

To Lady Civil Society

Citing chivalric code, Durito argues with El Sup on how to properly address a “Lady,” in this case a character called: Lady Civil Society. Marcos, commemorating the first year anniversary of Zedillo’s treacherous military invasion of indigenous communities in La Lacandona, salutes civil society’s important role while condemning the imprisonment of civilians alleged to be Zapatistas. In closing, Marcos offers Lady Civil Society a red flower that Durito proposes be a carnation.

February 1996

To National and International Civil Society

Brothers and Sisters:

I write to you in the name of my Zapatista *compañeros*. I write to you so that, together, we remember that we have memory to remember that we must remember . . .

A year ago, maybe some will remember, government officials (including the so-called president of the republic) trampled over each other to make declarations against the “bad guys” of the movement (that is, against the Zapatistas), the military chiefs trampled over each other to make declarations about their “overwhelming” military victories (such as the destruction of libraries, hospitals and dance halls), and we trampled over each other in our withdrawal into the mountains which we had already rehearsed in 1989. Among all the traffic and trampling, there was an “actor” (that’s how they now call someone who takes action) with no particular name or distinctive face. An EZLN “transgressor”? No, something else, something better. It was a character that now receives the disdain of big politicians and “intellectuals” (those who used to trample over each other to pay honor to Carlos Salinas de Gortari and who now trample over each other to ask that public opinion not lead to “political and moral lynchings” of their illustrious former heads of state . . . and of their not so illustrious “intellectuals”). The character who is spared existence and efficiency is a bothersome and disconcerting character because there is no schema that locates him (which is a more subtle way of saying: “that co-opts him”), nor a definition that suits him. The most heroic character at the end of this century in this country whose rulers are determined to make disappear: lady civil society. Already Durito and My Other Self are on top of me (the first on top of my right shoulder and the second climbing on top of my left shoulder) criticizing me for the “lady” civil society . . .

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“Don’t masquerade as a feminist,” My Other Self says. “Your machismo is public knowledge.”

Durito doesn’t question making her a woman, but rather my use of lower-case letters.

“You ought to know, my large-nosed squire, that knights-errant never refer to any female with a rank as high as “Lady” without the capital letter to introduce her, and this is so not only because one must proceed cautiously with women (especially if they are formidable), but because the supreme profession of knight-errant has no higher calling than to turn every young maiden into a lady. So amend that letter and mend your conscience because the lady, if she is indeed a lady, will choose to pardon you . . .” Durito continues reading a detective novel that Manuel Vázquez Montalbán sent for his review.¹

So be it. Like a good squire I abide by what Durito said and I hope for a benevolent judgment for what was said by My Other Self. Where were we?

Oh, yes! In that Lady Civil Society (Durito leans over again and tells me that capitalizing the “L” of “Lady” is enough and that there’s no need to exaggerate), well, in that Lady civil society didn’t join (a year ago) the generalized trampling. Instead of staying at home, or at least on the sidewalk, civil society took to the streets and organized the streets (is there any mayor or city regent who can boast the same?) and turned them into first a brook and then a river and, if they’re not careful, she wasn’t far from turning them into a sea, complete with its sirens (for fog and the other kind as well). With civil society sailing upon itself (or does anyone award himself the honor of having organized it: I mean, aside from Muñoz Ledo?), the government stopped trampling over itself in its declarations and returned to its routine of contradicting itself.² The military stopped trampling over themselves in the destruction of libraries (“because there were none left,” say the generals). And we Zapatistas stopped trampling over ourselves in our retreat (“because there was no where else to go,” says Camilo). The dialogue returned, but this time along a longer and more tiring road. The “feat” of February 1995 (which is the one Mr. Limón Rojas wants to avoid when he says that Chiapas won’t appear in textbooks.³ “Because we are going to make Chiapas disappear,” insists the smiling Del Valle, “and all that will be left of the Zapatistas will be their *zapatitos*—that is why we have to abbreviate their name and situate

1 A Catalan leftist, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán is one of Spain’s best-known mystery writers. His main character, gourmet private eye Pepe Carvalho, roams the mean streets of Barcelona observing and critiquing the venality and corruption of Spanish business, politics and sports. The Carvalho novels include: *The Angst-Ridden Executive* (1977), *Southern Seas* (1979), *Murder in the Central Committee* (1981), *Offside* (1988) and *An Olympic Death* (1992). He published a book-length interview with Subcomandante Marcos, *El Señor de los Espejos*, in 1999 and a collection of his writings concerning Chiapas and the Zapatistas appears on the Montalbán website: www.vespito.net/mvm/chiapas.html.

2 Muñoz Ledo’s reaction to the February 1995 military offensive is described in “The Story of the Hot Foot and the Cold Foot.”

3 Miguel Limón Rojas was Secretary of Public Education when this communiqué was issued.

those that we recognize as interlocutors in the future we're planning for them"). They will be left, along with thousands of indigenous people without houses or lands, a bunch of civilians imprisoned in the jails that the government has been building for *zapatos* and Zapatistas, since the time of Venustiano Carranza.⁴

The alleged Zapatista prisoners, imprisoned because they are "alleged" and because they are Zapatistas. Imprisoned are those who want a free, just and democratic country. Free are the presumptuous corrupt ones, free to be corrupt and to be presumptuous. Free are those who sold a Nation's freedom, those who mocked justice, those who defined democracy as "that's bullshit . . ."

The alleged Zapatista prisoners, imprisoned by Mexican soldiers. By Mexican soldiers who decorate their service records with the expulsion of the inhabitants of Guadalupe Tepeyac, with the destruction of Prado, with the demolition of the library of "Aguascalientes."⁵ By Mexican soldiers like those who spend their salary on the prostitutes that their superiors "administer." By Mexican soldiers who do not understand why when the children of Guadalupe Tepeyac insult each other, they call their offenders "soldiers". By Mexican soldiers like those in the crews of the three helicopters that "disappeared" in January 1996 without a trace. By Mexican soldiers like . . .

Mexican soldiers who form the ranks of the Federal Army realize they were deceived. For years they were taught that their duty was to defend the homeland and now they find themselves pursuing indigenous people (like themselves) in Chiapas, Tabasco, Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Chihuahua, Michoacan, Campeche, Yucatán, Jalisco, Nayarit and in any state of the federation suspected of being a place where poor Mexicans reside.

But didn't the politicians tell them that it was a question of only one group of "transgressors of the law" whose strength was limited to four municipalities? Didn't they teach them that one they called "General"—last name Cárdenas, first name Lázaro—returned to Mexico what belonged to it?⁶ From the news, the Mexican soldiers find out that the oil wells they are taking in Tabasco will not be for Mexicans, but for a client with a different flag than the one with the eagle devouring a serpent;⁷ from the news they find out that the oil profits that are the goal of Operation Rainbow in La Lacandona already have a destination and that

4 Venustiano Carranza became First Chief during the Mexican Revolution and in 1917 the first Constitutional President of Mexico.

5 See "Durito II" regarding military attacks on Prado Pacayal during the February 1995 offensive.

6 Following a labor dispute with foreign companies in 1938, former President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized all petroleum holdings.

7 The Zedillo administration used revenues from petroleum to cover its debt as part of the agreement for the \$50 billion investor bailout provided by the U.S. in response to the peso crisis.

the future owner speaks a language foreign to this history and these soils;⁸ from the news, they learn that the U.S. government is militarizing the border with Mexico while they, the Mexican soldiers are ordered to militarize the borders of Mexico with Mexico; from the news, they learn that their “Commander-in-Chief,” “Mr. President,” is getting the highest homage that Europe bestows upon . . . a salesman!⁹ Mexican soldiers begin to question what they are doing persecuting Mexicans. Where did the homeland and its history go, where did honor and shame go . . .

But we weren’t talking about soldiers. At least we weren’t talking about soldiers armed with guns (or “with sticks,” says Durito, who insists that the boots are the problem).¹⁰ We were talking about Lady civil society, and of how, when no one knew what to do (I’m talking about politicians and members of the military regardless of their leanings or uniform), she knew what to do, and—surprise, she did it! When the time and smell of gunpowder and blood, salty like sweat, had passed, and after we sent those letters to national and international civil society, someone wrote to me and, among other things, asked me why we insisted so much in addressing civil society, since it was an entity that didn’t exist (“for those in power, what cannot be accounted for doesn’t exist,” says My Other Self, who has a flair for axioms and skepticism), and that we were naïve to hope for something from civil society that it could never achieve: the transition to democracy. Well, I told myself (because I didn’t even answer the letter in writing), we have never hoped that civil society will achieve the transition to democracy. What we have hoped for, and still hope for, is that civil society may achieve something somewhat more complicated and as indefinable as herself—a new world. The difference between now and then is that now we want to participate along with her in that dream that may deliver us from the nightmare. We don’t seek to direct her, but neither to follow her. We want to go with her, march by her side. Are we hopelessly naïve? Maybe, but against “realist” cynicism, naïveté may produce, for example, a January 1st, and just look at the heap of dreams brought about by one January 1st. So, we have nothing to lose: Lady civil society and the Zapatistas share the contempt the big politicians have for us, we share an indefinable face and diffuse name; why not share a dream? Believe me, no matter what happens when we awake, it will always be better, infinitely better than the nightmare we are now suffering . . .

8 The Rainbow Task Force is the name for an elite counter-insurgency force developed to combat guerrilla forces as part of a strategy of low-intensity war. It operated in conjunction with other elite units, including the Aztec 7 Task Force designed to battle the “drug war” and the South Gulf Force organized to protect PEMEX oil wells and hydroelectric installations.

9 In late January 1996, Zedillo traveled to London and Madrid, where he was granted audiences with heads of state and representatives of the European Union, to lobby for trade agreements with Mexico.

10 Although the EZLN is a community that has taken up arms, not all members are able to carry guns. Remarkably, many Zapatista insurgents used pieces of wood carved to look like weapons during the January 1, 1994 offensive.

Well then, allow me to salute through these letters, those men and women who are Zapatista political prisoners; allow me to salute their determination and their dignity. Allow me to salute the indigenous people of Chiapas, those men and women who have preferred a dignified example to a comfortable surrender.

But, above all, allow me to salute Lady civil society, the men and women who do not exist, who have no name, who are without a face. Allow me to thank them for existing, for having a little-known name, and having a face like any other. Allow me to give them a present, not a promise nor an intention, a flower, yes. A red flower. Red, not for blood or for ideas. Red just because, because I didn't find any other. Red because it's the color the moon turns when she blushes, full-faced, if she looks at herself in the mountain's mirror, and the mountain gives her back, as well, the best image of herself. A red flower that, carefully considered, is also a promise and an intention . . .

Vale. Salud, and may that red flower never lack water or hope . . .

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. that polemicizes. Durito has shown enthusiasm about the red flower. He proposes a carnation that goes well with knight-errantry, in addition to bullfighting. My Other Self is more traditional and leans towards roses. I say that there is no rose or carnation that can equal that moon that blooms up above, nor a gift bigger than the one that, without possessing it, we already have . . .

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