

Crisis in Honduras

Golpe de estado, clase política y proceso electoral

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El domingo 29 de noviembre se realizaron elecciones generales en Honduras, las octavas elecciones desde que se inició la transición a la democracia en 1981. Desde 1981 se han alternado en el ejercicio de la presidencia de la república los dos partidos tradicionales de Honduras, el Partido Liberal y el Partido Nacional, el primero con cinco presidentes y el segundo con dos, al cual se suma el presidente electo de las elecciones más extrañas, anormales y contradictorias que ha vivido el país en toda su historia.

Un solo ejemplo basta para comprender lo expresado anteriormente: El presidente de facto, que encabezó el golpe de estado del 28 de junio, y que ordenó una intensa represión y emitió decretos violatorios de los derechos fundamentales, acudía a ejercer el sufragio en su ciudad natal con una fuerte cobertura de prensa e intensas medidas de seguridad, proclamando su compromiso con la paz y la democracia. Mientras tanto, el presidente constitucional de la república, electo por mayoría de votos en las elecciones de 2005, víctima del golpe de estado y reconocido internacionalmente como el presidente legítimo, se encontraba refugiado en la embajada de Brasil, fuertemente custodiado por militares y policías, y sin posibilidades de ejercer su derecho al sufragio.

Para complementar el cuadro anterior, mientras el gobierno de facto proclamaba su convicción “democrática” y declaraba que ésas serían las elecciones más transparentes de la historia, militares y policías ocupaban el territorio nacional, allanaban residencias y oficinas, perseguían a dirigentes y militantes

de la resistencia al golpe de estado, reprimían la manifestación pacífica de San Pedro Sula, en el norte del país, y amenazaban las concentraciones de manifestantes que se producían en otros lugares. Anunciaban con fuerza intimidatoria que se esperaban atentados terroristas para lo cual se prepararon con maquinaria, equipo, municiones, bombas de gas y todo lo que se les ocurrió financiar con el presupuesto que le adjudicó para tal fin el gobierno de facto.

Al caer la noche y luego de cinco horas de silencio del máximo organismo electoral del país y de múltiples esfuerzos asociados a intensas negociaciones políticas por hacer coincidir los resultados electorales oficiales con el anuncio previo sobre la “impresionante afluencia de votantes” que habían vaticinado desde horas tempranas los medios de comunicación golpistas, se produjo el anuncio oficial de que el candidato ganador fue el candidato del opositor Partido Nacional, cosa que no extrañó a nadie porque esa era la tendencia. Se hizo el señalamiento de que la diferencia de votos del candidato ganador con respecto al candidato oficialista era de menos del 20%, cosa que sorprendió mucho porque todas las tendencias anunciaban un porcentaje superior al 30%. Finalmente, a pesar a la constatación física de la escasa participación electoral, se produjo el anuncio de que la participación ciudadana en las elecciones generales fue superior al 61%, cuando la misma empresa contratada por el Tribunal Supremo Electoral señaló un poco más del 47% y la resistencia nacional contra el golpe de estado no reconocía más del 30%.

El fenómeno más sorprendente en la historia del golpe de estado es, sin duda alguna, la agrupación de sectores sociales diversos, pluralistas y pacíficos en lo que se denominó “Resistencia nacional contra el golpe de

Estado”, quienes lograron consolidar una movilización social más allá de la adscripción política, que provocó una presencia social de gran trascendencia y culminó con una asombrosa presencia política en las elecciones del 29 de noviembre, superando con el abstencionismo el caudal de votos de todos los candidatos presidenciales. Esa misma resistencia salió a las calles a celebrar el triunfo del abstencionismo, ondeando banderas de Honduras y del Partido Liberal y enseñando, entre orgullosos y desafiantes, su dedo meñique para demostrar que no lo mancharon con la participación el día de las elecciones.

Hechos, supuestos, posicionamiento

Para comprender lo que ocurrió el 29 de noviembre en Honduras, es preciso destacar algunos elementos clave que permitirán insertar lo ocurrido en un marco analítico más amplio, el cual se detalla a continuación:

En noviembre de 2005 la ciudadanía hondureña escogió al candidato del Partido Liberal de ese entonces, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, para que ejerciera la presidencia de la república por cuatro años que se contarían del 27 de enero de 2006 al 27 de enero de 2010. El golpe de Estado del 28 de junio de 2009 constituyó una burla al derecho ciudadano expresado en las urnas, lo cual se expresa en los siguientes hechos:

- En Honduras, ninguna institución del estado tiene atribución constitucional para destituir a un presidente de la república, lo cual incluye al Congreso Nacional.
- Ninguna instancia del sistema de justicia tiene atribución de ordenar la captura de un presidente de la república y menos de declararlo culpable sin haber iniciado un

juicio en su contra y sin haberle garantizado su derecho a la presunción de inocencia y a la legítima defensa.

- Ninguna institución del estado tiene facultades para expulsar a un hondureño del territorio nacional, como hicieron las Fuerzas Armadas el 28 de junio, y tampoco tienen potestad de negarle la entrada, como hizo el presidente de facto, el Fiscal General de la República, la Corte Suprema de Justicia, las Fuerzas Armadas y la Policía, en los dos intentos de ingresar al país que hizo el presidente constitucional.

La sociedad hondureña se encuentra en un estado de indefensión, totalmente expuesta ante la falta de protección por parte de las instituciones estatales, lo cual incluye al Poder Judicial y a las dos instituciones llamadas expresamente a defender los intereses de la sociedad, como el Ministerio Público y el Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, fuertemente involucradas en el golpe de estado del 28 de junio. El hecho de no tener una instancia estatal a la cual acudir cuando se producen atentados a los derechos fundamentales, hace que la ciudadanía acuda a los organismos civiles de defensa de los derechos humanos, los cuales se han integrado en una plataforma para enfrentar con mayor eficiencia la creciente demanda ciudadana de protección y defensa.

Por eso la ciudadanía se encuentra expuesta a la presión de dos instituciones de control social como los medios de comunicación y las iglesias, que se han encargado de uniformar el discurso, manipular conciencias, convencer a la sociedad de que no hubo golpe de estado y repetir constantemente el mensaje de paz y democracia que corresponde a una visión ideologizada de la vida cotidiana.

Causas, debilidades y deformaciones

Es importante incorporar algunas características de la institucionalidad y de la cultura política hondureña que nos permitirán comprender con mayor precisión lo que ocurre en la actualidad, destacando algunos aspectos clave que existen y persisten en el país:

Un estado de derecho frágil. A pesar de los millones que la cooperación internacional ha invertido en la reforma del sistema de justicia, sigue existiendo un Fiscal General que ordena a los fiscales cuáles casos deberán atenderse y cuáles no, para no incomodar a las autoridades del país o de su partido; un magistrado de la Corte Suprema de Justicia que emite órdenes de captura, después de que condena a un sospechoso; un policía que asume que su institución tiene el poder para decidir, que los procedimientos legales pueden obviarse y que se puede aplicar la fuerza a cualquier ciudadano por presumir que puede transgredir la ley; y un militar que cumple órdenes ilegales para atacar a la ciudadanía y rechaza otras argumentando que son ilegales.

Instituciones democráticas débiles. Las instituciones estatales están muy expuestas a los intereses políticos y empresariales, deformadas como instituciones partidizadas y con una actuación al margen de los intereses nacionales. Estas son las instituciones subordinadas al Congreso Nacional, en particular a su Junta Directiva, que se alinearon rápidamente para producir y sostener el golpe de estado.

Una cultura política autoritaria. Todavía persiste en nuestro país una cultura irrespetuosa, intolerante, vertical y excluyente, pues aún no se consolida una cultura política democrática que destaque valores como pluralismo, tolerancia, respeto a la diversidad, solidaridad, a los cuales son

ajenos los dirigentes de partidos políticos, los empresarios, los líderes religiosos, los periodistas y tantos otros que tanto daño le hacen al país al aferrarse a valores propios de una época ya superada en el país.

Una clase política cínica, manipuladora, calculadora y cómplice. Es una clase política que acusa al presidente Zelaya de atentar contra la Constitución cuando sus integrantes, liberales y nacionalistas, la han violado una y otra vez, sin inmutarse siquiera. Prueba de ello son el presidente de facto (Roberto Micheletti) y el presidente electo (Porfirio Lobo), quienes presentaron sus candidaturas a la presidencia existiendo una prohibición legal para hacerlo en su momento, por su condición de presidentes de un poder del estado; el candidato perdedor del partido Liberal (Elvin Santos), quien lanzó su candidatura teniendo una prohibición legal por su condición de vicepresidente de la República; un ex presidente (Ricardo Maduro), quien lanzó su candidatura y resultó electo presidente sin haber nacido en el territorio hondureño; otro ex presidente que resultó ganador sin haber sido el candidato más votado y, finalmente, el presidente de facto que acusa a Zelaya de querer reelegirse a través de una Asamblea Nacional Constituyente y el mismo promovió la idea en el Congreso en los años 80, para asegurar el continuismo de otro presidente.

Torpeza política y empresarial para analizar lo que pasa en el país y el mundo. En los últimos meses se pudo observar un partido político (el Liberal) que apoya un golpe de estado a un presidente de su partido, a cinco meses de las elecciones generales y pretendía salir victorioso; un candidato del opositor partido (el Nacional), hoy presidente electo, que cree que lo ocurrido en el país es un asunto del Partido Liberal que no le incumbe a él, que prefiere proclamarse neutral y que cree que con un

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llamamiento al diálogo va a ganarse el apoyo de la resistencia; políticos y empresarios que alteraron el clima de tranquilidad que se vivía en el país y hoy viven prisioneros de sus casas, sus negocios y sus guardias de seguridad; además, que con sus acciones abrieron las puertas a la inestabilidad política del país e hicieron que los militares recuperaran su viejo papel arbitral.

Escasa habilidad militar para analizar y mucha habilidad para aprovechar las circunstancias. Militares que argumentaron no estar obligados a obedecer órdenes ilegales y acataron otras órdenes ilegales de reprimir a la ciudadanía que ejercía el derecho constitucional a rechazar a un gobierno ilegal. Aprovecharon la crisis y el miedo de los golpistas para aumentar su presupuesto, adquirir armas, equipos y municiones y quedaron preparados para la guerra contra la ciudadanía.

Proceso electoral, resultados y perspectivas

Los resultados de las elecciones del 29 de noviembre colocaron políticamente a un actor ineludible en el escenario nacional, como es la ciudadanía en resistencia al golpe de estado, la cual creció en conciencia de su potencialidad y se convertirá en la principal fuerza opositora del próximo gobierno, destacándose en ella el liderazgo del presidente Zelaya, para demandar de nuevo la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, castigo a los golpistas y violadores de los derechos humanos y tratarán de neutralizar los miedos del presidente electo a los militares, a los empresarios y los líderes de las iglesias católicas y evangélicas. Todo ello se realizará en un clima político y social ensombrecido por la incertidumbre sobre el tiempo real que durará en la presidencia y, lo que es peor: tratando de controlar, neutralizar y denunciar las concesiones que

estará dispuesto a otorgar a todos los sectores golpistas, para que no le den a él un nuevo golpe de estado. Todo lo anterior se producirá en un clima de amenazante presencia militar y policial, líderes religiosos con fuerte injerencia política, empresarios con poder de veto y medios de comunicación al servicio de quien les pague. Solo la ciudadanía en resistencia nos puede dar esperanza de la creación de un clima de auténtica democracia. ■

Honduras, Obama and the Region's New Right

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Uncanny similarities link the current Honduran crisis with the conflicts that rocked Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, Jimmy Carter entered the White House as cascading crises threatened to cripple Washington's global authority. With the exception of Cuba and the Panama Canal, Latin America was not high on his agenda. His real concerns were in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and, eventually, Afghanistan. But insurgencies in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua forced him to focus on Central America. Now, another transitional president, Barack Obama, is entrusted with salvaging U.S. power after a period of economic and military overreach. And like what happened on Carter's watch, Central America has erupted as an unexpected distraction from a broad foreign-policy program only minimally concerned with the Western Hemisphere.

Then, conservative intellectuals such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, who would go on to serve as Ronald Reagan's ambassador to the UN, leveraged the Central American crisis to paint Carter as soft on Communism, rightly pointing out an obvious contradiction in his diplomatic philosophy. Carter said he wanted to deal with third-world nationalists on their own terms, not through the distortions of the cold war. Yet he still assumed it was Washington's right and responsibility to contain them. Carter thus legitimated the underlying premise of the cold war even as his confused policies allowed opponents to depict him as a ditherer, a Hamlet president. Obama is caught in the same trap. He promises to respect multilateralism, but he won Florida

by identifying “anti-Americanism across the region” as a problem that the United States needed to confront. So when supporters of the Honduran coup, inside and outside the country, made their case by pointing to Hugo Chávez, who could argue?

Thirty years ago, an emerging new right, based and financed largely in the United States but pan-American in its reach and vision, used Central America to build its institutional network, focus its critique, and lay the groundwork for Ronald Reagan’s patronage of the Nicaraguan Contras and Salvadoran and Guatemalan death squads. The signature episode of that patronage, the Iran-Contra affair, was more than a conspiracy; it was the coming-out of a coalescing coalition of first-generation neoconservatives, religious right activists, law-and-order anticommunists, free-marketeers, soldier-of-fortune mercenaries and Latin American oligarchs. This formidable social movement dabbled in Taiwan, Afghanistan and Israel, but Central America gave it its most extensive opportunity to remilitarize U.S. diplomacy—a campaign that used Honduras as its staging ground.

Today a new transnational coalition is shaping up behind the current crisis. This one includes Iran-Contra alums like Otto Reich, who in the 1980s ran what the U.S. Senate described as a covert domestic disinformation operation to dilute opposition to Reagan’s illegal Central American wars, and disaffected Venezuelans like Robert Carmona Borjas, who for about a year prior to the Honduran coup worked with Reich to mount a media campaign to destabilize Zelaya’s government.¹ These two are united in common purpose with corporate lawyer Lanny Davis, hired by Honduran businessmen to lobby Washington on behalf of the coup. Davis, a close supporter of Hillary Clinton and former

lobbyist for Pervez Musharraf’s 1999 coup in Pakistan, may have simply taken the job for the presumably sizable fee. His politics, however, broadly align with the neoliberal wing of the Democratic Party, which has close ties to those Latin American politicians displaced by the return of the regional left.

Honduras has galvanized Florida’s waning right-wing Latino community, expanded now beyond aging Cubans to include anti-Chávez Venezuelans. Republicans, such as South Carolina senator Jim DeMint, have used Honduras to harass Obama, blocking the confirmations of Thomas Shannon as ambassador to Brazil and Arturo Valenzuela as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. On the ground, among the many placards found at tea-party rallies are images linking Obama to Zelaya, and from there, to Chávez and Castro. And a survey of conservative blogs, both in the United States and Latin America, confirms the importance of Honduras in crystallizing and reconciling a number of half-formed ideas and fears, transforming Obama’s mild reformism into wild-eyed populism.

Within Honduras, Zelaya had taken a number of steps that stirred up familiar cold-war constituencies—the military, economic elites, evangelicals, and the Opus-Dei wing of the Catholic Church—and some new ones, like the biofuel sector, international mining interests, and energy companies. He raised the minimum wage, refused to criminalize the morning-after pill, promoted sex education in public school, apologized for a program of “social cleansing” that took place in the 1990s, which included the execution of street children, and resisted privatizing Hondutel, the state telecommunications company. He joined Petrocaribe, allied with Copán’s progressive bishop, Luis Santos Villeda, to limit open-pit mining, and worked with another environmentalist priest, Andrés Tamayo, to slow biofuel-induced

deforestation (Honduras has lost over a third of its forest cover since 1990).² This would be a provocative agenda for any country, but it was especially so for one of the poorest and most unequal in the hemisphere.

Those who overthrew Zelaya hoped to present themselves to the world as middle-class moderns, defenders of the constitution against the advances of retrograde populism. Yet they really are just cold-war gothic. Fernando “Billy” Joya, a former member of Honduras’s infamous Battalion 316, a paramilitary unit responsible for the deaths of hundreds in the 1980s, now serves as the new regime’s “security adviser.” Military chief General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, twice a School-of-the-Americas graduate, implicated in presiding over an international car-theft ring, ran the recent sham presidential election as if it were his own private lottery.

As for the de facto president Roberto Micheletti, the *New Yorker* recently compared him to Dick Cheney, with less self-control. He falsely accuses Zelaya of trying to change the constitution to do away with term limits, yet in 1985, it was Micheletti who tried to do exactly that, to keep an ally in power. He supported the Contra War, and more recently led the fight to privatize Hondutel and ban the morning-after pill. Joining this cast of characters are, according to a UN working group on mercenaries, 160 foreign paramilitaries, forty from Colombia, who “have been contracted to support the government of Roberto Micheletti” and defend the interests of sugar and African palm planters.³

It would be comforting to think of Honduras as the new right’s Eighteenth *Brumaire*, at least when it comes to Latin America. Reich conjures up yesteryear’s glories to justify today’s battles, writing that Obama should turn Honduras into his

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Grenada, Reagan's 1983 invasion of which, he says, led directly to the toppling of the Berlin Wall.⁴ DeMint mimes Jessie Helms, who in his day held up foreign-policy appointments to ensure that movement conservatives ran Latin America policy. Thus far, there is no conservative intellectual with the weight of Kirkpatrick to skewer the platitudes of Obama's new multilateralists. In Honduras, Billy Joya justifies the coup by invoking his admiration for Chile's Augusto Pinochet, seconded by Pinochet's daughter Lucía, who praised Micheletti for continuing her father's legacy.

If the new right of the 1970s and 1980s was tragic in what it wrought in Central America, this crew seems farcical—except that it has succeeded in shaping Obama's position toward the Honduran coup. After months of mixed messages and missed opportunities to work with the Organization of American States, which would have signaled its seriousness about returning to multilateralism, Washington brokered a dishonest deal that the rest of the world interpreted as meaning the restoration of Zelaya but the right immediately knew was a turnaround. "The Obama Administration has finally reversed its misguided Honduran policy," said DeMint, who released his hold on Shannon and Valenzuela, and "will recognize the outcome of the Honduran elections regardless of whether Manuel Zelaya is reinstated."⁵

Obama's Honduran capitulation indexes a broader hawkish foreign policy turn, including acceptance of expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank, thousands more troops to Afghanistan, an extension of military bases in Colombia, a renewed commitment to Plan Mérida in Mexico, and unexpected criticism of Brazil for hosting Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.⁶ Perhaps this turn is explained by the fact that the U.S. presidency is, as historian Garry

Wills argues, held hostage to the National Security State (and, I would add, captive to a sclerotic political system that forces politicians, unable to achieve even minimal domestic reform, to focus on foreign enemies in order to win at the polls).⁷ Whatever the case, it puts him at odds with most of Latin American and world opinion.

There is one crucial difference between Central America then and now. In the 1980s, the region's wars paved the way for the consolidation of the Washington Consensus, which tempered the new right's militarism with a moral vision of the market as a site of human fulfillment and national development. Today, in contrast, Honduras is but one of many instances of the ongoing unraveling of that "consensus."

Even if Washington convinces allies to recognize the elections—so far, these include Peru, Panama, Costa Rica, Israel and Canada—and even if the new Honduran president consolidates power, the legitimacy of both will be brittle. Washington's unilateralism has alienated it from important Latin American allies, particularly Brazil. "The United States will become isolated — that is very bad for the United States and its relationship with Latin America," Brazil's foreign policy adviser, Marco Aurélio Garcia, complained of Washington's decision to recognize the November vote.

In Honduras, the coup government has met persistent, creative and truly democratic opposition with steady repression. Over twenty Zelaya supporters have been executed.⁸ Many others have received death threats. The opposition press has been harassed and shut down, thousands arrested, many beaten, tortured, and raped, and there has been a spike in violent killings of women and LGBT activists.⁹ During the election, the military sent tens of thousands of soldiers onto the street and threatened to jail anyone

participating in a boycott of the vote (over fifty local and national-level candidates removed their names from the ballot), which took place under a state of emergency.¹⁰ The *New Yorker* rightly calls this "state terror," hardly auspicious conditions for an election meant to restore consensus. In fact, what the coup leaders seem to be angling for—and the United States is apparently willing to accept—might be called the Haiti option: in Haiti, the "restoration of democracy" has entailed the systematic exclusion of deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's supporters from the electoral process.¹¹

Micheletti's crackdown reveals more than his particular desperation. It suggests the larger dilemma of Latin American conservatives, like Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa and his son Álvaro Vargas Llosa, who have tried to represent themselves as having rejected the authoritarianism of the region's old cold-war right. But in Honduras, as in most countries where populism has won electoral success, there is no social base to create something along the lines of, say, Europe's new conservatism. Clinging to a discredited free-market economic model, their political program is based nearly exclusively on "anti-Chavismo" and on maintaining their own considerable privileges. In countries as poor and stratified as Honduras, that means reliance on increasing doses of violence to maintain order and a resurrection of the same military nationalism that powered anticommunism. Needless to say, the coup's exemplary effect on the region, particularly in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Paraguay—and possibly Bolivia and Ecuador if Evo Morales and Rafael Correa, now popular, stumble—will be poisonous.

Honduras may very well be the "first reversal in the drive to spread '21st Century Socialism' in the region," as Otto Reich, recently wrote. Yet that reversal—which

may continue through the region's upcoming electoral cycle—comes at the cost of revealing the lie that there is a progressive alternative to the contemporary Latin American left.

Endnotes

¹ William Finnegan, in *The New Yorker*, identifies a September 2008 threat Reich made to Zelaya—not for turning against the United States (Zelaya continued to cooperate with U.S. drug interdiction efforts, for example) but for joining the Venezuela-sponsored Petrocaribe—as kicking off the campaign to overthrow him: “if President Zelaya wants to be an ally of our enemies, let him think about what might be the consequences of his actions and words.” “An Old Fashioned Coup,” November 30, 2009.

² “Honduran bishop wins president’s support in fight to halt mining permits,” Catholic News Service, August 4, 2006, <http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=20800>.

³ “Use of mercenaries in Honduras on the Rise, U.N. Group Says,” CNN, October 10, 2009 <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/10/09/honduras.mercenaries>>; “Les Ofrecen Ser Mercenarios Al Servicio De Supuestos Empresarios Enlistan Ex AUC Para Ir A Honduras,” September 13, 2009, *El Tiempo* <<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-3621653>>. According to Bertha Oliva, president of the respected and besieged Honduran human-rights organization, Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras, it was Billy Joya who contracted the Colombian paramilitaries. See Oliva’s interview here: <<http://www.box.net/shared/talsfmcqjr>>. See also Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), pp. 206–207, for the use of a former CIA Contra base at Lepaterique, Honduras to train Latin American mercenaries by a corporate private security firm for service in Iraq.

⁴ “Honduras is an Opportunity,” *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2009.

⁵ “In wake of Honduras agreement, DeMint releases hold on Obama nominees,” *The Hill*, November 5, 2009 <<http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/66621-in-wake-of-honduras-agreement-demint-releases-hold-on-obama-nominees>>; See also the very conservative Mary Anastasia O’Grady’s “Hillary’s Honduran Exit Strategy,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2009, which immediately got right what the rest of the world’s press got wrong: that the agreement brokered between Manuel Zelaya and Roberto Micheletti was a U.S. betrayal of Zelaya.

⁶ “Obama Writes to Brazil about Iran,” *New York Times*, November 25, 2009.

⁷ “Entangled Giant,” *New York Review of Books*, October 8, 2009.

⁸ Most recently Gradiš Espinal, a retired teacher and coordinator of the National Front against the Coup <<http://ellibertador.hn/Nacional/3519.html>>.

⁹ Tacuazina Morales, “Más feminicidio y violencia contra las mujeres tras el golpe,” November 18, 2009, ALAI, América Latina en Movimiento <<http://www.alainet.org/active/344928&lang=es>>; “Condenan asesinato de activista LGBT en Honduras,” October 21, 2009, *El Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional* <<http://www.un-mundo.org/externo/?w=http://www.cejil.org/comunicados.cfm?id=949>>.

¹⁰ “15,269 centros de votación listos para recibir las urnas,” *La Tribuna*, November 20, 2009; “Militares y policías patrullan las calles para garantizar la seguridad,” *La Tribuna*, November 24, 2009.

¹¹ Aristide Party Barred from Haiti’s February Ballot,” November 25, 2009, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE5AP03K20091126>>. ■

An Interview with Darío Euraque

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Darío Euraque is Professor of History and International Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. From 2006 to August 2009 he served as Director of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IAHA). He was fired from his position following the June 28 coup. Professor Euraque was interviewed by John Soluri on November 16, 2009.

Soluri: Why did you decide to take on a job not typical for an academic working in the United States and what was your vision for the IAHA?

Euraque: In February 2006 Dr. Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle, Minister of Culture under the then newly-elected President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, called me to ask if I would be interested in being director of the Institute. I was intrigued. Pastor Fasquelle is a historian with a Ph.D. from the Colegio de México. We have been colleagues, and friends as well. When he was Minister of Culture for the first time, from 1994 to 1998, he had asked me to evaluate the Institute’s research program in history. So when he asked me to direct the Institute in 2006, and agreed to grant me autonomy, I sensed an opportunity to put into practice a number of policy recommendations that had been neglected for ten years.

Soluri: Would you briefly describe the scope of the Institute?

Euraque: The Institute is an autonomous agency of the Honduran State created in 1952. It has its own budget; it generates its own funds, primarily from receipts of visitors to the eight museums, archaeological parks,

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and Spanish fortresses. It has a Board that includes the Ministries of Education, Public Works, Finance, Culture, and Tourism; the Board is presided over by the Minister of Culture. Three members are not government-appointed: the presidents of the National University, the Academy of Geography and History, and the National Chamber of Tourism. The Institute has about 150 employees. Many people see it as the government agency charged with the conservation, restoration, and promotion of the cultural heritage of the country.

Soluri: Could you talk about the policy changes you implemented as Director?

Euraque: Getting back to why I took this on, in 2004 I published a book entitled *Conversaciones históricas con el mestizaje y su identidad nacional de Honduras*. I had intended for the essays in the book to provoke discussion about Honduran national identity and what I feel are misunderstandings of the relationship between race, culture and national identity. The Institute was a place where I could put the implications of that book into policy. One of these had to do with the role of archaeology in Honduran national identity. In one of the essays, I argue that the focus on the ancient Maya as the primary source of Honduran identity is problematic. The Mayans in Honduras were a tiny minority in the ancient period and certainly in the colonial period. Copán, which is where the ancient Maya world of Honduras was located, is about ten kilometers from the Guatemalan border—the vast amount of the physical territory [of Honduras] has nothing to do with the Maya.

In fact, Honduran territory is a fountain of diversity in ancient ethnic history. But if you look at ideas about Honduran national identity, those that were articulated in the twentieth century by government officials,

by the tourism industry, via parks, museums, and educational curricula, they all say that we are descended from the Maya. That is flat wrong. As Director of the Institute, I wanted to challenge those ideas. I did not wish to neglect the Maya, but to present a broader diversity of the ancient people of Honduras as well as the survivors today. The other very important part of the vision had to do with emphasizing the Afro-descendant population of the Caribbean coast, including but not limited to the Garífuna. So I was interested in promoting research and designing museums that would present a broader variety of African and native populations.

I also wanted to promote greater professionalization in our Institute, to have it be staffed not by members of any particular party, but by professional anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians. Another part of the vision was to establish closer relationships with academic institutions in the United States, Europe and Japan that would be supportive of our new policies. We signed many diplomatic and academic agreements. We also sought to diversify our publication series and compliment the emphasis on archaeology with an emphasis on history, literature and music.

Soluri: In our earlier conversations, you mentioned that as Director you also tried to involve non-experts in the Institute's projects.

Euraque: We wanted to link our policies and projects, to the extent possible, to what we perceived to be the broader vision of President Zelaya. There would be a greater emphasis on citizen participation. That meant that when we were going to design a new archaeological park or a new museum we didn't just contract with archeologists and museum people and say, "Here is our vision, give us some options." We organized workshops with Honduran citizens, not only

to seek their input as to what they thought should be in the parks and visitor centers, but also so that in the process ordinary Hondurans would gain a greater consciousness of their cultural heritage. Whether or not they provided ideas that would eventually be incorporated, they would meet others from the different communities. And that was very new; most museums in Honduras had been designed via a top-down process. In this way we wanted to connect with the overall emphasis that I, and others, think that President Zelaya was trying to have with respect to government policy in general.

Soluri: Turning now to the coup: you have talked about the "coups within the coup," things that have happened within ministries and below the radar screens of the mass media

Euraque: Ever since 2006 when I arrived there were different institutions and different personalities both inside and outside the state who were not happy with the vision that I have summarized. They were unhappy because they thought that I wasn't paying attention to Copán—after all that is where most of the tourists go and the largest single source of the Institute's revenue. There were others who were not happy with the fact that I was a historian or suggested that national identity is historical, as opposed to a continuum of an ancient past that is to be found in the material remains of archaeology. There was a lot of anxiety among foreign archaeologists, I think the majority, because they weren't used to a director who was a historian familiar with the academic world in the United States. Another sector that was uneasy was the tourist industry. On the one hand they liked having broader options for tourists to visit, but they were so secure in Copán, and as many business-oriented folks tend to be, they looked mostly at the short term. I was looking at the mid to long term,

because creating new parks doesn't happen overnight.

So, getting back to the coup within a coup, I think that those forces—and they have names—when the coup took place and President Zelaya was kidnapped and put on a plane and flown to Costa Rica, and my Minister [of Culture] was removed, those forces that had been “lying low” took advantage of the crisis to challenge me.

Soluri: In other words, they may not have been totally thrilled with your policies before the coup but with Zelaya in power they had to act cautiously?

Euraque: Of course they would never do that with President Zelaya in power. Once he was gone, things quickly moved in another direction. In fact, the new Minister of Culture convened a secret meeting of the Board on September 1 of this year, from which I was excluded. They charged me with a whole series of misdeeds including that I had neglected Copán. The income levels at Copán had declined. Of course they didn't say that it was the result of the recession that had begun at the end in 2008 as well as the coup itself. I was never given an opportunity to contest those charges. In the end anxiety and apprehension won out. If our vision been successful, it would have employed more people by creating new opportunities for tourism, but that isn't the mission of the Institute. The mission of the Institute is to promote the cultural heritage of the country, even if no tourists come to Honduras.

Soluri: Would you say that this de-centering of Copán and the ancient Mayans raised questions and brought forth actors who were not central in established views on Honduran national identity, including Afro- Hondurans?

Euraque: That is it exactly. See, the archaeological world, particularly as practiced in Mesoamérica, excludes the African diaspora. The idea that there is an archaeology of the African diaspora is almost unknown in Honduras. So, for example when we organized a symposium in Omoa at a Spanish fort built by African slaves, we wanted to make the African diaspora a central theme, meaning that we had to change the tourism literature in order to tell visitors that they would be seeing the African history of Honduras. When you say that to people who do not see themselves as having an African heritage they are put on edge. In a very profound way that is what we were all about: we were trying to give history a prominent, serious, epistemological role in Honduran national identity. We were trying not only to change that conception; we were actually mobilizing people through workshops and citizen participation. People who were either uncomfortable or just outright against that took advantage of the coup.

There were others who were trying to promote innovative policies in energy, agriculture, and taxation, who, in promoting different conceptual approaches as well as specific policies, challenged established constituencies. Once President Zelaya was removed, these middle people were vulnerable. That is the issue that is not talked about in the media, especially outside of Honduras, the way in which a coup of this kind, which was different from other coups, but a coup nonetheless, involves a “cleansing” of alternative policy orientations by dismissing people, intimidating people, forcing people to reorient themselves and if not, firing them. That is why I say that it was a coup within a coup.

Soluri: Given the political situation, how do you see the immediate future of the Institute?

Euraque: Well, the Institute is peculiar compared to other state agencies because it depends to a much greater degree than most on international financing. The Honduran state does not give much money to culture; it is not seen as relevant to development or to poverty. But now there is little money from outside. I would hate to be the director of the Institute for 2010 or 2011, since the resources they would have to work with would be minimal. We were supposed to start the budget planning process in July or August, but how are you going to plan your budget in the middle of a coup, particularly when a significant percentage of your budget is dependent on international bodies that don't recognize the new regime?

Soluri: Do you have any hope that the policies you implemented might have lasting effects in spite of the coup? That some of the people who participated in IHAH projects have different sense of Honduran national identity?

Euraque: I think that outside the Institute we mobilized a lot of people in workshops, in seminars, and in the context of the resistance that grew up around the coup. Many of those people, perhaps thousands (maybe I am being optimistic, but I don't think I am), will see that the consciousness-raising associated with the cultural heritage issue was connected to our policies. Insofar as they can maintain that mobilization, I am optimistic. Within the Institute I am not very optimistic; in fact, I am very pessimistic that there may be an effort to dismantle the Institute and make it a directorship of the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Tourism. After all, why not just have a directorship of culture and tourism, in which research is simply oriented toward supporting tourism? I think that there are forces in favor of that. ■