

REPORT: HONDURAS

resistance faced serious consequences. And as November approached, the drama in the schools had the potential to take its ugliest turn yet. As the pro-Zelaya teachers' unions insisted they would keep schools open and disrupt elections unless Zelaya was restored to power, the specter of violence emerged.

Constitutionally placed under the Supreme Electoral Tribunal for the month before the elections, the military openly expressed its willingness to confront the teachers and any other election boycotters with the full weight of the law (voting is obligatory in Honduras). These were ominous words from the armed forces—having already committed widespread human rights abuses in the preceding months, they continued to threaten civilians while presenting themselves as the ultimate defenders of democracy. These threats only strengthened the teachers'

claims to be defending Honduran democracy against a repressive regime.

THE HONDURAN TEACHERS' POSITION AGAINST THE COUP IS consistent with the historical role of Latin American unions, which have been at the forefront of struggles for citizenship rights and democracy in the region. Five of the country's six teachers' unions became central players in the resistance, using a combination of weapons that other groups lack: significant disruptive capacity, tens of thousands of members, a national network, and financial resources. The resistance would have folded without the unions' resources, according to several Honduran education experts.

"The teachers have sustained this movement," said Alejandro Ventura, former president of the one teacher's

The Coup That Awoke a People's Resistance

Chanting "They fear us because we are not afraid," Hondurans of all walks of life, colors, shapes, and sizes, including workers, students, housewives, teachers, feminists, lesbians, gays, transgendered people, Garifuna, Lencas, Tolupanes, campesinos, came together in the summer of 2009 to oppose the coup d'état.¹ They established the National Front Against the Coup d'État in Honduras—renamed the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) after the November 29 elections—a large, broad-based coalition with a presence throughout the country's regions. The resistance, as it is popularly known, is the result of a dynamic, inter-generational convergence between "new" and "old" social movements: Newer groups that push for the inclusion of marginalized people, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, Afro-Hondurans, and LGBT people, have joined the resistance, building strong links with older, more traditional unions and campesino organizations that focus on material needs and have a larger working-class membership.

The leadership of the FNRP (contraelgolpedeestadohn.blogspot.com) was initially led by traditional-sector men. But groups like the Garifuna Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH) and indigenous Lenca-led Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), along with feminist and LGBT groups, joined the leadership—representing a radical step toward moving people on the margins to the center. In the past, the "new" movements have not always been natural allies of the traditional sectors of labor and other male- and *mestizo*-led groups. Yet the traditional social movements

passed down the mobilizational tools and vision of what a just society should look like to younger leaders and activists, and they were indispensable in creating and defining the spaces for protest. On the other hand, without the newer social movements, the more traditional sectors would not be questioned and forced to reassess their strategies. The *golpistas* have unwittingly created an opportune moment for popular sectors to consolidate a powerful oppositional movement.

The presence of women at all levels of the resistance is profound and unmistakable. Early on, women leaders founded Feminists in Resistance, a national coalition whose members include representatives from all the women's groups in the country as well as from non-women-identified groups. In its first communiqué, the group made clear its intervention within the mostly male-led resistance leadership, but it also reflected a commitment to create a united front, bringing together many organizations that had never collaborated before.² Feminists in Resistance demanded and earned a place for women as leaders, not just as workers and protesters, and the traditional movements recognized they could not do without them.³

During the coup, Honduran LGBT groups like the Arco Iris, Asociación Kukulcan, Red Lésbica Cattrachas, Colectivo Violeta, and Comunidad Gay Sampedrana, quite visibly joined the resistance. This certainly sets off the movement as unique in Honduran history, challenging the more traditional movements to consider and incorporate people of non-normative sexualities within a framework built around defending constitutionality and human rights. To this day

union (PRICPHMA) that has not participated in the resistance and current minister of education under President Porfirio Lobo. Ventura suggested, as many of the anti-coup teachers' opponents have argued, that the unions were bankrolling and supporting the resistance movement, which otherwise would not have existed. Sánchez denied that COLPROSUMAH had spent much money supporting the resistance, but he acknowledged that his and the other unions were "a determining social sector in this struggle."

The teachers' unions, known as *colegios magisteriales*, are technically professional associations but act as de facto unions. They were established by the 1962 Law of Obligatory Professional Association, which mandated that all teachers belong to a *colegio*, lending strength to the unions by providing a steady stream of members and

dues.⁷ But the measure remains controversial because Honduran law does not permit other unions to require participation. Thus, the legislation allowed the *colegios* to exploit a legal loophole, according to Napoleón Morazán, a founding member and former leading member of COLPROSUMAH.

Teachers in Honduras have gained considerable political and economic strength in the last 15 years. Their efforts in recent years have focused on defending the Teachers' Statute (passed in 1997), which promised them scheduled pay increases and benefits. In the 1990s the unions united under the Honduran Federation of Teaching Organizations (FOMH) to pressure then president Roberto Reina (1994–98) to sign the statute, to push President Carlos Flores (1998–2002) to implement it, then to force President Ricardo Maduro (2002–06) to accept its provi-

they have been the most vocal human rights defenders against national police and military. While most of these organized sectors exist in the major cities, Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, the work of HIV prevention has spread throughout the nation via other partner organizations such as women's groups, campesino groups, and women's projects within labor unions.⁴

The resistance has also been notable for its inclusion of Honduran ethno-racial minorities. The role of Garifuna people in the resistance has been bold. These historically marginalized coastal communities, often seen as a thorn in the side of developers near the country's northern beaches, have also found a place in the leadership of the FNRP. So too have the Lenca community of indigenous campesinos, representing the interior regions of Intibucá, La Paz, Lempira, Valle, and Santa Bárbara. In both cases, their organizations descend from various older movements and larger federations focused on land rights and have a history of collaborating with labor federations, particularly in opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Another powerful sector within the resistance is composed of marginalized, working-poor urban neighborhoods and rural villages, which have organized resistance committees throughout the country.⁵ Formations of small fronts in towns or neighborhoods acted in local ways to protest the de facto government. For example, community members defied the government-imposed curfew from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., marching outside in the pitch darkness with banners displaying the name of their town or neighbor-

hood together with the words "en resistencia." Yelling and banging pots and pans, they photographed themselves and later uploaded and e-mailed them worldwide. These acts, called *la buyaranga* (the noise-making), made it clear to all Hondurans that the silence was broken.

These developments indicate that Honduras is entering a new period of organizing, marked by a realignment of national left and progressive movements and an openness to previously marginalized sectors and communities. Political differences continue to exist and will exist, and all of these organizations and their memberships are in constant flux, redefining each other as the resistance matures into a long-term effort. Like most of the international community, the FNRP refused to recognize the elections in November and views the new administration of Porfirio Lobo as a continuation of the coup government of Roberto Micheletti. One of the movement's clearest and most resounding demands has been the convening of a constituent assembly to redraft the ironclad Cold War constitution of 1982. The FNRP hopes to institutionally include marginalized sectors in the government through the legal means of reestablishing the constitution. Resistance activists see this as the ultimate end of an irreversible process of awakening Hondurans to their national reality.

by Suyapa G. Portillo Villeda

Suyapa G. Portillo Villeda is a Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University's history department and is a visiting fellow at Pomona College. A native of Honduras, she is writing a dissertation on the Honduran banana strike of 1954.

NOTES

- 14, 2009. See also: "Es un crimen lo que está pasando en Educación," *La Tribuna*, August 11, 2009.
4. Several Latin American countries submitted a resolution to UNESCO expressing their concern with the school closures, as well as violations of press freedom, since the coup. The draft resolution can be viewed at unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001849/184935e.pdf.
 5. Rachel Sieder, "Honduras: The Politics of Exception and Military Reformism (1972–1978)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27 (1995): 99–127.
 6. "Padres de familia asumen control en escuelas," *El Heraldo*, August 11, 2009.
 7. The full text of the law is available at colprocah.com/docsPDF/Ley Colegacion.pdf.
 8. For more on former president Maduro's efforts to freeze the provisions of the Teaching Statute, see "Premian a maestro del año y no descartan revisión a Estatuto del Docente," *El Heraldo* (Tegucigalpa).
 9. Explanation of the contours of this debate came from the interviews with Napoleón Morazán, Alejandro Ventura, and Saturnino Sánchez, as well as additional informal discussions with Honduran education experts in September–October 2009.
 10. Mario Posas, "Sindicalismo y gobierno. Una agenda para el diálogo en torno a la reforma educativa. El caso de Honduras" (2003), available at nupet.iuperj.br/arquivos/Posas.pdf. Translation by the author.
 11. "No darán clases, irán a asambleas informativas," *El Heraldo*, June 21, 2009.
 12. Saturnino Sánchez and Alejandro Ventura confirmed this.
 13. See, for instance, J. Foweraker and T. Landman, *Citizenship Rights and Social Movements: A Comparative and Statistical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
 14. For examples of media opposition to the union's pro-Zelaya stance, see "Exigen a docentes no imponer doctrinas políticas a los alumnos," *La Tribuna*, September 1, 2009, and "Dirigencia magisterial sepultó el año lectivo," *El Heraldo*, October 10, 2009.
 15. This characterization of the post-coup union debate derives from interviews cited above with Napoleón Morazán, Alejandro Ventura, and Saturnino Sánchez, as well as additional informal discussions with Honduran education experts in September–October 2009.
 16. "Tributo a FFAA," *El Heraldo*, November 6, 2009.
 17. "Ventura ofrece diálogo con maestros y padres," *Tiempo*, January 28, 2010.

The Coup That Awoke a People's Resistance

1. Special thanks to Eileen Ma, Arelly Zimmerman, Ismael Moreno Coto, Iris Munguía and Indyra Mendoza for valuable feedback and input. Any errors are mine. The chant comes from "Nos tienen miedo," a song written by the Mexico-based songwriters Liliana Felipe and Jesusa Rodríguez.
2. "Violaciones a los derechos humanos de las mujeres después del golpe de estado en Honduras," *Feministas en Resistencia*, November 25, 2009.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Sadly, transgender women (*travestis*) are the one component of the resistance that has been targeted perhaps more than any other. According to Human Rights Watch, 17 *travestis* were killed in hate crimes from 2004 to May 2009 in Honduras; between June and December 2009, 19 transgender women and gay men had been killed, 11 of them transgender women. "Not Worth a Penny": *Human Rights Abuses Against Transgender People in Honduras* (Human Rights Watch, 2009), 3.
5. Father Ismael Moreno Coto, presentation for Honduras Justice Tour, Los Angeles, 2009.

The Honduran Coup and Cultural Policy

1. Video of Minister Castro's denunciation of our cultural policy as Chavista indoctrination can be found, at the time of this writing, at "Repudio a Myrna

- Castro, ministra golpista 0001," youtube.com/watch?v=USH2H2-Brmw.
2. Marion Lloyd, "Anthropologist Is Fired in Honduran Cultural Debate, Roiling Researchers," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 16, 2009.

MALA

1. For incidents of voter intimidation, see Calvin Tucker, "Trampling on Honduran Democracy," *The Guardian* (London), November 26, 2009; for the coup government's inaccurate numbers on voter turnout see, Mariano Castillo, "Honduran Election Turnout Lower Than First Estimated," CNN.com, December 22, 2009; for ballot irregularities, see Jesse Freeston, "Honduras Elections Exposed," the Real News Network, December 8, 2009; Laura Figueroa And Frances Robles, "Several Nations Acknowledge Lobo's Victory in Honduras," *The Miami Herald*, December 1, 2009.
2. "Nations Divided on Recognizing Honduran Elections," CNN.com, November 30, 2009.
3. "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," The Chatham House, June 21, 2009; Freeston, "Honduras Elections Exposed."
4. Michael Corcoran and Stephen Maher, "Iran vs. Honduras: The Times' Selective Promotion of Democracy," *Extra!*, August 2009.
5. "Independent Investigation Needed Into Honduras Human Rights Abuses," Amnesty International, December 3, 2009; "Stockpile of Tear Gas Grenades in Honduras Triggers Fears of Human Rights Abuses," Amnesty International, November 27, 2009.
6. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2nd ed. (Pantheon, 2002).
7. Mary Beth Sheridan, "Hondurans Go to Polls, Hoping to End Crisis," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2009.
8. Helen Murphy and Eric Sabo, "Lobo Wins Honduran Presidency After Peaceful Vote," Bloomberg.com, November 30, 2009.
9. "The Honduran Conundrum," *The New York Times* (editorial), December 5, 2009.
10. For an example, see Amnesty International, "Independent Investigation Needed."
11. Tucker, "Trampling on Honduran Democracy."
12. Freeston, "Honduras Elections Exposed."
13. Tucker, "Trampling on Honduran Democracy."
14. Murphy and Sabo, "Lobo Wins Honduran Presidency"; for lower turnout, see Castillo, "Honduran Election Turnout."
15. Ian Kelly, "Honduran Election," U.S. Department of State, November 29, 2009.
16. Freddy Cuevas, "U.S. Military Denies Role in Honduras Coup Flight," *USA Today*, August 16, 2009.
17. Paul Richter, "U.S. Cuts \$30 million in Aid to Honduras," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2009. The United States "could have cut as much as \$200 million," the article reports.
18. Chris Kromm, "Key Leaders of Honduras Military Coup Trained in U.S.," Institute for Southern Studies, June 28, 2009.
19. Robert Worth, "Protests Flare Up in Iran as Opposition Disputes Vote," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2009; Neil MacFarquhar, "In Iran, an Iron Cleric, Now Blinking," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2009.
20. "Neither Real nor Free," *The New York Times* (editorial), June 15, 2009.
21. Corcoran and Maher, "Iran vs. Honduras."
22. Elizabeth Malkin, "Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2009.
23. "Hugo Chavez Departs," *The New York Times* (editorial), April 13, 2002.
24. Larry Rohter, "The World: In Latin America, the Strongman Stirs in His Grave," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1998.
25. Malkin, "Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup."
26. Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 3 (September 2006).