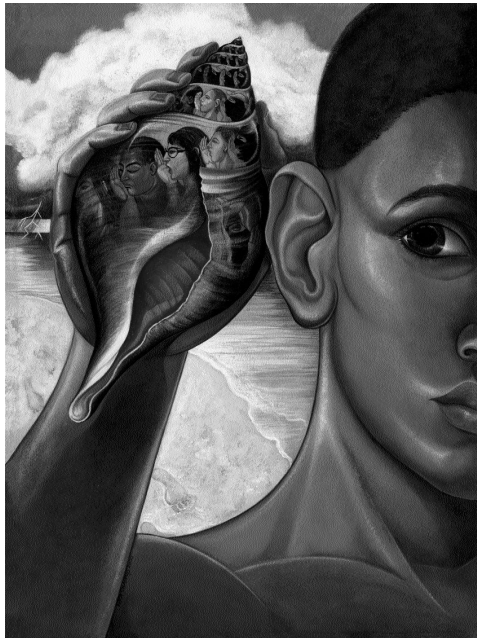


The Hour of the Little Ones, Part III: The Undocumented Others



For the brown men and women in the United States:

we are the emigrants
the pale anonymous ones with the heathen and carnal century
on our backs where we accumulate the legacy
of questions and perplexities
—Mario Benedetti

Durito says that, once over the border, a wave of terror strikes and pursues you. It's not just the threat from *la migra* and the *kukuxklanes*.¹ It is also the racism that fills each and every one of the corners of the reality of the country of the muddy stars and stripes. In fields, on the street, in businesses, in school, in cultural centers, on television and in publications, even in bathrooms, everything pushes you to renounce your color, which is the best way of renouncing one's culture, land, history, that is, surrendering the dignity which, being other, comes with the brown color of the Latinos in North America.

1 *La migra* is a common term for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now called the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services and housed within the Department of Homeland Security. *Kukuxklanes* is Marcos' Spanish phonological spelling of Ku Klux Klan, a paramilitary terrorist organization in the United States.

“Those brownies,” say those who hide behind the classification of human beings according to the color of their skin, the crime of a system that classifies according to purchasing power, always directly proportional to the sales price (the more you sell, the more you can buy). If the little brown ones have survived the campaign of bleach and detergent by the Powers of the American Union, it has been because the “brown” Latino community (not just Mexican, but also Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, Panamanian, Cuban, and Dominican, to mention some of the shades in which the Latin American brown color paints North America) has known how to build a network of resistance without a name and without a hegemonic organization or product that sponsors it. Without ceasing to be “the others” in a white nation, Latinos carry one of the most heroic and unknown histories of this dying 20th century: that of their color, hurt and worked until it is made hope. Hope that brown will be one more color in the rainbow of the races of the world, and it will no longer be the color of humiliation, of contempt and of forgetting.

And it is not just the “brown” that suffers and is persecuted. Durito recounts that, in addition to his status as Mexican, the black color of his shell must be added. This courageous beetle was, thus, “brown and black,” and was doubly persecuted. And he was doubly helped and supported, since the best of the Latino and black communities in the United States protected him. In that way, he was able to travel through the principal North American cities, as these urban nightmares are also called. He did not walk the routes of tourism, of glamour and marquees. Durito walked the streets of below, where blacks and Latinos are building the resistance that will allow them to be, without ceasing to be the other. But, Durito says, that’s a story for other pages.

And now “Black Shield” Durito, or Durito *Escudo Negro* (if you are not globalized) has begun insisting that it is important that I announce, with drum roll and clashing cymbals, his new book, which he has titled *Stories of Vigilance by Candlelight*.

He now gives me a story that, he says, he wrote remembering those days when he traveled as a “wetback” or *mojado* in the United States.

“Above and Below are Relative . . . Relative to the Struggle that is Waged to Subvert Them” Letter 4c (included in the story)

“It’s a very long title,” I tell Durito.

“Don’t complain about the story or there’ll be no treasure,” Durito threatens with his hook. Here goes then:

Once upon a time there was a little floor that was very sad because everyone would walk over him and everything was above him. “Why do you complain?” the other floors asked him. “What else could happen to a floor?” And the little floor

remained silent about his dream of flying lightly and winning the heart of the little cloud that, from time to time, would appear and pay him no mind. The little floor became more and more unhappy, and his sorrow was such that he began to cry. And he cried and he cried and he cried and he cried . . .

“How many times are you going to put: “and he cried”? Two or three would be enough,” I interrupt Durito.

“No one is going to censure the great Black Shield Durito, much less a big-nosed cabin boy, and, even worse, with the flu,” Durito threatens me while pointing out the terrible plank upon which the unlucky walks towards the bellies of the sharks. I give in silently. Not because I’m afraid of sharks, but because a swim would prove fatal to my perennial flu.

And he cried and he cried and he cried. The little floor cried so much that everyone and everything began slipping if they were standing or walking on him. And now he no longer had anyone or anything on top of him. And the little floor cried so much that he was becoming very thin and light. And, since he no longer had anything or anyone on top of him, the little floor began to float and he flew high. And he got his own way and now they call him the sky. And the cloud in question turned into rain and now she is on the floor and she writes him futile letters saying: “pretty little sky.” Moral of the story: Don’t look down on what is beneath you, because on the day you least expect it, it can fall on your head. And *tan-tan*.

““*Tan-tan*”? Is the story over?” I futilely ask. Durito is no longer listening to me. Remembering his old days, when he worked as a *mariachi* in the East End of Los Angeles, California, he’s put on a wide-brimmed *sombrero* and sings, off-key, the one that goes: “*Ay, ay, ay, ay, canta y no llores, porque cantando se alegran, cielito lindo, los corazones.*”² And afterwards, an out-of-tune shout of “*Ay Jalisco, don’t give up!*”

Vale. Salud, and I believe we’ll be late in setting sail. Durito has become determined to make modifications to the can of sardi . . . excuse me, to the frigate, so that it will look like a “low rider.”

El Sup, *Órale Essse!*

P.S. of *wacha bato*: Can anyone help? Durito is determined that the menu on board will include chili dogs and burritos. Ah, *que carnal ésse!*³

2 “Ay, ay, ay, ay, sing and do not cry, because when you sing, pretty little sky, you bring joy to broken hearts.” This line is from the song *Cielito Lindo (Pretty Little Sky)*.

3 “Órale Essse;” “wacha bato,” and “a que carnal ésse!” are Caló phrases, meaning respectively, “Right on Dude!”, “Check it out, man!” and “What a guy, man!”