

Durito VI: Neoliberalism, Chaotic Theory of Economic Chaos



In this communiqué Durito continues his reflections on neoliberalism. Taking on the role of Sherlock Holmes' hitherto unknown mentor, Durito tells *El Sup* that he has discovered that the government cabinet is secretly directed by "an invisible element" whom he identifies as character X or "stupid improvisation." This improvisation or "neoliberalism made political doctrine" is faithfully carried out by "junior politicians," who have been trained abroad and who have successfully created a "virtual reality" hiding poverty and repression in Mexico. This communiqué follows the fourth round of negotiations between the government and the Zapatista delegates that ended on July 6, 1995.

To the national weekly *Proceso*

To the national newspaper *El Financiero*

To the national newspaper *La Jornada*

To the local newspaper of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, *Tiempo*

First published in *La Jornada*, July 20, 1995. Originally translated by Peter Haney.

July 17, 1995

Ladies and gentlemen:

This is Durito writing you because *El Sup* isn't here right now. He climbed up the highest hill and is there, watching the horizon. He hopes the presents that are going to arrive for his birthday will be so numerous they'll need "the Grandmother of all Caravans" to reach the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. He says we'll be able to best appreciate the long line of trucks from afar. Poor guy! He doesn't realize that everyone already knows his birthday is the 30th of February.

Well, here go the communiqués and a postscript that I found thrown away here.

Finally we can breathe easily! The government has now declared that within two years, we will all be veery happy. Now the only thing left to figure out is who can endure the 730 days that separate us from Paradise.

Vale then. *Salud*, and I hope they don't put Mejía Barón on the government team for the dialogue in San Andrés.¹

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast,
Don Durito de la Lacandona

P.S. that salutes the wheat that, like a flag, flutters in the wind of an ordinary dawn.

To the west, the moon drops down between the open legs of two hills and rests its cheeks at the vertex, where the river stirs up its sex, dripping a serpentine murmur. Some clouds, excited, rub their wetness against the trees. To the east, there are lightening bolts and tremors, the crickets sound their alarms, and now only a few scattered stars will be surprised by the storm that is announced to the south. The vigilant airplane purrs its threat and becomes distant.

Another dawn of waiting and tobacco. Everything is calm. An excellent occasion for the uninvited (as usual) appearance of...

Durito VI! (Neoliberalism: The Catastrophic Political Management of Catastrophe)

A firefly glows on Durito's shoulder. A stack of newspaper clippings serves as a bed-chair-desk-office for my master, the illustrious Don Durito of the Lacandon Jungle, greatest representative of the noblest profession that any human being has

1 Following two defeats to the United States, in both the U.S. Cup and the World Cup, the Mexican Soccer Federation (FMF) fired Mejía Barón, Mexico's head soccer coach, in July of 1995.

ever practiced: knight-errantry. Through the pipe smoke, I observe and guard the last and greatest righter of wrongs, the renowned knight for whose safety I lose sleep, and for whom I keep myself alert and ready in case... y-a-a-a-awn.

"Yawning again, knave!" Durito's voice interrupts a blink that, he says, lasted for hours.

"I wasn't asleep!" I defend myself, "I was thinking..." I look at my watch and I notice that...

"It's three o'clock in the morning! Durito, can't we go to sleep?"

"Sleep! You think only of sleep! How can you aspire to achieve the highest level of knight-errantry if you spend the most opportune hours sleeping?"

"Right now, I only aspire to sleep," I say as I yawn and make myself comfortable again on the backpack that serves as my pillow.

"Do so, then. Until Apollo shreds night's skirt with his golden knives, I will devote myself to thoughts of the highest and most dignified lady that any knight has ever chosen for his flag and desire, the one and only, the best, the one without equal, the... are you listening to me!" I hear Durito shout.

"Hmmm," I respond, knowing that I don't need to open my eyes to notice that Durito must be standing on the stack of newspaper clippings, with Excalibur in his right hand and his left on his heart, and the other right on his waist, and the other adjusting his armor and the other... I don't remember how many arms Durito has anymore, but they're more than enough for the gestures he needs to make.

"And what keeps you up, my lazy squire?" Durito asks with obvious intentions of keeping me awake.

"Me? Nothing, if not for your midnight speeches and studies... Seriously, what is it you were studying?"

"The government cabinet," Durito responds, returning to his papers.

"The government cabinet?" I ask with surprise, doing what I didn't want to do, that is, open my eyes.

"Of course! I have discovered why the members of the cabinet contradict each other, each one pulls in his own direction and, apparently, forgets that the boss is...

"Zedillo," I say, losing interest in the talk.

"Wrong! It isn't Zedillo," says Durito with satisfaction.

"No?" I ask at the same time that I look for the little radio in my backpack so I can listen to the news. "Did he resign? Did they get rid of him?"

"Negative," says Durito, enjoying my sudden activity. "There it is, just where we left it yesterday."

"So?" I ask, now completely awake.

"The head of the government cabinet is a character who, for the sake of convenience and discretion, I will now call, 'Character X.'"

"Character X?" I ask, remembering Durito's enjoyment of detective novels. "And how did you discover him?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson."

"Watson?" I manage to stammer upon seeing that Durito has turned around the

cololté shell that he uses as a helmet, and I see that it now looks like a rapper's cap (although he insists that it's a detective's hat). With a tiny magnifying glass, Durito examines his papers. If I didn't know him so well, I'd say he isn't Durito, but rather...

"Sherlock Holmes was an Englishman who learned from me how to gather apparently inconsequential details, unite them into a hypothesis, and look for new details that would confirm or refute it. It's a simple exercise of deduction like those that I practiced with my pupil Sherlock Holmes when we would go out carousing through the slums of London. He would have learned more from me, but he went off with some Conan Doyle who promised to make him famous. I never found out what became of him."²

"He became famous," I say with sarcasm.

"I don't suppose he became a knight-errant?" asks Durito with some interest.

"Negative, my dear Sherlock, he turned into a fictional character and became famous."

"You are mistaken, my dear and big-nosed Watson, fame can only be reached through knight-errantry."

"All right, let's leave this and get back to the subject of the government cabinet and the mysterious 'Character X.' What about that?"

Durito begins to review his newspaper and magazine clippings.

"Hmmm... Hmmm... Hmmm!" exclaims Durito.

"What? Did you find something?" I ask on account of the last admiring "hmmm."

"Yes, a photo of Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*," says Durito with a look of ecstasy.³

"Jane Fonda?" I ask-get up-fidget-quiver.

"Yes, and *au naturel*," he says with a prolonged sigh.

A photo of Jane Fonda "*au naturel*" is enough to wake up anyone with a little self-respect, and I've always respected myself, so I get up and ask Durito for the clipping, who refuses to give it to me until I swear that I will listen to him attentively. I swore and swore again. What else could I do?

"Fine. Now give me your attention!" says Durito with the same emphasis with which he chews on his pipe. He puts one of his many pairs of hands behind his back and begins to pace up and down in a straight line as he speaks:

"Let's say that we have an ordinary country whose name is accented on the antepenultimate syllable and that is located, by chance, beneath the empire of stripes and turbulent stars. And when I say, "beneath," I mean just that, "beneath." Let's say that this country is struck by a terrible plague. Ebola? AIDS? Cholera? No! Something more lethal and more destructive... neoliberalism! Fine, I've already told you before about this sickness, so I won't stop to repeat myself. Let's suppose now that a young genera-

2 Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) earned a medical degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1885, but, like his character Dr. Watson, was not fully taken with the medical profession and took to writing novels, including the famous series highlighting the brilliant detective work of Sherlock Holmes.

3 Jane Fonda, model, actress, and political activist, starred in the science fiction classic *Barbarella: Queen of the Galaxy* (1968; Roger Vadim, director).

tion of 'junior politicians' has studied abroad the way to 'save' this country in the only way that it conceives of its salvation, that is to say, without knowing its history and hitching it to the caboose of the fast train of brutality and human imbecility: capitalism. Let's suppose that we manage to get access to the notebooks of these students without a country. What do we find? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Does this mean they're bad students? By no means! They're good and quick students. But it happens that they've learned one and only one lesson in each subject that they studied. The lesson is always the same: 'Act like you know what you're doing.' 'This is the fundamental axiom of power politics under neoliberalism,' their teacher has told them. They asked, 'And what is neoliberalism, dear teacher?' The teacher doesn't respond, but I can deduce from his perplexed expression, his red eyes, the drool that drips from the corners of his mouth, and the evident wear on the sole of his right shoe, that the teacher doesn't dare tell the truth to his students. And the truth is that, as I discovered, neoliberalism is the chaotic theory of economic chaos, the stupid exaltation of social stupidity, and the catastrophic political management of catastrophe."

I take advantage of Durito stopping to re-light his pipe to ask,

"And how did you deduce all of that from the teacher's face, drool, eyes, and shoe-sole?"

But Durito doesn't hear me, his eyes are shining, and I don't know if it's from the lighter or from what he says next:

"Fine. Let's move on. The aforementioned students return to their country, or to what remains of it. They arrive with a messianic message that nobody understands. While the respectable decipher it, they make off with their booty, which is to say, power. Once they have that, they start to apply the only lesson they ever learned: "act like you know what you're doing," and they use the mass media to acquire that image. They obtain consummate levels of pretense, to the point of constructing a virtual reality in which everything works to perfection. But the "other" reality, the real reality, followed its course, and something had to be done. Then, they started to do whatever occurred to them: this way one day, that way the next. And then..." Durito stops, examines his pipe and looks at me in silence...

"And then what?" I urge him on.

"And then... the tobacco ran out. Do you have more?" he answers me. I don't want to stop to warn him that the strategic reserve is about to run out, and I throw him the little bag I have at hand. Durito refills his pipe, lights it, and continues.

"Then it happens that they lose their understanding of the real reality and they start to believe that the virtual reality that they created with lies and pretense is the "real" reality. But this schizophrenia isn't the only problem. It turns out that each student started to create his own virtual "reality" and to live according to it. That's why each one dictates measures that contradict those of the others.

"That explanation is pretty... hmmm... let's say... bold."

Durito doesn't stop and continues with his explanation.

"But there's something that gives coherency to all that governmental incoherence. I've been analyzing several clues. I read all of the cabinet's declarations, I clas-

sified all of its actions and omissions, I contrasted their political histories, I requested and obtained even their least important acts, and I arrived at a very important conclusion.”

Durito stops, takes in air to give himself importance and lengthens the pause so I will ask...

“And what is that conclusion?”

“Elementary, my dear Watson! There’s an invisible element in the cabinet, a character that, without making itself known, gives coherence to and makes systemic all the braying of the government team. A boss to whose command everyone submits. Zedillo included. That is to say, ‘X’ exists, the real governor of the country in question...”

“But who is the mysterious ‘Character X?’” I ask, unable to hide the shiver that runs up my spine as I imagine that it might be...

“Salinas?”

“Something worse...” says Durito, arranging his papers.

“Worse than Salinas? Who is he?”

“Negative. It’s not a ‘he’; it’s a ‘she,’” says Durito, puffing on his pipe.

“A ‘she?’”

“Correct. Her first name is Stupid and her last name is Improvisation.⁴ And take note that I say, ‘Stupid Improvisation.’ Because you should know, my dear Watson, that there are intelligent improvisations, but this isn’t the case here. ‘Ms. X’ is the stupid improvisation of neoliberalism in politics, neoliberalism made political doctrine; that is to say, stupid improvisation administering the destinies of this country... and of others... Argentina and Peru, for example.

“So you’re insinuating that Menem and Fujimori are the same as...?”⁵

“I’m not insinuating anything. I’m affirming it. Just ask the Argentine and Peruvian workers. I was analyzing Yeltsin when my tobacco ran out.”⁶

“Yeltsin? But wasn’t it the Mexican government cabinet you were analyzing?”

“No, not only the Mexican one. Neoliberalism, as you should know, my dear Watson, is a plague that afflicts all of humanity. Like AIDS. Of course, the Mexican political system has an enchanting stupidity that is difficult to resist. But nevertheless, all of these governments that are ravaging the world have something in common: all of their success is based on a lie, and therefore, its base is only as solid as the bench you’re sitting on.”

I get up instinctively, examine the bench of logs and reeds we’ve constructed and make sure it’s solid and firm. Now more relieved, I tell Durito,

“But let’s suppose, my dear Sherlock, that the bad guys are able to maintain their lie for an indefinite period of time, that that false base remains solid and they keep

4 The noun is feminine in the original.

5 In 1995, Carlos Menem, a member of Argentina’s Peronist Party, was president of Argentina. Alberto Fujimori had been president of Peru since July 28, 1990.

6 Boris Yeltsin, as president of the Russian Federation since 1991, led the implementation of IMF-designed neoliberal policies.

harvesting successes.” Durito doesn’t let me continue. He interrupts me with an...

“Impossible! The foundation of neoliberalism is a contradiction: in order to maintain itself it must devour itself and, therefore, destroy itself. That’s why there are political assassinations, underhanded blows, contradictions between the acts and the statements of public functionaries at every level, battles between ‘interest groups,’ and everything else that keeps stockbrokers up at night...”

“It used to keep them up at night. I think now they’re getting used to it, because the stock market is on the rise,” I say with some skepticism.

“It’s a bubble. It will burst before too long. Mark my words,” says Durito as he smiles with a know-it-all air and continues:

“What keeps the system going is what will bring it down. It’s elementary. All you have to do is read G. K. Chesterton’s ‘The Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse’ to understand it. It’s a detective story but, as is well known, life ends up imitating art.⁷

“Sounds to me like your theory is pure fant-...” I hadn’t finished speaking; as I sat down on the log bench, it collapsed with the muffled sound of my bones hitting the ground and the not so muffled curse I uttered. Durito laughs as if he’s about to choke. When he calms down a bit, he says,

“You were going to say that my theory is pure fantasy? Fine, as you can appreciate from your current lowly position, life proves me right. History and the people will also give their two cents worth.”

Durito considers his talk over and lies back against the newspaper clippings. I don’t even try to get up. I pull my backpack over and get comfortable again. We stay silent, watching how to the east, as honey and wheat pour through between the legs of the mountain. We sigh. What else could we do?

Vale. Salud, and may neither history nor the people take too long.

El Sup with a tender pain in his side.

7 This story by Chesterton refers to a paradox related by a government official named Mr. Pond. In this riddle about obedience and contempt, Pond recounts the fate of Prussian Marshal Von Grock, who sends an aide to prevent the release and bring about the execution of a celebrated Polish poet, Paul Petrowski. Upon learning of the poet’s imminent death, a Prussian prince and admirer of Petrowski orders the swiftest rider of the White Hussars to overtake Grock’s aide and stop him. Grock, learning of this intervention and determined to eliminate the Polish nationalist, sends a second rider to prevent the Prince’s orders from reaching the executioner. Grock’s first rider, discovering the Hussar upon him, turns, fires, and kills the Prince’s messenger. Grock’s second rider, unaware of these events and mistaking Grock’s first rider for the Prince’s Hussar, shoots and kills him, thus bringing about the downfall of Grock’s own plans. Through the obedience of both aides the Pole survived and was released. G. K. Chesterton, “The Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” in *The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1937), 3-27.