

## Confronting Violence in the Layered Landscapes of East-Central Quintana Roo

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A substantial body of ethnohistorical work focused on the earliest years of contact, colonial domination, and Indigenous resistance exists for New Spain (now, Mexico). Between the 1520s and the 1550s, Spain's colonial project in Yucatán looked more like piecemeal concession than sweeping conquest (Chamberlain 1948; Bracamonte y Sosa 2001; Kaeding 2017). The region changed administrative hands rapidly, passing back and forth between the jurisdictions of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the Capitancy General of Guatemala, and the Audiencia de los Confines (Honduras). As the eastern areas of what have today been carved into southern Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize were brought under colonial control by Spain and Britain, the Yucatán buoyed—an administratively neglected limestone jungle of questionable value—to competing European imperial powers. As such, historians often characterize Yucatán's history of so-called conquest as uneven and contested (Gerhard [1979] 1993; Himmerich y Valencia [1984] 2010). Central to that uneven process of conquest are the several waves of violent reclamation (Jones 1989; Gosner 1992; Patch 2002) and myriad other forms of Indigenous resistance (e.g., Chuchiak 2010;

Matsumoto 2016) that occurred across the Yucatán between the sixteenth century and the eighteenth. The Rebellion of Jacinto Kan Ek,<sup>1</sup> in 1761, is perhaps the most famous of the pre-Independence uprisings, not least because the circumstances surrounding its inception were eccentric and its resultant violence rather spectacular (Bartolomé 1978; Bricker 1981, 70–76, 253–255; Patch 1998, 2014; Bracamonte y Sosa 2004). In an almost serendipitous confluence of events, the Indigenous community of Cisteil joined a man calling himself Jacinto Kan Ek, who they were told was the chosen king, in a rebellion against Spanish colonial authorities. The encounter was brief and the consequences swift. Kan Ek was sentenced to be torn apart by pincers until he died, then to have the remainder of his body burned and ashes thrown. His comrades were sentenced to similarly brutal punishments, including hanging, dismemberment, public lashing, exile, and forced labor (Patch 1998, 78–81).

In this chapter however, I will focus on a less swift yet equally violent instance of anticolonial uprising just two decades following Mexican and Yucatecan Independence from Spain. I present the results of a regional survey, conducted alongside longtime collaborators from a predominately Maya town called Tihosuco. Tihosuco is located in what was the easternmost extent of Spanish inland rule in the peninsular provinces of New Spain and the postcolony of Yucatán—what is today the State of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Our work began as a survey of historic sites, likely constructed between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth, which were abandoned or destroyed because of the uprising often glossed as the “Caste War” of Yucatán (*guerra de castas*, commonly dated to between 1847 and 1901). Our investigations revealed a landscape far more dynamic than historic maps and even the secondary historiography usually present. Although I will offer a glimpse of the many places that made up the late colonial to early Republican landscape of the Tihosuco Parish, the focus of this chapter will be to highlight the ways in which studies of war and everyday life—two areas that Maya archaeology has made significant contributions to—might be brought together to address the experience of prolonged collective violence such as that characterized by the Caste War. Our archaeological investigations allow us to interrogate the organization and structuration of social life in this often-overlooked frontier region. But they also allow us to begin to think through the contexts of violence, apprehension, and oppression that would have qualified social interactions during the transition from Spanish subjecthood to Mexican citizenship on the peninsula.

I will make the case for the value of exploring the period associated with the Caste War and its aftermath archaeologically. I argue this not from a place that privileges the usefulness of archaeological research to the verification or dismissal of historical narratives, but from a recognition that large-scale and prolonged forms of political violence invariably alter human geographies and

material culture. Social, cultural, and physical landscapes become draped with the excesses of violence, amplifying, reforming, and erasing human connections across time and space. Drawing on material evidence of localized fortification practice and abandonment conditions, I begin to think through how both actualized violence and the fear of it impacted social life. I move through a brief history of the Caste War and the Tihosuco Parish before arriving at an analysis of two common artifacts of the landscape that we have documented through our collaboration with present-day Tihosuco's *ejido* (communal land organization): limestone rock walls and grinding stones. I close with a consideration of what a materialist approach to the study of the war might offer while advocating for an even wider-reaching reformulation of traditional archaeological approaches to the study of both settler colonialism and political violence.

### **The Caste War of Yucatán and the Materialities of Political Violence**

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On July 26, 1847, Maya *batab* (representative leader), Manuel Antonio Ay Tec, was publicly executed by firing squad in the town square of the colonial Yucatecan Creole center, Valladolid. He was charged, tried, sentenced, and executed in fewer than four days on a count of conspiracy to rebel. Following his execution, officials displayed his body in his hometown of Chichimilá as a signal to the community of the repercussions for would-be revolters (Baquiero Preve [1878] 1990, 371–372; Bricker 1981, 95–97). The violent spectacle did nothing to cow Ay's co-conspirators: just four days following Ay's execution, Maya *batab* Cecilio Chi burned Tepich, his hometown of just under 2,000 inhabitants, to the ground. Within days, the parish seat, Tihosuco, had also been seized by its *batab*, Jacinto Pat. This multisited rebellion would transform into a full-scale insurrection, then paramilitary action, and finally a long-sustained guerrilla war in which the fluid borders between republican administration and insurrectionist reach would be maintained through targeted raiding on both sides (Reed [1964] 2001; Angel 1993; Rugeley 1996; Dumond 1997; Rugeley 2009). Lasting fifty-four years by conventional periodization, the Caste War is arguably the most successful Indigenous insurrection to have been mounted in the Americas (Bricker 1981, 87).

Even as the war unfolded, deeply racialized propaganda resulted in oversimplified readings of the rebellion as a primitive “race war” whereby so-called *Indios* were set on annihilating the white race. Early histories of the war propagate this discourse, and it has admittedly been relied on uncritically by scholars of Yucatecan and Maya history as well as popular media outlets (see, Baquiero Preve [1878] 1990; Reed [1964] 2001). The romanticism that results from the overrepresentation of war's spectacularity understandably makes some archaeologists turn their gaze toward what may seem like more deeply entrenched, complex, and long-term processes such as settlement strategy or the onset of global capitalism. Yet collective and sustained violence constitutes one of the

most fundamental processes of human social life. Indeed, Rani Alexander's (2004) *Yaxcabá and the Caste War of Yucatán: An Archaeological Perspective* was a vital contribution to the legitimation of historical archaeology in the Yucatán that nonetheless positioned the Caste War as a temporal bracket rather than as a central subject of study. Alexander convincingly argued that the origins of the Caste War have been mischaracterized because the agrarian system and cultural ecology of nineteenth-century Yucatán are misunderstood. Hers is an important corrective. Yet, her aversion to the romanticism surrounding Caste War scholarship resulted in the conflict being situated as little more than a proximate context for more important concerns about the persistence of Maya agricultural forms *through* punctuated events like war. I am arguing that that very romanticism may be reason enough to recharacterize the Caste War as part of a prolonged process of social violence warranting archaeological attention.

When does violence become a thing characterizable as war? Punctuated, watershed, or otherwise spectacular moments often inaugurate events called war. These flashpoints (Kazanjian 2003) or tipping points (Robb and Pauketat 2013) can be used to access not only the slower processes obscured by the discursive dominance of political violence but also the experiences of daily life in the midst of said violence. As the late historian María Elena Martínez (2004) showed in her work on racial hierarchy in Spanish America, spectacular acts of violence—such as that suffered by Manuel Antonio Ay Tec and Jacinto Kan Ek before him—were also expected, and thus mundane, aspects of life for many of Mexico's colonial subjects. As Herman Bennett (2009, 30) put it, commonplace acts of spectacular violence eventually led to violence writ large acquiring an ontological status in New Spain and, later, Mexico. In other words, violence permeated daily life. As such, evidence for such violence, punctuated and recursive, ought to be identifiable in the material record.

If we are to understand the experiences of Maya following the onset of Spanish colonialism in the Yucatán and Maya lowlands generally, we might simply consider that around one-tenth of the postconquest experience of Maya in this region was characterized by the event-process of the Caste War itself.<sup>2</sup> And, a far greater portion of that experience could be described as characterized by the oscillation between and coevalness of structural and expressive violence in this settler colonial space. The Caste War ultimately culminated in the massive loss of life and rapid outflux of people that would leave the region in the very state of being *despoblado* (depopulated) that the colonial administration had so often attributed to it in order to justify the continued expropriation of lands and labor from Maya peoples. The point is, if we are going to spend time thinking about life during this period using data from archaeological contexts and archival resources, maybe we should be paying more explicit attention to the lived experience of political violence.

The history of San Agustín de Tihosuco, the town and parish around which our studies center, aptly illustrates the kinds of political violence in operation across the peninsula following Spanish invasion. Tihosuco began as an *encomienda* (a land and labor tribute grant made to Spanish conquistadors by the Crown; Clendinnen [1987] 2003, 38–40) in the Spanish province of Beneficios Altos. It was positioned along the easternmost limit separating the reach of Spanish authorities from the colonially unsettled jungle buffer between them and the Caribbean Sea. By the late eighteenth century, the town and parish had expanded into a colonial trade outpost where commercial goods, sanctioned and illicit, entering the province from the eastern seaboard were transported and regulated. Despite constant threat of attack by pirates (see García Lara and Olán, chapter 4 in this volume), and although the Bourbon Reforms (especially from the 1760s onward) would alter Spanish colonial administrative structure and tighten control over smuggling and the trade of contraband in the colonies, this frontier town continued to grow and flourish. Tihosuco’s known history extends well into the postclassical period (Menchaca Lobato 1998; Martos López 2006), but its emergence as an entrepreneurial Creole outpost at the end of the eighteenth century signals an important shift in both its localized biography and the regional history to which it contributes. As *cabecera de parroquia* (parish seat), Catholic Spain’s colonial rule established Tihosuco as an administrative center from which tribute-paying Maya *visititas* (subject-towns) could be controlled and exploited. Parish records from 1784 show that Tihosuco administered at least two haciendas (plantations), known then as xCabil and Tinoh, and three ranches, Acambalam, Yaxche, and xHanan. It also governed two primary subject towns, one to its north, Tepich (where Cecilio Chi made his first attack), and the other to its south, Tela’ (Carvajal 1784).

The aftermath of the invasion of Spain by the French in 1808, the short-lived Spanish Constitution of 1812–1814, and Mexican and Yucatecan Independence from Spain in 1821 ushered in a new social and political system for the peninsula (Caplan 2003, 2010). Key characteristics of this new regime included the temporary abolition of the policy of separate republics that regulated Spanish settler incursion into Indigenous territories and communities. Imperial Spain governed its American colonies through a system of colonial administration that recognized “two republics” beneath its purview in New Spain and throughout Spanish America: the *república de españoles* (including peninsular and American-born Spaniards) and the *república de indios* (referring to the Indigenous peoples they were able to subjugate). Subject towns, such as Tepich and Tela’, were almost exclusively *repúblicas de indios*. Reinstatement of *repúblicas* for taxation purposes following French invasion both escalated unjust taxation practices (Kazanjian 2016) and ushered in Yucatán’s first neocolonial phase, intensifying extant unfree labor practices, squeezing land resources through increased capacity to privatize, and precluding the participation of particular social classes in civic society.

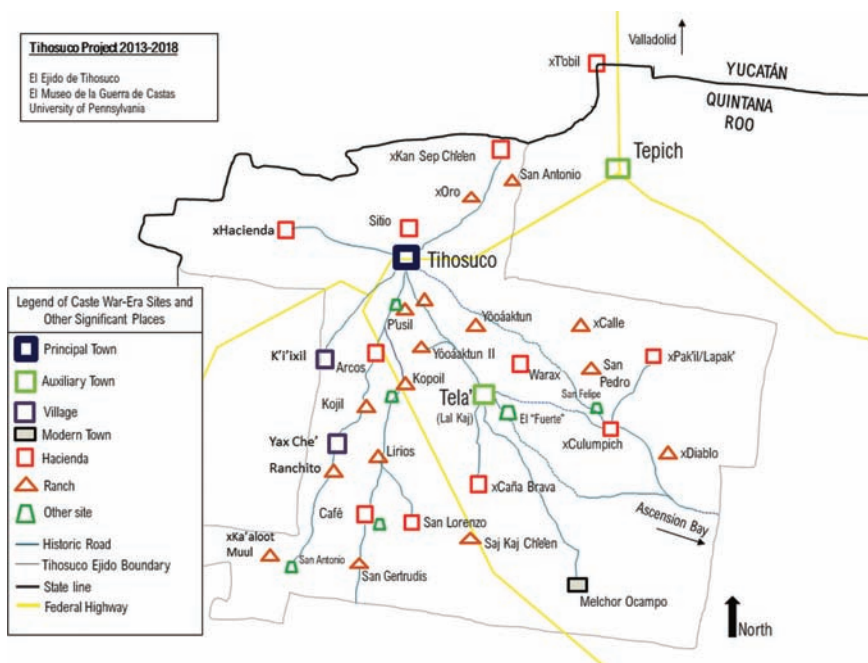
Because of the French invasion and War of Independence, many military-aged men from across the peninsula gained combat experience, including many Maya men from the southeastern frontier whom rivaling political factions enlisted in peninsular skirmishes for political power following Independence (Rugeley 1997, 485–486; Caplan 2010). With an increased period of progressivism afoot, Yucatecan Creoles, who had slowly been trickling toward Tihosuco in pursuit of land and free economy, now arrived at the outpost in rapid masses. Their increased presence during the 1830s and 1840s greatly altered the social landscape of the region. Yet, the presence of structural and punctuated violence remained a critical facet of everyday life. For example, Jacinto Pat (who would later emerge as a leader in the Caste War) and his kin, Cecilio Pat, submitted a formal complaint against the local judge, Perfecto Bolio, for abuse of power and extortion in 1838 (AGEY 1838). Although the document is severely damaged, it allows a glimpse of just one instance in which political authority was used to support an unjust system. It wasn't until those legal routes meant to rectify reported injustice proved ineffective beyond acceptance that the Caste War erupted.

### **Revising Cartographic Knowledges around Materialized Violences**

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When I began working with Tihosqueños, the proposed investigations centered on four primary places: the towns of Tihosuco, Tepich, and Tela', and xCulumpich, the former hacienda of insurrectionist leader and patron of Tihosuco, Jacinto Pat. Tela' and Tepich were formerly repúblicas de indios under the administrative authority of Tihosuco. Today, in postwar Quintana Roo, Tepich is a resettled town of around 3,000 residents that formally separated from Tihosuco by its autonomously operating ejido. Tela', on the other hand, became incorporated into Tihosuco's ejido. Although various families from Tihosuco made attempts to permanently resettle Tela' well into the 1980s, the conveniences of life in the reborn cabecera eventually exceeded the appeal of resettling the town: Tihosuco offered a life with access to primary schools, highways, religious and social communities, small corner shops, water, and electricity. Tela' eventually came to occupy a sacred place of sorts for Tihosqueños. Many still make pilgrimages to Tela's eighteenth-century church to leave dedications to its patron saint, the Archangel Michael, whose images hover over visitors from the still-frescoed altarpiece. Others gather medicinal plants, rare fruits, and small game, or establish their bee colonies to be nourished by the old growth jungle that has sprung up around the once-sizable town.

As a subset of a broader heritage initiative focused on the history of the Caste War, the aims of the archaeological partnership we created with Tihosuco's ejido members focused on identifying and registering the postcolonial sites believed to have been destroyed or "left fallow"<sup>3</sup> due to the violent undertakings of the war. Seven seasons into our investigations, our map has expanded well beyond the



**FIGURE 5.1.** Schematic Regional Survey Map, scale omitted for community's privacy. Map drawn by Tiffany C. Fryer.

four places around which we originally organized our work. Within the ejido, we have located and surveyed 3 towns, 10 haciendas, 16 ranches, 10 full or segmented historic road systems, and 7 other small sites including cenotes, wells, and reappropriated pre-Columbian sites around which significant historic processes have clearly occurred (figure 5.1). Our work complements that of Justine Shaw's (2015) team in the region west of us surrounding Saban, Sacalaca, and Ichmul, as well as the work of Rani Alexander (2004) in the area surrounding Yaxcabá to our north. The survey maps illustrate the proliferating growth of frontier life that occurred between the 1750s and the insurrection in 1847. But the surveys also opened our eyes to the ways in which the Caste War reorganized the landscape and the objects that helped shape it. These changes will be the subject of the remainder of the chapter. I will focus on two key artifacts of the landscape that our work has systematically recovered: *albarradas*—boundary walls made by stacking rough-cut limestone rocks without mortar—and *metates*—the culturally valued, semiportable grinding stones found ubiquitously across Maya households from the Preclassic period well into the twentieth century (Searcy 2011). Both of these artifacts derive from the limestone that dominates the peninsula geologically, and, I argue, can be understood as “core objects” of Maya social life in the region.

Following Ernst Boesch, Alfredo González Ruibal (2014, 36–37) describes core objects as key features of the communal body, those things whose consistent usage is central to the self-identification of a culture. Outside of Tihosuco’s historic core, where the smooth walls of its fortified eighteenth-to-nineteenth-century homes replace the albarradas that customarily enclose the Maya *solar* (house plot), albarradas continue to be the most common way of delimiting one family’s space from another’s—keeping out the uninvited and closing in the claimed. Even after a significant period of depopulation following the Caste War, and the move to resettle Tihosuco in the 1930s, the practice of albarrada building has not ceased in the former frontier hub. Nonetheless, the best example of how albarradas may have been constructed and used during the Colonial and Early Republican periods comes from Tela’, where albarradas continue to stand amidst the jungle overgrowth. Metates on the other hand, are increasingly rare. The proliferation of mechanized corn-grinding *molinos* has made the labor-intensive practice of grinding on polished limestone fall out of fashion. Still, these items remain important as heirlooms, often occupying places of honor in the thatched roof kitchens that maintain their position in Tihosuco’s architectural practices. While walls and grinding stones make for quite different forms of core objects, they may offer unsuspecting windows into the ways that violence refigures daily life. What happens to core objects during war?

### **Materializing Punctuated Political Violence**

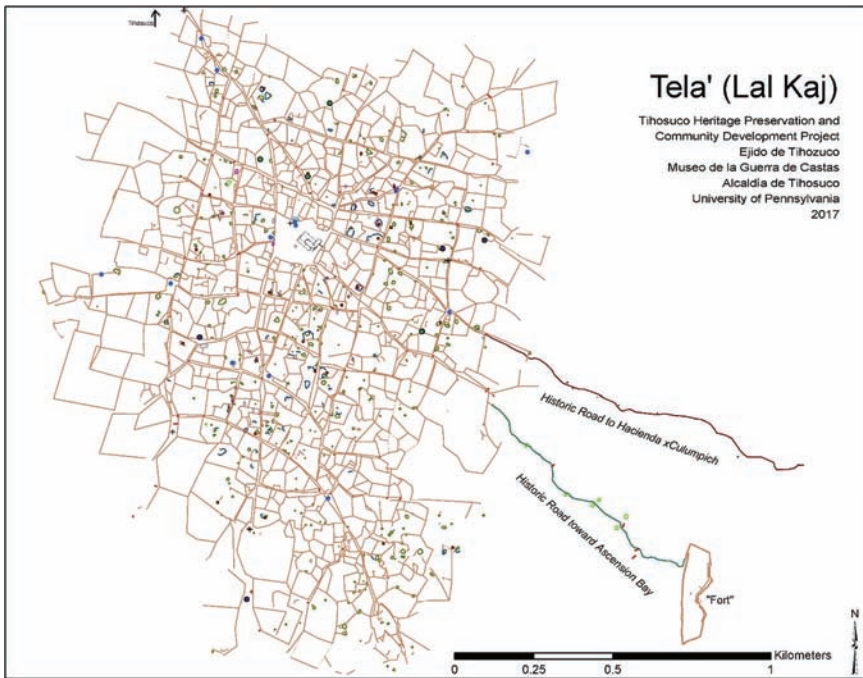
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Between 2013 and 2014, our team completed a detailed surface site map of Tela’ (figure 5.2). Although its most noteworthy feature is its church, located in the large central plaza near a cenote, Tela’s defining feature is its densely interwoven system of albarradas. These walls delimit house compounds and animal/husbandry plots in addition to creating negative spaces that compose roads and plazas. The average house compound contains at least one elliptical house foundation to support a perishable building; one to four garden planters’ sometimes a chicken coop or small animal pen; and frequently metates, watering basins, and feeding troughs. There are only six compounds, out of over 600, with standing nonperishable masonry structures—five of which are built in an elliptical style and one of which is cornered (for a detailed description of similar structure forms, see Sweitz 2012). The remaining evidence for structures is limited to those elliptical house platforms that would have supported wood pole and thatch structures that are still visible on the surface in lieu of the heavy jungle debris.

#### **Limestone Barricades: Transforming Albarradas into Trincheras**

Dry-laid walls were a defining architectural feature of residential areas throughout the Yucatán peninsula and, in many areas, remain so today. Created from





**FIGURE 5.2.** Survey map of Tela', also depicting the road to the Bahía de Ascención (Ascención Bay) passing through the eighteenth-century *trinchera* known today as “El Fuerte” (see chapter 4, García Lara and Olán, this volume). Map by Tiffany C. Fryer.

limestone sourced either from within the delimited house compound itself or from a *sascabera* (sourcing quarry) (Hutson et al. 2007, 464–467; Dahlin et al. 2011, 81–85), these walls are a strong example of core objects. Our survey at Tela' revealed distinct modifications to these core *albarradas*, though. There are walls that, to the untrained eye, are relatively indistinguishable to the onlooker from the typical *albarrada*. They are the same general height and width, similarly lack mortar, and are seamlessly integrated into the wall system. With a closer look, however, it becomes clear that these walls are interrupting the negative space, rather than creating it. They run across wide, flowing throughways demarcated by the confluence of compound *albarradas*, thus functioning to block the roads and disrupt the flow of movement.

War compelled people at Tela' to begin transforming *albarradas* into *trincheras* (figure 5.3). Contrary to what English speakers might presume, *trincheras* are not trenches but rather a form of standing field fortification that can be constructed rapidly. Alfredo Barrera Rubio and Miguel Leyba (1993) document a distinct style of *trinchera* construction north of Mérida that was used between the sixteenth



**FIGURE 5.3.** Example of an integrated trinchera at Tela'. Notice that this one has been partially deconstructed in the middle to allow for passage—a modification likely made during the mid-twentieth century by Tihosuco's postwar founders. Photo by Tiffany C. Fryer.

century and the eighteenth to defend against pirates. As García Lara and Olán (chapter 4 in this volume) show, a similar construction is contained within the Tihosuco Ejido on the road leading from Tela' to Ascension Bay. Yet this trinchera, which is partially mortared like those documented by Barrera Rubio and Leyba, is of a far more formal construction style than those that I am highlighting here. The Caste War-era trincheras found scattered across the Tihosuco Ejido measured to between 2 meters and 12 meters long and up to 1.5 meters tall in instances of good preservation. They abut, cross, or reroute roads and in some cases are perched on hills overlooking pathways below them. Across the ejido, our team has mapped 431 trincheras so far. Along the eight-kilometer historic road stretching between Tihosuco and Tela', for instance, we marked forty-five trincheras and an additional ninety-three were marked within Tela' itself. The frequency and magnitude of these trincheras within Tela' make their defensive function clear.

These rapid-construction trincheras are generally classifiable into three typological categories: *bloqueos integrados* (integrated roadblocks), *bloqueos autónomos* (autonomous roadblocks), and *trincheras independientes* (independent breastworks). Integrated roadblocks refer specifically to trincheras found within towns including (but not limited to) Tela'. They abut house-lot boundary walls to create blockades where roads and causeways would have flowed without impediment

before their construction. Autonomous roadblocks are *trincheras* that either cross or abut a road but stand alone because the roads—identified by compacted ruts in the ground that have been caused by many generations of foot, horse, and wagon or cart traffic—are not formed by walls as they are in towns. Finally, the freestanding breastworks are usually strategically elevated or offset from the road to provide views of surrounding compounds and roadways. We found that this form of *trinchera* most often occurred outside of settlements, but we did occasionally encounter them within both towns and hacienda properties. Within towns such as Tela', *trincheras* usually take a linear form because they follow the construction logic of the *albarradas* that are already in place demarcating house lots. Extrasettlement *trincheras* have a much wider range of forms, including linear, U-shaped, L-shaped, curvilinear, among others. Similarly to Kaeding's (2013, 212–213) observations for the area surrounding Ichmul, however, we found that our preliminary surface clearing and targeted excavations of some of these roadblocks revealed few associated artifacts.

### **Grinding Stones (Metates), Abandonment, and Gendered Experiences of Violence**

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In addition to these unique wall features, metates have a high surface occurrence at Tela' (figure 5.4). We might understand metates, like *albarradas*, as core technologies of daily life. Thick jungle debris at Tela' obscures most of the surface, yet we documented more than sixty-five metates, many near whole, without any surface clearing. Following other studies of violence-induced site abandonment (Schlanger 1991; Inomata et al. 2002), I think there is a likely association between metate presence in the fortified town, the speed of abandonment (often a function of distress), and whether people believed they might ever return. Prior studies suggest that in situations of rapid abandonment, valued items are left behind, whereas in situations of planned abandonment more time is available for removing valued items, making the archaeological assemblages at these locations less plentiful and diverse (Schiffer 1972; Stevenson 1982). In cases of rapid abandonment, multiple whole or broken whole metates are likely to be found within houses or on adjacent patios and in association with other whole objects (Healan 2000). If they are left in habitual-use contexts without packing for safekeeping, rapid abandonment can also be deduced (Simms et al. 2012). The conditions of that abandonment, sudden or anticipated, may be garnered from the subtleties of their *in situ* positioning.

Thinking about metates with respect to what they can tell us about the conditions under which people left Tela' is enticing because there is little archival documentation speaking to the subject. Metates also remind us that war violence is gendered. Limestone, fashioned as metate, was a core object of Maya communities well into the twentieth century. But metates were culturally valued



**FIGURE 5.4.** *Example of a three-footed metate found at Tela. Photo by Tiffany C. Fryer.*

as *women's* core objects, specifically. Metates, like looms (Restall 1997, 126–128), were rural women's technologies of self (González Ruibal 2014)—objects central to making life in their village communities (see, e.g., Hendon's [1997] study at Copán, Honduras). Metates held an esteemed place in the kitchen alongside the centuries-old *k'oben*, or three stone hearth, where women grind corn into meal for making tortillas (Searcy 2011; see also Houk, Bonoren, and Kilgore, chapter 7; Meierhoff, chapter 8). Women's experiences during the Caste War, as with many violent conflicts (see, e.g., Arce 2017) remain insufficiently addressed. Women are ancillary concerns in the historical narrative, mentioned at best when arriving in troves to refugee camps, or at worst when their abuse or rape catalyzes some sort of attack (e.g., Reed [1964] 2001, 66). Attending to these metates allows us a glimpse of both what daily life might have been like prior to the war, and how they figured into women's work and homemaking, but also into the abstract questions of site abandonment and gendered experiences of war. Although we have just begun our systematic study of metates, their potential to elucidate these issues is strong.

## Discussion

How did a community-based fortification process impact daily life in the Tihosuco Parish during the early years of the Caste War? What must it have been like to live in a town where you could not walk down the road? Did women and children stay, ready to fight alongside men? The juxtaposition of defense-modified albarradas called *trincheras* and metates as traces (Joyce 2015) of political violence brings the scalar opposition between overt and structural, punctuated and recursive, violence to the foreground. In some ways, the building of *trincheras*

represents a period of anticipation—a moment when preparation for impending violence was possible. They represent the simultaneous gearing up for and dread of imminent attack. Metates, left behind face-up and unstored, offer a window into other brief moments—flashpoints of a dramatic encounter when the time for preparation had expired. It is difficult to know whether in leaving behind the metates there was hope of return. Yet, it is possible to imagine that life during this period of prolonged violence may have at times acquired a mundaneness, a temporality characterized by waiting through which people, bored with anticipation (Mæland and Brunstad 2009), kept on living until living became impossible.

Archival evidence referencing Tela' is beyond sparse. We do not know the conditions of its abandonment—not when, not under what circumstances. We have recovered articles from early in 1849, originally printed in the *New Orleans Delta*, that recount the advances of Yucatecan and United States volunteer troops against insurrectionary forces between Tihosuco and Tela' (e.g., *Augusta Chronicle* 1849). Based on the accounts of returning wounded US soldiers, these articles claim that Tela' was captured and burned somewhere around the December 28, 1848. Nonetheless, our test excavations returned no evidence of burn lenses or other indicators that the reports might have been true *and* consequential—that is, that this incident led to mass abandonment of the stronghold that had been constructed at Tela'. Neither did we encounter any artifacts that might typically index combat: no artillery shells, no machete fragments, no buttons from soldier's uniforms, no human remains. By February 1852, another article in *El Siglo XIX*, reports that in early February troops under the supervision of Don Manuel Barbachano were advancing south from Tihosuco, spending the night in the "desolate town of Tela" (*El Siglo Diez y Nueve* 1852). Few other reports dealing specifically with the goings-on of the war in the former república de indios were ever made. Did the supposed burning of Tela' force its abandonment? If not, how much longer might it have been occupied? Who stayed? Who fled? When?

Tela' is the first major settlement if one heads south from Tihosuco. We know from 1846 census records—taken less than a year prior to the insurrection—that Tihosuco's population was declining while Tela's was increasing (Quezada 2010, table 12). Did people know the fight was coming? Were there plans in the works to make Tela' a stronghold? Many of these questions may remain unanswered. But, looking at the positioning of core objects, such as metates and albarradas, help us to think through *both* what archaeology can contribute to understanding domestic social life in Maya towns postconquest, and to how communities such as that of Tela' experienced not only living *through* war but attempting to escape it. The motivations for defensive construction are often unavailable through direct materials analysis alone (Winter 1994; Pauketat 2009, 246, 253–254), but made in concert with other interpretative factors, these sorts of landscape and

core technology modifications can illuminate people's experiences of violence. For instance, Russell Sheptak, Kira Blaisdell-Sloan, and Rosemary A. Joyce (2012) chose to move beyond describing colonial fortification at a sixteenth-century Honduran town as such, instead questioning the nature of the social subjectivities that fortification engendered. Similarly, I hope to have made space for the serious consideration of the social subjectivity of war as dependent on extant structures of violence in everyday life.

### **Conclusion: An Archaeology of Violence for the Future**

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In this chapter, I raised two main issues. First, violence is an important topic of study for archaeologists working in (post)colonial Mexico and Central America. Second, the epistemological divide that has been created between conflict studies and everyday life studies need not be insurmountable. To start, I offered a brief background on the Caste War and colonial violence more generally. Then, in keeping with the notion that any anthropology of political violence “cannot start with violence, or even war itself” (Lubkemann 2008, 30), I offered a snapshot of the historic Tihosuco Parish—the economic hub of our study area at the onset of the Caste War. I then turned to examine two core objects of Maya social life—dry-laid limestone walls called *albarradas* and grinding stones called *metates*—in an attempt to organize the analysis of violence as experienced on the Tihosuco Parish during the mid- to late nineteenth century around questions that center nonelites and the lived experiences of violent conflict.

When I consider what a material perspective on a so-called event such as the Caste War might offer, I arrive at its capacity to push us to ask tougher questions about things we often allow to be normalized as representative of certain experiences—for instance, “everyday life”—without recognizing that their mundaneness may in fact offer as rich a record of something deeper. How political violence reshapes lives, and how the act of survival, in itself a material phenomenon, reshapes our understanding of violence become salient. At times I have turned to work emerging from the epistemological shift being called the “new materialisms”—a theoretical movement finding followers across the humanities, social sciences, and material sciences. Some of the leading advocates of the new materialisms in archaeology have argued that we have to begin with the things, the matter, the objects of the archaeological record, taking them as we encounter them, in their own right (Olsen 2010; Witmore 2014). They also argue that to bring our biases and predeterminations to bear on the archaeological record does its own sort of injustice to the potentialities of the past and the life histories of the things that assemble it. That said, acknowledging our intellectual and political agendas may also open important kinds of potentialities in our research. In the case of the work I present in this chapter, our collaboration with members of the Tihosuco Ejido was a key factor in arriving at the questions we came to

ask about how violence materializes. Thinking more deeply about past violence and how people persist through times of political upheaval requires recasting the conventional material proxies of violence typically ascribed by archaeology. This is especially true of settler colonial violence, whereby the objective is always to obscure and erase the Indigenous. More than recasting, we must be willing to seek out new categories; we must be willing to ask unasked questions of unsuspecting objects. By illuminating the very ways that people live daily lives, sometimes for entire lifetimes, through war, we might upend its characterization as inherently other than *normal* or *daily*. Such an epistemological shift might more clearly render legible Indigenous experiences of settler colonial violence and the ongoing coloniality of knowledge construction about those experiences.

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## Notes

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1. Also written as Jacinto Canek in some sources.
2. This is not to homogenize the experiences of so-called Maya peoples across time, but to highlight the importance of recognizing continuity and ethnogenesis in the formation of what might today be considered “Maya.” Several scholars in history and anthropology have done the work of unsettling the blanket ethnic descriptions normally relied on by scholars, and I certainly recognize that work (Castañeda 2004; Gabbert 2004; Restall 2010).
3. Elsewhere (Cain 2019), I argued that the incompatibility of the concept of “abandonment” with the cultural and discursive practices of Yucatec Maya speakers (and several Indigenous groups throughout the Americas) has caused miscommunications between Maya communities and non-Maya archaeologists at best, and facilitated expropriation and dispossession at worst. What I consistently encountered in my work were two complementary ways of explaining the status of collective versus private land ownership. Under a collective claims framework, land is understood to be in use and thus ascribable to a particular person, family, or subset collective when it has a *representative* who claims responsibility for it. When no one claims such responsibility for care, the land does not default to abandonment. Rather, a notion derived from milpa agriculture, “lying fallow,” is used to explain its status as pending or awaiting a future representative caregiver. It is difficult to escape the language of abandonment in archaeological discourse,

but the employment of such terminology has real epistemological consequences and has consistently led to disenfranchisement, discrimination, and the removal of representational power from already-marginalized communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006).

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