

Durito IX: Neoliberalism, History as a Tale . . . Badly Told



Durito helps Marcos write his presentation to the First Continental Encounter against Neoliberalism and for Humanity, held in Chiapas in April 1996. Here, Durito points out how neoliberalism reduces history to a poorly written tale that glorifies the powerful and ignores everyone else. In the tale of neoliberalism, he argues, only money counts and dignity is bought and converted into a commodity. After a brief digression on Mexican rock bands and a display of his personal style of dance, Durito finally hands El Sup his own, one-sentence paper on neoliberalism, and introduces the notion of “Duritismo.”

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Zapatista Army of National Liberation
Mexico, April 6, 1996
*La Realidad, America*¹

I saw that the moon was slowly beginning to deflate, like those old balloons that get tired of holding air and shrink, little by little, like the spirit shrinks when goodbyes draw near. I was thinking that, perhaps, the night was walking so much that the edges of the moon were being worn away by its grinding feet and that the stars are nothing more than the dust left behind. I was thinking of those things and, of course, nothing occurred to me about what to say on neoliberalism at one of the tables of the continental encounter, and I knew well that we had already committed ourselves, and anyway I wasn't thinking about that, but instead I was looking at the moon, trying to guess what she could be announcing or what was hiding that deformity that made her shrink. I was surely in what one might call a state of "lunatic irresponsibility," when a black, shiny object fell on my nose. It bounced and landed on my feet, it began to climb up my pants and it wasn't until it reached my right knee that I was able to make out a figure very similar to a beetle. And yes, it could well be considered a beetle if it were not for the unfolded paper clip that he carried in one right hand, the little lid of a flask that he carried in another right, the small twig that was bound to his belt, and the *caté* shell that he wore on his head. I should say that the single horn that jutted out in the middle of his face could well cause one to confuse this being with a unicorn, but no, it was clear as the moon that will keep us awake tonight that this was not a unicorn. I declared myself firmly disconcerted and, as always when I find myself firmly disconcerted, I devoted myself to sneezing with that vivacious and frolicsome style that has caused the joy and delight of small and big . . . pharmacists. One of the sneezes fully reached the figure that had already managed to climb two inches above my knee. He went down to the ground, and again began the ascent, but this time up the left leg. I pretended not to notice and I amused myself looking at how the moon, worn away and all, was flinging clouds to one side and another. Suddenly I heard a voice telling me,

"It's common knowledge that going by way of the right one always ends up falling down. Going by way of the left usually takes work, but at least one gets there."

I thought that it was the voice of some of the presenters in this Continental Encounter, and that the wind had been able to catch in a ripple a fragment of what was said and that it had allowed it to fall right above me when I was occupied with moons and astral erosion. I would have been satisfied with this veery logical explanation if it were not for something pricking me in the neck and I could see, on my left shoulder . . .

1 *La Realidad* literally means "reality," but it is also the name of a Zapatista community in the Highlands of Chiapas. Marcos' use of the term "America" designates both American continents together, not just the United States.

DURITO IX

(Neoliberalism: History as a Tale . . . Badly Told)

"I am speaking to you, brainless simpleton," says Durito while he reiterates his pricks with the paper clip against my neck.

"And it is not a paper clip, ignorant plebeian, it is a knight-errant's lance," says Durito while he finally leaves his paper clip, I mean his lance, to one side and takes out his pipe and lights it. I take advantage of the pause to tell him,

"Durito, it's a good thing you've come. Listen, I have a big problem . . ."

"Just a moment!" says an indignant Durito. "Since when are squires here allowed the sacrilege of directing themselves to their masters and sires, the knights-errant, in such disrespectful and inappropriately equal terms? Have you forgotten, pale and big-nosed rogue, what I have taught you of the sacred laws of knight-errantry?"

The "pale" and the "rogue" offended me. As for the "big-nosed," I was not offended because one should not hold a grudge against nature. I began to protest . . .

"But, Durito . . ."

"No 'but' nor any 'Durito'! I am the great and sublime Don Durito de la Lacandona, the highest example of knight-errantry, the supreme righter of wrongs, the dark object of desire of all women who consider themselves so, the superior status to which all honest males aspire to rise, the hero of children, the comfort of old men, the best and only one!" says Durito while he unsheaths his twig, pardon, his sword "Excalibur," sucks in his chest and sticks out his belly, pardon, I meant the other way around, although the truth is that with Durito, it is very difficult to make out which one is his chest and which his belly. Well, in any case, Durito looks truly indignant, so I had better opt for a conciliatory attitude.

"And should I address you, pardon me, address THEE, with all those qualifiers?"

"That you should, but this morning I arose magnanimous and generous, so you can call me "Don Durito" or simply "Sir."

"Okay, Don Durito or simply Sir, I was telling your grace that I have a serious problem that distresses my soul and clouds my vision with anxiety," I said, and I accompanied my words with a bow, because of that business about the relationship between plebeians and noblemen.

"Well, that's better," says Durito, now seated on the edge of my shirt collar, sufficiently close to leave my line of sight, and to manage to wound me with the lance if the circumstances and his mood deem it necessary.

"And what is the problem that brings so much anguish to a soul as simple as yours? Are you, perhaps, lovesick?"

"No," I responded decisively. "Well, not only that," I continued doubtfully. "Well, I mean, that is, you see, well, it really is something else," I ended, firmly emphasizing my indecision.

"Well, stop stammering and spit it out.² Durito becomes impatient.

"Well, it turns out that I have to write a paper for the American continental encounter for humanity and against neoliberalism. That's one thing, but the problem is that I have not thought of a topic to develop. I have here some drafts that I made . . ." I say while I take out a file of papers.

Durito snatches them from me immediately and begins to review them with impatience.

"Hmmm, hmmm, hmmm," murmurs Durito while he chews on his pipe. I already know what those "hmmms" mean, so I sneeze to urge Durito to hurry. Durito just takes out a little umbrella, and continues his reading. After awhile, he remains silent, and he looks fixedly at me.

"And well?" I ask him, impatiently.

"Rather you should ask, 'And bad?'" says Durito and continues, "Your prose, my illiterate squire, is lamentable. Your resemblance to my colleague Cyrano de Bergerac is limited to the exaggerated promontory that you wear as a nasal appendage.³ Although one must duly recognize that, in size, yours notably surpasses that of Bergerac."

"Well, it's best we not speak of promontories, my illustrious gentleman," I say as I sneeze with such emphasis that the storm of a while ago is forgotten.

"Fine, it is common knowledge that it is neither the time nor the way to speak about mirrors, so I'll continue," says Durito, putting away the little umbrella and putting on an asbestos suit.

"Hmmm. This part about the economy is too political, this one about culture is very economical, the political one is very cultural, and the social one has everything except society. So, what we have . . . it's useless!"⁴

"I already know that. The question is, how do we solve the problem?" I reiterate my impatience to him.

"Not to worry. You have before you the greatest and most wonderful righter of wrongs the world has ever seen. I will see you through this predicament, into which your proverbial inexperience has put you," says Durito while he throws my papers into the latrine nearest to his heart.

With bitterness and pain upon seeing how my papers flounder in the simile of neoliberalism, I tell him,

"And how do you plan to solve the dilemma, my lord?"

"Veery easy. I have with me a magic potion that a great sorcerer of the Amazons gave me. It has wonderful properties, and it can make miracles happen," says Durito while he extracts from his shell a tiny bottle of sherry.

2 The original Spanish suggests a pun on *chiclés*, "gum," and *chides*, "rubbish."

3 Cyrano de Bergerac, the central character in Edmond Rostand's 19th-century novel by that name, not only had a huge nose, but was a skilled writer whose words won the heart of a woman he loved—for another.

4 At the suggestion of the EZLN, discussions at the first continental and intercontinental encounters were organized around the "social," "political," "economic," and "cultural" dimensions of, and struggles against, neoliberalism.

I ask, "And if one drinks that liquid, can he understand neoliberalism and construct an intelligent alternative?"

"Of course not! This liquid works wonders on the luster of any type of shell. It has given me a 'look' that has caused a furor among the respectable," says Durito while he throws the liquid on his back and rubs it in with my bandana, well, with what remains of it.

"But, Durito . . . what does the shine of your shell have to do with neoliberalism?" I say, forgetting all the protocol of knight-errantry.

"Quiet! Attention everyone! Quick! Pen and paper! Take note for I am about to speak!" says Durito, going to a pasture that, if not for fifteen million ticks and four cows, was vacant of any listeners.

Durito clears his throat and puts on some eyeglasses that I had not seen on him before. One of the bullets that he carried in the chinstrap of his helmet is his improvised pulpit and, without any paper, he begins to speak, directing himself to the mirror that we all are:

"In neoliberalism, my squalid squire, history becomes an obstacle because of what it represents of memory, graduate students are promoted into forgetfulness and the meticulous statistics of the trivialities of Power become the object of study and of great and profound dissertations. Power converts history into a badly told tale, and their social scientists construct ridiculous apologies with, indeed, a theoretical scaffolding so complex that they are able to disguise stupidity and servility as intelligence and objectivity. In the tale of neoliberalism, the powerful are heroes because they are powerful, and the villains to be eliminated are the 'expendables,' that is to say, Blacks, Asians, Chicanos, Latinos, the indigenous, women, the young, prisoners, migrants, the ones who have been screwed over, homosexuals, lesbians, the marginalized, the elderly, and, very especially, rebels. In the tale as told by Power, the happening that is worth something is the one that can be recorded on a spreadsheet that contains respectable indices of profit. Everything else is completely dispensable, especially if that everything else reduces profit.

"In the tale as told by Power everything is foreseen and determined ahead of time: the bad can be bad, but only to contrast with the power of good. The ethical balance between good and evil transforms into the amoral balance between Power and the rebel. For Power, money carries weight; for the rebel, dignity carries weight. In its tale Power imagines a world not without contradictions, one with all the contradictions under control, administrable as escape valves that let off the social pressures that Power provokes. In its tale Power constructs a virtual reality where dignity is unintelligible and not measurable. How can something have value and carry weight that is not understood and that doesn't change? Ergo, dignity will be defeated, irremediably, by money. So 'no problem,' there can be dignity because money will already take charge of buying it and converting it into merchandise that circulates according to the laws of the market . . . of Power. But, it turns out that the tale as told by Power is just that, a tale, a tale that disdains Reality and, therefore, a badly told tale. Dignity continues escaping from the laws of the market and begins to have weight and value

in the place that matters, that is to say, in the heart . . .”

Durito takes a deep bow. The crickets applaud loud and long, figuratively speaking. I venture a,

“Well, it’s dense . . .”

“Silence! Don’t ruin art with your trivialities and addendums!” protests Durito while he puts away his glasses. Then he continues:

“I hope that you have taken note of everything and that this brilliant dissertation helps you out of your jam.”

“Actually, I believe that it has confused me more,” I say, trying to hide the fact that I didn’t write a single letter.

“You’re hopeless. Your reasoning is as limited as your nose is limitless. Better we leave that matter in peace, and inform me of the latest happenings,” says Durito with resignation.

I take out my notebook, stand at attention and report,

“‘El Serpiente Motorizado’ has said that they propose La Realidad be electrified and that its first installation will be . . . an electric chair that will be at the disposal of all those who perform the ‘slam.’”⁵

“Ah! *Cosas veredes* Sancho!” muses Don Durito.⁶

“Moreover, everyone says that the best musician in El Serpiente Desviada is La Flama and the only thing that *he* plays is the horn,” I say while I load a round, just in case anyone wants to kill me.

“What that ‘Serpiente de Hoy No Circula’ needs is for I, the great Head-Banger Durito, to incorporate myself as artistic director.”

“Will they learn to play like that?” I ask while I prepare the hard rock version of “Cartas Marcadas” in case we have to do a “number.”

“Don’t even think about it, however, I’m sure that our concerts will be filled to capacity with those who come to admire my style of *baile*, which I call ‘Durito’s Dance.’ *Wacha bato*—look at this *beautiful* move!” says Durito as he begins a kind of epileptic seizure.⁷

I remind the great and never prudent Don Durito de la Lacandona that it is not the time go twisting things around and that we have to solve the problem of the paper for humanity and against neoliberalism. The reminder takes me many

5 Throughout this story Marcos and Durito are garbling words, and using hybrid slang terms. *El Serpiente Motorizado* (“The Motorized Snake”) is the name of a musical group that attempted to raise money for Zapatista communities. The group is referred to as *El Serpiente de Hoy No Circula* (“The Snake that doesn’t drive today”) a play on Mexico City pollution-control campaigns that rotate driving privileges, and as *El Serpiente Desviada* (“The Broken Down Snake”). The English “slam” in the Spanish original is presumably a reference to slam-dancing. Marcos has often said that “Cartas Marcadas” (“Marked Cards”) is his favorite song. See note in “The Story of the Bay Horse” These items are referenced in: *Desde las montañas del sureste mexicano* (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1999), 20–21.

6 “*Cosas veredes*,” a phrase connoting archaic Spanish and popularly attributed to Don Quijote, translates literally as “the things you will see.”

7 “*Wacha bato*” is Caló for “Check it out, man!”

sneezes because Durito mistakes the first ones for applause.

“Ahem, ahem,” says Durito while he readjusts his helmet and again sheaths “Excalibur,” which had simultaneously played the roles of guitar, piano, drums and electronic synthesizer. The paper clip stops being a stand-up microphone and is once again the fierce lance of the knight-errant.

“You are right. It is necessary to return to the prosaic things of this world. I have foreseen your incompetence . . .” This said, Durito takes some papers out from I don’t know where.

“Here is my paper. Make five million copies and distribute them throughout *La Realidad*,” says Durito while he tosses the pages to me.

“If you speak of the community *La Realidad*, that will be too many copies, and if you speak of *the real reality* that’ll be too few,” I say while I thumb through his writing. The title is:

“Promissory Elements For An Initial Analysis As The First Basis Of An Original Approach To The First-Born Fundamental Considerations Concerning The Supra-historical And Supercalifragilisticesimal Foundation Of Neoliberalism In The Decisive Juncture Of April 6, 1994 At 01:30 Hours On-The-Dot, Southeastern Time, With A Moon That Tends To Empty Itself As If It Were The Pocket Of A Worker At The Peak Of Privatization, Monetary Adjustments And Other Economic Measures So Effective That They Provoke Encounters Such As That Of *La Realidad* (First Of 17,987 Parts).”

The paper is quite concise. In fact, it is composed of a single sentence that goes like this:

“The problem with globalization under neoliberalism is that bubbles have a tendency to burst.”⁸

I scratch my head after reading. Durito becomes restless:

“Well? What do you think?”

“Well, what can I tell you,” I respond carefully. “At least let us recognize that the workshop coordinators will not have to struggle with the synthesis.”

“Come on. Don’t be stingy with your praise! And do not fear, my modesty is proverbial. You can say that it is clear, overwhelming, illuminating, clarifying, undebatable, definitive and defining. You can add that it’s at the forefront of a new scientific paradigm, that it’s no longer a secret who will win the Nobel prize in economy, that a new science is born, that ‘Duritismo’ will revolutionize all research and all economic models, that world history will from now on be organized as ‘before Durito’ and ‘after Durito.’

“No,” I say hurriedly, “let’s not exaggerate.”

8 At the beginning and end of this article Marcos makes a play on the double-meaning of the Spanish “*globos*,” which translates literally as both balloons and globes, and evokes speculative financial bubbles.

“Well,” says Durito sliding down one of my guns, “I have to leave because there is going to be a concert, and it is known that a serpent on wheels, without me, will end up with flat tires.”

Durito leaves. The moon takes overhead a cloud of petticoats and its blush stains the edges. Underneath there are men and women dreaming, wheat celebrates existence, and I sigh as if ending, as if continuing, as if beginning . . .

Vale. Salud, and do not be sad. The moon and hope always return. And do they give up? Never!

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. In *La Realidad*, during the Continental American Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Old Antonio discovered that all those who had boarded the boat were the same ones who had been excluded, forever, from all the boats.

And that is why they boarded, Old Antonio told Subcomandante Marcos, because those men and women—young people, some prisoners, most of them indigenous—“no longer wanted to follow orders, but to participate, whether as captains or sailors” and to make the boat move forward, towards a greater future, with seriousness and joy, meeting as full human beings.

But indeed, warned Old Antonio, between cigarettes, there will be many shadows, and it will take much work to find the midnight sun, “that which joins word and desire about itself. That is why I wanted to tell them not to go, that, if they remained, they would also see the moon turn itself into drum and beat desire with the wind. And they would see that the crickets are nothing more than lazy stars who are constantly complaining about having fallen down, that the fireflies paint teardrops and that the light can be perceived in even the darkest corners of the night.”

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