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Heritage Activism in Quintana Roo, Mexico

Assembling New Futures through an Umbrella Heritage Practice

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The Tihosuco Heritage Preservation and Community Development Project (hereafter Tihosuco Project) works to combat economic and social inequalities through multimodal approaches to heritage, including the creation of community-organized initiatives related to identity, the economy, and the future (Leventhal et al. 2014). The continued legacy of the Caste War of Yucatan (or Maya Social War, 1847–1901) anchors the project’s collaborative work in the town of Tihosuco, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Although the Caste War was arguably one of the most successful anticolonial indigenous insurrections in the Americas (Bricker 1984, 88), it remains largely absent from national and (to some extent) regional historical narratives. The war began in the nineteenth century parish of Tihosuco, a southern frontier region of the Yucatan Peninsula, and persisted in various forms for at least fifty-four years. Although the war itself will not be the focus of this chapter, it is important to bear in mind that it permanently altered the geopolitical landscape of the Yucatan Peninsula. A major consequence was the creation of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. The reflections we offer here have emerged from over seven years of partnership with Tihosucueños (residents of Tihosuco).

Our project advocates an umbrella heritage model that pushes beyond conventional archaeology by recognizing the centrality of both colonialism and modern globalization for how communities—in this case

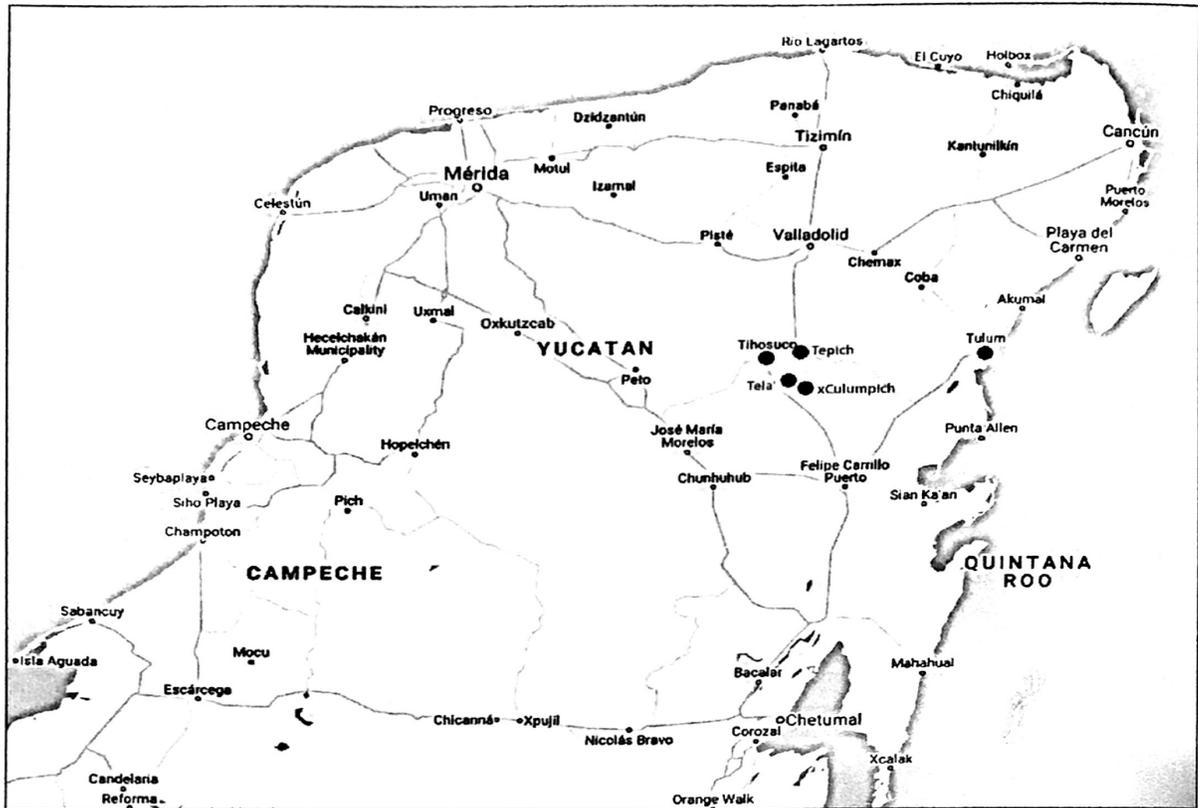


Figure 5.1. The Yucatan (which encompasses the Mexican states of Yucatan, Quintana Roo, and Campeche), showing key locations mentioned in chapter. Map by Tiffany C. Fryer.

predominantly Yukatek Maya-speaking communities across Quintana Roo—negotiate and assert their collective identities and agendas. “Umbrella” here refers to the overarching structure of the heritage initiative and the integrated approach to what are typically considered disparate forms of heritage practice (e.g., archaeology, museum development, oral histories). Contemporary politics are not, as some have implied (Stump 2013), an ancillary concern for archaeological heritage practice. Rather, incorporating our activist agendas and multimodal thinking in our research designs ultimately enriches both the overall quality of the archaeological research and the value of that research to particular communities. Our umbrella heritage model uses grassroots initiatives that use wide-ranging methods, engage a multiplicity of heritage narratives, and exercise a self-representative process of heritage management. We place our work in the context of heritage and tourism in the Yucatan Peninsula more broadly, as tourism is increasingly intertwined with and commodified by the heritage industry.

We begin with an overview of the current state of affairs regarding tour-

ism, heritage management, and Maya self-representation in the Yucatan. We then offer an analysis of two heritage assemblages that are connected by their roles in the narratives surrounding settler colonialism and the Caste War in the area. We use the concept of assemblage to break down the methodological and temporal barriers that often undergird heritage projects. The first assemblage we address consists of the colonial-era structures in the town center of Tihosuco. We focus on how the regulations that govern the preservation of these structures complicate their status as heritage assets. The second assemblage zooms out to think about how documenting the historic properties located outside town on Tihosuco's ejido (federally recognized land commune) has provided another complex but potentially promising resource for the community. Finally, we reflect on how attention to these assemblages can shift our practices away from heritage management toward heritage activism that bolsters the effectiveness of past-centered research in marginalized communities such as Tihosuco, whose members face very real, present-day problems. We both began working with the Tihosuco Project as graduate students, and we seek to encourage and train junior scholars who want to advance an activist anthropology for the future (Hale 2007; Atalay, Clauss, McGuire, and Welch 2014; Berry et al. 2017).

Although our arguments are specific to Tihosuco and the conditions we work in, the examples we highlight here will likely resonate with others working under similar circumstances. We hope that what we discuss will provoke self-reflection about the potential for broad-reaching heritage programs to create spaces from which effective change—however fragile—may develop.

Heritage, Tourism, and Maya Self-Representation

In Mexico, the forces of the global tourism industry situate heritage and culture as exploitable commodities. Tourism is one of the largest industries in Mexico, second only to agriculture (Ely 2013). The processes of heritage management and tourism in Mexico are highly regulated and top heavy. Government programs and private agencies set the terms and tone of heritage discourse, especially with respect to the management of historical landscapes and archaeological sites (Clark and Anderson 2015).

Although tourism to the Yucatan Peninsula is dominated by beach vacationing and ecoparks, heritage tourism is a significant secondary draw. Cultural tourists, as the industry calls them, are thought to be seeking novel

experiences that will facilitate a deeper connection with a culture that is not their own (McKercher and du Cros 2002). Heritage destinations that target cultural tourists include historic cities, museums, towns, and archaeological sites (Visit Mexico 2018). Sites such as the ruins at Chichen Itza, Coba, and Ek Balam draw millions of foreign and domestic tourists annually. For example, the town and archaeological park of Tulum, a main attraction in Quintana Roo's coastal "Riviera Maya," grew from around 3,000 residents in 1995 to 28,000 in 2010. In 2016, they received over 738,000 tourists (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía 2010; Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Quintana Roo 2017). Ana Juárez (2002) concluded that the shift toward an economy based largely on tourism in Tulum limited the amount of control that local, primarily indigenous residents have over economic and environmental resources which has increased both distributive and social inequalities. She noted that this increase also contributes to the loss of Maya cultural autonomy in Mexico. For instance, the spike in Tulum's population severely disrupted customary fishing and swidden agricultural practices. The residents of Tulum whose families have been there for generations (they reoccupied the site during the Caste War) shifted to larger-scale farming and ranching to support the growth in their town and the resort areas surrounding it. Job seekers in places such as Tihosuco must move closer to these new tourism centers or must be bussed in and out for fifteen-hour workdays. This can disrupt familial structures and local economies (though it may also open opportunities for already marginalized groups such as single mothers). The forces of global capitalism that are bound up in the development of transnational tourism are quickly transforming social relations across the peninsula (Re Cruz 1996; Castañeda 2009; Castellanos 2010; Wynne 2015; Taylor 2018).

In order to streamline the rapidly expanding cultural tourism industry, private and government agencies seek to present a standardized, consistent, and thereby static past as their primary cultural product (Castañeda 1996). The industry seems perfectly content to misrepresent Maya heritage as a relic of a lost culture (Ardren 2004; Torres and Momsen 2005). Limited value gets placed on how the peninsula's majority-Maya communities want to represent themselves (cf. Hawn and Tison 2015). Instead, cultural promoters emphasize a palatable, exotic, homogenized culture that can be packaged, marketed, and eventually sold to tourists (Castañeda 2004; Taylor 2009; Little 2004).

Heritage certainly has consequences outside the realm of tourism. Across Mexico, there are several often-competing frameworks for protecting his-

torical and/or archaeological sites. Principal among these are the rules set by the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia (INAH) under federal law. Other frameworks operate at different scales: at UNESCO World Heritage sites, in national archaeological parks, on smaller-scale archaeological and ecological reserves, and through Pueblos Magicos (“magic towns,” a brand used to promote and link sites around the country). Multiple entities may vie for the right to own and manage these sites, their objects, their histories, and the economic opportunities they bring. Like the cultural tourism industry, the heritage conservation industry only grudgingly includes local indigenous communities in decisions made about heritage management plans (Breglia 2006).

Like other indigenous groups across the Americas, Maya communities continue to face estrangement from their pasts and their cultural practices by the processes of colonialism and modern state making (McAnany and Parks 2012). Archaeologists have played and continue to play a significant role in this estrangement (Vázquez León 2003; Watkins 2005; Bueno 2016). In the Yucatan, the relationships between archaeologists and indigenous communities are often acknowledged as contentious or ambivalent (Castañeda 1996; Juárez 2002; Breglia 2006; Magnoni, Ardren, and Hutson 2007; Armstrong-Fumero 2009), but in our experience are rarely construed as positive or substantively beneficial to the community (cf. Ardren 2002; Hutson, Can Herrera, and Chi 2014). This subpar relationship exists at least in part because “while [anthropological] scholars have long found Maya cultures worthy of attention, their agendas, and conclusions have not always coincided with current Maya politics and priorities” (Watanabe 1995, 33). Under the pressure “to be considered ‘authentic Maya,’” people find themselves in a complicated web of relationships that values the “the real Mayas of the past” while disavowing, dehumanizing, and devaluing present-day Maya peoples (Cojti Ren 2006, 12). Archaeologists and other Mayanist scholars may undertake research that meets the standards of their professional organizations, but many remain deeply out of touch with the current needs of the communities they work with (or—more often—who work for them). In turn, these practices feed into a system that perpetuates unjust racial geographies characterized by historically embedded social hierarchies and paternalism (Saldaña-Portillo 2016).

A social activism agenda in Maya archaeology, then, requires that practitioners exercise epistemic deference, by which we mean the humility to understand that researchers’ self-perceived expertise is unlikely to be exclusive or more relevant in the contexts they find themselves in. Epistemic

deference is necessary for effectively decentering non-Maya researchers' independently designed agendas and making space for collaborative research decisions made in concert with their community partners (who are researchers in their own right). We support practicing what Llanes-Ortiz (2019, 178) outlines as the Yukatek Maya notion of “e’esaj-ing,” or “showing, demonstrating, and partnering in,” a given task—in this case, collaboratively designed research agendas. E’esaj is an orientation toward learning and cooperation that maintains open dialogue in the partnerships we seek to construct. We applaud programs such as the well-known Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative (MACHI) that are beginning to change the frameworks of Maya archaeology by adopting “an activist stance in reference to mitigating the rapid destruction of archaeological heritage in the Maya region and addressing the centuries-old pattern of heritage distancing” (McAnany and Parks 2012, 85). These initiatives are still too rare. Moreover, they tend to emerge as an afterthought to the priority that archaeological research objectives take at these sites. Indeed, these shifts frequently result from what archaeologists recognize as a threat to the archaeological record rather than the belief that one can both practice archaeology in an academically rigorous way and work alongside communities to address local social justice concerns. As McAnany (2016, 101) notes about the successful Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative, “I was concerned about social justice intellectually but at the time did not feel compelled to link that concern with the practice of archaeology—a space within which I sense many of my colleagues dwell today.” The foundations archaeologists and heritage professionals who received conventional training but continue to seek more from their work have set enable us to alter the ways we design our research agendas. Instead of treating local social concerns as auxiliary, we may begin incorporating more equitable practices such as sharing power and epistemic deference in our research aims.

The Tihosuco Heritage Preservation and Community Development Project

A primary aim of the Tihosuco Project has been to take seriously the interests members of the Tihosuco community express. The idea is simple: when confronted by neocolonial practices such as the mega-tourist industry in Quintana Roo (Scher 2011), communities such as Tihosuco might be able to use localized heritage practices to subvert repression and design a more desirable future for themselves, based in part on tourism but set on their

own terms. Determining who we call “the community” in any collaborative project can be difficult and is usually far less static than is suggested by the way scholars may sometimes talk about it (Agbe-Davies 2010; Crooke 2010). In our case, we began by identifying the community with members of three local representative bodies: the *ejido*, the *alcaldía* (mayor’s office), and El Museo de la Guerra de Castas (a state-funded, locally run Caste War Museum). As the project has grown, the community has expanded beyond these initial gateway organizations to include a broader group of interested Tihosuqueños. Together with researchers from the University of Pennsylvania’s Penn Cultural Heritage Center, the members of the Tihosuco Project have developed a grassroots initiative centered on a localized Maya heritage that departs from, although it does not ignore, the more common emphasis on the precolonial past encountered in heritage and cultural tourism work across the peninsula.

The Tihosuco Project combines multiple subprojects that highlight a variety of approaches to co-creating heritage, each of which is in some way linked to the town’s involvement in the Caste War (Diserens Morgan and Leventhal 2020). We see this blending of subprograms as forming the necessary spokes for an activist, engaged, unashamedly political umbrella heritage project. Together, we study the history and legacy of the Caste War as an anticolonial movement through archaeology and historic preservation. We focus on the material remains of the towns, haciendas, ranches, houses, churches, and convent associated with Tihosuco from roughly the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Additionally, we engage the more recent history of Tihosuco’s postwar repopulation through oral histories, museum development, archival exploration, the reclamation of Yukatek Maya language among Tihosuco’s youth (including the production of a bilingual comic book series), the digital archiving of the community’s historic photos and documents, and a biographical portrait project. Through our collaborative work, we seek not only to understand the history of the war but also to help Tihosuqueños tell their history to outsiders in a way that reflects their experiences. By doing so, we celebrate the power of self-representation in a heritage economy that would prefer to market a standardized historical narrative that is more aligned with the essentialized tropes of Mayaness that pervade it.

The story of the Caste War is one that in both its proclamations and silences constructs both identity and contemporary sociopolitical consciousness across the peninsula. Nonetheless, the pride and solemnity that is connected to the history of Maya oppression and resistance, as exemplified

by the war, is readily apparent in towns such as Tihosuco (although that history is more nuanced than its description as “Maya” is able to capture; Gabbert 2019). Annual commemorative events reinscribe the centrality of the conflict—or perhaps more importantly the anticolonial and pro-Maya autonomy it now represents for community members. At the national level, the Mexican Revolution, which is widely understood to have been a unifying event in the nation’s history, often overshadows this conflict. However, the state of Quintana Roo began incorporating Caste War history into its own narratives about regional and national belonging in the 1990s. In fact, the once-localized commemorative celebration held in Tihosuco and its northern neighbor, Tepich, has become a stage for state politicians to lay claim to the Caste War’s history as the foundation for a politically active and fully integrated regional polity. As Jose Esquivel Vargas, a local state representative who neither speaks Maya nor would be racialized as Maya, declared in a public speech in 2018 that celebrated the naming of Tihosuco as “Cultural Patrimony of the State of Quintana Roo”:

We all know *our* history. We have heard tell of the Maya Social War . . . that the Maya decided to protect their lands and lifestyles . . . rebels, they were called. . . . Therefore, the protection of cultural patrimony is of utmost importance. It is *our* cultural heritage, we must maintain the uses and customs of our Maya ancestors.¹

The result is a complicated milieu of competing narratives about the Caste War that walk a line between what becomes authorized public memory or heritage discourse and what does not (Delle 2008; Smith 2006). Among many residents of Tihosuco (and other towns throughout Quintana Roo), though, there remains an undercurrent that continues to challenge and subvert these authorized narratives through localized and community-based memory and heritage-making practices. The heritage assemblages encountered in Tihosuco may serve as media for mending the disconnect between present-day Maya, their pasts, and the state’s (frequently extractive) heritage interests—including economic development through cultural tourism.

Two Heritage Assemblages

In his contribution to the edited volume *Reclaiming Archaeology*, Rodney Harrison (2013) proposes that archaeologists should be reimagining what archaeology offers to the present and the future—what archaeology is and

what it does. His argument rests on understanding archaeology as the study of enmeshed and overlapping surface assemblages. Assemblage is a foundational archaeological concept that typically refers to a collection of materials related through contextual proximity (Joyce and Pollard 2010, 292; Hamilakis and Jones 2017). Surface assemblages are often undervalued in archaeology because they are seen as merely indicative of potentially more significant depositional assemblages that could be recovered through excavation. Although Harrison is not alone in his emphasis on assemblage, he departs from this conventional understanding and valuation of assemblages in a useful way. Without decreasing the importance of excavation, he suggests that even it is a process of exposing surfaces in the here and now. In contrast to the widely reinforced idea that all archaeology is destruction (Wheeler 1954), Harrison (2013) advances the position that archaeology is best suited to exposing obscured surfaces, to drawing out and actively assembling the fragments of the past that remain in the present:

To think of archaeology as the study of surface assemblages emphasizes it not only as a creative act in the present—a process of assembling and reassembling—but as a discipline which is concerned explicitly with the present itself. This present is not fixed or inevitable, but is still in the process of becoming; it is active and ripe with potential. . . . Archaeology [that turns its attention toward the future] would abandon its focus on particular periods to work more fluidly across time and space, with a focus on the production of an intimate present and future, rather than a distant unknowable past. In doing so, we would work towards the development of an archaeology in and of the present, for the future. (51)

We agree with Harrison's reconfiguration of the concept of assemblage. In a research environment where we continuously seesaw back and forth between historical questions about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and today's ethnographic and social concerns, situating our aim as one that looks deeply at the ways each of these spatiotemporal surfaces interface is far more effective than attempting to draw arbitrary boundaries between past and present. Taking Harrison's lead, then, we offer two assemblages to demonstrate how amplifying localized heritage practices can provide a platform for supporting local communities now and into the future. Archaeologists and heritage practitioners must recognize that the communities they work in are likely organizing; they already have social, political, and economic agendas. Becoming allies in these spaces allows for more

substantive heritage practices that upset the cycles of appropriation and disenfranchisement in neocolonial contexts such as those created by the tourism regime in Quintana Roo.

Assemblage One: In Kaj Jo'otsuko'e', or Tihosuco's Historic Core

There is perhaps no more clear evidence of the blurring between past, present, and future than what is represented by the extant prewar era structures, or *casas coloniales*, that many of Tihosuco's families live in. Most of these houses are in the center of the town near the central plaza, forming what we have come to refer to as the historic core of Tihosuco. The houses show use over time, adaptation to modern conveniences, and historical fabric, often all on the same wall (Figure 5.2).

Most *casas coloniales* were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before the Caste War. Of the over sixty structures that we have identified, including walls, wells, and smaller elliptical-style houses, thirty-three are large masonry buildings that were previously identified for inclusion in the *Catálogo Nacional de Monumentos Históricos* (National Catalog of Historical Monuments), a register maintained by INAH. Today, the houses exist as an important piece of heritage for those who live in Tihosuco because of their use during resettlement in the early 1930s. The most iconic of the structures is the Templo del Santo Niño Jesús, a large church and former convent that was built in several stages beginning in the sixteenth century. Today, the church stands in partial ruin because Caste War insurrectionists bombed it in 1867.

Recent intentional destruction of the material remains of the past as an act of war (Al Quntar et al. 2015), and the use of historical symbols in divisive political agendas (Morgan 2018; Brundage 2018) makes the study of heritage as a tool in negotiating identities an urgent endeavor (Meskell 2002). Acts such as the bombing of the Temple Bel at Palmyra and the long-standing debate over Confederate monuments in the United States highlight questions about who controls heritage, who creates or destroys it, and who benefits from it. These questions about the use of heritage over time and the nature of power dynamics surrounding the control of heritage are a central concern of the Tihosuco Project. To contextualize these larger debates regarding heritage, we move beyond traditional archaeological practice by including community collaboration, ethnography, and historic preservation in order to understand how heritage assemblages, such as the *casas coloniales*, are being used and valued today.



Figure 5.2. Photo of a block of prewar homes in Tihosuco. Photo by Kasey Diserens Morgan.

In fact, who owns the *casas coloniales* is a contentious subject in Tihosuco. Each one houses one or more families that have signed a deed of agreement with the ejido to occupy them, but the ejido retains the rights to their land as part of the communal holdings. In addition, the inclusion of the houses on the national register adds a layer of protection and a perception that INAH owns these properties under federal law. That means that they require a permit for any construction or alteration to a property on the list. Moreover, because Tihosuco was abandoned during the war and reoccupied in the early 1930s, there are lingering fears among current residents that descendants of some of the original owners might come back and request the return of their houses. Many owners, when asked what living in a *casa colonial* means to them, speak of heredity: the idea that these houses have stood the test of time and can be passed down to their descendants. When pressed, many also recognize the benefits they would stand to gain from future tourism or for resources coming in for restoration, as has been the case in nearby cities such as Valladolid, Yucatan.

The idea for an official project to document and preserve the history of the *casas coloniales* came from within the community. Tihosuqueños wanted to clarify issues of ownership and value that some of the houses



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recognized on the national register—and the increased interest from regional politicians in using that recognition as a stepping-stone to tourism development—raised. Mariano Chan Pech, who was mayor when we began this subproject, formed a committee dedicated to helping local house owners understand the laws associated with owning a colonial structure and to working in tandem with INAH on permits and other regulatory issues. Kasey and the sub-project's co-lead, Socorro Poot Dzib, regularly report to this committee on their progress documenting the houses and organize town-wide meetings to set the priorities for their work.

Kasey and Socorro have worked together for the last six years. The previous mayor connected Socorro with the project because she and her family had recently moved back to Tihosuco from the Riviera Maya and she was looking for work. The initial stages of the study involved entering houses and speaking with their owners. Being a team of two women had its advantages. As men are often away from the house during the day, having Kasey work with a local woman who could provide introductions to other local women proved advantageous and reassuring for *casas coloniales* owners. Now, in her capacity as the treasurer for the mayor's office, Socorro keeps members of the project tuned into local politics and introduces the team to regional politicians as they visit Tihosuco. Her position also enables her to present the priorities of the *casas coloniales* committee to these politicians.

From the outset, Kasey and Socorro recognized that the scope of the subproject had to be much more than documentation because of the various time periods that are represented and the different stakeholders who are involved. They want to tell the histories of these houses in a way that effectively bridges past, present, and future. They combine physical documentation, such as measured drawings and photographs, with oral histories and ethnographic interviews. They have fully drawn and documented over thirty structures and have photographed and georeferenced another thirty. On the practical side, their work needs to be useful to the owners and the community at large. They are working to produce maps and a register of the houses most at risk for deterioration. Such a register can serve as the basis for requesting restoration funds, tourism plans, and guided tours or for future preservation plans. They also carefully observe and involve themselves in meetings with government actors such as INAH and other officials interested in bringing tourism to town. Kasey walks the line between her academic interests in how heritage preservation practices become localized and socially embedded and being an advocate for a heritage

preservation agenda that considers and benefits both the houses and the families who occupy them.

Recent interest on the part of the government further highlights the need for input and participation at the local level. Government actors such as INAH, state legislators, and the Secretary of Tourism began repairing and repainting the facades of ten houses in 2018. Much of that work was done without any real input from the owners. A few meetings were hastily thrown together where each owner had to sign the application for a work permit or was given a copy of a permit that had already been approved. No one was given a choice about paint color or was told when the work would start. Socorro and Kasey spent time with the owners, documenting concerns and bringing them to the appropriate authorities where possible. The work remains fraught with complications because of the differing levels of control over the project each of the actors has. The funding for the project came from the State Congress of Quintana Roo, who dispensed it through an entity called *Sistemas Integrales para el Transporte* (SINTRA; Ministry of Infrastructure) and the *Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Quintana Roo* (the Secretary of Tourism). They, in turn, subcontracted the restorations to a private agency with only one available contractor. The hierarchy of actors involved in the project caused miscommunications, work stoppages, and a general discontent with the quality of the work within the Tihosuco community. This recent development has greatly impacted how Kasey approaches her role and further highlights the need for greater town involvement in the government's initiatives. What the restoration project needed was a strong group of advocates who could give permissions, guide the work, and speak up if things were not advancing appropriately. Kasey and Socorro hope that through this subproject they are providing tools and a platform from which they, the *casas coloniales* owners, and the attendant committee can advocate for more transparency and more government funding for future work.

As researchers from outside Mexico, Kasey and Tiffany (co-author) must work within these structures. We apply to INAH for permits, and we work within the protections in place at these sites. At the same time, we are helping to produce knowledge that strengthens the history of a multivocal counternarrative that continually negotiates what it means to be Maya in southern Yucatan. We want to work alongside Tihosucos to preserve the tangible and intangible remains of that story for the future, but we understand that government restrictions and controls (and, at times,

affordances)² have very real and palpable impacts on the lives of those who live in and around Tihosuco's historic structures. We must take all of these perspectives into account as we continue our work.

Assemblage Two: In the Name of the Ejido

Similar to the work that Kasey and Socorro have been doing with the *casas coloniales*, Tiffany and several members of the ejido are working to bridge the gap between what is known about the period that led up to the war and what happened during and after the war, including the region's repopulation (which happened around 1930). As Harrison (2013) notes, there are limits to the usefulness of periodization when what is at stake is how people engage with, understand, and make use of particular histories in the present and how they will do so in the future. The second assemblage we offer grapples with how to approach the many historic places within the 60,000 hectares of the ejido. Through the work we have undertaken together, members of the Tihosuco Project are challenging ideas about conventional archaeological practices, traditional approaches to dividing and categorizing time, and who has the power to contribute to and construct the narrative of the history of the region.

Over forty historic properties that date to the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, including depopulated towns, haciendas (plantation estates), and ranches, are scattered across ejido lands (Figure 5.3). Members of the archaeological subproject have so far encountered a limited amount of archival information pertaining to these places but they continue to investigate. Many official documents are rumored to have been destroyed during the Caste War; what does exist in regional archives is limited. Tihosuco appears frequently in secondary accounts, but these typically prioritize the history of Tihosuco as a key war zone following the uprising in 1847. This temporal bias obscures what we can know about the other historic places on the ejido, which would have belonged to the parish of Tihosuco before the outbreak of the war. After over seven decades of severe regional depopulation, Tihosuco was among the towns in the region that were reoccupied. Many other prewar settlements, including those we describe below, were not. But, as Kasey and Socorro's work makes clear, Tihosunqueños today continue to engage with these places through renewed dwelling practices. Many sites that were once ranches or haciendas (plantation estates) have been repurposed for similar locally controlled economic and/or social endeavors. They have become places for community festivals and family



Figure 5.3. Hacienda estate of insurrectionist leader and patron of Tihosuco, Don Jacinto Pat. Ejido de Tihozuco. Photo by Tiffany C. Fryer.

gatherings, making milpa (a kind of swidden agriculture) and cultivating traditional foods, keeping bees, raising cattle, hunting, and gathering medicinal plants. Some people even recall how their families set out in search of specific places that family members who had fled the region long ago told them to look for during the 1920s and 1930s, when Mexico's agrarian reforms began to make space for a new wave of communal landholding organizations.

One of these places, an unoccupied town, has been central to our archaeological work under the auspices of the Tihosuco Project. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Tihosuco had two associated subject towns that were administered by the colonial and then the republican government, together with the Catholic Church. (Some additional towns were under the purview of the Tihosuco parish before this period.) Although we do not fully understand why, Tihosuco and its northern subject settlement, Tepich, retained their prewar names when the region was repopulated in the twentieth century. The second of Tihosuco's subject towns, known then as Tela', did not. Although it is clearly recorded on the historic maps and

census records that survived the war and even played a significant role in the peninsula's history of piracy, Tela' was largely forgotten. Today, Tihosuqueños refer to it as Lal Kaj, meaning "old settlement," or, in a word play achieved through the lengthening of vowels that is common among Yukatek Maya speakers, "place of thistles," referring to the overgrowth of jungle thistle, *láal*, found at the site today. Even INAH published a brief article on this place under the name Lal Kaj (Martos López 2006).

After Richard Leventhal (co-director of the Tihosuco Project and director of the Penn Cultural Heritage Center) had visited the region for several years, a group of Tihosuqueños invited him to help set up a collaborative project focused on documenting the remains of these pre-Caste War sites located on the ejido. He was also tasked with helping to envision a plan for a locally controlled niche tourism endeavor that drew on the resources identified in Tihosuco and its surrounding lands. Tihosuqueños were far more guarded about the Caste War sites, especially Tela', than they were about the prospect of allowing a foreign archaeologist to exploit the precolonial remains of the ejido (Leventhal et al. 2014, 217–218). Tihosuqueños identified these historic places as more salient to their own experiences, their collective identity, and their notion of local heritage. They routinely diverted the attention of outsiders as a form of preservation. But given the recent boom of the heritage industry on the peninsula and the absence of employment opportunities in town, ejido members are seeking new uses for their rich historical sites. In 2013, Leventhal invited Tiffany, then a graduate student, to join the project with the cautionary note that this would be a trial period: she would have to be invited back by the Tihosuqueño co-directors of the project. Her priority for the first season was to map and document Lal Kaj alongside Tihosuco's ejido members and work with them to imagine a much wider scope for the research.

Using a high-accuracy GPS unit, Tiffany, Secundino Cahum Balam, Alfredo Pat Pool, Elias Chi Poot, and a rotating group of other ejido members spent fourteen weeks over the course of two seasons mapping the three-square-kilometer town, which is characterized by densely interwoven limestone stone walls. During this time, many of the project members shared personal histories with Tiffany about how they and their families were connected to this place and about how they interpreted the connection between the town and the war. They told her that while they had long known Lal Kaj, that knowledge had centered on the sacred areas of the central plaza, the cenote, and the church. Our collaborative investigations opened up new possibilities for understanding the extent of this place, such

as what daily life might have been like for people living here during the nineteenth century, the town's potential influence on the region, and how the war uprooted that influence. It also generated opportunities to use excavation and archival research to augment oral histories about the region. Now, the reference points for explaining the town's history have become anchored to its name: instead of speaking of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people speak of the time before it was Lal Kaj and the time after its historic name was reclaimed and it became Lal Kaj-Tela'.

Over time, project contributors became more excited to share the other places on the ejido that they and their families represent. For many, the most treasured of these are the former haciendas. As our survey of Lal Kaj-Tela' ended and the ejido's administrations changed with local elections, Tiffany and a new lead partner, Bartolome Poot Moo, expanded investigations to other historic properties based on an interactional snowball method (Noy 2007). To date, they have mapped ten hacienda sites and sixteen ranches. Like Lal Kaj-Tela', though, the knowledge of the original names of all but one of these properties has long faded. We refer to them by the names their current representatives gave them. The exception, xCulumpich, retained its name through oral histories. xCulumpich was the hacienda of Jacinto Pat, one of the initial organizers of the Caste War.

The ejido's growing register of historic sites includes two additional towns (with areas of about one square kilometer each), an extensive road system, and hundreds of defensive field fortifications erected during war-time. INAH did preliminary documentation at some of these places (and even listed the church at Lal Kaj-Tela' and the house at xCulumpich in its register). But our work is motivated by more than an interest in recovering presumably lost vestiges: members of the project team worked together to adjoin the many knowledges that members of the ejido and their families had already cultivated on smaller scales. One ejido member, Jose María Uc Cahun, even presented Tiffany with what turned out to be photocopies of transcribed vital statistics from the prewar parish records. Although he had guarded them for years in his personal library, he did not have the citation. Using the typeface as a guide, Tiffany was able to track them down in the university library (Arrigunaga Peón 1982), setting in motion her own archival research journey.

Many of the ejido members who contribute to the Tihosuco Project's archaeology program have worked with other archaeologists along the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. Their experiences with these other projects have followed a conventional international model in archaeology (Berggren and

Hodder 2003; Pollock 2010). Archaeologists bring local residents in as laborers (who haul buckets of material, scout out sites, outline transects, and wash and sort artifacts) and then send them home or to small, temporary working settlements away from the archaeologists who employ them (Pollock 2010). Most of them will have names only on payday and will never be recognized for the products of their labor. Many archaeologists mistakenly assume that the historical and archaeological knowledge of their labor force is rudimentary at best (see Leighton 2016). Regrettably, this remains the unsavory state of most archaeological practice globally—although, thankfully, this ethos is slowly shifting. Putting labor organization into the hands of the ejido and making small shifts in the language used to characterize the collaborative nature of the project—such as emphasizing the unity of our team instead of segregating ourselves into archaeologists and workmen—engenders a vital difference in how labor is articulated and experienced on this project.

As a final note, every July during the Caste War Anniversary Festival held in Tihosuco, we create temporary installations in the central park and in the museum as a means of showcasing our collaborative work for the wider community. In 2017, we worked together to install a permanent exhibit in the ejido's administrative office. Part of the exhibit involved enlarging the enabling act of the ejido so that its members would be able to view it more easily. Until then, only a handful of paper copies were floating around the ejido's small office, making it difficult for even the ejido's members to access information about their rights as *ejidatarios*. The current administration sought ways to demonstrate the benefits of ejido membership that go beyond access to (occasional) financial aid and the right to land use. The exhibit enabled us to highlight many historic properties that residents had near-exclusive entitlements to through the act (with, of course, the caveat that INAH also has a legal claim to them). While these displays may someday be of interest to visitors, they are aimed at Tihosucueños.

Focusing the benefits of this work inward, toward the Tihosucueño community—ejido members, other town residents, and youths—means that negotiated control over how and why the research is done and the narrative that emerges from that research may provide a small respite from the ongoing disappointments Tihosucueños receive from a sociopolitical and economic system that consistently undermines their power of self-representation and their capacity to invest in their own community.

Summary

In our discussion of these complementary heritage assemblages, we have tried to outline the ways members of the Tihosuco community negotiate and embrace their ever-present past. Tihosuco's colonial houses represent both the ambitions of late colonial Spanish creole society and the future that Maya residents who have reoccupied the dilapidated structures envision. The historic properties that pockmark Tihosuco's lands open an opportunity to join together dispersed community knowledge and mobilize a previously guarded assemblage in a way that may benefit the town. State-level interest in positioning Tihosuco's heritage as a key component of state-authorized heritage discourse and state-controlled heritage to be marketed is rising. Government interest need not be understood as an imminent threat, but the community's history of disenfranchisement at the hands of both governmental and private institutions makes residents uneasy and suspicious about whether the state will eventually seize control of this heritage. Organizing around these two assemblages to assert and maintain community autonomy reaffirms a heritage that nonlocals previously undervalued. These heritage opportunities also have the potential to improve social and economic prospects for the Tihosuco community. Our commitment to socially relevant heritage work and our belief in reciprocity and solidarity through action has cultivated a collaborative and dynamic effort to address contemporary problems in Tihosuco. Before concluding, we offer some takeaways from our work that have shaped the activist agendas and advocacy efforts of our team members.

Heritage Activism

Collaborative frameworks prioritize the redistribution of power in order to create equal footing between contributors. Negotiating the roles that each project member or group will fill is crucial to the success of the program (Shackel 2004; Cipolla and Quinn 2016). This is not a new notion, but we highlight it here because it greatly impacts the outcomes of our work. Juggling multiple initiatives—any of which could constitute whole projects on their own—requires constant discussion and reflection. Moreover, open conversation and diligent reflexivity facilitate flexibility in our work. As a team, we adapt to shifts in social and political agendas, economic needs, and academic responsibilities. Those of us associated with the Penn Cultural Heritage Center will serve the project for as long as we continue to be

invited. However, that invitation rests precariously on our disciplinary constraints, academic schedules, funding cycles, and ambitions. Even though we have established a mission statement, created a research design, and received formalized approval from Penn's Institutional Review Board, we frequently need to make changes to that plan on the ground to accommodate the structures of life in Tihosuco. For instance, the number of ejidatarios means that the archaeological program involves a wide range of participants. It also means that we have to accept built-in participant turnover in order to fulfill local notions of access and fairness. Paid participants must rotate in order to provide as many families with a work opportunity as possible, all the while pursuing our jointly established research goals. The three-year election cycles for the ejido's administration and the mayor's office also complicate our ability to establish long-term working relationships with specific people. Nonetheless, we find strength in the constant hand-off of responsibility. Fresh ideas and an increase in the number of project advocates in the Tihosuco community are just two of the benefits. The heterogeneity of communities that collaborate in activist archaeology need not be understood as a problem or a potential root of failure; rather, it is a marker of opportunity.

Our own positionalities as nonlocal researchers also play an important role (Fryer 2020). On more than one occasion, colleagues have told us that we are somehow relinquishing earned status, "giving up" our expert cards, and effectively wasting the time and money that has gone into our educations to be just one more voice in the conversation. Various professionals have cautioned us against too heavy a focus on "peripheral concerns" or told us to stop focusing on the broader impacts of our work, to focus on the data and science of understanding the past and the history of the Caste War instead of "that heritage stuff." People have made these kinds of comments even as academic departments and university policies have started talking more about how much they value engaged scholarship.

We fundamentally reject such positions and we implore established scholars to provide their students with the support necessary to cultivate research that is intellectually rigorous precisely because it focuses on the broader consequences of the work. As Tilley (1989, 106) argued three decades ago, "people, and not inanimate machines, write and create the past. Archaeology is a process, a system of social relationships in the present within which the production of meanings take place." The Tihosuco Project has taught us that a commitment to community research involves an implicit understanding that the past has power over the future. Those who

work in a bubble and only focus on “the past” are misleading themselves and others.

Giving lip service to engagement and advocacy does little more than reinforce the histories of disenfranchising indigenous and otherwise marginalized communities that our disciplines carry. Heritage practitioners, including archaeologists, public historians, museum specialists, and so forth, have no right to shift the burden of historical revisionism onto such communities under the guise of collaborative research. We are obliged to and should feel privileged to participate in the rebalancing of power engendered by removing disciplinary gatekeepers and by recognizing local communities as keepers and producers of valuable historical knowledge that can be mobilized to effect change in a world that continues its attempts to keep certain kinds of people down. We can, as Hernández Castillo and Hutchings (2019, 16) argued, destabilize “knowledge hierarchies through epistemic dialogues that recognize other ways of ‘being in the world,’ while we use our anthropological knowledge as ‘expert knowledge’ in the struggles for rights.”

We recognize that if people do not care about a project or do not see it as a way to sustain their livelihoods, they will not fight for how it is run, who it involves, or what it stands for. It simply does not matter enough to them; why should it? There is nothing at stake. In Tihosuco, some people view the precolonial past (which more readily gains the attention of heritage practitioners and tourism agencies) as distinctly important. But the overwhelming sentiment we have encountered over our several years of working with Tihosuqueños is that while the precolonial past is something that other Maya folks might rightfully find important, it just does not resonate in the same way here. In fact, one local family that is known for having an affinity for the precolonial past managed to get in with a regional politician who wanted to make a showing of support for Tihosuco in hopes of earning votes. Under advisement from this family, the politician erected a statue along the main highway that depicted a Maya ball game player bunting a ball from his hip. When the politician unveiled the statue during the opening ceremony of the annual Caste War Anniversary Festival, the murmurs from the crowd ranged from unimpressed to indignant. We heard people whisper, “That’s not our history” and “What does that have to do with Tihosuco?” These feelings may be a simple function of the fact that Tihosuqueños express little affinity with precolonial history. It is not denied by any means, but the distancing that McAnany and Parks (2012) addressed had real impacts here. For the moment, there is little to compel a rekindling

of that relationship to the precolonial past in order to legitimately and authentically embody and represent Mayaness. Perhaps this will change as Mayan language use diminishes and customs transform. For the moment, however, war, abandonment, and repopulation are what figure most prominently in local narratives about what it is to be Maya and Tihosuqueño.

What is at stake for Tihosuqueños is not only control over the representation of their past but also the prospect that that past might contribute to how people make their livelihoods, today and in the future. Is there a chance that collaborating on a heritage project could provide any jobs in town? Could doing so keep people from having to leave for jobs in the Riviera Maya? Could heritage projects encourage people to return to their homeplaces? Could supporting a heritage project help get street lights and clean water systems installed or roofs on houses? Too many archaeologists believe that their influence ends at the sites they chose to study or with the reports and articles they write. But our efforts have clear impacts on the local communities where we work. It is incumbent upon us to recognize when there may be more pressing needs in the community than “doing archaeology.” We need to be working toward an umbrella heritage practice for which collaboration is the baseline.

While substantive collaboration has been a pillar of the Tihosuco Project, it is not without its challenges. We continue to grapple with how to restructure the notion of “field seasons” so that work toward the various goals is not halted simply because the Penn portion of the team cannot be there. The traditional archaeological field season is impractical for this sort of grassroots work, but constraints imposed by the academic cycle interfere with our long-term goals and hopes for sustainability and practical action. Trying to sell to a granting agency that you need six or seven month-long trips spread out over a few years is daunting (Pyburn and Wilk 2000, 82–83). Yet as we reflect upon the project, this model makes the most sense. With the *casas coloniales* project, for example, while the data collection on the houses can be done rapidly, it is the conversations and events that take place after documentation that contribute to more meaningful ideas about heritage and the future. Moreover, there are still clear structural barriers that manifest, for instance, in the ability of someone who has not been professionally trained as an archaeologist to lead archaeological investigations. We don’t mean to suggest that just anyone should be able to get a permit. Rather, we mean to underscore the fact that lack of access to education for people from places such as Tihosuco means that there are very few opportunities for potential collaborators (such as ourselves) to create

on-the-ground partnerships that can function legally without their presence. Thus, we hope that the future will bring more educational opportunities for local students interested in archaeology and other heritage-related fields (in addition to tourism, which currently dominates postsecondary educational trajectories in the region for the reasons we outlined above).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued for the utility of an umbrella heritage model for activism-oriented heritage work. By situating the Tihosuco Heritage Preservation and Community Development Project in the context of a globalized, multibillion-dollar tourism industry that exploits tropes of Maya identity for private and state gain, we demonstrate small acts of resistance that localized heritage initiatives can engender. Among these acts, we emphasize self-representation and community-controlled economic growth. We believe that our umbrella heritage model responds to various (and often well-founded) critiques about community archaeology by taking seriously how people in Tihosuco are themselves defining the different communities and subject areas within the project. We are reminded that humility, dignity, and epistemic deference are the greatest tempers for the hierarchies embedded in the expertise acquired through access to formal/higher education and are the greatest offsets to unequally distributed power. For our team, the Tihosuco Project is about positioning the community to claim heritage as a social, political, and economic tool that will begin to reframe the structures of inequality.

Both of us have come to realize that, in contrast to what the disciplines of archaeology and historic preservation have suggested we elevate as key values and roles, we do not practice heritage for the protection or preservation of the past as embodied by buildings, sites, and artifacts. Rather, we take people's histories seriously and acknowledge that such a disposition fundamentally alters the questions we are inclined to ask about the past because, ultimately, the interest lies in the future. We work where silencing the legacies of violence and dispossession has been rampant. Our hope is that this collaborative initiative has created a space where it is safe—albeit contentious and filled with dissent—to truly talk about this past and develop new, subversive ways of unsettling it that might promote growth, a sense of justice, and increased community cohesion.

Notes

1. Authors' transcription and translation of a speech recorded in Felipe Carrillo Puerto on March 24, 2018, during fieldwork.
2. Here we are invoking affordance in the way that materialism scholars in archaeology have used it to underscore the material realities of the conditions structures engender—in this case, structural inequities. That means recognizing that there may be positive potential (affordances) to some of these restrictive policies at the same time that they risk negatively impacting the very people they are put in place to uplift.

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