

The Story of Dreams



Marcos vividly describes Durito and his role in helping the EZLN cope with the difficulties of war. Written on Christmas Day, this communiqué reflects growing tensions the Zapatistas faced in the aftermath of the first two rounds of the San Andrés negotiations on Indigenous rights and culture, and as the Mexican Army sought to intimidate them during the inauguration of four new “Aguascalientes.” He closes with a story told to him by Old Antonio about the importance of dignity and dreaming.

First published January 2, 1996. Originally translated by irlandesa for this volume. See *EZLN Documentos y comunicados 3: 2 de octubre de 1995 / 24 de enero de 1997* (México, D. F.: Ediciones Era, 1997), 72-75.

December 25, 1995

In the oppressive solitude of the first years of the Zapatista war, an odd character presented himself in our camps. A little beetle, a pipe-smoker, a good reader and even better teller of tales, set himself to the task of easing the cold dawns of a combatant, El Sup.

With the legal name of “Nebuchadnezzar,” the little beetle chose the *nom de guerre* of “Durito” because of the hardness of his skin. Durito, like all children, has thick skin. And in the same way, Durito chose as his first interlocutor the child we have within, whom we have forgotten, along with our principles.

One dawn, ten years later, almost at the end of the military retreat which had been forced upon us by the betrayal of February, Durito found us once again, and once again he inspired the best that human beings possess: their capacity for wonder, their tenderness, their aspiration to be better . . . as well as other qualities.

At times a detective, at times a political analyst, at times a knight-errant, and at others a writer of letters, Durito speaks to us, offering us a mirror of the future that shows us what we can be. The *Tales for a Suffocating Night* are begun in order to lighten hearts made heavy by the unknown. Through them, Durito opens a wound in our chest, a wound that hurts and that relieves, a painful wound, but one that allows us to breathe better.

Self-proclaimed knight-errant, with the new title of “Don Durito de la Lacandona,” this little beetle resolves to travel the paths of the world in order to right wrongs, to rescue damsels, to relieve suffering, to support the weak, to instruct the ignorant, to humiliate the powerful, to raise up the humble. Always full of vitality, Don Durito de la Lacandona is the greatest knight-errant who has ever lived. He lives, astonishing the stars that discover him in the forest dawns. News of his deeds have now gone round the world, and millions of women sigh for him, thousands of men speak his name with respect, and hundreds of thousands of children revere him.

Don Durito de la Lacandona describes some of his adventures and thoughts to us, and tells us disconcerting tales that have a thousand-and-one interpretations, that teach and that relieve the innumerable nights of suffocation in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Durito will be ten years old in this month of December, 1995. He only awaits the results of the Intergalactic Plebiscite that he called in order to know if he will continue to astonish us with his wonders or if he will be lost again among numerous paths that cross the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.¹

Today, December 25, 1995, I salute the greatest and the best practitioner of knight-errantry, Don Durito.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

1 For the genesis of that plebiscite, see “The Story of the Hot Foot and Cold Foot.”

P.S. that teaches one to dream or, that which is the same, to struggle.

Old Antonio was sharpening his machete and smoking in the doorway of his hut. I was dozing by his side, covered by the buzzing of crickets and weariness. Just like ten years before and ten years after, the smoke of Old Antonio's cigarette rose in the still air. The sky was a nocturnal sea, so large that one could see neither beginning nor end. The moon had floated into view a few minutes earlier. A cloud of light marked the point of the hill that would be a balcony for a silvery flirtation, a springboard for a clean dive, a platform for a new flight. A golden sliver subtly winked the glen that awaited it into being. Afterwards, there was the change from gold to silver, and from there to pearly white. With swollen and mended sails, night launched itself and sailed on. Below, silence and nostalgia waited.

December 1975, 1985, 1995. Always, the sea opens to the East. It was not raining, but the cold dampened the clothes and the restless dreams of the light sleep of slow suffocation. Old Antonio confirmed out of the corner of his eye that I was awake, and he asked me:

“What did you dream?”

“Nothing,” I told him as I looked for my pipe and tobacco in my cartridge belt.

“Bad, then. One dreams and one learns. Dreaming, one knows,” Old Antonio replied as he returned to the slow caress of the file across the tongue-shaped blade of his machete.

“Bad? Why?” I asked, now lighting my pipe.

Old Antonio stopped his sharpening and, after testing the edge, put the machete to one side. With his hands and his lips he lit a cigarette and began a story.

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“The story I'm going to tell you was not told to me by anyone. Well, my grandfather told it to me, but he warned me that I would only understand it when I dreamed it. So I'm telling you the story that I dreamt and not the one my grandfather told me.” Old Antonio stretches his legs and rubs his tired knees. He releases a puff of smoke that clouds the reflection of the moon in the length of steel resting across his legs, and he continues . . .

“In every furrow of the skin that is borne on the faces of great grandparents, our gods are kept and they live. It is a faraway time that comes to us. The truth of our ancestors travels through time. The great gods speak through the oldest of the old and we listen. When the clouds settle over the land, barely grasping the hills with their little hands, then the first gods come down to play with the men and women; they teach them true things. The first gods reveal little with their faces of night and cloud. Dreams are what we dream in order to be better.

“Through dreams, the first gods speak to us and teach us. The man who does not know how to dream himself remains very alone and he hides his ignorance in

fear. So that they could speak, so that they could know and be known, the first gods taught the men and women of the corn to dream, and they gave them *nahuales* so they could walk through life.²

“The *nahuales* of the true men and women are the jaguar, the eagle and the coyote. The jaguar in order to fight, the eagle so that dreams fly, the coyote in order to think and to pay no attention to the tricks of the powerful.

“In the world of the first gods, those who formed the world, everything is a dream. The earth on which we live and die is a great mirror of the dream in which the gods live. The great gods live all together. They are equals. Not one is above or below the other. It is injustice, which makes itself government that splits the world and puts a few above and many below. It’s not like that in the world. The true world, the great mirror of the dream of the first gods, those who created the world, is very large and everyone fits equally. It is not like the world of today that they make too small so that a few stay above and many remain below. The world of the present is not complete; it is not a good mirror reflecting the world of dreams where the first gods live.

“That’s why the gods gave the people of the corn a mirror that is called dignity. In it, men see themselves as equals, and they become rebels if they are not equal. That is how the rebellion of our first grandparents began, those who now die in us so we might live.

“The mirror of dignity serves to defeat the demons that spread darkness. Seen in the mirror, the man of darkness sees himself reflected as the void that forms him. As if he were nothing, the man of darkness, the de-equalizer of the world, becomes undone in front of the mirror of dignity.

“The gods set out four points so that the world could lie down. Not because it was tired, but so men and women would walk as equals, so that all would fit, so that no one would put themselves above the other. The gods set out two points in order to fly and to be able to stand on the earth. The gods set out one point so that true men and women could walk. Seven are the points that give meaning to the world and work to true men and women: front and back, one side and the other, above and below, and the seventh is the path we dream, the destiny of the men and women of the corn, the true ones.

“The gods gave mothers a moon in each breast so they could nurture new men and women with dreams. History and memory come with them; without them, death and neglect eat up everything. The earth, our great mother, has two breasts so that men and women may learn how to dream. Learning to dream, they learn how to become great; to become dignified, they learn to fight. That is why when true men and women say, ‘we are going to dream,’ they are saying, and they are saying to each other, ‘we are going to fight.’”

2 According to Mayan tradition, the Gods made human beings out of corn. See Part Four of *Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, trans. Dennis Tedlock, 2nd ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996). *Nahuales* are guiding animal spirits that embody abilities and wisdom accessible only to those who understand them.

Old Antonio fell silent. He fell silent or I remained asleep. I am dreaming that I dream, I am dreaming that I know, I am dreaming that I understand . . .

Above, the bosom of the moon offers milk on the road to Santiago.³ The dawn was queen and everything was ready for doing, for dreaming, and for struggling.

El Sup, packing memories and bullets.

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3 "Road to Santiago" refers to the Milky Way. See note in "On Bullfighting, Détente and Rock."