

in their own tongue:

bats'i' k'op zapatista



JANUARY 1st, 1994

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS

daybreak

Thousands of indigenous people descend from their communities in the mountains and take over seven city centers of Chiapas, Mexico. They carry a black flag embroidered with a single star and the letters

EZLN: Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

we are the product of 500 years of struggle... the
dispossessed, we are millions and we there by
join our struggle as the only path, so that
we will not die of hunger
due to the insatiable
ambition of a 70-
year
dictator-
ship



They declared that they would not stop fighting until these demands were met. That day and the next, the Zapatistas took over more than 500 ranches and freed more than 230 prisoners from four state prisons.

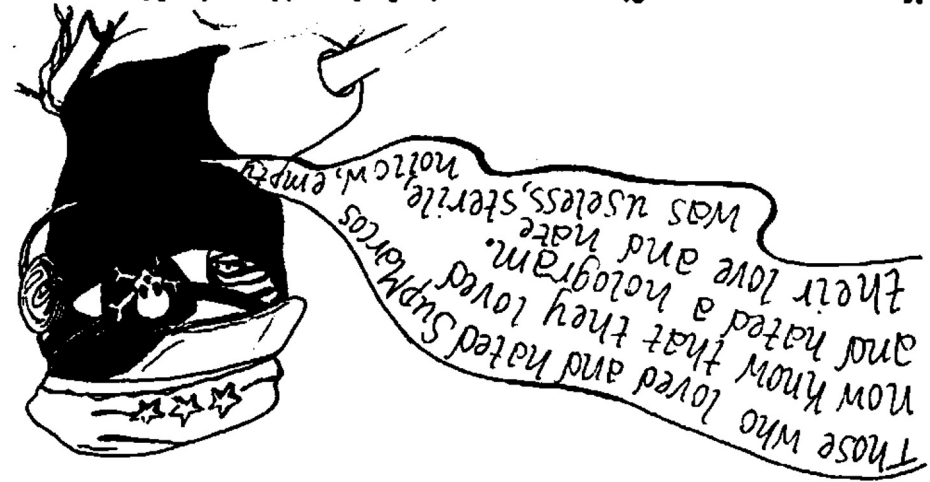
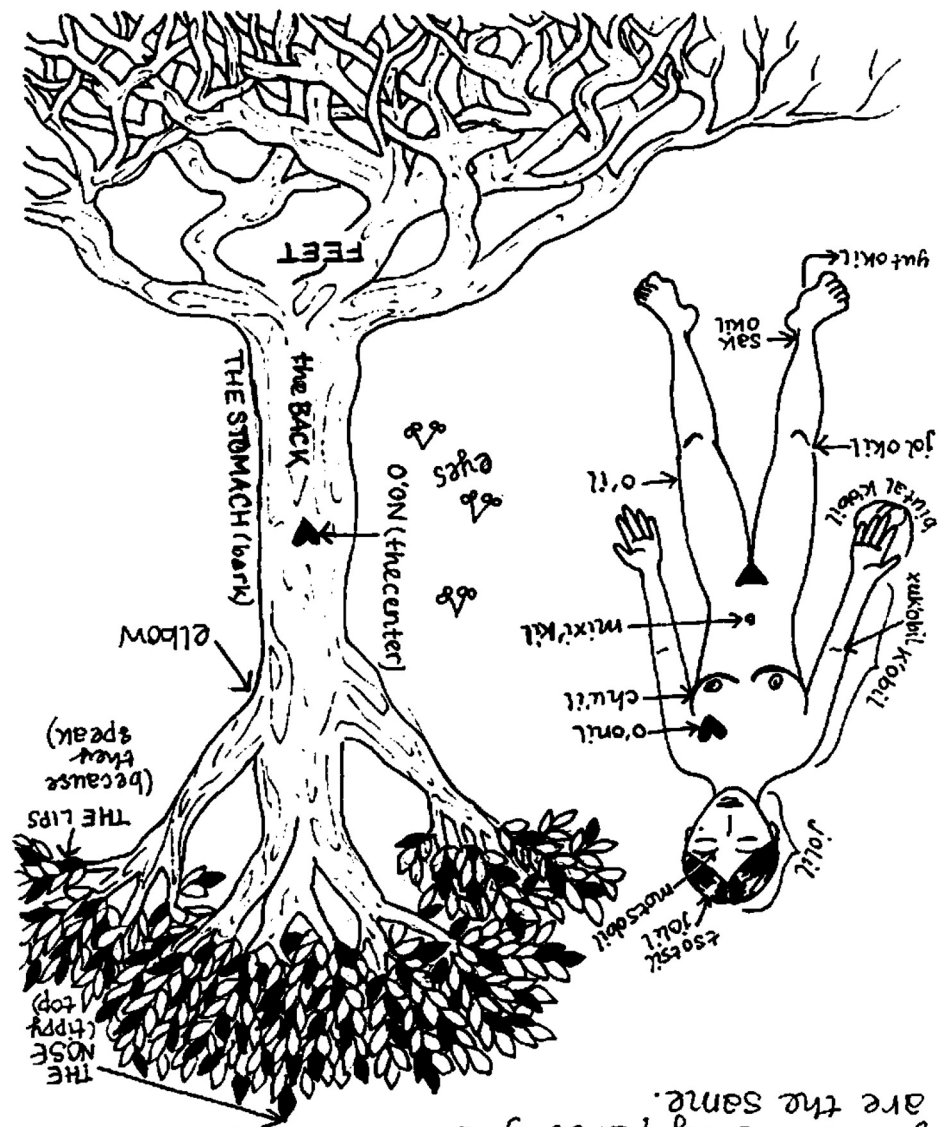
Many of us are more or less familiar with this story. The Zapatistas themselves have released thousands of communiqués explaining each step of their now nearly 24 years of above-ground struggle. It is natural to take these words and judge them according to our own frameworks of guerrilla warfare and national revolutions; to read words like 'justice' and 'peace', and think that they are saying the same thing that countless revolutionaries have said before them. However, when we read the words of the Zapatistas, we are receiving a translation of a language with fundamentally different precepts than our own (whether Spanish or English).

We are familiar with the figure of the late Subcommander Marcos (rebirthed in 2014 as Subcommander Galeano) and his pipe.



It is common for anarchists to mark him as a vanguardist guerrilla leader and judge the otherwise entirely indigenous movement for placing a blue-eyed mestizo intellectual from the city at its forefront. However, understanding the role that SubMarcos played and why it has been necessary can help us understand our own relationship to the Zapatistas.

there is so much more to include and strive to wrap our heads/hearts around, like the time when a Zapatista teacher asked 'what's more important, your shoes or your soul?' in order to teach us that in the world of Bats'i'k'op, there is no sense of separation between things, so it would be incoherent to say that one thing is more important than another. U betik, our path is unending and spiraling towards the horizon. So I'll just close of by sharing how the names for the body parts of a human and a tree are the same.



Marcos was a figure created by the indigenous Zapatistas to translate their movement to the non-indigenous world. The actual human behind this figure has no special authority or decision-making power. He is and has always been a comrade like any other, besides his role as vocero or spokesperson, and subcommander in the Zapatista military. Why was this figure necessary?

The Zapatistas come from a different world, which is at once the same world and also entirely toj'jel- (other). The Mayan world has for the past five centuries related to, reckoned with, and fought against conquest by the world from which the Spanish and English languages come, but its roots lie deep in the soils on top of which colonial civilization has been constructed.



more (from Dylan's notes)

mi chtal io' ta mal k'ak'al
? it comes rain in the afternoon

→ is it going to rain this afternoon?

mi lajavaychi nax ta ak'aval
? you slept a lot in last night

→ did you sleep well last night?

tal xa jo' → it's about to rain (tal=to come)
came already rain

xa = in Spanish 'ya' which translates as already or now depending on the context

jay' pe'j on ta ste'el avi jabil
how many round avo- in tree this year
many fruits cados their

→ how many avocados grew in the tree this year?

* when saying 'how many' one uses the prefix 'jay' with a different suffix depending on the class of objects being referred to (pej: round fruits, pok: outfits, -tek: plants w/ large roots, -flik: soft, light things)

some common phrases

Jechun euk: me too

Mi jechot euk: you too?

Mi jech euk: her too?

Jay'im jajabilal: how old are you?

K'usi chapas: what are you doing?

K'usi chapasik: what are you all doing?

Mu jna: I don't know

Ok'omto: see you tomorrow

K'usi yan: what else?

Kolaval: thanks

Kolavalik: thanks (to more than one person)

Koliyal: thanks (to them)

SK'on xal: that's to say...

xjulta j'jol: arrives in my head (I remember)

va'ene/lajne: so what? (in conversation)

Originally inhabiting the fertile lowlands, the Mayan peoples were pushed up into the rocky highlands by colonial powers and wealthy landowners. As the settler population increased, the landowners encroached on the highlands, displacing indigenous campesinos from their collectively held ejido land and forcing them into debt-slavery on massive ranches and plantations. In the 1950s, displaced and landless campesinos were forced by the government into the previously sparsely inhabited Lacandon Jungle. Tens of thousands of starving indigenous peoples created new communities deep in the jungle, carving out lives on the thin, infertile soil.



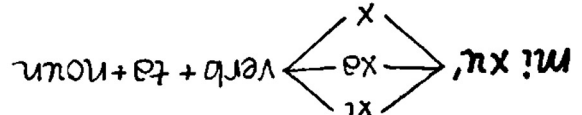
All of this is to illustrate a distinct strategy of government repression and attempted extermination of indigenous peoples. In contrast to most Native American peoples in the so-called USA, who were forced off of their ancestral lands and onto reservations where they could be surveilled and controlled by the colonial government as if in open air prisons, the indigenous peoples of Chiapas were pushed further and further outside the margins of civilization in an attempt to push them out of existence entirely. Rather than forcing assimilation in order to disappear cultures, the Mexican government made assimilation impossible in an attempt to also make survival impossible. Obviously, they were unsuccessful.

Instead of dying out as was intended, the indigenous people displaced to the jungle began to organize, culminating in the 1994 Zapatista uprising. Of the mostly young people who moved to the jungle in the decades prior, all spoke a Mayan language and very few spoke any Spanish at all. Speakers of Tsotsil, Tzeltal, Zoque, Chol, Tojolobal, and Mam, particularly women, built new communities together, learning how to survive in the jungle and relating their experiences across different cultures and language barriers. All of these languages, though now very different, have the same origin - Bats'i' k'op the true word, a language where all beings are subjects who mutually relate to one another, where the earth is our mother and where everything is understood in relation to the heart. This is where the Zapatista movement comes from.

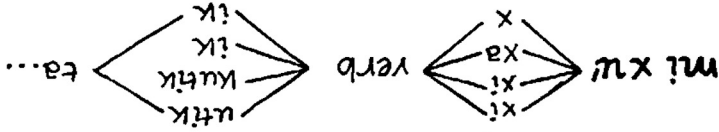
Many anarchists and leftists alike, whether critically or favourably, attempt to reduce the Zapatistas to the Marxist origins of its mestizo founders, members of the FLN (National Liberation Front), a political-military organization which was largely extinguished by the state during the 1970s. However, when these same Marxists came to the jungle of Chiapas to organize the indigenous people into a peasant wing of the FLN for their armed national uprising, they were quickly humbled: "You speak the hard word," their recruits told them. "We don't understand. You have to find other words." What the university-educated revolutionaries first saw as an issue of translation, they soon came to realize was the limitation of their understanding of revolution.

XU'-to be able to

intransitives:



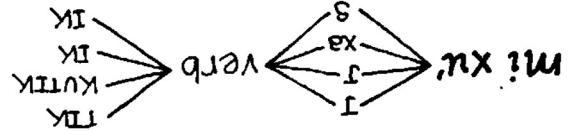
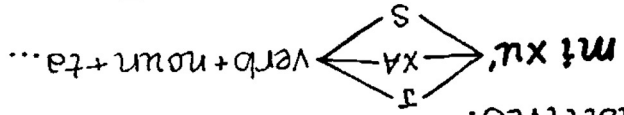
ex: **mi xu' xi' yay ta chana** ^{could} ^I ^{sleep} ⁱⁿ ^{your} ^{house?}



ex: **mi xu' xi' k'opoj k'utik ta s'pask'op Zapatsa** ^{could} ^{your} ^{struggle} ^{about}

→ could we talk about the Zapatista struggle?
(all nouns must include the relationship. In this case, I was speaking to a Zapatista, so I used the third person singular form to express her relationship to the struggle (s'pask'op) which can be translated as 'your struggle')

transitives:



A small dialogue:

A: **mi xu' xi' tal ta j'umal sventa Zapatsa** ^I ^{can} ^{come} ^{to} ^a ^{community} ^{to be}

B: **moxu' Sutan ta j'umal sventa** ^{No.} ^{return} ^{to} ^{your} ^{community} ^{to}

cha va'an ja be ta s'pask'op ^{you} ^{construct} ^{your} ^{path} ^{of} ^{struggle}

A: **ali mi xu' xi' chanu' tas ta s'beik sventa** ^{but} ^{can} ^I ^{learn} ^{it} ^{to do} ^{to} ^{learn} ^{your} ^{path} ^{to} ^(can I learn your path to learn it to do it?)

B: xu' la chan xchi'uk jo'uketik.
 yes (you can) you learn with us.
 (you can) you learn (command) with us.

→ Yes you can. Come learn with us!

A: Kolaval
 thank you!

more sample sentences

try copying them out and translating them yourself using the vocab list/notes.

K'usi cha k'anik chapasik ta ja kuxlejalik
 what want do in lives
 you (plural) you (plural) your (plural)

→ What do you want to do in your lives?

*When you have two consecutive verbs in a sentence, both must be conjugated (chak'anik chapasik)

taj k'an tajchan jpijil k'ucha'al bats'i'
 I want I learn my wisdom like the true

vinikantsetik ta spejel balumil xchi'uk
 elders from the whole world and

tajchan k'usba tajts'akbal j pask'optik
 I learn now I continue our struggle

→ I want to learn wisdom like the traditional elders from across the world and learn how to continue the struggle

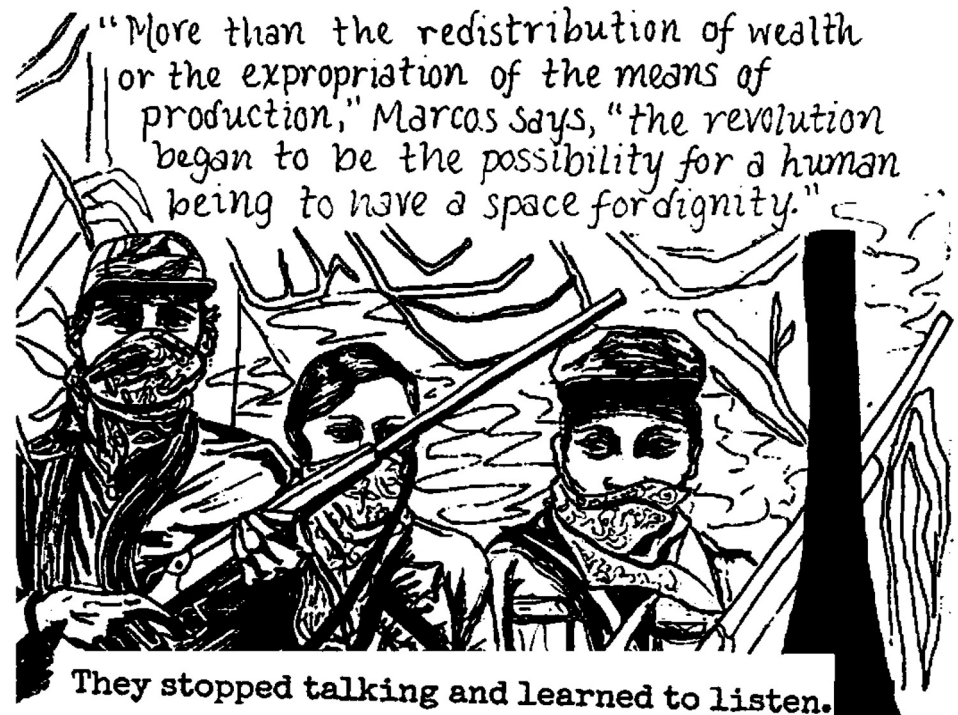
taj k'an tajva'an kutskalal xchi'uk
 I want I construct family and

tajchan k'usba tajchi'in ilumal ta pask'op
 I learn now I accompany my community in the struggle

sventa taj jekutik osil balumil.
 to change the earth

→ I want to build family and learn how to accompany my community in the struggle to change the world.

these phrases are way less cheesy in bats'i' K'op, I swear!



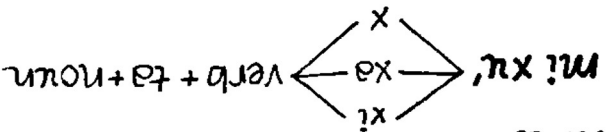
We, as comrades, need to do the same. Before professing to understand the Zapatista movement or placing it in historical schemas in which it does not belong, to comprehend what they are really fighting for and why their steps have followed the path that they have, we must attempt to see the movement on its own terms, in its own world. As insurrectionary anarchists who believe in the generalization of uncontrollability, we often talk about the importance of making ourselves incomprehensible to the state. We reject their gender markers, their social contracts and family units. Our leaderless struggles based on true affinity and joy are beyond the understanding of the state, as well as the parties and the unions of the Left. Yet it is difficult for us to believe that a struggle could be incomprehensible not only to them, but to us.

When they formed the caracoles in 2003, the Zapatistas also closed their autonomous territory to outsiders. Non-Zapatistas can now only enter if invited. However, they also formed a Language Center in Caracol II Oventic. Outsiders can come learn Bats'i'kop from a collective of Zapatista support bases whose role in the movement is that of linguists and educators. They teach students the particularly Zapatista Bats'i'kop that is spoken in the caracoles, meaning that they use the language center as an opportunity to analyse how their language has been transformed by their struggle and share this analysis with comrades from all over the world. I have had the opportunity to study in Oventic on three separate occasions, for a few weeks at a time. Obviously, I do not speak Bats'i'kop. However, the extremely brief time that I have spent learning the language has given me insight into the world of the Zapatistas that has transformed my understanding of the movement, and that is what I will attempt to share here. This is not an effort to construct a romanticized vision of, or attribute an inherently political meaning to, the language itself. Rather, I hope simply to share language lessons as they were shared with me by my Zapatista teachers along with personal reflections and analysis of Zapatista reality, as well as excerpts from an incredible book written by a close friend and comrade Dylan. The words of the Zapatista education promoters are direct quotes from either my or Dylan's notebooks.

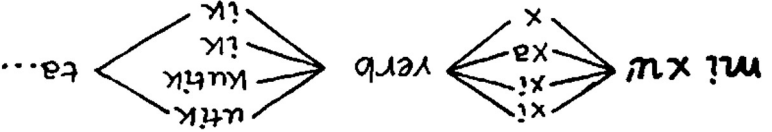
→ everything that is handwritten in this font is a direct quote from a Zapatista language promoter, condensed into the fictional character of 'Juliana' to maintain anonymity.

XU'-to be able to

intransitives:



ex: mi xu' xi yay ta chana ^{could} ^I ^{sleep} ^{in your house?}

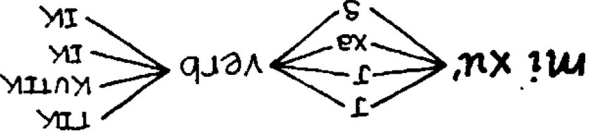
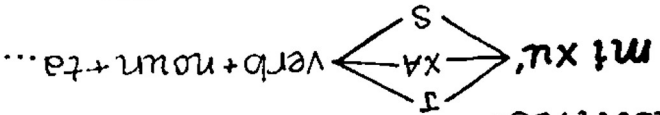


ex: mi xu' xi kopoj kutik ta s pasik'op Zapatista ^{could} ^{we} ^{speak} ^{about your struggle}

→ could we talk about the Zapatista struggle?

(all nouns must include the relationship. In this case, I was speaking to a Zapatista, so I used the third person singular form to express her relationship to the struggle (spasik'op) which can be translated as 'your struggle')

transitives:



A small dialogue:

A: mi xu' xi tal ta j'imal sventa Zapatista ^{I can} ^{come to your community} ^{to be}

B: moxu' sutan ta j'imal sventa ^{No.} ^{return to your community} ^{to}

chava'an ja be ta spask'op ^{you construct your path of your struggle}

A: ali mi xu' xi chanum'as ta sbeik ^{but can} ^{I learn} ^{of your path} ^{learn it to do} ^(can I learn your path to learn to do it?)

ta j'chan spask'op ^{I learn it to do}

B: xu' la chan xchi'uk jo'uketik.
 yes (you can) you learn (command) with us.

→ Yes you can. Come learn with us!

A: Kolaval
 thank you!

more sample sentences

try copying them out and translating them yourself using the vocab list/notes.

K'usi cha k'anik chapasik ta ja kuxlejalik
 what you (plural) want you (plural) do in your (plural) lives

→ What do you want to do in your lives?

*When you have two consecutive verbs in a sentence, both must be conjugated (chak'anik chapasik)

taj k'an tajchan jpijil k'ucha'al bats'i'
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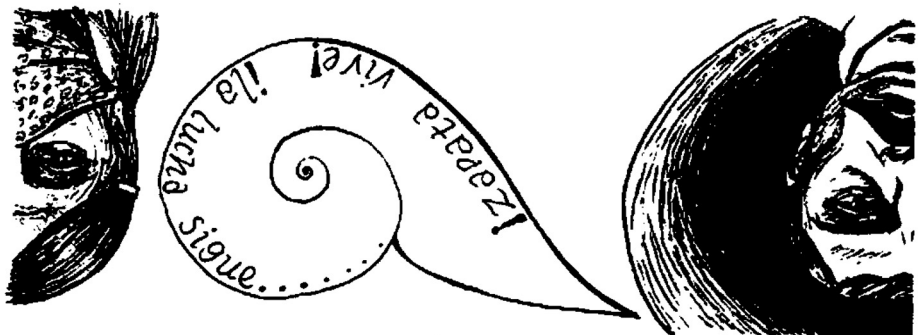
→ I want to build family and learn how to accompany my community in the struggle to change the world.

these phrases are way less cheesy in bats'i' K'op, I swear!

→ (I wanted to make this zine because I had so many notes of my own and thought it would be useful to have a briefer and easily reproducible introduction to Bats'i' k'op Zapatista, but everyone should get their hands on Dylan's incredible book 'Autonomy is in Our Hearts' when it is published by PM Press.)



These lessons should not influence readers to stop being critical of certain aspects of the Zapatista movement, such as their engagement with the Mexican Left, or of other indigenous movements that are often cast as above critique merely for being indigenous. It is not the objective of the Zapatistas, including the education promoters at Oventic, to mystify or shield their movement from judgement. Actually, they have continuously made space for anyone who fights against capitalism and neoliberalism to share their opinions and proposals for forms of struggle, no matter how painfully oblivious. However, if we continue to cling to and engage from our colonial subjectivities and cosmologies, we will remain incapable of learning from, teaching, and walking with the Zapatistas. Their prolific and readily available communiqués alone present us with the rare opportunity of stepping into their world and being shaped by their struggle. But this step is not an easy one for with it a world trembles at its core and, if struck with enough force, ruptures.

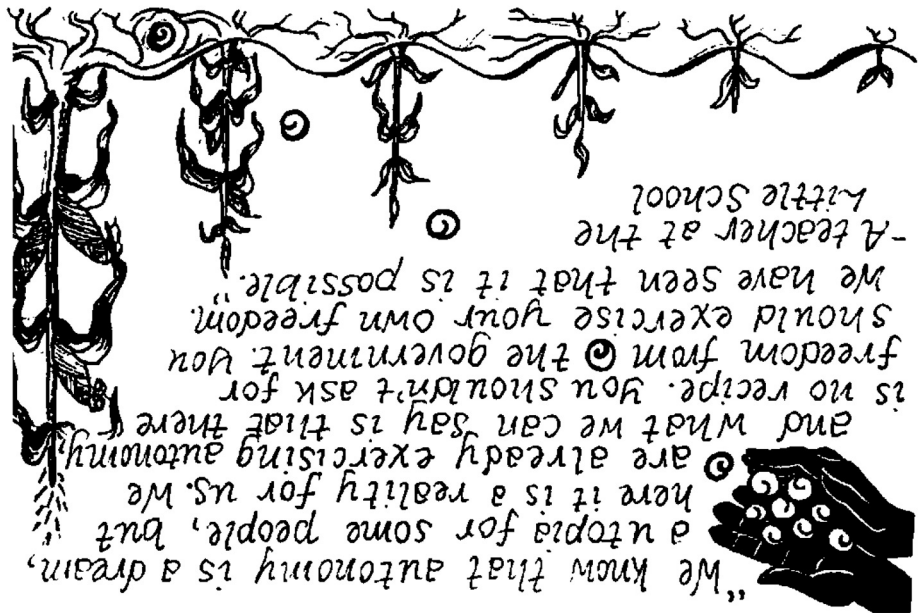


"We know that autonomy is a dream, a utopia for some people, but here it is a reality for us. We are already exercising autonomy, and what we can say is that there is no recipe. You shouldn't ask for freedom from the government. You should exercise your own freedom. We have seen that it is possible."

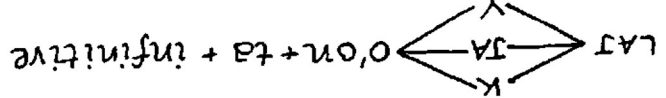
-A teacher at the Little School

The beginning of the Zapatista movement is also an ending and an in the middle. When the Zapatistas rose up in arms at dawn of January 1, 1994, their cry of 'Enough!' began to ring through the ears of every listening person in Mexico and the world, their silence ended forever, and their 500 year struggle against colonialism continued on its path, *lento pero avanza*, slow but steady, like the caracol.

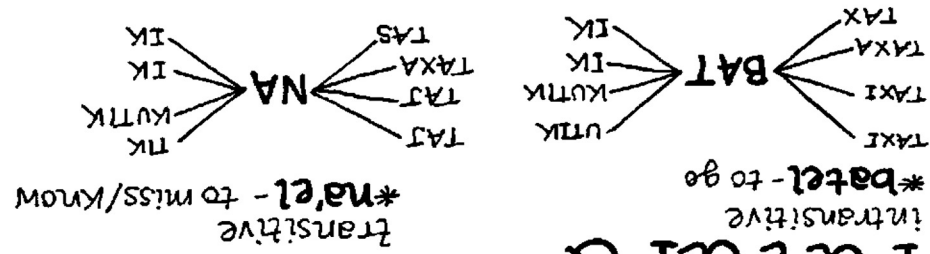
For the Zapatistas, time is not a line, but a spiral. The snail's shell is their path towards liberation; always moving forward and changing, but with past and future embedded in each present.



EX: **laɪ k'o'n ta a'metel, tax! batkukik ta**
 when my heart V to work go we will to
 (finishes) **¡um aikutik.**
 our community after work, we'll go to our community.

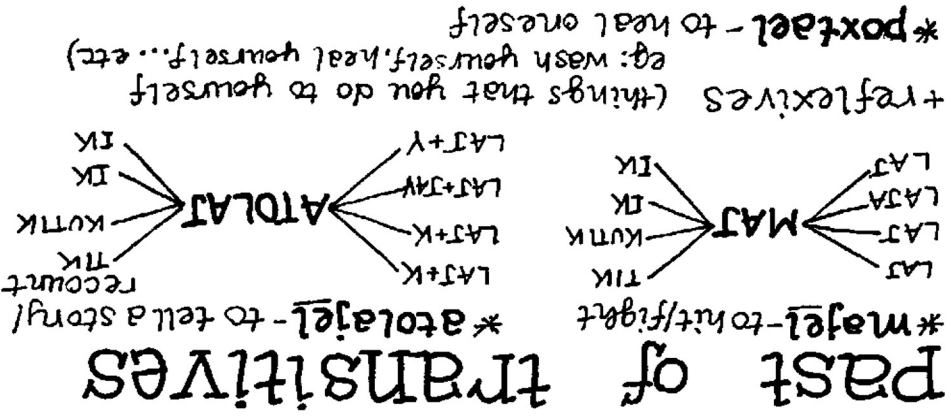
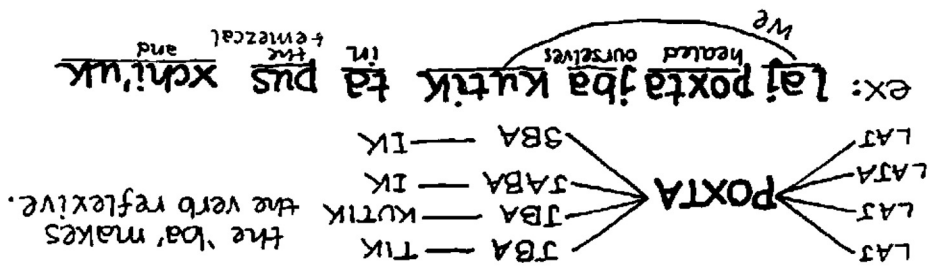


when my heart finishes



future

EX: **laɪ kusukik i'kutakukik ta uk'um**
 we washed clothes our in the river



chik'opoj xchi'uk jchi'lltak
I speak with my comrade 5

past of the intransitives

LI
LA → (+verb root) Changing the prefix changes
JI verb to past tense

examples:

Li bat kutik ta chivit xchi'uk lajchankutik
went to the market and learned
we (past) we
sventa batsi' poxil. Li ilin yu'un kaxlan
about true medicine I got angry at the city
poxil xchi'uk lajnop k'usba tajjel tik.
medicine and I thought how are going to change
we

these examples include both intransitive and transitive verbs because they come from my homework while at the language school. Check the section on transitive verbs to figure out these sentences.

Li k'ejin xchi'uk togoetik lajchan batsi'
I sang with the togolese (people) I learned true
K'op xchi'uk kaxlan K'op
word and (the) city word
(the)

transitive verbs

* k'anēl - to want

* a'iel - to hear/feel/understand (takes form for verbs that start w/ a vowel)

TAJ
TAJ
CHA
TS
K'an
IK
IK
ex: Taj K'an chisuttal
I want I return to

to Oventik

→ I want to come back to Oventik - all verbs in the sentence

XK
XK
XAY
X
a'i
TIK
KUTIK
IK
IK

ex: mi xu xka'i ot
could I I listen to you
→ could I listen to you?
(mi xu + verb = could I...)

To the Mayan people, time is a continuum, with the past constantly resurfacing and no notion of foreclosed future possibilities. The caracol, the snail that moves slowly forward, the conch that calls the community to gather, the shell, pu'y, that represents entering the heart.

The past (ech'emxa) is the time that has passed



But it's not a past that already passed forever, it could return at any moment

the future (sk'anto) is the time that is coming

what we're missing now, who knows what will happen.

[Juana, one of the education promoters at the Oventic language center.] They call them education promoters and not teachers to break from the student/teacher, learner/educator, dichotomy.

To isolate individual moments in Zapatista history, including the current ones, and critique them without a sense of past or future context is to crush their spiraling world onto a flat surface. Not only is this an imposition of colonial time and history, but it prevents us from appreciating the true spirit of their steps.

For example, when the EZLN first rose up in arms in 1994, their plan as stated in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle was to "Advance to the capitol of the country defeating the Mexican Federal Army, protecting the civilian population in their liberating advance and permitting the peoples to elect their own administrative authorities freely and democratically."

If, through the lens of a classical armed revolution, this were viewed as the totality of the movement, it would be easy to say that they failed entirely. However, if we conceptualize of their plan to take Mexico pueblo by pueblo by force of arms as a present objective without any attachment to what followed, we can better appreciate the unanticipated achievements of the initial uprising, namely the reclamation of over 250,000 hectares of land and the silent formation of 38 autonomous municipalities.

Kuxlejäl ta vone (the life) (of) you can return to the past in a good way... history, memory, life
ta jelaöl (that) (comes) everything from now on
max (before now) **now** (after now) **тана**

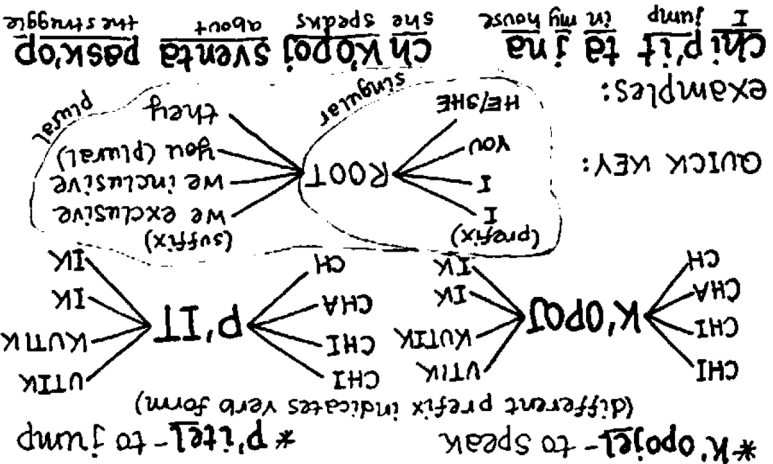
When we recognize their path as an infinitely adaptable continuum, it becomes unnecessary to judge the failure or success of each individual step and we can instead appreciate the application of lessons from the past for the movement of the present and future.

to be

(estar, there exists) (ser, only used w/people)
 OYUN-I AM OYUK-WEARE JA'UN JA'UTIK
 OY'OT-YOU ARE OYUKUTIK-WEARE JA'OT JA'UKETIK
 OY-THERE IS, OYOXUK-YOU ARE JA OYXUK
 OYIK-THEY ARE OYIK JA'IK

"Many verbs can take either the transitive or intransitive form, but it changes their meaning. It's like the difference between the reflexive and non-reflexive form of the verbs in Castellano, sometimes it changes the meaning of the verb completely, sometimes it just gives emphasis. For example 've'el' in the transitive form means to eat tortillas and in the intransitive form means to feed oneself. Pasel in the transitive form means to do/make yourself (reflexive) Tajkan chipas ta jpojvanej yu'un jtekium: I want to make myself a defender of the people. Tajpas jna: I make my house." -Dylan

intransitive verbs



Numbers are in units of twenty (because we each have twenty). Twenty is one man (jun vinik). Larger numbers require borrowing from more men.



43- OXI'M YOX VINIK
three (from the) third man

2 men (20+20) plus 3 from the third man = 43

73- OXLAJUNE'M XCHAN VINIK
thirteen (from the) fourth man

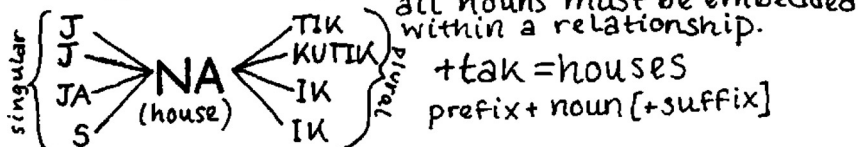
32- LATCHE'M XCHA VINIK
twelve (from the) second man

95- JALAJUNE'M SJO VINIK
fifteen (from the) fifth man

(anti)-possessive

to have (this verb does not exist)

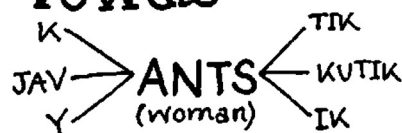
→ the other subject with whom I am relating
 all nouns must be embedded within a relationship.



JNA = my house
 JANA = your house
 SNA = his/her house

JNATIK = our house (exclusive)
 JNAKUTIK = our house (inclusive)
 JANAIK = your house (plural)
 SNAIK = their house (plural)

vowels



KANTS JAVANTS YANTS
 KANTSTIK KANTSKUTIK JAVIK YANTSIK

oy kajantak ta jna
there are elotes in my house (corns)

oy ssakil na'ik ta slumalik
there is their white house in their community
 → they have a white house in their community

Oy ep jnatakutik
↑ many house 3
 there are OUR

Oyun ta Oventik xchi'uk jchi'iltak
we have many houses I am in Oventik with my comrade 3

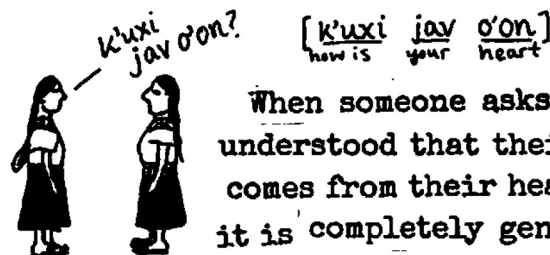
the heart (o'on) & its potentiality (chu'udel)



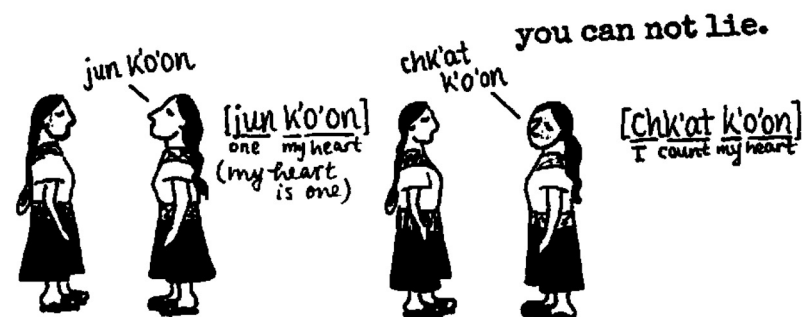
"autonomy is in our hearts."

-Elena, member of the autonomous council, autonomous municipality Ricardo Flores Magón, Caracol III La Garucha

In Bats'i' k'op the heart is the origin of everything. Instead of asking 'how are you?' and receiving a superficial response, it is common in Tsotsil and Tzeltal communities to ask "how is your heart?"



When someone asks this, it is understood that their intention comes from their heart, meaning that it is completely genuine, and the response, in kind, must come from the heart. When asked how your heart is in Bats'i' k'op,



If you respond 'I count my heart', then the person who asked you the question helps you to identify the pieces and gathers the community to resolve the issue, making the heart whole again. The state of the heart is not individual, but collective. It is not

jo'uketik - we inclusive*
jo'utik - we exclusive*
jo'oxuk - you plural
jo'ik - them

yes

Oy: There is (Hay, third person of the verb 'to be')

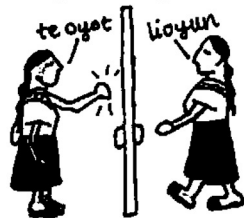
Tana: Yes to an offering, proposal...etc.

Ja': it is, yes it is

Jech: that's correct, certain

Ja' jech: It's like that

basic greetings



te oyot

lioyun



te oyotnik

lioyun kutik

(plural)



te xabat

te yak



-te oyan



te yak



k'usi jabi

ja' jabi Elena

(my name is Elena)



k'uxa elan

lek oyun

(how are you?)

I'm well

k'uxi jay o'on → jun k'o'on
how is your heart one my heart

k'uxi jay o'onik → jun k'o'on kutik
how is your (plural) heart one our heart

muyuk jun k'o'on
not one my heart

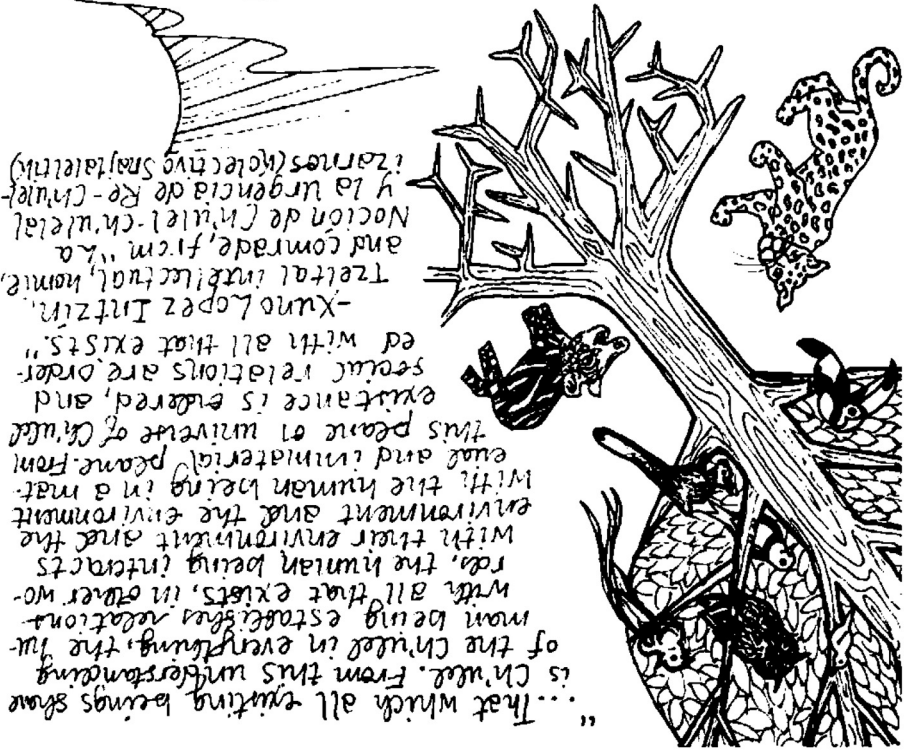
ch'kat k'o'on
I count my heart

All of these phenomena, or 'thoughts/feelings' as they are understood in Bats'i' k'op, emanate from the inherent potentiality of the heart known as 'ch'ulel'. Often translated as 'soul' or 'spirit', ch'ulel is the sacred potentiality that resides in each of our hearts.



The root of the word is 'ch'ul' which is translated as 'sacred'.

for the Mayans sacred things are things that can not be destroyed. The givers of life like the earth, the water, the sun. All that is nature, the natural world. We aren't important to this world, what's important is that we do not exist outside of nature. When you realize this is when you have ch'ulel!



"...That which all existing beings share is Ch'ulel. From this understanding of the Ch'ulel in everything, the human being establishing relations with all that exists, in other words, the human being interacts with their environment and the environment with the human being in a material and immaterial plane. From this plane of universe of Ch'ulel existence is ordered, and social relations are ordered with all that exists."

-Xuno Lopez Intziri, Tzeltal intellectual, humanist and comrade, from "La Noción de Ch'ulel-ch'ulel y la urgencia de re-ch'ulelizarlos" (collective S'ajtaléitw)

Ch'ulel is fundamentally relational and interdependent. All beings on earth are subjects with hearts that contain potentiality that can only be realized through the potentiality of the hearts of others.



(Stajesetel ch'ulel = matter el ch'ulel)
 ↳ When one is born and lives in the city

Avl- today, now, the present

Volje- yesterday

Oljl k'ak'al- noon

Bat k'ak'al- afternoon

Sa'p'at- twilight

Olol ak'ak'al- midnight

Sakll osll- dawn

Ja'vjl- year (twelve months,

vaxkuyume'm u)

U- month

Totol k'ak'al- calendar

expressions

Kolavsl- Thank you (singular)

Kolavsljk- Thank you (plural)

Kolavsltajek- Thank you very much

Mu'yuk k'usl- You're welcome

Xke'l- I understand

Muxka'l- I don't understand

To- still

Xa- already (ya)

Taj k'an- She wants

Ja vokuluk- please

Jmaletik tl- I hope that

Melel xaval- Are you sure?

Sk'an- It is needed (we need)

NO

Muyuk: there isn't, doesn't exist

Mo'oj: Rejection of an offering, proposal...etc.

Mu: negation that is used with a verb (Mu taj k'an: I don't want)

etc...

Vo'm- music

K'eo'j- song

K'eojetik- songs

K'op- word

Ip- pain

P'yljl- intelligence

P'ylj- intelligent

Smelol- option

Vatch/Waychll- dream

Sjlelal- difference

Chamel/lajel- to die, to
be finished

Lu'mtsael- to grow tired

Ch'ayel- to lose oneself

K'uxel- to eat crunchy things

Tiel- to eat meat

Loel- to eat fruit

Uch'el- to drink

Na'el- to know

Tsakel- to take/grab

Ichel- to carry or receive

Tsim'tael- to write something

Ipajel- to get sick

Ak'intajel- to clear a field

Ak'inajel- to clear specific
plants

Alu'bel- to freeze, to be
paralyzed

A'iel- to understand/to feel

Ilel- to see

A'k'el- to give

Atel- to count

Alal- to say/to speak about

P'ijilal- intelligence

Bonolajel- to paint in general

Elovajel- to have fun

Chanum'tasel- to teach

Ts'isomajel- to embroider

Paxyael- to hunt

Tajinel- to play

Jolil- to remember

Kelel- to care for/watch/observe

Sutel bal- to return from here to there

Sutel tal- to return from there to here

K'atinel- to heat oneself from the sun or fire

Tijel- to wake up people/
instruments

K'a'vinel- to urinate

Tsa'anel- to poop

Utel- to punish

Uts'iel- to smell

P'ajvanel- to discriminate

Majvanel- to beat up

Milvanel- to kill

commands

Paso- Do it

K'elo- look

Ts'intao- write it

Bono- paint it

A'vino- understand it

La'- come

Alo- Say it

Koltao- help

Chi'ino- Accompany them

Poko- Wash it

time

K'uxulak'aval- The
darkness of the night

Jtotik- sun (a name),
our father

Ak'abal- in the night

K'ak'al- Day, sun

Ok'om- tomorrow

So'm- morning

Ak'aval- night

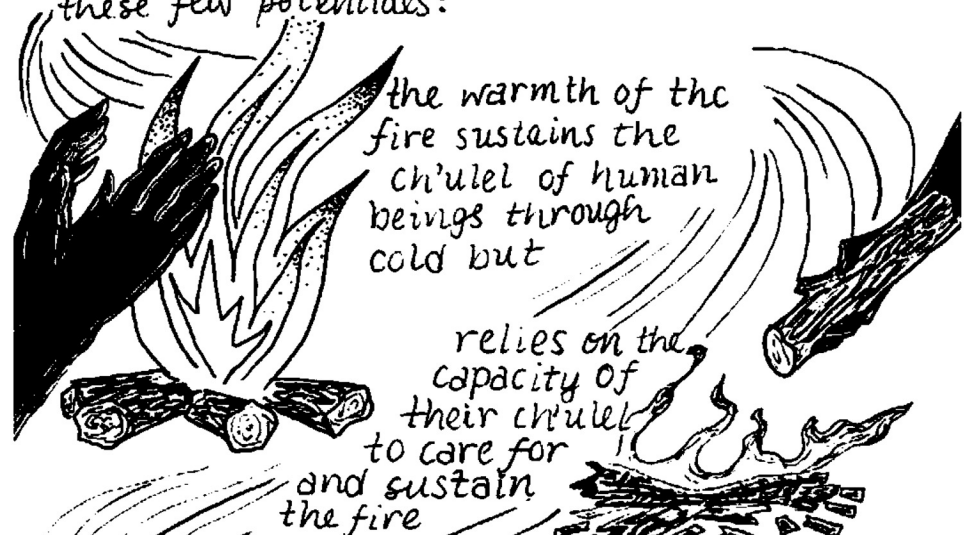
Jme'tik- the

moon, our

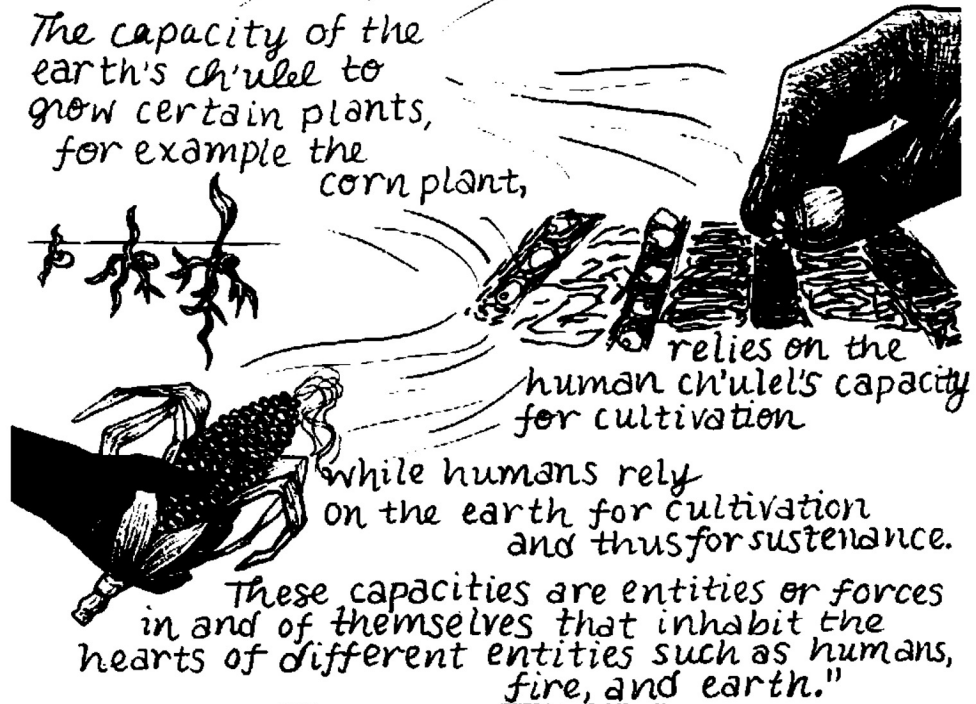
mother

(from Dylan) "For example, fire's ch'ulel includes the potential to give warmth among it's characteristics, human ch'ulel includes the capacity to cultivate the land, and the ch'ulel of the land includes the capacity to nourish and give birth to plants.

There are already relationships apparent even in these few potentials:

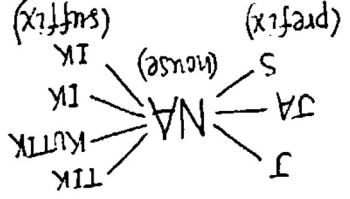


The capacity of the earth's ch'ulel to grow certain plants, for example the corn plant,



In Bats'i' k'op there are no objects, only subjects. "We see colonization as the objectification of our world." All beings are subjects with hearts that relate to one another and allow for the mutual realization of their ch'u'leletik. There is no concept of one being possessing another. There is no verb for 'to have, or way of saying 'my house', 'my land'...etc. All statements are expressions of currently existing relationships between subjects. Instead of 'my dog, you would express something like 'the dog that I have a relationship with, and this relationship is understood as one that exists in this moment without any expectation or claim that it always has or always will.

Zapatista language promoters use the possessive forms to translate this expression of relationships between subjects-



JNA = MY HOUSE
 JANA = YOUR HOUSE (singular)
 SNA = HIS/HER HOUSE
 JNATIK = OUR HOUSE (general)
 JNAXUTIK = OUR HOUSE (specific)
 JANAIK = YOUR HOUSE (plural)
 SNAIK = THEIR HOUSE (plural)

the same prefixes can also be used to indicate relations between things that are not people. For example SNAI IXIM of thing, and not one individual thing, in this case with corn in general and not one individual corn plant. since both are actually inclusive and general and the specific we but we refer to as the refer to as inclusive and exclusive that linguists in Bats'i' k'op. *three we two we

*three we two we
 refer to as inclusive and exclusive
 since both are actually inclusive and general and the specific we but we refer to as the refer to as inclusive and exclusive that linguists in Bats'i' k'op. *three we two we

Patix- venomous newt (The heads of which are used as a cure for snoring)

Ve'al- pants
 Sma'k jo'11- hat
 Mak- the top of a thing
 Sna'11- House of
 Vun- book
 Tak'e'l- money
 Jo'lob'11- weaving/fabric
 Ts'1somi'11- embroidery
 K'alna- wall
 A'wte'je'bal'et'ik- tools
 Vaye'bal- bed
 Mexa- table

Bu- Where
 Bak'in- When
 K'uxe- How is
 K'ust- What
 K'alal- when
 K'ucha'al- why
 Yu'un- Because, it's that
 Buch'u- who
 Bu oy- Where is
 Komon- everyone
 Li'- Here
 A'11- But
 Xch't'uk- and/with

Sventa- for/in order to/about

Kuxel- to rest
 K'opo'jel- to speak
 P'itel- to jump
 At'nel- to shower
 Ts'1'ba'jel- to write
 Batel- to go
 Muxel- to go up
 Lok'e'l- to write
 Lok'e'l- to leave
 T'ale'l- to come

quantity/size

Ep- many
 To'jech'em- too much
 M'uk- big
 Jay't'in- How many
 To'je much (quantity of concepts/ much time)

Feelings (toj sik: much cold, to'jal: Xanavel- to walk
 Channel- to learn
 Nopel- to think
 Xanavel- to walk
 Ato'la'jel- to count
 Kap'1jel- to confuse
 Lo'11a'jel- to chat, converse
 Il'nel- to be angry, to have rage

nouns

K'ie'p- trash
 X'ino'bil- shoes
 Il'nel- to be angry, to have rage

FOOD

Lobajel- Fruits and vegetables
Itaj- vegetable
Sate'- fruit
Koxox- tostada
On- Avocado
Ti'bol o beket- food with meat
Vaj- tortilla
Kaxlan vaj- bread
Chenek'- bean
Ats'am- salt
Yoxo'- water

Yisim te- Tree moustache (root)

Vinajel- sky
Xojobal- light
Be- path/road
Yanalte- leaf
Jo'- rain
Ki- wind
Tok'- cloud
Nichim- flower
Chem'tik- Field (Milpa, small field for planting)
Ixim: grains of corn
Ton- stone
Vits- hill

PEOPLE

Me'il- mother
Tot'il- Father
Its'inal- little brother
Mukil- sibling
Chi'ilil- Compañerx/
comrade
Lumal- People/country/
community
K'usetik no'ox- Everyone
Yantik- others
Yan- other
Tse'm- Child (girl)
Kerem- Child (boy)
Olol- Baby

Kukyvits- Mountain
Uk'um- River
Osil- land/territory
Ts'i'lel- Small plants
Itaj- plants that you eat
(also plants that animals

eat)

Yanal- leaf
Sbe'k- seed
Ixim- corn (that you grow)
Ajan- corn (that you eat)
Pech- duck
Chitom- pig
Tsi'i- dog
Kaxlan- chicken/City folk
Alak- Rooster/hen
Choy- Fish
Bolom- cat
T'ul- rabbit
Vakax- cow
Ch'o- rat

earth/animals

Balumil- land/earth
Te- tree
Te'tik- forest
Yibel- Root

Instead of constantly expressing subject-object possession, speakers of Bats'i' k'op simply refer to the relationship between subjects in space and time:

OY KAJANTAK TA JNA = there is corn in my house
there is / corn (plural) in my house (re: I have corn at home)
(hay) my

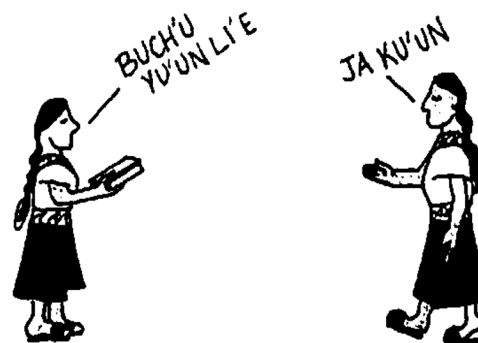
'OY', like the Spanish 'hay' expresses existence.
So this phrase could be more closely translated as
'there exists corn in my house.'

OY SSAKIL NA'IK TA SLUMAL IK = their white house exists in their community
there is / white house in / community
their their (re: they have a white house in their community)

OY EP JNA TAKUTIK = There are many of our houses
there many are / house (plural) / our
(re: we have many houses)

OYUN TA OVENTIK XCHI'UK JCHI'IL TAK =
I am in with my comrades

☺ I'm in Oventik with my comrades ☺



BUCH'U YU'UN LI'I
who your's this
+ whose
(Whose is this?)

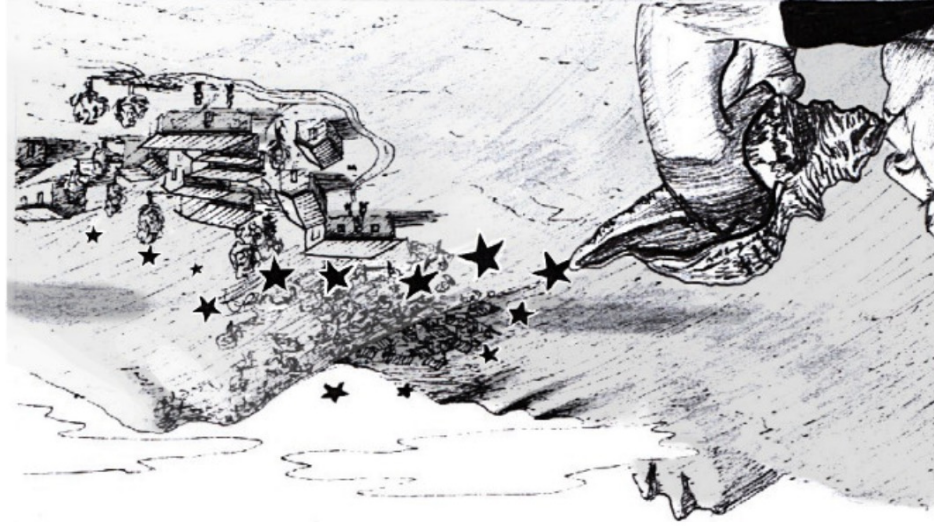
JA KU'UN
it's mine

this is not really saying
'this is mine,' it's saying that in
this moment, I have a relationship
with this book (Juana)

demanding the impossible:
the struggle (pask'op)



The word for 'lucha' or 'struggle' is 'pask'op' (pasel= to make+ k'op= the word). Whereas in English, the word 'struggle' implies a confrontation between two opposing sides with an endpoint of either success or failure determined by the methods of struggle employed, pask'op is a creative process that is built over the spiraling continuum of time. The word is born in our hearts and realized through action. What began as words in 1983 has been transformed into the concrete forms of organization and self governance that exist in the autonomous territory today.



The purpose of autonomous governance is to gather the word of the various Zapatista communities into a collective word that can then be made. This implies a very different process of assembly and consensus than we are familiar with.

MINI MANUAL

A note on PRONUNCIATION:

Since Bats'i' k'opwas not written using the alphabet, its spelling is phonetic

to the Castellano (Spanish) language (j is pronounced like H in English, X is pronounced 'SH'...etc.). The glotals, words with apostrophes like k'ak'al,

represent a hard stop in the word where the letter before the apostrophe is emphasized in the back of the throat before proceeding to the next syllable.

It's difficult to do without practicing with a native speaker, and even then takes a lot of practice and constant correction. But you never know, there could be Tsotsil speakers living right in your neighborhood! Maybe someone would want to trade for English lessons. And if you can make it down to

Oventic with a working knowledge of the language mechanics, the Zapatistas will definitely correct (and laugh at) your pronunciation.

vocab colors

Satil- Eye
Tsotsil jolil- hair
jolil- head
Motsoobil- eyebrow
X'ik satil- eyelashes
Nt'il- nose
Ik'alil- mole
E'il- mouth
Sbon- color
Yox- green
k'on- yellow, stars
Tso- red
Sak- white
Ik- black, the wind goddess

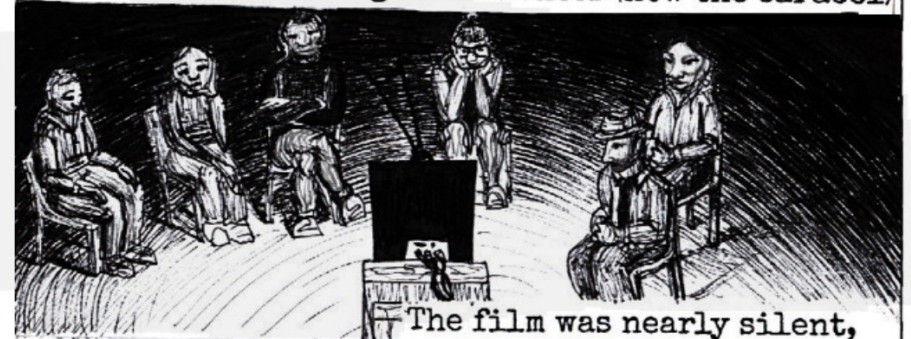
AUTONOMY

there is not one single word in Bats'i' K'op, but some people translate it as: xkuxlejal stuk jtek-lum- the people's own life. They also say: A'ch kuxlejal: the new life, lekil kuxlejal: the dignified life.

K'AK'AL O'ONIL

we are here in this pask'op, in this struggle, because we have fire in our heart. If the pueblos have struggled always, it's because they have this fire. It is the fuel for the struggle, it gives life and strength to the struggle.

Once, while studying at the language center at Oventic, we were watching a documentary about the construction of the aguascalientes (now the caracol)



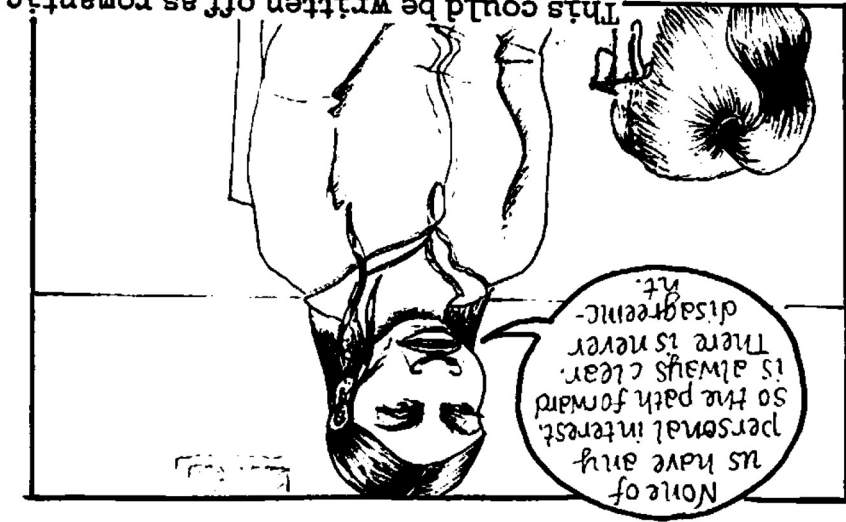
The film was nearly silent, with just the rhythmic sounds of the compas' rakes and shovels working in tandem, no arguments over how to best level a slope, no screaming over one another.



We can see the fulfillment of these demands through the construction of autonomy in Zapatista territory. In 2013 and 2014 they invited thousands of comrades from throughout the world to be students in La Escuelita, an initiative meant to give people the opportunity to learn about the Zapatista pask'op directly from the families. Personally, I felt all of my previous understandings and notions about the construction of autonomy that came exclusively from books be unsettled, uprooted. Spending a week with a Zapatista family deep in the jungle, I felt like my brain was cracking, rupturing.

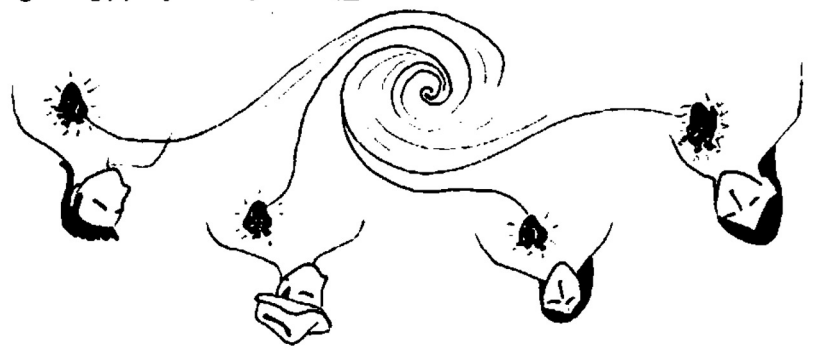


Then I realized that this cracking, this rupture was the whole point. Not only is this process necessary in relating to the Zapatista and other indigenous movements and insurgencies, but it is also the immeasurable gift that they are giving us through sharing their pask'op: the gift of uprooting the seeds of colonialism that lie deep within us and allowing us to confront the state from a fertile ground that is not sewn with these seeds, but rather those of true affinity based on our ch'uleetik. And maybe, if we allow ourselves to open to their world, we can become incomprehensible to colonial civilization too.



None of us have any personal interest so the path forward is always clear. There is never disagreement.

This could be written off as romantic or unrealistic, or used as a way to understand the process of pask'op. The word is already latent in each person's heart, and gathering together in assembly is a means of creating a collective heart through which the collective word can be spoken and then materialized through action.



There is no battle of ideologies or ideas because the objective is not to win the struggle, but to continue along the path of pask'op, whose way forward is evident in the collective heart.

senté pere-awajá

Their demand for land is also more profound and less quantifiable than is often interpreted.

Land could be 'osil' which is the milpa (collective farm plot). You have lived so closely with this piece of land that you have a history, you have something in common. All of our history, our culture, our dreams are with her.

'balumil' is the earth. When we say that we have to defend the land, we are speaking of our mother.

'Lum or 'jteklum' is our territory. Each pueblo has its own territory. It has its own customs, its own histories, and its coexistence with this land.

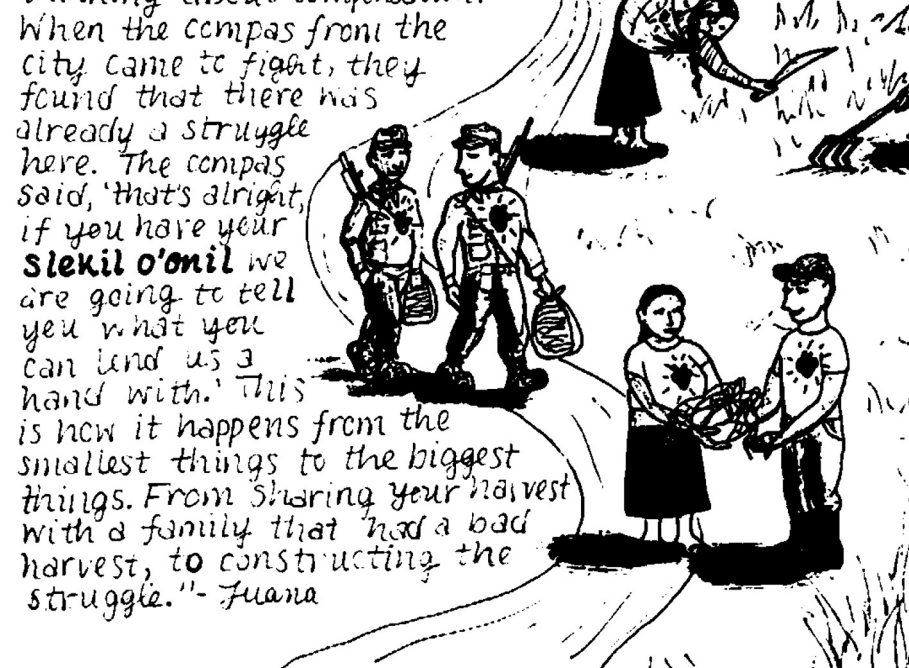
The future of our pueblos is possible only in the recognition of oneself with the earth, our mother. In her is our past and our future, and also the freedom and autonomy for which we struggle.

Again, these distinctions can help us understand how the Zapatistas have resisted cooptation and selling out. When they demand land, they are not demanding territory as a commodity to exploit in collective, but rather dignity for the whole earth, their mother, and space for the diverse relations that they share with her through harvest, but also history and culture which is unquantifiable and thus cannot be won through appealing to or conquering state power.

The construction of the collective heart, however, is by no means anti-individual. When Juana says that none of the Zapatistas have any personal interest, she is not asserting the submission of the individual to the collective, but rather expressing the mutual necessity of personal and collective autonomy. No one has personal interests that are counter to the collective interests because the collective interest is based only in the personal.

Being a compa means acting from *Slekil o'onil*: the dignified side of the heart.

"I'm going to give the good of my heart to the struggle. It's not for money, we're thinking of the common good. And this exists very strongly still. We're not thinking about compensation. When the compas from the city came to fight, they found that there was already a struggle here. The compas said, 'that's alright, if you have your *Slekil o'onil* we are going to tell you what you can lend us a hand with.' This is how it happens from the smallest things to the biggest things. From sharing your harvest with a family that had a bad harvest, to constructing the struggle." - Juana



Though the Zapatistas have an army (the EZLN) the members of this army are not seen as the leaders or arbiters of the struggle. From the beginning, they were careful not to replicate Marxist models of revolution wherein the armed element of the movement aims to take state power and become the new presiding authority. Rather, the EZLN worked to assure its own lack of authority in the territory, first by establishing the 38 autonomous municipalities with their own governance structures and then, in 2003, establishing the Councils of Good Governance, making any need for oversight by the CCRJ obsolete.

In Bats'i, k'op, the word for the army or police of the state is 'jmlvanejetik'; 'Mlvanet' is the verb meaning 'to kill' and the prefix j- makes the verb a noun that means the profession of killing, with the suffix -ej meaning that it is a person who kills (+etik=pplural). The Zapatista Army, on the other hand, is called jpojvanejetik, the root being the verb 'pojel' which means to save or defend, creating a noun meaning defender of the pueblo.



(a classic)

The work of the Councils, which in traditional Marxist formations of revolution could be perceived as specialized administration or management of the movement, is another form of a 'mtel, known as a jpatan (the work of our community) no different from that of the collectives or the primary school education promoters, in the sense that they are doing work to ensure the collective survival of the Zapatista communities.

it is not entirely true to say that the good government council 'administers' in the sense of controlling 'trabajos colectivos' or even 'coordinates' the unilateral authority over them.

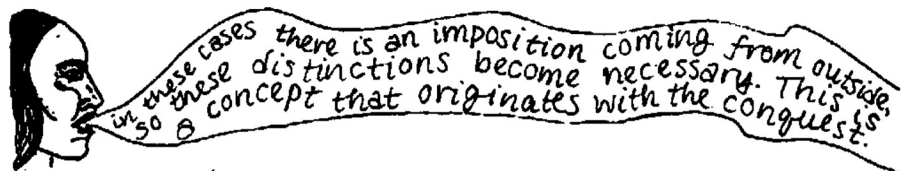


(Dyleny)



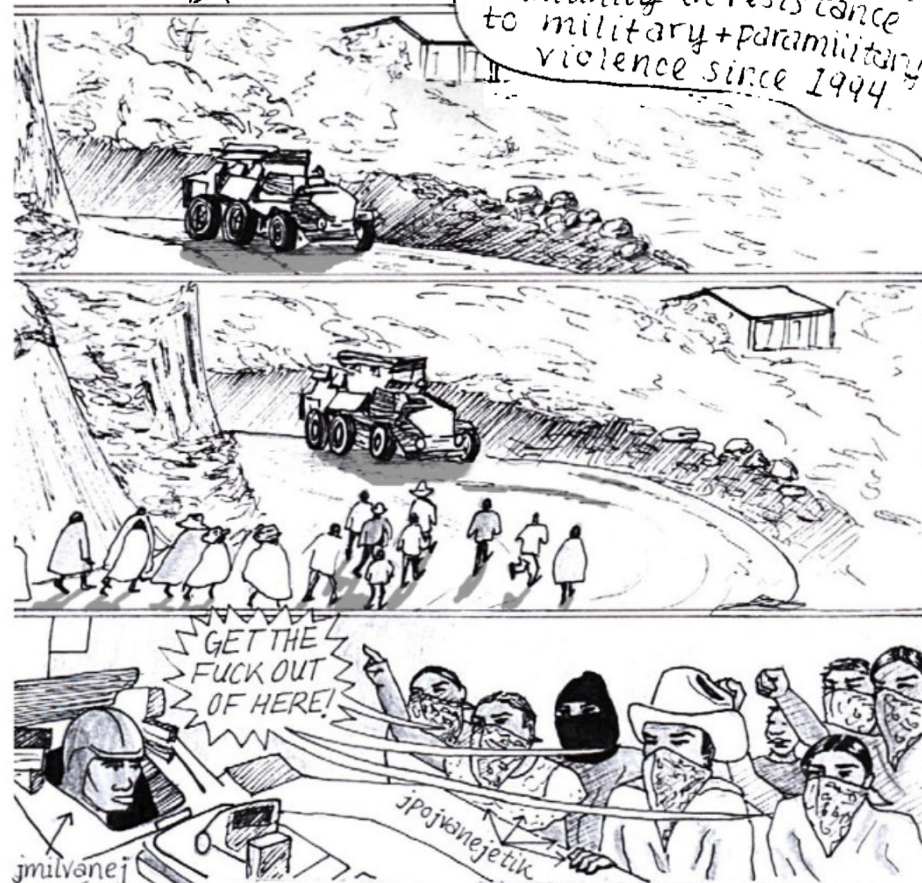
Rather, both are different forms of a 'mtel, one that is more focused on working in a particular trabajo colectivo...





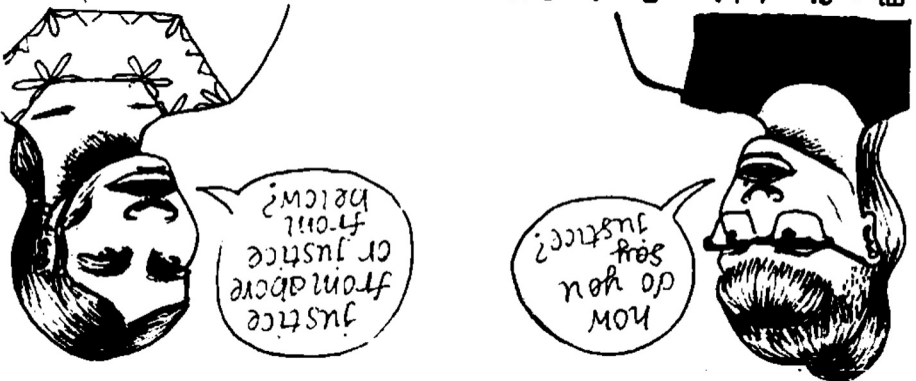
Similarly, when the Zapatistas demanded education, they are not making an appeal for more or better access to government schools.

The verb for what the western cultures call studying is '**chanvun**'. **Vun** means paper, sheet, and book. So in Bats'ik'op this form of teaching and learning is not the only form, it's just the form of learning related to the book, with the learning of the school. The verb '**chonel**' means to learn, understand by doing, and it has the connotation of giving your body and heart to learning. The noun for this activity in general is not **chanvun**, because **chanvun** only refers to learning with books. The noun for learning in general is **Chanu'm tase**: to learn in the community, to learn all of the activities in the community. This learning includes verbs like: **chan+pas+na**: to learn to make the house; **chan+ts'un+lo'bol**: to learn to plant bananas; **chan+lo'il**: to learn the word and histories. **Chan+pask'op**: to learn the struggle. All of these activities, all that is **chanu'm tase**, are directed towards the **p'ijum tase**: to learn and live in the world, to know how to use the body and the heart to construct life, to know how to live on the land in all of the senses. When someone doesn't understand how to respect other people or nature, because they don't truly recognize them. We say in Bats'i w'op: **Mu'yuk chanu'm tase**: there isn't learning, they haven't learned or they do not understand well, **Mu'yuk p'ijum tase**: they don't know how to live well on the land, **Mu'yuk Ch'ulel**: there is not spirit.

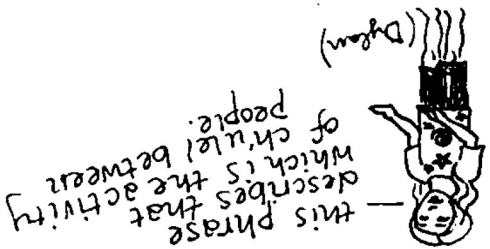


The army exists to defend the communities, but once they are liberated from the state or the killers, they establish their own self governance which is not opposed, but complementary, to the army in the process of making the word, **pask'op**.

What are the Zapatistas struggling for? What are the objectives of pask'op? All struggles, after all, must have objectives or it would be impossible for them to succeed. Looking at the EZLN's initial demands—work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace—it might seem that these are demands that the state could comply with, signifying the success of their struggle. However, when explored in Bats'i'k'op, this becomes less clear.



The first time I asked this, I was told Tsakbail ta venta, which means to take one another into account reciprocally. The verb 'Tsakel' means to take, to feel, or to hold +ba—a suffix that signifies reciprocity +il which gives it the infinitive form +Ta venta which means with respect, recognition.



A year later when I asked the same question, I was given this same definition, but as the term for 'democracy', and was told that justice was 'lekil chapanel' which means to judge well.

The other demands (housing, food, healthcare, education) are similarly unquantifiable when understood in Bats'i'k'op.

A lot of outsiders come here and talk about their 'privilege' of having access to healthcare or education, but to us that is not privilege. We don't want your medicine that poisons you, your education that brainwashes you, your mansions. We want our humble houses, our tortillas, our schools.



The clarity with which this education promoter differentiated between what is 'your's' and 'ours' can be understood with the words 'batsi' and 'kaxlan'. Batsi, like in Bats'i'k'op—the true word—refers to that which is true, traditional or, in the sense that the compa used the term, 'ours'. Kaxlan translates as 'from the city' and can be understood as the relative 'your's'. In one lesson, an education promoter took us through the various linguistic distinctions commonly made in the communities to indicate colonial impositions.

For example:

vo'm = music
kaxlan vaj = bread
bats'i'vaj = tortilla
bats'i'vo'm = true music
bats'i've'al = traditional
food, food that fills you,
food that nurtures you.
ve'e'il = processed
food

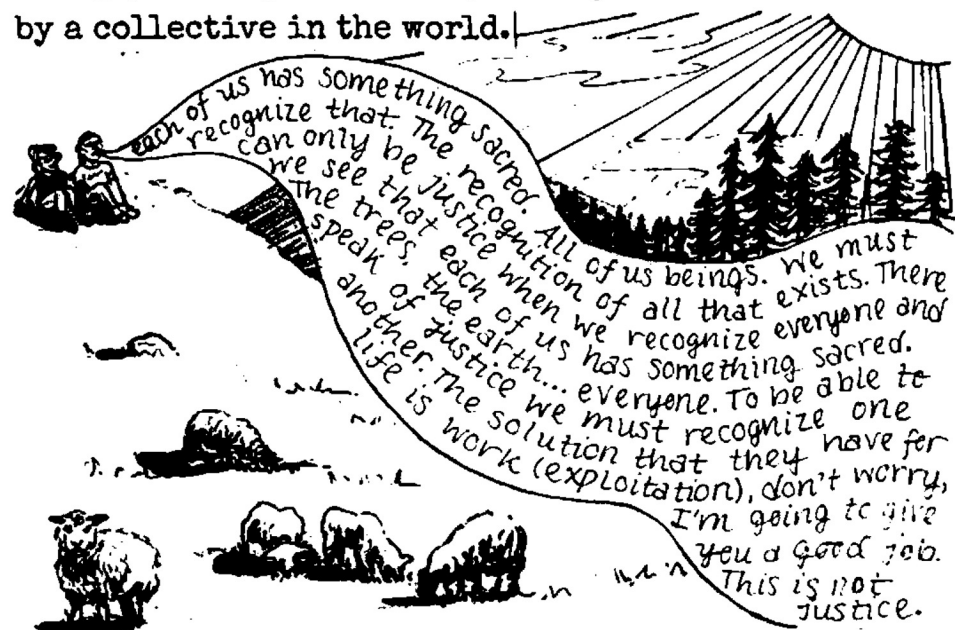
The third word translated simply as 'work' is *kanal* which is a new word that was introduced with colonization, and which explicitly means exploitation.

'It is the work that you do each day that isn't for you or your family or your community. Work for a boss. It is a relation of slavery. The people know that they are being exploited. When they go to the city to find work they say, 'Chibat ta Kanal', 'I'm going to be exploited.'



So when the Zapatistas demand 'work', they are not in danger of selling out for promises of jobs or union contracts from the state or corporations. They clearly differentiate capitalist exploitation and productivity for the capitalist system from that which serves them and their communities. They are constructing autonomy through a'mtel, which encompasses all the levels of work carried out in Zapatista territory, from the Councils of Good Government to the health promoters in the autonomous clinics, to the coffee production collectives, to the work of the education promoters teaching me Batsi'k'op. No one receives a salary for their a'mtel, rather they support one another at the level of their families and local communities in order to make possible the different collective work. For example if a compa goes to work in the Council of Good Government for a time, their community provides them with the amount of food that they need to sustain themselves during that period and helps the compa's family with their harvest or family-level a'mtel.

Two years later I was told *Ich bail ta mu'k*, which translates as recognition of the greatness of all beings, and implies a reciprocal process carried out by a collective in the world.



This points to a linguistic trap that is a fundamental downfall of anti-capitalist struggles in the western world. When people demand justice, whether or not they believe that it can be granted by the state, they are implying a concrete set of conditions wherein oppressed people are vindicated and the oppressors condemned. Interpretations of that vindication are used to impose authority and quash rebellious energy through piecemeal gains. When one group (party, union...etc.) achieves something and calls it justice, everyone else is forced to refocus their energies from confrontation with the state towards defending the achieved justice through subsequent submission to the state. When justice, however, means the 'recognition of the greatness of all beings', this is not possible. Justice is all or nothing, and it is not susceptible to state cooptation or interpretation.

Likewise 'peace' and 'democracy', which could be dismissed offhand as liberal demands, are inadequate translations of concepts which are holistic and uncompromising.

'Peace is a dream outside of the indigenous reality. Maybe *'lekil kaxilejal'* is peace, maybe it is something different. It's a life without danger, the dignified life that we have to construct. Sometimes people think that living the *lekil kaxilejal* is a disaster, living in the country, harvesting corn means losing something. But you don't realize what you are losing when you leave these things behind.'



The Zapatistas' demand for 'work' is also less direct than it may seem. They have no interest in working for or receiving a salary from the capitalist system. Rather, they are fighting for the right to work for the collective good of their communities. Whereas in English the word 'work' is monopolized by capitalist notions of productivity, in Bats'i' k'op further distinction and differentiation in forms of work exist.

Three different Bats'i' k'op words are

that you do the human work, the true work, the family, and your community. You are free. The right time to stop a *mitel* is when your energy tells you. When everyone starts work together, everyone stops at different times and everyone is respected.

