Zapatista Maya Literacies and Decolonial Civic Pedagogies

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ZAPATISTA MAYA LITERACIES AND DECOLONIAL CIVIC PEDAGOGIES

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Gracias jnojpteswanej jVíctor and jwix xJen. Thanks to my dissertation committee, my family and friends and mi amorzón. Even though the inscriptions on this paper appear to be those of one person, they stand for a demand put forward by many voices. My job consisted only of enduring the fire set ablaze in the burning zeal of that collective heart.
ABSTRACT

Zapatista Maya Literacies and Decolonial Civic Pedagogies evaluates an educational outreach project led by an Indigenous grass roots mobilization in the high plateau of central México, the Zapatista movement. Using retrospective narrative inquiry and theoretically informed perspectives, this dissertation shows that the program of the Zapatista escuelita, Spanish for “little school,” is rooted in the Maya educational paradigm of nojpesel-p’ijubtasel, a cultural and political process of socialization at the heart of contemporary Maya peasant families. The research focus of this study offers rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies two interrelated points of insight tied to the overall Maya conception of the conch shell, “puy”: first, a theoretical study ascribing to the Zapatista the conceptions of “k’op,” “language-struggle,” and “ts’ib,” “writing-plowing,” which represent alternative notions of literate activity understanding reading and writing as distributed and embodied modes of “bringing into being” dignified coexistence. Second, a concrete instructional model that stresses a political way of being in the world by situating students within the symbolic distribution of a council, a temporal and spatial dimension of encounter, dialogue, and accord where they are called to adopt a public (inter)subjectivity through mutual respect and recognition. This research responds directly to the call of contemporary Maya scholar-activists to decolonize cross-cultural power relations and to (re)create socially and culturally sustainable models of education and civic engagement. To that effect, the dissertation enacts a research methodology responsive to Maya culture both in continuity with their ancient inscription traditions and as a present possibility for recomposing colonizing power structures.
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Ch’aban spisil te k’inale / Let all the earth be silent.

This dissertation will let light fall upon Maya rhetorics,

artistic methods of cutting through the dark veil of colonality,

rooted on the inmost heart and memory of my community,

here in this urban de-Indianized Mestizo barrio at the northern border region of México.

Here I will cast a look at things put in shadow by colonality and

brought back to light by true women and men who did not abandon the night,

imperviously gathered around the fires that awaken the common word of the peoples.

As a student-instructor of rhetoric, composition, and literacy (RCL) drawn to non-hegemonic models of composition in which writing is “an act of world making” (Antczak and Eberly 145), two of the most exciting feats of literate action I ever witnessed happened at the margins of the formal boundaries of academia. The first one took place in March of 2017; after more than 170 years of legal struggle, the Māori tribal federations of New Zealand (Iwi) gained governance over the Whanganui River, a natural resource which constitutes the community’s “source of spiritual and physical sustenance” (Iorns Magallanes). Besides being an instance of political sovereignty, the restoration of the ancient right to an Indigenous-controlled model of governance became a legal precedent in which the Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament recognized the legal personhood of the Whanganui River. As an act where the topoi of personification
became the central means to foster communication and cooperation from an Indigenous intellectual standpoint, the legal victory of the Māori tribal federations was clearly an occurrence of what Scott Richard Lyons calls “rhetorical sovereignty.” Indeed, composition (re)structured the legal and social structure of interaction by emphasizing the dignity of other-than-human agents in the world; language style doing poetical work in the world through “one’s actions with one’s fellows” (Dunne 315; 244), or, as an old Maori saying has it, “beneath the herbs and plants are the writing of the ancestors” (Iors Magallanes).

That same year, in June 2017, on a different geography, the CNI (National Indigenous Congress) of México announced the creation of the CIG, a Council of Indigenous Government whose spokeswoman went on to become the first female Indigenous presidential candidate in the history of the country. The CNI was the result of a long struggle an Indigenous political and cultural grouping in the high plateau of central México advocating for a grass-roots globalism premised on radical democracy. The appointment of María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, “Marichuy,” took place within the confines of an assembly, and it was envisioned as a political means to face a war waged against communality, the commodification of life that results in the murdering of women, children, and Native peoples (Ejército Zapatista). The ultimate purpose of the CNI was to call urban subaltern communities and other social actors to build a coalition envisioning alternatives to the existing capitalist orientation, “Nuestra pelea es por la vida, no vamos por votos. Vamos por la organización y la construcción del poder desde abajo” (Editorial Board). This expression of conjoint communication materialized in the appointment of Marichuy was yet another assertion of rhetorical sovereignty, pointing to
a striking correspondence with the Iwi’s efforts, a struggle for the emancipation of
Nature, land, and life, “la tierra es la madre, es la depositaria de la cultura, . . . ahí vive
la historia y . . . ahí viven los muertos” (Marcos, “¿Cuáles son” 89). An important cultural
politics remaking culture is emerging, and at forefront of this shift, there come an
Indigenous mobilization with a sophisticated notion of critical modes of agency and
rhetorical tactics.

At the time the Iwi and the CIG enacted the purification of capitalist war, I was
taking a course on global rhetorics as part of my coursework towards my PhD. I was
particularly fascinated with Jürgen Habermas theorization of what some call deliberative
democracy, considered a groundbreaking political model (Mouffe 192) based on a
political organization where power emanates from “private people coming together as a
public to subject the prevailing norms to critical examination and discussion” (Scrivener 2).
While the foundations for a theory on deliberative democracy has been tied in
academia to the theories like Kant’s political cosmopolitanism (cfr. Scrivener), the “post-
political” turn in political theory (Webb), Indigenous movements all over the world were
in the process of enacting critical modes of civic agency, and, in the case of the struggle
of the CIG, in continuity with centuries long practices of consensus of which the West
had taken notice at least since the xvi century, “muchas de las naciones y gentes de
indios no sufren reyes ni señores absolutos, sino viven en behetrías, en comunidades
donde se gobiernan por concejos de muchos” (Lenkersdorf in Contreras 11).

Both the Iwi’s and the CNI’s assertions of rhetorical sovereignty constitute a
disruption of the disciplinary landscape of RCL. They make visible the existence of a
non-normative subject from a non-normative arena coexisting at the margins of
rhetorical Western, “male-dominated and elite ways” (Royster “Disciplinary Landscaping” 149-150). For my coming of age as an RCL scholar, they marked the culmination of my disciplinary shuddering, what Jesús Martín-Barbero calls an escalofrío epistemológico, or a moment of epiphany where academy-based intellectuals realize the ways in which their “liberatory/transformative” methodologies in actuality enable oppressive power relationships. As Martín-Barbero claims, this realization entails taking on the commitment to dismantling hegemonic research methodologies by enacting ver con los otros, a respectful disposition towards the contemplation of the intellectual specialties of the oppressed. On a personal level, it meant realizing my complicity in reproducing a structure of erasure and dominance where rhetorical agency was interpreted exclusively as a domain of the European cultural archive. Therefore, my escalofrío epistemológico shaped the present study as an attempt at responding to the extended call in Latino decolonial thought for cognitive justice, an articulation of global epistemological diversity into a coalitional consciousness resisting the coloniality of power.

Scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have responded to the call of cognitive justice in academia by turning to Pre-Columbian Americas and by emphasizing its continuity with present Mestiz@ (Mestize) history. Nevertheless, limiting research to these sites of inquiry risks misrepresenting Indigenous peoples as absent from or irrelevant to the contemporary society at large. Responding to such issue, my work bears witness to the survivance of Indigenous cultures of México sharing the world and time with us. It focuses on an often under-theorized area of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies: contemporary Latin American Indigenous literacies. More
specifically, my hope is to contribute to the effort of contemporary Maya scholar-activists to decolonize cross-cultural power relations and to (re)create socially and culturally sustainable models of education and civic engagement (Gómez Lara; Bolom Pale; Sánchez Álvarez; López Intzín). To that effect, I will look at the escuelita zapatista, or “Zapatista Little school,” a cross-cultural immersion program on emancipation and sovereignty facilitated by the Zapatista pask’op, or Zapatista movement.

Although the most widely known component of the Zapatista pask’op is their armed self-defense group, the true heart of the movement is a social base of federated Indigenous communities made up largely by Maya Tseltal-, Tsotsil-, Ch’ol, and Tojol-ab’al-speaking Originario Nations peoples from the South of México. As a result of their long struggle for self-determination, the Zapatista pask’op called into being a series of encounters that culminated in the creation of the CNI. The goal of this study is to trace the practices of consensus that inform the rhetorical agencies used by the CNI at the core of the Zapatista movement. These sets of practices offer RCL studies a critical-rhetorical paradigm where Western and non-Western cultures can intersect, broadening our conception of reading and writing to include multimodal modes of inscription that cultivate the sustenance and continuance of community life. In this way, my study reinscribes into RCL studies practices specific to the Maya people both in continuity with their ancient inscription traditions, and as a sovereign and very present possibility for cross-cultural, coalitional recomposing of unjust power structures.

The Zapatista pask’op created the escuelita in order to educate non-Indigenous populations on the civic mission of their struggle. As a critical-rhetorical civic pedagogy, the escuelita stressed the need to subvert the past collective experience of Indigenous
peoples with State educational programs, an experience marked by a racialized extractivist-assimilationalist model. Taking this goal into account, I seek to advance a reconsideration of the terms with which our field has approached the Zapatista guided by what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch identify as a “feminist rhetorical” framework. Royster and Kirsch distilled this methodology from their work of rescuing/recovering/(re)inscribing subaltern subjects in the dominant rhetorical tradition. Their approach creates a “dialectical and reciprocal intellectual” space for nonnormative “traditions,” (14), expanding and re-forming the ways in which we value and recognize rhetorical activity in the discipline. Therefore, rather than trying to enforce traditional standards of rhetorical expertise on the practices of the Zapatistas, I will identify what Royster and Kirsch call “qualities of excellence” (19) by “listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly” through “humility, respect and care” (21). This will entail a flexibility welcoming unexpected “practices, values, properties, and processes” (15) with an open mind and “heart,” placing them in relation to traditional and “nonnormative” (16) notions of rhetoric, composition, and literacy. To that end, the point of entry for this study will be:

How do the rhetorical practices of the Zapatista speak to us, to our field, and to our lived experience?

How do we render their work and lives meaningfully, honoring their ways of being in the world?

How do we respond to it, and what new possibilities emerge in that space of mutual and respectful contemplation?

In addition to this ethical framework, the research design will be laid out in terms of a
systematic literature review and a rhetorical ethnographic content analysis. Through the chapters, I will use systematic literature reviews as a syntheses approach for generating interpretations of the qualitative data. Besides mapping out the research space of the existing disciplinary landscape in the first chapter, the main objective for this approach will be to enable a dialectical and dialogical relation between RCL studies and the Zapatista paradigms. This means that the use of literature reviews for synthesizing qualitative primary-level studies will go beyond the preliminary function usually associated with this processes by constituting a method of meta-analysis offering “new interpretations in the process” (Noblit and Hare 9). By bringing together texts from RCL studies and Originario Nations scholars, and the Zapatista pask’op, I will derive a translation examining relationships of reciprocity, refutation, and/or argumentation (Heyvaert et al.) which will provide inspiration for creating concrete practices and actions. In this way, the systematic reviews of literature will act as comparative matrices enabling the Indigenization of the field of RCL.

Complementarily, the field texts of the study—consisting broadly of the materials of the first level of the escuelita—will be studied following a rhetorical ethnographic content analysis methodology. I will rely on Klaus Krippendorff’s conceptualization of this methodology in which the study “places the analyzed text within the context of who produced it” (Leslie 149). By and large, this will entail what curriculum studies call a retrospective narrative study in which I enter the “life space” of the curriculum of the escuelita through the field texts so, in general terms, the methodology will take the form of an exploratory archival research. The main focus of this approach will be “the language, logic of arguments, logics of circulation, modes of evidence, norms of
propriety, and stylistic devices that define issues and construct rhetorically salient meanings” (Hauser 17). More specifically, I will be investigating the symbolic interactions of the Zapatista pask’op with rhetorics of coloniality, and I will attend those lived realities as inducements to attitudes organizing the cultural and political life of the movement. This approach will emphasize the intersection of the fields of RCL and educational research as concerned with a realm where identities are shaped (cfr. George; Schubert), which is also a major area of interest for contemporary Maya scholars (cfr. Bolom Pale, López Intzín). Moreover, this design will recognize the paradigm shift of New Rhetorics to vernacular modes of discourse (Hauser), a move that will enable this study to spread over a number of different modes and media, from historical and theoretical artifacts to vernacular, non-traditional rhetorical enactments.

In order to engage with the complexity of non-traditional field materials, I will use a decolonial Indigenous research methodology interrogating the traditional conceptualization of rhetorical discourse. As indicated by Bagele Chilisa, Indigenous methodologies focus on localized phenomena and combine Western and Indigenous paradigms all the while showing sensitivity to the context of the research participants. For this study, this approach will serve chiefly to construct a culturally relevant methodology drawing directly from the Zapatatista Maya intellectual specialties. This culturally responsive rendering will take the guise of an inductive analysis typical of grounded theory methods (Noisy Hawk and Trimble), meaning it will involve the disruption of linearity by a recursive, mutually informing process in which the content analysis will generate a methodology which will in turn provide emerging categories for ulterior content analysis. My adoption of this spiralic, culturally relevant design responds
to an interest in decolonizing damage- and deficit-centered methodologies that perpetuate “existing structures of domination” (Chilisa 142).

Therefore, the enactment of this concentric methodology will consist at the outset of two phases. First, in Chapter One, “Decolonization and Indigenization as a Feminist-Rhetorical Informed Operational Framework,” I will explore Western paradigms of RCL in order to find a niche where a structuring of “interknowledge” can germinate. Through literature reviews, I will locate a non-hegemonic theory of rhetorical excellence within New Rhetorics and New Literacy Studies, and articulate it with Latin American decolonial theories so that Western and non-Western paradigms can unfold dialogically and dialectically. This interposed mode of theorization, or “pensamiento fronterizo,” is a space of contact between intellectual traditions that creates the necessary tension to weave anti-racist and anti-patriarchal patterns alternative to colonial ways of being in the world. Subsequently, in Chapter Two, “Towards a Puy Research Methodology,” I will propose a culturally responsive Indigenous research methodology rooted on the Zapatista Maya paradigm of the conch shell, or “puy.” This chapter will use the metonymic contiguity of puy with the act of summoning to council to describe a methodology of encounter, dialogue, and accord. I will formulate the guiding principles of puy methodology as follows: (1) “laja,” enactment of intersubjectivity through a respect for the research participants and the community’s equality of expertise; (2) “k’op,” ethical awareness of language’s function in mediating traditional and novel patterns of coexistence; and (3) “pasel,” observance of research as a process of consultation to reach agreements that set forth commitments.

After establishing the methodology for this study, Chapter Three, “Zapatista
Rooted Literacies,” will offer a theoretical exploration of the Tseltal-Tsotsil categories of literacy through the concepts of *k’op*, “language-struggle,” and *ts’ib*, “writing-plowing.” I will provide an account of literate activity as “inscribing” or “making appear” patterns of dignified co-existence, expanding the sense of written and spoken language beyond the historical experience of Western culture. Zapatista understanding of language encompasses speaking as a process that uses tension to spin together cultural frames of orientation through *k’asesel*, “translation-infection.” Rather than seeking command and assimilation over mute objects, *k’asesel* advocates for an open and responsible orientation towards the cultural dispositions of others. This process of intercultural translation enables an ideological transition-revolution towards mutual respect and recognition necessary to (re)create the fabric of communality.

Upon determining the conception of literacy for the Zapatista, Chapter four, “The Composing of *Bats’i Vinik Antsetik*,” will show the escuelita educational program as concerned with the composing of a virtuous public humanity—*bats’i winik antsetik*—critically situated against and envisioning alternatives to existing unmarked processes of identity formation. These unmarked processes of colonial provenance, will be identified as “*alfabetizaciones de la crueldad*.” Additionally, I will explore the connection of the learning intentions and success criteria of the escuelita through the contemporary Maya conception of *p’ijubtasel*, an educational model tied to the overall philosophical conception of *puy*. *P’ijubtasel* is a process of socialization into a collective identity premised on the social, cultural, and political significance of sovereign self-determination. It aspires to a conscious orientation cultivating public subjectivities ethically rooted on the territory.
Finally, in Chapter Five, “Zapatista Civic Pedagogies as Pask’op,” I will come to understand pedagogy within the frame of the Zapatista “pask’op” (pasel-k’op), or “enactment of the word-struggle,” as a locally relevant model for rhetorical instruction. Through meta-aggregative synthesis of educational projects influenced by the Zapatista movement, I translate theory into praxis to inform, guide, and inspire concrete practices for the writing classroom. As a result, I propose the implementation of a critical-rhetorical mapping workshop, “lok’tayel te lum k’inal,” to reveal the secret pulse of the community in the guise of iconic images and multimodal storytelling. Through a Maya conception of visuality and following the tradition of (Latin) American critical cartography, these workshops afford educators the opportunity for envisioning with students, local communities, and social actors, “premonitory” perspectival landscapes where respect across difference slowly begins to kindle.
CHAPTER ONE

RHETORICAL EXCELLENCE AND THE ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA

As a crucial step towards an ethical framework for indigenous literacies, this chapter will open by conceptualizing literacy as sets of practices always-already inhabiting and producing particular socially constructed spaces. In particular, I will draw attention to the ways in which this approach disrupts a model of reading and writing as an autonomous process that unwittingly sets into place oppressive power relations that disparage non-Western intellectual specialties (Street). This will entail making my inquiry accountable to “adhering to cultural expectations and to fostering ethical relationships along the way” (Tuck and McKenzie 10), which will largely mean this study will be guided by the hope to advance the decolonizing / emancipatory interests of the Zapatista movement. In a first move, I will identify and occupy a niche in the field / discipline of RCL studies that recognizes language as symbolic action and that understands knowledge, culture, and identity as socially constructed through that rhetorical process. I will also frame this process of collective and individual identity formation as being at the core of civic pedagogies.

Therefore, this dissertation is deeply indebted to scholars working in cultural rhetorics (Ríos; Cobos et al.; Sackey, Haas; Mailloux) and scholars of critical literacies (Freire and Macedo, Giroux, hooks, Morrell) who shake the semantic foundations of terms like “rhetoric” and “culture.” My hope in adopting this approach is that contributing to this body of scholarship will follow the lead of feminist rhetorical practices in enacting a shift in the field of RCL from Western patriarchal criteria for “excellence” (Royster and
A Rhetorically Informed Framework for Pedagogical Literacy Inquiry

As a Kaxlan Ladino scholar engaged in literacy inquiry for a long time, the construct of alfabetización, understood as a pedagogy of writing-reading specific to Latin America, played a crucial role in my everyday practices all through academia. The expectations established by peers, instructors, family, friends, and myself were molded after a colonial model of literacy that from the times of the Conquista seeks to assimilate the “indio” and “las masas” to Hispanic culture. Therefore, one of the most challenging aspects of my current inquiry has become bridging vernacular expressions of conjoint communicative action to dominant institutions, especially as non-abstract, spiritual, non-alphabetical literacies are often characterized as early developmental stages in the attainment of a dominant, more “advanced” variation. To avoid perpetuating the oppressive power relations around literacy instruction, the following sections explore alternative definitions of literacy to the ones used to maintain the epistemological violence canonizing one socially situated literacy as universal. Besides identifying the niche in the territory where this inquiry stands, this move will serve to mark the particularities, contingencies, and politics that inform my work, and will suggest the provisional character of my theoretical apparatus in the hope to serve as an entry point for its revaluation.

The explicit aim of this inquiry is to disrupt the positivist model of pedagogies of literacy and the oppressive power relations that they inform. By positivist in the context of writing instruction, I refer to the methodologies informed by a view of language as an
autonomous, clear, and stable system in hierarchical relation to non-Western literacies. As pointed by scholars like Brian Street, the influence of this ideology is evident in approaches that work under the assumption that language is a biological trait, as Steven Pinker suggests, or an abstract system separated from the individual, like in the views of Ferdinand de Saussure or Noam Chomsky (cfr. Bloome and Green). Countering the ideological hegemony of this approach became part of an explicit rationale that informed the work of both New Literacy and New Rhetoric scholars. For New Rhetoricians, the scientist orientation of positivism resulted in approaches to language focusing on writing as the process of putting together static words following straightforward rules of correct usage (Hauser). By rendering invisible the societal, contingent dimension of language, these models have failed to account for the ways in which rhetorical practices can serve as a means to reproduce and recompose social structures of coexistence. New Literacy scholars like Brian V. Street have pointed that a scientist perspective on literacy establishes a “great divide” that separates cultures on a hierarchy determined by a degree of literacy “development.” As Branwen Gruffyd Jones points, this metaphor of development functions as an anchor to recast the colonial discourse of civilization and evolution into a “technical” vocabulary, but without ever abandoning the logic of hierarchy and extraction (72). Literacy models of this sort stand in continuity with these colonial power relations, while rendering invisible their racial bias, “it is claimed that a culture is intellectually superior because it has acquired [the] technology [of literacy]” (Street Literacy in Theory and Practice, 29).

For Pierre Bourdieu, scientist approaches to language sometimes rely on the metaphorical anchor of the abstract treasure, where literacy is a patrimony of universal
access, turning a blind eye to the oppressive power relations enacted through the monopolization of symbolic systems. This relation of domination is normalized by the objectification of writing and the perception of a unified language in dominant educational institutions. The pedagogies circulated in these spaces tie writing to a neutral production of information and communication. Writing is commodified as an object of consumption, a skill, and a cultural capital accessible to just a few. According to Elsasser and Irvine, this uneven distribution of literacy education serves as a mechanism for the construction of communities and individuals as illiterate, promoting a deficit-oriented model, and helping to sustain a meritocracy through narratives where students that do not enact dominant literacy practices are categorized as resisting/failing to engage in a practice crucial to the very “skill” of critical thinking.

Sociocultural scholars of literacy seeking to break away from the implications of these models have increasingly focused on reading and writing as embedded in social practices that produce and transform both meaning and space (Leander and Sheehy; Mills and Comber; Gutiérrez; Moje et al.; Gee; Leander et al.). This body of work focuses on the problematization of scientistic accounts of reading and writing by calling on an “ideological model” which regards literacy as “embedded in and constitutive of cultural ideologies” (Bloome and Green 20). From this perspective, literacy is conceptualized as both practice and event mediated by social institutions and spaces, i.e. by the interaction of people engaged in written communication, broadly conceived, and the discursive mechanisms that inform such an interaction. In rhetoric and composition, critical spatial-based approaches have served to procure theories on composition with a lens receptive to ideological dynamics (Fleming; Reynolds; Dobrin;
McComiskey and Ryan; Drew; Rice; Porter et al.). Among other things, this approach lends itself to challenge research on traditional sites of reading and writing, shifting attention to the rhetorical practices of local, historically disenfranchised populations (Hess). Drawing from the broader spatial turn in the social sciences, rhetorical theorization of space emphasizes an implicit theory in classical rhetoric that views language as a “distinctly political way of being” (Fleming 12), a social occurrence that by engaging in signifying practices in space writes “the script of hegemony” (Dobrin 50). Scholarship in New Literacy Studies has also adopted a view that transcends the conceptualization of reading and writing as a neutral skill or tool of communication, and instead emphasizes its ideological dimension. By contextualizing literacy practices in the reality of ideology, socio-spatial research recognizes literacy as situated “lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden practices” (Gee et al. 3) connected to specific types of “social identities” (Gee et al. xii), that is, as distinct “ways of being in the world” (Gee et al. 3).

Approaching literacies as producing the world rather than just passively occupying it has provided literacy research the tools to uncover oppressive and exclusionary power relations (Mills; New London Group). It has also expanded the site of inquiry beyond conventional literacy practices, as in the “rule-breaking” digitally-mediated literacies (Lankshear and Knobel), and back to local concerns, like the history and politics of cultural opposition enacted by Native American (Olivas). It is from this lens on language as a practice distributed socio-spatially, that Indigenous literacies can be ethically approached. The emphasis on literacies as producing, perpetuating, or disrupting oppressive/exclusionary power relations gives salience to the historical and
embodied locations of Indigenous literacies, enacting an ethics of "relationality and openness to difference and transformation" (Timeto 10). A socio-spatial approach would have us look into the instituted literacy scenes, how they are circulated pedagogically and naturalized on deficit models. It will enable an understanding of the ways in which the space inhabited and produced by Indigenous literacies is overrun by historical contradictions that shape their cultural sovereignty. As Rice envisions for a publics approach to place, a focus on the connection of space and literacies will give us insight into the everyday symbolic engagement on which "people read themselves into" (13). Understanding this material-ideological dimension of literacies is of crucial importance when trying to imagine culturally sustaining pedagogies, as Indigenous representational practices inhabits an ideological script that articulates a constant intellectual colonization (Driskill), erasure (King), and acculturation (Menezes de Souza).

A spatial turn can offer a metaphorical anchor to disrupt what some critics have identified as a potentially universalizing and deficit oriented premise behind the goal of "human liberation" (hooks; Haas; Blake and Masschelein; Peters and Wain; Irwin). The spatialization of literacy problematizes a developmental scope often shared by critical approaches in the broad area of social sciences, a framing of identity as an interior quality to be synthesized within the goal of a shared single consciousness. Focusing on "locational" concerns stresses the existence of situated identities and knowledges, as well the need of articulating alliances in order to enact political change (Zerilli). However, since another important point of contestation in the developmental narrative is the interrogation of the conventional / widespread theorization of ideology as a characteristic false consciousness of the "masses" (Irwin), I will dedicate the following
space to specify what an ideological approach to literacy from the perspective of New Rhetorics will provisionally imply for this inquiry. I decided to establish a common ground for rhetoric with cultural studies and anthropology in the hope to create the necessary conditions for future transdisciplinary conversations while at the same time framing my work within the scope of the broader area of cultural rhetorics.

**Culture, Literacy Wars, and the Incipient Realm of Ideology**

If true, being coloniality inseparable from social sciences and the humanities, how can we avoid staying within what Audrey Lorde called “only the most narrow perimeters of change” (111)? In this section, I will discuss a set of definitions of culture, literacy, and ideology as a heuristics to disrupt the ground, texture, and attitudes of everyday life and academia, and open up the “master’s tools” to an “interculturalización crítica desde la diferencia misma” (Walsh 60). Whereas cultural rhetorics has only recently taken an important role in our disciplinary landscape (Sackey), rhetorically informed cultural studies, such as Geertz semiotic anthropology, have been taking their cues from rhetorical notions like that in Kenneth Burke’s theory. In this section I seek to extend the conversation on cultural rhetorics regarding the ways in which culture and ideology bears on the composing of the self. I trace the intersection of cultural studies’ conceptualization of ideology and identity with Burke’s theory of symbolic action to establish a niche of intervention that responds to the political exigencies of the field-discipline of cultural rhetorics (Cobos et al.). I specifically identify the ways in which the relationship of culture with subjectivity would have us locate rhetorical excellence on its capacity to intervene the cultural systems in the pursuit of an ethical self.
Critics in the discipline of RCL studies have long strive to denounce the existence of a racialized discursive undercurrent inherent in the make up of the formal institutions that organize literacy practices in the Americas (Villanueva; Menezes de Souza; Crowley; Watanabe). The power relations that emerged as a result of European colonial expansion extended beyond the grip of military power, informing every aspect of everyday life. Educational institutions constituted a central role in the constitution of this relations, establishing a racialized conception of “humanness” tied to one group’s mode of knowledge-literacy, a connection made explicit in the idea of “the man of letters” (Lucas). In this context of domination and exploitation traversed by hierarchical markers of race and gender, local European literacies raised to a universal status, resulting in the emergence of institutions with both a “colonial and monocultural orientation” (Cupples), a process that often took the form of violent suppression and appropriation of non-European cultural heterogeneity (San Juan Jr.; Grosfoguel). Therefore, the “imperial conceptions of subjects, values, and interests” (Groovogui 20) became the rationale of states and empires, actively engaged in a process to secure Europe’s dominant position.

Even if formal colonialism ceased to exist centuries ago, the imprint of its cultural institutions still inform our everyday literacy practices. Institutions of humanities and “letters” in México were created with the explicit mission of educating people on “alta cutura,” a process that revolved around alfabetización, first, as the “acquisition” of Castilian writing-reading skills at the basic level, and then of “functional” literacy, that is to say, the “appreciation” of the Western literary canon, a practice often associated to the capacity of “abstract” thinking and moral judgement. One of the founders of liberal
education in my hometown, the famous Mexican writer Agustín Yañez was the heir to the *Campaña de Alfabetización*, a crusade to teach reading and writing that rested on the racist assumptions José Vasconcelos laid to assimilate “el indio” to the hispanic culture and “[desanalfabetizar] las masas” (Torres Montero 387). Universities in México, as evident in the discourse of education philosopher Gabina Barreda, inherited the Enlightenment narratives that shaped secondary education around the conceptualization of racialized subjects as “pasivo[s] e inconsciente[s]” (Barreda 233), positing aesthetic education, taught all over Europe in the context of rhetorical instruction, as a way to raise moral stature, “las humanidades, cuyo fundamento necesario es el estudio de la cultura griega, no son solamente enseñanza intelectual y placer estético, sino también, como pensó Matthew Arnold, fuente de disciplina moral” (Henríquez Ureña 74). Whereas an early goal of rhetorical education was forming students into the workings of democratic, civic discourse, the Reinassance saw a shift in focus where the assumed function of language teachers became to “help students discriminate between the tastes of the educated and the uneducated classes” (Crowley 36). Educational literacy policies in historical continuity with this model of differentiation and organization into hierarchies of peoples into degrees of intelligence and humanity aggravates the inequalities that limit subaltern communities’ “access to and interconnection with the surrounding dominant community” (Menezes de Souza 159).

For Giroux, it is in the context of school where students learn to connect their understanding of literacy with knowledge and their sense of self. Ian Hacking expresses this idea as the categorization of people under a specific type of intelligence that results in a hierarchy always connected to the emergence of a “new kind of literacy” (317). As
Crowley points, “any rhetorical theory that is successful enough to be taught in school will necessarily reflect the dominant subjectivity of its era” (33). This is how different models of literacy help create, reproduce, or transform “ideologies for, and of, everyday life” (Bloome and Green 27). An approach to composition connected “to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged, and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition” (Giroux, “Literacy” 2) fosters an ideology of individualism where the acquisition of literacy is “an individual responsibility constrained by the cultural, social, and economic capital one can individually employ” (Bloome and Green 28). As pointed out by Henry Giroux, “illiteracy” is “a form of cultural hegemony” (in Mulcahy 8). The key concern for my exploration at the intersection of RCL and cultural studies is the possibility of countering this form of cultural hegemony that may still haunt our academic landscape. Such countering approach in relation to the politics of knowledge making is at the core of the work of Jamaican neo-Marxist critic, Stuart Hall.

Hall’s understanding of the social use of the term of “Culture” as an ideological shorthand of “high” culture, is crucial in demystifying the autonomous model of language and literacy. His theory represented a counterpoint to the theories of classical Marxism that conceptualized social structures, culture, and ideology as mirror images of economic relations. Instead, Hall conceptualized culture and ideology as structural mechanisms structured in the sense making practices of everyday. Educational and religious institutions, sate and independent media, and even folklore, are spaces where hegemony is constructed actively by consent, rather than being just being passively endured. Challenging traditional conceptions of domination this way, Hall sought to
abandon paternalist conceptions and recognize that a culture other than Culture was already transformative of politics (Procter 14), and instead met “people where they are” (Hall, “Introducing NLR” 1). Rather than a fixed entity embodied in material products, culture is what Raymond Williams understands as a “particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values” (57). This “social” definition of culture directed the attention of research to a semiotic and moral sphere in constant contestation, a discursive domain of “preferred readings” which Hall called “the everyday knowledge of social structures, of ‘how things work for all practical purposes” (“Encoding and Decoding” 118).

For the novel discipline of cultural studies rallied around Hall’s approach, sensemaking practices were not fixed by a one-way process that creates a message, but it is determined by the ideological context of whoever is “decoding” on the other end. Rather than a structure of false-conscious, “ideology” for Hall was made up by these “mental frameworks” that determined the “articulation” of meaning (“The problem of Ideology” 25-26). Culture in this perspective is the site of conflict where diverse articulations struggle to come about, “meaning is always a social production, a practice. The world has to be made to mean” (“The Rediscovery” 63). The value of Hall’s for an ideological literacy approach is the characterization of non-hegemonic culture in an active process of resistance and appropriation of representation systems. Further, this active process bears on identity formation, which implies a conceptualization of identity as culturally constituted, and as such, dynamic and multi-layered, rather than a fixed essence. The premise of non hegemonic cultures as competing with, rather than
passively subjected to high culture, represent a tremendous potential for literacy pedagogies that avoid a deficit-oriented model.

This focus on the politics of representation in the conceptualization of ideology and culture represents a productive kernel of connections between rhetoric and cultural studies. Hall’s notion of mental frameworks as a field of ideological struggle aligns with Clifford Geertz’s own semiotic approach to ideology. For Geertz, culture is a “fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (145), for which he uses the metaphor of “webs of significance,” and ideology is the imaginative mediation of those patterns, “maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience” (220). Like Hall, Geertz approach to ideology sought to avoid a view of ideology as deceit (210) in the hope to encompass the realm of representation that Geertz saw as lacking in contemporary theories, resulting in a notion of ideology “as systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings” (207). Rather than requiring mastering of a neutral tool, language practices required an ethical orientation on networks “of framing intentions and cultural meanings” (Greenblatt 15). It is worth noting though, as critics like Dominick LaCapra have pointed, that Geertz’s notion of ideology ends up relying on a hierarchical binary between ideology and science articulated on a conception of objectivity (Geertz 230-233) that risks the reproduction of a deficit model.

Geertz’s developmental bias can be made up by stressing the focus of the rhetorical model he directly draws from. His semiotic account of culture and ideology is based on Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical approach to social acts and relations, which also conceptualizes language, broadly conceived, as structuring and restructuring “charts of
meaning” used to navigate social interaction. However, while Geertz’s rendering of ideology leaves a space open to a deficit-based conceptualization where ideological webs of significance ought to be corrected by “scientific analysis” (232), Burke stresses that “Charts of meaning are not ‘right’ or ‘wrong’—they are approximations to the truth” (Burke, The Philosophy 108). These “interpretive networks” (Permanence and Change 75) where the struggle over what makes life meaningful takes place, is referred to by Burke as “orientations” (George 30).

For Burke, an orientation is a “social structure of meanings by which the individual forms himself” (Burke, The Philosophy 108) in the context of a community, the “communicative equipment” of a “system of cooperation” (Rueckert 36). Burke stresses the linguistic character of these interpretive networks. Orientations are literally determined by their style—form—, interpretive “vocabularies,” stylized “strategic answers” to “size up the situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude toward them” (On Symbols 77). These charts of meaning set the ground, the “given situation” where we acknowledge “what properly goes with what” (George and Selzer 103). For Burke, this determines language as a situated occurrence, “We discern situational patterns by means of the particular vocabulary of the cultural group into which we are born. Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally moulded) which select certain relationships as meaningful” (Burke, Permanence 35).

By linking the contested terrain of ideology to meaning making rather than solely to economic structures, Burke intended to account for a reality as constructed by language, that is, an account of language as symbolic action. He referred to this
approach as a “dramatistic” account to language (“Words as Deeds” 147), “because it approaches language in terms of action” (“Words as Deeds” 147). The emphasis on human linguistic practices as a drama sought to debunk, among other things, the scientist orientation that saw it as happening in a vacuum. For Burke, a dramatistic approach entail its constitution as an act always tied to the scene of its performance. Hence, more than a mere descriptor of reality, language is a means to act upon our social reality through “the sharing of sympathies and purposes, the doing of acts in common” (*Permanence* 250); “To call a man a friend or an enemy is *per se* to suggest a program of action with regard to him” (*Permanence* 177). In this sense, language is grounded on an incipient realm of preparation for action, “attitude being an incipient act” (*A Rhetoric* 42), a cue to act on reality through language “Action requires programs—programs require vocabulary. . . . In naming . . . we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in the attitudes there are the cues of behavior” (*Attitudes* 4). According to Bygrave, ideology is this ground, “the point of personal mediation between the realms of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action” (*Attitudes* 394). Ideologies are strategies to be actualized in social interacion, and so they function to “maintain something permanent through flux, while at the same time they must adapt themselves to specific changes of material provided by flux” (in Bygrave 83).

According to Ann George, Burke’s dramatistic approach implies both a linguistic as well as a social turn. Orientation schemes imply that people find their position in relation to the “linguistic texture into which [they] are born” (*Permanence* 36) and select whether certain relationships are meaningful, but also “formulate still other relationships” (*On Symbols* 131) from within that textual fabric. It is through the adherence or
refutation of these patterns that the self is posited, “The individual’s identity is formed by reference to his membership in a group” (Burke, *The Philosophy* 306). Like Hall’s anti-essentialist conception of the self (Garner and Hancock), Burke’s theory implies an understanding of identity as multi-layered, “*In this complex world, one is never member of merely one ‘corporation’*” (*The Philosophy* 307). The epistemological model of the self focused on “an objective world of common experience” (Cahoone) shifts to a cultural semiotic model where identity is an ongoing process dispersed across webs of significance. Much like culture, identity is a social arena in contestation where attitudes become actualized and transformed through textual configurations.

Consequently, Burke defines the positing of subjectivity as a poiesis of the self, “Life itself is a poem in the sense that, in the course of living, we gradually erect a structure of relationships about us in conformity with our interests” (*Permanence* 254). This construction of the self is always already ethical, since symbolic action relies on ideological predilections, “Poetry is ethical. . . . The ethical shapes our selection of means. It shapes our structures of orientation, while these in turn shape the perceptions of the individuals born within the orientation” (*Permanence and Change* 250). It is a composing of the public and private self. However, unlike the an epistemological understanding of self construction that entails the uncovering of an individual essence, a training of sorts in ready-made subjectivities, Burke’s poiesis of the self is what Dunne calls a “phronetic *teche,*** an ethico-political mode “of interacting with others in the material world” (Yeoman 93) in a constant process of becoming.
As pointed by George, the implications of Burke’s theory go beyond a model of language practices as processes, since it stresses symbolic action as a way in which we “are socialized into inhabiting certain kinds of orientations and identities,” which is to say, it “is the stuff our lives are made of.” This “unmarked” (George) structuring and restructuring of the rules by which we guide our behavior presupposes a pedagogical function behind rhetorical engagement, which is why Burke urged for the need of a “pedagogy of critical reflection” (in George), an educational program to interrogate the normalization of “competition, ambition, and, ultimately, violence” (George) of capitalist societies. As George points, this is a pedagogy set directly against pedagogies of domination enacted through colonial institutions. The ultimate goal of Burke’s pedagogy was the formation of “propounders of new meanings,” educators able to “cultivate the arts of translation and inducement” which envision civic alternatives and engage in “the responsibility for collectively re-creating society” (George).

George’s characterization of Burke’s critical, civic pedagogies, lead me to make a connection with the emphasis put by the escuelita Zapatista on the imperative to recompose through pedagogical intervention colonial schemes of orientation which I locate in writing instruction on the ideology of alfabetización. Such counterstatement to pedagogies of domination springs from the experience of Indigenous peoples with state mandated education programs. Like Burke’s pedagogy, the escuelita provides specific rhetorical strategies to enact change (George). However, unlike most critical inquiries, the escuelita Zapatista is a pedagogy tried and tested by overt, unapologetic action, and still in the process of doing work in the world. It is a civic Indigenous praxis of the sort
Burke identified as “mysticism,” a necessary orientation to disrupt injustice. Like in Burke, democracy is, much more than just consensus, it is “a sense of humans’ interdependence” (George). Democracy is a poiesis of intersubjective autonomy that fosters a politics of dignified existence, the recognition of the greatness and value of ourselves and life.
CHAPTER TWO

TOWARDS A PUY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

On January 1st, 1994, in preparation to gain membership into “modernity” as an
“advanced” nation through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), México
had just undergone profound policy changes designed to provide a legal basis to abolish
communal land holdings. The implementation of such policies sought to dismantle
agrarian economy and society on the grounds that communal landholding was “un
anacronismo que impedía el progreso económico de las zonas rurales” (Ouweneel 109;
“an anachronism which hindered economic progress in rural areas”). Being communal
stewardship of the land central to the sustenance and continuance of Indigenous
community life, the privatization of land tenure threatened to completely disrupt the
relationship of entire communities with their source of spiritual and material subsistence,
abolishing a communal system which has been central to the Indigenous way of being
in the world for ages.

Only just two years earlier, in 1992, before the Zapatista decided to organize a
military unit to fight for the right to land, health, and education, the living conditions in
the Maya territory of the Chiapas Highland were particularly precarious. As detailed in a
text published by the Zapatista movement that year, the state of Chiapas had the
highest mortality and malnutrition rate in México, largely as a consequence of activities
related to the exploitation that its rich natural resources had attracted since the Spanish
conquest of America. There, in the highland mountains, on the grounds of a little school
building, men, and women, and children came together to talk, to consult each other,
and to consider if the time was propitious for the insurrection to begin. They came into agreement that the struggle for democracy and justice ought to begin, for “el hambre pasa” (Marcos, “El Viejo Antonio;” “hunger goes away”), but there did not appear to be a way back from the technological psychosis the country was heading to.

The first day of 1994, amid the dark, wee hours of the morning, there came a faceless group of Indigenous rebels wearing balaclavas and bandannas over their faces, shrouded like the mist, honoring the agreement of that early council, an assembly held on the hallowed grounds of a little school building. The military contingent announced their struggle for the emancipation of México, waged to regain autonomy from the predatory orbit of the State. The EZLN, a group that consisted in its majority of Maya Tseltal-, Tsotsil-, Ch’ol and Tojol-ab’al-speaking Originario Nations peoples, claimed a continuity with a 500 year struggle against colonial expansion, from the Spanish conquest of America to present day systems of exploitation of territories, bodies, and cultures. The Mexican State responded by bringing in indiscriminate firepower to the civilian population of Chipas, bombarding civilian sites, making arbitrary arrests, and carrying out summary executions. As long ago as 1994 and ever since, Indigenous communities in the Highland territory of Chiapas have been constant victims of a violent cycle of domination and dependency as a consequence of the series of events that followed the neoliberal reorganization and conquest of their territories, what the Zapatista have characterized as a Global War enacted through a relentless subjugation and elimination of difference. In this so-called “low impact” war, Indigenous peasant communities are the target to be eliminated in order to make a free way of access to the globalized market, a process structured by a centripetal force that seeks
to “homologar todas las lenguas . . . [and] los aspectos culturales” (Marcos, “¿Cuáles son las características;” “homogenize all languages and cultural traits”).

Remarkably, the first days of the uprising, when the extermination of the Zapatista Armed Forces seemed inevitable, grassroots civil organizations emerged across the country opposing the attack that the Mexican army had mounted on the Zapatista civilian communities. This civic unfolding of a public consciousness around the Chiapas struggle for land and democracy forced the Mexican state to stop the fire and seek a political solution. The General Command in charge of the Zapatista army recognized that the active manifestation of the “sociedad civil,” that “masa informe que no responde a una organización política en términos clásicos” (Marcos, “Marcos a Fox;” “shapeless mass that does not owe allegiance to any political organization in classical terms”), prevented the armed confrontation from escalating. The powerful enactment of citizenship that México witnessed during those early days of 1994 forced both the government and the Zapatista communities to construct an alternative path towards the pursuit of justice and peace.

However, the peace talks that followed this new revolutionary spirit did not make any significant progress, among other things, because of a crucial difference between the cultural schemes of orientation of both parties. As the Zapatista soon learned, the Mexican political class could not interpret the space of the negotiations outside of the logic of “clientelismo,” which interpreted the talks as a transaction of rewards and political power, “Nos decían: ‘nos arreglamos, pero tú y yo. Tú qué quieres, ¿tierras?, pues te doy tanto’” (Marcos, “Marcos a Fox;” “they would tell us, ‘we can reach an agreement, but just you and I. What is it that you want, some plots of land? I can give
you so and so”). As Jeff Conant points out, the impossibility of reaching an agreement was embedded in a profound lack of attention from the part of the Mexican political class to “cultural differences” (184). The Zapatista noticed that the only public with which they could share a truly dialogical and dialectical space was constituted by the sociedad civil, “Lo que nosotros hemos esperado, y seguimos esperando, es que la sociedad civil consiga algo . . . tan indefinido como ella misma, un mundo nuevo” (Marcos, “El diálogo regresó;” “What we have hoped for, and still are, is for the sociedad civil to accomplish something as inchoate as itself, a new world”). For the Zapatista, this “moral uprising” of the sociedad civil, as Carlos Monsiváis called it (Marcos, “Marcos a Fox”), was a call to hold a communal assembly responding to an ill-defined situation and pursuing insight into future possibilities. As some of the Mestizo commanders of the Zapatista army acknowledged, this humble disposition to listen deeply and assess the urgency to intervene a rhetorical situation, “es lo que nos habían legado [to the Mestizo Zapatista] las comunidades indígenas del EZLN: hablar y escuchar la historia” (Marcos, “Marcos a Fox;” “is the legacy of the Indigenous communities of the EZLN to the Mestizo Zapatista: to speak and listening to History”).

In order to arrange the assembly with the sociedad civil, the Zapatista communities laid out a physical space on their territory, still surrounded by the Mexican Army. The place was intended to become a permanent site of encounter between the Zapatista movement with the society at large, a space for communal assembly on Indigenous lands. This site eventually became the model for the Zapatista regional centers of the autonomous civilian municipalities, or “Caracoles”—plural for both “snail” and “conch shell” in Spanish. As the Caracoles origin narrative goes, it was a Tojol-ab’al
military leader, Comandante Tacho, who taught the Mestiza command of the Zapatista Armed Forces the metaphorical connection between the conch and the practice of encounter, dialogue, and agreement, “A spiral with no beginning or end. . . . The [Caracol] conch was the place of the encuentro, of dialogue, of the transition,” of the quest (Marcos, Our Word 128). For Marisa Belausteguigoitia, the Zapatista autonomous territories of the Caracoles became zones of pedagogical intervention where Indigenous knowledge systems informing the local histories of the community transformed the reality of the Zapatista struggle. The Caracoles hold a “uso particular de los registros del tiempo y el espacio” (329; “unique use of the registers of time and space”) where the then largely Mestizo movement of the Zapatista Armed Forces was “contaminated” and “reeducated” by the Indigenous voices that mandated the insurgence at the break of the new year of 1994. As the sociedad civil prepared to enter the Zapatista territories for the first time after the uprising, the Caracoles set a symbolic and material space that unfolded back into the heart of the deepest part of México, the Indigenous heritage of the country that had been pushed aside to make way for a commodified new world order.

Whereas Chapter One explored the epistemic borders and fissures of Western thought through which interparadigmatic relationships might loom up, in this chapter, I explore a culturally responsive Indigenous research methodology rooted on the Zapatista Maya paradigm of the conch shell, the “caracol” or “puy,” in Tseltal-Tsotsil. This chapter draws upon the metaphorical anchor of puy to promote a model that approaches the research process as a call to assemble in council responding to an intensely urgent situation which requires the invention of new ways of being in the world.
This approach to a methodology of encounter, dialogue, and accord, conceives of research as the enactment of a coalitional consciousness of non-Western and Western paradigms mediated by a third-space, an intercultural logic where radical co-presence begins to unfold. In opposition to colonial politics of social organization that privilege Western modes of inscription and critical thinking, the rhetorics of puy broadens our conception of reading and writing to include multimodal modes of inscription that cultivate the sustenance and continuance of community life. I formulate the guiding principles of puy methodology as follows: “k’op,” ethical awareness of language’s function in mediating traditional and incipient patterns of coexistence; “pasel,” observance of research as a process of consultation to reach agreements that set forth commitments; and “laja” enactment of intersubjectivity through a respect for the research participants and the community’s equality of expertise.

Puy’s research ethos is guided by the lenses of “critical imagination” and “strategic contemplation” that Jacquelin Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch distill from feminist practices in the field of rhetoric and composition. In order to embrace Royster and Kirsch’s approach as part of puy methodology this chapter asks: how do we render the work and lives of the Zapatista meaningfully, honoring their traditions? How do we adopt their vantage point, the look “para escuchar”—“that listens”—and not “para imponer”—“that dictates”—, the look, that “por muy lejos que estén la una y el otro, se pregunta, se interroga” (Marcos, “Ellos y nosotros;” “no matter how far apart she from he, the other, they are, there’s asking, there’s querying”)? How do we listen to and bear witness to the way they frame the context of their symbolic actions? How can we render what we listen relevant for our context? How do the rhetorical actions of the Zapatistas
speak to us, to our field, to our lived experienced? How do we respond to them, and what new possibilities emerge in that space of contemplation, dialogue, and agreement?

**The Origin of Puy: Research as Encounter, Dialogue, and Accord**

In the central highlands region of Chiapas, “puy” is a Tseltal-Tsotsil Maya term that refers to a local variety of freshwater snail. It is also the name given to the Zapatista regional centers of the autonomous civilian municipalities. On account of the metonymic contiguity of the snail to its shell, *puy* also refers to the act of summoning people into council by sounding the conch, “Con el caracol también se llamaba al colectivo, para que la palabra fuera de uno a otro y pudiera nacer el acuerdo” (Marcos, “Chiapas: la treceava . . . Primera parte”; “With the conch the community was summoned, so that the word traveled through the land, and accord could come about”). The revelatory power of connecting the conch shell to the practice of gathering in council is ubiquitous in Maya intellectual tradition, from the Preclassic period—Gucumatz, the ideal mythic type of the *Popol Vuj* or “Book of the Council” from which Maya culture is claimed to be derived, is represented as a conch shell or a snail—to the contemporary reality of Maya communities in Chiapas—Andrés Aubry describes how local parishioners attending mass arrive at “la celebración litúrgica dibujando las espirales de un inmenso caracol que se va formando en torno al altar” (Aubry; “the worship ceremony walking in the spiral pattern of a conch shell around the altar”). The space of the council, which for the Classic Maya was embodied by the *popol naj*, or “community hall,” was from their perspective a “escuela de la comunidad” (Hernández Díaz 27; “community school”) where issues about life, work, and culture are discussed and learned together. As pointed by Belaustegui-goitía, the main anchor of this pedagogical space rests on the
principle of equality of worth, so the disposition of a space as *puy* functions to actively challenge the disparaging attitudes the Zapatista communities experienced in their first encounters with the political class and the civil society.

In this dissertation, I propose to adopt the Maya principle of *puy* as the anchor for a methodology that approaches research as encounter, dialogue, and accord. This framework offers a model sensitive to the experience of Zapatista communities with researchers that seem to be only “interested in advancing their own careers without any benefit for the movements themselves” (Oikonomakis 6). Adopting the logic of an assembly enables an approach where researchers and participants assume themselves as summoned to perform the sacred function of joint shaping of life, a dialectical discursive exchange where new structures of power, knowledge, and being emerge, “*El Caracol es un principio de vida*” (Bolom Pale 74; “The conch shell is a principle of life”). In this way, research is brought closer to Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s ideal of cognitive justice, the structuring of “interknowledge,” through making “*interconexiones continuas y dinámicas*” (182; “dynamic and continuous interconnections”). Accordingly, my adoption of *puy* as a research principle responds to my interest in engaging in a culturally responsive Indigenous research methodology to decolonize damage- and deficit-centered methodologies that perpetuate what Chilisa identifies as “existing structures of domination” (142), a colonial logic that discredits, ignores, and denies Indigenous epistemologies by placing them “in direct opposition to Western ones” (Brayboy et al. 428). Instead, a *puy* informed research creates a dialogical and dialectical space of knowledge production in which community-based wise action makes its way into the dominant institutions on equal footing.
Research as encounter, dialogue, and accord implies engaging in what Bryan MacKinley Jones Brayboy calls “serious listening,” a practice that Tseltal-Tsotsil paradigms describe as the “apertura de una mirada y de una escucha” (Bolom Pale 137n25; “widening of one’s view and listening”) seeking to initiate intercultural dialogical and dialectical relationships. Reciprocal appropriation in the research process is often suppressed by a diagnostic perspective that assumes “an examining gaze” (Anker and Felski 4) establishing a one-way relationship “directed toward mastery over mute objects, brute things, that do not reveal themselves in words, that do not comment on themselves” (Bakhtin 351). The logic of puy disrupts this marginalization by requiring the sanctification of the space of research through the practice of silence, or slamalil k’inal. In Tseltal tradition, slamalil k’inal is a disposition that fosters a state of connectedness with the environment, an orientation through which the researcher assumes herself first of all as a person speaking to another. For the Zapatistas, disrupting the gaze that dictates and instead taking up the other’s perspective is a way of querying, a questioning where respect for difference is born, “Mirar es una forma de preguntar, decimos nosotros, nosotras las zapatistas” (Marcos, “Las miradas;” “Looking is a way of asking, so we, the Zapatista, say”). This practice of looking-listening is instrumental for agency to come about. Silence is the first word, the calm where emergent worlds are to be shaped through the word, for in the darkness of ill-defined predicaments one might not know “qué sigue pero sí sabemos que los pasos que siguen no los podemos decidir nosotros, . . . tenemos que escuchar otras voces y necesitamos que esas otras voces se escuchen entre ellas” (“Intervención de Marcos” 323; “what to do, but surely one cannot decide on one’s own what the steps moving forward will be, we have to listen to
other voices and those other voices need to listen to each other”).

**The Two Orientations of Puy’s Spiral**

“This is the account of how all was in suspense, all calm, in silence; all motionless, still, and the expanse of the sky was empty. . . . Then came the word. Tepeu and Gucumatz came together in the darkness, in the night, and Tepeu and Gucumatz talked together. They talked then, discussing and deliberating; they agreed, they united their words and their thoughts. . . . So it was, in truth, that they created the earth.”

—*Popol Wuj*

Although the translation of the epigraph to this section from the Maya K’iche’ points to a similarity of traits between the *Popol Wuj* with Western cosmogonic narratives, it is important to highlight that the founding principle from where the earth arose in Maya intellectual tradition is not nothingness or emptiness, but silence. In this Indigenous paradigm, the shaping of dignified existence depends on the calm expectation that precedes the word of accord in the council, a harmony that allows perspectives and affects to be expressed, and come together as one. The spiralic orientation of puy requires the sanctification of the council through silence, a respectful attendance to the others’ difference. The silence before the arrival of the word is a transitional opening to an “otro paradigma distinto a lo transitado” (Bolom Pale 19n2; “other, different paradigm from the one that has been trodden”). It represents a liminal space that, much like Heidegger’s conception of boundary, is where “something begins its essential unfolding” (in Klapcsik 168). For Anna Blume, it was this symbolic quality that made the snail shell in Maya thought the perfect metaphor for the concept of zero, as the conch stands for “a
home built by the accumulated secretions of a gastropod that after death leaves its exoskeleton for others to inhabit” (Blume 77). The foundational stillness of the space and time of puy made the symbol of the conch shell the iconic representation of the concept of zero in Maya paradigms, as it came to stand for “a space held open for transition” (Blume 76).

Like other cyclical Indigenous research methodologies, puy disrupts the linear conception of time and space of some Western paradigms. However, more than a “circular cultural ontology” like that of Sarah Amira de la Garza’s Four Seasons of ethnography (154), the spiral of puy points to a logic of overlapping where situations and events do not stand in isolation but, rather, build on, and often seem to collapse into, each other (see fig. 1). The shape of puy does not represent a time of repetition, but the coincidence of present occurrences with past and future ones, emphasizing instead the fact that “transitions are never wholly new beginnings but always building on what has happened before” (Bellini 105). By the same token, a spatial orientation grounded on puy understands that no situation is grounded on vacant soil but, rather, it is always already rooted on the past and always already unfolding into the future. Therefore, puy research model seeks to engage in a respectful positioning on researched territories, abandoning the linearity of the myth of progress and acknowledging the presence of other ways of knowing sharing the world and time with us. The main emphasis is that researchers must reflect on the relationality of their practices in terms of accountability to the researched community, undertaking research that is relevant and meaningful, and that addresses the exclusionary and oppressive power relations articulated in damage- and deficit-centered research models. Unlike the positivist logic where scientific
progress describes a linear trajectory that suggests a point of departure from a foundational emptiness, the spiral shape of *puy* emerges from the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges where it stands, so it is accountable for listening to all the voices, like in the spatial and temporal disposition of a council.

Tenejapa Tseltal philosopher Xuno López Intzín describes the non-linear quality of *puy* as a two-directional spiral. The first move, from the margins of *puy*, is a move toward the heart, or *xcha’ sujtesel o’tan*—Tenejapa Tseltal for “going back to the heart again”—, a move enacted by the Zapatistas against the acculturation imposed through colonization. This return to the heart has implied for Maya scholars an ethical
consideration of the roots of their ancestry “nuestra ancestralidad” (López Intzín 16; “our ancestral quality”), and it surfaces in the performance of an intersubjective and autonomous identity within their research practice in which they emphasize the connections of “lo personal en relación con la comunidad” (López Intzín 16; “individuality in relation with the community”). Xcha’ sujtesel o’tan is a recognition of the stories that Indigenous communities have “tejido a lo largo y ancho del tiempo” (López Intzín 16; “woven across the length and breadth of time”). For Bolom Pale, this move—“t’abesel ta o’ntonal,” Huixtán Tsotsil for “to cause it to arrive in the heart”—is the recognition of “estar en la vida como tsotsil” (Chanubtasel-p’ijbtasel 115; “being in life as a Tsotsil”), an exercise that highlights positionality in a place-responsive manner, that is, in a manner that is conscious of the presence of other actors. The space of research is then a site of unfolding tension between the researcher and the participants’ cultural and material territories.

The spiral of puy also coils towards the exterior, as the assembly constitutes a space for the revision of structures, and the invention of future possibilities. This movement from the core toward the margins is identified by López Intzín as xwaychinel lum k’inal—“envisioning of the world’s becoming.” Xwaychinel lum k’inal is the enactment of the imaginative rewriting of unjust power relations, the unfolding of puy that reaches out to the exteriority of “los primeros sueños o soñares novedosos” (Bolom Pale n2, 19; “early dreams or novel dreaming”) in order to foresee “nuestros mundos de vida digna posible” (López Intzín 16; “our worlds of possible dignified existence”). The upward spiral of puy towards the world outside is represented in the call of the Zapatista to the civil society to reach an accord with the Indigenous communities. Whereas xcha’
sujtesel o’tan is a downward spiral in the periphery pointing towards the roots of the territory where we stand, xwaychinel lum k’inal is an upward spiral springing from the center, a creative force in outward direction that opens up the possibility of rewriting the world collectively, delving in boundaries that unfold into new worlds to transform unjust situations (see fig. 2).

The two-way helix of puy is a metaphorical research orientation that emphasizes the need to nurture a responsible positionality in a world of agency. It is a simultaneous move going back to the word of our root, and reaching out to the global community. The enacting of this research positionality makes possible the ethos of democratic social life where the transvaluation of values takes place. Coming together in the space of the

Figure 2. Votán: Puy’s two-way spiral. Grey right downward spiral representing “going back to the heart again”—at the bottom, Yucatecan-Chólan logogram for “uol,” “heart, soul, will.” The black left upward spiral represents the “envisioning of the world’s becoming”—on top, Yucatecan-Chólan logogram for “tan,” “center, surface, front.” Together, “uol-tan” (or “votán”) denotes “the inmost heart,’ or ‘heart of the expanse’” (Thomas 222). Adapted from Martha J. Macri and Gabrielle Vail, The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, vol 2., pp. 144, 151.
assembly is “el entrarse en el corazón . . . y el salir del corazón para andar por el mundo” (“Chiapas: la treceava . . . Primera parte;” “making one’s way into the heart and stepping out of the heart to walk around the world”).

**The Roots of Puy**

The ethos of puy research disrupts research paradigms set out to discover generalizable knowledge, and instead proposes what Huixtán Tsotsil scholar Manuel Bolom Pale refers to as the weaving and restructuring of knowledge, that is, the plotting of a strategic, practical wisdom in response to pressing matters. As its reference to encounter, dialogue, and accord suggests, puy involves a moral orientation that stresses research in connection “a los hechos, al lenguaje . . . , y la intersubjetividad” (Bolom Pale 78; “to actions, language, and intersubjectivity”). In this sense, puy is a paradigm that points to a theoretical disposition towards inquiry—a framework that recognizes mutual connectedness among social actors and the rhetorical make-up of reality—as well as an ethical approach—the ideal of an emancipatory work in the world with a committed sense of complex power dynamics facing marginalized groups.

In a puy research approach, community- and academy-based inquirers are summoned to perform the sacred work of the assembly. Therefore, the basis for validity within this framework begins with the assumption of the researcher as a speaker that engages seriously with the meaning-making practices of participants. Knowledge is the restructuring of both the researcher and the participants’ frames of orientation into a common strategic, practical wise action to intervene in a site of conflict. Unlike methodologies that assume academy-based frameworks serve to cast a diagnostic gaze on community issues, puy focuses in the transformation of the researcher’s
theoretical assumptions and sense of ethical responsibility for the territory that nurtures our work and daily life in academy. Encounter, dialogue, and accord involves three principles that, like the root of a plant, anchor and nourish a puy research model, (1) laja, or “intersubjectivity;” (2) k’op, or “language-struggle;” and (3) pasel, or “action.” These principles will be the basis of this dissertation to approach the traditions of the voices and perspectives that we will study.

**Laja: Intersubjectivity**

A puy methodology acknowledges the principle of equality in plurality as a necessary condition to reach a genuine agreement-in-difference in the space of the council. This implies stressing that research is not a practice to be enacted “por uno mismo” (Bolom Pale 137n25; “on one’s own”). The Tojol-ab’al Maya concept of “laja” expresses this idea as a “leveling up” of individual opinions that results in the structuring of a collective conscious, “el acuerdo refleja y manifiesta la voluntad consciente de todos nosotros” (Lenkersdorf 20; “accord reveals and expresses the conscious will of all of us”). Much like the the way feminist work done in the field of rhetoric focus on “balancing [of] multiple interpretations” and a “seeking [of] multiple viewpoints” (Bizzell x), the structuring of laja power relations implies a dialogical and a dialectical practice even in the imaginative relation established across time and geography in historiographic and / or archival research. Within the confines of puy, the space and time of dialogue, encounter, and accord, research participants are “rhetorical inquirers” on their own right.

In the dialogical and dialectical context of laja, research becomes the weaving and re-structuring of cultural dispositions. A laja approach entails attentive noticing of other’s ways of being in the world, that is, as Elenore Long points about the foundations
of any rhetorical art, it requires paying serious attention to the cultural dispositions of others “to learn from them and . . . venture one’s own response” (20). The ethical implications of this practice align with the relational accountability that Chilisa identifies at the basis of postcolonial Indigenous research paradigms. Research in this guise is a practice where new patterns of social relations emerge and, as is often the case, the researcher is largely responsible for how reciprocal or oppressive these new structures are actualized. For the Zapatistas, this sort of ethical behavior is implicit in the function *puy* has to connect multiple perspectives, as it constitutes a gateway “para entrarse a las comunidades . . . para recordarnos que debemos velar y estar pendientes de la cabalidad de los mundos que pueblan el mundo” (Marcos, “Chiapas: la treceava . . . Tercera parte”; “through which one gains entrance into the communities to be reminded that we have to be vigilant and safeguard the many worlds that populate the world”). Adopting this disposition of serious listening transforms the diagnostic gaze that dictates into a look that understands the worth of participants, which is why, like the space of the council, research becomes a site of pedagogical intervention where everyone learns from one another. As Tsotsil Maya paradigms teach us, this process of mutual learning following the intersubjective logic of *puy* is where true dialogue takes place, as “cada uno tiene un turno de hablar y de escuchar, . . . comprender el rasgo cultural, de esta manera posibilita generar nuevos saberes” (Bolom Pale 88; “everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen, to understand the cultural trait, which is the way new knowledge has the possibility to emerge”).

*Laja*-informed research focuses on the connections and commonalities of researchers and participants to shape a common heart. Like postcolonial Indigenous
frameworks that rely on the quality of “fairness” to avoid becoming “a form of marginalization or a way of silencing” (Chilisa 150), puy relies on laja to make visible the perspectives and the voices of the research participants. As a methodology that hopes to counter monologic perspectives, the spiral of puy coils toward the roots anchored to a cultural substrate that predates the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. As Guillermo Bonfil Batalla points, this deep cultural layer is often subordinated to dominant cultural paradigms, but it is patent in subaltern urban and rural cultural practices. Acknowledging these paradigms often excluded from academia will allow this study to establish dialectical and reciprocal knowledge-making practices in accord with the particular schemes of orientation of the voices we study. In order to achieve this, laja dictates the space of the assembly, the site of research, to be sanctified through silence, the slamalil k’inal at the origin of puy and of the primeval word to decenter dominant methodologies and lay the ground for interknowledge to appear.

**K’op: Language**

In Tseltal-Tsotsil Maya language, k’op is a word that refers simultaneously to the concept of “language” / “word,” and “struggle” / “conflict.” The overlapping of these two senses highlights the agonistic function of dialogue in the space of the assembly, not in opposition to a rhetoric of cooperation, but as a willingness to risk one’s self assumptions “to take appropriate responsibility for [one’s] position in the world” (Kastely 17). In this sense, puy research that relies on the principle of k’op aligns with Kenneth Walker’s characterization of deliberation as a practice that enables democracy on account of its bringing together “desirable difference and disruptive social groups as political resources to reflect and renew commitments to core values, identities, and
actions” (182). Researchers in this context embrace the conditions of action inherent at the heart of encounter and dialogue, the knowledge-making practices that take place in an intersubjective space setting the ground “for hesitation and resistance that produces new modes of relating” (Springgay and Truman 1). As Bolom Pale points, situating oneself in a cultural territory is a practice to be assimilated “con el conflicto” (137; “through conflict”). The notion of language-struggle in the principle of k’op highlights the conflict inherent in the symbolic configuration of reality, a practice entangled “with problems of injustice and inadvertent injury” (Kastely 6), and therefore, needing for research protocols committed primarily and foremost with justice.

As a principle highlighting the role of dialogue in the joint shaping of life, k’op directs our attention to the ways in which language is situated historically and ideologically, and how it constitutes a fabric where traditions, values, and beliefs are interwoven. The reality of k’op becomes in puy a legitimate object of inquiry, so it directs our attention to what Kenneth Burke characterized as “charts of meaning,” webs of significance that we actualize in our social interactions through “the sharing of sympathies and purposes, the doing of acts in common” (Permanence 250). For Burke, language is grounded on this realm of potential action, the common places that prompt us to act on reality, “Action requires programs—programs require vocabulary. . . . In naming . . . we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in the attitudes there are the cues of behavior” (Attitudes 4). Therefore, a puy methodology facilitates inquiries that generate knowledge of the cultural dispositions mediating social relations, rather than finding generalizable truths about human affairs.

A k’op research orientation recognizes the word that is born in the assembly as
the kernel which bears the cultural potential to lay out novel social territories. This entails thinking about research as “witnessing” somebody else’s life, a principle that Royster and Kirsch call “strategic contemplation” (23). As Amalia con R, a Tseltal Zapatista points, k’op “nace en nuestros corazones . . . y se realiza a través de la acción” (Xchel Atletl Pájaro Colibrí; “is born in our hearts and it is carried out through action”). In this sense, the principle of k’op acknowledges research as an ethical practice of active intervention with a material impact on the lives of the participants and the researcher. In its dealings with the rhetorical ontology of language, k’op demands from the researcher an openness to the potential transvaluation of her values contained in dealing with new vocabularies of action. As new vocabularies create new connections and realities, researchers must engage in an paradigmatic listening in which we recognize that those vocabularies stand for strategies with which marginalized groups have negotiated their lives in the midst of colonization, so they bear a valuable potential in our own daily quest towards decolonization. As we open to embrace the fracturing of our perspectives though the word of the assembly, k’op enables us to enact the perspective by incongruity that Burke prescribed as a critical heuristics to reorient the vocabularies and so “promote reinterpretation” (George 43) and novel cues for more just ways of being in the world.

**Pasel: Action**

The focus of puy on the invention and revision of vocabularies of action entails an ethical standard that supports and promotes social change, finding validity in the coherence research has with everyday life practices. *Pasel* is a Tseltal-Tsotsil Maya term that designates “making” but also “performing” and “acting as something.” As a
culturally relevant method informed by Zapatista paradigms, pasel is concerned with an accounting of research as a call to perform transformative action. Conceptually, pasel implies “ch’uunel”—usually translated as “obeying,” but which encompasses both “honoring” and “credence.” For Bolom Pale, pasel implies a deeper, nuanced understanding of the participant’s perspective, and a sharing of the cultural dispositions that make up her individual and collective identities, “Pasel significa . . . plantearse una mirada, es compartir la palabra” (Bolom Pale 90; “Pasel means considering for oneself a look, it is to share the word). Ch’uunel usually refers to the responsibility a prominent position implies, the duty to abide to the decisions of the community and the observance of their execution. Like the agreements reached at the heart of the council, the outcomes of puy research involve ch’uunel towards the structures of power and being in the world created together with the participants.

The principle of pasel in a a puy methodology finds resonance in the approach to action research that John Elliott developed in the 1970s. Elliott founded his approach on the rhetorical perspectives of both Aristotle and Gadamer, so his design is also based on identifying strategies of practical knowledge from the disciplinary context of rhetoric and composition. However, although pasel is also a practice committed to social change, as a decolonial research methodology, pasel stresses the need to disrupt any potential deficit- and damage-centered practices in the enactment of research. Therefore, unlike action research that focuses on the function of the researcher as bringing “insight” to the participants’ “tacit knowledge” (Somekh 6), pasel encourages researchers to reflect on and transform the frames of orientation that guide their practices through the participants and the community’s insights. More than adopting the
role of facilitator or consultant in a position of leadership, *pasel* focuses on opening up academic paradigms to the decolonial practices of the participants. Additionally, this entails nurturing reflexivity practices that continually revise the accountability we as academy based intellectuals owe to the communities we research.

Action research from the culturally relevant category of *pasel* means that research is not an epistemic work that privileges abstract reflexion, but rather a commitment to take responsibility for the experiences that research sets into place, “hacer la experiencia indica obtener algo en el caminar” (Bolom Pale 90; “enacting experience means getting something as one walks”). Walking, for the Zapatista, is a form of speaking and writing, a way in which we inscribe the imprint of life-giving practices on the world. This implies a responsibility for leaving a footprint that generations to come will bear witness to. In the context of this dissertation, walking will imply gaining insights into a pedagogical practice that can be translated into the implementation of a writing curriculum in terms of encounter, dialogue, and accord. That is the way in which I will transform this study into a life-giving practice, carrying it out to have an impact on the world. As Bolom Pale points, embracing the mandate of the council allows inquiry to germinate from the heart, “La verdad se da en el lenguaje y en los hechos, en la plática y se guarda en los corazones como una huella” (93; “Truth springs up from language and from action, from dialogue and it is kept in the hearts like a footprint”).

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*Puy* research methodology articulates data collection methods and ethical practices predicated on the principles of encounter, dialogue, and accord as embodied by the
metaphor of the conch shell. Like many of the intercultural practices mediated by a "pensamiento fronterizo" (Walsh 56; “border thought”) where reciprocal appropriation is enacted, the principle of “accord”—literally “coming together with one heart”—involves a productive tension that results in a common perspective whose elements are impossible to isolate discreetly. Pensamiento fronterizo is what Chilisa, theorizing on decolonial research paradigms, identifies as third-space methodologies, in-between sites where “dominant Western methodologies are decentered and productive ways are found for Western and Indigenous methodologies to be performed together” (Le Grange and Mika 509). Third-space methodologies seek to disrupt the imaginaries that homogenize and fix Indigenous culture and identity (Medina-Ramírez 131) by reducing them “a meras piezas de museo o curiosidades para turistas” (Le Bot 13; “to mere museum exhibits or tourist attractions”). Therefore, the purpose of third-space frameworks is to open up Western thought to Indigenous paradigms and pave the way to a coalitional consciousness, a “diasporic migration in both consciousness and politics, performed to ensure that ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations be enacted in the everyday, political sphere of culture” (Sandoval 62). As Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, Indigenous thought offers the possibility for a “total reinvención de la sociedad dominante” (59; “a total reinvention of dominant society”). In this “Indigenization” of academia, Indigenous peoples’ “values, principles, and modes of organization and behavior” are combined with our paradigms and ultimately incorporated into “the larger system of structures and processes that make up university itself” (Alfred 88).

Indigenization implies taking decolonization seriously enough to go beyond a mere transformation of minds and seeking to contribute in earnest to the survivance that the
Indigenous communities enact against settler colonialism.

As a culturally responsive Indigenous research methodology mediated by 
*pensamiento fronterizo*, the overall purpose of *puy* research is to facilitate an 
intercultural dialogue that disrupts the extraction-assimilation logic of settler colonialism 
(Cfr. Tuck and McKenzie) by encouraging honest and observant listening. The 
imaginative joint shaping of the world into the space and time of the council implies 
honoring and giving credence to academy- and community-based imaginaries where 
difference is cared for, a “mundo donde quepan muchos mundos, donde quepan todos 
los mundos” (Marcos, “7 piezas;” “a world where many worlds coexist, where every 
world coexist”). Echoing the question asked by the commander of the EZLN, 
*Comandante* Moisés, when announcing the pedagogical project of the *escuelita* 
Zapatista in 2013, in this dissertation I wonder, “¿cómo será de este país y de este 
mundo si nos organizáramos con los demás herman@s indígenas, y también con los 
herman@s no indígenas?” (Moisés; “What would this country and this world be like if we 
were to come together with the rest of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and with our 
non-Indigenous brothers and sisters as well?”).

So it is that this study was gathered together, to wind its way down toward the 
heart of the council, where words and thoughts unite before the break of dawn. So it will 
be, in truth, that the work of honoring, walking the word of the Zapatista will be made 
perfect.

*Ta ch’ux-oc. Qu’yx nohin-tah / Then be it so. Let the silence be replenished* 

*(Popol Wuj).*
They say here that our ancestors said that the first word of every story is the silence that precedes the actualization of speech.

There used to be here an account we all knew, the story of a country caught in a war between the State and drug trafficking organizations. The violence of that war ravaged all four sides, four corners of the country, but here, in the territory where I now stand, it reached incomprehensible levels of violence. This story still continues, only there is no longer a place to see it, and we speak of it as if of a time long gone: los años de la violencia, when sudden gusts of machine gun bullets brought the heart of our community to a standstill. They still ripple, still hum, on this land here where I now stand still.

Amid this war, farther south from Juárez, in the colonized territory of Highland Chiapas, one cold misty morning tens of thousands of Maya Tseltal-, Tsotsil-, Ch’ol and Tojol-ab’al-speaking Originario Nations peoples, the Zapatista, marched in complete silence. Women and men walked through a light rain, all the way from their communities, to five different Colonial cities, their faces covered in accordance with their millinery mores and customs. Since the movement had announced for that day an upcoming message, the “word”, from the Zapatista, the press and everybody watching expected that at some point a delegation or the leadership of the Zapatista armed forces would give a speech. Instead, the tens of thousands of women and men continued walking, climbed across an improvised stage in front of a Mexican and a Zapatista flag,
raised their left fist in the air, and continued walking, until they disappeared into the indomitable jungles and mountains of Highland Chiapas.

That night, the general command of the Zapatista issued a communiqué saying, “Did you listen? It is the sound of your world falling down. It is the sound of our world growing back” (Marcos “¿Escucharon?”).

When Mariana Mora, a scholar from the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social asked a Zapatista man from Altamirano about the meaning of the march, the true man responded, “To us, speaking is done by walking. And speaking, which is also our walking, can be done in silence. Our word isn’t just done by a few, it is in all of us, all the communities, not just the authorities. That is what [autonomía] is, and that is how we propose to move history” (Mora 3).

In this chapter, I will consider the theoretical implications of the Zapatista Maya conception of embodied, spatial symbolic action. Since the “¿Escucharon” communiqué that provided the context for the Zapatista demonstration was presented as the opening text of the preparatory materials for the first level of the escuelita Zapatista, I consider this exploration a necessary step enabling escuelita candidates to successfully grasp the curricular experience of the course. Whereas the disciplinary conversations of RCL have only very recently expressed an interest on the material-spatial dimensions of language (cfr. Ríos), the theoretical sophistication connecting language, embodiment, and sovereignty in Zapatista paradigms is rooted on a long predated Maya intellectual tradition. The exploration in this chapter is then, first and foremost, a necessary gesture towards decolonial cognitive justice.

Here, I will explore the ways in which the Zapatista understanding of embodied
literacy overlaps with Kenenth Burke’s conception of symbolic action, a critical-rhetorical mode of agency envisioning alternatives to oppressive schemes of orientation. Exploring this connection will help us to understand the Zapatistas theoretical and methodological framework for civic education as providing a mode of critical agency through what Burke calls “arts of translation and inducement” (Burke, *Permanence* 272). I will ascribe to the Zapatistas a notion of symbolic action revolving around the understanding of cultural transformation as a process of the composition of an autonomous-collective self oriented towards dignified coexistence. The motivation behind this exploration is advancing the emancipatory interests of the Zapatista movement, as it will embody Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy methodology of “listening seriously” (428) and Royster and Kirsch’s exercise of “critical imagination” (21).

I will argue that the Zapatistas’ conception of k’op—“word-struggle”—holds a view of language that is similar to contemporary conceptions of rhetoric, where the role of the arts of language is central to address existing injustices. In contemporary Maya intellectual tradition, k’op is inextricably tied to listening—ayel—, a connection which stresses an understanding of deliberation—k’ajk’al k’op, “the torching of the word”—as only possible through accommodating difference. In this paradigm, writing or “ts’ib,” refers to the patterns inscribed when enacting the commitments set forth through the practice of deliberation. The conception of language that I ascribe to the Zapatistas articulates an understanding of the escuelita as an “ethical-poetic-‘mystic’” pedagogy informed by “a view of humans and their relation to the universe and each other based on metaboliological ethics that identify action as the central human purpose” (George 86). Since deliberation requires that speakers situate themselves on novel cultural-rhetorical
situations, I argue for an understanding of the Zapatistas' literacies as an enactment of *k’asesel*—“translation-contagion”—, a spinning together of familiar and novel frames of orientation through the dialogical spiral of puy. The hope for this chapter is that accounting for “*k’oponel-ts’ibuyel*” as a Zapatista conception of literacy will open RCL pedagogical practices to a dialogical reconfiguration of our commitments to the democratization of the writing classroom and our inquiry practices.

**Rooted Inscriptions, Decires Fuera de Lugar, and Buen Vivir**

As discussed in Chapter One, the construct of alfabetización supported by the institution of studia humanitatis is a technology of domination that inscribes (in)humanity on racialized bodies. Literacy is a marker of humanity that circumscribes and fixes knowledge to specific bodies, under “the ‘I think’ we can read ‘others do not think’, and behind the ‘I am’ it is possible to locate the philosophical justification for the idea that ‘others are not” (Maldonado-Torres 106). Alfabetización pedagogies see epistemic rationality as “*una actividad ligada a la lectura y al libro*” (Mignolo, “Decires” 16). As Bent Flyjberg points, the uncritical dismissal of ethico-political knowledges has rendered social sciences “controlling, repressive, and legitimating” (62). For this reason, I argue that a productive critical civic pedagogy should offer a theoretical alternative that fractures the traditional conception of knowledge as well as the modes of inscription traditionally favored for its production. As Mignolo has rightly pointed, an ethico-political account of knowledge has long being a domain within the field of classical rhetorical theory (“Decires” 16).

Alfabetización pedagogies hide their dehumanizing function under the guise of a “scientific” objectivity that sees language as a tool of unproblematic access, a claim that,
as Samuel A. Chambers points, implies the existence of an autonomous subject that can instrumentalize language (96). However, as discussed in Chapter One, language is always a situated occurrence, as one makes out the possibilities of symbolic action "by means of the particular vocabulary of the cultural group into which we are born" (Burke, *Permanence* 35). The “social texture” into which we are born as symbol using beings is not just an epistemic archive from which we unproblematically, consciously draw language for our everyday transactions, but socially given, complex networks (re)constructed and negotiated in our daily interaction with others. Burke’s conception of socially situated symbolic users is aligned with social-spatial research perspectives on literacy that recognize writing and reading as always “value-and-belief-laden practices” (Gee et al. 3). As shown in Chapter One, being rooted on situated charts of meaning, literacies are inextricably tied with social identities, as subjectivities are “formed by reference to [our] membership in a group” (Burke, *The Philosophy* 306). New Literacy Studies also see the configurations of the self in relation to others as a mediated by language practices, as evident in Gee famously description of literacies as situated “ways of being in the world” (Gee et al. 3). Therefore, identities are constituted linguistically, and, given language inherent hierarchical nature, they are constituted hierarchically. As hierarchies and multiple memberships collide, identity is constantly negotiated through rhetorical exchange.

According to Ann George, Burke’s rhetorical model of the self implies that identity formation is a practice contained within and structured by language’s meaning-making practices across peoples. Collective and individual ways of being in the world are the ongoing result of a composing of the self through affective, moral, and corporeal
networks that are “beyond all possibilities of charting” (Burke, *Permanence* 238). The situated nature of language makes intercultural dialogue all the more difficult, as the schemes of orientation drawn from our different cultural allegiances, given that they are at the core of the constitution of our selves, are rendered invisible through constant use and taken to be part of a "natural" order.

Building on those same premises, though from a different intellectual tradition, Walter Mignolo gives an enlightening account of the clash of cultural allegiances in the context of the Spanish colonial rule. Drawing from Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, Mignolo discusses the Aymara conception of language as a spatial practice, comparing it to the surface of the ground, and implying a multilayered constitution below that surface. Consequently, the speaker’s “soil,” the linguistic texture that mediates their social interactions, rests on an unconscious, cultural “subsoil” constituted by “el hábito y la costumbre,” and as such, similarly to Burke’s assertion, well beyond any possibility of comprehensively charting by language users. Mignolo connects Ortega y Gasset’s account of speech to Argentinian Anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch’s conception of language and thought as “rooted” practices. Thus, language germinates not only on the subsoil of habit and tradition, but on the collective memories and practical knowledges of the community. Mignolo’s conceptualization of language imagines speakers “planted” on the world, a conception aligned with the implications of the model of literacy as a mode “of being” in the world, or as Kusch puts it, a “‘estar-de-pie’ o instalado en el mundo” (Zagari 22). As Sebastian Purcell has pointed about the ancient Náhuatl people, this notion of thinking would have us think of knowledge as a “rooted” practice. Rooted knowledges, both in Purcell and Mignolo’s account means being planted on an ethical
way of being in the world, a literacy they both referred to as “good life.” This idea of “buena vida” as a historical horizon is a theoretical category favored by (Latin) American scholars as a cultural alternative to the power relations enabled by coloniality of power (cfr. Astudillo Banegas). This way of being “well” in the world is aware of its own situatedness, acting through a “memoria del espacio” (“Decires” 24), that is, it is firmly rooted on the subsoil which constitutes the cultural territory. In the Aymara tradition, rooted knowing and speaking is “waliquíwa”—“be well” (Mignolo, “Decires” 23), and in Tseltal Maya tradition, an ethical orientation on the territory is referred to as “lekil kuxlejal,” a practice enacted by weaving respectful dialogue in the space of the assembly.

Like Street, Mignolo recognizes too a technological model of literacy—oriented towards “la incorporación y al control de lo ajeno.” (“Decires” 24)—, a model of language denying its situatedness and seeking to impose its own mode of inscription as a form of “uprooted,” authoritative literacy that he calls “decires ‘fuera de lugar’” (22). For Mignolo, this colonial scheme of orientation articulates a “semiosis colonial” (23), a space where the rooted literacies of Indigenous peoples clash with colonial uprooted literacies in a war of “control, adaptación, oposición, resistencia” (23). Like the silent march of the Zapatista, a demonstration showing their ethical way of being in the world against the backdrop of the Mexican State war against criminal organizations whose schemes of orientation are uprooted from the cultural funds that sustain life through mutual respect of recognition of each other’s greatness.
According to Kenneth Burke, one of the most productive rhetorical strategies aiming at envisioning alternative cultural institutions is the disruption of unproductive schemes of orientation through the process of “perspective by incongruity.” Perspective by incongruity is a rhetorical maneuver that seeks to intervene schemes orientation by interrogating the cultural allegiances of an intended audience. This rhetorical intervention implies a restructuring of semiotic textures through the recognition of the interstices where they can be reoriented, an operation that takes a sensibility known in rhetoric as kairos. Perspective by incongruity can be set into motion by means of cultural “translation,” the integration of a new set of meanings without noticeably disrupting the audience’s cultural orientation—as an illustration, George refers to Burke’s proposal of “‘translating’ the Marxist symbol of ‘the worker’ (not a term middle-class Americans identify with) into the American symbol of ‘the people’ (a term that resonates within America’s founding documents” (51). However, the process of translation is not an unproblematic mobilization of meanings, but what we might call a “transterritorialization of vocabularies,” or a “transplantation of words” (Permanence 109) into uncommon soil that will generate a productive ambiguity opening the possibility of semiotic restructuring, or, a perspective by incongruity.

For Burke, the function of perspective by incongruity, to translate schemes of orientation across cultures, is similar to that of a “homeopathic cure,” in the sense that, it “must bear notable affinities with the disease” (in George 68). Burke’s analogy of translation with the workings of disease, aligns with the Tseltal Maya conception of
“k’asesel,” a term referring both to “translation” and “contagion.” Interestingly enough, one of the Mestizo military leaders uses this metaphorical anchor of k’asesel to describe the process of “indianización” (Marcos, El sueño 133) of the Zapatista Armed Forces. As the rooted literacies of the Indigenous communities increasingly took over the urban Marxist-Leninist movement, “los jóvenes indígenas que entraban en la montaña, y que tenían que aprender medicina, comunicaciones, carpintería, todo lo que necesita un ejército para mantenerse, los mandábamos a la ciudad y con ellos mandábamos el virus” (Marcos, El sueño 133). “Defeat” is another term with which the commanding officer expands the meaning of “contagion,” as it is an extension of the sense of an outside agent breaking the defenses of an organism. However, Burke’s analogy with homeopathy could imply a diagnostic quality inherent in the process of perspective by incongruity, since it entails the need of an expert “engaged in the scrutiny” of defects “not readily or automatically apparent to a nonspecialist perspective” (Anker and Felski 4), or a rhetor “exceptionally gifted in the arts of translation and conciliation” (Burke in George 50). In contrast, k’asesel implies translation by means of contact with an “impious” agent, an openness to be defeated by close contact with an Other different from us. Whereas perspective by incongruity is often seen as a conscious, individual strategy (cfr. George; Dubriwny; Rosteck and Leff), that is, as a critical mode of agency or “planned incongruency,” k’asesel describes a practice of surrender needing trustful observance and participation as a constituent in a vast web of significance.

In the same vein, Mignolo describes the Indigenization of the Zapatista Armed Forces by describing it as a “double translation.” The spreading of the movement by close contact between differently situated cultural agents entailed not only a process of
transparent integration of new meanings, but a two-way transmission that constituted the transformation of both Mestizo and Indigenous Zapatistas. This rhetorical maneuver constituted for Mignolo a “theoretical revolution” (*The Darker Side* 214) that, rather than considering the Mestizo Zapatistas as the sole agents of emancipation, identifies a fracturing of colonial schemes of orientation by Indigenous ways of being in the world rooted on an experience of survivance “built through five hundred years of coloniality” (*The Darker Side* 215). The dialogical and dialectical openness of Indigenous paradigms made translation-contagion possible, preparing the seedbed for the common space of deliberation that for Anthony Faramelli is necessary to enact resistance. Dismantling of oppressive power relations is only possible in that “space where subaltern peoples are able to enter into communication with one another” (88). Whereas Mignolo calls this process of encounter and dialogue a double translation, Faramelli highlights its ecological quality by referring to it as an “assemblage politics.”

In a similar fashion, Acosta identifies the significance of the Zapatista army in the vindication, as a subaltern group, of “their capacity to be understood through their equality as speaking beings” (173). However, although he reaches similar conclusions, Acosta explicitly distances himself from Mignolo’s theorization. Specifically, Acosta takes issue with what he considers a lack of clarity in what constitutes “the reversal of the power of coloniality” and the “ethical and political imaginary” that Mignolo identifies in the Zapatista movement (Acosta 181). For the purposes of this study, I have chosen, without claiming absolute certainty, to ascribe to Mignolo the view that the colonial structure of power is the racial hierarchy that organized the colonial world into “different cultures,” and its reversal, the opening up of a cultural alternative by the Zapatistas.
Although I understand Acosta’s concern with legitimizing a practice of translation that seeks to capture oneself’s own exterior as “difference”—“the West reflecting on itself as Other reflecting on the West” (Acosta 181)—, Mignolo’s double translation signifies a “bi-directional” practice that sets the conditions for what Burke calls “courtship,” the recognition of equality within which the subaltern become “critical thinkers in their own right” (Mignolo, The Darker Side 223).

Acosta also warrants his critique by ascribing to Mignolo a “philological” (186) understanding of language as “coherent, systematized semiotic systems” (186), a charge that as shown in the description of situated knowledge, literacies would be difficult to sustain. Furthermore, Acosta dismissing grammar as “nothing more than an accident of history” (183) overlooks the fact that the contingent structures of language, due to their historical make up, are nothing but situated and as such an aspect that should not be overlooked as a category of analysis. As I have shown in previous chapters, New Literacy Studies and New Rhetorics base their whole methodological and theoretical framework on the premise of language being always already ideological. However, the most compelling reason to refute Acosta has an ethical basis, as one of the critical modes of agency explicitly adopted by contemporary Indigenous scholars is exactly based on the validity of the premise that language is a practice envisioning alternative cultural institutions. Listening to and “scrutinizing” the texture of the “palabra-lengua verdadera” as bilingual scholars, “nuestra lengua de la infancia, que guarda muchos secretos y con la que nos esperan momentos y tiempos de revelación desde adentro” (López Intzín, “Ich’el-ta-muk” 182) has been constantly vindicated as a methodology for decolonial scholarship. Similarly, Manuel Bolom Pale theorizes
translation as a theorization that in and of itself has legitimized his experience as an Indigenous academy based scholar, as it is concerned with language itself “toda vez que permite apreciar la profundidad y la originalidad” of Tsotsil thought (131).

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that Mignolo’s description of the Zapatista’s theoretical revolution as a practice of double-translation takes his cue from the Zapatistas themselves, as they describe the most important shift in their process of transformation as a translation in which “la revolución se transforma en algo esencialmente moral” (Marcos, El sueño 129). For the Mestizo military leadership, translation is best described as a “digestión enriquecida” (El sueño 129), a product of a clash where the Mestizo members of the EZLN became familiar with an Indigenous struggle against colonialism that was centuries old. Describing the Zapatista’s theoretical revolution in terms of translation makes visible the translingual nature of intercultural coalition building, “los verdaderos creadores del zapatismo fueron los traductores, los teóricos del zapatismo” (El sueño 339). Assemblage politics depends on the possibility of this translation not only at a metaphorical level but also, more significantly, as a concrete practice between communities enacting a conjoint communicative experience across linguistic difference and “from the multiplicity of our given social texture” (George and Selzer 99). More than a matter of mutual intelligibility across abstract systems, the double translation of the Zapatistas implied finding a common ground in the soil cultural allegiances, a reciprocal process where meaning is co-created rather than a mere one-way rendition of information into meaningfulness.

As Bolom Pale shows, translation is a process of spinning, jalel, where tension is used productively to weave language with culture and identity. However, k’asesel is not
only the threading of words, but a threading of speech-listening. For Bolom Pale, the weaving of speech-listening, k’opolel ai’el, is the main component of the assembly. Translation seeking agreement and community building, requires attentive listening, a recognition of the “worth” of the interlocutor (Kastely 237). Acknowledging the importance of listening in translation articulates an alternative understanding of perspective by incongruity which disrupts the utilitarian orientation of pedagogical relations seeking command by positioning instructors as alien to and in control of a learning environment. Instead, k’asesel advocates a rooted perspective by incongruity in which speakers-listeners become “sensitive to the instability and flux within a situation” (Kastely 253). This positionality does not seek the instrumentalization of language, but an ethical assumption of the responsibilities inherent in an always already ideological soil.

As Jenny Edbaur points, a model of linguistic action that captures the dynamism of its constituents accounts for discourse as “infecting” and as always already “infected.” In this sense, translation-contagion is a concrete actualization of what Marylin Cooper identifies as “responsible” rhetorical agency, an ethical positioning that resists “the lure of certainty and of matters of fact,” and that is “open to and responsive to the meanings of others” (443). For Arturo Escobar this implies dropping a will to predictibility and control in favor of a disposition to find intelligibility and participation, or as Solé and Goodwin put it, rather than seeking domination, it envisions ways in which we can influence complex systems (in Escobar 15). As academy based intellectuals, our role to enact perspective by incongruency through the arts of translation, implies the weaving of listening-speech that opens Western paradigms to transformation. Listening, delving
into the significance behind the schemes of orientation informing the Zapatista demonstration of silence is an exercise of openness to the contagion-Indigenization of the rooted literacies of the Originario peoples, a respond to the call to participate in the space of the assembly to envision new patterns of dignified co-existence.

Ts’ib as Equipment for Living: Walking-Writing Rooted on the Land

One of the common sense notions in RCL theory that the Zapatista demonstration forces us to interrogate is the autonomous model of literacy where language is an abstract operation removed from action and from the body. A theory of rooted language locates the ecology of literacy in the unconscious, and in habit and tradition, but also in the material space and in the body. This salience of embodiment in composition has been an important premise for sociocultural spatial approaches to discourse. In RCL, the corporeal turn is present in the seminal works of New Rhetoric: Burke’s *Permanence and Change* argued that the body constituted a “point of reference” where persuasion was constructed, a realization that, for Burke, urged us to anchor a theory of ethics on the body (George 64). By centering the body as the ethical axis of symbolic action, Burke sought to counter what he identified to be the disembodied orientation of capitalism, “separation from the land, increased valuing of mental labor, disregard for factory workers’ and miners’ welfare” (George 64). A theory of an embodied ethics hoped to dismantle schemes of orientations commodifying life, which is why Burke praised the Christian tradition of mysticism, as its practitioners acted like rhetors that “grounded ideology in the human body” (George and Selzer 98). This dissolution of the mind-body binary was framed by Burke under the name of “metabiology,” a dialectical relation that creates a third category were both “substances” are woven together. This
means that the body has a creative role that entails ethical choices and a “particular work in the world” (George 68). When the Zapatistas marched to enact silence as their word, they were emphasizing this relationship of speech to the senses, a literacy of listening embedded in the body, and the weaving of speech as symbolic action, a weaving pattern that sets the conditions for the coming of lekil kuxlejal, or good life.

The patterns that result from the weaving of speech regarded in this way are referred to in Maya Tzeltal-Tzotsil as “ts’ib.” Ts’ib is an external actualization of internal attitudes—what Mignolo refers to as “formas de inscripción” (“Decires” 9)—that encompasses speech, writing, weaving, and other practices mediating relationality and the sustenance of lekil kuxlejal, like the inscriptions made in the space of the milpa crop system (Bolom Pale 30). The conception of ts’ib rests on a view of language that is similar to Burke’s theory of symbolic action. Ts’ib refers to the patterns where one can recognize the activity of knowledge and thinking, which in turn constitute the materials necessary to enact a collaborative composing of the lekil kuxlejal. Ultimately, Zapatista civic pedagogies is a ts’ib alfabetización, the instruction of a literacy that sets the seedbed of dignified life by “clearing” a space, and then inscribing the imprint of beenel—“walking,” or in the context of the milpa, “plowing.”

For Paul M. Worley and Rita M. Palacios ts’ib is a means of history recording, a cultural practice of “storing and transmitting knowledge” (22) that enacts “a performance-based sense of citationality where each new articulation . . . in some sense ‘cites’ previous articulations” and that reinforce a sense of community (21). Worley and Palacios use Diana Taylor conception of the “performatic” to analyze ts’ib as a corpus of contemporary Maya literacy practices that are “nondiscursive” (Taylor 6). However, even
though Taylor articulates the performatic as a term that bringing together the ephemeral and the stable, her and Worley and Palacios’ conceptualization of ts’ib as “systems of representation” “embedded” in practices, can lend itself to a classify ts’ib under the category of what Deborah Brandt calls a “strong-text” literacy. Such a model rests on an autonomous conception of literacy that privileges “the logical, literal, message-focused conventions of language-on-its-own” (Brandt 13). This model also focus on the product of literacy rather than on the whole ecosystem, and is closely tied to the positivist conception of language where the text is an instance of “objective” knowledge, “human thought made into object and turned out into the world, coming back around to influence the state of affairs in the world” (Brandt 23). It is also an opposed view to relational paradigms, as it implies the separation of language from experience, the self, and “from action” (Brandt 25). Strong-text models of literacy understand the reading process as “restoring” a connection between textual products with a more direct performance, that is, they see writing as a practice or recording information for later access, like in Worley and Palacios’ understanding of ts’ib. However, whereas hegemonic Western perspectives conceptualize literacy under this guise, ts’ib relies on a Maya conception of that, as seen in Chapter Two, rather than have us conceive literacy as the creation of “banks” of memory, implies a two-way spiral pattern where the imprint of ts’ib is simultaneously connected to the past and tending towards the future.

As an alternative to a strong-text model of literacy, Brandt proposes a view of literacy as “social involvement,” a practice where both language and context are inextricably entangled. This mutual constitution of writing with its means of production implies that context is constructed instead of just being a given, neutral place, and so
writing emerges amid “socially forged conditions of mutual awareness” (30). Meaning, regardless of the material mode of the symbolic act, whether Latin script or walking and plowing, establishes as well as sustains “an ongoing, publicly accomplished sense of ‘what is going on here’ by which meaning can be constituted” (30). While a strong-text model would have us conceptualize material inscription as a representation of a past event, literacy as social involvement frames writing as relying on a “consciousness of intersubjectivity as the basis of reference” (31). A strong-text model of literacy depends on a division between the occurrence of language and its context, given that it is a the mimetic rendition of a referent, whereas ts’ib sees the past as participating of the present and the present, as participating of the future. In this sense, ts’ib is a conjoint poiesis of the world of other-than present bodies, a construction of the very context where writing takes place, and that is oriented toward non-human and human Others, “a thickening history of ‘the we’” (Brandt 32) over new or traditional ways of being in the world. For this reason, rather than anchoring literacy on the metaphor of “record keeping” where knowledge is conceptualized as epistemic—universal, based on analytical rationality, and a means of recording history—, I have chosen to conceptualize ts’ib through a dramatistic lens, that is, as a phronetic technē, an art that is context dependent, based on ethical reasoning, and geared towards political action (Flyvbjerg 57).

As Worley and Palacios point in their visionary work, ts’ib expands the conception of literacy as a technology of inscription to a more expansive view where unsuspected practices, like that of weaving, are regarded as affective-intellectual specialties. For Mignolo this is the process where culture becomes a praxis, an
inscription of “saying” selves on the soil and on the symbolic horizon. However, Mignolo does not mention anything about the Indigenous conceptualization of rooted knowledges as envisioning the future, as we have seen in the concept of puy, or its simultaneous emphasis on a return to the heart and a dreaming about the future. The word that is agreed in the assembly has to materialize in “una práctica” (Bolom Pale 144). This notion of writing as the involvement of the writer with the material of inscription is encapsulated in the Runa Simi term “qillqa” that refers to alphabetical writing but also to carving and embroidering, highlighting an activity that emerges through the engagement of the writer-artisan with a surface. Like qillqa, ts’ib refers to alphabetical writing and to many of the plastic arts, but ts’ib also refers to activities like horticulture and house building. For this reason, Yucatec scholar Pedro Uc Be represents ts’ib with the combined glyph of a footprint on top a cleared hill. Ts’ib is the preparation of the territory for the word, that is “el alimento del alma” (Uc Be), to emerge. Regarding text as always tied to the construction of social interaction, can allow us to pay attention to the kind of power relations that come into being in classrooms organized around the production of strong-texts. Zapatista literacy paradigm conceptualizes writing as mediating the bringing about of life, and as such, as an the indication that someone “is in the word” (“oy xa sk’op”). In this sense, reading is but to entering into a “conversation” by the appreciation of the pattern of dignified coexistence printed by the process of becoming a subject rooted on the territory.

**K’op: The Struggle and the Word**

Zapatista’s sovereignty and emancipation, the two concepts around which the escuelita is organized, rest on the possibility of weaving the collective word-struggle of the
community, “k’op.” Given that autonomy is posited not only as a practice that is self-determined, but also “interdeterminada” (Paoli 369)—self-determined inter-subjectively—the related term “jbahtik” literally means “que todos nosotros actuamos sobre nosotros mismos en el contexto de nuestra interioridad colectiva” (Paoli 370).

Being able to enact the collective word, and its realization as collective work, is what makes a community autonomous, as it is evidence of a space where a collective “heart” emerges. It is in this context that the Caracoles and the Escuelita were born, motivated by the need to reach an accord, to build a common heart with civil society. The move outwards of puy is not only the expression of the desire to be autonomous, but “la objetivación de una memoria histórica y ancestral de nuestro pueblos” (Intzín, “Zapatismo y filosofía” 17). For Fizwater, this is the message of the escuelita, the fact that praxis, the enacting of the word “itself speaks” (11).

In order to understand the Zapatista silent demonstration is important to complement the definition of “k’op” presented in Chapter Two as part of the culturally relevant methodology of this study. As hinted before, k’op is a broad, vast term that encompasses “language,” “word,” or “issue,” but, at the same time, “struggle,” “conflict,” and “revolution” (López K’ana et al., “K’op”). It is the type of thinking that Isabelle Stengers envisions as enacted “in the presence of” (996) others, and as such, deliberation—k ‘ajk’al k’op, “the torching of the word”—is of emergent conflict. The overlapping of k’op as word- with -conflict has its root in an ideological view of language. Conflict is inherent to an active, ideological construction of the social world (Ott and Domenico 242). K’op does not keeps an unproblematic relation to the knowledge it helps create, but is situated, political, and ideological, that is, is a way of symbolically
construct the world.

For Debra Hawhee, shifting our view of language from a conception of an abstract, knowledge keeping system to that of embodied action, does not entail that action excludes knowledge. However, this approach allows us to better frame the complexity of the Zapatistas embodied rhetorics. Burke’s ultimate insight on symbolic action surpasses the binary often attributed to him, the pair nonsymbolic motion/symbolic action. Symbolic action emerges from nonsymbolic motion, which means that one cannot be reduced to the other, but that nonetheless makes both necessary for its constitution. Movement is the ground of “symbolicity.” The constitution of symbolic action is a weaving of motion into culture, “Symbolic action is public, social; but we live and die as individual bodies in the realm of nonsymbolic motion” (Burke 330). This weaving together of the past memory and future envisioning is done in the ongoing presence of the body. Like dancers, Zapatista enacting of k’op acts like symbolic action, that is, “at the very edges of language, at the place where the individual becomes part of a collective” (Hawhee 161).

This is one of the reasons why Burke located ideology in the body, much like the Christian tradition of mysticism use to do (George and Selzer 98). In the end, k’op as word-struggle is the type of perspective by incongruity that Burke saw necessary for change, “If there are radical changes to be made in the State, what metaphor can better guide us than the poetic one” (in George and Selzer 108). As opposed to schemes of orientation that commodify life, a poetic orientation is based on the values of “imagination, community, cooperation” (George and Selzer 108). Burke used to say that the same principles that we apply to a poem can be applied to “a social construct, or a
method of practical action” (in Rueckert 51). This is the perspective that calling the word “struggle” enables: the Zapatista marcha del silencio is an instance of practical, poetic action, a “communicative, sympathetic, propitiatory” (in Rueckert 51) factor aiming at transformation and emancipation. Like Bolom Pale points, a’yel, “listening,” is also k’op. Weaving the word is a process of “speaking-listening.” Like in the case of deliberative democracy, this quality could guide our own teaching practices in the composition classroom: the first move toward dialogue implies a respectful, silent honoring of the commitment we have taken on as instructors with students.

It is possible that the core implications of la marcha del silencio as the inaugural text of the preparatory course of the escuelita is that we have to enter, as instructors, with a disposition of “aprendemos uno del otro” (Bolom Pale 88). “Yip k’op,” “the strength of our word” can only inscribe patterns of ts’ib by a collective integration into one heart. Learning is then not a matter of memorizing, but of enacting the ways of being of the community, the practical action of “el vaivén de la realidad cotidiana” (Bolom Pale 89). Walking, which is also peaking and which inscribes writing—“escribir es caminar . . . , es dejar huella” (Uc Be)—is creating rather than recording the world. The sharing of the word to learn the world implies a translation-contagion that requires courtship, recognizing the worth of the interlocutor and wondering, a willingness to know and to “listen” “j’akel” (Bolom Pale 90). This is how, for the Zapatistas, to walk is to ask, and to ask, is to walk “the world into being” (Sundberg 39). Ts’ib is the path, the way already trodden that signals the way to follow. Reading its signs is to enact the word, and to respect it as mandate, and even if it done silently, leaves behind a new inscription of its
own. Such a path is where sovereignty and survivance bear witness of Indigenous peoplehood. The struggle is the word.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE COMPOSING OF Bats’i vinik antsetik: P’ijubtasel as a Critical-Rhetorical Civic Pedagogy

In 2003, while the world was appalled at an unnatural escalation in gender violence that prompted Amnesty International to declare Chihuahua as “emblematic of the violence against women” (4), the Indigenous Zapatista peoples formalized their struggle for sovereign self-determination with the creation of the “Caracoles,” the seats of the governing bodies of the autonomous municipalities liberated in the first days of the 1994 uprising. Ten years after the Caracoles were born, in 2013, the Zapatistas announced the opening of the escuelita, an educational program on sovereignty and emancipation enacting a pedagogical aiming at disrupting oppressive educational practices of mainstream institutions. Although at the beginning student candidates had expected instruction would take place at a conventional classroom setting, escuelita classes revolved around the reconstruction of conjoint communicative experience that took place in the everyday activities of the Zapatista communities, from the harvesting of corn to the gathering together around the fire during the night.

In Chapter One I have discussed the ways in which an unmarked structuring and restructuring of schemes of orientation constitute a rhetorical civic pedagogy that determines our expressions of conjoint communicative experience. In this chapter I use this conception of rhetorical civic pedagogy to show the ways in which the escuelita functions as a pedagogical intervention concerned with the composing of bats’i winik antsetik, a virtuous public humanity critically situated and envisioning alternatives in
relation to existing pedagogies of domination. In order to do that, I first identify the pedagogies of domination the escuelita sets out to remake. I specifically contextualize this hidden curricula through Rita Segato’s conception of “pedagogías de la crueldad,” a cult of violence that originated in the modern-colonial orientation of criollización. I then explore the escuelita learning intentions and success criteria through the Maya Tzeltal-Tzotsil conception of p’ijubtasel, a civic pedagogy which, unlike mainstream pedagogies, is best understood as preparing a seedbed for germinal autonomy to take root. I argue that the Zapatista escuelita is a p’ijubtasel pedagogy, an educational program designed to intervene injustice via rooted literacies that plant students ethically in the world, stressing the realization of their potential uniqueness by nurturing a disposition toward intersubjective participation.

**Femicide and Alfabetizaciones de la Crueldad**

Drawing from Henry Giroux, Ann George asserts that one of the crucial elements in the constitution of critical civic pedagogies is a methodology providing a profound understanding of how oppressive power relations work. For Bernice Olivas, this sensibility towards injustice is at the core of “place-conscious education,” a pedagogy of “seeing” guided by an effort of situating oneself in the geopolitical histories of “colonization, slavery, and marginalization” (210). Rita Segato exemplifies this spatial sensibility to coloniality by comparing it to the Yoruba based Afro-Brazilian rituals, where participants remove their shoes to “feel” the “soil” underneath their feet (“Critica a la razón”). In the Yoruba ritual, other-than-human potentialities manifest when mediums are “grounded, connected to the earth” (De Wys). For Segato, the body alone can feel the imprint of colonization so (Latin) American scholars should step with our bare foot
on the soil of our reality. Rita’s call is constantly in the back of my mind whenever I have to explain, to myself and others, why after being admitted to a graduate program in the US—a huge sign of social mobilization in México—, my partner and I decided to stay on the Mexican side of the border.

Enacting pedagogies of seeing in Juárez-El Paso demands one takes note of the violent marks colonial schemes of orientation have left at the threshold of our border. At the entrance of one of the busiest point of entry to the US, right below a sign wishing a happy, safe return to one of the safest city in (Ø) America, stands a cross against a pink background, huge nails on it, each of which represents a victim of femicide in the city of Juárez (see fig. 3). There, in 2019, as I made my way to school, Norma Laguna sang a feminist version of a traditional Mexican song “Reloj de campana”(see/listen fig. 4), wearing a black veil over her face as a sign of mourning for her daughter:

![Cruz Rosa en la frontera](image)

Reloj de campana tócame las horas
para que despierten las mujeres todas,
porque si despiertan todas las mujeres
irán recobrando sus grandes poderes.
Reloj de campana tócame de prisa
para que despierten las sacerdotisas:
lá que invoca el cielo, lá que invoca el agua,
lá que invoca fuego, lá que invoca el aire,
lá que lleva ofrendas a su tierra madre,
porque de sus hijas ella necesita
que canten y lancen llenas de contento,
invocando siempre los cuatro elementos. (del Cerro)


As of 2020, the “intolerable killings” reported as “one of the most alarming examples of violence against women” by Amnesty International in 2003 are only on the raise.

Actually, one of my last memories before the pandemic’s stay at home order is that of a group of cyclists steering an empty pink bike by the handlebars, riding up one of the
main avenues of the city. The empty bike stood for the senseless void left by the murder of young feminist activist Isabel Cabanilla. A crack on the otherwise peaceful, clear window pane on this side of the Paso del Norte border.

For Rita Laura Segato, femicides cannot be explained as an individual psychological or even social problematic. They are the sign of a cultural crisis that emerged out of the matrix of “coloniality of power.” Coloniality of power is a global pattern of domination that mediates meaning making practices through the use of the construct of race. It is a realm of mastery, exploitation, and conflict that informs labor, gender and sexuality, authority, and intersubjectivity (Céspedes Arias 120). This pattern of domination establishes a racialized hierarchy where biological and cultural markers determine the position one holds in a scale of humanity. Those at the bottom of such hierarchy do not exist “en ninguna forma relevante o comprensible de ser” (De Sousa Santos, Para descolonizar 12). Racism for modern-colonial critics is not just a categorization of skin color, but a categorization of “humanidad” (Céspedes Arias 120) where non-white, non-male individuals can never aspire to occupy the space of “genuine” public concern, a humanity that would guarantee their most basic rights to safety.

Segato claims that as a result of the racialized nature of coloniality of power, the composition of bourgeois subjectivity in (Latin) America became a process of “criollización” (La guerra 91). The disciplining of criollas subjectivities revolved around the composing of white (or “blanqueado”), pater-familias, male, proprietors—“pater-familias” refers to a complex expression of “heteronormativity” (La guerra 94). Non criolles were relegated to an invisible non-public sphere where the “ideales de la
democracia y de la república” are rendered a mere fiction (Laura, La guerra 98); non-normative subjectivities have no place in modern projects of nation building. In this space outside public concern, historically disenfranchised groups are at the mercy of a high impact form of coloniality which perpetuates the criminal violence of the Conquista, a “conquistualidad del poder” with the complacency of the State (Laura, “La pedagogía de la crueldad”). This criminal sphere and the State’s apathy all over (Latin) America towards femicide legitimizes a symbolic drama where non-male bodies are robbed of their humanity, “destituid[as] de su plenitud ontológica y reducid[as] a cumplir con la función de alter” (La guerra 94).

The everyday coexistence with violence in the conquistualidad del poder requires a very specific cultural force to shape political, economic, and social interaction. This scheme of orientation which legitimizes the ravaging of bodies and territories through dehumanization is what Segato calls “pedagogías de la crueldad” (La guerra 102). Pedagogías de la crueldad are unmarked pedagogies of domination constitutive of criolla subjectivity that “teach” or normalize the objectification and commodification of life at all cost. Non-criollo bodies become a preferred medium of expression in these pedagogies, undergoing the inscription of a “grammar” of violence inflicted on them. This is why for Segato, femicides are embodied expressions of a literacy of violence, a “violencia expresiva” (Segato “La pedagogía”) actualized in a linguistic texture within which empathy ceases to be meaningful.

Pedagogías de la crueldad determined the attitudes of colonial institutions toward vernacular literacies. For Segato, coloniality legitimized as universal the agency and enunciation of male landed gentry, tying forever the notion of linguistic proficiency to
European literacies. The quintessential liberal education stood in direct opposition to Othered intellectual specializations which were pushed to the margins of the public sphere. As pointed in Chapter One, this process of marginalization was anchored on a racialized conception of “humanness” supported by the institution of studia humanitatis (Lucas), as it established the common sense notion that criolla identity, epitomized in the man of letters, was the ultimate station of the human condition. Indeed, from the first grammar books that accompanied the Castilian “Imperio” to the military zeal of the “cruzadas” and “campañas” against analfabetismo, technologies of alfabetización have subjected bodies to a racialized inscription of (in)humanity, a pedagogy of reading and writing that I have called “alfabetizaciones de la crueldad.”

The composing of criollas subjectivities through alfabetizaciones of crueldad is diametrically opposed to schemes of orientation based on relationality, caring, and a rooting on the territory, the sacred, and the community (Segato, La guerra 100). Segato identifies these unmarked civic pedagogies as “contra-pedagogías de la crueldad,” processes of subject formation anchored on the weaving of symbolic textures that mediate relations on the basis of the affects and well-being. These “tecnologías de la sociabilidad” (La guerra 105) are more commonly found in the “vida comunal fuera del Estado” (“Contra el patriarcado”), and have traditionally been enacted as the composing of feminine and Indigenous subjectivities.

Segato’s envisioning of civic contra-pedagogías overlaps with Ann George’s characterization of critical civic pedagogies. Like the pedagogical intervention that, according to George, Burke advocates, Segato calls for the formation of “profesionales de la palabra” educated in the arts of systematization of counter-grammars of cruelty
through a “retórica” and a “vocabulario” of “valor” and the defense of relationality aiming at inter-subjective “felicidad.” As escuelita graduate Quincy Saul points, the escuelita where citizens could be equipped with the ability to envision these technologies of socialization as an alternative to the “femicide machine,” introduced its curricular program in 2013, deep in the Highland mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

**The Death Sentence of Originario Nations Peoples, “Low-Intensity” Wars, and Fincalidad del Poder**

As Sergio González Rodríguez succinctly puts it in *The Femicide Machine*, “The denial of extermination is part of the extermination” (84). Juárez femicides can emerge on a “pacto de silencio y de lealtades mafiosas” (Segato, *Contra-pedagogías* 73) that asserts the total impunity of what Segato calls the “mandato masculino” over the “control del territorio-cuerpo y del cuerpo como índice de un territorio” (*Contra-pedagogías* 49).

Nonetheless, as Segato herself acknowledges, this border is a porous boundary. For the Zapatista, this covenant of silence and impunity is like a wall that shifts its appearance—at times is “como un gran espejo que reproduce la imagen de destrucción y muerte, como si no fuera posible otra cosa. . . . A veces el muro se pinta de agradable y en su superficie aparece un plácido paisaje” (Galeano, “El muro”). The schemes of orientation of alfabetizaciones de la crueldad seek to convince us of the “impenetrable solidez” of that system (“El muro”). The Zapatistas acknowledge that the “método zapatista,” their critical mode of agency is based on a rhetorical strategy that can break the criminal silence that exterminates through impunity. To be able to transform injustice is necessary to understand that “el muro” has not always been there, and that opening a crack on its surface is just enough to venture a quick glance into “todo lo que se podrá
hacer mañana” (“El muro”). As mentioned earlier, this ability to envision an alternative to existing oppressive power relations is a crucial element of critical civic pedagogies.

As escuelita graduate Quincy Saul points, the central lesson of the escuelita is a direct challenge to the political and cultural system that brought about the unchecked violence against women all through the territory of Mexico. After a partial restoration of Indigenous territory during the Mexican war of Revolución the first decade of the twentieth century, the late 80s saw a political reconfiguration of the country that abolished all forms of communal-property-holding. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this political move meant an effective shutting down of collective property that had sustained Indigenous peoples livelihood. For Jan de Vos, in this socioeconomic reconfiguration “el campesino, no únicamente en Mexico y centroamerica sino en toda america latina ya no tiene futuro como tal” (El color de la tierra 34:15-34:25). As the Zapatista announced in their very first communiqués, NAFTA represented “el acta de defunción para los pueblos indígenas de México” (en Zárate Vidal 57). Since the implementation of this reform, economic and security policies in the region have pursued strategies to set up the geopolitical conditions for an “integration” to the global economy, often through military intervention justified as wars on narcotics and organized coups, which have trapped communities in a violent cycle of domination and dependency (Rodríguez Rejas). For the Zapatistas, this reconfiguration is part of a Global War enacted through a constant “conquista de territorios y su reorganización . . . la destrucción del enemigo” (Marcos, “¿Cuáles son las características”) and the administration of that which is subjugated.

The Zapatistas refer to the continuity of neoliberalism with criolla lordship as the
institutionalization of a world *finca* system, an institutionalization of the territory as a property grid to be exploited, with the pursuing of the virtual enslavement of the communities as laborers. Following the colonial pattern of criolla lordship, the space of the finca is also articulated under the scheme of orientation of the mandato de la masculinidad which inscribes its territorial sovereignty on women’s bodies through rape (Hopkins et al.). Even to these days, sexual assault is endorsed in Chiapas under the culturally sanctioned form of the “derecho de pernada” (Moisés and Galeano “Y mientras tanto”) that the owners of the finca can “exercise” on their laborers.

After the 1994 uprising against the imminent extermination of their communities, right in the middle of a round of peace negotiations, the State launched a military offensive on Chiapaneca communities, looking to exterminate the general command of the Zapatista Armed Forces as well as the civilian communities (Gómez Alonso). This counterinsurgency warfare resulted in the detention of alleged Zapatista military leaders, and in the displacement of thousands of families in Chiapas who became “‘desplazados-refugiados’ en su propio país” (Corral C. 52). Carlos Montemayor shows how paramilitary groups—that official documents referred to as “*autodefensas civiles*”—waged a State sanctioned war by burning down houses, farms, and murdering hundreds of Zapatista sympathizers (47). As part of the war strategy, and given the important role of civil society as observers of the most basic human rights, the State pursued a strategy of counter-intelligence which consisted in the delegitimization of the Zapatista movement. The discursive tone was set up by Salinas de Gortari’s racist affirmation that the Zapatista movement was nothing but a small mercenary group that manipulated the local Indigenous populations (Montemayor 48).
What makes the Zapatista escuelita such a remarkable case of critical civic pedagogy is that, due to the fact that they came into being in the context of a struggle for material survival, a literal “low-intensity” war, Zapatistas pedagogies are not only a theoretical methodological innovation, but a concrete instance of a pedagogical intervention on social injustice. Following the logic of puy, the curricular program of the escuelita looks reaches towards the world outside, calling the civil society to share with them in the space of the council and determine the extent to which the commitments made in the early days of their resistance were indeed honored. Its educational program seeks to teach us a cultural alternative envisioned and enacted by the Zapatista peoples, to provide us with the same equipment for living that has enabled them to read the world of capitalism and understand how to dismantle the alfabetizaciones de la crueldad that sustained the coloniality of power.

**Zapatista Survivance: Autonomía-Libertad, Educación, and Alfabetizaciones Originarias**

Not only did the adoption of neoliberalism in México impacted the sphere of economics, but it had a lasting and profound effect over other very significant aspects of social life. As expressed in the first State sponsored mega-project inaugurating this socioeconomic model, neoliberalism is a cultural-political project of “desarrollo,” national sovereignty, and control of transnational borders. Education in this economic-cultural undertaking was explicitly reconfigured as training in work, an oppressive pedagogical approach with which Indigenous communities were very well familiar with (Gómez Lara). The commodification of education follows the same rational of the modern-colonial orientation that sustains the pedagogías de la crueldad, resulting in low impact
oppressive and exploitative pedagogical power relations. State mandated education had arrived to Chiapas in the 30s as part of the wider project of the “Misiones Culturales,” a national project revealingly named after the early religious campaigns that legitimized the Conquista, identifying itself with the assertive zeal with which misioneros taught the Gospel in the Nueva España (Monsivais). Postrevolutionary State education was largely a continuation of a devotion to assimilationist pedagogies. Indigenous peoples, not explicitly recognized in the Constitution as citizens, could only hope to equal rights as long as they became “civilized,” i.e. “alfabetizados.” Indian education in México has been historically a pedagogy of acculturation, an institution aimed at preserving Eurocentric schemes of orientation to the detriment of Originario Nations’ own culture (Gómez Lara 283).

However, even though evangelization was used at the outset of the Conquista as a tool of acculturation (cfr. Turriago Rojas), religious education in the region of Chiapas allowed indigenous communities to preserve their traditional schemes of orientation. As Bolom Pale points, Indigenous paradigms are informed by a dialogical openness to external orientations that is evident in the many syncretic practices of their tradition, and that colonial schemes of orientation, largely based on a will to conquer, tend to describe in terms of defeat. Furthermore, the Diocese of San Cristóbal was deeply influenced by the Catholic Church reforms that brought about the liberation theology movement, and which encouraged the creation of “autochthonous,” popular churches (Harvey 62). These reforms allowed the creation of a vernacular discursive space where, for the first time, Indigenous communities participated openly in public discourse. Although these public spaces became the base of future political actors, the peasant movements that
sprang out as a result of the political climate in (Latin) America fell prey to political clientilism. The access to a form of education that was truly an indigenous education of their own still seemed far out of grasp.

As Tsotsil anthropologist Miguel Sánchez Álvarez points, in order to disrupt the ideological dependency on commodified education, contemporary Maya scholars have been forced to go back to non-dominant pedagogies located in the intimate sphere of the community’s civic life. These unmarked processes of self formation, extend from ways of being in the world that parents pass on to their children, to equipment items for living acquired through holding political and religious positions, and even varied forms of crafts literacies (183). For Bolom Pale, these are affective pedagogical practices that structure schemes of orientation through intergenerational relationality, passed down in the form of rituals by the forefather-mothers of a community (59). As Tsotsil scholar Horacio Gómez Lara claims, traditional indigenous education (ETI) is an unmarked practice consisting of cultural schemes that sustain Indigenous cultures across the country.

A direct consequence of the Zapatista uprising of 1994 was the legitimization of traditional Indigenous civic pedagogies, as the movement made the concern for culturally sustainable and autonomous education one of the central demands of their struggle (Sartorello 41). The drafted document that resulted from the negotiations with the State, the Acuerdos de San Andrés Larráinzar, emphasize the need for an education for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that is simultaneously bilingual and intercultural, and with the ethical commitment of respecting all different Indigenous cultures of Méexico (Consejo Estatal 104). As discussed in Chapter Two, negotiations
were eventually abandoned due to the continuous undermining of these Indigenous demands, as “the dominant institutional matrix has enough capacity to block reformist initiatives directed at expanding the political and social rights of disadvantaged groups” (Gargarella 179).

At the peak of the “low-intensity” military offensive launched against their communities by the State in 2003, Zapatistas constructed the alternative cultural institution of “autonomía” and “libertad.” For Tzeltal philosopher Xuno López Intzín, within this civic core of the Zapatista struggle is the realization of a Maya political and philosophical reconfiguration of life. The autonomous education that the EZLN sought to dismantle pedagogies of domination embedded in the programs of alfabetización. Zapatista realization of autonomía and libertad in the regional centers for the autonomous municipalities profoundly transformed the pedagogical institutions of the region. The result, as Gómez Lara points, was a type of civic education different from both mainstream and traditional Indigenous pedagogies which eventually, inspired the intercultural immersion program of the escuelita Zapatista. The everyday reconstruction of the fabric of relationality that the Zapatista enacted through their civic pedagogies is a “design” of communal life, a cultural alternative to the “ontologías de la separación” (Escobar 27) ravaging the whole country through the unmarked instruction of alfabetizaciones de la crueldad.

The Escuelita Zapatista, Nojptesel-P’ijubtasel, and the Composing of Bats’i Vinik-Antsetik

In 2013, after years of having dropped out of the media spotlight, Zapatistas broke the silence by calling forth the project of the escuelita, a pedagogical intervention of conjoint
communicative experience among all those struggling “desde abajo y a la izquierda.” In keeping with traditional Indigenous education, the escuelita Zapatista took the form of *ich’ k’op mantal*—“receiving the advice”—, through curricular materials written as *testimonios* of a concrete experience with sovereign self-determination. From the beginning it was clear that the testimonios were not to be taken as field materials to be studied, but as the lectures themselves; rather than case studies for the consideration of academic scrutiny, the escuelita hoped to become a seminar where Zapatistas would share their experiences and thus create the conditions where students *with* teachers would learn from each other. The setting of the terms of engagement for the escuelita disrupted the framework of inequality inherent in mainstream pedagogies, an inegalitarian model referred to as “el orden explicador” by Jacques Rancière (*El maestro* 18). The orden explicador is a deficit based model that establishes a power relation where the teacher holds a position of domination over the student by assuming their ignorance. In contrast, the civic pedagogy of the escuelita is based on the reversal of this relation, forcing dominant communities to assume themselves as “ignorant,” resisting in this way the pitfalls of foundationalism and epistemic authoritarianism.

Therefore, even though the escuelita shares in a long tradition of education policy aiming at intercultural dialogue (cfr. Maine and Vrikki), its significance lies in that it is an instance not instituted by academy based educators, thus literally reversing the power relations of domination encouraged by the orden explicador. As escuelita graduate Dylan Eldredge Fitzwater points, one of the most important lessons of the escuelita was to see the Zapatista communities not “as objects of study, but as teachers,” an approach that highlights Indigenous pedagogical sovereignty in a way never seen before. The
escuelita was first and foremost the enactment of an intercultural exercise that reversed Eurocentrism, tackling the oppressive and exclusionary power relations of state-mandated education through a praxis anchored on the premise of equality of intelligence. This is what emancipation in politics looks like for Rancière, “un conjunto de prácticas guiadas por la suposición de que todos somos iguales y por el intento de verificar esta suposición” (“Política, identificación” 145).

**Koltayel: Emancipation According to the Zapatista Maya**

Contrary to pedagogies of domination which typically rely on the composing of individualist subjectivities who relate to the world through control and domination, escuelita pedagogies aim at the construction of collective identities through a process of mutual respect and recognition of all forms of human and other-than-human life. As a composition pedagogy, it aligns with ideological approaches in New Literacy Studies that acknowledge that in writing instruction “we are doing more than simply decoding script, producing essays or writing a proper hand: we are taking on—or resisting—the identities associated with those practices” (Street, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives” 98).

Therefore, just like Cicero’s pedagogical method predicated on the composing of the *vir bonus*, Tseltal-Tsotsil pedagogies are consciously concerned with the fomation of “*bats’i vinik antsetik,*” literally “true men and women,” but which refers to a virtuous mode of public humanity enacted through rooted literacies. However, even though a puy instruction would intersect pedagogies concerned with the constitution of subjectivity (“*paideia*”), it varies crucially in methodology and scope. This divergence might not be readily visible if explored theoretically, as there are at least two large traditions of *paideia* which have been accounted for in the field RCL. One of such traditions can be
identified with a process of formation of normative subjects, while another one is tied to
a subjectivization process aimed at disrupting traditional values (cfr. Atwill).

The main distinction of traditional liberal education and the approach of the
escuelita can be accounted for in the every-day life experience of Indigenous
communities. As shown in Chapter One, traditional humanities instruction is practiced
through a methodology that Bakhtin might have described as “centripetal,” meaning an
process tending to the imposition of order and unification that constrains and simplifies
an otherwise complex and ambiguous reality (cfr. Bakhtin). Tenejapa Tseltal scholar
Juan López-Intzín refers to this process as “monel-k’ajesel,” or “captivation-
domestication,” a pedagogy of domination closely linked with the teaching of Castilian
alfabetización in the Americas. Monel-k’ajesel implies a gradual “transformación o
cambio en el sujeto” through a process of acculturation taught “desde un solo punto de
vista” (López-Intzín 187). This pedagogy of domination stifles alternative pedagogies
based on a logic “de vida y del corazón” (187). As jTatik Antonio Intzín suggests, monel-

Moreover, traditional liberal education is focused on the character of a virtuous
speaker in the active sense (cfr. Gross), a focus which diverges from a literacy
necessitating a true listener carrying out the commitments of the community through
silent concrete praxis. As Wendy B. Sharer states, this approach in rhetoric and
composition is embodied in a “traditional” model that is teacher-centered and “focused
primarily on static, academic modes, and literary ‘taste’” (374). Disrupting pedagogies of
captivity-domestication is a process of emancipation or “koltayel,” a term that encompasses the Zapatista method of decolonization. This emancipation from monel-k’ajtesel actualizes the first move of puy’s spiral, xcha’ sujtesel o’tan, a move back to the heart again that has guided many Indigenous scholars through a work of recovery and reinscription of Indigenous ways of being in the world. As Tseltal scholar Miguel Silvano Jiménez points, ultimately, sujtesel o’tan refers to the restoration of harmony through reconciliation, a reconciliation made possible by enacting “chapbil k’op,” or “accord.”

**Nojptesel-P’ijubtasel: A Puy Teaching Methodology**

Tsotsil people of Huixtán find the process of emancipation to be the result of the composing of Indigenous subjectivity, a process to which they refer to using the term “p’ijubtasel,” which literally means “bringing about someone’s germinal uniqueness” (Paoli 101). P’ijubtasel is often rendered in Spanish under the term “education.” The cornerstone of p’ijubtasel is an emphasis on the nurturing of “uniqueness,” rather than on that of “skill” or “intelligence.” Through considering this potentiality as being part of the student and not to the instructor, this approach disrupts the idea of an ignorant student in need of acquiring unchanging, universal sets of skills. Unlike epistemic approaches to education, knowledge in p’ijubtasel as a structure in constant becoming, “se va reconstruyendo en cada instante” anchored “en el hacer, en la práctica y en la palabra” (121). P’ijubtasel is then a conjoint process of figuring out potential symbolic action within culturally relational maps, emphasizing a literacy (a reading, listening, and enacting) of patterns of communal life within the territory. This acknowledgment begins with a wonderment which opens the sensibility towards “un tejido simbólico significativo de la experiencia frente a lo real, a lo aplicable, a lo visible” (Bolom Pale 91).
Much like other approaches seeking to disrupt the educational model of banking denounced by Freire, p’ijubtasel relies on a paradigm of instruction where facilitators set into motion a process that is enacted by the student. The process in which students gain na’bail, “knowledge,” begins with the process of “nopojibal” (Paoli 120), or “coming near,” which is a gaining of orientation within a given rhetorical situation. Nojpteswanej, the contemporary Maya word for teacher, literally means “the agent who brings someone closer to something.” Instead of instructing or training in the traditional sense, the work of a nojpteswanej is to show the path that leads to the positioning of one’s subjectivity within the relational networks of one territory. Bringing someone closer does not mean “guiding” in the traditional sense, at least not in the sense often used by deficit models of “helping students understand.” Rather, the work of nojpteswanej implies walking alongside students in their path towards the germination of their individual uniqueness. Nopojibal is then a process enacted by the instructor and the students: nojpteswanej “ya yak’ta ilel te snopel” “da a mirar su aproximación o aprendizaje” (Paoli 118), that is, “da testimonio” “abriendo los ojos y trabajando con un solo corazón” (Bolom-Pale 86) so that student’s understanding is closer to na’bail. In turn, the student actively positions herself in relation to the nojteswanej’s ya yak’ta ilel te snopel, their approximation, by asking, “jak’ef” (Bolom Pale 90) and restructuring in setting forth common agreement in a conjoint poiesis.

Unlike hierarchical pedagogies where teachers act as the sole source of knowledge, nopojibal happens as a dialectical-dialogical praxis, xmelet lo’il or “true conversation” (Bolom Pale 88). Xmelet lo’il is different from classical dialectics in that is not a way of arriving at truth by the purification of reason, but the sharing of “rasgos
culturales” that brings collective uniqueness into being. It is, like Kastely’s conception of refutation, a dialogue that moves a person to take “responsibility for its position in the world” (17). Zapatista civic pedagogies are then a situated, experiential methodology where the student makes connections between the uniqueness of the teacher and her own context through trial and error, opening for her new networks and connections (Paoli 120). This dialogical practice rehearses the dynamic of puy, connecting the foundational acts of the ancestors and the envisioning of the future by a new generation (Bolom Pale 95), all in a space of becoming where encounter, dialogue accord (re)create symbolic action.

Furthermore, the possibility of nearing the secret pulse of a community is not solely brought about by the intellect like in traditional liberal education, but in a combined effort through jol and o’nton, that is “con la cabeza y el corazón/con el pensamiento y las emociones” (Pérez-Santiz 28). For Tseltal scholar Xuno López Intzín, finding the secret pulse of dignified life is in fact a labor of “yo’taninel,” that is, of an epistemic “hearting.” Moreover, nearing the ways of being of a community require active and concrete praxis, as the heart, “ot’anil,” is the seat of situated lived experience (Paoli 114; Bolom Pale 93 ), and it is also the soil where the memory of situated lived experience is written. P’ijubtasel is a form of literacy instruction not because it enables one to create an archival artifact containing information, but because it makes sense of appropriate ethical action within semiotic networks, “la racionalidad de una cultura es básicamente su orientación hacia el logro de lo que considera valioso” (Paoli 219). Na’bail, “rationality,” in this paradigm is a virtuous orientation within the subsoil of the territory, so it implies “tending towards,” or “taking a direction” in “a proper manner,”
“bien dirigido hacia la cosa, dirigido con propiedad, con pertinencia” (Paoli 121) in concrete ways with relation to the community.

**Stukelin Sbahik: Sovereign Self-Determination According to the Zapatista Maya**

Similar to rhetorically informed curricula centered on civic engagement, p’ijubtasel is a methodology aiming at sovereign self-determination and emancipation from unjust schemes of orientation. The space brought about by a nojteswanej is a space that opens the “ear” and the “sight” of the student to “smelol,” the sacred ways of being in the world of the community. Smelol, often translated as “secret,” is an invisible, “intangible quality of [Indigenous] identity” (Gossen 108), a story within a story not always readily available to everyone. What hides behind smelol is the logic that charts the way towards Indigenous peoplehood, and it is, as Pedro Pitarch explains, this “sacred path of advice” (95) expressing the ways of the community is structured, agreed upon in the space of the council. P’ijubtasel, as a teaching methodology based on the logic of puy stands as a process helping to reassert Indigenous cultural sovereignty, or “autonomía.” This is why when Zapatista and other Indigenous movements in (Latin) America talk about the right to self-governance, they do not refer to a freedom of exercising political power separated from the State or from any commitments to communal collectivity with a country, but to the right to the continuance of their systems of dignified co-existence. Autonomía involves a communal way of being in the world, or as Scott Lyons puts it, the possibility of “affirmation of peoplehood” (456).

In Tseltal Maya, autonomía or “stukelin sbahik”—literally meaning “embraced collective self-sufficiency”—refers to the state of collective autonomy that “depende en
gran medida de la autonomía de cada uno de sus miembros” (Paoli 102), the realization of each’s individual potentiality. Although a Westernized conception of self-determination might suggest an individualistic process, Zapatistas understand uniqueness relationally: the process of bringing about the student’s potential peoplehood is a labor of the germination of what Lyon calls “specific ethical human relationships” (47), the assertion of a collective heart belonging to everyone. Since bats’i vinik antsetik or virtuous humanity is determined by an ethical orientation in a particular territory, that is, by a phronetic command of kairos, it refers to “una conciencia más clara que los otros de su propio potencial” (Paoli 112) and, at the same time, a humility that recognizes the preeminence of the cultural order of the community. P’ijubtasel brings about autonomy by having students acknowledge the potential agency of one’s unique positionality. This unique potentiality is only fully realized as a relational, responsible agency, and that is what autonomía means for the Zapatista Maya people of Chipas.

Zapatista teachers praxes of p’ijubtasel in the context of the escuelita took the form of a dialogical-dialectical sharing of the instructors’ sovereign ways of being in the world. They were articulations of knowledge-making processes aiming at the emancipation from monel-k’ajtesel, the pedagogies of captivity-domestication. The second grade of the escuelita expressed this idea of critical positionality on the title of a textbook called El Pensamiento crítico frente a la hidra capitalista. The radical praxis of libertad Zapatista that educates on a conception of critical-rhetorical agency infringing “los mandatos supuestamente instituidos por [nuestros madres-padres]” (jMetik Rosa in López Intzín, “Ich’el-ta-muk” 189) offers an insight for rhetorical training that is very
valuable for the field of RCL. The transvaluation of values that for Western scholars is considered “the most challenging and the most democratic” value of democratic social life (Crick 18) is a lived reality in the Zapatistas communities. For the escuelita, autonomía-libertad implies sharing a perspective through enacting a look that wonders. The spaces where publics meet and share testimonios, the “círculo para la convivencia” is the “punto de partida” (Bolom Pale) of puy, the source of knowledge that “se da en el lenguaje y en los hechos, en la plática y se guarda en los corazones como una huella” (Bolom Pale 93). But the germination of this seed is also an act of rupture and shock, of “acalorar el corazón” (Bolom Pale 91). It is, as López Intzin claims, a congregation “en la fogata de la palabra atizada por la misma historia de rebeldías y luchas de largo aliento” (“Zapatismo y filosofía” 17).
CHAPTER FIVE

ZAPATISTA CIVIC PEDAGOGIES AS PASK’OP: PUY CRITICAL-RHETORICAL MAPPING AND DECONQUISTUALIZATION OF ALFABETIZACIONES DE LA CRUELDAD

This chapter is motivated by a desire to further highlight the connections between RCL studies and educational research, and by my adherence to the tenet of pasel, an observance of research as setting forth concrete commitments. As such, it will focus on translating the paradigm of puy into a praxis informing, guiding, and inspiring concrete practices for the writing classroom. A curricula based on the Zapatista Maya paradigm of the conch shell offers a unique opportunity for connecting the goals and rationales of writing-about-writing (WAW) curricular designs—i.e. focused on teaching “writing as a subject of study” (Downs and Wardle 131)—with composition curricula in rhetoric—promoting and incorporating civic engagement (Sharer). The walking into being of collective critical-rhetorical maps is part of a methodology that seeks nearing the class to the goals of a puy writing course through taking part of the “intangible quality” of the k’ínal. It is a sharing of a territorial experience to steer students with teacher affectively and conceptually into “los procesos inasibles del sagrado kuxlejal” (Paoli 116). The purpose of puy mapping is the instruction of literacy from a culturally responsive Zapatista Maya paradigm. It engages actively in the deconquistualization of alfabetización “campaigns,” steering students-teachers near literacies—understood as “equipment for living,” or “nojptesel ta sk’oponel-sts’ibuyel”—in an ethical way.

As a form of cultural geography (Newstead et al.), puy mapping relies on Burke’s conceptualization of frames of orientation, a theory which makes up the basis of Geertz
definition of culture, as mentioned in Chapter One. However, it is important to note from the beginning that the parallels I draw between Zapatista Maya concepts of k’op-ts’ib and theories of RCL studies do not to seek to indicate Indigenous paradigms represent novel additions to our field. Rather, I argue that the most novel theories of RCL are only beginning to near the sophistication of Indigenous paradigms that predate the Conquista and that are practiced in contemporary spaces. Unlike Indigenous paradigms, RCL studies is yet to be able to consistently enact an ethical praxis in the same measure the Maya Zapatista have done for over half a century.

In actuality, this basic tenet is drives the whole purpose of puy critical-rhetorical mapping. It departs from a problematization of the conquistual logic that imagines a territory “not in use,” or “empty.” Disrupting the assumption that only the work of academy based intellectuals makes knowledge spring into existence is a premised on the notion of the nojpteswanej cargo as steering near community knowledge holders, emphasizing sk’oponel-sts’ibuyl as distributed in the territory-community. This methodology neared my work to deconquistual, embodied praxes of civic education already taking shape in my own city, like the social movement of the Perras Bravas Colectiva. Perras is a feminist school of urban art created as an alternative to male dominated pedagogical spaces of art where care, trust, and empathy is prioritized over competitive orientations. The concrete way in which they enact the disruption of the mandato de la masculinidad through a community based civic pedagogy prompted yet another escalofrío epistémológico that guided my mirada by the assumption of “intelligent life” outside the margins of academia. Puy mapping enables this mirada, seeking to verify the supposition of equality of intelligence, and breaking with the cycle
of academic extraction for the sole purpose of individual professional advancement. In this sense, puy mapping is not a work of discovery, but of treading the territory mindfully with our feet well planted on the soil.

Therefore, following this rationale, this chapter will draw the lessons of a culturally responsive contemporary Maya approaches already set into place within the context of the Zapatista pask’op in Highland Chiapas. These initiatives are the “Escuela y Comunidad” certificate of the Universidad Iberoamericana, a program directed at training community based elementary and middle school instructors in Southern and Southeastern México; and the “Milpas Educativas” project steered by the Unión de Maestros de la Nueva Educación para México (UNEM) and the Red de Educación Inductiva Intercultural (REDIIN) as part of an initiative to design culturally relevant curricula in over 48 Indigenous communities in the South region of México. Both “Escuela y Comunidad” and “Milpas Educativas” made use of “collective mapping” workshops, collaborative multimodal critical composition projects in which they surveyed their territory for the local knowledges and languages that feed the everyday life of their communities. The purpose of critical mapping for both this projects was to bring together territory, knowledge, and language under a spiralic paradigm understanding past, present, and future as simultaneous dimensions that feed on to each other. The result of these workshops was intercultural and multilingual teaching and learning materials created “desde el lugar de enunciación y la mirada” of the community (Sartorello 50), materials that were later used by instructors in local schools to facilitate ethical, territorial, and legal literacy classes.

The collective mapping activities of these projects is based on the work of the
Argentinian grass roots organization, Iconoclasistas, who since 2008, use Latin American critical and feminist theory to map oppression and resistance in América. The work of the Iconoclasistas builds on the spatial turn in the Global South lead by the work of critical geography scholars like Milton Santos and Armando Correa da Silva, and femenist decolonial geographers like Diana Lan, Susana Veleda da Silva, and Verónica Gago, among others. Much like Edward Soja in the United States, Milton Santos traced during the 70s a relationship between geography and Marxism (Moreira). As Melgaçao and Prouse point, Santos sought a decolonial version that disrupted “hegemonic geographic thought” (2) framing territory in terms of a neutral space by instead thinking of it as “the result of the historical process and the material and social basis of new human actions’” (17). Space is understood as situated, or as Milton Santos puts it, as “constant living environment” (26). From decolonial feminism, Iconoclasistas use the notion of “cuerpo-territorio” (Cruz Hernández et al. 11) as an axis to facilitate some of their mapping workshops.

According to Iconoclasistas, the purpose of critical mapping is the creation of critical narratives of the territory, situated knowledges out of the experiences the participants bring to their mapping workshops. The knowledges produced within their spaces is not proposed as academic research but, rather, as communal narratives built through collective work. In their workshops, people from the community and who work on it or about the community like writers, researchers, and artists are called forth to participate. The premise of the workshop that everybody has something to share is aligned with the principle of equality of expertise of puy methods. The goals of the Iconoclasistas’ workshops is to render visible the problems and the communal territorial
networks of caring and support, encounter and exchange. As Milton Santos points, the globalization of space is both "perversidad" and "posibilidad" (in Martín-Barbero 10).

**Lok´tayel te Lum K’inal: Puy Critical-Rhetorical Mapping**

Based on the paradigm of puy, I have adapted the critical mapping methodology of Iconoclasistas to create a pedagogy where teacher with students enact a two-way spiral firstly by going back to the heart again ("xcha’ sujtesel o’tan") and then envisioning the world’s becoming (xwaychinel lum k’inal). Puy critical-rhetorical mapping allows exercising positionality in a place-responsive manner in order to envision the becoming of the script of unjust schemes of orientation. Whereas the process of p’ijubtasel refers to a process of identity formation through ethical literacies, lok´tayel te lum k’inal, or puy critical-rhetorical mapping proposes the invention of novel territorial scapes.

This classroom approach is anchored on the perspective by incongruity emerging from the translation-infection of the word “mapping” in Tseltal Maya, “lok’tay.” Lok’tay literal refers to the action of “drawing” and “photographing” but, more significantly, to “las imágenes vívidas del sueño o las visiones premonitorias de la vigilia” (Pitarch et al. 220). Lok’tay is then related to dreaming, a realm that, as pointed by Carl Gustav Jung, makes up symbolic foundations of one’s culture. This overlapping (infection) of the term “photograph” with “dream” highlights the point that in Indigenous literacies, “visuality does not simply refer to the presence or not of illustrations” (de Souza 163), but rather, to interpretation. According to de Souza, this awareness about the partiality of representation is at the core of Indigenous literacies, as they recognize the “dynamic perspectival relationship between the seer and the seen . . . , neither of which are believed to have ‘the whole picture’” (163). This dialogical relationship between the
person enacting the mirada and the scape being looked at is also implicit in place-conscious approaches to education. As Gossen points, smelol, the hidden attributes of Maya identity, surface in both oneiric visions and storytelling (*Four Creations* 12). In the case of puy mapping, I take this sense of “lok’tay” to refer to the upward path of puy, *xwaychinel lum k’inal*, the envisioning of new patterns of dignified co-existence rewriting unjust power relations in the world.

“Lum k’inal,” translated in Chapter Two as “world,” is a composed term comprising a Tseltal paradigm of spatiality. “Lum” refers to the soil, but also to society and even to a whole country. As an adjective it is translated as “civic,” so in the context of critical-rhetorical mapping it refers to a literacy, a “drawing” of “civics.” “K’inal” refers not only to space, but also to time, so it is closer to Bakhtin’s concept of the the “chronotope.” It represents the time-space continuum where the moral sustenance of daily life, lekil kuxlejal, takes place. As pointed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, k’inal refers not only to the physical situation of life, but to the intangible chronotope where existence flows. As the chronotope of lekil kuxlejal, the k’inal is the time-space where collectivities make up “un solo corazón” (Paoli 73). Lekil kuxlejal is not a utopia, in that it is not a place without real existence, but rather the cultural funds that constituted Originario Nations peoplehood for generations until the arrival of the Conquistual scheme of orientation.

As a methodology derived from the Zapatista pask’op, puy mapping explores disjunctures of rhetorical flows on Conquistual schemes of orientation. This “fissures” on the symbolic webs that hold the world system together are what Appadurias identifies as the “building blocks” of “imagined worlds” that “contest and sometimes even subvert the
imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality” (33). The literacies mapped through lok’tayel te lum k’inal are patterns of ts’ib, inscriptions that walk life into being where Conquistuality has commodified life. It interprets these patterns of everyday rhetoric as manifestations of publics orienting themselves ethically within the k’inal, imagining “themselves as actors (or not) through common patterns of public talk” (Rice 18).

**Puy Critical-Rhetorical Mapping as an FYC assignment**

In order to be able to use it in a scaffolding sequence with typical genres in an FYC classroom, puy mapping can be part of the initial stages of a research paper when students are trying to find a research problem. The resulting deliverable will be a multimodal document which can be presented as a research proposal before conducting the literature review. As part of a WAW curricular approach, puy mapping would encourage conversations around the topic of literacy as a construct and its intersections with colonial schemes of orientation. Since it would aim at enacting a critical / cultural studies axiology (cfr. Downs and Wardle), this assignment would encourage civic awareness of schemes of orientation that naturalize the values of dominant groups as universal, and how modes of writing are constructed hierarchically and culturally.

As part of the reading component of this assignment, a puy informed class can read excerpts from Patricia Seed *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World: 1492-1640*, in order to understand traditional cartography as a component of dispossession practices within settler colonialism, so maps in the traditional sense are framed as literacies of cruelty from the Conquest of the Americas, as they constitute a legitimization of dispossession. “Discovery,” in the scheme of orientation of the
Conquista, meant “the establishment of legitimate dominion” (Seed 9). Excerpts from Mignolo’s *The Idea of Latin America* can also be useful to deepen the class’s understanding of the works of the webs of significance sustaining Conquistual schemes of orientation. One of foremost premises of Mignolo can be easily connected to Street’s view of literacy, as Mignolo makes the point that Eurocentrism lurks behind the apparent neutral narrative of discovery that make up traditional charting. From this Eurocentric perspective, America came into being only after European discovery, and thus, it was denied equal standing beside European epistemic traditions. The division into continents that made (Latin) América subservient of America is an implicit premise in cartography, and as such, “a Christian invention” (Mignolo, *The Idea* 29). (Latin) América is then a colonial construct that came about through “conceptual appropriation of the globe” (Mignolo 105), where the perspective of Western ways of being in the world became the “universal” gaze to be cast upon the rest of the entire world. Abandoning this myth of an “empty continent” (Powell 11) enable us to see Originario Nations peoples and their paradigms as co-existing with ours, and relevant for a common historical project.

**Why a workshop?**

One central motivations of the tenet of k’op in puy methodologies is to create the conditions for perspective by incongruity to emerge in the processes of translation-contagious. As I explained in Chapter Four, k’op is both an illustration and a rationale of the principle of incongruity, a view of language as symbolic action rather as solely manifesting through the vocal cords. K’op is the silent expectation of dialogue and the silent enacting of the commitments set forth through the common word. It is also the trail
we leave behind as we tread in the soil of the territory. Although scholarship in the field of rhetoric has theorized on the role of moving bodies in the process of composition (cfr. Ríos; Rice; Anderson; Rhodes), Zapatistas conception of walking as writing highlights an often unseen dimension of embodiment that requires listening from the Other, rather than the active practice of political mobilization we often associate with embodied advocacy. This distinction is important in my scholarship as a deindianized Mexican scholar treading on the soil of Indigenous ways of being in the world, for my responsibility lies in enacting a listening-looking of the patterns of decolonization set already into place, rather than seeing myself as discovering and making a “better use” of seemingly empty use. Whereas the traditional rendering of rhetorical excellence imagines virtuous speaker as an “active” person “tied to virility as a physical act” (Gross 124), the rhetorical excellence driving the process of p’ijubtasel, “k’op,” implies listening bringing about respect, ich’el ta muk, a word translated by Tseltal-Tsotsil scholars as “democracy.”

The embodied, rooted, and intersubjective rhetorics of puy are based on the (re)creation of schemes of orientation where teacher with students realize their unique potentiality collectively as members, researchers, and workers of the living territory. According to María Patricia Pérez Moreno, workshops encourage participant to construct a common “memoria sobre el corazón,” a lok’tayel where they themselves can recognize each other, realizing “que es importante que pensemos nuestro mundo y nuestra cultura” (12). A workshop setting creates the conditions for the classroom to enact the chronotope of puy by emphasizing the connection of learning with embodiment and dialogue. It is a setting focused on concrete action towards social
transformation, which is why it has been one methodology of research preferred in Latin America (Pérez Moreno 96).

Moreover, the focus on embodiment of puy mapping disrupts the Cartesian binary of res cogitans and res extensa, enacting Burke’s theory of the inseparability of symbolic action to embodiment, where humans “are embodied language users” (George 65), participants who enact “subsumed action, cooperation, and communication” (George 68). Embodied composition from the Zapatista Maya perspective means the inscription of language rooted in the heart, that is, symbolic action directed by a moral purpose, rather than by a desire to record or transmit information. As Rita Segato points, the “cuerpo en la calle” (La guerra, 105) is part of a feminine tactic based on “tecnologías de sociabilidad” (105), that politicizes the private sphere, disrupting thus the patriarchal logic that marginalizes non-criollas subjectivities. This is aligned with Rice’s spatial approach to rhetoric and, more significantly, with concrete methodologies of collectives like the Perrás Bravas Colectiva.

0. In preparation of Workshop

Students will be divided into groups of no more than eight people. The workshop can start with a printed map demarcating a territorial scape from the community of the class. The map can be black and white so that color can be later added. Traditional maps can be presented as partial perspectives needing to be completed with the perspectives from the whole class. With the idea of expanding the notion of literacy and at the same time giving access to dominant modes of literacy, critical-rhetorical mapping can revolve around the topic of “Puy Literacies and Conquistual Screens.” The purpose is having teacher with students engage in place conscious pedagogies, where we set out to walk
an nearing the secret pulse of the lum k’inal.

This focus on the rhetorical is the main distinction of puy mapping from the Iconoclasistas’ workshops. Through analysis, the class identifies the ways in which territory is reorganized by hegemonic forces causing what Milton Santos calls an “alienation of space” (Melgaçao and Prouse 18), that is, a transformation “neither locally inspired nor concerned with local destiny” (in Fredrico and de Almeida 69). According to Santos, one of the causes of the alienation of space is facing a space one did not help create and whose history is unknown to us (Amaral 376). The ravaging of territorial communality by extractivism generates “productos y sentidos de vida hechos tejido social territorializado” (Machado Aráoz 146). Ultimately, the goal of these activities is to actively explore research problems for future assignments. However, instead of being looking for “research problems,” a puy workshop enacts a mirada that wonders, looking for the inscription of patterns of dignified co-existence enacted by groups and collectives.

0.1. Selecting a Territorial Scope

Territorial scopes refer to the cartographic scales that will be selected for the assignment. As evidenced by the work of the Iconoclasistas, such scales can cover anything from the human body to the whole globe. Whereas the mapping workshops of the Iconoclasistas can be done in any scale, a puy approach focuses on the mapping of the territory, a place of “pertenencia” as opposed to state-centric narratives that emphasize formation of cities and nations. This can be done framed by Santos’ notion that “Each place is in its own way the world” (in Melgacao and Prouse 2). In order to disrupt the traditional notion of scale as a neutral perspective, puy mapping uses
Santos’ concept of “used territory,” which considers space as “both the result of the historical process and the material and social basis of new human actions” (Melgaçao 17), a concept which aligns with the conception of k’inal as a chronotope. Three different scales can be used as individual assignments or workshops depending on the flexibility of the class. They can also all be done together on a whole period if the focus of the class is completely driven by a puy logic. It is important to stress that scale-jumping in puy cartography is not concerned with the scientificist approach in cartography that sees maps as storage artifacts that contain fixed, transparent representations of space, but rather, they are considered to reflect different types of embodied relationships to space.

**Scale 1: Daily Paths Scapes**

This is a useful scale when thinking about space in relation to embodied experience, and as such engaging with a reflection on the ways rhetorical cartography mediates the scale of the human body and that of our community. Students individually sketch their commuting route, or any time-space path experienced over daily life routine, like going to the church, a shop, or a restaurant. They mark important scapes and their relationship through icons, and the rhetorical (symbolic-embodied) differences of different means of mobilization. Landscapes of colonization found on commuting routes are lost to normalization, as one does not make sense of the city without them. The instructor shares their Daily Path Scape map to illustrate the use of multimodal elements like layouts, icons, links, etc.

**Scale 2: Barrio Scapes**

This scale emphasizes the possibility of stepping out of a routine chronotope to
consciously walk around our home or the school where the class takes place. On this personal map students bring to their attention spaces that they enjoy or dislike. One way to go about is having students dwelling in common spaces work in teams to draw a layout showing their neighborhood. Another option is to collectively visit one significant neighborhood or the surroundings of the school where the classes take place. This activity can also be done as a workshop where the whole class collectively draws a selected barrio scape. This scale emphasizes the possibility of finding new paths of accountability by “making commitments and connections” (Barad in Springgay 7). After drawing / walking the barrio scale, students research the background of the many scapes found in the territories explored. As a model for the class, I have shown a map I created walking with my partner where we ran into the inscription left by the Perras Bravas Colectiva. Like the escuelita, even to this date, perras enact concrete decolonization work much more effectively than any other effort I have experienced within academia.

**Scale 3: Community Scapes**

The purpose of this scape is to investigate the hegemonic history of one’s locality. At this scale it is important to think about the pueblos originarios, those displaced by coloniality, those wiped out of the territory, and those who remain there in resistance. Students can draw settlements and natural formations as the scapes showing the history of colonization. The class can lay in political boundaries and symbols representing the peoples that inhabit the territory, as well as the emblematic neighborhoods, parks and landmarks. This scale can be used to discuss the genre of the land acknowledgment, so it can be explored using the following native land map:
This scale can be explored in the classroom by putting together all other scales on a wall creating a collage where all scapes are included. In this collective map the dimension of the chronotope is more clear in that one can see the colonial imprint clearly demarcated in the layout of a city. It is important to make visible two versions of the scale, one which some of us can have access to where we can freely mobilize accross borders, and another one taking into account the coloniality of power where those displaced by violence from Latin America cannot, even in transnational communities like that of El Paso del Norte region. As a sample for my classes I have presented students the Juan the Oñate Camino Real, Americas oldest and longest colonial route, its significance for the first settlers of the Americas, and Oñate’s monument in Ciudad Juárez, framed by the context of Oñate’s genocidal violence against the Acoma people. I also talk about patterns of dignified co-existence like the Café Mayapan in El Paso and its connection with the Zapatistas, and a traditional panadería, Rezizte, which is maintained by an activist-baker and his family, and which is offer as a space for enacting survivance in Juárez.

0.2. Selecting a Topic (Research Problem), its Categories, and Drawing Icons

Once the scale is selected, a topic for mapping workshop can be selected. Although puy mapping would emphasize the theme of conquistuality/deconquistuality, other topics and/or categories are possible.

1. First Session of the Workshop

As an activity to open up the workshop I have used an activity done by Diana Taylor in which students are asked to bring rocks and then are asked to pile them all up as tall as
possible. I use this exercise to illustrate how different schemes of orientation would have
us do things differently, for example, whereas a Conquistual frame based on
individualism and competitiveness compels us to work individually, an ubuntu or laja
scheme of orientation would have us do the activity collectively. This is a way to
exemplified through an embodied activity the role of interpretation in puy mapping.

I have shared in some classes a sample mapping of my own for each of the
scales not as an ideal model to imitate, but as a testimony. I focus in my mapping on
three moments that have steer my academic focus and trajectory, where the problem of
femicide was salient. I show in this map the Conquistual literacies that construct the
common sense notion of love as the conquering of territories in grupera music, and the
demonstration at the Cruz Rosa at the México-US border. I also show the famous bar
Kentucky and its implication in an incident with Rarámuri siríame and activist, María
Rosalinda Guadalajara Reyes, to illustrate how spaces are experienced differently
depending on which side of the conquistual line of being one is situated. I talk about the
terrorist attack directed at people of color in a Walmart store in El Paso, considered one
of the safest cities in the country, to reinforce the relativity of safety in places ravaged by
the coloniality of power. I explain how these topics lead my academic path to research
literacies of cruelty, and how my escalofrío epistemico had me enact a mirada to the
Zapatistas.

It is important to emphasize for the class that the map should be composed as a
text with non-yet-to-come classmates as an intended audience, so the instructor can
show students maps from previous cohorts. In order to encourage an ethics of puy
citational practices, teacher can talk with students about the importance of citing the
work of those cohorts, as well as what comes about in conversations during the class. Citational practices like those of the FEAS collective should include students’ interactions as sources of knowledge making (cfr. Springgay and Truman). Besides seeking to prevent the practice of academic appropriation, this citational practices keep track of how the work in academia is always a collective endeavor more often than not rendered invisible.

Along a set of icons representing these topics, I give students the following questions, showing the underlying logic of my choices, and also as starters to reflect during their class encounters: “What is the significance of these place/space?” “How would you define it?

1.2. Ts’ibetik (grafías, letras, signos)

The iconography I use is made up by Maya and modern images to reflect the border thinking of colonialism (Walsh). Following the Iconoclasistas method, after explaining the iconography of the images we will be using, I encourage students to modify or add different sets of icons.

a) Japajtik icon: this icon represents fissures on the wall of Conquistuality. Zapatista’s critical-rhetorical mode of agency is a work of breaking open what Bernice Olivas the traces of colonization that have been “whitewashed away, cleared from the surface, rendered invisible” (210). Its purpose is to disclose alternative ways of being in the world, and one of its concrete manifestations is the material intervention of space by street art. The symbols used are the Nuttall Codex logogram of a bivalve mollusk and an icon of a fissure (see fig. 5).
b) *Tsoblej k’op* icon: this icon represents walking as a literacy that steps in in response to what Jenny Rice calls “crises of place” (14). NGOs enacting “word-revolution,” are shown as calling the civil society to react back at instances of Conquistuality of power.

This icon identifies what Welch calls vocabularies of “struggle” behind the cracks on the wall of Conquistuality, calls to *tsoblej bajtik* (“organize ourselves”) that seek to open paths towards *ich’el ta muk’,* the mutual respect and recognition of plurality that brings dignity back to the community. These instances do not need to be explicit calls for action, but just about any work where collectives enact literacies of survivance amidst the ruins of capitalism, standing for the “intelligent life at the edges of the State” (Segato). These inscriptions disclose alternative ways of being in the world, and one of its concrete manifestations is the material intervention of space through street art. The symbol I chose to represent these literacies is an adaptation of the logogram for “road” from Postclassic Maya codical texts (see fig. 6).

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*Figure 5. Japajtik: The Crack on the Wall of Conquistuality. Adapted from logogram of bivalve mollusk on Nuttall Codex and “ruin icons” by Freepik, flaticon.com.*

*Figure 6. Tsoblej K’op: Walking the Word. Adapted from logogram of “road” on Postclassic codices, Martha J. Macri and Gabrielle Vail, The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, vol. 2., p. 84 and “agriculture icons” by DinosoftLabs, flaticon.com.*
c) Tsojb Bail icon: this icon represents discourses that cultivate collective public subjectivities, spaces where the trail of ts’ib, literacies of dignified life is made evident. With this symbol I mark the sites of groups seeking to intervene space, including Rezizte panadería and the Perras Bravas Colectiva, which are instances of people looking to rewrite the script of hegemony. Their spaces are not only sites where conventional capitalist practices take place, but they seek to strengthen and (re)create community. This icon marking specific sites of encounter, dialogue, and survivance, is represented with an adaptation of the conventionalized speech logogram for “language” from Postclassic Maya codical texts (see fig. 7).

Figure 7. Tsojb Bail: Puy’s Chronotopoi. Adapted from logogram of speech on Postclassic codices, Martha J. Macri and Gabrielle Vail, The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, vol. 2., p. 164 and “voice recording icons” by designvector10, flaticon.com.

d) Tsojb lum icon: this icon marks Originario Nations people’s settlements, and is represented with an adaptation of the logogram for “ch’u na,” meaning “sacred house” or “temple,” from Postclassic Maya codical texts (see fig. 8).

Figure 8. Tsojb Lum: Pueblos Originarios. Adapted from logogram of “temple” on Postclassic codices, Martha J. Macri and Gabrielle Vail, The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, vol. 2., p. 173 and “pin icons” by Freepik, flaticon.com.
1.3. First Assignment, “Xcha’ sujtesel o’tan: The Ground which the Crack has Broken”

At the end of the first session, students ought to do more traditional research on the scapes that they identified. For the next session, instructor can hand in an envelop and ask students to bring in it a printed multimedia text (academic or otherwise) that illustrates one of the categories of the Conquistual orientation, changes in the scapes of the community, or any other topic that highlights the connections between rhetoric and civic life.

2. Second Session of the Workshop

For this session of the workshop, nopteswanej can ask students to paste the multimedia text they brought to the class, write a heading and a small post on a piece of paper and display it on the classroom. The purpose is to identify those scapes within a map and, prepare for a barrio scape mapping activity.

2.2. Second Assignment, “Xwaychinel lum k’inal: Mapping and Rhetorical-Ethnographic Interview

As a space of encounter, a puy methodology is always conscious of creating chronotopoi of encounter and dialogue, so an important component of this class is to find non-academy based intellectuals with whom to create long-term meaningful and sustainable partnerships, enabling thus paradigmatic third-places. It is important to think about the map in and of itself as an academic fissure on the wall of Conquistuality seeking to envision what academy would be like if it were to organize with the community. This means that puy mapping is a literacy of mediación that consciously serves to encourage a mirar con los otros, inquiries based on the principle of equality of
intelligence that disrupts action research, co-researches new schemes of orientation that enact dignified co-existence.

Students have to interview community knowledge-holders through a rhetorical-ethnographic framework. This is where the most embodied part of the walking methodology is enacted, and it consists on finding a votán, a guardian of the territory and the inmost heart of the community, a tsobel-k’asesel k’op or “bearer of the word” who translates-transmits the secret pulse of the territory. The votán can also be any student showing instructors their territory. Students would “teach” as instructors get to know the territory where they stand. The best way to go about this section of the workshop is having a big format map of the region and some questions to converse with the people during the interview, which can be of the sort, “are you from this neighborhood? How long have you been living here? Can you remember any public display of activism? Are there any organization that does activity to ? What do they do? Tell us at least three activities they do.”

The first questionnaire sets the scape selected as a site of encounter and dialogue. In my classes I have used a map of the University Campus, and ask about two of my favorite landmarks within it, they relationship to stories of coloniality or survivance.

3. Third Session of the Workshop: Teaching by Learning, Collaborative Research and Stukelin Sbahik

Once the mapping is concluded, each group presents the results of their encounters. The final project can be a collaborative multimodal piece intended to become a way of talking with other communities sharing similar problems, or even presented to government or university authorities. They can also simply be displayed as
counterstatements to injustices. Every map created by students can be put together as a collective map containing all the partial scapes. An alternative layout can be to put them side by side to reflect their dependency. In order to emphasize the chronotope of the k’inal, I have presented in my class maps stressing the El Paso del Norte Region as one single territory comprising the city of Juárez on México and El Paso County on the (Ø) American side.

This final part of the workshop emphasizes collaborative writing and the Zapatista idea of civi engagement, where the work done is accountable to the research participants who collaborated with our work as academy based knowledge-holders, so it can be done as a public event where guests are presented with the final assignment, which can be interrogated and mediate a session of consultation. The purpose of this approach is to avoid extractivist practices where mapping would only serve to advance our individual academic career. Lok’tayel lum k’inal becomes an enacment of collaborative writing, from agreeing on the spaces to be used, to the kind of decision-making involved in naming the “author” of the inscribed material.

Xcha’ sujetesel o’tan, the spiralic move of puy back to the heart again, and xwaychinel lum k’inal, its progress toward the soil of the earth, is both a p’ij of emancipation, libertad, and sovereignty, autonomía. This two-way spiral acts through “acción intersubjetiva de un nosotros en el que cada uno se influye a sí mismo y al grupo en su conjunto y esto lo hacen todos a la vez” (Paoli 145). Such a frame applied to the educational context of a composition classroom would mean that teacher with students acknowledge their right to respect and their responsibility in following the commitments
set forth in a democratized classroom, determining at each step of the way the goals and the means necessary for such an endeavor. As the chronotope where equality emerges, puy leaves on the soil the imprint of dignified co-existence, lekil kuxlejal, which will be always available to read by anyone willing to enact a respectful mirada bearing witness to the fact that, un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos, is a possible horizon of struggle.
The theoretical implications arising from the lessons of the escuelita may lead the path towards an understanding of literacy as embodied symbolic action involving the inscription of and the ethical orientation with respect to patterns of dignified co-existence. This realization shifting the traditional, Eurocentric intelligibility of writing and reading enable RCL to reconceive the domains of literacy, a conceptualization which has a direct impact on the subject matter that we study and teach in writing studies classes. Not only does this notion of literacy widens the scope of composition to encompass traditional performatve arts like dancing (cfr. Driskill “Shaking our Shells”), but it goes beyond by considering unconventional scenarios like cultivation cropping systems and house building. In short, Zapatista literacies, k'oponel-ts'ibuyel, reveals composition as referring to the traces of the material, embodied involvement with “espacios de arraigo y proyección donde se experimenta la potencia de pensar juntas” (Gago 165). Their understanding of linguistic events transcend both traditional models framing communication as mere exchanges of information and strong-text frameworks focusing on literacy as a material, finished product. For the Zapatista, symbolic action begins with a silent moment of mutual recognition, and extends beyond vocal utterance to continue through the work in the world that honors the commitments set forth in that space of recognition.

The notion of a connection between embodied action and meaning-making is not a foreign idea for RCL studies. As I have shown, it is part of Kenneth Burke’s theory of metabiology, and Indigenous scholars like Qwo-Li Driskill have studied it as a rhetoric of cultural continuance and resistance (“Shaking our Shells”). This interpretation also
resonates with the interest that the field of RCL has expressed in the spatial turn where meaning-making is said to be “constructed through place and spatial practices of sociality and positionality” (Springgay and Truman 3). The Zapatista perspective on symbolic action acknowledges this complexity, but it offers an account focusing on the ethical implications of that premise and bears witness to the enacting of a concrete methodology, a tested methodology to set those ethics into place. Since speaking is not a process that can be done in isolation, true conversation begins within a space of mutual respect and recognition which is enacted through silent contemplation. As shown in this study, silence in Maya tradition has different significance from that revealed by Western paradigms, who would have us connect it to primeval chaos and as preceding utterance (cfr. Tuan 74). For the Zapatista, the space open through walking-uttering in silence is the space of the council, for silence “es como un acto que . . . santifica [la] reunión” (Paoli 143). It is the interpellation of the civil society to recognize themselves in symbolic chronotope of an assembly. As the opening text of the preparatory course, the march of silence of the Zapatista embodies the question that prompted the realization of the escuelita, a question that for Comandante Moisés asks, “what would become of this land and this Earth if we were to organize ourselves [“tsobej bajtik”] with all other Indigenous siblings, and with non-Indigenous siblings as well?” The realization of the vision of the escuelita begins as a reconciliation-decolonization of the territory through “chapbil k’op,” or “accord,” the arrival of a common heart willing to carry out the zealous stewardship of the land and the community.

For this reason, the core of the first level of the escuelita was a mentoring programme comprising the matching of students with individual peer tutors. These
Zapatista advisors were called “votanes,” which in Tseltal Maya means simultaneously “the inmost heart” and the “heart of the expanse.” According to the Zapatista, votanes stood for guardians of the community and stewards of the Earth. These peer mentors were considered, “el método, el plan de estudios, la maestra-maestro, la escuela, el aula, el pizarrón, el cuaderno, el lapicero, el escritorio con la manzana, el recreo, el examen, la graduación, la toga y el birrete” (Marcos, “Votán ii”; “the method, the course syllabus, the instructor, the school, the classroom, the notebook, the pen holder, the desk with the apple, the recess, the graduation, the gown and cap”) and, together with their immediate relatives, votanes were both the hosts and nojpteswanjetik of the students of the escuelita.

More significantly, as Natalia Arcos points, the votanes represented the embodiment of the inmost heart of the students, that is, they were the Zapatista counterpart of non-Zapatista true women and men. The purpose of the votanes was to show students the way in which Zapatista communities had “neared” sovereign self-determination, enabling students to have an ear and sight of the secret pulse of their communities while enacting mutual respect and recognition. This secret pulse is revealed in an understanding of Zapatista inscriptions as telling the story of their “stalel,” their “ways of being,” or

el color, la textura de los objetos, los recuerdos, la explicación de una forma de existir . . . [que] se va forjando en la participación, en las creencias, actitudes . . . . una realidad intersubjetiva . . . [que consiste de] un modo de sentir, de ser, de hacer, de pensar, comprender y actuar en el mundo y en formas de vida compartida, que se expresan en instituciones construidas en el tiempo,
comportamientos regulados por ciertas reglas y saberes transmitidos. (120)

In keeping with RCL understandings of symbolic action, Zapatista esteem stalel as being born through “las palabras que expresamos en el diálogo, en nuestro encuentro” (Bolom-Pale 73), that is, through the chapbil k’op within the space and time of the council.

As I have shown, all through the first level of the escuelita, it became clear that success criteria for the curricular experience prioritize an awareness of the unique, relational potentiality of the stalel of true women and men. Ultimately, this recognition of one’s intersubjective interaction aimed at realizing the task of sujtesel o’tan, an spiralic return to the seat of the heart, which is the site of habitation of the ch’ulel. Ch’ulel is a pervasive concept in contemporary Maya intellectual tradition, and it is usually defined as “soul” or “holy,” but it also encompasses both “reason” and “heart” (Paoli 210). However, as Fizwater explains, ch’ulel does not merely refer to an abstract quality but, more importantly, to the enactment of very “concrete forms of political organization.” As Tsotsil scholar manuel Bolom Pale points, maturation of ch’ulel is a process of “bringing together,” both in mind and heart, “la experiencia anterior con la práctica para las acciones futuras” (84). Even though the ethical orientation enabled by the arrival of ch’ulel begins with a necessary return to the heart again, xcha’ sujtesel o’tan, it is only when carried out on the concrete territory, xwaychinel lum k’inal, that it reaches its full realization: ch’ulel arrives through a combination of rationality, affect, soul, and action. This is why ch’ulel is all the more patent in the inscriptions of literacies like that of weaving, an involvement of “un ser que se está cuidando y se está plasmando” (Bolom Pale 138). The unified, collective heart germinating out of the process of p’ijubtasel is
one that has learned “a gobernar y gobernarnos, es decir, a respetar y respetarnos” (Marcos, “Ellos y nosotros vii”). Therefore, the escuelita approach to civic education is directed at opening our perception to the fabric of relationality, decolonizing thus the commodification of life by revealing the dignity of Others. The ch’ulel of bats’i vinik antsetik necessary for sovereign self-determination and emancipation is anchored in practices of “respecting, reciprocating, complementing, and serving one’s community” (Eber and Antonia 21).

The curricular experience of the escuelita situates students within the symbolic distribution of a council, a chronotope where one is called to adopt a public (inter)subjectivity through mutual respect and recognition. Respect, in Tseltal and Tsotsil Maya is translated with the term “ich’el ta muk’,” literally “mutual recognition of each other’s greatness,” but which is also the way in the Zapatista movement has translated our term “democracy” in their many encounters with civil society. From the Zapatista perspective, writing is a way of walking the world into being, leaving the inscriptions of patterns through which is possible to (re)create dignified co-existance for those able to read them. A civic pedagogy based on this notion of composition would focus on identifying and nurturing these patterns of dignified co-existance not only in alphabetical writing, but also within patterns like those left by crop-growing systems, or any other system that (re)creates the fabric of communality. More importantly, this type of civic pedagogy would stand in direct opposition to what bell hooks calls “pedagogies of domination,” the “lessons taught by imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal mass media” (8).

For this reason, the escuelita Zapatista is an extraordinary resource for a model
of decolonial, i.e. anti-racist and anti-patriarchal, pedagogies that offers an expansive understanding of literacy and democracy through a Maya rhetorical perspective.

Democracy, or ich’el ta muk’, is understood as the respect and recognition of plurality bringing dignity back to the places where alfabetizaciones de la crueldad have destroyed life; it implies we walk by joining others in wonderment, for true women and men, according to the Zapatistas, walk by wondering.

\[ \text{Ch’aban spisil te k’inale.} \]

This is, then, the ch’ulel in the stalel Zapatista Maya, made secret to the ear and the sight, a long time ago, shrouded in mist, covered with balaclavas. So it is that the Maya—now called Zapatista—sk’op, the rhetorics of puy, has been made complete.

This is, in truth, the walking into being of the word, through wandering and wondering, “what would become of academia, and te lüm k’inale, if we were to tsobej bajtik with all other non-Indigenous siblings leftward at the grassroots, and with Indigenous siblings as well?”

\[ \text{Ta ch’ux-oc. Qu’yx nohin-tah.} \]
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Vita

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