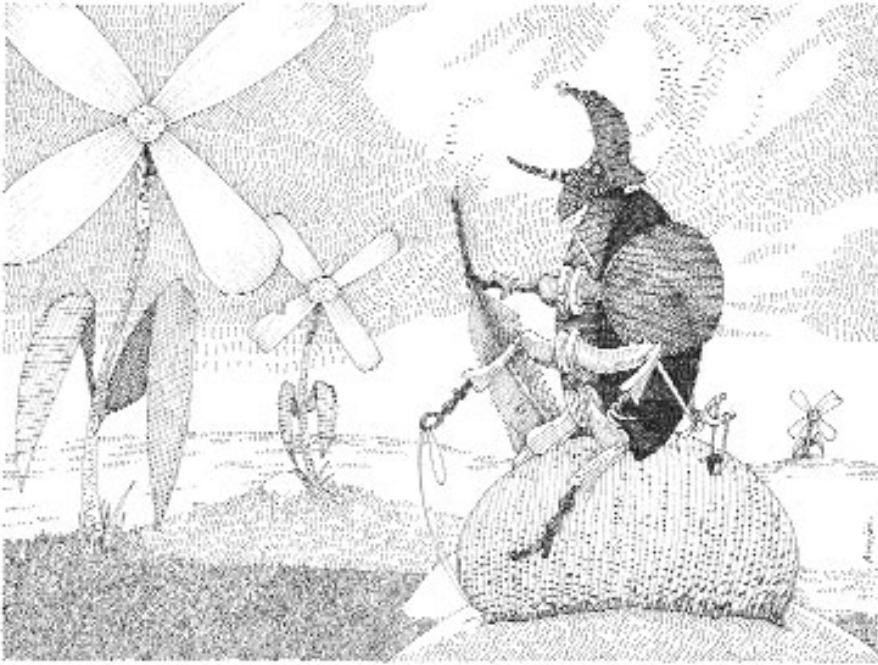


Off the Record: La Realidad



While Marcos writes to Pablo González Casanova, past rector of the UNAM and prominent member of the CONAI, Durito interrupts to hand him some political texts and then to lead him to some cookies. In an old sack hanging from a tree, Marcos finds among the rancid “Pancremas,” various odds and ends, and two books: Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, and a book of political theory authored by himself.

P.S. proposing another window

(Off the record: La Realidad)

(Postscript to Letter 6c)

March 2000

To: Don Pablo González Casanova

UNAM, Mexico

Windows are like cookies: they are tasty and nourishing.

—Don Durito de la Lacandona

First published in *La Jornada*, March 25, 2000. Originally translated by irlandesa.

Don Pablo:

I am sure that the epigram at the top of this letter will seem strange to you, and to its author even more so. It is not easy to explain, but I will try to do so. Everything began when . . .

Above, the sky stretches from horizon to horizon. It is stretched so much that its skin rips and light can be seen through the tatters. There is very little wind. Even so, a fleeting breeze brings me the echoes of some voices. I climb down from the ceiba and walk towards a little light covered by trees. It appears to be a small gathering or something like that. I approach and “in order to distinguish between the voices of the echoes, I stop and hear, among the voices, just one.” The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are sharing tea while discussing with La Mar a poll that says that 90% of human beings prefer to celebrate their non-birthdays and to give up birthday parties. These things only happen in the mountains of the Mexican southeast. I am of the 10% who prefer to celebrate their birthdays, and so I was left without tea and without discussion.

Whatever it may be, the 21st is now hovering about on all the calendars, and for lack of tea there will be coffee and animal cookies. And, speaking of little animals, Zedillo’s expanded cabinet (that is, his own and the one called—presumptuously—Labastida’s “campaign team”) overwhelms with its increasingly disreputable statements.¹ And it is not that the respectable has lost respectability, what is happening is that the number of Mexican men and women who are paying attention to what the Supreme One is saying is dwindling rapidly.

Durito, who when it comes to cookies, charges like a politician looking for his name on a ballot, appears at one of the edges of the table. I was writing a response to Don Pablo González Casanova (more of a postscript), when Durito, throwing eye patch, wooden leg and hook aside, exclaims-asks-exacts-demands, “Did someone say cookies?”

“I didn’t say it, I wrote it. And don’t get excited because they’re animal cookies, and, I understand, they aren’t among your favorites.”

“Why do you always mix politics with things as noble as cookies? Besides, I know where there are some ‘Pancremas’ put away.”

I immediately stopped writing.

“‘Pancremas?’ Where?”

“Nothing, nothing. If there’s no tea, there are no cookies.”

“But Durito . . . Okay, let’s negotiate: I’ll help you to work on the sardine ca . . . er, excuse me, the galley, and you tell me where the ‘Pancremas’ are.”

Durito thinks about it for a minute. Then he asks: “Does that include swabbing the deck and bailing out the water in storms?”

1 Francisco Labastida Ochoa was the PRI candidate anointed to succeed Zedillo as President in the July 2, 2000 election. During his candidacy, Labastida visited Zinacantán where he claimed that in Chiapas there was no war with military maneuvers and exchanges of fire, only a “state of tension.” See José Gil Olmos, “En Chiapas no hay balazos, sí un clima de hostilidades: Labastida,” *La Jornada*, August 8, 1999.

“It includes it,” I say, seeing that right now the sky has no room for clouds, and so I don’t have to worry about any storms.

“Follow me,” says Durito, and, getting down from the table, he embarks on a march through the mountains.

I took the lamp, although the moon made it unnecessary. We did not walk far. Durito stopped in front of a *huapac* and pointed to one of its branches. “There,” he said. I looked towards where he was pointing and I saw a little hanging sack. It must have been an old “mailbox,” left some time ago by one of our units. Durito sat down at the base of the tree, took out his pipe and began to smoke. I interpreted his silence and climbed the tree, untied the bag and climbed down with it. Upon opening it I saw that there indeed was a package of “Pancrema” cookies, a pair of AA batteries, a lamp that was now rusted, an old, worn book by Lewis Carroll (*Through the Looking Glass*), a Zapatista song-book . . . and a book of political theory whose author is Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos!

I don’t remember having written any book on political theory. In fact, I don’t remember having written any book, period. Certainly the idea of a long work, expounding on what we Zapatistas think about politics, has been floating through my head, but nothing has materialized. I began leafing through the book while Durito did a good job of polishing off the cookies. When I turned around, not even any crumbs of the “Pancremas” were left.

“You finished them all off?” I reproached him.

“You should be grateful. They were more rancid than the ‘new’ PRI.” Durito looks at me and adds: “I can see that something is bothering you. You can confide in me, my dear disconcerted nose.”

“Well I have just found this book in the mailbox. How is it possible, in an old mailbox in the mountains, to find a book that hasn’t been written yet?”

“The solution to your problem is in the other book.”

“Which one? The one by Lewis Carroll?”

“Of course! Check out Chapter Five.”

And so I did. I’m not very sure, but I believe the answer would be in the following dialogue between Alice and the White Queen:

“That’s the effect of living backwards,” the Queen said kindly: “it always makes one a little giddy at first—”

“Living backwards!” Alice repeated in great astonishment. “I never heard of such a thing!”

“But there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.”

“I’m sure *mine* only works one way,” Alice remarked. “I can’t remember things before they happen.”

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,” the Queen remarked.

“What sort of things do *you* remember best?” Alice ventured to ask.²

“So I have in my hands a book that hasn’t been written yet?” I said.

“That’s the way it is. We are in one of those areas called a “window.” I look at him in surprise.

“Yes,” Durito says. “‘Windows.’ These places where one can see to the other side, be it what has happened, or what is going to happen. Here, for example, you can see what Zedillo’s administration has been, and also see the chaos that it is leading to. Now the only stable thing is instability. There will be all kinds of problems.”

“Well it seems they’re getting there. You can already see the stock market is up in the clouds, and while not well understood, economic indices assure there will be no ‘December error.’”

“Perhaps because it will happen in another month.” Durito seems to take notice of my perplexity because he almost immediately adds, “You should understand.” Durito looks at me doubtfully and corrects himself. “Okay, you should try to understand that . . . look, better that you read this than I’m writing.” Durito hands me some written pages where it says:

Notes that try to explain what will happen just because when they happen just because.

Macro-economic Indices: Cosmetic Framing

In an election year, candidates are abundant, as are lies. One of the biggest is the one that sings the praises of an economic prosperity that is not to be seen anywhere. Blind to what the common people are suffering, government officials exhibit figures that say more in what they don’t say. The high macro-economic indices are nothing but a macro cover-up for concealing the reality of the growth of poverty and the number of poor in our country. Facing the evidence that no one believes them, the government puts the achievements and the applause for the rapid and tumultuous sale of Mexico into the mouths of large financial centers. At business and government meetings (the most powerful club of national criminals), they congratulate each other for increased profits. Meanwhile, in Mexico’s streets and countryside, survival becomes an everyday battle, and the price increases of basic products and services are reflected on the tables (less nourishment and quantity), in the streets (the number of the unemployed and under-employed are increasing), in small businesses (misery and closings), and in the countryside (increased emigration to the cities and to the American Union).

Even so, the cosmetic framing presents serious shortcomings. At the 13th Congress of the National College of Economists, Herminio Blanco, the Zedillo loyalist and Secretary of Commerce, faced criticism of his publicity campaign. Enrique Dussel, UNAM researcher, told him: “The 3,100 *maquilas* and 300 big national and foreign companies are 0.12 percent of the country’s businesses, and they create only

2 Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, Donald Gray, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 150-151.

5.6 percent of the jobs.”³ Noting that large corporations had not created productive linkages with small and mid-size industries (which are the primary source of employment in Mexico), the researcher had the sense of humor to point out to Señor Blanco: “These are facts, not globalphobia.” (Ibid.)

In the great fraud called the “North American Free Trade Agreement” (product of the great Salinas lie), the immediate future is now being projected with the signing of a free trade agreement with the European Union. With a relish for modern cosmetics, the European governments are extending their hands to Zedillo without caring that his is covered with indigenous blood, without noticing that his government is the one that has the most ties with drug trafficking, and are closing their eyes to the lack of democracy in our country. The European Union’s flexibility can be understood: what is at stake is a slice of the pie that is called, still, “Mexico.” Due to the marvels of globalization, a country is measured by its macro-economic indices. The people? They do not exist; there are only buyers and sellers. And, within these, there are classifications: the small, the large and the macro. These last ones buy or sell countries. At one time they were governments of nation-states; today they are only merchants in search of good prices and substantial profits.

The Political Class And Their Organizers: The Clergy, The Army, The Media, Intellectuals, and International Organizations

If we have said before that the political class is increasingly less political and increasingly more business-like, in an election year cynicism takes on the overtones of a publicity “boom.” The ones that “matter” are not the governed, but those who contribute to, or interfere with, the exercise of power. Convened by the Mexican political class, the high clergy, the army, the electronic media, the intellectuals and international organizations become “the great electors.” Their respective interests receive the regime’s benefits in an exaggerated way at election time. Citizens remain at the margins and their demands are reduced to electoral polls. The statements, counter-statements and comments to each other belong to the so-called “leaders” of an opinion that is increasingly closer to an agreement among cronies, and is increasingly removed from serious debate about ideas and programs.

The high clergy advances, with purported divine endorsement, in earthly intrigues. Teaming up with those who govern and/or those who aspire to govern, the Catholic hierarchy sees with satisfaction that its word has influence and bearing on government policies. While the lay state is nothing more than a shameful date on the calendar, the politicians and clergy share bread, salt, complicity and shamelessness in public and private meetings. It is not a mutual respect between

3 *El Universal*, February 9, 2000, Financial section, reported by Lilia González and Alberto Bello. *Maquilas* or *Maquiladoras* are assembly plants originally located on the U.S.-Mexico border and first developed under the Border Industrialization Program during the mid-1960s. Multinational corporations increasingly use *maquilas* throughout Mexico to provide low-waged labor to assemble electronic and automotive consumer goods.

different spheres, no. It is a symbiosis that allows some bishops and cardinals to be closer to the Mexico of Power than to common, everyday Catholics (the great majority of Mexicans). The Reform Laws? Pardon, my dear sir: isn't that the name of a street?⁴

In another arena, other “bishops” and “cardinals”—but from the intellectual Right—are fighting to occupy the space left by the supreme pontiff, Octavio Paz.⁵ If one could in some way measure Paz' stature as an effective intellectual with and for power, it is measuring that of the dwarves who are fighting over his legacy. With Paz dies the last great intellectual of the Right in Mexico. Those who follow him might be of the Right, but they are far from being intellectuals. Still, the hierarchies of the intellectual Right in Mexico have their acolytes and, if it were necessary, their soldiers. In recent days, the intellectual front against the university movement suffered a serious setback. The blow came from an academic, an intellectual and leftist, called Pablo González Casanova. The UNAM researcher proved something fundamental: legality cannot supplant legitimacy. In the case of the UNAM conflict, “legality” (now other intellectuals have demonstrated that the entrance by the Federal Preventative Police into UNAM was illegal, as are prison trials against the imprisoned students) was converted into a means by which the senselessness of the violence received an honorary doctorate from the largest university in Latin America.⁶

If being a leftist was already something unforgivable in González Casanova, the fact of his working in accordance with his ideas was now too much. The “cardinals” of the intelligentsia sent their pawns (it seems that some of them even have first and last names) to cross swords with Don Pablo. Although they lost the battle, the intelligentsia of the Right does not lose sleep over that failed skirmish. Their decisive battles are not in the arena of ideas (they would surely lose), nor against progressive intellectuals. No, the ground to be conquered, the one they want, the one which some of them already enjoy, is at the side of the “prince,” at the edge of his table, whispering praise into the ears of the great gentlemen of politics and money. Nonetheless, they have to do something to differentiate themselves from the buffoons swarming around government palaces. That is why they have their maga-

4 Following the Revolution of Ayutla of 1855, the liberal revolt that ousted Antonio López de Santa Ana, a series of legal reforms were enacted prior to the Constitution of 1857 to limit the power of the Church hierarchy and Mexican military, including the Ley Juárez (1855), Ley Lerdo (1856) and Ley Iglesias (1857). Many cities in Mexico have a street named La Reforma in honor of the revolt.

5 Poet and essayist associated with the PRI, Octavio Paz (1914—1998) was one of Mexico's most prominent intellectuals winning the Cervantes prize in 1981, the American Neustadt Prize in 1982 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990.

6 Violating the autonomy of the campus, Federal Preventive Police, under the direction of Wilfredo Robledo, raided the University, arresting almost 1,000 student strikers in early February. The Federal Preventive Police was established as a special unit under the leadership of the *Consejo General de Huelga* (General Strike Council), partly in response to the student strike. The strike for the abolition of educational reforms that sought to limit free public education began on March 12, 1999.

zines and television programs. The dead texts they sketch, their intellectual circles and their open spaces are not targeted at anyone but themselves. In these places they comment among themselves, they read among themselves, they “critique” among themselves, they greet each other, and, in so doing, they say to each other: “We are the conscience of the new Power, we are necessary because we say we are necessary; Power needs someone to set economic interests and their expenses to prose and verse; what makes us different from the buffoons is that we do not tell jokes, we explain them.”

In this dwarf-like world of dwarves, the surface is a chessboard where bishops, kings, queens, pawns, knights and rooks conspire at the tops of their voices. Everyone knows who is going to win, what is important is not that, but rather which square they occupy and for how long. The racket deafens each of them, but the machine works. There are seven decades of a political system that is now called the “new PRI.” The noise of the machine does not resemble that of gears grinding, each time it seems more like a publicity spot.

The problems begin when pieces enter that do not belong on that chessboard, when some strange object jams the gears, or when some interference obstructs the omnipotent “buying and selling” . . .

From the National News Page to the Entertainment Section?

The fundamental sound box of this Mexico of the powerful is the electronic media. However, far from being merely an echo of what the political class says, television and radio take on their own voice, and, without anyone questioning it, they become the primary voice. The great problems of the country do not define the national agenda, for that matter, neither do the political leaders. No, election campaigns and government agendas agree with radio and television programs. Electronic media does not broadcast news; it creates it, feeds it, makes it grow, annihilates it. The difference between party choices during elections is not based on the programs for the nation that one and the other support, but in the time slots they manage to secure in the media.

The ratings that matter are not of the television viewing public, but rather those that reside with the political class. The major part of the statements and declarations by the main political actors do not deal with real situations, but lead news stories. Thus, the “up-to-the-minute” issues covered by the media are those that they have selected. In the great theater of Mexican politics, the politicians are the actors and simultaneously the spectators. Radio and television carry out the roles of director, screenwriter, producer, lighting designer, stagehand and ticket taker.

If it is increasingly difficult to speak of a single Mexico, during elections it is impossible. The existence of two countries is palpable: the one that exists in the headlines and the one that takes place “off the record,” outside the news and exclusive stories.

Off the Record: Reality

While radio and television try, ineffectively, to present an image of “normalcy” at the Autonomous National University of Mexico, the enthusiasts for the “Rule of Law” exercised against social activists are surprised that the entrance onto the campus of Wilfredo Robledo’s paramilitaries and the detention of hundreds of university students did not “solve” the conflict at the greatest university. The university movement is not over, nor is the pretender, De La Fuente, the rector.⁷ The selective and piecemeal release of student prisoners (at great pains to leave a few still in jail) has not discouraged the struggle for the demand for free education and for a truly democratic university congress with authority to make decisions. At times disconcerted, the university movement remains firm in its demands for freedom for political prisoners, free education and the congress, while radio and television try to make sure that the headlines belong solely to those who have paid for airtime. The rest should be relegated to the police blotter or used as “filler.” Who cares about the parents who are bleeding to death to demand the release of their children, if Esteban (Guajardo) Moctezuma and Emilio Gamboa are fighting on Labastida’s team?⁸ The same media that were once horrified by the CGH’s vocabulary now get excited about the “crap-fart-sssh” of the election campaigns and about the profuse exchange of digital signals among the candidates.

But, if Reality takes place well outside the programming, every once in a while it takes a bite out of the Mexico of above and ruins macro-economic indices, news programs and candidates’ agendas. In a corner of the other Mexico, a community decides to do without *telenovelas* and news shows; it confronts the police and defends a rural teachers school.⁹ In El Mexe, Hidalgo, the protagonists are not education students, nor the police who went to crush them; they are the people.¹⁰ People who had no space in the news save for the police blotter, a point in the candidate’s rally, a number in the amount of sandwiches and sodas to be given out during the proselytizing tour. As it appears, it disappears. An avalanche of statements bury the fundamental fact (the “*Ya Basta!*” firmly exercised) and one other thing:

Chiapas? It might be on the agenda of the UN or other national and international non-governmental organizations, but not on the national one. In order to

7 Juan Ramón De La Fuente became Rector of the UNAM on November 12, 1999, following the sudden resignation of Francisco Barnés de Castro.

8 Esteban (Guajardo) Moctezuma and Emilio Gamboa, both prominent members of the PRI, held important positions in Labastida’s election team. Moctezuma served as campaign manager while Gamboa was the campaign’s director of communications. Gamboa’s alleged ties to narco-trafficking while a top PRI official was the focus of some controversy.

9 *Telenovelas* are soap operas, primarily produced in Mexico, Venezuela, and Brazil, popular throughout Latin America and increasingly translated into a number of foreign languages.

10 On February 20, activists from El Mexe Teachers College in Tepatepec, Hidalgo freed 176 students illegally held by police following an early morning raid on the college. Protestors retaliated for the attack on the school by parading some 40 captured officers without their clothes in the main plaza.

prevent that, the croquette Albores spares no expense.¹¹ In one year, the croquette has spent 28 million pesos to prevent “Chiapas” from being the sour note on the news (*Proceso Sur*, Number 1, March 4, 2000). The man with the checkbook is the beloved son of TV Azteca: Manuel de la Torre, who just yesterday was destroying rural schools with his whirling helicopter.¹² And today he is trying to herd journalists as if they were cattle.

While the government insists it has made a great economic investment in Chiapas, it “forgets” to say that that the greatest expense is on publicity, paid journalistic notes, bribes in order to silence “disagreeable” news and to improve the federal army’s battered image.

Between Albores’ barking and Rabasa’s braying, the army takes up new attack positions, it ostensibly reinforces its garrisons, planes and helicopters increase their flyovers and the war continues, now keeping a prudent distance from press headlines.

The Zapatista indigenous insist on the value of the word: the women in San Cristóbal on March 8th, the *coordinadoras* on March 21st, the residents of Amador Hernández, those from Amparo Agua Tinta, the Tzotzils of Los Altos, the Tzeltals of Las Cañadas, the Chols and Zoques of the North, the Mames of the Sierra. They all remember that there is a word that the government did not honor, the San Andrés Accords, and that there is no peace, nor justice, nor dignity for the Mexican indigenous.

Far from the front pages, from the electronic news programs, the Mexico of the people takes place in resistance, in patient waiting, in hope . . .

“What are they waiting for?”

I return the pages to Durito, saying to him: “That ‘what are they waiting for?’ Is it a question, a demand or a prophecy?”

“Look out the window,” Durito tells me. I do so, and I see and I don’t believe it.

“You mean that . . . ? Who would have thought?”

“That’s how it is. Windows are like cookies: they are tasty and nourishing,” says Durito while he sets out on the return . . .

With those words Durito ended his talk that early morning, Don Pablo. When I returned to the hut, I re-read your letter and began writing you these lines. I should try to explain to you that we Zapatistas see ourselves not only in the window on the left that you point out in your text. We believe we have

11 A nickname for Chiapas Governor Guillén, suggesting that he resembles the deep-fried dumplings known as croquettes.

12 Manuel de la Torre, the executive director of TV-Azteca’s news program “Hablemos Claro” (“Speaking Clearly”) and brother to the Chiapas Secretary of Agriculture, accompanied Dolores “Lolita” de la Vega, the program’s news anchor, on a surprise visit to the community of La Realidad. The fully-equipped newsteam landed a helicopter provided by the governor on the patio of the community’s school house. Tojolobal leaders forced the helicopter to leave, but its departure ripped through the roof of the schoolhouse, severely injuring a number of children.

opened another window, a window within the window on the left, that our political proposal is more radical than those that look out your window and that it is different, very “other.” (Note: I did not write “better,” just “different.”) And I suppose that this letter was intended to explain to you (and to others) what that other window that we Zapatistas had opened consists of, according to us.

But it happens that everything will be in that book that hasn't been written, but which can be read in one of the “window zones” in the mountains of the Mexican southeast. So you will have to wait for that famous book to be written (which is nothing if not optimistic) and to be published (which borders on naïveté).

For the moment, Don Pablo, receive our greetings and send your next letter with, preferably, some “Pancrema” cookies (better if they are not rancid). Perhaps then I can convince Durito to take me to the lucky “window” again. Because in the book I haven't written (but which, I suppose, I will write), I only managed to read the dedication, and I didn't get any further because a damp tenderness prevented me from doing so.

Vale, Don Pablo. *Salud*, and taking a good look at it, a window is nothing more than a broken mirror.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

* * *