

# The Story of Durito and Neoliberalism



Responding to a letter from ten-year-old Mariana Moguel, Subcomandante Marcos shares the story of his first conversation with Durito, thus marking the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between them. During the period in which this communiqué appeared, the fighting of January 1994 had given way to negotiations and the Zapatistas had returned to their base communities to discuss a set of peace proposals offered by the government.

April 10, 1994

To: Mariana Moguel

From: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Subcomandanta Mariana Moguel,

I greet you with respect and congratulate you for the new rank you acquired with your drawing. Permit me to tell you a story that, perhaps, you will understand someday. It is the story of . . .

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## DURITO

The story I am going to tell you came to me the other day. It is the story of a small beetle who wears glasses and smokes a pipe. I met him one day as I was looking for my smoking tobacco and I couldn't find it. Suddenly, on one side of my hammock, I saw that a bit of tobacco had fallen and formed a small trail. I followed it to see where my tobacco was and to see who the hell had taken it and was spilling it. A few meters away, behind a rock, I found a beetle sitting at a little desk, reading some papers and smoking a tiny pipe.

"Ahem, ahem," I said, so that the beetle would notice my presence, but he paid no attention to me.

Then I said, "Listen, that tobacco is mine." The beetle took off his glasses, looked me up and down, and told me angrily, "Please, Captain, I beseech you. Do not interrupt me. Do you not realize that I am studying?"

I was a bit surprised and was going to give him a good kick, but I calmed myself and sat down to one side to wait for him to finish studying. In a little while, he gathered up his papers, put them away in the desk, and, chewing on his pipe, said to me, "Well, now, what can I do for you, Captain?"

"My tobacco," I replied.

"Your tobacco?" he said to me. "You want me to give you a little?"

I started to get pissed off, but the little beetle passed me the bag of tobacco with his little foot and added, "Don't be angry, Captain. Please understand that you can't get tobacco around here and I had to take some of yours."

I calmed down. The beetle was growing on me and I told him, "Don't worry about it. I've got more around somewhere."

"Hmmm," he answered.

"And you, what is your name?" I asked him.

"Nebuchadnezzar," he said, and continued, "but my friends call me Durito.<sup>1</sup> You can call me Durito, Captain."

I thanked him for the courtesy and asked him what it was that he was studying.

"I'm studying neoliberalism and its strategy of domination for Latin America," he told me.

"And what good is that to a beetle?" I asked him.

And he replied, very annoyed, "What *good* is it?! I have to know how long your struggle is going to last, and whether or not you are going to win. Besides, a beetle should care enough to study the situation of the world in which it lives, don't you think, Captain?"

"I don't know," I said. "But, why do you want to know how long our struggle will last and whether or not we are going to win?"

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1 Nebuchadnezzar, the second king of the Chaldean dynasty of Babylonia (605–562 BC), was known as a skilled field commander who conquered Jerusalem in 597 BC. During his reign, he built the "hanging gardens" of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. He is referenced in the Bible in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, where he is characterized as a champion warrior-king divinely chosen by God. Durito literally means "little hard one."

“Well, you haven’t understood a thing,” he told me, putting on his glasses and lighting his pipe. After letting out a puff of smoke, he continued, “To know how long we beetles are going to have to take care that you do not squash us with your big boots.”

“Ah!” I said.

“Hmmm,” he said.

“And to what conclusion have you come in your study?” I asked him.

He took out the papers from the desk and began to leaf through them. “Hmmm . . . hmmm,” he said every so often as he reviewed them. After having finished, he looked me in the eye and said, “You are going to win.”

“I already knew that,” I told him. I added, “But how long will it take?”

“A long time,” he said, sighing with resignation.

“I already knew that, too . . . Don’t you know exactly how long?” I asked.

“It cannot be known exactly. Many things have to be taken into account: the objective conditions, the ripeness of the subjective conditions, the correlation of forces, the crisis of imperialism, the crisis of socialism, etcetera, etcetera.”

“Hmmm,” I said.

“What are you thinking about, Captain?”

“Nothing,” I answered. “Well, Mr. Durito, I have to go. It was a pleasure to have met you. Know that you may take all the tobacco you want, whenever you like.”

“Thank you, Captain. You can be informal with me if you like.”<sup>2</sup>

“Thank you, Durito. Now I’m going to give orders to my *compañeros* that it is prohibited to step on beetles. I hope that helps.”

“Thank you, Captain. Your order will be very useful to us.”

“But regardless, be very careful, because my *compañeros* are very distracted, and they don’t always watch where they’re going.”

“I’ll do that, Captain.”

“See you later.”

“See you later. Come whenever you like, and we’ll talk.”

“I’ll do that,” I told him, and went back to headquarters.

That’s all Mariana. I hope to know you personally someday and be able to trade ski masks and drawings.

*Vale. Salud*, and more colored markers, because the ones you used surely must have run out of ink.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast  
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

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2 In Spanish, “puedes tutearme” (you can be informal with me) is an invitation to use the familiar form of address, “tú,” instead of the formal “usted.”