horses were made with stakes to kill them," and noting that "many Spanish people died, and so too did many horses die in the pitfalls."[144] In addition to Kaqchikel manuscript, the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* further illustrates the violent

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[141] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 32; Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 60.

[142] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 33; Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 63.

[143] Restall, "Invasion," 109; Van Akkeren, *La vision indígena de la conquista*, 105; and Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 132-133. Van Akkeren's precise words are "Aparte de batallas, los autores pintaron diversas escenas de caminos bloqueados y trampas en forma de hoyos con palos puntiagudos." He continues by adding "Las crearon para atrapar al caballo, arma nueva, y de gran detriment para los mayas del altiplano."

[144] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 108, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 270, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187-188., and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 125. Otzoy's precise words are "Se cavaron agujeros, sembrándolos de estacas que sirvieron de trampa mortal para los caballos." He continues by adding "Muchos castellanos perecieron y los caballos murieron en las trampas para caballos."

impact of these traps, which not only impaled enemies but the Kaqchikels themselves (Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6). Moreover, these traps served additional purposes such as acting as barricade or roadblock, which proved to be a significant challenge for the Spaniards (Figure 2.7). Even Cortés, who did not participate in the conquest of Guatemala, reported in his letters to Charles V the "much harm" Spaniards faced against the "fierce and brave" Kaqchikels who devised "all kinds of methods of attack and defense" with "much success."[145]

Figure 2.5 Stake Horse Pit; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan*.[146]
Image from the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin.

[145] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 429-430.

[146] In the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, numerous staked horse pits are depicted. These traps are illustrated as black holes containing sharp vertical stakes inside.

Figure 2.6 Impact of the Staked Horse Pits; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan*
Image from the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin

Figure 2.7 Staked Horse Pits as a barricade (center); *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan.*[147]
Image from the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin

[147] The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* depicts Iximche' (illustrated as a pyramid and referred to as Tecpán Quatemallan) surrounded by stake horse pits, underscoring that this technique was also used for defensive purposes.

The effectiveness of warfare tactics like urban ambushes and staked horse pits, underscores the challenges that the Kaqchikel and any other Maya resistance movements posed to the Spaniards, significantly hindering their colonization efforts. Since these tactics diverged sharply from the Spaniards' traditional concepts of warfare, they were quickly labeled as treacherous, further branding the Kaqchikels' actions as mere rebellion. But again, the Spaniards' framework for labeling the Kaqchikels as such is inappropriate, as it imposes an anachronistic and culturally insensitive interpretation, especially considering the dilemma the Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil faced when they initially allied the Spaniards and then reverse their decision following Alvarado's (or Tonatiuh's) notorious greed and volatile behavior. Thus, this nuanced understanding of the Kaqchikel resistance and its implications shed light on the broader challenges faced by the Spaniards in the conquest and colonization efforts.

2.6 The Resistance

Fighting commenced "On 4 Kamey [September 5, 1524]", as the *Memorial de Sololá* records that "the Kaqchikels began hostilities against the Spaniards."[148] Interestingly, chroniclers like Francisco Vázquez, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán ([1690-99] 1883), and Francisco Ximénez ([1715-1720] 1929) dated the onset of the resistance to 1526 in their respective *crónicas* (chronicles). This is surely surprising, especially for Vázquez, considering he might have had access to the Kaqchikel manuscript. However, according to Contreras, the resistance "began in 1524 and had not ended by 1530," which the *Memorial de Sololá*

[148] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 108, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 269, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 187, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 124-125. Otzoy's precise words are "El día 4 Kamey, los castellanos empezaron nuestra destrucción."

corroborates.[149] This is because the Kaqchikel manuscript, per Contreras, is the most reliable source with its precise dating affirming the resistance's timeline.[150] With the conflict in effect, Spaniards were forced to retreat, leaving Iximche' deserted. The *Memorial de Sololá* records that "the Spaniards had moved to Xe Paw," a town near Quetzaltenango, which many now recognize as Olintepeque today.[151] This sequence of events is confirmed by Vázquez's writing, in which he describes how the Spaniards, under the interim leadership of Gonzalo de Alvarado, one of Pedro's brother, were compelled to retreat, triggering Pedro's return from Honduras, where he intended to confer with Cortés.[152]

Fuentes y Guzmán, who penned his chronicle a decade after Vázquez, independently drew on various native accounts to construct his narrative of the Kaqchikel resistance. He specifically extols on the *fiesta de volcán* (the Volcano Festival) for his interpretation. He casted it as a collaborative effort between the Kaqchikels under Kaji' Imox, referred to as Sinacán, and

[149] Contreras, "Sobre la fundación de Santiago de Guatemala y la rebelión de los kaqchikeles," 54. His precise words are "sabemos que principió en 1524, y que no había terminado en 1530.

[150] Contreras, "Sobre la fundación de Santiago de Guatemala y la rebelión de los kaqchikeles," 54. His precise words are "tiene especial importancia porque va acompañado de fechas que sitúan correctamente en la historia esta rebelión."

[151] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 108, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 272, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 125. Otzoy's precise words are "Los castellanos habían establecido su centro de operaciones en Xe Paw."

[152] Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 73-77. Not only does Vázquez erroneously dates the resistance to 1526, but also incorrectly attributes the provocations to Gonzalo de Alvarado instead of Pedro. His precise words are "este caballero [Gonzalo] quisiese aprovecharse de la ocasión para enriquecer. He continues by adding that Gonzalo imposed an insane amount of tribute. His precise words are "Impuso al numeroso pueblo de Patinamit [Iximche'] un irregular tribute." Bernal Díaz mention in his account of his expedition from Honduras back to Mexico with Pedro de Alvarado that they stop at Olintepeque finding Gonzalo and his forces there after Pedro had named him captain when he had originally left for Honduras (see Alvarado and Mackie, Appendix III, p. 122-123).

the K'iche's under a king named Sequechul.[153] His account suggests that this coalition posed significant challenges for the Spaniards near Quetzaltenango causing "many hostilities and damage to the towns that remained under our [Spanish] devotion and obedience, often impeding the entry of supplies to the city of Goathemala."[154] However, his narrative is questionable. If the Spaniards retreated to Olintepeque (like the *Memorial de Sololá* and Vázquez confirmed), then they entered K'iche' territory since it is geographically near Quetzaltenango, meaning they would have entered enemy territory, which makes no sense. Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache concur, suggesting that the Spaniards' retreat to any area near Quetzaltenango meant that they were entering an area where they "were already allies of the Spaniards in their fight against the Kaqchikels."[155] Moreover, Ximénez, who severely criticized Fuentes y Guzmán's chronicle, challenges the assertion that the Kaqchikels and K'iche's were in collaborative opposition to the Spaniards. He refutes this by claiming the K'iche's "did not rise nor was there such a King Sequechul."[156] In fact, he adds that the name Sequechul likely belonged to a prominent

[153] Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán and Justo Zaragoza, *Historia de Guatemala ó Recordación florida* (Tomo 2) (Madrid: Luis Navarro, 1883), 155. His precise words are "Es inexcusable y preciso, para describir esta admirable y espléndida *fiesta de Volcán*, decir cómo habiéndose levantado por el año de 1526 el rey Sinacam de esta parte de Chachiquel, acompañado y coligado con Sequechul, rey de Utatlán y el Quiche."

[154] Fuentes y Guzmán and Zaragoza, *Historia de Guatemala ó Recordación florida*, 155. His precise words are "muchas hostilidades y obediencia, impidiendo muchas veces la entrada de los mantenimientos á la ciudad de Goathemala."

[155] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 56. His precise words are "es decir, en territorio de loa quichés, que entonces eran ya aliados de los españoles, en la lucha de éstos contra los cakchiqueles."

[156] Francisco Ximénez, *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala* (Tomo 1) (Guatemala, Centro América,1929), 151. His precise words are "la parte del Quiché no se levantó ni hubo tal Rey Zequechul en el Quiché."

Kaqchikel ruler, which is accurate given that the name was designated to the Ajpo Xajil, B'eleje' K'at, by the Spaniards.[157]

The Kaqchikel resistance proved to be a significant challenge for the Spaniards during its initial stages. With many Indigenous allies having retreated north before the conflict, Spanish forces dwindled leaving them extremely vulnerable. Luckily for Alvarado, Cortés fortuitously reinforced him with approximately two hundred Spaniards and several Indigenous allies before his departure to Honduras.[158] However, despite these reinforcements, the Spaniards faced increasing difficulties in the highlands. As Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache detail, "several Indigenous lordships seized the moment to repudiate Spanish rule" amid the Kaqchikel resistance, dispersing various military efforts throughout the highlands. [159] Among the most notable confrontations were with the Pok'omams, another campaign against the Pipil in Cuzcatlán, and possibly a renewed conflict with the Tz'utujils. Lovell (2015) expands on this period, noting additional campaigns in remote areas of the highlands including the *Sierra de los Cuchumatánes*, where groups like the Mam, Ixil, Uspanteko, Awakateko and Q'anjob'al resided.[160] Campaigns in this region often resulted in prolonged sieges.

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[157] Francisco Ximénez, *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala*, 151. His precise words are "Ese sería algún Casique poderoso de Cacchiquel."

[158] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 57. Their precise words are "Pero para fotunada de Alvarado, Cortés le envió, antes de salir a Honduras, a finales de 1524 o principios de 1525, un refuerzo de 200 españoles e indios auxiliares."

[159] Luján Muñoz and Cabezas Carcache, "La conquista," 57. Their precise words are "Al parecer, en el interior de actual territorio de Guatemala otros señoríos indígenas aprovecharon la situación, y lograron rechazar el dominio español, obligando a los conquistadores a distribuir sus esfuerzos env arias direcciones."

[160] Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala*, 57-67. For an in-depth account of the campaign against the Mam, refer to pages 57-64, and for the campaign against the Ixiles and Uspantekos, see pages 64-67.

By 1526, the situation had worsened for the Spaniards, who were already overstretched and increasingly embattled. Pedro de Alvarado intended to venture to Honduras to confer with Cortés but faced a mutiny from a contingent of his men who refused to embark on the journey. The mutineers, in an act of defiance, ablaze sections of Iximche', exacerbating tensions with the Kaqchikels.[161] This incident is confirmed by the *Memorial de Sololá*, though it attributed the destruction to Alvarado himself, claiming that "On 4 Kamey [February 7, 1526]… Tunatiw came and left the city, passing through and burning it." According to Recinos, Alvarado condemned the actions of the mutineers in a report that he communicated to authorities in Mexico, before his departure to Honduras. Anticipating that the defectors would give them their version of the events, Alvarado labeled them as traitors to the cause, believing they had abandoned the conquest at a critical juncture.[162] With Iximche' in tatters, Alvarado's focus shifted away as he prepared to meet with Cortés in Honduras, resigning the city that had once served the Kaqchikels so well to its fate.

Bernal Díaz has more to say on the state of Iximche'. He recounts his expedition, along with Alvarado during their journey from Honduras back to Mexico. This journey included passing through "the old city of Guatemala [Iximche'], where the caciques named Zinacan [Sinacán] and Sacachul [Sequechul] used to reside."[163] As they entered the city, they faced

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[161] Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado*, 116. His precise words are "un grupo de cincuenta o sesenta soldados se amotinaron, negándose a continua en una expedición que, a su juicio, sería larga y peligrosa y escasa de provecho. Los rebeldes decidieron deserter el ejército en marcha, incendiaron parte de la cuidad [Iximche'] la noche del 7 de febrero." Recinos additionally records that the mutineers kidnapped a priest and stole ecclesiastical ornaments.

[162] Recinos, *Pedro de Alvarado*, 116. His precise words are "Alvarado se quejó a las autoridades de México de la deserción de sus subordinados."

[163] Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 122 (Appendix III translated by Maudslay).

substantial resistance from several "squadrons of Guatemaltecos [Kaqchikels]."[164] Despite the ensuing battle, the Spaniards managed to overcome them, leaving Iximche' deserted once again, offering the Spaniards a respite. Díaz described the conditions of the Kaqchikel city from "the lodgings and houses" being well maintained to "the buildings very fine."[165] His descriptions suggest that the Kaqchikels had reestablished a temporary presence in Iximche', maintaining it as stronghold despite the events that occurred when the city was set on flames. As for the Kaqchikels, despite their loss when Alvarado and Bernal Díaz passed through Iximche', their resistance remained strong. Bernal Díaz informs us that Alvarado "sent twice to summon the people of Guatemala and other pueblos in the neighborhood to make peace," but "none of them would come."[166] The *Memorial de Sololá* supports this narrative as it records that "During this course of year [March 29, 1526, to June 2, 1527]", "our hearts had some rest," and "No one fell before the Spanish people; we were there still at Jolom B'alam."[167] This passage in the Kaqchikel manuscript signifies that the Kaqchikel resistance was momentarily successful, granting them a period to recuperate and ready themselves for continued resistance.

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[164] Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 122 (Appendix III translated by Maudslay).

[165] Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 122 (Appendix III translated by Maudslay).

[166] Alvarado and Mackie, *An Account of the Conquest of Guatemala in 1524*, 122 (Appendix III translated by Maudslay).

[167] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 109, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 273, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 126. Otzoy's precise words are "Durante este año que se inició nuestro corazón quedó disfrutando de algún Descanso, estaban completes los señores, Kaji' Imox y B'eleje' K'at, no cayeron ante los castellanos. Entonces estábamos allá en Jolom B'alam." The translation by Recinos and Goetz describe Jolom B'alam as "Head of a Tiger," identifying it as a place situated on a high-mountain near Iximche'.

In the face of continued Kaqchikel resistance and parts of Guatemala eluding Spanish control, Pedro de Alvarado was intent on returning to Spain after his stint in Honduras. His aim was to gain recognition for his achievements and receive royal consent for future expeditions. Departing Guatemala in August 1526, Alvarado left for Mexico on a mission that would keep him from returning to the highlands until April 1530, a hiatus of nearly four years.[168] During this period, he delegated authority to his brother-in-law, Pedro de Portocarrero. Fuentes y Guzmán reports that Portocarrero was pivotal in countering resistance, assisted by a contingent of "one hundred and twenty Tlaxcaltecas and two hundred and thirty Mexicans."[169] Under Portocarrero's command, employing tactics that caused "disorganization and confusion" among the resistance, many were compelled to surrender.[170] This included Sinacán and Sequechul, who were imprisoned in "harsh and dire conditions" for fifteen years until Alvarado's return and intended departure for the Spice Islands and Moluccas.[171] However, despite the claims of Fuentes y Guzmán, the resistance did not capitulate, and Portocarrero's role was just a placeholder, serving as a stand-in until Pedro's other brother, Jorge de Alvarado, would take over command upon his arrival from Mexico.

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[168] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 65, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 49.

[169] Fuentes y Guzmán and Zaragoza, *Historia de Guatemala ó Recordación florida*, 156. His precise words are "D. Pedro Portocarrero, dispuso su marcha en la forma que mejor ofreció el tiempo y número de la gente con que se hallaban, que por entonces era el de doscientos quince españoles escopeteros y ballesteros, ciento ocho de á caballo, y ciento viente tlaxcaltecas y doscientos treinta mexicanos."

[170] Fuentes y Guzmán and Zaragoza, *Historia de Guatemala ó Recordación florida*, 158. His precise words are "Pero desordenado y confuse aquel número de defensores atropados, que siendo mucho ellos mismo se hacían embarazo é impedimento para el manejo de las armas."

[171] Fuentes y Guzmán and Zaragoza, *Historia de Guatemala ó Recordación florida*, 158. His precise words are "quedaron presos entre éstos Sinacam y Sequechul, que perseveraron, como queda referido, por quince años en lo duro y funesto de la prisión, hasta el embarco de D. Pedro de Alvarado para la Especería ó las Molucas."

Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer highlight the overlooked role of Jorge de Alvarado in the conquest of Guatemala noting that he "secured more of Guatemala in the years he was charged with governing the kingdom (1527-1529) than when his brother Pedro first ruled (1524-1526)."[172] Indeed, Jorge de Alvarado played a pivotal role that led to a significant shift in the dynamics of the Kaqchikel resistance. He arrived in Olintepeque on March 27, 1527, leading a substantial force of Indigenous allies from Central Mexico that ranged between five to six thousand warrior.[173] These allies, Matthew observes, hailed from regions that participated in "Pedro de Alvarado's original campaign of 1524, including Tlaxcala, Cholula, Coyocan, and various other central Mexican polities, as well as Oaxaca."[174] Asselbergs adds depth to this narrative, positing that "The bulk of Quauhquecholteca arrived in this group," who come from Quauhquechollan, a town near Puebla that contributed to Jorge's campaign through tributes of goods, services, and military support.[175] This contingent's story is preserved in the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, detailing Jorge's tactical maneuvers from Olintepeque to Chij Xot near Comalapa and ultimately to Chimaltenango, which became the strategic foothold for successive campaigns and further consolidation of Spanish control in the region.

Upon his arrival, Jorge de Alvarado swiftly deemed the Kaqchikels as the primary target and prioritized his military efforts against them. This approach is identified in the *Memorial de Sololá*, which recounts that after a year and twenty days since Iximche' was set on flames "the

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[172] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 70, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 50.

[173] Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 85, and Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 91.

[174] Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 85-86.

[175] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 91.

Spanish people came to Chi Xot," and that "On 1 Kawoq [March 27, 1527] our dying began again, because of the Spanish people."[176] The Kaqchikel manuscript then goes on to describe a "prolonged war" in which "death absorbed them again," but "None of the territory paid tribute," highlighting the Kaqchikels' defiance.[177] While Jorge de Alvarado's own exploits are not directly mentioned in the *Memorial de Sololá*, the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* (Figure 2.3) provides complementary details to the Kaqchikel manuscript, tracing the footsteps of the Spanish incursions during that era. Asselbergs adds credibility to this connection, indicating that the simultaneity of the conquistadors' arrival with these events leave little room for doubt that it catalyzed the renewed conflict.[178]

[176] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 109, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 274, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 126-127. Otzoy's precise words are "El día 1 Ka'oq los castellanos comenzaron de nuevo a matarnos y la gente se batió con ellos en una guerra prolongada."

[177] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 109, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 274, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 126-127. Otzoy's precise words are "Nuevamente la guerra nos hirió de muerte, pero todos los habitants de la comarca se negaron a pagar el tributo."

[178] Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 91

Figure 2.8 Olintepeque and Jorge de Alvarado; *Lienzo de Quauhuquechollan*.[179]
Image from the Universidad de Francisco Marroquin.

Within a short period, the dynamics of the resistance began to change markedly. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer draw attention to Jorge de Alvarado's decisive action to secure a proper location for the Spanish colonial capital, which led to the establishment of Santiago in Almolonga on November 22, 1527.[180] This city was cited on the lower slopes of the Agua volcano, close to a location that the Kaqchikels called "Bulbüx Ya'," which the *Memorial de Sololá* mentions.[181] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer also note that Jorge de Alvarado nearly succeeded in capturing the Kaqchikel kings during his expedition into the mountains near Chimaltenango,

[179] This scene from the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* depicts the Spaniards and Quauhquecholteca warriors departing from Olintepeque (left), led by a Spanish conquistador on horseback. Asselbergs suggests that this figure is most likely Jorge de Alvarado (middle).

[180] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 68, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 50.

[181] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 109, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 275, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 127. Otzoy's precise words are "Entonces dichos castellanos fueron a establecerse a B'ulb'u'x Ya'."

where Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at were rumored to be hiding but failed to capture them.[182] However, the situation shifted "On 6 Tz'i' [January 12, 1528]", when the Kaqchikels began to pay tribute, leading to new hardships and their eventual renunciation of the war.[183] This decision prompts reflection to Polo Sifontes's ruminations about the complexities of Kaqchikel actions, including abandoning their resistance, choosing peace at the expense of heavy tributes. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer also reflect on this by asking "Would it be possible, somehow, for hostilities to cease, and a new accord to be struck?"[184] While the broader Kaqchikel nation was affected by this turn of events, Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at found themselves once again in a precarious situation with this dilemma. The contemplation of their decision extended for over two years until the circumstances was transformed by the news of Pedro de Alvarado's return.

Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at, well-versed in the Mesoamerican tradition of treaty-making and strategic negotiation, recognized their predicament but did not surrender under Jorge de Alvarado's command. Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer point out that the Kaqchikel kings "well understood that Pedro, not Jorge, was the authority with whom to negotiate."[185] The *Memorial de Sololá* reflect this understanding, noting, "The kings did not go for their pleasure; they were prepared to suffer at the hands of Tunatiw."[186] And so, when word spread of Alvarado's return,

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[182] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 70.

[183] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 109, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 275-276, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 127-128. Otzoy's precise words are "El día 6 Tz'i' se principió a pagar el tributo."

[184] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 69, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 50.

[185] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 70, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 50.

[186] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 110, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 278, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 128. Otzoy's precise words are "No era del agrado de los reyes volver a presentarse ante Tunatiw, pero preferían arriesgarse a ello."

the Kaqchikel rulers surrendered, as the *Memorial de Sololá* records: "On 7 Ajmaq [May 7, 1530], the kings Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil were driven out; they arrived at Ruya'al Chay," and "appeared again before Tunatiw."[187] The text adds that "Many lords joined them," including the grandsons and sons of the lords, and that "Tunatiw was happy with the lords when he saw them again."[188] Despite Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at's efforts to secure favorable terms for their people, they had minimal influence over Alvarado's decisions.

Upon Alvarado's return to Guatemala from Spain, he had been elevated to the rank of an *Adelantado*, granting him the title of supreme governor. With his new augmented powers, there was no better way for him to exercise them then to demand "cripplingly amounts of tribute, extreme even his rapacious standards."[189] The *Memorial de Sololá* comments on the severity of these demands, stating "13 Aj [August 14, 1530],… precious metals was given again to Tunatiw."[190] The situation deteriorated further when Alvarado demanded several men and women to wash for gold, as the Kaqchikel manuscript states that "all the people dug for precious metal."[191] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer suggest that phrase "all the people" implies that Alvarado's

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[187] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 110, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 277, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 188, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 128. Otzoy's precise words are "Entonces el día 7 Ajmaq salieron los reyes a Chi Ruya'al Chay."

[188] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 110, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 277, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 128-129. Otzoy's precise words are "Iban protegidos por gran número de señores, por todos los nietos y los hijos de los señores y gran número de gente iba acompañado a los reyes."

[189] Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 51.

[190] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 110, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 279, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 129. Otzoy's precise words are "Durante este año fueron terribles los tributos que se impusieron."

[191] Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala*, 110, Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 279, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 129. Otzoy's precise words are "toda la gente se dedicó a extraer oro."

condition of surrender indiscriminately subjected everyone to labor and tribute, including members of nobility.[192] This indiscriminate demand for tribute proved to be not only a source of humiliation but also a cause of death. For the Ajpo Xajil, B'eleje' K'at, the demand was a burdensome and ultimately lethal imposition. As recorded in the *Memorial de Sololá*, "the lord B'eleje' K'at died; On 7 Kej [September 24, 1532] he died; He was panning for precious metal when he died here."[193]

The death of the Ajpo Xajil presented Alvarado with an opportunity to further consolidate his authority. In a departure from tradition, which would have seen the Kaqchikels choose their new leader, the *Adelantado* took it upon himself to appoint B'eleje' K'at's successor. Alvarado chose Kab'lajuj Tijax, known as "Don Jorge," a son of the former Ajpo Xajil who had been present at his father's capitulation. Don Jorge was anticipated to be a compliant Ajpo Xajil, a role he indeed plays over the following three decades. This installation is noted in the Memorial de Sololá, which states: "The lord Don Jorge was installed," and pointedly adds, "There was no election by the people to name him."[194] The aftermath of his counterpart's death greatly impacted the Ajpo Sotz'il, as Tunatiw's "decree was accepted by all the lords," mainly out of fear.[195] This

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[192] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 76, and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 51.

[193] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 280, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 129. Otzoy's precise words are "Cuando faltaba 40 días para completer el tercer año desde la presentación de los reyes, murió el rey B'eleje' K'at. Murió el día 7 Kej, cuando dicho rey se ocupaba en lava oro aquí."

[194] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 281, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 130. Otzoy's precise words are "Inmediatamente Tunatiw se levantó para poner un successor del rey. Entonces entró a gobernar don Jorge por la única voluntad de Tunatiw, no hubo Consejo para nombrarlo."

[195] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 281, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 130. Otzoy's precise words are "Luego dio sus órdenes Tunatiw a los reyes y ellos obedecieron, en verdad se hacía temer Tunatiw."

climate of intimidation spurred Kaji' Imox to flee the Spanish-dominated capital, seeking refuge in the ruins at Iximche'. The *Memorial de Sololá* recounts: "On 4 Aj [November 26, 1533], the lord Kaji' Imox, Ajpo Sotz'il, went away and went to live in the city."[196] He was compelled by the "tribute imposed on the lords as well as on everyone."[197] What Kaji' Imox did afterward remains unclear, as the *Memorial de Sololá* falls silent on his account for seven years, leaving his fate during that period to speculation.

2.7 More Resistance?

Interestingly, the *Memorial de Sololá* does not mention Kaji' Imox's name until "13 Q'anel [May 26, 1540]" when "he was hanged by Tunatiw."[198] Before this date, there is no information on his actions or whereabouts following his flight from Almolonga to Iximche'. However, Contreras argued the Kaji' Imox likely led a second Kaqchikel resistance, potentially more impactful than the first.[199] This argument is compelling and has been adopted by scholars such as Polo Sifontes and Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer.[200] Unfortunately, no Indigenous accounts

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[196] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 287, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 132. Otzoy's precise words are "En el transcurso de este año, el rey Ajpop Sotz'il Kaji' Imox se apartó y fue a reconocer la ciudad (Iximche')."

[197] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 281, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 189, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 130. Otzoy's precise words are "El rey Kaji' Imox pensó separarse porque vio rebajada su jerarquía hasta casi compararse a los demás señores, pues todos pagaban si tribute, incluso el mismo rey."

[198] Maxwell and Hill II, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, 281, Otzoy, *Memorial de Sololá*, 190, and Recinos and Goetz, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, 130. Otzoy's precise words are "Doscientos sesenta días después de su retorno, Tunatiw mandó ahorcar al rey Ajpop Sotz'il Kaji' Imox. Fu el día 13 Q'anel cuando lo ahorcaron, juntamente con Kiyawit Ka'oq, por orden de Tunatiw."

[199] Contreras, "Sobre la Fundación de Santiago de Guatemala y la rebelión," 54. His precise words are "Sinacán se refugió en su antiguo Tinamit, descontento con el nuevo sistema de vida." He continues by adding "Sinacán debió volverse a levantar en armas en contra los castellanos."

[200] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 79-93; Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 52-55; and Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*, 81-85.

provide information supporting this argument. Therefore, Contreras, Polo Sifontes, and Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer draw heavily on Francisco Vázquez's chronicle, who retrieved pertinent data from the *Libro Segundo de Cabildo*, described as "the second book minutes of the city council of Santiago, spanning the years 1530-1541."[201] Until recently, this manuscript was considered lost, meaning Contreras and Polo Sifontes had to rely solely on Vázquez's summaries. These summaries included five entries related to Indigenous resistance, allowing speculation on whether three of them, certainly one, allude to Kaji' Imox and a second Kaqchikel resistance. However, with Kramer and Luján Muñoz having recently transcribed and edited the now found *Libro Segundo de Cabildo* in 2018, Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer have compared Vázquez's summaries with the original manuscript, thereby evaluating the evidence the led Contreras to make his case.

Based on three of the five entries by Vázquez, specifically the second, third, and fifth, it is likely that Kaji' Imox took a second stand against the Spaniards. The evidence for this claim is based on three factors. The first comes from Vázquez's second entry that tell us Pedro de Portocarrero and another Spaniard named Diego de Rojas had been charged with leading a campaign in 1533 "due to the urgency of the wars waged by the Indians."[202] This information is confirmed in the *Libro Segundo de Cabildo*, which records how the city council assembled and announced, "a summons to prepare for war," in which Pedro de Alvarado named Portocarrero

[201] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 79.

[202] Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 39. His precise words are "El 21 de abril de 1533 se hace mención de haber nombrado dos Capitanes para las guerras, que fueron Diego de Rojas y don Pedro de Portocarrero, y que se habían puesto en lista, hasta los del regimineto, por la urgencia de las guerras, que les daban los indios."

and Rojas as captains.[203] According to Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, both these men, particularly Portocarrero had already faced against the Kaqchikels during the previous decade, making it sensible to appoint them to lead this urgent campaign given their familiarity with "the terrain in which Kaji' Imox had again taken refuge."[204] The second piece evidence comes from Vázquez's third entry dating March 2 and 21, 1534, hinting that Kaji' Imox still roamed free, resulting in Alvarado, restless and once again abandoning Guatemala to satisfy his insatiable greed; in this case, it was Peru.[205] The *Libro Segundo de Cabildo* informs us that Alvarado's evasiveness in countering Indigenous resistance, despite appeals for him to stay, resulted in his brother, Jorge de Alvarado, taking charge once again.[206] However, his authority was limited, and when the Adelantado had returned from the Andes in 1535, "The Indians along the [Pacific] coast have spurned Your Majesty's conditions and risen in rebellion against the Spaniards in this land."[207]

Polo Sifontes inform us that despite recurring Indigenous resistance when Alvarado returned, the Spaniards managed to capture Kaji' Imox. He was captured "in the vicinity of Comalapa around 1535," along with another Indigenous leader named Kiyawit Kawoq, who likely assumed the title of Ajpo Xajil in exile after B'eleje' K'at's death.[208] The capture of the

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[203] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer (citing Kramer and Luján Muñoz 2018), *Strike Fear in the Land*, 82.

[204] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 83; and Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 53.

[205] Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 39. His precise words are "A 2 y a 21 de marzo de 1534, se dice: como el Adelantado es forzado a salir frecuentemente a la guerra, por causa de los indios que de cada día se alzan contra el real servicio; por lo cual no puede estar de asiento en la ciudad, y que pore so nombra Teniente suyo a Jorge de Alvarado."

[206] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer (citing Kramer and Luján Muñoz 2018), *Strike Fear in the Land*, 84.

[207] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer (citing Kramer and Luján Muñoz 2018), *Strike Fear in the Land*, 85.

[208] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 86; Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 54; Polo Sifontes, *Los cakchiqueles en la conquista de Guatemala*, 81. Polo Sifontes's precise words are "sin duda fueron capturados [Kaji'

Ajpo Sotz'il is confirmed in the *Libro Segundo de Cabildo*, from which Vázquez produced "an almost word-for-word transcription" of the council's meeting minutes, explicitly naming "the imprisoned Cinacán [Sinacán] and Sachil (likely Kiyawit Kawoq), lords of Guatemala."[209] Both accounts tell us that council members pleaded with Alvarado to take the imprisoned Kaqchikel kings with him on his venture to the Spice Islands, fearing that "because these Indians have always been rebellious, and from his stay in the land, it is feared that they will rise and cause some uprising that could lead to the loss of the land."[210] According to Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, Alvarado reputedly said that he would act in the best interest of God, the king, and the pacification of the land.[211] Rather than risk another resistance movement by taking Kaji' Imox and Kiyawit Kawoq to the Spice Islands, Alvarado did what he is known best for: executing the kings. This ensured that there would be no third Kaqchikel resistance, allowing the Spaniards to rest in Guatemala, although it meant that Pedro de Alvarado would not profit from his decision.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion: Reiterating the Face of Resistance

The enduring legacy of Maya resistance to the Spanish conquest of Guatemala is often overshadowed by the legendary heroics of the K'iche' military lord Tekun Umam. His valiant

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Imox and Kiyawit Kawoq] en algún promontorio montañoso que bien podría ser Holom Balam, en las inmediaciones de Comalapa hacia 1535."

[209] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 89; (citing Kramer and Luján Muñoz 2018), 89; Lovell and Lutz, "Unsung Heroes," 54; and Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 39. Vázquez's precise words are "los capitulares le digeron: que su Señoría tiene presas a Cinacán y Sachil, señores de Guatemala."

[210] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer (citing Kramer and Luján Muñoz 2018), *Strike Fear in the Land*, 89; and Vázquez, *Crónica de la provincia del santisimo nombre de Jesus de Guatemala de la orden de N. Seráfico Padre San Francisco en el Reino de la Nueva España*, 39. Vázquez's precise words are "que su Señoria se va ahora en su armada, porque estos indios siempre han sido rebeldes, y se su estado en la tierra se temen, que se levantarán y harán algún alzamiento con que la tierra se pierda."

[211] Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer, *Strike Fear in the Land*, 90.

stand and subsequent death at the hands of Pedro de Alvarado have been enshrined in the national consciousness, celebrated in monuments and currency. This focus, however, has inadvertently marginalized other significant historical figures from the historiography and public memory. Paramount among these are the Kaqchikel kings, whose sustained and vigorous resistance to Spanish incursion was both profound and consequential. The Ajpo Sotz'il, Kaji' Imox, and the Ajpo Xajil, B'eleje' K'at—or by their Spanish-given names, Sinacán and Sequechul—spearheaded a strategic military resistance that stymied colonial ambition for six years, and likely even longer. Their initial compliance to Alvarado's demands hid the temporary nature of peace, with Kaji' Imox' likely reviving the resistance following B'eleje' K'at's death—a demise deeply felt by his people. Captured in 1535, Kaji' Imox met his ultimate fate by hanging in 1540, as noted by the *Memorial de Sololá*, which fell silent on his actions following his counterpart's death.

Unfortunately, the annals of conquest history in Guatemala are still dominated by the figure of Pedro de Alvarado and have yet to fully acknowledge the Kaqchikel kings for their courageous resistance. Contemporary historiography continues to label their resistance as "rebellion," "revolt," or "insurrection," imposing colonial biases that unjustly brand the Kaqchikels as traitors and their actions as treasonous. This framework is inappropriate, as it imposes an anachronistic and culturally insensitive interpretation, especially considering the dilemma the Ajpo Sotz'il and Ajpo Xajil faced when they initially allied the Spaniards and then reverse their decision following Alvarado's (or Tonatiuh's) notorious greed and volatile behavior. Rather than being denounced, their contributions and sacrifices deserve recognition, as they played a critical role in challenging and delaying Spanish colonization efforts. Elevating the

stories of Kaji' Imox and B'eleje' K'at ensures a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Maya resistance, honoring the complexity and resilience of their struggle.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

The conquest of Guatemala represents a multifaceted episode in the complex tapestry of Mesoamerican history, characterized by a dynamic interplay of alliances, conflicts, and shifting power dynamics. This thesis has explored the pivotal transition of the Kaqchikels from allies to adversaries of the Spanish conquistadors—a transformation that underscores the nuanced agency of Indigenous polities in Colonial Latin American History. Initially, the Kaqchikels aligned with Pedro de Alvarado (through his alias Tonatiuh), leveraging Spanish military support to settle scores with rival groups and expand their authority in other areas of the Guatemalan highlands. This alliance, however, was fraught with tension and ultimately unsustainable due to conflicting interests and cultural misunderstandings. The subsequent dissolution of this alliance marked a significant turning point, as the Kaqchikels shifted from cooperative partners to formidable opponents, initiating a prolonged period of resistance that challenged Spanish colonial ambitions and disrupted their expansionist agenda.

The resistance of the Kaqchikels illuminates the strategic and tactical acumen of Indigenous leadership, embodied by figures such as the Ajpo Sotz'il, Kaji' Imox, and the Ajpo Xajil, B'eleje' K'at known the Spaniards as Sinacán and Sequechul. Their adeptness in warfare, especially in employing tactics such as urban ambushes and staked horse pits, not only stalled Spanish advances but also highlighted the adaptability and resilience of the Kaqchikels in the face of colonial encroachment. These military strategies, deeply rooted in the geographic and cultural fabric of the region, played a crucial role in prolonging the conflict and shaping the course of the conquest. Furthermore, this study has delved into the ideological aspects of the

conflict, examining how colonial narratives and Indigenous perspectives intersected and clashed, particularly in the portrayal of resistance as rebellion or treason. By critically analyzing both Indigenous and Spanish accounts, this thesis contributed to a reevaluation of the historical narrative, advocating for a recognition of Indigenous agency and a reassessment of the colonial lexicon that has traditionally framed such encounters.

Overall, the story of the Kaqchikels during the conquest of Guatemala is not merely one of conflict and resistance but also a profound testament to the agency, resilience, and strategic ingenuity of a people navigating the turbulent waters of historical upheaval. As this thesis shown, understanding the depth of Indigenous participation and influence in these historical events is crucial for a more balanced and nuanced appreciation of the conquest period. The Kaqchikels, far from being mere footnotes in the saga of Spanish conquest, were active agents shaping their destiny, reflecting broader themes of resistance and adaptations that resonate throughout Latin American history. As scholarship continues to evolve, the insights gleaned from studies such as this underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and the inclusion of diverse perspectives to enrich our understanding of the past and its enduring impacts of present realities. The Kaqchikel dilemma during the Conquest of Guatemala serves as powerful reminder of the complexity of historical narratives and the indomitable spirit of those who resist subjugation, challenging us to reconsider the legacies of conquest and colonization that continue to influence societies across Latin America and beyond.

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