

The Story of the Bay Horse



From January 1-8, 1996 the National Indigenous Forum is held in San Cristóbal de las Casas. The Forum, called by the EZLN and its advisors, was designed to receive the opinions and thoughts from indigenous peoples throughout Mexico whose decisions and proposals were to be taken up by the EZLN in the San Andrés talks. The Forum was attended by 24 comandantes of the EZLN, and nearly 500 representatives of more than 30 indigenous groups. Attending in disguise, Durito tells Marcos a story of a bay horse who changes the rules of the game. In his Closing Address to the Forum, Marcos explains Durito's recent silence while waiting for the results of the plebiscite on his popularity.

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San Cristóbal de Las Casas

January 9, 1996

Through my voice speaks the voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Brothers and Sisters:

We want to say a few words to those present at this National Indigenous Forum.

I. Advisors

During the first days of January, there exists, in many of our indigenous communities in Mexico, the custom of reading how the months of the coming year will be. This knowledge tells when to prepare the earth, when to plant the seed and when to harvest. Among the most ancient Mayans, this practice was known as *Xoc-kin* or “the counting of the days.”

And they were, as today there are among us, the most knowledgeable men and women: the *h-men*, “those who know.”¹ These *h-men* had great knowledge that they had learned in their dreams. Through dreams the gods taught the *h-men* the knowledge of the world. In this way, they could find things that were lost, cure sickness with their herbs and their prayers, and see the future by reading their sacred stones or counting grains of corn. But their main responsibility and concern was to help ensure, with their guidance, a good harvest.

Today we have our *h-men*, those men and women of knowledge who make up the body of counselors of the EZLN in the search for a peace with dignity. These men and women are the ones who organized this forum that allowed us to find one another and build the bridge of the seventh rainbow.² They dreamed together of the great gods, the ones who gave birth to the world, the very first ones, and from them they learned their great words and their best thoughts. These men and women have been able to find things that were lost, like words, like reason, like unselfishness, like dignity. They have been able to cure that most mortal illness that exists, oblivion. These men and women can read the future by reading what their hearts say and counting grains of corn, which in today’s world are called hearts.

But, just like our ancient *h-men*, their principal responsibility and concern is to help us with their guidance to ensure a good harvest. Therefore we want to ask you, the attendees of this National Indigenous Forum, to join us in this salute that we give to our advisors and that, together, we ask that with their wisdom they help bring about a good harvest in the sowing of words and understanding

1 “H-men” is an indigenous word, pronounced “achemen.”

2 “The Story of the Seven Rainbows” was told by Marcos two days earlier at the Forum’s plenary session on January 7, 1996, and published in *La Jornada* (January 8, 1996). See also EZLN, *Documentos y comunicados 3, 2 de octubre de 1995 / 24 de enero de 1997* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1997), 94-98.

of dignity that we fulfill today. We ask that they calculate the *Xoc-kin* well, that they calculate well the counting of the days so that our harvest may be good and the hearts of the brown men and women who first lived on these lands may never lose hope.

Some of our advisors are not here today; they have not been able to accompany us on this bridge that begins today for different reasons. But there is one group of our *h-men* that is not here because they are imprisoned.

They are accused of the crime of belonging to an organization with which the government dialogues under the protection of the law. By keeping them imprisoned, the government violates the law that obliges it to talk and not to fight. That is why these men and women who are our advisors, our counselors, are not here with us on this good road. We, the Zapatistas, want to ask all of you to send, together with us, a salute to these, our imprisoned advisors. And we ask that we all greet them, as is the custom in our indigenous communities, with applause.

II. Participants

The task of planting the seeds of the words that we have gathered in these days falls to us, the participants of this National Indigenous Forum. Here, in the Valley of Jovel, where today reign the intolerance, racism and stupidity that exclude, we have come together to speak and get to know one another.³ We have gathered up the seed. We must prepare what we are planting: the future. Today we must live in a country that is not like the one of our ancestors. Today we live in a country with a government that wants to deliver us to foreign lands, sold as though we were animals, things. We, the indigenous people, are bad merchandise, they say. The great Power of money does not want to buy merchandise that does not produce good profits. And we indigenous people do not produce good profits. We are a bad investment. That is why the government shopkeeper gives us oblivion and repression for free, because he can't get a good price if he sells it to us. Today the shopkeeper said he was going to modernize his store and he has to eliminate all of the merchandise that is unattractive and we, with our dark skin and this desire to stay close to the earth, which makes us pretty short, are not attractive.

They want to forget us. But it is not only the indigenous who are threatened by this forgetfulness, there are also many other Mexican men and women who are unattractive because they can't be priced in dollars. They who are not indigenous, and we who are, have been condemned to oblivion. They sell our entire house and with it, our history. If we want to save ourselves from oblivion, we must do it together, united. Today the hope of this homeland that hurts us has an indigenous heart; it is up to its brown skin to start to save it from oblivion. It is no longer enough to die, this we have learned for five centuries. Now it is necessary to live for ourselves and to do so together with the others who are also us.

3 San Cristóbal de las Casas, the colonial capital of Chiapas, is located in the Valley of Jovel.

The past is the key to the future. In our past we have thoughts that can serve to construct a future, where we fit without getting squeezed as much as those who live above us squeeze us today. We will find the future of the homeland by looking to the past, to those who first sheltered us, to those who first thought of us, to those who first made us.

We have to prepare for the planting. We must become rain, we have to be like the *Chaacob* or gods of rain who came out of the cenotes and met in the sky to travel from there by horse, each one with his sacred gourd full of water, watering the earth from one side to the other so that all might have life-giving rain.

If the rain doesn't come, then we will have to squat down like our ancestors and sing like frogs do before it rains and shake branches as if a stormy wind were beating them and someone will play the role of *Kumu-Chaac*, the principal god of rain, with his lightning rod and sacred gourd.

We have to sow and cultivate ourselves. Gone are the days when stones were soft and could be moved with a whistle, when it wasn't necessary to labor to plow the cornfield, and one grain of corn was enough to feed a whole family. Since the chief was defeated by a foreigner at Chichen Itza, the good times have ended and the bad times have begun. The ancient chief entered a tunnel that led east from Tulum descending below the sea, and then the foreigner, the *Dzul*, took power. Now we have to return so that reason can reign again in our lands.⁴ We will do this by sowing our word.

We are our earth. We understand well how the earth and we are one. In olden times, four spirits protected the planting field, what we call the *milpa*, and there were another four that cared for the village, there was one for each of the crosses planted at the corners of the village. The *macehuales*, our most ancient ones, had seven directions; the first four were the corners of the *milpa* or the village, the fifth was the center and each community was accustomed to marking it with a cross and, generally, a ceiba tree. The sixth and seventh directions were up above and down below. In addition to the four guardians of their field and the four of their village, each person had their individual guardian. To represent the five points, the four corners plus the center, our ancestors used a cross. As time passed the fifth point was lifted, and the four corners became five and then it was the five-pointed star that represented the guardian of the people and the planting season.

Guardian and heart of the people, Votán-Zapata, is also the guardian and heart of the word.⁵ He, the man, the five-pointed star represents the human being, he. Now that we have spoken and listened, he is happy, the happy heart of Votán-Zapata, the guardian and heart of the people.

4 Chichen Itza was a Mayan city-state of the post-classic period, located in the northern Yucatan Peninsula. Tulum, also known as The Fortress (El Castillo), is a Mayan site dating from the late post-classic period, situated on the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, near the present-day resort town of Cancun.

5 Votán-Zapata is the syncretism of Votán, the Mayan God known as the guardian of the people, and Emiliano Zapata, who rose up to fight for all Mexicans during the Mexican Revolution. See the communiqué that first appeared in *La Jornada* on April 10, 1995.

Brothers and Sisters:

Each of us has our own *milpa*, our piece of land, but we all belong to the same people, although sometimes we speak different languages and we wear different clothes. We invite each of you to plant in your own place and in your own way. We invite you to make of this Forum a good planter and we will see to it that the seed reaches everyone and that all the earth is well prepared.

Here we have listened to wise people and good planters such as our *Mixe* brothers and sisters whose position on autonomy has been a bridge between brothers and thoughts. With great truth our *Totonaco* and *Huichol* brothers have also spoken. From the states of Guerrero, Veracruz and Oaxaca, brown and dignified voices reach us speaking the word that is persecuted by Power and yet, still wise. Our *Chinanteco* brothers speak through the wisdom of the woman representing them. The *Mazatecos*, *Mixtecos* and *Zapotecos* have opened the eyes and ears that our heart possesses but sometimes forgets. The *Chatinos*, *Chochos*, *Chontales*, *Cuicatecos*, *Mayans*, *Nahuatl*, *Nanhu*, *Otomíes*, *Popoluca*, *Puréhpéchas*, *Chocholtecos*, *Tarahumaras* and the *Tepehuas* are also light and color with their word. Our *Zapoteco* brothers from the United States also have given us the benefit of their thought. All who are seven, you, we, the brothers and sisters that we are.

All of them, you have undergone great suffering to get here, to speak with each other and, with us, to listen to each other and listen to us. We know it, but many others don't. You all came without our material help; your communities supported you so you could come here. And you always knew that you weren't coming to receive any land, money or promises. You always knew that you wouldn't leave here with anything material for you and your community. You always knew that you were coming to give your word and your example. And knowing all this, you made it here. And my *compañeros-jefes*, the commanders of the CCRI-CG of the EZLN, have ordered me to thank you in their name and in mine for all that is known and for all that is unknown. We want to thank you for having made it here, for having spoken and having listened, for reaching the good agreement that guides our path.

We have nothing material to give you; all we have is our greeting, which we ask that you accept as all greetings should be accepted, that is, as a gift.

III. Guests and Observers, CICR, Mexican Red Cross and Cordons of Peace⁶

As an observer at this National Indigenous Forum, a character has been present, who, timid as he is, slips away from the room at this moment. I refer to the very great and much loved Don Durito de la Lacandona, knight-errant and noble lord who rides the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. The highest and most dignified representative of the lofty and gallant profession of knight-

6 CICR is the Spanish acronym for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Peace observers organized to protect the EZLN leaders formed one of three different walls of people around the building where the peace talks took place; the other two were made up by the Red Cross and the Military Police.

errantry, the always lively Don Durito de la Lacandona has asked me, being as I am his squire and companion, to say a few words to you in his name. Due to one of those promises that knights-errant should make and fulfill, Durito has had to keep silent for some time, awaiting the results of the intergalactic plebiscite that he convened.⁷ I should say, taking advantage of his absence and that he won't hear me, that his silence was pretty strident and he never gave me a dawn's rest, which, I believe all valiant squires deserve.

It happens that early this morning I was smoking and trying to think of how to tell you all that we thank you for coming, when suddenly I see that beneath the door something that looks extraordinarily like a beetle enters. It took me a moment but then I recognized . . . Durito!

Dressed in an old and torn coat, with a hat down to his eyes that in my estimation was too big for him, and a cane in his hand, Durito quickly told me that he was incognito to avoid his many admirers and he made it clear that it wasn't a cane he was carrying, but Excalibur, his righteous sword, camouflaged as a cane.

"The ones you need to avoid are the agents of the national security, the PGR, military intelligence, the CIA, the FBI and the etceteras who usually show up to these types of events," I told him, alarmed, as I watched him swipe a bag of tobacco.

"Quickly," he tells me, "Write down what I'm about to dictate because I have to leave!"

And without giving me a chance to ask the reason for his haste, Durito dictated to me the story called . . .

The Story of the Bay Horse

There once was a bay horse that was brown like a bay bean, and the bay horse lived in the house of a very poor *campesino* and the poor *campesino* had a very poor wife and they had a very skinny chicken and a lame little pig. And so, one day the very poor wife of the very poor *campesino* said: "We have nothing more to eat because we are very poor so we should eat the skinny chicken." And so they killed the skinny chicken and they made a skinny chicken soup and ate it. And so for a while they were fine but the hunger returned and the very poor *campesino* told his very poor wife: "We have nothing more to eat because we are very poor so we should eat the lame little pig." And so the lame little pig's turn came and they killed it and they made a lame soup out of the little lame pig and ate it.

And then it was the bay horse's turn. But the bay horse didn't wait for this story to end; and he fled and left for another story.

"Is that the end of the story?" I ask Durito, unable to hide my discomfort.

"Of course not. Didn't you hear that the bay horse left to go to another story?" says Durito as he prepares to leave.

7 The plebiscite was demanded by Durito in the "Story of the Hot Foot and Cold Foot."

“And so?” I ask exasperated.

“And so nothing, you have to go look for the bay horse in another story!” he says adjusting his hat.

“But Durito!” I say, attempting a protest that I know will be useless.

“Not one more word! You tell the story the way I told it to you. I can’t because I have to leave on a secret mission.”

“Secret? And what’s it about?” I ask lowering my voice.

“Insolent knave! Don’t you understand that if I tell you what it’s about it stops being secret . . . Durito manages to say as he slips away under the door.

Durito already knows the results of the intergalactic consultation that ended with the year of 1995. He already knows that his victory was resounding and indisputable and that I have been condemned to narrating his great feats and marvels. That is why Don Durito de la Lacandona has already left to right wrongs and to astound the entire world with his achievements. The greatest thief of feminine sighs, the aspiration of men, admired by children, the great Don Durito de la Lacandona now returns to us. I know well that many of you rejoice at his return, but as for me, it doesn’t please me at all to have to be the writer of such absurd and marvelous stories like these . . . *Stories for a Suffocating Night*.

IV. The Press

Finally, we want to thank the press that has also sacrificed to cover this Forum. And we want to make it clear that we are referring to the true press and not the police who hide behind a press badge. We know that we’ve been somewhat inattentive and discourteous; some of you have even said this is the press politics of the EZLN. But today we repeat what we told you almost two years ago here in San Cristóbal at the Cathedral talks: the press has had an important role in holding back the war and opening a path for dialogue and peace.

The press acted like a great mirror so that this country that is still called Mexico could see its true image reflected in a war against oblivion. We know that you are doing your job and that you do it with interest, professionalism and pride. We also know that, many times what is made public is not what you produced but only what suits Power and money.

Some of you complained yesterday that there were no political declarations that were newsworthy. You complained that El Sup only came to write literature with the stories of Old Antonio. So now we want to make a very clear political declaration, as are all the political declarations of the EZLN. And, in view of the audiovisual media present here, the declaration will come in the following, as a rough draft of a video script . . .

P.S. disguised as a video-clip.

First, a distorted image and a long and bothersome screech in the audio. Afterward, the image comes into focus and in the background you can hear that song “*Cartas Marcadas*.”⁸ The images pile up: Power laughing approvingly, hastening its historic and definitive triumph in the last minutes of 1993. An army of shadows creeps in amid the cold and dampness. Power looks in the mirror and finds itself eternal and omnipotent. The great wise ones predict for him great triumphs, praise and robust statues throughout the land. A killjoy has promised him, “You will rule until the jungle walks toward your palace.” A handful of shadows multiplied in the mountains. Power knows that it is impossible for the jungle to walk and its confidence and euphoria are confirmed. The great wise ones are at his side and pick up the crumbs of the feast. With wooden guns walks the collective shadow in the dawn of the beginning. In the dawn of 1994, the indigenous people come down from the mountains. They go to the palace of Power to claim death and oblivion. In their rifles made of wood walk the trees of the jungle. Power trembles and begins to die. A stick rifle has wounded it mortally. The end and the beginning.

And if this video-clip too closely resembles William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, it’s not my fault. Perhaps it belongs to the great gods who during these times are restless in Chiapas and choose to travel in other worlds and in another time; because that’s how playful and mischievous these gods are, the greatest, the ones who bore the world, the first ones.

Thank you very much.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos
Mexico, January 1996

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8 “*Cartas Marcadas*” (“Marked Cards”) is a popular song from the movie of the same title starring Pedro Infante (1948), directed by René Cardona.