

Gossip, Gossips, and Gossiping in Zinacantan

K'al tana mu xpah slo7iltael
(Gossip about him will never cease)

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Summary:

I learned about Zinacanteco culture by attention to gossip among Zinacantecos. Starting from the premise that gossip contained the key to an appreciation of what Zinacantecos did, what they were concerned with, and what they noticed enough to comment upon, I came eventually to believe that there is no more direct way to penetrate 'cultural codes' than the study of gossip.

Zinacantan is a municipio of Tzotzil (Mayan)-speaking Indians in the state of Chiapas, in Southeastern Mexico. The municipio is divided into hamlets, which in turn are composed of smaller units: waterhole groups, residence locales, and domestic units. These units, along with communication routes linking hamlets together, define the group of people a given individual in Zinacantan is likely to gossip with or know enough about to gossip about. In addition, the activities associated with corn farming and with the ritual cycle, as well as political and factional machinations, provide sources and contexts for gossip.

Though no single word in Tzotzil is adequately glossed as 'gossip', there is evidence that Zinacantecos consider gossiping to be a coherent and familiar sort of activity. Despite the fact that formally elicited taxonomies of verbal

behavior will not uniformly include a domain similar to gossip, the use in ordinary speech of certain roots (e.g., /-lo7ilta/ ('tell stories on...'), or /-laban/ ('mock')) strongly suggests not only the existence of such a domain, but also a native theory about gossip and reputation. This theory concerns (a) the separation of public from private (privileged) information; (b) the question of truth versus hearsay; and (c) the general ethics of telling tales on people.

The structure of Zinacanteco gossip sessions required that I gather certain special sorts of information before I could understand what gossips were talking about. Much of a gossip session is devoted to identifying participants through various standard identifying schemata. Gossip further relies on a large body of shared knowledge, not only of cultural rules and conventions, but of the contingent facts about particular people. In order to gather this information (without which Zinacanteco gossip was completely meaningless to me) I assembled what amounts to a Who's Who in Zinacantan --- an extended census containing basic shared information about all well-known people in the municipio. Once I had this information I was a better participant in gossip sessions (knowing who people were, and what was likely to be said about them), and also a more desirable gossip partner (being able to reciprocate story for story).

A survey of the information in the Who's Who (that is,

of the facts of reputation generally shared by Zinacanteco men about their fellows), and of the topics which frequently arose in the whole corpus of gossip I heard or collected shows definite themes and preoccupations. Certain facts accrue to reputation: success in religious or civil hierarchies, skills at dispute settlement, economic status, willingness to lend, unusual occupations (i.e., anything other than corn-farming), spiritual powers (curing, witchcraft), tendencies to aggression or factional troublemaking, poverty and drunkenness, or mental incapacity. Certain topics are extremely frequent in gossip sessions, notably: drunkenness, divorce, illicit sexual relations, jailing, wealth or poverty, courtship and courtship disputes, adultery, fighting, theft, performance in religious office, formal settlement of disputes (at the town hall), witchcraft, promiscuity, quarrelling (e.g., between kin), sickness and death, curing practices, marriage disputes generally, and murder. These frequencies reflect generally preoccupations throughout the culture, although certain individuals with whom I gossiped have their own special interests. (One man told me dozens of stories about rape.) There is a strong coincidence between frequent gossip topics, themes in Zinacanteco humor, and categories of conflict discovered by earlier researchers.

I suggest that all aspects of a gossip interaction bear on our ethnographic aims. One can extract information

not only from the story that a particular narrator tells, but from his relationship to the protagonist in the story, to his interlocutor, and to the relevant groups to which each belongs within Zinacantan. Gossip is a powerful tool for advancing personal and factional ends; and at the same time the ability to gossip clearly defines the boundaries of a community.

Moreover, gossip demonstrates the power of certain crucial words. Gossips depend on their skill with words to draw morals from (apply rules to) the events they describe and to elicit the desired responses from their audiences. Gossip is thus a good source for information about the use and semantic properties of culturally important words. I pay particular attention to (a) words frequently used to mark approval, disapproval, agreement, disagreement, etc.; (b) keywords in implied rules underlying questions of fact; (c) words which refer to unobservables (e.g., personal propensities and traits of character); and (d) words which evoke hypothetical outcomes, alternative courses of action, contrary-to-fact possibilities.

Similarly, gossip shows something about the nature of cultural rules and their relation to actual behavior. One sees in gossip the most ordinary sort of appeal to cultural rules: after the fact (after certain events), gossips cite and manipulate rules to reconcile them with behavior. As ethnographers we are familiar with a wide range of propositions and conventions which, according to current fashion,

we call 'rules': among others, rules which embody stated norms, rules which amount to definitions (of particular acts or entities), rules to account for observed regularities, rules of interpretation, and rules of strategy. Whether or not rules in any sense constrain behavior, gossips use rules to construe, interpret, and ultimately evaluate behavior.

Finally, I urge that the ability to gossip --- undeniably a part of the cultural competence of native actors --- can be accounted for and described only in an extended ethnography. Recent ethnography has tried (or, at least, asserted the possibility of) modelling native decision schemes, anticipating appropriate action. I suggest that the prospects for developing a descriptive mechanism powerful enough to characterize the native's ability to act in contingent situations are bleak; that instead we take that ability as essentially equivalent to the gossip's ability to understand action after the fact. And this latter ability --- to gossip and to understand gossip --- rests, first, on a large body of contingent fact (including the information in a Who's Who) which is in no sense part of a cultural tradition or of an 'ideational order', and second, on familiarity with the possible manipulations of cultural rules. The contingencies of life restructure the rules, even change them over time. It is in gossip sessions that people most often confront rules directly; at such times the rules have no independence --- one's whole understanding of the cultural code depends

on a particular setting, on the configuration of past experiences and knowledge, which is suddenly relevant to the application of rules and standards to the facts in question.

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(Gossip about him will never cease.)

A thesis presented

by

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to

The Department of Social Relations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Social Anthropology

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

December, 1971

Acknowledgements

I would never have pursued anthropology at all, least of all spent twenty-four months in Zinacantan, without the constant help and encouragement of the Harvard Chiapas Project, personified by Prof. Evon Z. Vogt and his wife Nan. People have asked: "How can you study gossip?" The answer is: "Only with the help of everything that almost twelve years of fieldwork have uncovered in Zinacantan." Vogtie and Nan opened all of this to me and kept it open, welcomed me into their house and, thus, into the anthropological world.

Though many people have taught me about Zinacantan, directly and indirectly, several deserve special mention. George and Jane Collier, first as my teachers and later as colleagues, introduced me to Zinacantan and to fieldwork, and eventually to home-made ice cream, cheesecake, cornfritters, and the Stanford Computing Center. Everyone I know in Zinacantan has been my teacher. Some have also been part of my family. I especially thank /mol petul buro ta hteklum. Lisp'is ta skrem, 7i lixcanubtas ta vob./

-/nmol kumpare xun vaskis ta nabencauk xci7uk hme7el kumale. Ihc'amunbe sna ta hteklum. 7I hal ic'ay hhol ta lo7il xci7uk i mole/

-/nmol kumpare petul vaskis ta nabencauk. Lek lizak ta lo7il, ihcan 7o k'u ca7al cilo7ilahotik./

-/nmol kumpare cep k'obyox ta 7apas. Kilohbe sna 7i yilohbon hna noxtok. Lek hci7il hbatikotik ta 7abtel xka7i hbatikotik./

Several other Zinacantecos contributed heavily to my work, notably /k'ox romin ta nabencauk, mol cep nuh ta naci, romin teratol ta hteklum, hkumpare maryan 7ac'eltik ta nabencauk/.

Robert M. Laughlin shared with me his deep understanding of Tzotzil, even when I could only babble ignorantly. I wish I knew all the gossip he does.

Finally, many more Zinacantecos taught me about their world by making it pleasant for me to be there. I must mention especially /hkumale paxku7 vaskis ta nabencauk, hkumpare xun sukupan ta nabencauk xci7uk smol tot xci7uk sme7, hmol kumpare cep pulivok ta 7apas xci7uk hme7el kumale, xci7uk hc'ul c'amal mal, 7i hmol kumpare xun pavlu ta nabencauk xci7uk hkumalex, mol manvel tulan ta nabencauk xci7uk yahnil xunka7/.

My family shared with me the entire excursion into a new world entailed by my work in Zinacantan. My wife Leslie and my daughter Sophie found their way into Zinacanteco homes more easily than I did; Sophie was the key, and Leslie was my crutch. She also carried my pour-off bottle.

My brother Pete helped me stay fit and happy in the field; as a junior male he could run my errands just as I ran errands for older Zinacantecos. Tim Rush took part in all our games and also criticised my research at each stage.

I owe special thanks to my mother, Iby, who rescued my work by typing this thesis, and to my father, Morrison C. Haviland, who kept us in touch with home while we were in

the field, and who mediated between us and the outside world.

I benefitted from the advice and friendship of the following people in San Cristóbal: Frank and Franzi Cancian, /mol xalik/ from /vo7 ta peteh/ (Chamula), Francesco and Phip Pellizzi, Ulrich Kohler, Richard and Flora Alderson, Priscilla and Johannus Linn, Gertrude Duby Blom and her staff at Na Bolom, Bibiano Luna (y los jugadores de basketbol de los equipos de La Merced, Secundaria las Casas, y Selección San Cristóbal), Maria-Elena Bermudez, mi comadrita Maria-Luisa Porras, and Don Vicente Reyes. I have overlooked many, I am sure.

Other occasional members of Harvard Chiapas Project volleyball teams shared with me their thoughts about fieldwork as well as their energy.

I am indebted to readers of earlier versions of this thesis, especially Prof. David Maybury-Lewis whose criticisms were especially devastating.

I also acknowledge the support of the following agencies which financed my work: National Institutes of Mental Health (Pre-doctoral Research Fellowship number 2 FO1 MH36381), the Harvard Summer School, and NATO (Postdoctoral Fellowship in Science, at the Department of Linguistics, School of General Studies, Australian National University.)

Last, I wish to thank Christopher Boehm, who started me on this whole project. One evening Chris, Leslie and I

were sitting at a Cambridge delicatessen eating cheese blintzes. I was puzzling over a possible topic for a dissertation, and my head was in the clouds. Chris and Leslie were engrossed in a violent, shocking gossip session. Suddenly I became aware of what they were doing, and we three together realized in a flash how fascinating gossip was. Hence, this thesis on Zinacanteco gossip...

November 1, 1971
Canberra, ACT
Australia

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Chapter 1

Ha7 yec sbolil ce7e...
(That's how foolish he is...)

Walking along the path, I met a group of Zinacanteco men, and I stopped to join their conversation. They were talking about Antun, who has no children.

"Why haven't they any children?" (W5a)¹

"Maybe they don't do anything together (Ha ha ha)."

"Hah, you're probably right. They've taken medicine for it."

"His wife hasn't anything here (points to breasts.) She's just like us; she can't nurse."

"Gee, you mean...."

"That's right. No breasts. She's just like us men."

"She hasn't any children at all? I guess I've heard about her. They call her 'barren'. There are such women."

1

The conversations in this chapter are loose translations excerpted from what I describe below as Who's Who gossip sessions. The numbering system is described in Appendix 1. I have occasionally put Spanish words of common usage in the translation, and I have left Tzotzil words (1) in situations in which some scrap of ethnographic information essential to the meaning of a word or phrase is not available from context; and (2) for expletives, which I find untranslatable. As a guide, the literal meanings of the following frequent expletives are:

/puta/: whore
/kere/: boy! man!
/kobel/: fuck

In cases of type (1) I often quote a definition from Laughlin's Tzotzil-English Dictionary (n.d.) to provide a minimum background.

"They don't bear children. /Buluk' sat/ as they say."²

"We don't ordinarily run into women like that. I guess you would know if she came to have her corn ground at your mill. You could feel her here to see if she had any...."

"It would be good if only all women were like that." (W9)

"I see it that way, too."

"Then they could help us with weeding our cornfields, even with clearing the land. They could work just like men. As soon as we woke up we could start clearing our fields...."

Everyone laughed, considering the prospect of a wife who could labor in the fields just like a man. Soon conversation turned to Antun's poverty. He is so poor that he has little corn. Instead he makes a meagre living by selling charcoal.

"Is it true that one shouldn't sell charcoal as people say?" (W11)

"Why not?"

2

/Buluk' sat/: "highland caterpillar with eye markings. By common belief one kind inhabits the womb of sterile women, causing their sterility." Laughlin (n.d.)

"It's terribly hot, or so it used to be said. Our luck would turn hot from it; our cornfields wouldn't grow. At least that's what they say; I don't know if it's true...."

"I suppose it's probably somewhat true...."

"Oh, we mustn't believe that; consider what old Petul did before he died, before he got sick. He used to get out a couple of bandannas and spread his money out to dry, when the sun was good and hot. He used to measure his money in boxes just as one measures corn. Old Petul --- you know, Maryan's father. Then he got sick; ohhh, he was sick for a long time. He used up all his money (trying to get well). He was buried on borrowed money; all the money that he used to spread out in the sun --- who knows where it went? His sons had many debts when they buried him. So they burned charcoal, made charcoal; they sought work (as laborers) --- they did everything. What else could they do, after all, since they had no money? But the charcoal didn't sour their luck, didn't leave its heat with them. They are now quite wealthy."

"But that was just recently...."

Another Zinacanteco asked about a different son of the dead man. Old Petul's son Xun owns an important ritual drum which is a saint.

"He would have been a curer, long ago. That's the gossip: he almost became a curer but his curing power was taken away, was stolen." (W15)

"His seeing powers went to another?"

"That's right. This is why he prays so well...."

"He does pray well."

"It is obvious how well he talks, how well he prays."

"The old man is quite competent, I think. He is neither ill-tempered nor stuck up."

"He would have been a curer."

"Listen, when you say he would have been a curer --- do you mean that he gave up curing when he started looking after the sacred drum?"

"No, the power to cure was taken away from his soul...."

"In other words, the ancestral gods in their meeting place took away his curing powers. There was perhaps something wrong --- maybe insufficient gifts were offered to Our Lord. That's why his powers were taken away, and he did not remain a curer. But he didn't die of it; he is alright. Some people do die of that, you know; there are lots of people like that. They die if their curing powers are stripped away."

"Old Xun just became a leftover, an ordinary man."

"Probably old Xun has good luck. His curing powers left him, but he didn't die of it. Instead he takes care of Our Lord (the sacred drum); he has celebrations for it, and so forth."

As we stood talking, another Zinacanteco approached bearing news from the town hall of a newly disclosed murder

in a neighboring hamlet. It was rumored that two men had been sent to jail in San Cristóbal. The newcomer had details.

"It was Maryan --- he killed old Manvel, from /Zahte7tik/. They say that Maryan had borrowed money from old Manvel." (W19)

"I think I heard this story...."

"You may have heard it. But there were lots of borrowers, not just one...."

"They say that old Manvel is extremely rich."

"Anyway, Maryan also had a debt to old Manvel. But he couldn't pay it back. So he went as a laborer to pay off his debt. Well, when old Manvel would go to collect debts in different hamlets, he would take Maryan along with him --- as his 'boy' you might say. Maryan would accompany old Manvel. Well, the people who had borrowed money from old Manvel couldn't pay it back. They got together in their hamlet and began to think of what to do. '/Putá/', they said, 'we can't pay back the money. But why should we suffer being jailed, being scolded? It would be just the same if we simply killed him.' That's the sort of thing they began to say --- Maryan, along with Mikel from /Cak Toh/. He was the one who actually gave the death blow --- smashed his head with an axe.

"Maryan, you see, was walking along with old Manvel. He distracted the old man. They had agreed on the spot, below the Akovs' house, where the path splits. That's where they killed him, right where the path goes off to /TElan Vo7/,

where there's a slight depression. They had been on their way to /Na Cih/, back from collecting debts. Maryan was leading a pig --- the old man had taken a pig (as payment for a debt). All the other people who owed him money were waiting together. 'Have you come, father Manvel,' they said.

"I've come.'

"Listen, I don't know what you will decide about our debts. We just can't find the money. We just want to talk with you. Shall we become your laborers, or what? We don't have the money.'

"Well, have you gotten together even a part,' said the old man.

"Very little,' they said. /Putá/, they got out their liquor, placed it down on the path (before the old man), and sat down on the meadow. There's a meadow there with some 'broom-trees'. The poor old man didn't know he was to be murdered. He believed that they would make a request of him, ask him for a favor; because everyone was all smiles. It seemed like a friendly conversation --- just like this one now.

"Well, the old man took the liquor and drank --- they had a shot glass there with them. /Putá/, that old Mikel had his axe under his arm. While the old man was in the midst of drinking Mikel quickly sliced him here on the head. /Putá/, the poor old man was amazingly tough. He wanted to hit the others with a rock; if there had been a rock within

reach he would have injured the others ... but there was none.

"'Hand me my machete,' he said to his supposed helper, even though his head was already split open. /Putá/, another chop --- they beat him with stones, with sticks, whatever they could find nearby. That's how they killed him; that's how they managed to murder him. There he died.

"Meanwhile, as far as the pig goes --- /kere/, they killed it and ate it! They had a meal. When they had finished eating, Maryan went to old Manvel's house to tell what had happened.

"'We met highwaymen on the path. Who knows why they wanted to murder us. And I didn't even recognize one of them --- they just appeared. I ran away. There was a pig, but I threw it aside and I don't know where it went. I ran away.' (Ha ha ha)....

"'Did he (the old man) die?' the others said.

"'I'm sure he did; I heard him scream. I didn't really see him because I ran away immediately. But father Manvel can't run anymore --- well, he must be dead,' said Maryan when he arrived at the old man's house.

"Mol Manvel's relatives gathered together and went to look. Hmmm, the old man was dead. His head was chipped to pieces. They had tormented him, put salt on him, pissed on him. Evidently the old man just wouldn't die. But now, both Maryan and Mikel are jailed."

Everyone agreed that it is hard to pay moneylenders, especially when they ask for interest.

"We just can't pay that much interest." (W92)

"If the old man were acting properly, he would help his fellows for just a small amount. This man collects IOU's."

"/Kere/, it's not as though he had just a few IOU's stacked up."

"No, sir, he needs a truck to haul his IOU's around. Just like old Xap from /Na Cih/."

"Is that how he is, too?"

"That's right. If you ask him for two hundred pesos, and you agree to repay it in, say, a year, then he calculates how much it will amount to with interest --- you have to sign and leave him the paper."

"And if the interest accumulates, he can still ask you for more. It doesn't matter to him."

"Twenty pesos interest on one hundred pesos each month."

"On five hundred, one hundred pesos of interest per month."

"That's why people always ask why he acts that way, ...that's the gossip about him: he lends at great interest."

"It's pure theft --- it always astonishes us. He seems rich, that old man does. He seems to have money; he buys things; he has land. 'I know how to work,' he says. But really it's the proceeds of theft. We are poor, and we

just suffer for his benefit."

This old man, it developed, had other propensities. The conversation continued.

"I just don't know whether the story is true, but back before she got married, they say that old Xap used to embrace his own daughter." (W28)

"He fucked her, they say,...."

"Little kids evidently saw it happen --- it was little Xun, who plays nearby there. They say that the old man was tickling his daughter inside the house. When the children got there, the little brats peeked inside --- though they didn't know what was going on, they looked under the rafters. 'I'll take a look at what they're doing,' said the little fuckers. When they looked, they were lifting each other onto the bed, playing each other's music. (Ha ha ha)."

"Probably the little boys danced around behind the house to that music. (Ha ha ha)."

"They probably sat there to hear how the girl would sing. (Ha ha ha)."

"The fucking kids went right up to the house. 'Are you here, mother Paxku7,' said the mischievous kids. They went to talk to her, (to ask if she was home.) They were there alright: they were embracing each other on top of the bed. So the kids went home and told their mother.

"'I don't know what mother Paxku7 is doing with grandfather Xap,' they said upon arriving home. 'They are sleeping in the bed.'"

"When the old women heard they went over to have a look.

But when they got there, the old man and the girl were seated by the fire. The music was already over."

"Is it his real daughter?"

"Yes, his own daughter."

"Sonafabitch!"

We came to the road to wait for a truck. One man decided to invite the rest of us to share a beer and some talk. The oldest man present, an elder who had successfully passed through several religious offices, described the performance of another man who had served at the same time. (W73)

"We went to talk to the elders, to ask whether they had found a sixth man to accompany us. We had already gone to great expense making the necessary arrangements (for the year in office), just the five of us. 'With great difficulty I convinced someone to serve,' said the /muk'ta 7alkalte/.³ 'It is father Manvel.'

"/Kobel/, we don't want to be fooled around with. (Ha ha ha). Did you choose that old man? But he is too quick to threaten witchcraft.' That's what I told the elders.

"Well, then, decide for yourselves if you will find someone else yourselves,' said the elders.

³
/muk'ta 7alkalte/: "most prestigious office of fourth grade of religious hierarchy." (Laughlin (n.d.) Cf. Chapter II, under The Cargo System.)

"Okay, but you'll have to replace him if anything goes wrong, if he flees. Why didn't you find someone just a little worthy," I said.

"He won't run off. He claims to be wealthy," (said the elders).

"I haven't seen him get any corn. I haven't heard about his returning his debts; and he has lots of debts, he can barely feed himself. He only cooks a /kwarto/-measure of corn and sometimes goes to sleep without eating," I replied."

When old Manvel entered his cargo his performance was bad, and his colleagues would often scold him.

"Listen, straighten up, father Manvel, father /bik'⁴-it 7alkalte/. Why on Earth don't you take your responsibilities seriously," we said to him.

"If that's how you're going to talk, /kere/, tomorrow or the next day we'll look after each other," said the old man. (Ha ha ha).

"Right away he threatened witchcraft."

"He's a witch that one...."

"Well, listen, we entered our offices. The year progressed, hiiiiii, he wouldn't straighten out. During Lent we all got together and prepared ourselves at the house of

⁴
/bik'⁴-it 7alkalte/: "Petty alcade, second most prestigious official of fourth grade of religious hierarchy." (Laughlin (n.d.))

the /muk'ta 7alkalte/. We went with our old lady helpers. We were all together, and the group was complete except that old Manvel didn't appear. It was the fourth Friday in Lent, or perhaps the third...."

"It must have been the third. He would have to be there on the fourth Friday."

"Anyway, his wife accompanied his old lady helper. She was a white-haired lady, old lady Konte. That's who his helper was. The old man himself wasn't there.

"'Where's my younger brother?' said the senior /7alkalte/. 'Where's my younger brother /7alkalte/?'

"'The disgusting old man --- he stayed behind,' said his wife. 'He'll come along after a while. He's still tying up his sandals.' That's what the old man's wife said, along with his son Manvel --- they had both arrived.

"'What did I tell you,' I said to the others. 'Didn't I tell you before that this would happen?'

"'/Kavron/, what shall we decide, compadre?'

"'I don't know what we should think. He won't listen to reason; he won't act wisely.'

"'Well, are we just gathered here for nothing? You, helper! Go to the town-hall!'

"Off to the town-hall went the helper, off to tell the Presidente to send a couple of his deputies. Meanwhile we all went out of the house. We were all ready; we'd gotten our old lady helpers ready. Still no old Manvel. We were

just assembled outside the door when old Manvel finally came walking up, carrying his staff of office. He had finally gotten dressed.

"'So you're all ready?'

"'Yes we are. Let's go,' said the first senior /7alkalte/.

"Well, we marched out, and by the bridge (we met the deputies).

"'What do you desire, father?' they said to the senior/7alkalte/.

"'Give me your staff, my younger brother.'

"'What?'

"'I said hand over your staff.'

"'Take it, then.'

"'Take this old man away, let him go take a rest (in jail),' said the senior /7alkalte/ to the two constables. (Ha ha ha).

"Off went old Manvel with his two hands like this, held by the deputies. (Ha ha ha). Off to jail, wearing his ritual robe, with his black hat drooping --- off he went.

"'My God!' said his wife. 'What punishment! But he just wouldn't listen to reason. I tried to advise him long ago,' she said.

"He slept locked up that night."

"Well, but during Lent we mustn't fail in our duties."

"No, we mustn't."

"I learned about that when I was serving as /7alperes/.⁵
 We each have our own saints to carry in processions. And
 we have arranged ourselves to fit together --- so that we
 are all the same height as we bear the saints. If we don't
 go, if we don't perform well, what happens?..."

"There are those who don't go. People also said such
 things to me when I was /7alperes/. 'Listen, shall we split
 up the duties during Lent? Shall we arrange to have alternate
 Fridays without duties?' said the /7alkalte/ at that time.

"'Why on Earth should we split up the responsibilities?
 Haven't you seen what you must do each Friday in Lent?...
 Have you somewhere else to go? If you are sick, then you
 may not come, of course....'"

"Ahh, but what can we do when we're sick?"

"'But now, while we are well, you have work to perform.
 For this is a celebration for Our Lord. You cannot abandon
 your responsibilities now. We will serve each Friday in
 Lent....'"

"So this is why you were angered over old Manvel's
 behavior. Each of you elders has a separate burden...."

⁵
 /7alperes/: "ensign: official of the second or third
 grade of the religious hierarchy." (Laughlin (n.d.))

"Yes. So anyway, the old man slept locked up."

"He slept locked up, but he was the junior /7alkalte/.
(Ha ha ha.)"

"The next day we were coming into San Cristóbal, and we went by to pick up the senior /7alkalte/. 'Shall we go, compadre?' I said.

"'Let's go. Have you come already?'"

"'I've come.'"

"'Well, let's go see how the old bastard is doing. Let's go get him out of jail.'"

"We went off to get him out --- it was early dawn. 'Have you rested, my younger brother?' said the senior /7alkalte/ as he arrived.

"'Heee, I've rested!' he replied."

"He was angry?"

"Very angry. (Ha ha ha). 'Are you here, father elder?' I said.

"'I'm here!'"

"'Good, well, you're getting out today. Will you come out to take a walk. Shall we tell the Presidente to let you out right away? We can settle the matter of yesterday later,' I said.

"'No! I'm not going to leave. Hah! I'll stay locked up here four or five days, you bastards! I may as well die here,' he said. (Ha ha ha.)"

"'Aaa,' I said.

"'Oh, come on out, my younger brother. I'll have you let out,' said the senior /7alkalte/. 'I'll get you out right now. That's what the Presidente said: that he would open the jail and let you right out.'

"'No, no. Hah! Thanks a lot, /kere/, thanks.'

"'Okay. Just see how you like being stuck there, you old bastard,' we said as we left him. Off we went.

"About noon we went back and talked to the Presidente. 'What's happened to the old bastard? Where has he gone?' I said.

"'He's gotten out. He was angry!' (Ha ha ha).

"'Does he perhaps want another spell (in jail)?' we asked.

"'I don't know. Just come tell me if he is uncooperative, if he won't talk. Just come tell me if I should punish him a bit more.'

"'Fine,' I said. We all went home.

"'Hee....I don't know what came over me. I feel terrible,' said old Manvel when he finally showed up. He offered us a half litre of liquor.

"'/Kere/, we won't drink it,' we said. 'We'll just pour it off and keep it.'

"'Drink it,' he said.

"I refused. /Putá/, it was only recently during the Fiesta of San Sebastian (that he had his revenge). I swear to God. He didn't do anything to me while I participated

in the fiesta. It was the ex-senior /7alkalte/, who was playing the Spanish Gentleman, who was felled (by witchcraft). He had just delivered the saint images; the next morning he couldn't even get up. And he didn't get better; he recovered only with great difficulty."

"I heard he was sick for a long time."

"The curers discovered by feeling his pulse that it was (old Manvel). 'That's his doing,' they told him. Later he cut me down, too. I was at my house in low country. He hurled me down to the ground through witchcraft. Listen, I was terribly sick. 'Please pulse me to find out,' I said to my father.

"'/Kere/, have you been quarrelling with that old one?' He said. 'This is his work, his hand is perched here. This is that old man. But he has been tricked. He didn't shoot quite straight. He has just brushed by your side --- this is only a whiff of it. This is the doing of that old bastard. Yes, yes it is he,' said my father. 'If I meet him on the path I'll just belt him one, that old bastard,' said my old father. (Ha ha ha)."

"So it was old Manvel."

"Ohh, so he is capable (of witching people)?"

"Yes, that fucker knows how. He knows how very well."

"But that's all he knows. Curing, on the other hand, he's no good at. He can't cure."

"But he just acts like a curer. He is unsuccessful

when he tries to defend people against sickness. He only succeeds at giving sickness."

"But he gets fantastically drunk all the time. How could we ever know whether or not he can cure? That old man never stops drinking, never gives up liquor."

"He's a terrible drunk."

"When he was junior /7alkalte/ he'd simply stagger about."

"That's true: the snot would just dangle from his nose."

"He drinks all the time. He doesn't know the proper way to behave...."

"His nose gushes....(Ha ha ha)."

"But at night he opens up the liquor he has poured off and saved (Ha ha)."

"But he pisses all over himself: that's why his wife divorced him that time...."

The talk turned to another man who had long been without a wife; his first wife had left him in unusual circumstances, and he had only recently found a new one.

"Didn't he find a replacement lover for his ex-wife, the one who has now gone to /Hteklum/?" (W34)

"But wasn't that back when he contracted venereal disease?"

"Yes, that was when his penis got rotten. He used to go on selling trips to Tuxtla, to Arriaga, to Tonalá, and

other places; so I have heard. Since they have houses for women there, he went to pay for a woman...."

"He went to give injections...."

"He got a bad woman; she had a disease. He got venereal disease; his penis began to rot. Well, since his wife was accustomed to working, and since old Lol could no longer perform, he just had to go find someone to take care of his wife...."

"It was a compadre of his, or so I heard once. I can't remember which one...."

"It was old Antun, old Petul's older brother; he fucked the wife."

"The man who served as /martomorey/⁶ ...oh, yes, I remember who that was."

"Old Lol discussed it with his wife. 'It would be best if we found someone else for you. Suppose I made love to you, sick the way I am,' he said. 'You would get the disease, too. If you look elsewhere for it it would be better.'

"'But I don't want anybody else,' said the woman.

"'Whom would your heart desire?' said old Lol.

⁶
/martomorey/: "steward-royal, most prestigious religious official of the lowest grade." (Laughlin (n.d.))

"Perhaps you should mention it to our compadre Antun; he might be the one."

"Alright, shall I tell him then?"

"Go on and tell him."

"So you see, he found some liquor as a gift, and he went to talk to his compadre."

"Yes, he was supposed to have had liquor...."

"Ha, ha, ha, just like a religious official."

"So he waited until his comadre (old Antun's wife) left the house --- she had been there when he arrived to visit. Old Lol waited until his comadre went out to gather firewood. Then the two men were left alone. So old Lol began to tell his compadre about the affair.

"Won't you do me this favor, compadre? This is what is making me so anxious...." That is the sort of thing he said.

"But why, compadre?" said old Antun. "But are you telling me the truth? You aren't going mad, are you, compadre?" This is what old Antun said as he looked his compadre in the eye."

"What's happened to you?" he said. "Because you see, old Lol was a very healthy man, a big fat man."

"Well, I'll speak frankly; this is what has happened to me. You see, my penis is rotting," said this guy Lol."

"That's right; he told him straight out."

"And the fact is that your comadre doesn't desire anyone

else. Only you,' said Lol.

"'If this is the truth, well I guess it might be possible,' said Lol's compadre. (Ha ha ha). 'Let's go into the woods,' they said. They decided where they would meet each other --- old Antun and old Lol's wife. She was there, too; she had been following behind her husband. When the time came, she knew where they had decided to meet in the forest. 'Go on,' said Lol to his wife, while he himself just stood aside. That's the way it happened."

"He sent his wife off for treatment."

"It was only supposed to last as long as he was sick. But the compadre became accustomed to it; he grew attached to the woman. (Ha ha ha)....But didn't he actually marry her?"

"Who, old Antun? Yes, he tried to marry her. They were taken to the town-hall over the dispute."

"But old Antun himself didn't get full satisfaction. Someone else stole the woman from him. His own younger brother Petul got in there, too."

"The /pasaro/⁷?"

"That's right. (Ha ha ha)....Old Antun was giving injections at the same time as his younger brother, Petul. In fact, from what I hear, old Petul was more desirable."

"/Putu/."

⁷
/pasaro/: "man who has passed through entire religious hierarchy." (Laughlin (n.d.))

"Perhaps he was more capable."

"Mmmm, I'd really like to get into that bed, too."

That's what old Petul supposedly told his brother Antun.

I don't know how he heard or found out about it. Old Antun

got angry about it, and they quarrelled over the woman.

They quarrelled over the gift which a compadre had given.

(Ha ha ha.)"

"Anyway, that's how old Lol's wife left him. He didn't take her again afterwards. The whole affair just ended."

"Old Lol was just sitting alone and idle for a long time."

"/Kere/, only recently did he manage to find a replacement."

The truck had arrived, and people were loading cargo onto it. Several of the men were preparing to leave, and the rest were about to return to their houses. Down the path someone spotted a young man named Xun, whose reputation as a drunk made everyone anxious to be on his way.

"If you meet him drunk on the path, he has no mercy. He won't listen to what you say, that Xun." (W160)

"He doesn't understand what you say; you're right. If he's just a bit tight when you meet him on the path --- /puta/, 'Let's go, let's go,' he'll say. You will be forced to drink."

"But doesn't he get angry?"

"No, no. He'll just say 'Let's go have a little soft drink.'"

"He's good-natured."

"But he doesn't bother to ask if you're in a hurry to get someplace.... (Ha ha ha)."

"No, he's good-hearted. (Ha ha ha)."

"If you find yourself in a hurry to get somewhere, and if you see him coming, the best thing to do is hide...."

"...or run away."

And with that, the various men went on about their business.