

Preface

Since 1994 when they emerged as a political force in Chiapas, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN, has repeatedly addressed grassroots movements in Mexico and around the world about new forms of political action. Under an indigenous leadership, the Zapatista military commander and spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos has issued hundreds of communiqués that form a broad political discourse illuminated with poetry, humor, and storytelling.

Through the forty-four stories collected here, in which the beetle and quixotic knight-errant Don Durito de la Lacandona befriends and advises Subcomandante Marcos, we learn about the shifting political terrain on which the Zapatistas struggle and about their history as an organization and movement. The political analysis and strategy embodied in the Durito stories and in the communiqués in which they appear has engaged not only Zapatista supporters, but also the broader international movement against neoliberalism and capitalist globalization.

The idea for this book grew out of an earlier project that originated in Chiapas during the First Continental Encounter Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity in April 1996. Prompted by international solidarity discussions, that project assembled thirteen Durito stories in a chapbook quickly produced for circulation to those interested in learning more about the Zapatista rebellion. In 1998, as the number of Durito stories continued to grow, the Acción Zapatista Editorial Collective began work on this collection. Regrettably, the original intent to publish a bilingual volume was thwarted by the large and growing number of stories and the need to disseminate them as soon as possible. This compilation ends in 2002, but the Durito stories continue to appear regularly in the magazine *Rebeldía*.

While most other Durito collections have excerpted these stories from the communiqués in which they originally appeared, *Conversations With Durito* presents each one within the original Zapatista communiqué, presenting them not simply as stories, but as documents of particular moments in the Zapatista struggle. To further this understanding, we have supplemented the communiqués with a historical overview, brief introductions to each story, integrated footnotes and bibliographic resources. Where necessary, the footnotes include comments on translation, but primarily add critical political, historical, and cultural information.

Translation & Editing Notes

The stories of Durito are some of the most literary and complex EZLN communiqués. Their narratives combine political critique, satire, historical debate, literary seduction, and poetry, and regularly change register from elevated theoretical language to popular Mexican word play or *albures*, indigenous and foreign languages, archaic and peninsular Spanish, and Caló (a hybrid language spoken along the U.S.-Mexico border). They are a formidable challenge to translate.

Compiling and editing the stories into a cohesive collection also posed the challenge of crafting linguistic, stylistic, and narrative consistency. Most of the communiqués were originally disseminated through the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* and then over the Internet. Most had previously been translated by various persons, usually in a matter of hours or days. Given the complexity of the task, our editing process consisted of two stages. Each member of the collective took responsibility for the initial edits of a story: either reviewing and revising an existing translation or creating a new one, and then adding preliminary footnotes. This stage was followed by subsequent collective edits that incorporated discussion of footnotes, additional research, and a line-by-line translation review.

We hope that our liberties with translation have made the text more fluid for the English reader while remaining true to the meaning of the original documents. On the one hand, we sought to avoid interpreting the text for the reader any more than is implicit in any translation. On the other, we sought to capture the literary resonance and multi-narrative that takes place across the communiqués. In attempting to make them as accessible and rewarding in English as they are in the original Spanish, we have sometimes rendered the Spanish into idiomatic phrases common to English speakers.

At times we chose to retain the use of some Spanish terms. In this, we were guided by three principles: 1) the terms had specific cultural and historical significance that was fairly widely known, e.g., *cacique*; 2) there was no direct equivalent in English, e.g., *pozole*; and 3) there were poetic, metaphorical or thematic elements that would be lost in translation. A notable example of the latter is the use of *vale* and *salud* at the end of each communiqué in that these terms have a number of possible translations and interpretations. Because their function as closings was clear, but the play and emphasis impossible to determine, we chose to leave both untranslated.

Gendered terms were also a subject of discussion, for example, the customary use of the male plural to signify both men and women. Letters are sometimes addressed to “*hermanos*” and at other times to “*hermanos y hermanas*.” Our choice was to simply translate both as “brothers and sisters.”

When confronted with text quoted by Subcomandante Marcos from other writers, we tried to locate existing standardized translations of the text and provide a citation for further investigation. However, there were some quotations for which we chose to provide our own translation, and others that we chose to leave in the language in which they appeared in the original.