

Cultural Pluralism and Persistence in the Colonial Sierra Sur of Oaxaca, Mexico: Three Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interactions between multiple groups of people in the Sierra Sur region of Nejapa and Tavela, Oaxaca in trans-conquest and Colonial Mexico. Bringing together ethnohistoric accounts, oral histories, and archaeological data in Nejapa and Tavela, I highlight three case studies to show that migration, conquest, and interregional trade created a complex, dynamic, pluralistic ethnic landscape prior to the arrival of the Spanish. As such, when the Spanish colonial regime took hold in the Sierra Sur, people in Nejapa and Tavela were already accustomed to making strategic choices about how to engage. Some distanced themselves from migrants, merchants, and militaries, while others embraced new opportunities for trade and exchange. Some used the Spanish legal system to protect or solidify their social and political standing, while others persisted in maintaining subversive and secret indigenous religious practices and spaces. Enslaved Africans, government officials, priests, and residents of various *castas* likewise struggled to find their places. Understanding the dynamics of the pluralistic cultural landscape of Colonial Nejapa requires bringing together various threads of evidence and accepting that identities in Nejapa were, and always had been, multiple, changing, and global, across time and space, before, during, and after Spanish colonialism.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the interactions and intersections between multiple groups of people in the Sierra Sur region of Nejapa and Tavela, Oaxaca, Mexico. Bringing together ethnohistoric accounts and archaeological data in trans-conquest and Colonial Nejapa and Tavela, I demonstrate how migration and conquest, religious proselytization, and interregional trade relied upon and created a complex, multi-ethnic landscape, even prior to any Spanish colonial efforts. As such, when Spanish colonialism first took shape in the Sierra Sur of Mexico, multiethnic peoples living across the Nejapa and Tavela were already accustomed to making strategic choices about how to engage with foreign invaders, migrants, and merchants. Some residents relocated to high mountain peaks and constructed fortified settlements to protect themselves in their relations with outsiders, while others chose to seek out new opportunities for trade and exchange and claim political power. At various points in time, residents of Nejapa used the Spanish legal system to try to protect and solidify their standing in the newly configured Colonial landscape, while at the same time maintaining religious practices and visiting sacred sites that were first visited centuries earlier. Enslaved Africans, who were brought to Nejapa in large numbers to work and manage hacienda operations from as early as the late 1500s, Colonial officials, and Jesuit and Dominican clergy, who adopted Nejapa as a new home as a matter of (often temporary) service, had their own complex strategies of engagement. Both immigrants and long-standing residents struggled to find and make sense of their places in the Colonial Sierra Sur. I argue in this paper that understanding the multiethnic landscape in trans-conquest and Colonial Sierra Sur requires expanding the conquest time frame and a theoretical position that acknowledges and embraces the idea that identities of Nejapa residents were always changing and always multiple, across time and space, before, during, and after Spanish colonialism.

COLONIALISMS

Colonialism is a process that includes the large-scale movement and relocation of peoples from one part of the globe to another in the service of military, religious, and economic goals of an empire. From the 16th to 18th centuries A.D., Spanish colonialism had a major impact across a wide part of the land that now comprises the Americas, including Mexico, Central America, and large parts of the United States, the islands of the Caribbean, and the continent of South America. Yet we talk much less about the impact of colonial campaigns that preceded the initial arrival of the Spanish in the 1400s to 1500s, and the protracted, episodic, and irregular way that the Spanish colonial regime spread throughout the Americas between the 1500s and 1700s. Perhaps this is because Spanish colonialism in the 16th century fundamentally and profoundly impacted the Americas, producing large-scale social, economic, and political change and mass death for so many indigenous peoples.

Conceptualizing earlier empires as colonialist regimes requires us to reconsider what we mean by “global” and “large-scale.” Is it accurate to label the Aztec and the Inka regimes as colonial in nature? Each of these regimes built empires that depended on the subjugation of other peoples (non-Aztecs and non-Inkas) and the establishment or imposition of complex military, religious, and governmental structures and political ideologies across vast territories (Conrad and Demarest 1984). Both regimes also utilized strategies of relocating people across vast and distant lands and demarcating social differences in the service of their growing empires (Alconini 2005, D’Altroy 2004, Berdan et al. 1996, Davies 1973, Smith 2003). Given what we know about the strategies of both regimes and the successes of their empire-building efforts, few specialists would argue that colonialism in the Americas, in particular, simply began with the Spanish.

However, should not we then also consider the Zapotec migration/conquest from the highland Valley of Oaxaca to the coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec to be colonial in nature? Based on ethnohistoric accounts, sometime around A.D. 1450, a faction of the Zapotec ruling party headquartered in Zaachila in the Valley of Oaxaca, relocated to the southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Burgoa 1989 [1674], Zeitlin 2005, Wallrath 1967, Oudijk 2008, Oudijk and Restall 2007). Along the way and once in the Isthmus, they conquered and displaced the local indigenous peoples who had been living there for centuries. As the Dominican friar and historian Francisco de Burgoa writing in 1674 put it, they did so by “fuego y sangre” (fire and blood) (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:339). Based on ethnohistoric documents, researchers have proposed various motivations to explain the Zapotec decision to move to the Isthmus. First, it may have been a response to ongoing conflicts between Zapotec factions in the Valley and/or a response to the pressure stemming from increasing Mixtec incursions into the Valley, which made relocation an attractive choice (Wallrath 1967:13, Oudijk 2008, 2000, Zeitlin 2005, Sousa and Terraciano 2003). The Zapotec likely chose the Isthmus because of its important role in economic exchange between the Central Mexico and the Pacific coast of Soconusco (Oudijk 2008, Zeitlin 2005). Leaders of the migration/conquest, therefore, already knew that those who could control the southern Isthmus would also put themselves in the advantageous economic position of controlling the trade of prized coastal luxury goods such as salt, chocolate, feathers, and jaguar skins (Oudijk 2008, Gasco and Voorhies 1989). Further, the Zapotec might have known about and taken advantage of a political vacuum in the southern Isthmus, as evidenced by a decrease in site during the Early Postclassic in the Jalapa region (Montiel Ángeles, Zapien López, and Winter 2014), and may have been aware of increasing Aztec interest in controlling this important trade route, suggesting that the opportunity and moment was right.

Based on a reading of Zapotec Prehispanic and early Colonial pictorial manuscripts, Michel Oudijk (2000, 2008) has argued that soon after the initial conquest of the Isthmus, the Zapotec leaders returned to their Valley homelands to encourage Zapotec people to move *en masse* to their newly annexed territory. Soon thereafter, the Zapotec population in the southern Isthmus grew exponentially, with Zapotecs pushing out and subjugating local indigenous peoples, including Huave-, Mixe-, and

Chontal-speaking groups. Zapotec control of the southern Isthmus was strong and from this vantage, the Zapotec famously withstood multiple Aztec conquest attempts during the late 1400s during the reign of Ahuitzotl (Burgoa 1989 [1674], Durán 1994). Around A.D. 1520, after a shaky peace accord with the Aztec, the Isthmus Zapotec leaders quickly changed allegiance and established close ties with the Spanish (Chance 1981:16), and for several decades were able to maintain sovereignty in their relatively young political empire (Zeitlin 2005). Still today, Zapotec populations are largest in number and, some would say, strongest in terms of their political and cultural presence in the southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

When different peoples from across the globe coalesce under new political regimes in colonial spaces, “ethnogenesis” may occur. Ethnogenesis is the emergence of new unified (but not uniform) cultural identities, and is a process that relies on the recognition and manipulation of existing social differences (Voss 2008, Hill 1996). Colonial spaces provide the perfect political, social, and economic milieu for novel identities to take shape and take hold, since they are places where people from distinct regions and cultures are in regular contact with one another. People living in colonial spaces, whether new immigrants or native-born residents, have to adjust to unequal social, economic, and political relations with their new neighbors. Because colonial systems are exploitative, those in power in colonial regimes often make extra efforts to mark and categorize people as a way to clarify roles within the economic, religious, and political system (Voss 2005, 2008). The kinds of identities that emerge in colonial spaces can be defined through a combination of factors – language, culture, civic identity, home village, skin color, etc. – and need not be based on “ethnicity” alone (Voss 2008, Jenks 2013). Colonial spaces can also produce a doubling down or entrenchment of existing social differences, which may look like cultural “persistence.” In this paper, I consider the roles of cultural pluralism, ethnogenesis, and cultural persistence in Colonial Nejapa based on archaeological and documentary evidence.

COLONIALISM(S) IN NEJAPA

The region of Nejapa, a wide, lush valley nestled in the mountainous Sierra Sur of Oaxaca lies at the midway point on a 2500 year old trade route between the highland Valley of Oaxaca and the coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Nejapa was long used by migrants and merchants as an economic crossroads and point of resupply, and was occupied by diverse peoples throughout its history (King 2012). Between the years A.D. 1450 and 1650, three different colonial regimes, the Zapotec, Aztec, and Spanish, moved through, conquered, and variously settled Nejapa, claiming it within their newly established political territory. Nejapa was thus “colonized” three times over, all within a relatively brief span of two hundred years. For this reason, Nejapa is the perfect laboratory in which to examine ethnogenesis, cultural pluralism, and cultural persistence.

In the sections that follow, I explore three different aspects of colonial relations in Nejapa, migration and military conquest, religious conquest, and economic changes, and show how people living in Nejapa endured and made sense of their new social, political, and economic worlds. Based on these themes, I argue that the identities that characterized Nejapa’s residents were always changing and multiple. Nejapa identities were never formulated as uniform, even though they may have at time been unifying for some or various groups of people. This gave Nejapa residents across a broad social, religious, and political spectrum – both colonizers and the colonized, of course, but also all those in between – choices in how they could position themselves and claim rights and privileges under colonial rule. Ultimately, by the end of the Colonial period in Mexico, place-based identities emerged as meaningful categories in the Nejapa region. By this point in time, so many different peoples of so many different origins had moved through and settled in Nejapa that social differences were less regulated and less meaningful. Place-based identities emerged in part because they ignored ethnicity. In a place where cultural pluralism was already well established and had long been the “tradition”, place-based identities were productive precisely because they elided or ignored cultural differences, giving diverse

people a common identity around which to mobilize and make sense of themselves within colonial political systems.

CASE ONE: MIGRATION AND CONQUEST

Dominican clergyman and chronicler Francisco de Burgoa wrote in 1674 that the Zapotec, in their conquest of the Isthmus, had built multiple fortresses across a wide band from Quiavicuzas in the north to Quiechapa in the south (Figure 1), and left behind Zapotec troops in each of them (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:235-236, 1989 [1670]:242). These strongholds, he contends, served multiple purposes: 1) to secure the route to the Isthmus, 2) to divide the Mixes (who lived north of the route) from the Chontales (who lived south of the route) so that they could not unite in opposition to their Zapotec overlords, 3) to leave behind sentries and troops in anticipation of an armed Aztec *entrada*, and 4) to provide a place for Zapotec troops to convalesce and resupply during their conquest efforts. Our team has documented four large archaeological sites and numerous smaller fortified sites throughout the mountains (on the highest peaks and associated hilltop extensions) that could be associated with such an incursion (Figure 2). Each of these sites has excellent views, providing strategic vantage points from which to monitor travel and movement through the region. All of them are also built in such a way that they take advantage of natural cliff faces for added protection and have added constructed features to further impede access. The constructed features include multi-coursed stone defensive walls with hidden entrances, stones added to craggy rock faces that helped to restrict access, or a series of two to three large stone spaced about 20 meters or more apart running perpendicular to more exposed approaches. Ceramic artifacts from excavations and surface collections indicate that the majority of the construction associated with these mountaintop sites date to the Middle Postclassic and later (A.D. 1100 and thereafter).

While it is tempting to associate these sites with the documented 14th century movement of Zapotecs from the Valley of Oaxaca to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the archaeological evidence is equivocal (King et al. 2014). The sites appear to be built according to long-standing Nejapa construction methods, and the artifacts that we found in both surface collections and excavated deposits include ceramic wares made with local pastes and forms that are common across the entire Nejapa region. The ceramic pastes and forms also demonstrate continuity with earlier time periods, which indicates that most of them may have been built and occupied by locals rather than by Zapotec conquerors or soldiers (King et al. 2014). The evidence therefore suggests that it is difficult to associate these sites specifically with the Zapotec colonial regime and agents of Zapotec expansion alone. Further, the shift to hilltop sites may have been in part a local response to increased insecurity. It is also possible that the Zapotecs hired (or conscripted) local residents to provide labor and goods to build garrisons. If the Nejapa sites were Zapotec fortresses (only), then the material culture and construction styles should look novel and different and indicate a break from earlier traditions, and this simply does not hold true.

Los Picachos, for example, is a fortified site that extends along a 2 km long stretch of ridgeline, containing over 75 residential terraces, and a ceremonial complex with a temple at the highest point (2150 m ASL) (Figure 3) (King, Konwest, and Badillo 2012). This site had a ceramic assemblage that fits very well in the Postclassic Nejapa sequence, encompassing primarily fine gray ware serving vessels, coarseware jars, and patojos. While the site is far away from the likely *camino real* connecting the highland Valley of Oaxaca and Isthmus, residents of Picachos enjoyed relatively easy access to widely circulating ideas about ceramic styles. Some of these include the same styles commonly associated with Zapotecs during the Late Postclassic – plain fine gray-ware tripod bowls with serpent-head supports. Residents also had limited access to imported obsidian, primarily from Central Mexican sources including Pico de Orizaba.

Yet, Los Picachos is close to and is likely linked with the Early Colonial period site of Majaltepec, which sits 200 m below Los Picachos on a more exposed mountain spur (King 2010, King, Konwest, and

Badillo 2012). While some areas of Los Picachos were still visited and occupied in the Early Colonial period, our work has shown that the majority of the residents of Los Picachos likely relocated downslope to Majaltepec in the early 16th century. In two Colonial documents from 1591, the name of Majaltepec is given as “Maxaltepec de los Mixes” (King and Konwest n.d., King 2011). We have located the abandoned townsite in mountainous terrain belonging to Santa Ana Tavela, closer to small villages of people that still speak Mixe today. Other colonial sources state that the indigenous people who lived on the valley floor were Zapotecs, within what was to become in 1560 the Spanish villa of Santiago Nexapa. Archival documents state that the small number of immigrant Spaniards clung to the Zapotec living on the valley floor, who numbered 2000 *casados* (married Indians) (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:235). Sometime later, during the term of the third Dominican *vicario* (vicar), the Spaniards requested to move closer to the Zapotec town and convent because where they had been living - across the river on the north side of the Nejapa valley - was deemed to be unhealthy and unsafe (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:238). What these documents show is that Los Picachos was likely inhabited by ancestors of Mixe-speaking peoples living in Colonial Majaltepec, while Zapotec-speaking people lived on the valley floor.

So was Los Picachos a Zapotec fortress? The evidence here is equivocal. The ceramic assemblage at Los Picachos had access to some widely distributed ceramic ideas and styles described by some as Zapotec and obsidian from sources heavily used by Postclassic Zapotecs (Pico de Orizaba), however pastes and construction styles are local and continuous and obsidian is relatively rare (Workinger and King 2017). The site falls within the hilltop territory described as being inhabited by Mixes in the sixteenth century. Although it might be tempting to call this a Zapotec fortress, the preponderance of evidence indicates that the same styles and imported goods were also widely distributed across various sites in Nejapa and elsewhere – locals and valley floor inhabitants included. Further, the spatial layout of the site, with contiguous terraces climbing up and over the top of the mountain along the ridgeline, is similarly arranged when compared to sites inhabited by mountain dwelling people throughout the Sierra Sur, even down into the supposed Chontal-occupied zone of Zapotitlán (King and Zborover 2015).

A second “fortress” located in Nejapa is Cerro de la Muralla, which among the various others, is perhaps our best candidate for being an actual Zapotec fortress. Here, the central architectural complex, called the “palacio” by locals, is a series of 11 contiguous patios, with 33 rooms built around them. The whole construction sits on top of a large platform and is connected by a paved stone path to a temple-patio-altar complex, often associated with Zapotec sites. The palace complex is built similarly to the Zapotec construction at the highland Zapotec site of Yagul in the central Valley of Oaxaca, and an exposed tomb jamb just outside the palace at Muralla suggests some potential affinity with highland Zapotec elite funerary practices. At Muralla, the overwhelming majority of the obsidian (95%) is from Pacucha (Workinger and King 2017), a source was heavily quarried and distributed through Late Postclassic trade networks in Oaxaca to which Zapotecs were closely linked (Levine, Joyce, and Glascock 2011, Parry 1990, Workinger and King 2017, Zeitlin 1982). At Muralla, we found evidence of widespread use of plain tripod gray ware bowls with serpent head supports, widely associated with Late Postclassic Zapotec sites within highland Oaxaca and the southern Isthmus. A massive 1 km long, 3 m high defensive wall (“la muralla” for which the site is named) encircles the elite civic-ceremonial core and some residential architecture downslope (King, Konwest, and Badillo 2012). However, different sections of the wall appear to have been built in different styles, suggesting that teams of people with different knowledge and practices contributed to its construction. Archaeological excavations both inside and outside the walls have confirmed a Late Postclassic occupation at the site (A.D. 1261-1641), yet it is unclear based on archaeological evidence alone that the site was built and occupied by Zapotecs conquerors and soldiers in whole or in part.

Given what we know about early Colonial Nejapa from documentary evidence, we might look to the valley floor instead to find evidence of the Late Postclassic period Zapotec conquest. Even though we are told that the Zapotecs built hilltop fortresses along their routes in documentary sources (Burgoa

1989 [1674]: 235-6). Peterson and MacDougall (1974) hypothesize based on analogy that fortresses were only necessary during the initial Zapotec entrance. As locals were “pacified” and the route was secured, migrant conquerors would have likely abandoned the fortresses, presumably establishing more permanent homes nearer to rich agricultural lands, such as those on the Nejapa valley floor. Thus, we should see a successive and sequential abandonment of fortresses along the route that would indicate the pace and timing of the conquest itself. Early Colonial chroniclers suggest that Zapotecs had control of the entire valley floor of Nejapa at the time of the Spanish conquest, supporting this scenario.

However, even here we are met with enigmatic archaeological signatures. The site of Colonia San Martín lies atop a small rise at the confluence of two rivers on the valley floor, and appears to have been occupied by elites with extensive knowledge of Zapotec elite material culture repertoire (King 2010, King et al. n.d.). Here, at least one large multi-roomed adobe building was constructed and frequently renovated with layers of red-painted stuccoed floors and walls. In some areas, only the lower half of the walls were painted red, and the interior rooms were left their natural white. In this case, the residents of the building may have been signaling to outsiders their wealth and knowledge of foreign practices, by investing in red-painted stucco on public corridors and exterior public facades of the building. Colonia San Martín is also the only site that we have yet located with a large corpus of polychrome ceramics mimicking well-known international codex style ceramics documented throughout Oaxaca. Ceramic sourcing and stylistic comparisons show that the Nejapa polychromes, however, are local interpretations of this widely shared elite style. Likewise, the obsidian assemblage at Colonia San Martín includes a wider variety of material from a wide variety of sources than is present at other mountain sites (Workinger and King 2017), perhaps an indication of access to a wider network of trade goods.

The architecture and artifact assemblages at Colonia San Martín contrast sharply with those from other Late Postclassic valley sites in Nejapa. One of these is Greater La Amontonada, a similarly situated valley floor community 2 km further downstream whose large population was divided into various neighborhoods, each with their own central ceremonial core. Greater La Amontonada’s ceramic assemblage is more closely linked with wider Nejapa styles, demonstrating continuity through time with earlier time periods and the Early and Middle Postclassic, in particular (Konwest 2017). One neighborhood at Greater La Amontonada was involved in their own specialized craft industry of stone bead manufacture, which seems to have allowed them to acquire elite luxury goods, including polychrome ceramics (though in small number), sculpture, and metal tweezers (King and Konwest n.d.). Thus, the archaeological evidence across the valley floor is as varied as the evidence within fortified mountaintop sites. What the archaeological evidence shows is that communities living on the valley floor had multiple and varied ways of living and interacting with each other and increased opportunities for interregional exchange with outsiders (Workinger and King 2017, King and Konwest n.d., Konwest 2017). Further, each community – and perhaps even each neighborhood – managed access to trade goods and elite wares independently. The picture that emerges is one of pluralism, diversity, and decentralization, rather than uniformity.

CASE TWO: RELIGIOUS CONQUEST

The Dominicans were the most effective agents in the Spanish conquest of Nejapa. After numerous Spanish conquistadors had entered Nejapa on their campaigns, the Spanish tried to establish a Spanish villa on the valley floor in 1533, which quickly failed (Gerhard 1972). It wasn’t until three decades later that the first permanent Spanish villa was successfully established in 1560 (Gerhard 1972). Instead, it was the Dominican church that had made the first successful entrance, setting up their local Nejapa doctrina in 1553. From this vantage, the Dominican clergy (largely Portuguese- and Spanish-born) served multiple rural communities across the Nejapa region, including Chontal-, Mixe-, and Zapotec-speaking villages (Burgoa 1989 [1674], Paso y Troncoso 1905a, Gerhard 1972). Many of the

early Colonial documents from Santiago Nexapa pertain to the workings of the Dominican *doctrina*. They include complaints by clergy about having to travel to mountain villages, rulings to determine who was required to provide goods and labor to the church, and Indigenous complaints about abuses and non-payment for such labor. Two Nejapa archaeological sites figure prominently in this era of conquest and colonialism: Majaltepec and Cerro del Convento.

Although now abandoned, Majaltepec was one of two *cabeceras* (head towns) within the territory of Nejapa and is mentioned in the *Suma de Visitas* prepared between the 1530s and 1550s and the *Relación Geográfica* of 1579 as having 182 tribute-paying citizens (Paso y Troncoso 1905a, b). As mentioned earlier, 16th century documents refer to Majaltepec as a Mixe town in the mountains, which the Dominicans complained was too far away from church headquarters in Nejapa for effective control. Yet, elites and traders from Majaltepec quickly requested rights and privileges under Spanish colonial rule, including rights to land, to keep animals, and to carry arms, and rights to trade independently with towns as far as away as the Central Valleys of Oaxaca and receive fair wages (King 2011). Later in the late 1500s and early 1600s, the crown ordered a series of congregations affecting Majaltepec, which appear to have been largely unsuccessful in depopulating the town site. Majaltepec was inhabited until at least 1768, when residents were party to a series of formal complaints about *repartimiento* abuses by corrupt *alcaldes mayores* (Baskes 2000).

Yet, the archaeological evidence from Majaltepec indicates more intimate and dynamic interactions between indigenous inhabitants and the church. Our excavations at the abandoned town site of Majaltepec show that the church there was the most formal building at the site, with multiple rooms and thick adobe, stuccoed walls and multi-coursed stone bases, and a formal staired entrance (King and Konwest n.d., King, Konwest, and Badillo 2012). Additionally, the church had an enclosed stone-walled plaza in front of the building, which would have served a formal, public meeting space (King et al. n.d.). Although the clergy complained about the arduous hike to the site, the accommodations nonetheless appear to have been well-maintained and formally designed, far surpassing any other structure in both size and formality.

In an adobe-walled residence about 200 m north of the church, we uncovered a series of burials beneath the building's earthen floor. There, in an excavation unit of only 3 square meters, we uncovered 8 individuals, among them women, subadults, and children, buried in a manner that would not likely have been condoned by the church – beneath a house floor with offerings (King and Konwest n.d., King and León in press). The offerings we found associated with the interred include fragments of a metal blade and hundreds of glass beads, which residents presumably obtained through their interactions with Dominican clergy (King and Konwest n.d.). Glass beads are common in early Colonial period sites in the Americas more broadly and were widely used and distributed by religious authorities (including Dominicans) in their proselytization efforts. Beads often show up in early Colonial period cemeteries in Spanish colonies, including in indigenous graves. The Majaltepec beads are – as far as I know – unique in Mexico and are most similar to the assemblage excavated at St. Catherine's Island in the southeastern US (Georgia), with examples that were likely produced in Spain and Italy. Some of the diagnostic bead types in the collection date to between A.D. 1560 and 1630, providing a better date than radiocarbon dating – with its double intercept for this timeframe - has been able to provide. We have argued that the evidence at Majaltepec indicates that indigenous peoples of Nejapa were selectively adopting and using introduced materials, but were doing so within their own cultural logic – subtly subverting the imposed social order (King and Konwest n.d.).

Majaltepec residents were also using the court system to acquire goods and land, to protest unfair treatment, and maintain their own livelihoods (King and Konwest n.d., Baskes 2000). The town was still occupied into the late 1700s despite multiple attempts to relocate residents, which shows that indigenous residents were relatively successful in maintaining some amount of independence and self-determination. If Majaltepec was indeed a Mixe community throughout its history, then it seems at least

some Mixe-speakers achieved distance from the Spanish colonial system, while at the same time being part of it and manipulating it. As such, the community was able to leverage and strategically perform different identities when required to do so – as dutiful Catholics, as either subservient or rebellious Indians, as Mixes, and as Nejapa traders and entrepreneurs in wider Oaxaca. Here, the evidence seems to suggest that conquest and colonialism did not require or necessarily result in the formation of a new unifying identity. Rather, the indigenous community here was able to benefit from ambiguity in identity, by mobilizing their “multiple” identities in different contexts as needed.

The site of Cerro del Convento demonstrates yet another kind of local indigenous response to religious conquest and colonialism. Cerro del Convento sits on a mesa top with a 360 degree view of the surrounding Nejapa valley, positioned closest to what we believe was the primary mountain pass along the *camino real* between the highlands and the Isthmus, as one exits Nejapa. Cerro del Convento has been identified in later sources as one of the Zapotec fortresses mentioned by Burgoa in 1674 (Ramírez 1892, Martínez Gracida 1910, Gay 1982). However, the archaeological data show that it was much more. Architecture on the mesa top includes a rather Prehispanic simple ballcourt by local standards, a few stone foundations associated with humble buildings (presumably residences), and a temple built with a combination of stone and earthen fill. We excavated a hearth directly below the center of the Postclassic period ball court playing field, from which we recovered embers that date to the Late Classic period (A.D. 430-643) (King et al. n.d.). Thus, the Postclassic ballcourt was emplaced immediately on top of the earlier hearth, perhaps indicating this this location held important meanings for locals and deserved commemoration (King, Morell-Hart, and Berubé 2017). The ceramics excavated from the site show similarities with local Nejapa wares, mostly plain utilitarian serving bowls made with fine and coarse pastes (King et al. n.d., King et al. 2014). Residents used obsidian tools imported from a variety of sources from both highland Mexico and highland Guatemala, the two major source regions for obsidian in Mesoamerica in opposite directions along the trade route (Workinger and King 2017).

The large cliffs that form the edge of mesa also contain numerous rockshelters and caves, which people have used periodically as far back at the Late Formative (500 B.C.) up until the present. We have found evidence that people modified the caves and rockshelters on the cliff face into storage areas for agricultural products during the Late Postclassic and Early Colonial period (King, Konwest, and Badillo 2012, King et al. n.d.). They did so by carving out the soft seams and constructing multiple series of small contiguous rooms divided by stone and mud walls (King, Morell-Hart, and Berubé 2017). People visited Cerro del Convento leaving behind evidence of small campfires and offerings in front of the caves. We have located offerings in the form of ceramic incense burner fragments, an unfired ceramic plate (with leaf impressions), and tied fiber bundles in various intricate forms. Based on ample archaeological evidence of plant remains (over 70 different species!) in storage rooms built within the caves and the offerings, it is clear that pilgrims visited Convento regularly throughout its history. Given that all of the plant species are native to Mexico, the use of these storage rooms likely dates to the Late Postclassic even though the rooms yielded calibrated radiocarbon dates ranging between A.D. 1027-1635.

Cerro del Convento was the target of Dominican *vicario* Juan Ruiz in a major campaign to extirpate idolatry in the late 1500s (Burgoa 1989 [1674]: 242-247, Barabas and Bartolomé 1984:15-16, Gay 1982:365-366). Padre Juan Ruiz had heard about the ongoing idolatry at Cerro del Convento and decided to take it upon himself to witness what was happening at the site. Thus, he hiked up the mountain with Native acolytes and aides, and identified the grave of a Zapotec warrior – apparently the nephew of the Isthmus Zapotec king Cosijoeza. According to Burgoa, the warrior was buried with a feathered headdress and various ceramic vessels and other goods (Burgoa 1989 [1674]). He later had himself lowered by rope into the caves to see what they contained, and here he removed a greenstone idol, ceramics, and other offering, and brought them to the mesa top. There, he lit a bonfire and burned all of the remains associated with the idolatrous acts in to show those who accompanied him the error of their ways.

However, the mountain continued to figure strongly as a sacred site after Juan Ruiz's visit, and remains so in the present day. Rather than a "Zapotec fortress", Cerro del Convento appears to have been an important pilgrimage site, which provided penitents and indigenous people physical sustenance in the form of seeds and foodstuffs and spiritual sustenance, in times of need (King, Morell-Hart, and Berubé 2017). The generic, poor quality of the ceramics, the small number of stone tools, and the expedient nature of most of the (remaining) offerings suggests that all sorts of people visited and used the site and did so periodically and at times clandestinely throughout its history. Here, conquest and colonialism did little to change the meaning and reduce the sacred importance of the site – it was and still is an important sacred place for various peoples from various places.

CASE THREE: ECONOMIC CONQUEST

The Spanish conquest in Nejapa took many forms and impacted the region differently over time following 1521. Nejapa was apparently considered to be part of the Isthmus Zapotec cacicazgo under the leadership of Cosijoeza II/Don Juan Cortés (Chance 1989, Gay 1982:225), which could mean that towns were required to pay tribute to the Isthmus Zapotec. After the Isthmus Zapotec allied with the Spanish in order to retain sovereignty and fend off Aztec incursions, Nexapa was among the lands that were granted to Cortés within the domain of his Mayorazgo in 1528 (Gay 1982:225). Cortés proceeded to distribute the land throughout his Mayorazgo in encomiendas (Gerhard 1972:195), though it is unlikely that many of the encomenderos were permanent residents. The lands supplied cochineal, vanilla, cacao, cotton, cotton mantles, indigo, and corn. With the arrival of Spanish, wheat and five sugarcane haciendas were also established.

Spaniards who led the first incursions into Nejapa include Pedro de Alvarado in 1522-23 (Matthew 2007:106, Wallrath 1967:16), Diego de Figueroa and Gaspar Pacheco in 1526-27 (Chance 1989:17), and Francisco Maldonado in 1533 (Gerhard 1972:195). Maldonado's campaign seems to have been an effort to secure and protect mining interests in the vicinity of Villa Alta, where the allied Zapotec and Spanish forces had established a Spanish *villa* in 1527 to contain the "obstinados nativos" (presumably Mixes) (Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007). Spanish rules were such that rebellious Indians could be taken as slaves, and the ongoing Spanish-Zapotec-Mixe conflict meant that many eastern Oaxacan Mixes were captured and forced to work in mines, salt works, and later cattle operations across the Mixe region, Nejapa, and the Isthmus (Zeitlin 1989, Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007).

The *vecinos* of Villa Alta attempted to establish a *villa* in Nejapa in 1533, but it soon failed (Gerhard 1972:196). In the 1540s, Cortes' landholdings were greatly reduced, and the encomienda of Nejapa fell into the hands of property owners who lived in Antequera (later Oaxaca City) (Taylor 1972). In the Suma de Visitas (compiled between the 1530s to 1550s) (Paso y Troncoso 1905b), Nejapa had three *señorios*, divided into 5 *estancias* with over 200 *vecinos*, who gave tribute in the form of corn, beans, chili. Nejapa is described as having irrigated fields that were good for fruit and foods of all kinds. Maxaltepeque, located three leagues from the "*minas de Nexapa*" in Lachixonace, had 182 tributaries, who were required to give gold and corn, and later provide service in the mines. Thus, by the time the Spanish established a Dominican monastery in Nejapa in 1553, multiple decades of wars, slave raids, ranching, and epidemics had already had a major social, economic, and political impact in the greater Nejapa region. Soon after, in 1560, the "*villa de Nexapa*" was established with 16 subject communities, most of them Mixe, according to early Colonial documents (Gerhard 1972:197).

As early as the 1520s, the Spanish were already bringing African slaves with them to the Isthmus to work on cacao plantations and livestock ranches (Gerhard 1972). The vast lands between the Isthmus and Nejapa that had been depopulated in these early decades of the Spanish conquest (Brockington 1989:5) were quickly purchased by and/or redistributed among Spaniards (Zeitlin 1989:36, Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007:27). After Cortés' death in 1547, the management of these lower elevation

plains of the Isthmus shifted largely to cattle-ranching (Zeitlin 1989:36). It is in this same context that the economic landscape of Nejapa transformed. With the arrival of Spanish *vecinos* in Nejapa after 1560 came early Colonial industry, including the first sheep and goat *estancias*, and farms. Even the religious orders had a keen economic interest in Nejapa, running a large sheep and goat ranch where friars produced milk, cheese, and wool for their own consumption (Chance 1989:156). Due to labor requirements and church relocation policies, many indigenous people had (reluctantly) moved to the lowlands, where they suffered and died due to epidemic disease between 1560 and 1580 (Paso y Troncoso 1905a:35). Fray Bernardo de Santamaria, the vicario of the Dominican monastery wrote in the 1579 *Relación de Nexapa* that population had declined so much that there were now deserted plains and fields in Nejapa where sugarcane and wheat haciendas could be established (Paso y Troncoso 1905a:38).

Zapotecs in eastern Oaxaca were adept in using the Spanish court system as a method of securing their place in this newly reconfigured political and economic landscape (Gay 1982:190). Sometimes Zapotecs were able to acquire lands that were in dispute or had never been theirs in the first place (Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007:25, 29-30, Oudijk 2008, Yannakakis 2007). In 1570, the Spanish took advantage of the continuing hostilities between the Zapotec and Mixes and pacified the Sierra Mixe for good with an army of 10,000 soldiers made up of Zapotecs and Tlaxcaltecas from Villa Alta, Nexapa, Mitla, Cajonos, and Mixtecs from Cuilapan (Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007:31, Yannakakis 2007:230). It was during these years that Zapotecs produced multiple *lienzos* to consolidate their land claims in Spanish courts, establishing communities across Nexapa (Barros van Hövell tot Westerflier 2007:31, Oudijk 2008). In this way, Zapotecs were able to expand their land holdings across the Nexapa region, while Mixes and Chontales were pushed into the mountains, further away from the most productive lands.

Zapotecs in general fared much better than Mixes and Chontales both economically and politically. For this reason, between 1570 and 1600, the Zapotecs' raw population numbers grew slightly in private *encomiendas*, while Mixe and Chontal populations were greatly reduced (Gerhard 1972:198). At the same time, especially in contested places where population had thinned, relocation policies (*reducciones*, *congregaciones*, and *mercedes*) aided and abetted the land grab (Owensby 2008:22). At the turn of the sixteenth century, Indian elites in Nejapa were requesting their own *estancias* in an effort to compete in this new economy, and Zapotec elites in the greater Isthmus became significant players in the colonial market economy (Zeitlin 1989:54, 2015). The tributary count of Nejapa itself (the villa, not the district) fell from 786 in 1569 to 189 in 1623, when almost half were Nahuatl-speaking immigrants (Scholes and Adams 1959:37-38, Gerhard 1972:198).

As economic interest in Nejapa grew, haciendas were established across Nejapa. Throughout their history, Nejapa haciendas tended to have owners based out of Antequera, with Spanish landlords and resident African slaves and mulattos providing the primary estate management labor, following a pattern noted by Brockington (1989:37) and Zeitlin (1989:42) in Tehuantepec. Indigenous residents of Nejapa supplied both the haciendas and the church with wage labor. While hacienda administrators complained repeatedly of their poverty and desperate situations (probably in part as a strategy to acquire supplies from distant owners living in Antequera), many of these enterprises became very successful, riding the economic booms of vanilla, *grana cochinilla* (cochineal), livestock, and sugarcane. The first record I have found about sugarcane haciendas dates to 1630 when the Jesuit priest Bernabé Cobo wrote of the Spanish having sugarcane plantations in Nejapa near the Dominican church (Vásquez de Espinosa 1944:198).

The most famous of these haciendas is the Hacienda San José. We don't know exactly when the hacienda was first established, but it is listed as an entailed estate belonging to Pedro de Guendulain, as part of the Mayorazgo of Guendulain in Tlacolula in 1677. His son Pedro sold the "Trapiche San José" in 1683 (Taylor 1972:155). In 1696, the "Hacienda San Joseph" is mentioned in the will of Don Pedro

Ramírez de la Serda, where it states that Lazar Antonio would pay the bills on the administration of the sugarcane trapiche for three and a half years (ADD CITATION). Don Pedro Ramírez de la Serda held land, slaves, and livestock in his “*trapiche de azúcar*”, all of which were inventoried. He also left 22,000 pesos to Manuel Fernández de Fiallo, redeemable on his trapiche and all that pertained to it. Fiallo, who lived in Antequera and was known as a great funder of the Jesuit church in the early 1700s, eventually gifted the Trapiche San José to the *Compañía de Jesús* – the Jesuit church – in Oaxaca upon his death in 1708 (Decorme 1941:104).

In 1746, a series of letters written by Jesuit administrators of the Hacienda San José record the complex social and political dynamics of this era. In multiple letters to Jesuit authorities in Oaxaca, hacienda administrators detailed their tense interactions with local Zapotecs, *alcaldes*, and church authorities. According to these letters, the Jesuits lamented that Indians were complaining and demanding payment for destruction of crops caused by free roaming cattle belonging to the hacienda, claims that they believed to be exaggerated and extortionist. To fight having to pay the expenses, the Jesuits appealed to the various local authorities, including the *alcalde mayor* and the local Nejapa priests. Their other complaints to Jesuit headquarters in Oaxaca were about the difficulty they were having in contracting sufficient day laborers to plant and harvest hacienda crops and acquiring sufficient foodstuffs and materials to run the hacienda. Many letters were focused on the poverty of the Nejapa hacienda, and contained elaborate appeals to the Jesuit authorities for money and goods for hacienda managers and slaves. Runners apparently traveled back and forth between Nejapa and Oaxaca on a fairly regular, perhaps weekly, basis, delivering letters and shipments, and the hacienda seems to have been purchasing foodstuffs and goods from locals as much as they were exporting and importing goods and materials between Nejapa and Oaxaca. Communication between the Hacienda San José and other nearby trapiches was also frequent, about matters related to slaves and mulattos and meetings between area hacienda managers on business matters. The former Dominican *doctrina* in Nejapa, which had been secularized in 1707 (Gerhard 1972:198), still managed religious services for Nejapa valley communities, including for Indians and *criollo* residents of the region, while the Jesuits held their own services in the hacienda for themselves and their slaves and mulatto residents.

While the Hacienda San José Jesuits appear to have been in a difficult economic position, the *alcadía mayor* of Nejapa, on the other hand, was profitable and wealthy. The position itself was considered the number two *alcalde mayor* position in New Spain (after Villa Alta) because of the trading opportunities that came with the office (AGN Reales Cédulas 90:116-121). The position was often reserved for Spanish-born or *criollo* men who had served the crown well (usually in military service), and was either awarded to them late in their careers as a reward for services rendered (Chance 1989) or was purchased to the highest bidder (Baskes 2000:28). The wealth generated in Nejapa’s *alcalde mayor* during the middle 1700s was derived from the production of cotton cloth and *grana cochineal*, the latter of which was in a boom during this time (Chance 1989:36,104). On the other hand, Indian communities who provided the products suffered from at least two major epidemics in 1737-1739 and 1779, the earlier being particularly devastating for Nejapa (Gerhard 1972:198, Hamnett 1971:61-62). Nejapa also periodically experienced major famines on account of lack of rain, especially in 1799-80 (Hamnett 1971:61-62). Tensions between Indian citizens, *criollo* residents, *alcaldes*, and church officials ran high throughout these years. The *alcaldes* would rack up debts during their 5-year terms owing to the frequent requests for loans from Indian communities, some of which would be inherited by the next *alcalde*. In 1752, the outgoing debt of an *alcalde mayor* in Nejapa was usually around 20000 pesos (Baskes 2000:115), with severe debts in 1765 and 1770 (Baskes 2000:117-118).

Indian communities, who provided the bulk of the labor and product, however, also knew how to navigate and profit from the system. They would sometimes sell their products on the open market (Baskes 2000:77) or would barter with Jesuit haciendas on the sale of foodstuffs (*Jesuitas*). During boom years, enterprising Indians would sell products to traveling merchants or in Oaxaca, claiming to the

alcalde mayor that their crop had been destroyed by a plague (Baskes 2000:77). Others resorted to using the court system to demand payment from corrupt *alcaldes* (Baskes 2000). The *repartimiento* system obligated Indian growers to give a portion of their harvest to the *alcaldes* in exchange for financing. In 1765, many of the isolated mountain communities of Nejapa (including Majaltepec) banded together to file a formal legal complaint against a particularly corrupt *alcalde mayor* who was requiring them to pay far more on their debts than was originally promised, which resulted in the crown removing the corrupt *alcalde* from office (Baskes 2000).

Thus, the colonial economic landscape was highly varied and complex. Certain colonial authorities – religious orders, hacienda managers, *alcaldes*, and Native elite – sometimes enjoyed privileged positions, but no position guaranteed an individual success. The hacienda struggled to keep its labor force and was in constant battle to generate funds, let alone turn a profit. Religious authorities were still major landowners, who were contending with increased pressure from secular authorities; tensions between the church and the state remained high. In the mid-1700s, the *grana cochineal* industry was successful in rural Nejapa, in part because it did not require large-scale relocation of laborers or oversight (Baskes 2000:13). Thus, in many ways Indian communities were left alone and would act as free agents and entrepreneurs. Some native communities benefitted from this system and were able to do quite well.

However, during the latter half of the 18th century severe shifts took place. First, the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico in 1767 and their former properties were liquidated (Decorme 1941:104). The *grana cochineal* market bottomed out after 1781 (Hamnett 1971:76) and Bourbon reforms were implemented in 1786 (Charlton 2003:226), which eliminated *alcalde mayor* system and introduced *ayuntamiento* government structure in Indian communities. Combined with severe frosts, droughts, and epidemics, Majaltepec was abandoned sometime before 1800, and the Indian population in larger Nejapa severely declined. According to the 1794 census, Nejapa-Chontales had 4380 Indian and 142 free Negro and mulatto tributaries (Gerhard 1972:198). By 1821, Nejapa only had 7 Indians, which prompted the importation of many black slaves and increased the mulatto population dramatically (Brockington 1989:16, Gay 1982:516).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the examples above, I have outlined three case studies that highlight the impact of conquest and colonialism in rural Oaxaca, focusing on different centuries and different aspects of conquest and colonialism in Nejapa. The examples cover the centuries between A.D. 1450 and 1800, when military, religious, and economic impacts of Zapotec and Spanish colonialism impacted Nejapa in various ways. By delving into the details and complexity of the pluri-ethnic Nejapa world during these centuries of colonialism, I have tried to show that the “new” identities that emerged in Nejapa – if present – were never homogeneous. Such a description characterizes other parts of Oaxaca as well, such as Coixtlahuaca, which similarly experienced multiple conquests and colonialism at the hands of Mixtec, Aztec, and Spanish incursions (Rincón Mautner 2015). The documentary and archaeological evidence shows that Nejapa had always been culturally plural. People living in Nejapa, whether new immigrants and agents of colonialism or Natives to the region, played with their identities, moving between and among multiple identities, to their own benefit, as needs arose. This created a highly diverse archaeological landscape. Neighboring communities exhibit very different material assemblages and architectural styles, indicating that each community had independent access to merchants and political and religious authorities. People of various *castas* learned quickly how to move within the changing political landscape. In many ways, this is what they had always contended with and they knew how to navigate the various systems. There is much variation across the region throughout these transconquest centuries. Even places one would imagine to be homogeneous (e.g. “Zapotec fortresses”, Mixe villages

in the mountains, and valley floor Zapotec towns) provide varied and complex documentary and archaeological signatures.

I contend that during these turbulent centuries between 1450 and 1800, colonialisms in Nejapa did not result in ethnogenesis or produce new “unifying” identities. Instead, the Nejapa social landscape was as varied as it had always been across various conquests and colonialism. I argue that we should therefore never expect a single, coherent pattern – different people made different choices at various points in time that helped them to navigate their way through changing politics, economic systems, and power structures. Just as Nejapa’s indigenous residents included diverse peoples who spoke Mixe, Chontal, Zapotec, and Nahuatl, so did the new arrivals – including religious authorities of diverse heritages and orders, and Spanish and *criollo* residents and landowners in the new political system. Likewise, the African slave and mulatto populations in Nejapa were incredibly diverse and eventually came to dominate in both number and influence throughout the colonial era. Economic interests in Nejapa included non-resident landowners (mostly Spanish or *criollo* residents of Antequera), who appointed hacienda managers of varying statuses and affiliations. This incredible diversity makes for “messiness” in archaeological signatures and results in complex, even contradictory documentary evidence.

The political, social, and economic landscape in Nejapa was at times destructive and devastating for the people living and working within it. It placed some people in positions to take advantage of others, as in the case of Native elite, Zapotec residents, religious authorities, Spanish colonial administrators, and hacienda managers. Zapotec residents, who themselves were new migrants and Colonial administrators, used the court system and their proximity to the Dominican church to their own advantage, successfully requiring the Spanish *vecinos* to establish their own separate neighborhood when they moved to the Zapotec town of Santiago Nejapa for protection because they weren’t trusted. It also left some people vulnerable, in the position of having to “hide” themselves, their religious practices and/or foodstuffs, as in the case of the fortified site of Picachos, or the caves at Cerro del Convento. Other suffered from abuses, forced to provide labor in mines, the church, and hacienda, for which they were (often) grossly under- or un-compensated.

The “messiness”, however, also provided some of these same people with new opportunities. During the Zapotec migration and conquest of the Isthmus, different valley floor communities in Nejapa were able to take advantage of the changing economic and political landscape. Cerro del Convento is a good example of a place where native indigenous peoples continued to visit on pilgrimage for physical and spiritual sustenance despite Spanish attempts to shut it down. While Zapotec soldiers may have occupied and inspired the construction of Cerro de la Muralla, local Nejapa native populations likely provided at least some of the labor for its construction. Many of the goods that they used at Muralla indicate that occupants had access to both local and interregional economic networks. The indigenous residents of Majaltepec, the likely early Colonial descendants of the occupants of Los Picachos, had frequent interactions with the local Dominican church in spite of their high elevation location, and economically benefitted from these relationships. Yet, at the same time, they were also able to take advantage of this distance and lack of everyday oversight to use new technologies and material goods in novel, local ways, some of which likely would have been prohibited by the very church authorities from whom they procured the goods. Later, some Indian residents across Nejapa were able to navigate the hacienda and *repartimiento* system and benefit economically by understanding the value of their labor and their products. Some residents used the court system to try to solidify their political and economic positions and acquire compensation for their grievances. Others were able to manipulate the economic situation and gain advantage in other ways, such as by going directly to Jesuit hacienda managers and demanding compensation or selling their products on the open market. Residents of Late Postclassic Colonia San Martín were able to carve out a unique way of life in Nejapa, using distinct styles of ceramics and architecture that linked them more broadly with Zapotec populations in the Valley and the

Isthmus. Whether the site represents a small settlement of immigrant Zapotecs remains to be seen, but it is also clear that the people living in this outpost was never in complete control of access to imported goods across the region at any point in time. Residents of the Greater La Amontonada barrio of El Órgano had their own, separate networks of trade and access to imported goods, supplied by their own export industry of locally-made stone beads. Other fortified settlements in the mountains such as Los Picachos selectively engaged with or retreated from economic and political networks, as needed, from a position that ensured that they were in control of the terms of engagement.

The various examples recounted in this paper show that at no point between 1450 and 1800 did a single, unifying identity – a process of ethnogenesis – emerge out of these centuries of colonialism in Nejapa. Nejapa was, across these centuries, pluri-ethnic and complex. What was “persistent” was that Nejapa residents had likely always spoken more than one language and moved in different circles in order to facilitate their economic and political pursuits. However, by the late 1700s, after the Bourbon reforms and several major epidemics, social, political, and economic differences in Nejapa began to level out. Everyone from the hacienda managers, *alcaldes*, mulattos, and “Indians”, was struggling and trying to eke out an existence in this newly reconfigured landscape. Church authorities did not hold as much power as they once did, and for the Jesuits, at least, their missionary zeal was less a concern in their writings than was their collective economic suffering. The complexity of the social and political situation in Nejapa meant that people had various identities on which to draw, which they used strategically in different circumstances. I have contended elsewhere that the pluri-ethnic and “messy” political, economic, and social circumstances of immigrants and residents of Nejapa in the Colonial period set the groundwork for place-based identities to emerge as primary identifiers in post-Colonial Nejapa (King 2016). With such complex social and political relations, place-based identities were meaningful precisely because they elided social, political, and ethnic differences. Even today, as is common across Oaxaca, when people in the Nejapa region are asked about their origin, place-based identities (“I am from x place”) are the primary way that people identify themselves.

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