"The Tyranny of Ethnonyms in Multiethnic Worlds"

Dr. Stacie King

Monday, November 9
4:00 PM
Student Building, Room 150

Dr. Daniel Suslak will be the discussant

Abstract:
This talk explores the challenges that ethnonyms create when trying to reconstruct histories of multiethnic landscapes in the ancient world. My larger project in the Nejapa region of Oaxaca, Mexico addresses various aspects of conquest and colonialism along interregional trade routes, including identifying fortresses in mountain landscapes, the meaning of unoccupied land, the relationships entailed by trade and exchange, and reconciling archival documents, oral history, and archaeology. For this talk, I will use my work to demonstrate how ethnonyms have pervaded interpretations of the past, archaeological reconstructions, and Colonial period registers, such that it remains difficult to envision a different kind of thriving, multiethnic world. Taken together, archaeological data, archival information, and oral history from rural multiethnic Nejapa, Oaxaca show us that Aztec, Zapotec, and Spanish conquests and colonialisms were experienced differently by different indigenous communities across this landscape between the years of A.D. 1350 and 1650, and that these differences do not fit well with traditional reconstructions of Nejapa’s indigenous ethnic groups (Mixe, Chontal, and Zapotec). Instead, the data complicate entrenched notions of ethnicity and challenge their basic formulation. I also argue that the long-standing multiethnic past of ancient Nejapa sets the stage for the different form of indigeneity that is experienced by Nejapa’s residents in the present.