The Politics of Honduran Schoolteachers: State Agents Challenge the State

Jordan D. Levy
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. A Kim Clark
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Anthropology
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
© Jordan D. Levy 2014

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd

Part of the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2142

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.
THE POLITICS OF HONDURAN SCHOOLTEACHERS:
STATE AGENTS CHALLENGE THE STATE

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Jordan Levy

Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© Jordan Levy 2014
Abstract

This dissertation examines the everyday work of schoolteachers in post-coup Honduras from the theoretical perspective that they are individuals with a vested interest in the state, who reflect upon their own experiences when carrying out the vital state service of national public education, and while acting as leaders of the anti-coup National Front of Popular Resistance. This movement emerged in response to the violent overthrow of the country’s democratically-elected president in June 2009 and has since broadened its agenda, calling for the ‘re-founder’ of the Honduran state by rewriting the constitution.

Yet state formation occurs not only through such formal projects but also through everyday activities. Based on extended ethnographic fieldwork in 2012 in the southern Department of Valle, I explore how schoolteachers from one region act upon their visions for what the Honduran state could be, while navigating the first full school year during reforms to the education sector that aim to decentralize and privatize the country’s national public education system, while disciplining teachers and reducing their already meagre salaries and benefits. This anthropological study of state formation, based on the contradictory ways that people engage governing policies and state projects, illuminates how schoolteachers actively reject the neoliberal spirit of these reforms, even though they are the people responsible for implementing these policies in practice. By comparing and contrasting the experiences of teachers working in rural and urban areas, whose schools must now compete among themselves for funding from municipal governments and private entities, I examine how teachers seek solutions to the unequal distribution of education resources, while defending the validity of state services in general, even when the post-coup government has reduced its own commitment to that project.

This research challenges understandings of the state as a monolithic entity by asking who is responsible for policy implementation, and how do they approach their work when they disagree with the policies they are supposed to implement. I suggest that ethnographic research can illuminate the contradictory nature of state projects, and argue that popular resistance to neoliberal governing policies in post-coup Honduras is also occurring from within the state.
Keywords

Honduras, Schoolteachers, Political Anthropology, Neoliberalism, Ethnography of the State, Development Policies
Dedication

*Para toda mi familia en Honduras quienes han dedicado sus vidas al magisterio.*

For all of my family members in Honduras who have dedicated their lives to the *magisterio.*
Acknowledgments

“Agradecimientos” would have been a more fitting title for this section of my thesis, given that I wish not only to acknowledge, but also to express my gratitude to several different people who have contributed to my academic success and personal happiness over the course of this research project. This requires that I think not only in terms of my doctoral program at the Department of Anthropology in the University of Western Ontario, but back to 2008 when I began the masters program in this same department and came to Canada. It also requires that I think back to previous visits to Honduras over the past decade, which led me to meet the compassionate people I have since had the pleasure of coming to know. I also have colleagues and family in the United States, who have supported me in different ways over the years.

The transnational nature of this rather difficult endeavor is in fact suitable for explaining the process through which I applied to graduate school, as I was initially interested in studying issues to do with migration. I wanted to find a Latin Americanist anthropologist who was willing to not only supervise my research project (that I had not even figured out) and invite me to become a professional in this great discipline, but also serve as a mentor who I could trust and respect. For me this warranted searching on an international level and moving to wherever this person might be. And it was an inspiring journal article by Kim Clark that made me do a Google search for the ‘University of Western Ontario,’ wondering where exactly she worked and if she would be willing to accept me as her graduate student.

Before reading Kim’s work, I had never thought I would someday move to London, Canada, but I soon realized that it was one of the best decisions I ever made. I cannot imagine having gone anywhere else. Working with Kim during the past six years has far surpassed my hopes and expectations of what a successful graduate school experience would entail. Kim has been the most incredible supervisor and mentor. I feel as though I can ask her about anything and receive a sincere, prompt, and extremely helpful answer. Kim is a highly skilled teacher who has patiently and enthusiastically taken all of my ideas seriously, while knowing when and how to guide me in the right direction. Her areas of research and theoretical orientations are some of the most interesting and intellectually stimulating I have had the pleasure of reading. And she has continuously prioritized my needs as an
international student – going far beyond what anyone could expect from a thesis supervisor. Kim has believed in my abilities to succeed even when I was not sure of these abilities myself. She has inspired me to pursue a career in academia, and demonstrated for me the significance of a great teacher. She has truly become a dear friend. I cannot possibly sum up in a mere few sentences what a positive influence Kim Clark has had in my life. But I can tell her that *estoy muy agradecido por todo lo que ha hecho por mí*.

Tania Granadillo is my other outstanding mentor who has always been readily available to offer me incredibly useful advice with a great deal of patience. She is another person who I feel I can go to for any kind of question or favour, with the assurance that she will always do *whatever* she can to support me. Tania has helped me to succeed in multiple ways. She has also taught me a great deal about linguistic anthropology and Latin America. Moreover, Tania is a distilled example of how to live a good (academic) life. I admire her intelligence, abilities, and life choices, just as I continue to value our friendship and all that she has taught me.

Another linguistic anthropologist from whom I have learned a great deal over the years is Karen Pennesi. I entered graduate school already a fan of ethnography and Latin America, but Karen quickly sparked some interests in environmental anthropology and research methods in applied anthropology that I never knew I had. Despite not being on my committee, Karen has been another great source of support over the years. I know I can always count on her for sound advice on a range of topics.

The other UWO professor who is not on my thesis committee, but who has nevertheless been an amazing source of enthusiasm for the discipline, is Andrew Walsh. I had the privilege of being a Teaching Assistant one semester for a current debates oriented theory course that Andrew taught, and there I discovered what an incredibly talented lecturer he is. (I already knew he was a gifted ethnographer!) Andrew, Karen, Tania, and Kim were all so incredibly supportive and helpful when I entered the job market as an ABD candidate. I am forever grateful for all of their encouragement and support.

I have also benefited from collegial conversations on a wide-range of theoretical debates from my third committee member, Adriana Premat. Over the years she has pushed me to take my analysis in new directions. I place tremendous value in her feedback because I believe that her research is of great quality. In a similar manner, I thank Dan Jorgensen for all of his thought-provoking feedback and collegial comments. Dan has been an essential
component of my support – contributing primarily from behind the scenes – and I am grateful for all that he has done. If I were to find one possible regret during my entire six years of graduate school it would be that I never had the opportunity to take one of Dan’s graduate seminar courses (I have heard that they are well worth it!) Sherrie Larkin, Regna Darnell, and Douglass St. Christian have also been a great source of support and inspiration. I have benefited from conversations with all of them too.

I also thank Chris White for her useful class on professionalization that I took back in the Fall 2008 term. I wish to thank everyone from the UWO Teaching Support Centre – especially Nanda Dimitrov and Deb Dawson – in helping to prepare me for a career in university teaching. They offer an especially useful program, although I should admit that I consider Chris White’s course to be an essential component of my subsequent success at the TSC five years later.

While numerous graduate student colleagues have been a great source of enthusiasm and support, I wish to thank Christian Español and Sarah Shulist in particular. These two Amazonianists have, in different ways and in different contexts, always been there for me throughout my time in graduate school. They are both great anthropologists and incredible friends.

The UWO Department of Anthropology itself has been a tremendous source of support. While this goes beyond anything to do with money, here I should mention their very generous institutional financial support that I have enjoyed during my four years in their doctoral program. This has come in the form of a Western Graduate Research Scholarship for international students during the last 12 semesters and a very generous Regna Darnell Scholarship for Fieldwork in Sociocultural Anthropology. Through the Department of Anthropology I have also been fortunate to twice receive a Faculty of Social Science Graduate Thesis Research Award. These sources of institutional support have been especially meaningful to me as a US citizen studying in Canada, where I have been ineligible for most major external scholarships from both countries. It has been of great fortune that my department has consistently recognized this problematic and done everything they could to make sure that I had adequate funding. It has been quite generous indeed, and I am grateful to the UWO Department of Anthropology, and to the UWO Faculty of Social Science for their financial support.
Outside of UWO I have benefited from collegial discussions about Honduras and Anthropology at different professional meetings. In particular I would like to recognize the insightful comments from Chris Krupa, Lindsay Dubois, Carlota McAllister, Tyler Shipley, Charmain Levy, James Phillips, Darío Euraque, Jeff Boyer, Mark Anderson, Jon Carter, Jon Wolseth, Rosemary Joyce, and Adrienne Pine.

In Honduras I thank all of my teacher research participants for having the patience to put up with my constant questions about their profession, their opinions about a wide-range of critical political issues, and for their incredible hospitality. Since the 2009 coup Honduras has been facing a series of difficult problems, and these people represent an outstanding example of the incredible ability that a people can have to change their situation for the better. Frankly, their passion for learning and love for Honduras has made me feel closer to the human race. And just when I thought my fourteen years of visiting Honduras somehow meant that I had a grasp on its politics and culture, these teachers introduced me to yet another world I had not yet discovered. The people I write about in this thesis provided me with more support and enthusiasm than I had ever imagined being able to receive. And during each encounter they stimulated my anthropological curiosity in a characteristically patient and welcoming manner. The schoolteachers with whom I work are without question an essential part of the solution to all of the post-coup problems affecting the country. They are striving everyday a que Honduras siga adelante.

I am grateful to the school directors of where I call ‘CEB José Cecilio del Valle’, and ‘CEB Carías Andino’ for allowing me to have a continual presence in their schools. This was a tremendous privilege that I did not anticipate having when I began the research; now I cannot imagine having successfully carried out the project in any other way. In particular, I thank those teachers I call Esdras, Mercedes, and Luis – my closest research participants – who I always felt I could visit or call at any time to ask any kind of question. The interest, support, and patience of these three teachers were essential throughout my fieldwork.

In the United States I thank my parents, Denise and Norm Levy, for always encouraging me to follow my dreams, and for supporting my decisions to go to graduate school and to pursue a career in anthropology (even when none of us quite understood all of what that would imply). I am glad they are able to see how happy I am with the outcome. And I am thrilled about being able to soon live closer to them, after so many years of living on opposite sides of the continent.
My partner, Ana Zepeda Paz, has been the most amazing contributor to my overall success and happiness. She has been there for me in so many ways over the last ten years – inviting me and motivating me to learn more about Honduran politics and culture, while accompanying me to Canada, back to Honduras, to Canada again, and now to the United States. Our first four years of marriage have coincided with the four years of my doctoral program. During this time Ana has made incredible personal sacrifices so that I could have the luxury of reading and writing about her country. My initial interests in transnationalism seem to have come full circle. Moreover, Ana has put up with my continual interests and constant questioning about what her parents did for a living! Her contributions to my happiness and academic success are enormous. Estoy muy agradecido por todo su apoyo y amor.

“Ana and I don’t have children yet” was a phrase I repeated during almost every day of fieldwork – where the idea of a married couple in their prime without children seemed rather puzzling to many of my friends, family members, and research participants. I’m not sure how many anthropologists bring their cats with them to the field, but here I would also like to recognize who Ana and I do have in our lives at the moment, our ‘hijo felino,’ Coco, who became my witty second response to the recurring question of if we have children of our own. Coco quickly taught me about all the red tape that gets put around bringing an animal in and out of Honduras – his presence was questioned more than mine, even during the outbreak of the coup! While Coco did not seem to have much of a choice in matters to do with international travel and his immigration status, lessons from the work of Donna Haraway have taught me that he did have some choice in becoming the best non-human companion in San Lorenzo – drawing the attention of, and breaking the ice with, a range of people.

While many people have contributed in different ways to my success with this research project, my family members in Honduras who have dedicated their lives to the magisterio are the people who have been most present in my mind while conducting fieldwork and writing my dissertation. From my mother-in-law whose legacy in San Lorenzo I didn’t quite comprehend until 2012, to my father-in-law whose incredible career I have only just begun to learn about, to my nephew who has persistently demonstrated unflappable dedication to his carrera del magisterio (despite the newly-imposed constraints), these three teachers in particular have contributed the most to my interest in the Honduran magisterio, and I dedicate this thesis to them.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... ii
Keywords ........................................................................................................................ iii
Dedication....................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments............................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. x

1 Schoolteachers and the State ..................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Theorizing the Work of Schoolteachers in Honduras ............................................ 5
   1.3 Contributions to Existing Literature in Anthropology ........................................... 9
   1.4 Presenting the Reforms from Schoolteachers' Perspective .................................... 20
   1.5 Fieldwork: Locating the South in Contemporary Honduras .................................. 30
   1.6 Research Methods: Studying the Work of State Agents ........................................ 34
   1.7 A Word on Violence ............................................................................................. 46
   1.8 Chapter Layout .................................................................................................... 48

2 Locating the 2009 Military Coup in Honduran History ........................................... 51
   2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 51
   2.2 Historical Characteristics of Honduras ................................................................. 52
   2.3 Preventing an Armed Guerrilla Movement .......................................................... 58
   2.4 The Political Environment of the 1980s ............................................................... 64
   2.5 The National Political Environment under the Government of Mel Zelaya .......... 77
   2.6 The Formation of LIBRE ..................................................................................... 84
   2.7 Current Research among Schoolteachers ............................................................. 88

3 Historical Antecedents through Life Histories and Colegio Accounts .................. 90
   3.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 90
   3.2 Basic History of the Honduran Magisterio ......................................................... 93
   3.3 Profesor Luis ....................................................................................................... 96
   3.4 Profesora Mercedes ............................................................................................. 112
## Table of Contents

7.5 Ending the 2012 School Year ........................................................................................................ 270
7.6 Conclusion.................................................................................................................................. 282

8 Conclusions ................................................................................................................................ 284
8.1 LIBRE’s Electoral Loss ................................................................................................................. 285
8.2 Concerns with LIBRE and Electoral Politics in General ............................................................ 287
8.3 Continuing Changes to Teachers’ Working Conditions .............................................................. 292
8.4 Significance of These Data .......................................................................................................... 295

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................. 306

Appendices ..................................................................................................................................... 323
Appendix A: Political Map of Honduras.......................................................................................... 323
Appendix B: Research Ethics Approval Form .................................................................................... 324
Appendix C: List of Acronyms .......................................................................................................... 325
Appendix D: List of Laws .................................................................................................................. 328
Appendix E: Graph Showing Growth in Student Enrolment ........................................................... 329
Appendix F: Letter to Staff about Sub-Director’s New Duties.......................................................... 330
Appendix G: Chart of Teacher Absences in Director’s Office ......................................................... 331
Appendix H: Letter Requesting Donation for Bingo Night ............................................................... 332
Appendix I: Emblems of School Sponsors on Classroom ............................................................... 333
Appendix J: Sign from Sponsors Pointing Toward School ............................................................... 334

Curriculum Vitae ........................................................................................................................... 335
1 Schoolteachers and the State

1.1 Introduction

The Spanish translation of the title of my doctoral research project – ‘La Política de Los Maestros Hondureños: Agentes del Estado Retan el Estado’ – usually caught the attention of my research participants when I presented them with my letter of information and consent. The idea of calling schoolteachers in Honduras ‘state agents’ and suggesting that they ‘challenge the state’ seemed to resonate with the experiences of many people, despite the fact that my analytical term, state agents, is not something teachers themselves use to describe their positions. Some chuckled and commented that it was a clever title; almost everyone asked if I had a pen they could borrow to sign the form. But one high school economics teacher took particular interest in my title and shared with me his reactions:

‘Agentes del Estado’ – that’s interesting! Look here [he says to his colleague] – look at what this gringo is saying about us…. Let me tell you something about the relationship between the state and the magisterio [the teachers’ professional association] here in Honduras.¹ We teachers have always had problems with the state…. We are the largest public gremio [guild] in this country, and that means that we’re capable of bringing the entire national public education system to a stop…. The magisterio isn’t afraid of any government! We’re the real deal! We are conscious that the state needs us – every country needs to educate its citizens. That’s why the state eventually gives in…. But as ‘agentes,’ as people, right, we are always in some fight with the state – new governments come in and don’t respect the laws that we, as a gremio, have passed…. That’s why we ‘challenge the state’ [pointing to my title]. We protest on the streets because they don’t respect the laws…. No government has ever gotten along well with the

¹ All translations in this thesis are my own.
magisterio, not even that of Mel Zelaya. It’s been better with Liberal [Party] governments, but still, always problematic. The state sends in the armed forces to break up our marches. But in the end they know that they need us. We are the ones working to form citizens in order to enrich Honduras. We know this. In fact, nosotros también somos parte del estado [we too are part of the state]. The state needs an education system. That’s why they need us – this government can’t just get rid of all teachers. That’s why the golpistas [coup mongers] are so afraid of us! They know that we’re not afraid. So they respond by persecuting us – because of our politics. These guys know we’re the backbone of the Resistencia and LIBRE Party. But we are not afraid…. We are still here in our schools everyday conducting classes – fighting and teaching at the same time.²

This is a thesis about the everyday work of Honduran schoolteachers, their roles in transforming governing policies toward education, and their positions as leaders of a nation-wide political movement and political party that promise to bring radical changes to policies of governance and state practices³ in post-coup Honduras. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Honduras during the 2012 school year – three years after the military coup of 28 June 2009. Since the coup’s rupture of Honduras’ democratic system, the country has experienced both a deepening of neoliberal state projects (in often violent and militarized ways) and an unprecedented level of popular mobilization – first to demand the reinstatement of President Manuel ‘Mel’ Zelaya and later expanding to promote a series of visions for ‘re-founding’ Honduran state and society. The Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular ‘La Resistencia’ FNRP (National Front of Popular Resistance), and its allied political party, the Partido de Libertad y

² Interview, 15 May 2012.
³ In this thesis I use the term ‘policy of governance’ or ‘governing policy’ to refer to legislation that affects the population, and ‘state practices’ to refer more generally to broader activities of the Honduran state over time (which can take place during different governments).
Refundación LIBRE (Freedom and Re-foundation Party), have successfully forged a nation-wide revolutionary spirit unlike anything experienced in recent Honduran history. The Resistencia continues to raise political consciousness about a host of national social and political issues, moving well beyond its initial goal of reinstating Mel to challenge the neoliberal status quo, which was experienced since well before the coup itself, but has been intensified by post-coup policies of governance.

Under the post-coup regime of Porfirio ‘Pepe’ Lobo (Jan. 2010 – Dec. 2013), government funding for basic public services was drastically reduced, negatively affecting the majority of the Honduran population who were already struggling to meet their basic subsistence needs. This doctoral research project examines one particularly revealing case in point: the 2011 passing of new laws for the education sector which aim to decentralize and privatize the country’s primary and secondary education system, while demanding new academic standards, disciplining schoolteachers, and reducing their already meagre salaries and retirement benefits.

While the maintenance of any public school has always been a local struggle in Honduras (and the central government has not been able to fund all aspects of education), in the past schoolteachers considered the central offices of the Ministry of Education a practical source from which to secure funding to cover basic infrastructure projects. Now however education funding is being transferred from the central Ministry offices in Tegucigalpa to departmental (provincial) and municipal governments, with new laws that require different schools to compete among themselves for these local government funds.

---

4 In the following chapter I expand upon what the neoliberal status quo has meant in Honduras.
and to solicit additional funding from private organizations such as transnational
corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and philanthropists.

In order to be competitive in this new funding system, school administrators need
to show that they are using the funds in an effective manner to complete necessary
construction projects, and to design new types of academic programs that the reforms
require, such as the teaching of computer literacy and English. The central government
can then reward those schools that are successful under this new model with additional
transfers of money to their local sponsors, or punish those that are not, by threatening to
fire any teachers who lose in the race to secure local funds, and by closing down smaller
schools whose enrolment numbers have not increased in recent years or whose students
have a higher failure and drop-out rate (something my research participants confirmed
was already underway in 2012). These unprecedented reforms aim to dismantle social
policy achievements for public education gained through Honduran schoolteachers’
labour struggles over the last half-century.

In this introductory chapter I describe the theoretical perspectives that orient my
approach to the work of schoolteachers and the anthropological study of the state. Here I
connect the larger questions and central arguments presented in this thesis with on-going
scholarly debates and broader research questions in political anthropology, the
anthropology of the state, and the anthropology of education. I then explain the research
methods used in this study, and describe how I came to conduct ethnographic research on
Honduran state formation and political culture and the circumstances that facilitated my
work with Honduran schoolteachers in the post-coup political context.
1.2 Theorizing the Work of Schoolteachers in Honduras

My assertion that schoolteachers in Honduras are ‘state agents’ might seem rather strange, at first appearance, given that they are frequently targeted by members of the national police and armed forces – people who are perhaps more commonly understood as ‘state agents.’ My conscious employment of this analytical term to describe Honduran teachers arises from the fact that they work directly for the Ministry of Education, and yet, they are more than simply government employees.

Schoolteachers are responsible for carrying out national public education and implementing the latest governing policy toward that undertaking. They realize (make real) the state modernity project of training a labour force and forming state subjects – influencing what citizens should know, believe, and be able to do (see Levinson 2005 for an analysis of how teachers in general aim to do this). Within and beyond the confines of the school, teachers produce certain kinds of state effects that make the state relevant for the populations with whom teachers work. In Honduras, teachers are recognized locally as having the privilege and responsibility of delivering a state service that the population actively seeks out, and which every citizen is required by law to undergo until she or he completes the ninth grade or reaches 16 years of age. Teachers verify that the populations with whom they work are complying with their legal obligations to undergo formal education. They matriculate Honduran youth from various backgrounds as students in public schools, while verifying their identities and those of their parents by demanding state-administered health records and birth certificates (which they later photocopy and stamp with formal seals for official records). For all of these reasons, teachers represent state authority in certain contexts, albeit in a more benign manner than the armed forces.
or national police (also see Wilson 2001 for an example of how schoolteachers can represent state authority in Andean Peru, and Luykx 1999 for an example of how teachers in Bolivia are trained to do just this by producing citizens). The analytical term ‘front-line state agents’ thus seems to capture the nature of schoolteachers’ positions and everyday work activities in Honduras.

This is however only one aspect of the equation. In addition to their daily labour in the name of the state, the other important characteristic of Honduran schoolteachers is that they occupy highly ambiguous positions as workers in Honduran society. On the one hand they are recognized as salaried professionals – individuals whose education credentials and life achievements exemplify the benefits that the national public education system can offer. On the other hand, however, in many parts of Latin America schoolteachers are also members of the underpaid working class who must sell their labour in order to subsist (some examples include Arnove 1997; Gill 2000; Luykx 1999; Wilson 2001). While most Honduran teachers experience standards of living slightly higher than the populations with whom they work (especially in the rural context), they also face serious financial consequences whenever they are not paid completely and punctually. In summary, many schoolteachers in Honduras struggle on a regular basis to meet their basic subsistence needs.

Schoolteachers also perform the duties of local intellectuals. In Honduras they are recognized as having the authority and responsibility to think and comment publicly on a variety of regional, national, and international current events and ongoing political debates. They are known as highly mobile individuals whose daily work requires that they travel and become acquainted with a range of urban and rural communities. This
means that Honduran teachers become familiar with the customs and livelihood strategies of various kinds of communities beyond their own places of origin, work, and residence. Such frequent travel also implies that they often forge and maintain personal and professional relationships with a range of people in distant regions of Honduras, and even in neighbouring Central American countries (which they frequently visit for conferences).

Honduran teachers are thus not only front-line state agents, but also workers with rather ambiguous statuses. As they reflect upon their own lived experiences with the national public education system, their profession, and the state in general, they develop political opinions about their everyday work, different kinds of governing policies, and state practices. Yet teachers’ formal political positions as an organized *gremio* do not always correlate with those of whichever government is in power, due in large part to the contradictory nature of their positions. Teachers are in charge of providing state services that most governments in Honduras cannot fund – or choose not to fund – to the extent that schoolteachers themselves consider adequate for them to properly fulfill their duties. Yet teachers are the front-line state agents who bear the burden of explaining these shortcomings to disgruntled students and students’ parents, who often see teachers as representatives of education policies and all the shortcomings of the public education system.

Even in situations of scarce resources, teachers know that a range of decisions about how to fund public education are available, and teachers reflect on what they

---

5 While in numerous other national contexts schoolteachers also advocate for more government funding, as the ethnographic examples that follow make clear, in Honduras the central government no longer takes responsibility for funding very basic needs of schooling in the context of poverty.
believe to be politically possible based on their own lived experiences with the education system (as both recipients and producers), drawing upon examples of what previous Honduran governments have done and what they observe in neighbouring countries.

Teachers’ professional associations do have established formal procedures that allow them to contribute to the design of national public education policies, although this is not without sacrifice and political struggle. Whenever schoolteachers determine that the government in power is not considering their suggestions (or worse yet, is not respecting the existing laws), it is common for the magisterio to take up political causes that bring teachers into direct conflicts with that government. This most commonly results in Honduran teachers withholding their labour – refusing to conduct classes – through paros (work stoppages) and nation-wide strikes, which bring the national public education system to a standstill, as the high school economics teacher so emotionally described in the quote that introduces this chapter. As he reminds us, schoolteachers comprise the largest gremio of public workers in Honduras, and they are one the state depends upon, both because schoolteachers work to create a productive labour force and form loyal state subjects, but also because they deliver a state service that the Honduran population actively seeks out.

This teacher’s comments allude to the fact that no government in the modern Honduran state has ever been able to do without such vital work. As this thesis demonstrates, Honduran schoolteachers are keenly aware of this reality, and use it to their advantage as they navigate through these new laws, selectively implementing aspects of them while also challenging the deepening of neoliberal policies.
1.3 Contributions to Existing Literature in Anthropology

When we think about resistance against neoliberal state projects it is easy to imagine individuals from different popular sectors protesting on the streets in disagreement with these development strategies (see, for example, Anderson 2009; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Gill 2000; Sawyer 2004 as recent examples in the Latin American context). These types of studies are indeed valuable. However, it is less frequent that we ask how challenges to policies of governance and state practices (as well as forms of accommodation and compromise) may also occur from within the state itself. For instance, what happens when such resistance comes from the same individuals who are responsible for implementing the very policies against which they protest?

This is precisely the situation of schoolteachers in Honduras, and in this thesis I examine the research question: what are the processes through which front-line state agents go about implementing policies with which they fundamentally disagree? A range of literature in the social sciences that aims to study the state ethnographically has guided my approach to exploring this question in the context of neoliberal education reforms in Honduras. I have found particular inspiration in the work of political geographer Joe Painter, who argues that:

passing legislation has few immediate effects in itself. Rather, its effects are produced in practice through the myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks,
police officers, inspectors, teachers… and so on…. Thus, the outcome of state actions is always uncertain and fallible…. This may seem obvious, yet it is striking how infrequently the gap between state institutions’ claims about their effectiveness and their actual effects is recognized in academic state theory (2006: 761).

These insights are highly relevant for understanding the Honduran education reforms and more broadly for studying the state ethnographically. Here I show how Honduran schoolteachers reject the neoliberal spirit of new education policies, even though they are the front-line state agents responsible for implementing the laws in practice.

Painter’s comments point us toward an understanding that there are essentially two different sets of processes at play in the kind of policy reform examined in this thesis. On the one hand we could pose productive questions about initial policy formation – all that goes into passing policies into legislation. Among other bureaucratic administrative procedures, in the present case this includes variables such as pressures from international financial institutions to reorder governments’ budgets and cut funding for public services in order to make loan payments. On the other hand however, as Painter identifies, there is the question of what happens after the law is passed, and how exactly (or even if) the policy is implemented in practice. In this thesis I am more interested in studying this second set of processes. This focus emerges out of the ethnographic data I was able to collect among teachers, since while they do not write the laws they do realize them on the ground. Studying how front-line state agents approach implementing policies is also a fruitful, although limited, arena of the anthropological study of the state. As anthropologist Alan Smart correctly points out, we continue to know more about policies themselves (as they are written in legislation), than we do
about the processes through which they are implemented in practice:

The massive output of policy analyses far exceeds the quantity of studies on the implementation of government policies. In a parallel sense, the practices of frontline state officials are understood much less than are policy formation processes (2002: 344).

One of the arguments that I make in this thesis is that an ethnographic approach to the work of state agents can illuminate the often contradictory nature of their mandates, and reveal exactly how (and the extent to which) policies of governance are implemented.

The present task is thus an exercise in studying how people responsible for policy implementation make the decisions that they do. How do schoolteachers make sense of the various pressures they face in their everyday work lives? How do they understand the shifting – often quite unstable – post-coup political environment, and to what extent does this inform their interpretations of new governing policies? In exploring these anthropological questions, I have found the work of Tara Schwegler to be useful. Her study of Mexican state officials reveals how these state agents actively seek to interpret and “assess the lay of the political land by reading the explicit and implicit signals… in order to align themselves with the administration’s priorities” (2012: 23). While Schwegler’s work differs in focusing on Ministry-level officials who actively align themselves with the regime in power, her analysis has inspired me to ask how Honduran schoolteachers are ‘reading’ the post-coup political landscape as they interpret the meaning of the reforms, determine in what ways these new laws affect them, and make a series of difficult decisions. Schwegler has identified a fruitful approach to studying how front-line state agents implement policies of governance and to revealing all that goes
into such an endeavour. As she concludes:

Too frequently, the question of governance and how it is accomplished has been reduced to institutions or ideologies, concrete actors or abstract rationalities. At the risk of sounding too conciliatory, there is good ethnographic evidence to support the contention that governance, in fact, is multidimensional, negotiated within government institutions, within society, and between government and society. It does not reside permanently in any one of these nodes, but is constantly moving in and through them. A focus on political labor enables the anthropologist to capture the complex positionality of political actors and, consequently, to systematically unravel the multiple layers of governance (2012: 43).

Recent anthropological studies of projects of governance have aimed to capture their multidimensional and negotiated nature to which Schwegler alludes. That is, rather than assuming that there is a single process of state formation, such literature emphasizes that there are a variety of processes of governance in different historical and social contexts, and that state formation does not begin and end with formal political projects or obvious examples of state power, but with everyday activities in which people’s subjectivities change over time and in different contexts (see, for example, Clark 2012b; Gill 2000; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Heyman 1995; Heyman, ed. 1999; Krupa 2010; Nordstrom 2004; Nugent 2001, 1999; Ong 2006; Painter 2006).

How, then, should the state be treated when attempting to understand such processes from an ethnographic perspective? How should an anthropology of politics proceed without reifying the state, while studying both the idea of the state and the system it produces (Abrams 1988: 82)? In this doctoral dissertation I follow the theoretical insights of Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, who have argued that:

One of the most promising avenues… is to disaggregate the state into the
multitude of discrete operations, procedures, and representations in which it appears in the everyday life of ordinary people. By treating the state as a dispersed ensemble of institutional practices and techniques of governance we can also produce multiple ethnographic sites from where the state can be studied and comprehended in terms of its effects, as well as in terms of the processes that shape bureaucratic routines and the designs of policies (2001: 14).

I believe this is a very productive way of approaching the anthropological study of the state – of state effects and processes that shape bureaucratic routines through the particular ethnographic site of schoolteachers’ everyday work. Moreover, an ethnographic approach to the work of state agents can illuminate the often contradictory nature of their mandates when we consider the question of who is responsible for implementing policies on the ground. This line of research is still limited, especially for Latin America (but, as notable exceptions, see Clark 2012; Nugent 2001; Wilson 2001). By illuminating the ways in which resistance to various governing projects also occurs from within the state itself, this thesis challenges understandings of the state as a monolithic entity. Here I aim to reveal exactly how, and the extent to which, these policies of governance are implemented in practice. In so doing this study contributes to a body of literature in the social sciences that aims to denaturalize ‘the state’ and highlight its variability through time and across geographic space. It follows a tradition in anthropology that sees the state as multi-faceted, made up of different kinds of institutions and actors, who often have contradictory visions and goals. This seems to be an especially productive way to study the state ethnographically in contexts of neoliberal economic reforms.

Neoliberalism is a form of governance that aims to curtail state-sponsored
services and programs, turning them over to the private sector. In Latin America it has been associated with creating a better climate for attracting foreign investment through the understanding that this ‘opening up’ of the economy will stimulate the ‘free market.’ Cutting basic social services from the state’s budget is also one of the primary methods by which international financial institutions have argued indebted countries can pay down their development loans – resulting in coercive agreements that require they cut such services. In this sense, the current neoliberal reforms to the education sector in Honduras can be seen in the context of similar attempts to reform the education systems of other Latin American countries (see for instance Gershberg [1999] on decentralization and education reforms in Nicaragua, and compare with Puiggrós ed. [1999] on the effects of neoliberalism on education policies in Latin America broadly). In their edited volume on these processes as they were emerging in Latin America, Carlos Alberto Torres and Adriana Puiggrós have argued that:

Today, some Latin American states aim at just providing basic education to the majority of the population, and in some countries such as in Peru, this is not even the case. Drastic reduction in public schools funding, and growing out-of-pocket costs for parents increase inequalities. New fees are charged for services that previously were free, including access to libraries, exams, salaries for teachers in special subjects…. Decentralization, including transferring schools from the federal to the municipal system, leaves many poor provinces and local municipal authorities in charge of a system of education where they lack the appropriate material, financial and even human resources. Some even claim that this transference of schools from federal to municipal authority condemn many educational systems to poverty. In some cases, funds are released only after an assessment of the efficiency of the establishments, or when mechanisms for nationally centralized systems of control of the teaching profession are established, paradoxically, in the context of increasingly decentralized public education systems (1997: 18).

The processes that Torres and Puiggrós describe resonate with the current reforms in Honduras. Neoliberal education policies and attempts to decentralize the schooling
system are thus nothing new to the region broadly or even to Honduras. In fact, different attempts to create semi-private schools already occurred in Honduras during the 1990s (which I refer to in Chapter 5). Up until the 2012 school year, however, the Honduran *magisterio* had been able to sustain their centralized, (mostly) publicly-funded education system. It was not until after the June 2009 coup and the deepening of neoliberal policies that this changed in Honduras.

Under the philosophy of neoliberalism, individuals and local communities are encouraged to take responsibility for meeting their own basic needs without the assistance of the state. Through a discursive framework of efficiency, self-regulation, and accountability (values that might well resonate positively with a range of people), proponents of neoliberalism argue that it is the best way to achieve financial well-being. Yet neoliberalism has also been associated with dangerous and poorly-paid working conditions, and tremendous increases in poverty and social inequities. Geographer David Harvey offers a comprehensive definition of neoliberalism that is most useful for our purposes in this thesis:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary (2005: 2).
In the process of ‘opening up’ and ‘de-regulating’ the economy in the name of the ‘free market,’ it is toward the latter part of Harvey’s conceptualization that I would like to direct our attention. In a manner congruent with what Harvey recognizes, recent literature in anthropology has shown that neoliberal policies do not eliminate government altogether (cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Fitting 2011; Ong 2006; Sawyer 2004). Rather, in their efforts to create an economic environment favourable to foreign investment, neoliberal development strategies depend upon a state and a particular type of government capable and willing to engage in such policies.

The privatization of state-managed industries and services – from oil extraction and water delivery, to health care and education – involves a series of decisions by policy designers and front-line state agents alike. In this thesis I have therefore chosen to use the term ‘neoliberal state projects’ to capture the fact that privatizing Honduras’ education system is not an isolated case (much less an inevitable or unavoidable process that necessarily controls Honduras) but rather it is part of a broader project that still depends upon state institutions and state actors.  

By focusing on how teachers navigated through these neoliberal reforms to the national public education system in Honduras and took on new responsibilities not previously associated with their mandates, this research also fits into a growing body of literature which aims to analyze new sets of hierarchies and forms of governance whereby authorities from the private sector and state agents of different positions are

7 In a similar manner, anthropologist Keri Brondo (2013: 10) uses the term “re-regulation” (instead of merely ‘de-regulation’) to refer to Honduras’ neoliberal agrarian legislation and its effect on Garifuna populations.
taking on new governing tasks not previously associated with their jobs (cf. Li 2009; Millar & Rose 1990; Rose 1999; Smart 2002, 2001).

The case of contemporary Honduras differs from countries undergoing processes of the expansion of state services, involving larger central governments and more investment in public sector jobs. However, the language of ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ states does not capture the complexity of forms of governance, as suggested by recent literature on neoliberal governmentality (see, for instance, Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Ong 2006), or the variable degrees of resilience, governability, and effective results that various state institutions achieve at different historical moments. While certain state institutions (such as the Ministry of Education) have been ‘weakened,’ others (such as the armed forces and national police) have arguably gained resilience and reasserted their power in post-coup Honduras.

My focus on how teachers view their own work in the context of shifting approaches to the state modernity project of national public education also connects with an emerging line of research in the anthropology of education that aims to study teachers’ knowledge and actions (see, for example, Batallán 2002; Gill 2000; Luykx 1999; Padawer 2002; Wilson 2001 for illustrative examples in the Latin American context). The majority of literature in the sub-field has nonetheless focused on the broad study of students’ differential experiences with schooling, to understand how different class, gender, ethnic, racial, national, and linguistic backgrounds have influenced students’ experiences with formal education (see, for example, Candela 2005; Foley 1996; González 2010, 2009; Hamann 2003; Hervé 2008; Hicks 2007; Hornberger 2005, 2003; Jacob 1993; Kirkendall 2002; Koyama and Gibson 2007; Ladson-Billings 2005;

To a lesser extent the sub-field of the anthropology of education has also focused on the different pedagogical strategies for teaching a range of ideologies to a specific group of people, with the goal of understanding the differences between what is taught and what is actually learned (see, for example, Anderson-Levitt 2003; Banks 2004; Bottery 2000; Burbules and Torres 2000; Cole 1974; Eddy 1985; Erickson 2006, 2002, 1993; García 2005; Gee 2005; Hahn 1998; Hall 1999; Huff 2007; Lave 1991; Levinson and Holland 1996; Levinson and Sutton 2001; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching 2012; Melgarejo 2002; Padawer 2008a, 2008b, 2007, 2002; Parker 2004, 2003; Pelissier 1991; Rival 1996; Rockwell 2007, 2005; Skinner 1996; Spindler 2006; Splinder, ed. 2000, 1997; Stevick and Levinson 2007; Willis 1981 [1977]).

While these topics of inquiry merit sustained anthropological research, and some could very easily be imagined in distinct Honduran contexts of public schooling among different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups, my research is very different from these types of studies. Here I examine the experiences, opinions, and actions of schoolteachers in order to understand post-coup policies of governance, state practices, and the ongoing effects of the political crisis in contemporary Honduras. To be clear, I am interested not in students’ experiences, or curriculum design or pedagogy, but schoolteachers themselves; and not necessarily because of my interests in education per se, but for the unique vantage point this offers to study the Honduran state ethnographically in the post-coup political context, considering the nature of teachers’ work as front-line state agents and as the everyday leaders of the Resistenca.
In this thesis I draw upon some of these other types of anthropology of education studies for the purposes of comparing how the projects of decentralization and privatization have been experienced in distinct contexts, especially in other Latin American countries (e.g., Arnove 1997; Rockwell 1994; Vaughan 1997, 1982; Wilson 2001). Such research has suggested that while public education can be considered a ‘top-down’ state modernity project – and will at least attempt to train a labour force and act as a mechanism of social control by integrating its participants, communicating ideas about the nation, state, and citizens (influencing students with specific ideologies) – how exactly this happens is highly variable, and dependent upon not only the country and historical period in question, but also the geographic region within a given country. There can thus be significant degrees of unevenness in what is referred to as ‘national public education.’

Such variability and shifting degrees of strength and weakness among different state institutions has also meant that the role of the central government in determining the function of public education is variable. For instance, in revolutionary Mexico historians have argued that the central government did not fund, and was not capable of determining, what was taught (or how) in local schools (see, for example, Rockwell 2007, 2002, 1996; Vaughan 1997, 1982). In specific contexts this might suggest greater local control over curriculum, yet as neoliberal policies have shown (and as the Honduran magisterio argues today), decentralization can also be associated with reduced funding overall and increased inequity among schools, which negatively affects the working class and students with fewer economic resources.
In 2012 Honduran schoolteachers were seldom thinking about questions regarding how to teach certain ideologies in the classroom, or how the decentralization project might affect curriculum design and pedagogical strategies. As leaders of the Resistencia political movement, I had suspected that they might be concerned with these matters (as Rockwell shows, in different ways, was sometimes the case in revolutionary Mexico [2007, 1996]). However, I found that my research participants were neither enthusiastic about any potential opportunities to teach more local history, nor were they very concerned about how the reforms might affect the content of what is taught and learned in their classrooms in general (which is part of what makes this project different from the other anthropology of education projects cited above). Instead, teachers in Honduras are concerned first and foremost about questions of how to finance education. They are struggling to meet the basic needs of schooling in the context of widespread poverty and political uncertainty. They see the reforms as a retreat of the state’s responsibility to fund the national public education system, and a quintessential example of the fast erosion of basic public services since the June 2009 military coup.

1.4 Presenting the Reforms from Schoolteachers’ Perspective

The current conflicts between Honduran schoolteachers and the post-coup governments that have come to power since the violent overthrow of Mel Zelaya are not simply a matter of teachers asking for a higher salary or better benefits. Rather, Honduran schoolteachers and their professional associations – the magisterio – are fighting to defend pre-coup policy achievements passed into earlier legislation, by demanding that post-coup governments respect those existing laws which they consider progressive and
that teachers fought to achieve. The reforms aim to override those features of previous
laws that affect teachers’ own salaries, benefits, and working conditions. Moreover, the
reforms bring to the fore the question of whether or not the state should be responsible for
funding the national public education of its citizens, and if so, what exactly this should entail.

The fact that in this thesis I refer to these reforms as measures that bring Honduras
toward a ‘decentralized’ and ‘privatized’ national public education system requires some
explanation. I am borrowing these descriptions of the reforms – especially the idea that
the reforms promote privatization – from Honduran schoolteachers themselves. In so
doing I am consciously presenting these new laws from a certain perspective, that of
Honduran schoolteachers (although as we will see, their views can be quite
heterogeneous). This practice goes beyond expressing the solidarity I have developed
with the Honduran magisterio. My fieldwork took place during the first school year in
which teachers were expected to abide by and implement these new laws. This meant that
I was learning about the reforms at the same time that teachers themselves were also
continuously endeavouring to make sense of these governing policies – an uneven and
sometimes difficult intellectual process for schoolteachers themselves as the significance
of this new legislation was not always clear to them (cf. Schwegler 2012).

When I would read an official document or law and ask one of my research
participants for clarification about what it meant, I would often find that she or he would
have similar questions, which would then provoke discussion among other teachers about
the significance of a particular article or section of a given law. When I would enquire
about teachers’ opinions or experiences with a certain aspect of these new laws, I would
similarly find that they were already asking each other comparable questions, learning from each other’s experiences. It soon became clear to me that Honduran teachers themselves were struggling to understand these laws, and make sense of the political environment in which they were working.

I found that teachers were learning about these new education policies not by carefully reading the actual laws, but by talking with each other about what they perceived to be the implications. When I asked teachers questions about particular articles, they would often tell stories of what they or other teachers had experienced because of the reforms, rather than cite these texts themselves. When teachers referenced sections of a particular law, I would read through the text myself keeping in mind what they had said about it. Throughout my fieldwork I carried around with me hard copies of the laws, and would quickly read through different sections after conducting interviews (in an effort to understand what teachers were referring to, and to formulate follow-up questions). Teachers were aware that I had hard copies of the new laws with me and would often comment to their colleagues that I was someone knowledgeable about the reforms – even though I was trying to understand these policies from teachers’ perspectives, which required ethnographic enquiry, rather than just reading the laws themselves. In this sense I became involved in the process through which my research participants were coming to understand these new policies, as we interpreted these texts together.

In disseminating my research findings, rather than simply announce the details of every new law abruptly in this introductory chapter, I have consciously decided to bring the reader to understand the specifics of the reforms through the ethnographic stories that
follow. I am choosing to incorporate into my thesis the circumstances through which both teachers and I were learning about these new laws to illuminate how teachers were producing knowledge about this legislation among themselves, and taking a political position on the reforms from their particular perspective as a gremio.

My aim with this writing technique is not to theorize ethnographic research so much as to illuminate the dynamic processes by which Honduran schoolteachers themselves navigated through the first year of the reforms. This approach is inspired primarily by the nature of the realities that I encountered during fieldwork in Honduras in 2012. It is also informed by the general anthropological emphasis on understanding the lived experiences of a particular group of people, and asking how they understand their own positions based on the experiences they have had. Moreover, those understandings also feed into their sense of how they should act in the world and more broadly what is possible. In this thesis while I aim to present the Honduran education reforms from the perspective of schoolteachers, I also focus on the heterogeneity of their opinions and analyze the conflicts that exist among teachers.

In order for my approach to be effective, it is necessary to first explain what Honduran teachers’ positions entail, and what other possible perspectives could have been explored. For instance, the continuous disputes between the magisterio and different governments in power are experienced differently from the perspective of students’ parents who seek to educate their children through this state service. The Sociedad de Padres de Familia (society of [organized] student parents) has been a key interested party in the Honduran national public education system, and correspondingly, a group of people interested in supervising the behaviour of schoolteachers. Since long before the
current reforms, Honduran teachers have had a somewhat conflict-ridden and volatile relationship with students’ parents, who (for reasons not unique to Honduras) often criticize teachers’ work, as well as broader processes associated with public education that are not always within the direct realm of an individual teacher’s influence but are nonetheless associated with their positions.

The dimensions of these conflicts are connected to the ambiguous nature of schoolteachers’ positions in Honduran society. On one level, the profession of schoolteacher still carries a good deal of prestige locally; parents recognize teachers as capable community leaders who have made respectable life choices. On another level, however, given that teachers have quite ambiguous positions as professional workers, some parents express their sympathy with the fact that teachers are underpaid labourers, while others consider teachers to be in a position of considerable privilege as salaried professionals paid by the Ministry of Education. Such stable employment is relatively uncommon in Honduras. Moreover, while other industries have produced private sector jobs that have come and gone, the understanding locally is that as government employees, teachers are in a better position to negotiate their wages and benefits over time, given that the state will not disappear or re-locate. Such tensions between teachers and parents intensify during moments of teacher-initiated paros and strikes, and it is common for parents in Honduras to view teachers’ disputes with the government as simply a matter of ‘teachers wanting more money.’

Regardless of any solidarity for teachers’ labour struggles that students’ parents may or may not have, parents’ primary interest is, understandably, to ensure their children have access to quality education throughout the entire school year. This inherent
difference in positioning means that the Sociedad de Padres de Familia is usually the first group of interested parties with whom teachers have conflicts during their labour disputes with the Ministry of Education and the government in power. Different Honduran governments, astutely aware of this reality, have sought to take advantage of the positioning of students’ parents through the promotion of the idea that teachers, and their pursuit of more money, are to blame for the shortcomings of the education system.

Students, the most direct recipients of this state service, are another group of people whose standpoint is usually different from that of teachers. Organized students have the power to withhold their own labour through student paros. This usually happens in one of two ways: nation-wide student paros, which ultimately have to do with students’ discontent with the extent to which education funding is satisfying their own needs and desires; and student paros in particular schools, which usually result from internal disputes between the particular teachers and students at the school in question.

Honduran teachers have generally been supportive of the first kind of paro, given that students’ demands for more government funding for education are often compatible with teachers’ own calls for more government funding. In fact, normal school students (that is, high school students studying to become teachers) have led most nation-wide student protests in Honduras. While there was solidarity among normal school and university students with the magisterio and their critique of these neoliberal reforms, there were no student-initiated nation-wide paros in Honduras against the reforms at the time of my fieldwork, despite the fact that we have seen how powerful such movements have been in other Latin American countries when protesting against neoliberal education policies (see, for instance, Craib 2010 on students in Chile). This is surprising when we
consider that students are ultimately the primary targets of these neoliberal policies in the long term. Their education system has been significantly altered from what previous generations experienced. Honduran students are now being asked by the policy designers (and even by teachers themselves) to contribute toward an education system that will likely result in more unequal access to secondary schooling, and fewer employment opportunities for poor students. Telling this story from the perspective of students, and attempting to understand how their subjectivities are or are not influenced by these reforms, would however also be a different kind of research project.

In addition to students and their parents, another group of people whose perspective I am not presenting in this thesis is that of representatives from the Lobo government and the designers of these neoliberal reforms. From their perspective (as reflected in public expressions of it), the decentralization of education funding has to do with making municipal governments take on the “responsibility of promoting education” and to “adopt the adequate methods of coordination with corresponding education authorities, so the right of citizens living in their territories to an education is effectively carried out” (see Article 79, República de Honduras 2012). The new laws describe the roles of community members, local businesses and NGOs in promoting the national public education system in a way that, at first appearance, does not necessarily seem like a bad thing. What does it mean, then, to say that these reforms are ‘decentralizing’ and ‘privatizing’ the national public education system? Given that less involvement from the central government has, in other contexts, been viewed as a benefit for students, parents, and even some schoolteachers, why exactly are Honduran schoolteachers so adamantly against these particular laws?
Although the reforms describe the supposed benefits associated with receiving funding from the private sector, they do not explicitly state that the central government will no longer fund education. Rather, they describe a process in which the central government’s Ministry of Education transfers funds to regional governments, which are in turn expected to formulate and operate their own budgets for school infrastructure projects through a combination of these transferred funds and their own regional revenues (see República de Honduras 2012).

Despite the fact that the new laws are written in a manner that renders the policies non-political, this thesis demonstrates how Honduran schoolteachers identify several problems with this scenario. First and foremost they remind us that departmental and municipal governments in Honduras are already struggling to fund different types of necessary infrastructure projects that their populations demand and they are required to realize (such as the construction and maintenance of local roads, potable water and sewage systems), without direct support from the central government. Teachers argue that while richer neighbourhoods do not have as many problems with these basic necessities, most municipal governments in Honduras are cash-strapped – sometimes even in debt – and will therefore not be in a position to effectively manage yet another local project.

In their articulations of the dangers of decentralization, teachers draw upon previous examples of what has happened in Honduras when the central government has left it up to municipal governments to deliver basic public services: they contract out to private companies, which has resulted in more unequal distribution of resources. For instance, I heard that even in San Pedro Sula (the country’s industrial centre), the
municipal government privatized the potable water service, and the private company in charge said it would not be profitable for them to deliver water to certain rural communities. Teachers frequently talk of poor municipalities in need of financial assistance from the central government in order to manage the public services they are already in charge of delivering. Drawing on this kind of empirical evidence, teachers have developed an argument about how in Honduras, the process of ‘decentralization’ means ‘privatization’ in practice, because municipal governments cannot manage such responsibilities by themselves. For teachers it is thus not necessarily decentralization itself that is problematic, but the fact that this implies asking private enterprises to become the primary funders of what has formerly been a public (centralized) education system. Given Honduras’ vast socio-economic inequities, teachers argue that this scenario will lead to the rich benefiting from a situation that further marginalizes the poor, a process they are most adamantly against.

Teachers recognize that the central government has also been responsible for privatizing other basic services on a national level (and has been interested in privatizing the national telecommunications and electric companies since the coup). However the understanding among schoolteachers is that such privatization schemes are more likely to succeed as decentralization is extended. They argue that this will especially be the case in poorer municipalities, since residents in richer areas will not see the need to protest against privatization in distant poorer areas. They argue that it is easier for the Honduran population to come together as a whole and defend national public education if everyone’s equal access to this basic public service is at stake (not just that of residents from certain municipalities) – thus they see decentralization as a form of undermining
both struggle and solidarity (and thus deeply political). This is the area of teachers’ discord with the reforms that most often conjures support among parents and students alike.

The other major concern Honduran teachers have with the decentralization and privatization project is the potential for funding for their own salaries to also come from individual municipalities and private companies (from which they now already seek financial support for their school infrastructure and academic programs). Convincing disgruntled parents of the negative implications of this aspect of the reforms is more difficult for teachers, especially since many parents view private schooling as a viable alternative to an unstable public education system.

As of 2012, the education money allotted for departmental and municipal governments to manage was not used to pay teachers’ salaries – the largest expenditure of the national public education system. (During my fieldwork, teachers’ salaries still came from the central offices of the Ministry of Education in Tegucigalpa.) Rather, the transferred money is supposed to be used for all the other expenses that schools require, such as infrastructure projects and education-based initiatives, for which different schools must compete with each other to receive any of these funds. While this was the extent of the decentralization process at the time of this research, teachers frequently mentioned that they suspect municipal governments will also soon be in charge of paying their

---

8 This research project specifically sought the opinions and experiences of teachers who work in public schools, given that the reforms primarily affect how the public school system is funded. Nevertheless, several of my research participants had additional jobs in private schools, or had worked in private schools in the past. Teachers reflect upon these experiences in the process of forming their opinions about the dangers of a privatized school system. They are well aware that private schools pay teachers significantly less, and the owners do not hesitate to fire teachers who attempt to organize paros or strikes. As one teacher told me: “All private companies exploit their workers. With the direction of these reforms, soon we will all be screwed!”
salaries as well. For teachers, the same logic behind how decentralization leads to privatization also applies to their salaries.

Honduran schoolteachers are arguing that the decentralization and privatization of funding will lead to more inequalities among different schools, and also among teachers themselves. This understanding was explicit in teachers’ arguments that the Lobo government was attempting to dissolve teachers’ professional associations with these reforms and weaken the *magisterio*. From teachers’ perspective, their organizations would no longer be able to conjure support for nation-wide labour struggles if their salaries and benefits were no longer uniform. These understandings are based on previous experiences in which different governments have in fact paid off teachers in select regions as a strategic manoeuvre to end nation-wide strikes early, thereby creating divisions within the *magisterio* and weakening their capacities to organize on a national level. Under these conceptualizations of the dangers involved with the decentralization of education funding, teachers who work in non-central regions of Honduras are particularly vulnerable. The south is one such region, and in 2012 teachers there were asking: if fellow teachers in other regions of the country are being paid completely and punctually, and we are not, why would they risk their jobs with a *paro* or a strike just to support us?

1.5 Fieldwork: Locating the South in Contemporary Honduras

Southern Honduras is an important field site for studying these recent changes to funding the national public education system given that within Honduras this region is

---

9 One frequently-mentioned example of this practice was when the government of Ricardo Maduro paid off teachers in the central department of Francisco Morazán during a nation-wide strike between June and August 2004.
characterized by higher levels of poverty and population growth, and thus will likely not be as competitive within the decentralized funding system. The departments of Valle and Choluteca have been relatively marginal to broader processes of state formation in Honduras historically, in part because government revenues have depended more upon the export of silver ores from the central regions and bananas from the north coast.

This historical context is especially interesting for studying the effects of the decentralization of education funds, as local elites and municipal governments of non-central regions now have on the one hand, more autonomy in making decisions regarding teachers’ role in public education (and how they are to successfully acquire those funds), yet likely less funding overall to promote local priorities, given their peripheral economic position. While as a nation-wide group of workers Honduran teachers criticize the reforms and feel that they will be a step in the wrong direction for the country’s national public education system, teachers in non-central regions – such as the south – arguably face a much more immediate threat since they work in a region already known for its relative poverty.

The Honduran south was characterized by privately-owned profit-oriented domestic agricultural traditions, preceding the introduction of coffee, with marginal integration into the country’s export economy since the colonial period. However, in the environment of the internationally-financed development projects following the Second World War, southern Honduras underwent rapid socioeconomic, demographic, and ecological changes (Stonich 1991: 133). By the 1950s and 1960s the Honduran state encouraged a specific type of economic growth in the southern region as a part of the country’s expanding export economy. This has primarily consisted in producing crops for
the US market. The infrastructure of Honduras’ only functional Pacific port facility, *el Puerto de Henecán* in San Lorenzo, along with that of the Pan-American Highway (which runs through the Honduran south, connecting El Salvador with Nicaragua) was vastly improved through World Bank and Inter-Development Bank development loans (Stonich 1991: 138). Prior to these changes, southern landowners and local capitalists had been unable to respond to favourable economic conditions due to the lack of necessary infrastructure and inputs such as transportation, markets, and credit (Stonich 1991: 138). These development loans enabled the previous governments to make infrastructure changes in the south to incorporate the region’s commodities into Honduras’ expanding export economy. Those land-poor and landless peasants unable to produce enough for their own subsistence needs became the new wage labourers in the south, involved in this export economy as agricultural workers, usually by sending at least one family member to work on the estates while others participated in subsistence farming.

As early as the mid-1950s, but especially in the 1970s, large foreign companies began to compete with local capitalists for land and labour. From the 1950s through the middle of the 1980s, the southern region produced cotton, livestock, and sugar for the world economy, but by the mid-1970s – in part due to the decline in global prices for these products – such commodities were replaced by sesame seeds, cantaloupe melons, and non-traditional exports such as industrial shrimp farming (Stonich 1991: 138,139). Southern Honduras did not experience population growth at as rapid a rate as the rest of the country did from the 1940s. This was in part due to the higher rates of both infant mortality and out-migration, but also because access to land was limited for small and medium scale agriculturalists, and instead was dominated by large capitalist landholdings.
(Stonich 1991: 139). The region continues to have a marginal position in the national economy.

Despite this history of marginality and continual relative poverty, in 2012 the south was declared a ‘model region’ by the Lobo government for its potential to increase production of export crops (including cantaloupe melons, watermelons, sugarcane, and shrimp, as well as zucchini, jalapeños, and cashews – the kinds of enterprises from which schoolteachers in the region are now expected to secure funding). The situation resonates with what Aiwa Ong identifies as “zoning technologies” in Southeast Asia (2006).

In the Honduran south this is occurring in large part due to its strategic location of access to the Pacific Ocean, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (see SEPLAN 2012). In its ‘national plan’ and ‘country vision’ the Lobo regime envisions Honduras as most productive when divided into sixteen different ‘development regions’ (see Artículo 5, SEPLAN 2009; República de Honduras 2004). Schoolteachers understand the project of decentralization of education funding as connected to a broader project of the Lobo regime to decentralize other aspects of the economy by having each of these regions specialize in particular forms of production. Some teachers fear that this type of initiative will eventually lead to an over-emphasis in education oriented toward training workers for the specific type of export-processing zones that the Lobo government envisions. Although in 2012 schoolteachers’ primary concerns were with funding for education and not curriculum design, training students to work in the export industry is neither the type of governing policies they agree with nor the kind of educational system they have sought to forge. The specificities of how the Honduran schoolteachers I work with identified the most problematic aspects of the reforms are partly a reflection of the region where they
are working. The south is marginal economically, but the teachers who participated in my study were not working with students of ethnic or linguistic minorities, as is commonplace in departments such as the Bay Islands or La Mosquitia. Teachers in other regions of Honduras may well have identified other areas of the decentralization project as problematic, and for other kinds of reasons specific to the regions where they work. Indeed, they may have even found that decentralization represented an opportunity to make education there more culturally-relevant to their students; this was not the case in southern Honduras.

1.6 Research Methods: Studying the Work of State Agents

For this PhD project I spent twelve months living in San Lorenzo, Valle, conducting anthropological fieldwork among schoolteachers from January through December 2012. The period of my fieldwork thus matched the Honduran school year, which runs from the beginning of February through the end of November. I was therefore in a good position to be able to observe how teachers navigated through the entire first school year in which they were expected to abide by and implement these new neoliberal education laws. When I arrived in January, teachers were already interpreting the implicit and explicit messages of the Lobo government in their analyses of the education reforms. They were worried about their job security, the cuts to their benefits, and what they interpreted as largely unachievable goals to increase academic standards since the government was not willing to pay the cost of such improvements. As teachers planned the upcoming school year, it became clear to me that the best way to study these processes was by accompanying my research participants in their daily routines – both at formal work-related events and informal social gatherings.
Since classes had still not begun in January, it was easy for me to seek invitations to various types of social gatherings that teachers were engaged in during this vacation period. I found that teachers were spending a good portion of their leisure time gathering ideas from each other about what these reforms would mean for their everyday work. At teachers’ homes and in public spaces – such as at the beach, at restaurants, in shopping malls, and at market places – teachers looked to fellow teachers for advice on what they planned to do during the 2012 school year. In this sense, teachers’ coordination of work-related activities frequently happens in spaces beyond the actual school premises, while ‘off the clock.’ I therefore began my research on the everyday work of teachers in these informal social gatherings, where teachers spent a surprisingly large amount of time talking about and planning the various tasks they would do at their schools. Through these initial conversations with teachers in informal social settings, I would receive recommendations about whom I should interview and invitations to other gatherings among teachers in the region. The news of my research project had begun to spread, and teachers were enthusiastic about talking with me over food and drinks; I received far more invitations to social gatherings than I had anticipated. While this practice remained a vital aspect of my fieldwork throughout the year, I later realized (and was persuaded by teachers themselves), that if I wanted to understand teachers’ work, I would have to spend time with them at their formal places of employment, their schools.

Admittedly, I had initially underestimated how useful it would be for me to develop a daily routine inside the premises of schools. I had assumed that the majority of my participant observation would take place outside of schools, and I had only imagined myself going to schools when the teachers I sought to interview told me it would be the
most convenient place for us to talk. I was already aware that schools in Honduras are fairly restricted areas (despite the fact that they are built on what is considered public land, or property of the state). The properties of Honduran schools have brick walls, barbed-wire fences, and armed security guards on the perimeters; students, students’ parents, and suspicious teachers on the inside. Since Honduran teachers are well aware that their work is subject to public criticism, they are understandably wary of the regular presence of outsiders in their places of work. While many visitors come and go, individuals who have a regular presence at schools in Honduras are those who have legitimate business there – usually in the form of some sort of financial benefit for the school itself. ‘No es cualquiera que entra’ (it’s not just anybody who comes in) as teachers in Honduras commonly say.

Even beyond Honduras, conducting ethnographic research in schools is problematic. As education anthropologist Bradley Levinson puts it:

Methodologically and ethically… schools are difficult places to study. They have gatekeepers from whom permission must be secured. They often require a difficult negotiation of structurally opposed interests and alliances. Such conditions may threaten the sustained observations and interviews needed to construct a compelling interpretation of the effects of schooling. Thus, the model of solitary ethnography makes the study of schooling more daunting… (1999: 599).

The fact that I had no intention of conducting research among students, the parents of students, or any other interested parties in education except for teachers themselves perhaps made this a little easier. The ‘gatekeepers’ welcomed me into their workplaces because they understood what my research entailed; because I communicated to them my
solidarity with their labour struggles; and because they knew that I would only be conducting research among them and they could determine what information to share with me.

School directors were the primary figures of authority from whom permission needed to be initially secured and maintained throughout the school year. As school administrators they were also individuals whose daily activities were of much interest to me, given that they bear the majority of the burden if they as managers fail to secure the funding required to maintain their schools. I secured permission to conduct regular research at two different schools, one in a rural community located roughly 15 kilometers outside of San Lorenzo, and one in the city proper. This allowed me to compare and contrast rural and urban settings, and to become exposed to many more schoolteachers beyond my social networks in San Lorenzo. It also permitted observation and participation in formal work-related meetings in which teachers would discuss their various school projects and daily administrative tasks.

At both schools, teachers asked me to assist with teaching English classes (which I had neither interest nor experience in doing, but I complied nonetheless because the teachers with whom I worked believed it would be useful for them). In the rural setting this consisted of helping to design and lead an extra-curricular ‘English club,’ while in the urban setting I answered questions about grammar and vocabulary that English teachers had, and would give lectures about English whenever asked to do so. On average I spent two working days at each school per week. Whenever I committed to volunteer

---

10 Throughout this thesis I thus distinguish between general teachers and school administrators, who sometimes also taught classes, but who were responsible for managing a staff. I refer to the latter as school directors or sub-directors, whose positions are similar to principals and vice-principals in North America.
with an English-teaching activity, I followed through with the exact schedule of that obligation, coordinating between both schools such that there was no conflict between my English volunteering activities. Aside from those commitments, however, it was understood that I would come and go as my schedule permitted. (I quickly developed a positive relationship with the security guards at both schools who would unlock the gates whenever they saw me arrive.) Teachers at these two schools comprised the majority of my total number of research participants (which in the end amounted to 38 individuals). However, since I would often receive invitations to other events from schoolteachers who did not work at these schools, it was understood that I would have a sporadic schedule throughout the school year.

As educated professionals themselves who work in the area of education, my research participants loved the fact that I hold university degrees. Overall they were enthusiastic about being a part of my research process; they took an interest in what my PhD degree requirements were, and frequently asked me what I planned to do upon graduating. However, conducting fieldwork among professionals at their places of work also implied learning when they seemed occupied with other tasks – sensing when it was best to leave them to their work – and finding the methodologically-appropriate ways of letting them know that in the meantime I was perfectly happy to sit by myself in the courtyard with my pen and notebook in hand. Navigating through teachers’ work spaces at these schools was a learning process in and of itself, and I explicitly told everyone that I would never want to interrupt their duties. This meant that while on the school premises, the moments in which I could sit down and talk with teachers were during recess, over lunch, and during school-wide activities and celebrations, as well as at
formal work-related meetings when I was invited to participate.

I also received invitations to accompany teachers from these schools to various work-related events that occurred off the school’s premises, happening at least twice per week (a reflection of how mobile teachers are in their everyday work). Honduran schoolteachers often have meetings with supervisors, students’ parents, or other local interested parties at locations other than their schools. Throughout the school year I received invitations to travel with teachers who worked at these two schools as well those who I had met previously through social gatherings. Most often this included: visiting rural communities where their students lived, to participate in events such as soccer matches, funerals and wakes, and celebrations of different kinds; going to regional Ministry of Education offices in Nacaome, Valle, and magisterio-related offices in Tegucigalpa; attending meetings between teachers and representatives of local businesses (such as banks, law practices, and NGOs) when teachers’ interactions with these entities were relevant to their work; and attending events at other schools in the region where teachers gathered for assemblies of different kinds, and formal work-related meetings with colleagues.

I also received invitations to attend university classes from some of my closest research participants who were taking these courses in pursuit of undergraduate degrees at the regional Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras UNAH (the National Autonomous University of Honduras) campus in Choluteca, and the regional Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán UPNFM (Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University) campus in Nacaome. At these universities my research participants introduced me to the course instructors who allowed me to present myself
and my research project to the entire class. I was then granted permission to sit in on the class and take notes about their conversations and class topics, although I only engaged a few of the teachers present in further conversations as research participants.

These university classes were designed to teach Honduran schoolteachers how the reforms would affect their work lives, including how to go about soliciting funds locally. While I attended five different university courses periodically during my fieldwork, in this thesis I draw upon two of these courses in particular: Macro-Educación (Macro Education) from the UNAH, and Gestión y Administración Educativa (Education Management and Administration) from the UPNFM. Throughout the year opportunities for various activities arose at short notice, and I often received last-minute invitations to travel somewhere with teachers. I determined that having access to a vehicle was essential for me to conduct this kind of research, given that buses do not travel to many of these rural locations, and taxi drivers are also unwilling to travel to the range of different locations that I would visit during the course of one day. Having a car also made it possible for me to offer to drive my research participants to various locations, which presented new opportunities for me.

The nature of this type of anthropological fieldwork represents a significant departure from the more place-bound ethnographies of a particular geographic community. My research participants resided and worked throughout the Honduran south – mainly in the Department of Valle, but also in parts of Choluteca. Some even lived in the southern regions of the Department of Francisco Morazán, from which they would commute south to their schools. Nearly all of my research participants had daily commutes of more than a half-hour drive, in addition to their activities outside of the
schools where they taught. In order to study teachers’ work ethnographically, I had to keep up with their mobility and become quite mobile myself.

As with any ethnographic research project, the participants in my study do not represent a random sample of Honduran schoolteachers. Rather, they are individuals who expressed a particular interest in my project, who were eager to offer me their opinions, and who were able to assist me in carrying out my fieldwork. I began the research by talking with teachers who I already knew through previous experiences in the region. My involvement in the Honduran south dates back to the summer of 2001. That year I participated in a US-based volunteer program which partners with the Honduran offices of the multinational NGO Save the Children. I spent the summer living with a host family in a poor rural community in Valle, promoting the public health projects of the NGO, learning Spanish, and participating in daily activities of community life.

In the summer of 2004 I returned to Valle to work directly with these NGO officials in the Pacific port city of San Lorenzo and to supervise the projects of US volunteers in four rural communities on the outskirts of town. During each of these experiences I came to know some schoolteachers, as they are often the primary contacts for NGOs and government agencies that attempt to deliver services in such rural communities. Together we coordinated projects in their schools and in the rural communities where the NGO worked. In so doing I became friends with several of these teachers from the rural schools, many of whom lived in San Lorenzo proper.

It was through this initial network of teachers who collaborated with the NGO that I was introduced to the Honduran woman whom I would later marry, herself a normal school graduate and daughter of two schoolteachers in the region (who were quite
well-known in the prime of their careers). As this relationship developed I returned regularly to Honduras for personal visits, before deciding to do my MA thesis research there during the summer of 2009. My research participants in that project were wide-ranging and included people who I had already known in San Lorenzo and the rural communities where I previously conducted NGO work.

The unexpected events of that summer then led to an MA thesis on political culture and the different lived experiences with, and varied perceptions of, the June 2009 coup. If I had not been part of a Honduran family at that time and someone who was recognized as having enduring ties to the country, I suspect that people would have been much less willing to speak freely to me about their views on sensitive political issues (much less during a moment of sudden political change and considerable uncertainty). Rather than merely an outside observer, I was working alongside my research participants to try to understand together what the coup might mean to all of us.

My doctoral research project is an organic outgrowth of all my prior experiences in the Honduran south. Methodologically my ability to gain access to the social and political worlds of the schoolteachers whose lives I write about in this dissertation was facilitated by my on-going kinship ties and my personal experiences of having lived through the coup among Honduran family members in the south. I believe that my long-term involvement in the region facilitated the permission I was granted to conduct research at these two schools, and the strong levels of trust that teachers have granted me when sharing details of their work. Part of this has to do with my personal connections (to a family of schoolteachers from the region), and previous NGO experience among schoolteachers. However, the most important aspect of gaining the trust and enthusiasm
of my research participants had to do with the fact that I was in Honduras during the coup, and chose to express my support for the Resistencia movement rather than the violent overthrow of President Mel Zelaya.

Neither I nor my research participants considered me to be a neutral outside observer during my doctoral fieldwork. My background and previous experiences influenced the types of relationships that I was able to form, and my own opinions and perceptions of the events that took place. I cannot imagine conducting ethnographic research into political phenomena in any other way, much less in polarized post-coup Honduras, and especially not at the workplaces of well-known Resistencia leaders. In this thesis I therefore explain, where appropriate, how my previous experiences and personal connections, as well as my solidarity with the Resistencia movement, influenced the types of relationships that I was able to cultivate among teachers. In Chapter 4, for instance, I describe the details of how I came to do research at the rural school, a process which illuminates not only my methodological approach, but some of the ways in which Honduran schoolteachers are currently developing personal relationships with individuals who they suspect might be able to assist them in some way.

Honduran teachers go about doing business and seeking local support for their schools in the context of pressures they face to show local interested parties that they are being innovative and resourceful. In this regard, they often saw my presence in their schools during the first year of the reforms as advantageous. The fact that I was willing to help (however minimally) with English teaching endeavours meant that my research participants would often emphasize this aspect of my presence over others when introducing me to their superiors from departmental Ministry offices and potential
funders of different kinds. All teachers, students, and students’ parents who had a regular presence at the school were aware of my research project among teachers, and intentions to write a thesis about the Honduran *magisterio* as a student of anthropology in Canada.

At both schools I was formally introduced during school-wide assemblies and formal meetings at the beginning of the school year. And I always answered completely and honestly all questions that anyone had about my presence, even if that person was not a schoolteacher. However, throughout the school year I left it up to my research participants themselves to decide upon the most appropriate (and useful) ways to introduce me to their superiors, visitors of various kinds, and local interested parties who could potentially audit their work. Teachers thus often chose to introduce me to regional political authorities, local business owners (as well as police officers and armed forces personnel), as a ‘friend of the school’ who was helping to teach English.

Given the history of US military and Peace Corps-initiated construction projects and English classes at Honduran schools (not to mention my own previous NGO work which involved similar activities), this was an easily understandable explanation for my presence. In certain instances my presence as a foreigner was grouped together in the same category as volunteers from the Japanese development organization (Japan International Cooperation Agency, JICA),\(^\text{11}\) who taught mathematics classes at both schools. On various occasions, the directors from the rural school boasted to their superiors that they were not only abiding by the reforms, but were in fact exceeding expectations to promote their school in the local context, given that they had ‘two foreign

\(^\text{11}\) This organization’s website, its mission and vision statement for their work in Honduras can be seen at: [http://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/mission/index.html](http://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/mission/index.html)
volunteers’ working at their school. I always chose to respect the choices of my research participants when describing to their superiors why I was at their schools, and then answered any questions interested parties had about my presence (which were usually quite minimal after having been introduced by the school directors themselves).

Similarly, when I would receive invitations to events for teachers outside of their schools, I opted to let my research participants describe to other teachers the fact that I support the Resistencia movement (which they were always eager to do). This was especially important when attending magisterio assemblies in which teachers would discuss their strategies for withholding their labour to pressure the Lobo government to reverse these laws, and in those where they simply sought to learn about the implications of the reforms.

Teachers’ assemblies essentially take two different forms: 1) informative assemblies, in which representatives from teachers’ professional organizations give Power Point presentations about the reforms, and answer questions about different policies affecting the education system, while offering suggestions about what their colleagues should do; and 2) assemblies before a paro, in which magisterio leaders rally support and enthusiasm among teachers right before they take to the streets for a formal protest. As my closest research participants told me, these second kinds of assemblies would be dangerous for me to attend without their company, and without first being introduced to their leaders as someone in solidarity with teachers and with the anti-coup Resistencia movement. They explained to me that at these events teachers are especially cautious of infiltrators – of Honduran or foreign origin – who spy on their organizing activities and then report back to the government in power about teachers’ strategies for a
given paro.\textsuperscript{12} I heeded their suggestions.

While I attended several assemblies of this kind, my closest research participants (and family members) advised me not to participate in the actual protests themselves. As my friends took to the streets, I made the prudent (although sometimes difficult) decision of returning home. I chose to not participate in the protests because the aims of my research did not depend upon it – in fact the protests themselves were not an everyday occurrence but more of an extra-ordinary event, happening about once every other month – and because the Honduran national police and armed forces would almost always break up teachers’ protests on the streets, usually by arresting protesters, and often through the use of violence. I knew that being arrested or becoming a victim of violence would bring my fieldwork to an abrupt end and I therefore chose not to participate in these protests. This same type of prudent behaviour guided other decisions about accompanying teachers to certain events, especially those that involved drinking alcohol in public spaces at night.

1.7 A Word on Violence

By many estimates, Honduras is currently the most violent country on the planet. According to a recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report, Honduras has an estimated homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants (UNODC 2013: 24). While political violence has been endemic since at least the 1980s, it is clear that Honduras’ teachers take such spying on their organizations quite seriously, and have been known to retaliate. In one instance they made an infiltrator walk through the streets of Tegucigalpa in just his underwear (see, for instance, this video clip about teachers from The Real News: http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=6635). My research participants told their leaders who I was, and that I supported their struggles and those of the Resistencia, in order to avoid any instances of this sort.
homicide rate has increased since the June 2009 coup. Different kinds of leaders of the *Resistencia* movement – including teachers, but also students, lawyers, journalists, gender equality activists, unemployed young men, labour activists, and peasants – have been particularly targeted by the state’s security apparatuses and by the private security forces of large landowners. Although none of the teachers with whom I worked became victims of actual bloodshed themselves, on an average monthly basis at least one of my research participants would talk of someone she or he knew who was recently murdered. The subject was often on people’s minds in some way or another.

This situation resonates with the work of anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom on how violence is experimental and fluid, how it shapes realities, reconfigures social worlds and can be “made” and “unmade” (2007 [1997]: 251; see also Nordstrom 2004; Scarry 1985). Fellow scholars of Honduran political processes have illuminated how meaning is ascribed to the everyday effects of violence in Honduras, as violence destroys the future and devastates long-term plans, which are contingent upon not becoming victim to the violence (see, for example, Boyer and Peñalva 2013; Phillips 2013, 2011; Pine 2011, 2009, 2008; Wolseth 2011, 2008). These valuable contributions underscore Hondurans’ preoccupations for what happens today and for what tomorrow might bring – issues that have become quite urgent in the post-coup context.

Despite the importance of this topic, my objectives here are different. This thesis is not about studying the on-going effects of violence in Honduras. Rather, I wish to examine the processes through which people criticize and challenge oppressive policies while imagining, and taking actions toward, creating a brighter future. The 2012 school year was a key moment in which the post-coup Honduran government withdrew some of
schoolteachers’ basic rights as educated professional workers. It was however also an opportunity for teachers to reflect on what types of collective values they have as a group, and what are the most effective strategies to realize the broader political projects of the Resistencia and LIBRE Party. As members of the political movement that promises ‘state re-foundation’ and radical changes to policies of governance and state practices in general, schoolteachers were in a unique position to continue forging the revolutionary spirit this movement has conjured. Here I hope to capture the ways in which this group of front-line state agents creatively and opportunistically took political action during a particular historical moment characterized not only by violence and political crisis, but also by glimpses of enthusiasm and hope.

1.8 Chapter Layout

In the following chapter I locate the June 2009 coup in a broader historical context, and highlight specific processes that have interested scholars of Honduran political culture, drawing on some of the conclusions from my MA thesis. In this first core chapter I also connect my doctoral research with distinct research topics that have interested other scholars of Honduran history and politics since the 2009 coup. This background information about the immediate effects of the coup and what sorts of social and political processes characterized daily life in Honduras in 2012 is necessary to understand the political environment in which the education reforms took place. Chapter 3 illustrates some of the ways in which teachers’ own experiences with the education system and the state have forged their vested interests in the validity of state services in general. Through life histories and official narratives of the history of this career and its labour achievements, I show how experiences with these previous historical periods
(when the state’s approach to national public education was quite different) have become essential to teachers’ interpretations of the current reforms.

From these two historically-oriented chapters we move to my ethnographic narrative of the 2012 school year (which I present in a loosely chronological fashion throughout the remainder of the thesis). In Chapter 4 I show how teachers were preparing for the beginning of the school year, and reading the political landscape in which the reforms were going to take place. I describe the circumstances in which I came to do research at both schools, and in the process I show the ways in which teachers selectively began to implement the reforms, recognizing full well that the overall neoliberal spirit was not in their best interest, but that certain aspects of the laws could be useful given the circumstances they were already dealing with in trying to find ways to meet the basic needs of public schooling. Here I begin to show how teachers were pushing the limits of what was intended by these new laws, in order to further their own agendas at their schools. Whereas Chapter 4 underscores how teachers secured funding for basic infrastructure projects, Chapter 5 analyzes the co-dependent relationship among teachers and politicians to reveal how funding reaches primary schools in practice, and what innovative decisions teachers were making while both abiding by the reforms and trying to meet local expectations for what the education system should be providing.

While Chapters 4 and 5 begin to show how teachers were developing visions for a different kind of national public education system, Chapter 6 illuminates some of the key obstacles to achieving that project by examining areas of conflict and discord within the magisterio. It presents different aspects of teachers’ everyday work in rather mundane contexts in order to understand how such conflicts intersected with the political
environment of the reforms. In Chapter 7 I examine the ways that teachers’ resistance to the reforms and ideas for what constitutes a better education system intersected with the development of their opinions about what constitutes good governance and proper state practices. Here I explore how schoolteachers’ experiences during the 2012 school year informed their understandings of what state practices in general should be like in Honduras with Resistencia/LIBRE-initiated re-foundation projects. This final core chapter analyzes how teachers’ collective actions and daily acts of resistance were merging into broader collective struggles to form distinct political paths to the future.

In the concluding chapter I present the reader with an update to Honduran schoolteachers’ situation after the November 2013 presidential and congressional elections, bringing together the central arguments of this thesis with the significance of these data to show their relevance for the anthropological study of politics and the state. I then suggest future avenues of research for an engaged anthropology of Honduran political culture and Latin American state formation.
2 Locating the 2009 Military Coup in Honduran History

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the major themes in Honduran history that are relevant for my subsequent analyses of schoolteachers’ everyday work in the post-coup political environment. I begin by describing the general history of Honduras in the 19th century, leading up to the 1870-1930 period of Liberal economic reforms, with a specific focus on the relevance of Honduras’ concessionary development policies. From there I analyze some of Honduras’ development strategies in the 20th century following the Second World War, and analyze the importance of Honduras’ geopolitical position during the Cold War. This history serves as a platform from which I move to describe the significance of the government of Mel Zelaya and the national political environment leading up to the June 2009 coup, drawing on some of the conclusions of my MA research about diverse attempts to make sense of this sudden political change, precisely through reflection on this recent history. I then describe the context in which the Resistencia emerged and people in the south became active in the movement, as well as the subsequent formation of the LIBRE Party. I finish by connecting this recent history with ongoing themes since the 2009 coup, situating my doctoral thesis in relation to other research in the social sciences on political processes in post-coup Honduras.

This chapter thus aims to describe general historical characteristics of Honduras in order to lay the groundwork for illuminating the significance of the FNRP and LIBRE Party. It does not claim to be a substantive overview of Honduran history. Rather, I am interested in sketching certain political processes with broad strokes by drawing selectively on secondary literature and my own previous research. This will serve as
necessary background information for understanding the post-coup political environment in which schoolteachers were navigating the reforms in the 2012 school year. One of the arguments of this thesis is that schoolteachers are approaching the implementation of these reforms and developing visions for what the state should become with re-foundation through reflection on Honduras’ past, as they image what possibilities the future could bring and take action toward what they think that future should entail.

2.2 Historical Characteristics of Honduras

In order to present nuanced arguments about the significance of the 2009 coup, the Resistencia, and schoolteachers’ everyday work, we must first begin with basic information about this Central American country. Contemporary Honduras is a republic of approximately 112,090 square kilometres, divided into 18 different departments. Its northern, sea-level Caribbean coast borders with Guatemala (to the west) and Nicaragua (to the east); the much smaller southern Pacific coast borders El Salvador (to the west) and Nicaragua (to the east). Coastal plains and a mountainous interior with deep valleys characterize Honduras’ tropical, humid geography. The country has a population of approximately 8.6 million with a negative net migration ratio of about -1.18 for every 1,000 persons per year. Roughly 60 percent of Hondurans live below the poverty line, and about 52 percent of Hondurans live in urban centres. The literacy rate is roughly 85.1 percent, and the average Honduran is schooled for 11 years in the national education system (Central Intelligence Agency 2014). Honduras has also been considered one of the poorest places in Latin America since the colonial period.

Spanish colonizers named the country ‘Honduras’ for its deep valleys – ‘ondo’ means ‘deep’ in Spanish.
Unlike other areas of Spanish America, the Central American isthmus was never a significant source of precious metals for the Spanish colonizers. Rather, indigo and cacao became the two primary products of the region’s colonial economy, the labour for which came from the indigenous population through a system of encomienda. In Honduras, some silver was found, and the diseases brought by Spanish colonists to the mining towns of Comayagua and Tegucigalpa devastated Honduras’ already relatively small indigenous population (Lapper 1985: 17-18). The combination of disease, tropical lowland climates, floods, landslides, and the lack of deep-water anchorage sites contributed to the difficulties of establishing Caribbean ports in Honduras. All of these factors made Honduras a ‘backwater’ or ‘no-man’s land’ of the Spanish Empire.

After gaining independence from the Spanish Crown in 1821, Honduras was one of five countries comprising the United Provinces of Central America, a new nation “born in debt,” owing five million pesos after absolute independence was declared (Euraque 1996: 3). Elite Conservative wealth in Honduras derived principally from a tobacco factory near Comayagua, silver ores exploited near Tegucigalpa, and a domestic cattle market. Moreover, mining encouraged cattle raising in central and southern Honduras to supply meat, leather products, candles, and mules. Salt was exploited from the southern Pacific coasts for the process of smelting precious metals (MacLeod 1973: 261).

---

14 This is where the Spanish Crown granted a conquistador, and then subsequently a criollo (person of Spanish descent born in the new world), the ability to collect tribute and labour from a particular indigenous population. As the encomendero he would then have to take responsibility for the population’s health and wellbeing, and provide instruction about Catholicism.

15 Hondurans have told me that ‘Tegucigalpa’ means ‘silver hill’ in Nahuatl. The exploitation of such silver ores served as justification for Tegucigalpa becoming the nation’s capital.
While the Conservatives wanted to continue a monopolistic trading system for their own benefit, a middle sector emerged that wanted free trade and a confederation based on the North American model (Woodward 1985: 91, 94). Since independence, the subject of unity among the five states to form a more powerful economic and political system for the isthmus became a Liberal project, for which Honduran General Francisco Morazán was instrumental, fighting against several Conservative Guatemalan leaders who opposed union. His defeat in 1840 under Conservative rule led to the rupture of the United Provinces into five separate autonomous states; the idea of political union continues to be debated in modern Central America (Woodward 1985: 111).

Following the breakup of the United Provinces, Honduras entered an economic crisis even worse than when Central America as a whole separated from Spain, and the government struggled with immense financial difficulties in the process of initial state formation. There was still no clear sense of nation in Honduras at the time. The economic crisis and high unemployment levels experienced under Conservative rule (from independence up until the 1870s) created a weakening of these traditional economic elites and thus an opening for subaltern groups. This increased support for Liberalism.

Between the 1870s and 1930s, Honduras experienced a series of Liberal military dictatorships managing centralized, executive-run governments aimed at significantly developing the country’s export economy by passing legislation which favoured export production and the entrance of foreign capital (in congruence with a broader regional phenomenon during roughly this same time period). In Honduras these reforms resulted in a particular set of labour relations, land tenure, and governing policies toward economic development in Honduras.
Philosophically, the New Liberals of Honduras were positivist-oriented thinkers, and their economic policies thus were aimed toward ‘scientific material progress.’ While the social theories, political, and economic projects of ‘Liberalism’ were intellectual ideas originating from Europe, in the Latin American context they took on new meaning as the philosophy was applied “in countries which were highly stratified, socially and racially, and economically underdeveloped, and in which the tradition of centralized government authority ran deep. In short, these ideas were applied in an environment which was resistant and hostile, and which in some cases engendered a strong opposing ideology of conservatism” (Hale 1989: 226). This was especially the case in Central America and the introduction of Liberalism was a contested process, largely impossible under Conservative Guatemala (Woodward 1985: 111).

In Honduras Liberal intellectuals saw access to foreign capital as the means to carry out significant economic reforms and “make up for lost time” (Meza 1991: ix). The sparsely-populated national territory provoked images of vast untouched natural resources, and inspired the Liberal leaders to believe that anything was possible (Barahona 1989: 44). For Honduras’ first Liberal president, Marco Aurelio Soto, there needed to be a “thorough regeneration of the country” (Euraque 1996: 3), in order to incorporate Honduras into the world economy and “bring radical change to the way of seeing, representing, and serving the rights and interests of the nation” (Euraque 1996: 4).

The 1870s-1930s was a period in which the role of the clergy was diminished in Honduran society, in harmony with a broader trend of secularization in Latin America, and the Catholic Church lost its monopoly over education and many basic services. Instead, the Honduran armed forces became a significant state institution and began to
construct roads, hospitals, bridges, and in this regard started to provide valuable services to society (Woodward 1985: 170). The institution has maintained a degree of autonomy from different governments in power, thus comprising a political entity with its own agenda that was sometimes aligned with the administration in power at the time and in other cases was not. Whenever a president’s economic policies have not been in congruence with the interests of the armed forces (who have been allied with sectors of the country’s elite), that president ran the risk of a golpe de estado (coup d’état). As historian Ralph Lee Woodward Jr. puts it, “Any president who completed his constitutional term of office without being assassinated or forcibly removed had achieved the extraordinary” (1985: 171).

Since the 1850s, Liberal intellectuals in Honduras spoke of a railway which would connect not only towns along the north coast, but also run through Tegucigalpa and end in the Gulf of Fonseca, in the southern region. “Between 1867 and 1870 Honduran governments negotiated loans in French and British financial markets, but the project failed utterly” (Euraque 1996: 4) and Tegucigalpa remains without a railway. About half of the labour for this first attempt to build a railway in 1869 was imported from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Local industries also attracted labour from the countryside, although it was still difficult to speak of ‘urban centres’ in 1869.

Soto and his elite allies in Tegucigalpa sought US investment capital to realize their modernization project, and in December 1879, the New York and Honduras Rosario Mining Company was founded, with Washington S. Valentine and Soto as primary shareholders of the $1,500,000 company (Barahona 1989: 43; Euraque 2000: 98; Meza 1991: ix). This became the country’s most significant source of urban employment,
contracting a total of 460 workers by 1887 (Barahona 1989: 43). Labour relations in the mining industry during this period can, on the whole, be characterized as a relationship of mutual benefit, although it was not without conflicts. In March 1909, for instance, a group of miners protested against the company's low wages. Threats to strike were met with police violence in the name of defending the “security and order of the company.” These strike planners were subsequently thrown in jail (Meza 1991: 5). While it was not a significant source of state revenue, silver mining in central Honduras was still the country’s main industry and “Tegucigalpa’s population increased from about 12,000 in 1881 to about 24,000 by 1901” (Euraque 1996: 5).

One point for reflection that we can make thus far is that elites saw the Honduran population in a similar manner as they saw the country’s natural resources – as assets that could be used to promote the nation’s welfare, which they identified with their own (cf. Barahona 1989). Moreover, when foreign investors were encouraged by the liberal state in the 1870s to develop Honduras’ export economy, both parties initially sought to exploit not bananas on the north coast, but silver ores in the central and southern regions. Yet later bananas became Honduras’ principal export crop, contrasting with neighbouring countries’ emphasis on coffee. This is connected to the fact that whereas coffee oligarchs were established during the 1880s in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, it was not until after the Second World War that coffee became a major export crop of Honduras (Woodward 1985: 150).

In explaining this phenomenon, some studies of Honduran history point toward the absence of a ‘landed coffee oligarchy’ (see, for example, Alvarado 1987; Schulz & Schulz 1994). However, instead of asking what Honduras lacked, we might find it more
productive to ask what Honduras did in fact have, as historian Darío Euraque has done so well (2000; 1996). This focuses attention on the fact that landed families in the highland departments of Comayagua and Santa Bárbara (the most productive coffee-growing regions) migrated to the north coast where they had more to gain from easy access to banana lands than from producing coffee (Euraque 2000: 99; 1996: 13).

While the banana industry of the Caribbean coast was established by US banana companies, as Euraque demonstrates this was facilitated through collaboration with Honduran elites and entrepreneurs from the Sula Valley, who had their own capitalist interests and who pressured governing officials in San Pedro Sula to pass legislation in their favour (1996). These particulars of the banana industry, along with the failure to unite Tegucigalpa with the Caribbean coast by means of a railway meant that the ports and towns of the north coast became more closely tied to the United States than to Tegucigalpa. Because of the geographic barriers to land travel it was easier to travel from Tela to New Orleans, than from Tela to Tegucigalpa (Lapper 1985: 24; Woodward 1985: 180). Thus, Tegucigalpa declined in importance, as northern cities like La Ceiba, San Pedro Sula, and Puerto Cortés grew both economically and demographically (Woodward 1985: 180).

2.3 Preventing an Armed Guerrilla Movement

In comparison to its neighbours, these constellations particular to Honduras permitted a different type of land tenure in which the peasantry had more access to land in general. Whereas in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, latifundistas (large

---

16 These included Standard Fruit, Boston Fruit, and Cuyamel Fruit, all of which were eventually incorporated into United Fruit.
landowners) controlled the coffee exports and thus owned significant portions of land, in Honduras this simply was not the case. Instead, during the 1960s and 1970s, Honduran governments engaged the peasantry in moderate land reforms, which minimally and superficially met their demands. This in turn contributed toward staving off the formation of armed peasant guerrilla forces from the Honduran Left (a unique situation when compared to its neighbours).

Development policies under the government of Dr. Ramón Villeda Morales, a paediatrician who “advocated civil rights, land reforms, rights of organized labour, and revision of the government’s United Fruit Company contracts” (Woodward 1985: 255) provide an example of how the formation of leftist guerrilla groups were prevented in Honduras. Following his 1957 inauguration, Villeda began to engage Honduras in moderate agrarian reforms. His polices were later seen as consistent with Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress, created after the Cuban revolution, aimed at supporting moderate social reforms as a means to prevent socialist revolutions. Villeda therefore endured criticisms from both the Honduran Right and Left (Lapper 1985: 50; Woodward 1985: 256). The reforms were aimed at mollifying landless campesinos (peasants), while at the same time not fundamentally undermining economic elites and thus avoiding appearing to be too far to the Left, a strategy continuously employed by the ruling elites in Honduras.

The pressure for land reform resulted from violent confrontations over the legality of land titles since the 1950s, especially concerning the encroachments of commercial farms onto peasant lands, in conjunction with landowners’ common practice of leaving large areas of land idle for extended periods of time, onto which landless peasants would
move (Lapper 1985: 52, 53). This contributed toward the creation of the first peasants’ union, the National Federation of Honduran Peasants (some members of which were ex-banana workers, experienced in organizing), which focused their organizing efforts among renters and sharecroppers on land where United Fruit was expanding its cattle industry (Lapper 1985: 53). In response, Villeda’s government established the National Agrarian Institute, which distributed 75,000 acres of national and _ejido_ (communal) land in areas of low population density, in an effort to combat what they considered to be a “communist peasant union” (Lapper 1985: 53). In 1962, Villeda passed an agrarian reform law that aimed to prevent landowners from leaving their land idle (a common theme in agrarian reforms throughout Latin America):

The 1962 agrarian reform had three main aims: first to bring into production idle or poorly utilised lands and make the old landowners more efficient; secondly to create a legal basis for the recuperation of public and _ejido_ land, which the fruit companies and landowners had illegally occupied; and thirdly to absorb some of the _campesino_ pressure by giving land to peasants in individual plots (Lapper 1985: 53).

This legislation upset the landowning elites and the foreign fruit companies alike. In addition to their disapproval of the agrarian reforms, the Conservative opposition against Villeda in general was strong. In 1961 Villeda incorporated Honduras into the Central American Common Market, yet another change in Honduran political economy that challenged the traditional ruling class’ economic security (Lapper 1985: 4; Woodward 1985: 256). After the rise of Fidel Castro in Cuba, elite Hondurans said that Villeda was “soft toward the communists” (Woodward 1985: 256), even though he had suspended diplomatic relations with the island in April 1961 (Euraque 1996: 114).
Villeda’s political agenda of moderate reforms – aimed at preventing violent guerrilla groups from the Left – was met with being labelled as a ‘pro-Cuba communist.’ Under these circumstances Villeda suffered a golpe de estado: the military forced him into exile and postponed the 1963 presidential elections; they installed armed forces commander Oswaldo López Arellano as Provisional President of Honduras. The golpe against Villeda was justified through a discourse\textsuperscript{17} of a fear of communism penetrating Honduran society – it was necessary to take out that “communist menace” from power (Euraque 1996: 114).

Amidst the transition of power from Villeda to López Arellano, land tenure conflicts between Honduran campesinos and landowners continued. As an adept strategy to not confront either the peasantry or the elite land owners, the Honduran government used Salvadoran migrants as a scapegoat, leading up to what is known as the Football War of 1969.\textsuperscript{18} Since the early 1900s, Salvadoran migrants comprised a significant minority in Honduras, mainly as workers in the banana enclave of the north coast, but also as an estimated 20 percent of Honduras’ rural population, owning over 200,000 acres of Honduran land (Lapper 1985: 60). By the end of the 1960s, there were roughly

\textsuperscript{17} Rather than in the Foucauldian sense – to refer to the preconditions for talk, thought, and understanding – I follow linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill’s use of the term ‘discourse’ to refer to the “actual material presence, in structure and content, of language-in-use in history and at particular moments” (Hill 2008: 32). A focus on the implications of talk and written texts does not always imply a direct cause-effect relationship; rather, how people are talking (or writing) about a political subject can colour the topics raised with implicit messages and ideologies, which can then influence how others perceive these topics. While I do not intend to conduct a discourse analysis in this thesis, this is what I mean by the term.

\textsuperscript{18} Despite its misleading name, this war was actually about land rights, migration, deportation, and nationalism – significant issues for both countries. The origin of the name ‘Football War’ nonetheless comes from when Honduras beat El Salvador in a national soccer match in Tegucigalpa during seeding for the 1970 World Cup. Afterward, the Salvadoran press spread rumours about their team’s food having been poisoned. Shortly thereafter, at another game in San Salvador (where El Salvador won), Honduran visiting fans were attacked with fireworks (Lapper 1985: 61). Richard Lapper writes that in response to this violence, the Honduran government finally began deporting Salvadorans (the incident in San Salvador being the last straw).
300,000 Salvadorans living in Honduras, about half of whom had come during the 1950s and 60s, crossing an ill-defined geographic border (Lapper 1985: 60-61).

As Honduran campesinos continued to organize and stand up to Honduran land owning elites, the elites (mainly cattle ranchers) in turn called for the expulsion of Salvadoran migrants, blaming an essentially domestic land tenure problem on the Salvadoran migrants (Euraque 1996: 140; Lapper 1985: 61). López Arellano was keen on this strategy, as it was an easy way to avoid confronting land owning elites and a method for redirecting discontent with his regime toward Salvadorans. In short, Salvadorans were told to go back to where they came from. By May of 1969, 500 Salvadorans had been deported and thousands more were fleeing, returning to their country as landless peasants, which in turn caused land disputes between the returning migrants and the Salvadoran landed oligarchy (Lapper 1985: 61). The Salvadoran elites (who had invested significantly in their country’s industry and its trade within the Central American Common Market) called for an invasion of Honduras, as one way to deal with the arrival of landless peasants back in El Salvador (Euraque 1996: 141). The Salvadoran government told the Inter-American Human Rights Commission that Honduras was engaging in ‘genocide’ (Lapper 1985: 61).

The somewhat ill-defined border with this neighbouring country, coupled with these land and trade issues, along with international accusations of human rights violations, provided the perfect environment for violent conflict between these two countries, in what resulted in a four-day battle. A Salvadoran air strike was not as effective as their land invasion, which proved to Honduran governing elites that it was
necessary to strengthen Honduras’ armed forces.\textsuperscript{19} Directly after this war, Honduras closed its borders to trade and commerce with El Salvador. Honduras’ mere involvement in the Football War contributed to a sense of national identity, and a resentment of Salvadorans emerged especially among high-level officers of the Honduran armed forces. This set the stage for continual issues of conflict with El Salvador, which Honduras maintained throughout the 1980s – issues which in turn contributed to Honduran state actors’ embracing of the US plans for militarization. For the Honduran armed forces, El Salvador had become the traditional enemy of Honduras (Euraque 1996; Lapper 1985; Morris 1984).

In addition to its significance in creating a national rival, the Football War also helped ease López Arellano’s difficult position with the Honduran peasantry and working class. Villeda had forged positive relations with organized labour and the emergent peasant movement (two key sources of popular support) that the López Arellano regime needed to acquire. President López Arellano attempted to do this through an industrialization plan and a moderate agrarian reform aimed at pleasing reformists and engaging Honduras in a more efficient agrarian economic model, yet at the same time not deviating from a capitalist one, as to avoid a \textit{golpe de estado}\textsuperscript{20} by the land-owning elite in

\textsuperscript{19} According to Euraque, while the Salvadoran land invasion illuminated the Honduran army’s lack of preparedness, the air strike was fraught with logistical problems. He states, “The Honduran air force, composed of twenty-three aircraft, did not suffer any direct hits. Despite careful planning, the Salvadoran air raid confronted problems even prior to arriving near Tegucigalpa. Before taking off from Ilopango air base near San Salvador, two Salvadoran aircraft collided on the runway. Worse, the commander responsible for leading the attack on Toncontín failed to find the air base. He became separated from his squadron and eventually flew to Guatemala City” (1996: 137).

\textsuperscript{20} Despite his efforts to avoid it, on 22 April 1975 López Arellano was ousted from power by means of a \textit{golpe}. The foreign fruit companies were concerned with his attempts to let the Honduran state gain more control over prices and marketing, and United Fruit thus bribed López Arellano in an effort to reduce the banana tax (known as the Bananagate Scandal). It worked – the tax was reduced to US$0.50 per crate, which saved the company an estimated US$7.5 million, but when López Arellano refused to have his Swiss bank account investigated, he was ousted. Leadership was once again in the hands of the Honduran Armed Forces, which by then was closely allied with the National Party and the interests of land owners (Lapper 1985: 68; Ruhl 2000: 51).
alliance with the armed forces. In response to these land reforms, Nicaraguan president Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the staunchest US ally in the region at the time, referred to López Arellano’s plans for Honduras as being ‘communist’ and a bad example for Central America (Morris 1984: 47). All of this helps to place these political and economic reforms in Honduras in the context of what issues Central American leaders were debating (and how), prior to the 1980s US militarization.

Although moderate reforms in the third quarter of the 20th century helped prevent the formation of a violent leftist resistance capable of toppling the Honduran government, as the examples from the administrations of Villeda and López Arellano illustrate, moderate policies in Honduras aimed at satisfying the needs of the working class and the peasantry have been labelled as ‘communist’ by dominant ruling classes who oppose any such economic reform – a phenomenon which continues into the present context. Elite alliances with the armed forces mean they can oust any president whose agenda does not support their own interests. Because of these particulars, however, in the 1980s Honduras did not have a civil war of its own. Instead, it became the regional lynchpin for US geopolitical interests and a military launch pad for civil wars fought in the three neighbouring countries.

2.4 The Political Environment of the 1980s

As we will see, there are numerous connections between the political environment during the 1980s and that of contemporary Honduras, in terms not only of governing projects, but also Hondurans’ interpretations and actions as they make sense of these histories and act upon their cultural understandings. For this reason, my approach to studying the events leading up to and following the 2009 coup as well as their subsequent
effects on Honduran political culture is necessarily historically-informed (just as Hondurans’ political consciousness is also historically-informed). In order to understand the particulars of the processes of the 1980s in Honduras, it is useful to explore the interplay of how different local sectors and classes ally and clash with external processes and ongoing foreign interests, which in turn are inserted into particular contexts of power. This is what anthropologist William Roseberry means by the “internalization of the external” (1989).

This notion draws our attention to movement and change within the structures of dependence; it emphasizes the different possibilities and forms of dependence in particular countries and regions (Roseberry 1989: 166). In other words, rather than seeing the events of the 1980s in Honduras as the inevitable product of US imperialism in Central America, I see them as having depended upon distinctive conditions in Honduras at the time, which articulated with US preoccupations and geopolitical interests in specific ways. This approach does not aim to conceal or deny US power and coercion in the region. Rather, it is an attempt to emphasize the specifics of Honduran society – of the local situation – which helped to forge the forms of economic dependence particular to Honduras. My goal is to utilize this theoretical premise to provide nuanced understandings of the events of the 1980s, and then to use these insights to illustrate the continual effects of these ‘internalizations of the external’ in the remainder of this chapter. In my MA I argued that these internalized preoccupations of communism penetrating Honduras continue to manifest in contemporary society, cutting across social and economic class divisions (Levy 2010).
In examining the process of militarization of Honduran society in the 1980s, my focus will be on how various Honduran politicians and military leaders took advantage of US efforts to militarize the country for their own visions of domestic political-economic (including nation-building) agendas. My intention is to go against the tendency of so many North American scholars who focus solely on US forces over Latin America, while ignoring specific Latin American responses to and accommodations of their interests, which is what Brazilian sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso criticized in his discussion of the North American adoption of dependency theory (Cardoso 1977: 13; Roseberry 1989: 83).

In the beginning of the 1980s, Honduras entered a period of economic crisis, with record high unemployment levels coupled with chronic foreign debt. Although there were no leftist guerrilla movements, the government was dealing with pressure from peasant groups for land reform, along with well-organized and widespread labour union strikes, which threatened the already fragile economy. The government of General Policarpo Paz García needed income. Regionally, the Popular Guerrilla Army of the Poor continued against the US-supported Guatemalan government of General Romeo Lucas García, the Nicaraguan Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, Sandinista National Liberation Front or ‘Sandinistas’) successfully overthrew the US-supported Somoza oligarchy in Nicaragua in 1979, and the growing strength of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN, Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation) was coming closer to bringing down the US-backed Salvadoran government of José Napoleón Duarte (Woodward 1985: 251). The US, worried about the spread of Soviet-
and Cuban-influenced ideologies in its ‘own back yard,’ saw Honduras as the key to its geopolitical interests (see, also, Lapper 1985; Peckenham 1985).

It was during this time of dire economic need that Honduras made the transition from military rulers to a constitutional democracy. Amid re-establishing relations with El Salvador in a peace treaty and sending troops to their border at the request of the Salvadoran Defence Minister Adolfo Castillo (to protect against the FMLN), Honduras also held national elections in late 1981. Dr. Roberto Suazo Córdoba was inaugurated in 1982 as president. He quickly agreed to IMF conditions that required the government to reduce its spending and make its institutions more self-sufficient – which following the argument of the IMF would stimulate savings, investments, and ‘stabilize the economy’ (Peckenham 1985: 242). The government agreed to these conditions to maintain Honduras’ access to IMF development funds. During the Suazo government, there were major cutbacks to social programs and reductions to government subsidies of food staples (Peckenham 1985: 242). Suazo also increased sales tax, which cut the working class’ spending power (Peckenham 1985: 242). It was in the context of this economic crisis that this Honduran government continually bargained with the US – not only for military funding, but also for economic development aid during the 1980s.

The US military was determined to professionalize members of Honduran armed forces, who they viewed as inferiors, incapable of operating without US presence. Such military strength was supposed to intimidate the Sandinistas, the FMLN, and even Cuba. The goal of the US was to make Honduras the guarantor of regional stability, by having the largest air force in Central America. And because of the negotiations of specific Honduran actors, their government was actually paid by the US to have it. The official
purpose of the US military presence in Honduras – expressed by both governments – was to prepare Honduras for a Sandinista invasion. In reality, however, both the Honduran and US military personnel frequently spoke of how unlikely such an event was. They knew that the Sandinistas had no intention of invading Honduras (Lapper 1985: 90). On the contrary, because of their historical rivalry and land issues, most Hondurans had a much greater fear of an attack by the right-wing US-backed Salvadoran government than they ever did of the Sandinistas (Lapper 1985; Peckenham 1985).

In 1980 there were only 25 US troops in Honduras. By 1983 there were between 700 and 800 US troops (Lapper 1985: 88). By 1984, the number had gone up to an estimated 1,200 US troops, most of whom maintained a regular presence living at the main US airbase of Palmerola21 about two hours outside of Tegucigalpa (Alvarado 1987: 164). During this time Honduran control over US military presence was minimal – troops flew directly into US air bases without any immigration or custom procedures (Lapper 1985: 90). At any given moment the Honduran government had no idea of how many US troops were in its country22 (Lapper 1985: 90). All of this contributed to many observers (including Honduran academics) referring to Honduras as the ‘Pentagon Republic’ or ‘USS Honduras’ (Pine 2008: 50; Salomón 1989). What I will argue here is that these events would not have been possible if it were not for the particulars of Honduran politics.

21 Palmerola (Soto Cano) is still an air base owned and controlled by the US in Honduran territory. Indeed it is where the plane carrying Mel Zelaya to Costa Rica stopped after departing from the country’s main airport in Tegucigalpa, Toncontín. Hondurans comment that Palmerola has the best landing strip in all of Central America, much safer than that of mountainous, urban Toncontín, one of the most dangerous in the world. A debate surrounding whether or not Palmerola should become a Honduran air base, or even if it should be used as Honduras’ main airport, emerged in June 2008, after another fatal landing in Toncontín which prompted Mel to close the airport for about two months.

22 In an effort to win the support of the Honduran population, US troops engaged in school construction projects. Indeed, one of the classrooms at one of the schools where I worked was constructed by US troops. Peace Corps volunteers have engaged in similar activities. This history presented an awkward situation for me when I first began research at these schools, as it was common for students’ parents and local political authorities to ask me if I had plans to build a new classroom, ‘just like the other gringos.’
and society and the agendas of specific Honduran leaders at the time of US militarization.

One such leader was Suazo’s head of the armed forces, Colonel Gustavo Alvarez Martínez. The combination of Colonel Alvarez’s military background, political ideology, and greed with the particulars of Honduran history and economic conditions contributed toward the Suazo government’s collaboration with the US plans for militarization. Alvarez was notorious for his hatred of the Sandinista government and the FMLN. He openly supported right-wing Honduran operations and interests (Lapper 1985: 80). The entire militarization process might not have worked if it were not for Alvarez’s staunch anti-communist sentiment and willingness to use brutal force against anybody who he suspected was sympathetic toward the Sandinistas, FMLN, Cuba or the Soviet bloc.

At the crux of Alvarez’s behaviour and ideology was his adoption of a doctrine of national security in the context of his desire to invade Nicaragua, which he repeatedly threatened to do (Lapper 1985: 80). Between 1958 and 1962 he took military officer classes at the National Military Academy in Argentina, at the Superior War College in Peru, at Fort Benning in the US, and at the School of the Americas in Panama. His internalization of the national security doctrine – so popular in other Latin American countries during this period – contributed toward making him the Honduran military leader most capable of training the right-wing guerrilla group that the US wanted to support: the Contras (Lapper 1985: 79).

The Contras (Contrarevolucionarios) were Nicaraguan refugees who resolutely disagreed with the Sandinista government and who were willing to take up arms and attempt to overthrow it. Most of the Contras were actual Somocistas or officers from the former Somoza National Guard, but some of them were simply Nicaraguans who did not
like the Sandinistas (Lapper 1985; Morris 1984). They formed a right-wing insurgency unit and received significant funding from the US. The Contras were trained in Honduras, although both Washington and Tegucigalpa continually denied their presence (Peckenham 1985: 316). This occurred while Honduras was receiving refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala, most of whom were fleeing right-wing governments. By 1984 there were roughly 500 Guatemalan, 18,000 Salvadoran, and 20,000 Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras (Peckenham 1985: 319). Because of this internalized fear of the spread of communism in Central America, Salvadoran refugees were automatically associated with the FMLN by the Honduran government, and there was a general concern about Salvadoran leftist contamination sparking a revolution in Honduras (Lapper 1985; Peckenham 1985). Hence the Honduran government granted Nicaraguan refugees more rights than Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees who were fleeing from their ally governments.

This preferential treatment of refugees speaks to the Honduran ‘internalization of the external,’ of what have historically been US preoccupations (such as the spread of Soviet- and Cuban-influenced ideologies in Central America). Without such differential treatment of refugees in Honduras at the time, in part due to historical tensions with Salvadorans, the US geopolitical goals involved in militarizing Honduras during the 1980s might not have been as successful. The ways in which Honduran state actors dealt with this fear of communism included actively and violently preventing any sort of grassroots organizing for socioeconomic change. Protests by urban neighbourhoods

---

23 The Contras were funded in part by laundered US funds from the illegal sale of arms to Iran; hence the ‘Iran-Contra Affair.’
associations, peasant organizations, and trade unions were quickly and violently broken up. Any activists who the government suspected of having leftist tendencies were disappeared and held in clandestine prisons for their supposed ties with the Sandinistas and the FMLN (Lapper 1985: 95,96). Many schoolteachers were among those affected, and in the following chapter I show through life histories how these processes affected some *dirigentes magisteriales* (leaders of teachers’ professional associations).

With his internalized doctrine of national security and suspicions of Hondurans doing anything that resembled socialist activities, Alvarez created the *Cobras* and Battalion 316 – two government death squads that would hunt down people suspected of socialist ties through a network of spies working for the government (Lapper 1985: 92; Pine 2008: 51). The clandestine network of intelligence agents who disappeared suspected communists created an environment of fear among Hondurans, most of whom never had any direct affiliation with the Sandinistas or the FMLN, both foreign entities.

There was a wide range of organized Honduran resistance to the environment of fear and repression in Honduras during the 1980s, some violent and some peaceful. What is important to understand for our purposes, however, is that because of distinct historical experiences among differently-situated groups of people, there were great divisions between peasant groups on the one hand and urban activists (including schoolteachers) on the other. The *campesinos* would say that the urban activists were too concentrated on supporting the Sandinistas and regional causes, and not focused on Honduran domestic issues. The most important of the latter was access to land, a key point for fighting poverty (Acker 1988: 102). In the 1980s the Honduran armed forces and US military were thus never confronted by a united resistance front.
Later in the decade the Suazo administration took further advantage of US presence in order to solicit more economic development aid. Honduras’ geographic location was used as a bargaining chip to further not only US geopolitical interests, but also what Suazo and his supporters considered Honduran national interests. They did this by denouncing that El Salvador was receiving more aid money than Honduras, yet Honduras was doing the US a favour, furthering its interests in the region. The Suazo administration wanted compensation. In effect, the Suazo government was prepared to “sell the state” (Lapper 1985), but wanted a better price for it. If their traditional rival (El Salvador) was receiving more money than them, they argued, why should Honduras continue to serve the US? Additionally, at the request of the US, Salvadoran troops were being trained on Honduran bases, a violation of the Honduran constitution.

Whereas under the Alvarez-led armed forces, the Honduran government had no problem with this, and the Salvadorans were referred to as ‘students’ to avoid legal problems, later, during López Arellano’s tenure as the armed forces chief, the unconstitutionality of the situation was used as a bargaining tool (Lapper 1985: 98; Ruhl 2000: 54). When these leaders wanted a better price for their service, López Arellano discontinued the Alvarez-negotiated training program of Salvadoran soldiers and began to bargain with the US over how much aid Honduras would receive for training the Contras (Ruhl 2000: 54). Considering the historical tensions between the two countries and the notions of national identity furthered by the Football War of 1969, this was a strong bargaining chip for the Honduran government. Aid money, in turn, was to be used for economic development purposes. Suazo tried to create a bilateral defence treaty and negotiate more economic and military aid from the US for their use of Honduran land. He
came back from Washington to report that “Honduran dignity had been rescued” (Lapper 1985: 110), even though the US did not agree to all of his demands. Still, what is significant here is that this history shows a specific type of dependent development, one in which Honduran leaders internalized the US goals for militarization, and then took advantage of these shared ideas of national security to negotiate their own geopolitical and economic interests (a history which affected the magisterio during this period too, as we will see in the following chapter).

In short, these external (US) forces were inserted into particular Honduran contexts of power and cannot be clearly identified as the US having forced the Honduran government to act in specific ways. Rather, specific state actors allied and clashed with foreign geopolitical interests, which created particular (and sometimes unintended) results for Honduras. I have thus attempted to illustrate this conjuncture – the particulars of Honduran society as they intersected with the US preoccupation over the spread of Soviet- and Cuban-influenced ideologies – which contributed to the process of militarization of Honduras. Had it not been for factors such as the general economic crisis in Honduras during the 1980s, the disconnect between rural and urban activists, the country’s transition from a military-ruled to a constitutional government, differential treatment of political refugees, and resentment of Salvadorans among members of the armed forces, all within the context of attempting to build and strengthen a national identity, the US militarization of Honduras would not have been as successful. Likewise, had it not been for the ideologies of and particular actions taken by Alvarez and Suazo, and the specific outcomes such as training Salvadoran soldiers on Honduran soil, the
Suazo government would not have been able to take advantage of the US geopolitical interests for its own political, economic, and national development agendas.

In the 1990s the regional context changed. With the Contra war coming to an end (following the Sandinistas’ electoral loss), the US was no longer interested in supporting the Honduran armed forces to the same degree as previously (Ruhl 2000: 55). The end of the civil wars in the neighbouring countries made it difficult to rationalize supporting such a huge military in Honduras. The result was a reduction in US funding, which caused inflation, severe unemployment, and labour unrest, as the country’s main source of foreign income was exhausted. The financially-burdened armed forces reached a new level of corruption in which political disappearances and drug trafficking became commonplace among military personnel (Ruhl 2000: 55). The circulation of these stories further undermined armed forces funding and the US Embassy in Honduras became critical of the armed forces, as did national entrepreneurs, student organizations, and organized labour (Ruhl 2000: 56). This decline in support, political strength, and financing for the armed forces continued through the 1990s.

It was in this context of the removal of US military aid money and the end of the civil wars in its neighbouring countries that Honduras experienced the consolidation of neoliberal policies (although one could argue that these also existed in the 1980s during the militarization project). The year of 1990 was a significant change toward full acceptance of neoliberal policies with the beginning of Rafael Callejas’ presidency. As sociologist William Robinson describes:

The full turn to neo-liberalism and the new model of accumulation only came once the Sandinistas had been removed from power in 1990. In March 1990, within weeks of his inauguration, Callejas launched his paquetazo, or economic
reform package, negotiated earlier with the IMF, the AID, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. These institutions disbursed several billion dollars to support the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) over the next few years. The paquetazo included a 50 percent devaluation of the national currency, the Lempira, tax hikes on consumption, austerity measures, and the elimination of price controls, a sharp tariff reduction (and abolition in some cases), new export incentives, and a privatization program. Along with the neo-liberal program came the arrival of transnational capital, in what was locally referred to as the “Asian invasion,” the near overnight entry of maquiladoras, along with a commercial opening-up and new service activities (2003: 129).

With neoliberal policies and the curtailing of basic social services already in full swing, natural disaster struck. In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch whipped through Honduras, and roughly 80 percent of the country’s infrastructure and agricultural production were lost to floods (Ruhl 2000: 61). “Early damage estimates put the nation’s losses at $3 billion, a sum equal to about three-quarters of the entire Honduran GNP” (Ruhl 2000: 61), most negatively affecting those who were already struggling to meet their basic subsistence needs (see, also, Barrios 2009 for an analysis of how the poor continued to be the most negatively affected during the post-Mitch reconstruction efforts).

With the inauguration of Panamanian citizen Ricardo Maduro in 2002 as president, Honduras continued to engage in free trade. What was perhaps most significant about Maduro’s administration was the increase in military and national police personnel

24 Several teachers have shown me how they were instrumental in leading community-based emergency response teams to deliver water and food to people in need, as well as rescue individuals from dangerous levels of flood waters during this natural disaster – one example of the leadership roles that teachers often hold in the communities where they work.
25 Despite its controversy, there is no law in Honduras that prohibits a foreign national from becoming president.
to fight organized crime. By this time common theft and violent crimes especially by *maras* (youth gangs) had increased dramatically, particularly in urban centres. While the violence is usually between gang members themselves, Maduro’s policies of zero tolerance against crime consisting of *la mano dura* (an ‘iron fist’ policy) gave the often poorly-trained, poorly-paid, and corrupt officials a new level of power as they were allowed to arrest anyone who they suspected of being a gang member.

This had adverse effects for young men who were actually not gang members, but who were arrested nonetheless while wandering the streets and loitering – the police having identified them by their tattoos, short haircuts, and clothes, which are sometimes also gang symbols. As anthropologist Jon Wolseth (2011, 2008) has successfully illustrated, poor urban youth are often left with few alternatives other than to join the national police, armed forces, emigrate, or join gangs. In contemporary Honduras they are often targeted as ‘delinquents’ for their mere presence in public spaces. “Indeed, the bodies of young men act as a palimpsest of the state’s failure to provide for its young. At a time when public funding for youth – specifically educational funding and job training – is disappearing from budgets, youth are disappearing from social life through their murders” (2011: 11).

A slight change to the *mano dura* policies came about when the Liberals came back into power in 2006 with the inauguration of José Manuel Zelaya Rosales. Before becoming president, Mel was a cattle rancher and prosperous agriculturalist from Olancho. Yet his successful presidential campaign reached the interests of diverse social

---

26 These policies were adopted from New York Mayor Giuliani’s ‘Zero Tolerance’ policies against crime in that US city (Pine 2009).
and economic classes, beyond just conservative entrepreneurs and landowners. For instance, in contrast with the 2005 campaign of Porfirio Lobo Sosa (who was the Nationalist candidate who lost to Mel during those elections), Mel clearly stated during his campaign that he was against establishing the death penalty in Honduras.

In terms of battling organized crime, Mel promised to change the *mano dura* policies toward gang violence (unlike Lobo), and focus instead on rehabilitation educational programs for those arrested for gang-related crimes. At first, Mel’s principal support base was among his fellow land-owning elite Liberals, many of whom comprise the economically conservative sector of the Liberal Party (and had supported him throughout his political career in the Olancho department). Once in power however Mel’s support base broadened as his policies began to benefit the majority of the Honduran population. Meanwhile, elites began to see Mel’s policies as a threat to their economic interests.

### 2.5 The National Political Environment under the Government of Mel Zelaya

What did Hondurans themselves identify as the major areas of political discord in the months preceding the events of 28 June 2009? What were the most controversial aspects of Mel’s government – issues that people later internalized as reasons why the coup occurred? In the outbreak and immediate aftermath of the coup, Hondurans of diverse political opinions about the event were quick to describe why Mel lost the support of rich entrepreneurs and became imagined as a potential danger to elite interests. Their reasons included Mel’s domestic policies to raise the minimum wage, his attempts to enhance the benefits of some public-sector employees, and his engagement with the
peasantry in their struggles for land. Yet the people with whom I worked in 2009 also
generally agreed that the coup occurred because Mel ‘got too close to Hugo Chávez,’ and
that he ‘wanted to bring socialism to Honduras.’ The implicit understanding was that the
Honduran elite who initially supported Mel, and who were ultimately the instigators of
the coup, would not tolerate any state project resembling socialism. This notion is
connected to a widespread explanation for his ousting: ‘Mel wanted to remain in power
indefinitely, just like Chávez.’

The idea that Chávez and socialism presented a danger for Honduras has
historical antecedents in some of the processes we have seen here. Mel’s decision to sign
the Venezuela-initiated energy cooperation agreement Petrocaribe in December 2007
was controversial, but the move that brought Mel’s government into the discursive realm
of ‘leftist’ and ‘supporter of communism’ came in July 2008 when he committed
Honduras to the Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA,
Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of our America; later called the Bolivarian
Alliance, instead of Alternative). Despite the economic benefits for a poor country under
this agreement – including access to cheap gasoline and manufactured goods such as
tractors and energy-efficient light bulbs in exchange for Honduran beef and dairy exports
– committing Honduras to ALBA had important symbolic effects in the months prior to
Mel’s ousting.

After the signing of ALBA, the mainstream news media insisted that this new
alliance with the Latin American Left would ‘weaken’ Honduras’ alliance with the
United States. The messages communicated were that Honduras would suffer
economically and politically because of its new trade agreement with Venezuela; and
how dare Honduras, a close US ally and proven friend in the fight against communism, now support a leftist enemy such as Chávez? Absent from these debates was any acknowledgement that Mel’s government had also signed the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States; that neighbouring Nicaragua had been a long-standing member of ALBA and still maintained diplomatic and trade relations with the United States; or that Venezuela and the United States themselves have a co-dependent economic relationship where the United States was still purchasing Venezuelan oil and Chávez still chose to sell it to the United States. These variables were ignored as select politicians, entrepreneurs, and journalists denounced Mel’s decision to sign on to ALBA as a manoeuvre that would ‘bring socialism to the country.’

These national news media outlets later referenced Mel’s perceived close alliance with Chávez when Mel proposed holding a referendum to see if citizens would favour the formation of a national constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution (which Mel considered obsolete). One reform that Mel advocated was to allow presidential re-election for a second four-year term, similar to the US system. Normally the Honduran Supreme Electoral Tribune includes three different ballot boxes in the presidential and congressional elections, for citizens to select: 1) a presidential candidate; 2) candidates for diputado (regional delegate to congress); and 3) candidates for municipal officials. Because Mel wanted citizens to also vote in November on whether or not a national constituent assembly should be formed, by installing a ‘fourth ballot box’ in the 2009 electoral ballot, the entire proposal (including the non-binding public opinion poll scheduled for 28 June 2009) was referred to locally as la cuarta urna (the fourth ballot box).
In theory, if on 28 June 2009 the majority of citizens had responded to the opinion poll stating that they wanted a fourth ballot box to subsequently vote on a national constituent assembly, then the November 2009 presidential and congressional elections ballot would have included an opportunity to vote for or against the establishment of a national constituent assembly to discuss constitutional reforms. In other words, the June opinion poll would have been the first step in a three-step process for rewriting the constitution: 1) the opinion poll on 28 June 2009; 2) the referendum vote in November; and 3) the formation of a national constituent assembly and its deliberations on possible constitutional changes. Only then could Mel have been a candidate for re-election. For the country’s political and economic elite however, any attempt to rewrite the constitution – and especially the possibility of Mel’s re-election – was seen as a threat to their economic and political power, given how Mel’s policies were turning toward the Left.

By early April 2009, newspaper articles and debates on talk radio shows began to refer to Mel remaining in power indefinitely by changing the constitution in his favour, ‘just like Hugo Chávez.’ This fierce anti-Mel campaign in the months preceding the coup sought to equate the referendum itself with continuismo (‘continuism’). Grouped together within this same framework were accusations that in order to promote the non-binding June opinion poll Mel had reordered areas of the central government’s budget to promote his re-election, and that he was violating Honduran law by attempting to remain in power. Since the coup occurred in the hours before the opinion poll was to begin, and citizens

---

27 Here I am referring to a broad campaign against the cuarta urna and the overall political climate around the referendum. Among many examples, representative articles can be found in El Heraldo, 4 April 2009, 16 June 2009, and 19 June 2009, and in La Prensa, 18 May 2009 and 25 May 2009.
were never given the opportunity to vote on or experience the results of that poll, we will never know what the *cuarta urna* would have meant in practice.

It was in this confusing and uncertain political environment – of not knowing what the non-binding opinion poll would mean; or whether there would be a national constituent assembly; or who would be its members; or exactly what the changes to the constitution might be – that Mel suffered a *golpe de estado*. By now we are well aware of what happened to the president that morning: the military kidnapped him in pyjamas from his home in Tegucigalpa and flew him to Costa Rica (after a stop at the US military base Palmerola). In my MA thesis (Levy 2010) I attempted to show how ordinary Hondurans experienced these events, and how they unfolded in a non-central region of the country, processes about which we know considerably less.

In that research project I found that there was considerable heterogeneity in local understandings about the implications of the coup, which problematizes the strict divisions that were being drawn between supporters of Mel and/or of the *Resistencia* on the one hand, and on the other, supporters of the *golpe*, of the coup-installed regime of Roberto Micheletti Bain,\(^28\) or since November 2009 election, of Pepe Lobo. In some cases, even immediately after the coup, these differences were very real, and today most Hondurans clearly align themselves with one group or the other. However, when I examined the experiences of those who were neither active members of the FNRP nor direct collaborators with the coup complete support for one project or another was less

---

\(^{28}\) Liberal Party politician, Roberto Micheletti Bain, was President of the National Congress during the government of Mel Zelaya. Once members of the armed forces ousted Mel from power in a military coup, a false letter of resignation was forged on Mel’s behalf, and the National Congress elected Micheletti as the ‘interim president’ (see Levy 2010). In this doctoral thesis I refer to the government of Micheletti as ‘coup-installed’ or ‘de facto’ and the government of Pepe Lobo as ‘post-coup’ or elected during a coup government.
stable or easy to define in the immediate aftermath of the coup. I attributed this in part to
the fact that Hondurans had limited access to information about these events as they were
occurring, but also because the human experience of developing political opinions is a
complex and contradictory process.

Since so many areas of Hondurans’ lived experiences simply did not align neatly
with the initial discursive frameworks promoted by coup supporters or resisters, their
alliances were especially prone to shifting. In my MA thesis this allowed me to reflect
upon some of the lessons from an anthropology of political culture during moments of
sudden political change (Levy 2010). Here I maintain that everyday life in San Lorenzo
and the surrounding countryside during and immediately after the coup went against easy
categorization of being ‘with us or against us’, resulting in people’s alignments being
shifting and unstable. During the confusing and uncertain summer of 2009, common folk
were struggling to understand what was happening with the government. In the
immediate aftermath of the coup, there were aspects of the golpista justification for the
ousting that resonated with Hondurans of diverse backgrounds.

The emergence of the Resistencia first attempted to counter some of the explicit
and implicit arguments of the golpistas. They actively rejected, for instance, the idea that
there had been no coup, or that Mel and his supporters were not ‘true Hondurans.’
Members of the emerging movement argued that there was in fact a military coup, and
that they were engaged in a patriotic struggle to reinstate their democratically-elected
president. As people exchanged information about the coup – via word-of-mouth and
through what limited news outlets were available – these counterarguments began to have
an impact among individuals who previously believed aspects of the golpista justification
for the coup. In my MA thesis I sought to explore these processes ethnographically, to highlight two major factors through which Hondurans made sense of the coup during its occurrence: 1) reflection on the country’s recent history of being a US regional lynchpin in the fight against communism; and 2) internalization of some of the official messages from both the golpistas and the Mel camp/Resistencia. I argued that this human experience of living through sudden political change couldn’t be reduced to binaries, precisely because most of the Hondurans I worked with had experiences that simultaneously aligned with and contradicted the golpista discourse and that of the Resistencia in the summer of 2009 (see Levy 2010).

In Honduras during the summer of 2009 individuals navigated through a complex web of understandings about what could potentially happen in the context of heightened levels of uncertainty. Not knowing when or if Mel Zelaya would return, or if a civil war would break out, affected how people imagined the political future. Today we are quick to reject such an outcome as absurd, even despite the on-going political violence, because we now know that a civil war did not break out. Now we can reflect upon the results of the coup, consider what the on-going struggles of the FNRP to win control of the state through the LIBRE Party might mean, and study their strategies to alter the golpista status quo upheld by post-coup governments. During the period reviewed in my MA thesis however, such clear political options were not envisioned by most ordinary Hondurans. On the contrary, I found that people’s everyday experiences with the coup were more focused on navigating the contours of daily life. People developed understandings about the ways the coup might affect their lives based largely on the issues they were already facing during the months preceding 28 June 2009. An
ethnographic sensibility would lead us to expect just this. Less foreseeable however were the ways Hondurans of different political opinions were actively assessing what the Honduran state was capable of doing, and then re-thinking their initial opinions on the coup and sometimes altering their own actions. This assessing of the state’s capabilities was achieved through two discernable avenues: 1) individuals’ own reading of the political landscape – their interpretations of the political processes as they were occurring, through the filter of their own previous experiences as well as their interpretations of Hondurans’ collective experiences (such as with militarization in the 1980s); and 2) individuals’ experiences in the moment of this particular political change where specific things either did, or did not, happen to them.

Hondurans’ lived experiences continue to influence their shifting understandings of these issues, even today. I believe these experiences of ambivalence with the onset of the coup influenced people’s interpretations of the meanings of the event itself and the significance of being a member of the FNRP, or a supporter (to whatever degree) of the coup and post-coup governments. However, the goals of the FNRP, and the size of their support base, have also changed significantly since the summer of 2009 – something that individuals living through the coup could not have predicted.

### 2.6 The Formation of LIBRE

Today the Resistencia has moved beyond merely countering some of the basic golpista justifications for the coup. While their initial goal of reinstating Mel Zelaya was not achieved, the movement has since organized around a host of progressive issues such as the rights of vulnerable groups, decreasing political violence, creating mechanisms to hold politicians and elite entrepreneurs accountable for their actions, and redesigning a
series of previously-achieved policies that were overturned with the ousting of Mel and rule under post-coup governments (such as those in the education sector). For reasons we have seen here, those opposed to the FNRP project of state re-foundation sometimes (incorrectly) associate it with communism.

These broad goals of the Resistencia movement began to gain popularity in late 2009 when on the one hand it became clear that Mel Zelaya was not going to be reinstated, and on the other, there appeared to be more popular support for a national constituent assembly than initially expected. Shortly after the election of Pepe Lobo – despite the Resistencia-led boycott of the November 2009 presidential and congressional elections on the basis that they occurred during a coup-installed de facto government – many Resistencia members began to argue that the only method of successfully achieving a national constituent assembly would be through the formation of a formal political party. This was a controversial process, and not everyone in the Resistencia believed electoral politics would be a viable solution; some even argued that it would in fact weaken the movement and distract people from the grassroots work involved with the state re-foundation project.

Taking these preoccupations into consideration, the Frente Amplio de Resistencia Popular (FARP, Broad Front of Popular Resistance) was initially proposed by Mel Zelaya in May of 2011 as a political party that would represent the Resistencia, but remain separate from the FNRP. Meanwhile another faction within the Resistencia – opposed to the leadership of Mel Zelaya and his wife Xiomara Castro de Zelaya – formed a different political party called the Frente Amplio Electoral en Resistencia (FAPER, Broad Electoral Front in Resistance) with Andrés Pavón as its candidate. Given
that both parties were associated with the anti-coup Resistencia movement, and they both had very similar names, the FARP changed its name to Partido Resistencia Popular (PRP, Popular Resistance Party). Then in October 2011 leaders of the FNRP who supported Mel Zelaya voted to call their party the Partido de Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE, Freedom and Re-foundation Party). While there was substantial support for Xiomara as the LIBRE presidential candidate, there were however a total of five different currents within LIBRE which produced primary election candidates for diputados (departmental delegates to the national congress) and municipal government officials. These different factions consisted of the: 1) 28th of June Movement; 2) the Popular Revolutionary Force; 3) the Progressive Resistance Movement; 4) the People Organized in Resistance; and 5) the 5th of July Movement.

What is relevant here is that LIBRE became the dominant political party to emerge out of the Resistencia, with the goal of forming a national constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution, claiming that “revolution was inevitable.” The party advocates for socialism, but also aims to change broader state practices in Honduras. In the party’s official declaration of principles, they list: 1) popular sovereignty; 2) social and economic equality; 3) unity of forces and respect for diversity; 4) relationships with the popular sectors; 5) critical thought and permanent doctrinal updating; 6) respect and promotion of human rights; 7) human security; 8) honesty and transparency; 9) nature and environment; 10) secularism and liberty of worship; 11) Central Americanism and Latin

---

29 While Xiomara won her candidacy by consensus and was thus the only primary election presidential candidate, there was pressure from the National Electoral Tribune to insist that LIBRE had to vote among different candidates in the primary elections to determine their presidential candidate. LIBRE leaders later found the legal mechanisms to argue that Xiomara was the party’s candidate by consensus and that no primary election of presidential candidacy was required.
Americanism; and 12) anti-imperialism, anti-neocolonialism, and international solidarity (Partido Libertad y Refundación 2011). The contention among LIBRE supporters in 2012 was that the party and electoral politics were viable methods for achieving these goals, and that if LIBRE were elected to power and the constitution were rewritten to facilitate these processes, then Hondurans would indeed be living the revolution that so many have been hoping for since long before 28 June 2009.

As FNRP members and LIBRE supporters began to reflect on the recent history of the 2009 coup, they often suggested that these initial experiences with this sudden political change were the push that they all needed in order to advance a broader political project. As one schoolteacher who became active with the Resistencia and LIBRE Party explained to me in July 2012:

> Look here, the Resistencia has never been only about Mel; it is about all the injustices against the people. What happened with the golpe de estado was that the people finally woke up. Now we have united. They say that sometimes something bad has to happen in order for something good to happen. If Mel had never been kidnapped, who knows where we would be. But now the people are awake.  

I would add to this member’s statement the idea that the FNRP would probably not be in the position it occupied during 2012 (and perhaps would not even have existed) had Mel actually come back to finish his term. This ‘awakening’ was therefore neither inevitable nor predictable.

---

30 Interview, 16 July 2012.
Looking at such a situation ethnographically as it was occurring is a different kind of endeavour than interviewing people about the coup after it happened, when both they and the ethnographer have the privilege of reflection. The multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory meanings that individuals forge in the midst of sudden political change are not always coherent, which in the case of Honduras meant that in the summer of 2009 people were actively seeking out new information despite the confusion and censorship.

While retrospective insights are very valuable, my data from the summer of 2009 differ from the stories that Hondurans now tell about what they did in reaction to the coup. (This became especially apparent to me during my doctoral fieldwork when schoolteachers were in a position to reflect upon this recent history of sudden political change.) In 2009, rather than envision the formation of a progressive new political party (LIBRE), most people were struggling to figure out just what had happened and how these political changes would affect their everyday activities and livelihood strategies. In the process of imagining different paths to the future, the weight of Honduras’ past influenced people’s understandings about why the coup occurred and what was politically possible during the summer of 2009 and thereafter.

2.7 Current Research among Schoolteachers

By the time of my doctoral fieldwork in 2012, the Resistencia political movement and LIBRE Party had already gained considerably more support. Schoolteachers had a clear understanding of who was affiliated with the FNRP and who had chosen to side with the golpistas. The shifting of opinions I had observed during the summer of 2009
had slowed down, and the post-coup government of Pepe Lobo had significantly withdrawn support for basic public services.

Scholars of Honduran political processes and political culture have approached the post-coup political environment in different ways. Since June 2009 this has resulted in valuable contributions about why the coup occurred (Fasquelle 2011); the reactions of the international community (Pine 2011); the on-going effects of violence perpetrated by post-coup governments (Phillips 2013); the disruption of various pre-coup social policy achievements (Euraque 2010); the intensification of neoliberal development policies (Brondo 2013); and the cultivation of an unprecedented revolutionary spirit among those who continue to resist these practices and envision a fundamentally different path for the country (see, for instance, Anderson 2012; Boyer & Peñalva 2013; Euraque 2010; Phillips 2011).

This doctoral thesis engages aspects of these on-going themes by examining how a group of front-line state agents is denouncing these set-backs to progressive policies and critiquing the current situation, but also finding new and quite innovative ways to fill otherwise limited spaces with progressive political action aimed at forging what they consider to be better policies of governance and a more equitable education system.

31 Historian Darío Euraque (2010) writes about the cultural policy achievements made at the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History during the government of Mel Zelaya and how with 2009 coup, the newly-appointed Minister of Culture quickly dismantled these achievements. The reforms to the education sector can be seen in the context of this same problematic of coup-appointed state officials who produce the derailment of previously-achieved social policies.
3 Historical Antecedents through Life Histories and Colegio Accounts

3.1 Introduction

As the largest gremio of public sector workers in Honduras, schoolteachers are people whose daily activities and labour struggles support the expansion of state services in general. Most of those with whom I work studied in the normal schools during the 1970s and 80s – a period when the state sought to expand the education sector. As promising normalistas (normal school students) they studied under government-sponsored scholarships. These same teachers then experienced the career of schoolteacher as a ‘carrera de los pobres’ (career of the poor) – the opportunity for individuals from humble (usually urban) backgrounds to become professionals and experience all of the responsibilities and benefits their positions entail.

Today Honduran schoolteachers are reflecting on their own life histories in conjunction with the recent history of the expansion of state services under the ousted government of Mel Zelaya. They want at least that same level of support from the state, but have not been receiving it since the June 2009 coup. At international conferences for teachers in neighbouring countries they see public education systems which they believe work well – returning to Honduras with arguments about the progress and good governance that is occurring now in ‘sister republics’ El Salvador and Nicaragua. As both products and producers of a national public education system, Honduran schoolteachers have developed a vested interest in state services. All this contributes to reasons why Honduran teachers recognize the usefulness of the state, and are defending public education and state services in general.
This chapter has two central aims. The first is to provide background information about the profession of schoolteacher in Honduras and the ‘magisterio’ – the teachers’ professional organizations – as a whole. While Honduran schoolteachers often use the term ‘magisterio’ to refer to all teachers as a gremio, the profession, or their organizations, it is important to clarify that when it refers to their professional associations, this consists of six different nation-wide ‘colegios magisteriales’ (teacher colleges), which have developed in different historical contexts, specializing in their own strategies of how to represent a particular group of teachers. For instance, there are colegios for teachers who work in primary education, secondary education, or pedagogical planning and administrative activities. Indeed, there are conflicts within and between colegios magisteriales, which has led to factions and the creation of new colegios.

This background information will become essential for my subsequent ethnographic analysis of the significance of the 2012 reforms, of teachers’ actions as front-line state agents who challenge certain aspects of governance, and as agents of social and political change in the current political environment. Here I present basic historical antecedents about the functioning of the magisterio and profession of schoolteacher in Honduras, drawing on: 1) what my research participants have told me; 2) what different colegios magisteriales tell their members about this history; and 3) some secondary sources about education policies in Honduras written by Honduran academics.

As an anthropologist, I am not only interested in describing what happened. In addition, I seek to understand how differently-situated individuals have experienced these
changes over time. I am less concerned with exactly what laws were passed during which
governments, for instance, and much more interested in how schoolteachers themselves
experienced the effects of these laws, and developed opinions about their profession – a
process which has contributed toward schoolteachers’ collective struggles to pass new
legislation at the national level.

The second aim of this chapter is to address the question of who governs in the
context of implementing policies for national public education in Honduras. A central
premise of this thesis is that the agency of schoolteachers influences how – and the extent
to which – the reforms are implemented in practice. The way that they do so results in
part from their particular perspectives that emerge out of their backgrounds and the types
of experiences they have had both individually and collectively. Honduran
schoolteachers’ lived experiences underlie their vested interests in the state and in the
validity of state services in general, which in turn influences their actions vis-à-vis the
education reforms. Ethnographic examination of these processes requires that we first
ask: What type of person would want to pursue a career as a schoolteacher? And what
social, economic, and political circumstances attract individuals to the profession and
support them while they pursue this career?

To address these anthropological questions, I will explore aspects of the lives of
three Honduran schoolteachers, describing the circumstances in which they entered the
profession and how they arrived where they were in 2012. An account of key aspects of
their lives highlights some of the common experiences that Honduran schoolteachers as a
group have had since the 1960s. While all three of the teachers presented here are
considered to be professionally ‘successful’ (which might not make their experiences
entirely typical), their life histories illuminate the ways in which the *magisterio* and profession of schoolteacher have changed over time.

The information presented here reflects both what these individuals were willing to share with me, and their own assessments of which details of their lives were relevant to answering my questions about their professional experiences. This chapter therefore alludes to many shared aspirations of Honduran schoolteachers, as well as the social and political circumstances many have undergone. These lived experiences and the opinions formed about the profession are then remembered and reflected upon during an ongoing process through which schoolteachers: 1) develop political opinions about the current reforms and political environment; 2) act upon these perceptions of their realities; and 3) imagine the range of possibilities that the future might bring with different kinds of governing policies and state projects. I conclude each life history with a brief mention of how the individual’s professional life became interconnected with and affected by the June 2009 coup and emergence of the *Resistencia* movement, as these events continued to influence how teachers interpret and experience the *magisterio* and their engagements with national politics in 2012.

3.2 Basic History of the Honduran *Magisterio*

Most organized labour in Honduras locates its beginnings in the 1954 *Gran Huelga Bananera* (Great Banana Strike), in which United Fruit Company workers withheld their services for 69 days, and in the process gained the support of workers from other industries and popular organizations, as well as regional capitalists and politicians (see, for example, Euraque 1996: 95-97). The major achievement of the general strike was the legal right for workers to organize and to form unions. It also provoked public
debate about agrarian reform, the political rights of women, and workers’ rights in general. This later led to the passing of relevant legislation in those areas, and the emergence of various sindicatos (unions) for workers in different industries. It is in this national historical context that we also see the profession of schoolteacher becoming more institutionalized, with the centralization of the procedures whereby schoolteachers are formally registered with the Ministry of Education in 1957 – meaning that central Ministry offices in Tegucigalpa began to play a more important role in regulating teachers as workers – and a decree in 1958 that established teachers’ minimum monthly salary of 100 Lempiras (COLPROSUMAH 2011).

These structural changes were quite significant as they were the early stages of a process that would formalize the profession and encourage teachers to continue organizing and to demand better working conditions, rights, and benefits. With the 1962 passing of the Ley de Colegiación Profesional Obligatoria (Law of Obligatory Professional [Teachers’] College Affiliation), approximately 8,000 Honduran teachers were formally registered with the central Ministry (COLPROSUMAH 2011). This facilitated additional attempts to continue validating the profession by forming a ‘colegio magisterial.’ Up until that point, Honduran schoolteachers did have two different associations – ‘La Asociación de Maestros Hondureños’ (The Association of Honduran Teachers) and ‘Acción Magisterial Hondureña’ (Honduran Teacher Action) – but these initial organizations were of little significance in terms of the power they had to demand that the central government regulate the profession and thus pay schoolteachers as legitimate workers legally entitled to certain rights and benefits.
In addition to these initial structural changes that worked to formalize and validate the profession, in 1963, as the Acción Magisterial Hondureña sought to form an official colegio magisterial through legislation, they also formed teachers’ interest committees which later that year called for the first nation-wide schoolteacher strike (COLPROSUMAH 2011). The strike committee sought an increase in teachers’ salaries, and during the process of declining the initial offers from the national congress the Colegio Profesional Superación Magisterial Hondureño (COLPROSUMAH, Professional College of Honduran Teacher Improvement) was formed on 4 June 1963 (COLPROSUMAH 2011). Two days later the magisterio achieved their initial strike goal with the increase in teachers’ basic monthly salary from 100 to 150 Lempiras (COLPROSUMAH 2011).

Some Honduran schoolteachers who reflect on this history claim that these pioneering organizers sought not only to formalize the profession and further teachers’ rights, but also to distance themselves from the various sindicatos (for non-professional workers) that were emerging in the banana and other industries. By claiming that their organization was a ‘colegio magisterial’ (a teachers’ professional association), exclusively for educated professionals, they developed a certain amount of leverage in claiming that because of their education and because of the necessity of their services, they were worthy of additional rights and benefits.32 Inquiry into the history of the six Honduran colegios magisteriales seems like rich terrain for future historical research projects, if archival research into the internal dynamics of each colegio were permitted.33

32 For an analysis of similar processes in Peru see Parker (1998).
33 I initially enquired with Valle departmental COLPROSUMAH dirigentes about possible access to their colegio’s archives and was told by several senior teachers that the higher leaders of the colegios magisteriales would never allow
The focus of the present research project is the 2012 reforms and schoolteachers’ actions in the post June 2009 coup political environment. My historical inquiries here are therefore more modest – serving as tools for understanding the present, in accord with an anthropology that studies how people imagine what is, or is not, politically possible by considering how the weight of the past orients the present and opens different paths to the future. What, then, were the experiences of some schoolteachers who entered the profession during these earlier periods when the state sought to expand the education sector? How did these experiences interact with their involvement with the Resistencia?

3.3 Profesor Luis

Born in 1950 into a poor and fragmented family from a fishing village in rural Amapala (Isla del Tigre), Luis never knew his biological father, who left the family of four children soon after he was born. Luis’ mother supported herself and her children with the meagre wages that she earned by washing the clothes of her neighbours in the river. Basic subsistence resources (such as food, shelter, and clothing) were quite scarce throughout Luis’ early childhood, even after his mother re-married. Despite suffering from hunger and other challenges of poverty, Luis did manage to graduate from primary
school, after which his mother made arrangements with her cousin in Tegucigalpa for Luis to go live with her, where he had the opportunity to pursue a secondary education.

In Tegucigalpa Luis’ mother’s cousin – who he refers to as his ‘aunt’ – provided him with food, clothing, and a place to live. There Luis’ economic conditions were somewhat better than in Amapala: he had more food security and his aunt even bought him his first pair of shoes when he turned 14. But Luis’ aunt could not afford to support him and send him to secondary school all by herself. For these reasons, Luis took on a janitorial job mopping the floors of a public health centre in order to contribute to his living and educational expenses.

While the earnings did help to offset some living expenses, Luis’ desire to continue his secondary education came into direct conflict with the economic reality of his family’s situation: his aunt could not continue to pay for his educational expenses beyond ciclo común (the first three years of secondary school). However, around the time that Luis finished ciclo común the opportunity to study at the Escuela Normal de Varones ‘Pedro Nufio’ (‘Pedro Nufio’ Boys’ Normal School) presented itself. There Luis was granted a scholarship which covered his matrícula (enrolment and tuition fees), and which also provided a small stipend for the purchase of academic materials and school uniforms. Whatever minimal amount remained Luis could use to purchase basic food items at the school. Since this normal school was in Tegucigalpa, Luis was also able to continue living with his aunt and keep his part-time cleaning job to contribute toward his living expenses. Between the scholarship and the earnings from his janitorial job, Luis was almost entirely self-sustaining; his aunt only had to provide him with a place to sleep.
During the late 1960s, when Luis was in the normal school, he experienced what can be considered a period of victory for the Honduran schoolteachers’ labour movement. By then the *magisterio* already enjoyed various labour achievements made during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Opportunities were becoming more commonplace for individuals of limited financial resources. While the military government of General Oswaldo López Arellano sought to dismantle teachers’ organizations in general, these actions can also been seen as a reflection of teachers’ successful organizing and the fact that López Arellano considered them activists for the Liberal Party – around which, according to COLPROSUMAH and some of its members with whom I work, the *Primer Colegio Profesional Hondureño de Maestros* (PRICMAH, First Professional College of Teachers) was formed by this military government as a strategy for gaining schoolteachers’ support for the National Party.

What is significant about this period are the overall achievements made by the *magisterio*. That is, by the late 1960s Honduran schoolteachers – as an organized *gremio* – had already: 1) formalized their profession with the state by establishing a registration process and a basic monthly salary that all registered and working teachers were to receive; 2) achieved their demands for higher salaries during one (1963) occasion, a process which both increased their income and proved to schoolteachers that their organizing was worth the effort; and 3) developed a reputation with governing authorities as a group of professionals capable of influencing national politics. All three of these achievements are significant in and of themselves; all three will become important themes in subsequent sections of this thesis when analyzing the current attempts to dismantle teachers’ professional associations.
It is not coincidental that this period of labour achievements for the magisterio was also a time when the Honduran state needed more schoolteachers, and on the whole – especially by the late 1960s – was expanding the education sector. Employment was however not guaranteed for Honduran normal school graduates, as was the case in some other Latin American countries during this time (see, for instance, Luykx 1999 on Bolivia). Nonetheless, full-time employment was common for beginning teachers, although this often meant competing with other normal school graduates and moving to a less desirable and unfamiliar rural location.

It was customary for the all-male normal school to have regular social gatherings with the all-female Escuela Normal de Señoritas ‘Pedro Nufio’ (with which they later merged to form a co-educational normal school). At one such event Luis met his girlfriend who he would date through the remainder of his normal school studies. Having already made good friends and formed a romantic relationship, Luis did not want to leave Tegucigalpa when he completed normal school studies in 1973. His grades placed him at the top of his class, and his teachers told him that he would have a bright future as a teacher. He decided to take the ‘concurso’ (contest) qualifying exam to see if he could secure employment in Tegucigalpa at a primary school.

Luis did well on the concurso exam, receiving a perfect score of 100 percent. He was confident that such a high score would lead to a permanent primary school position in Tegucigalpa. However, this was not the case. As Luis put it: “At first I thought it was a really significant score, and then I realized there were about one hundred hundreds!” All of the concurso applicants with perfect scores that year were instructed to re-apply for

---

35 Interview, 31 December 2012.
their *licencias* (temporary positions) or *plazas* (permanent positions) by meeting directly with the Francisco Morazán *director departamental* (departmental Ministry director). It was then that Luis realized that his score, while better than his classmates’, did not stand out sufficiently at the national level where he was competing with normal school graduates from other regions who also wanted jobs in the capital city.

The *director departamental* had to make placement decisions based on other qualifications and qualities of these recent graduates. After his interview with the director, Luis was told that he would begin with a *licencia* that was created in order to cover the absence of a natural science teacher at a secondary school in Comayagüela (still within the greater Tegucigalpa region). Luis was shocked that the *director departamental* would send him to teach secondary school classes; he told the director that he didn’t have any real experience with natural science classes at all, as a recent normal school graduate. The director explained that the position was just for a few months until they could find a permanent, qualified, secondary school natural science teacher. Under these conditions, Luis began his first job within a few months of having graduated from the normal school.

One day the school in Comayagüela received a surprise visit from the Minister of Education, Lidia Williams de Arias, who did not have a reputation as a minister friendly to the *magisterio*. In fact she was often accused of not respecting the laws that the *magisterio* had achieved through its labour struggles (a common theme that we will continue to observe in the present context). The conflicts between Williams and the *magisterio* even led COLPROSUMAH to denounce some aspects of Williams’ professional life and ultimately demand her resignation (COLPROSUMAH 1977). In any case, the Minister told Luis that the Bay Islands high school on Roatán had been without
a natural science teacher during the first two months of class, and asked him to move to Roatán to fill this position. She explained that the Roatán high school had recently received status as a ‘colegio oficial’ (a high school completely funded by the state, as opposed to semi-private). Coincidentally Luis’ girlfriend, who had not yet completed normal school, had returned to her native Santa Bárbara to attend to the needs of her sick father. Williams brought Luis into her office, took out 100 Lempiras from her pocket and gave them to him. She explained that a one-way flight from Tegucigalpa to Coxen Hole would cost 33 Lempiras, and that he could use the rest to travel to the town where the high school was located and to get settled. Luis left the next day for Roatán.

Soon after his arrival both the sub-director and director of this high school retired, and the minister asked Luis to become the high school director. Thus at the young age of 26, Luis held the position of high school director and natural science teacher – even before having begun an undergraduate degree (technically, a requirement at the time in order to teach secondary school at all). Luis was awarded these positions at the Roatán high school not through the concurso process, but rather at the direct request of the Minister of Education. Luis later began to take courses toward his undergraduate degree at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán UPNFM (Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University) in Tegucigalpa during the school vacation months of December and January. This routine continued through his time in Roatán: he taught at the high school from February through November, and took undergraduate courses in Tegucigalpa during the summer break. He also became more involved with community life and was elected to be the community ‘padrino’ (godparent, or sponsor). In this capacity he engaged in various community-based development projects, including
helping to secure funds from the national public works department for construction of a paved road through Roatán.

In the late 1970s, around the time that Luis finished his degree in natural sciences at the UPNFM in Tegucigalpa, Minister Williams de Arias asked him if he would be interested in changing locations. As a southerner herself, she sympathized with Luis for having to live so far away from home. She offered him a job as the director of a high school in a rural, south-eastern border town. The school had also just been granted status as colegio oficial, and the central Ministry of Education sought an experienced director with an undergraduate degree to manage the colegio.

Luis accepted the position and moved to the south-eastern border town in the late 1970s. He bought property before he had enough money to construct a house, and therefore rented a room near the colegio during the first year of his position, in easy walking distance of work. Luis found that although he was in an isolated rural town, his basic subsistence needs were met without needing to travel outside the town on a regular basis. He did still make visits to the central Ministry offices to report on the status of his colegio. During one such visit to Tegucigalpa he ran into his former girlfriend who had been living with her sister-in-law while attempting to finish her normal school degree (after her father had passed away). They got back together and were married before she graduated. Luis’ wife left school to go live with him in the south-eastern border town, where the newlyweds built a house on Luis’ empty lot.

In subsequent years as Luis began to develop regional contacts within the Valle departmental Ministry offices he put in a good word on behalf of his wife for a position at a primary school in San Lorenzo that was in need of teachers. The departmental Ministry
directors permitted this type of employment at the time – as ‘profesores empíricos’ (empirical teachers, or teachers without professional credentials) – because of the need for teachers in this area. Luis’ wife was thus appointed her position even before she had graduated from the normal school. (She later went on to complete her normal school degree while working full-time as a primary education schoolteacher.) While living in the south-eastern border town in their new home, Luis and his wife had their first child in 1980. Once the couple’s second child was born they decided to relocate from the south-eastern border town, given that Luis’ wife continued to work full-time at the primary school in San Lorenzo. This arrangement meant that Luis would commute from San Lorenzo to the town (about an hour and a half driving time).

By the mid-1980s the effects of the Cold War were also being felt in Honduras in ways that profoundly affected teachers (just as they did other groups of organized workers and the peasantry). Schoolteachers’ organizing efforts began to be incorrectly categorized as ‘communist’ and as ‘subversive’ activities (as suggested in the previous chapter). More specifically, it was also common for magisterio dirigentes (colegio leaders) to be accused of supporting the Salvadoran FMLN or the Nicaraguan FSLN, even when they were organizing a nationally-oriented labour movement for educated professionals paid by the Honduran state.

While some Honduran schoolteachers did sympathize with the causes of the FMLN and FSLN – and expressed their solidarity for these movements verbally, during magisterio marches – none of my research participants were aware of anyone who actually joined those foreign revolutionary fronts. Instead, Honduran teachers were principally interested in furthering the rights of Honduran workers, and specifically, their
own rights as professional educators. In so doing they continued to distinguish themselves as educated ‘professionals’ from the uneducated general labourers, a process which perhaps reinforced distinctions of social class, but in any case was realized within the Honduran national context and had nothing to do with communism elsewhere.

Overall however, the armed forces special operations unit *Batallón 316*, known locally as a ‘paramilitary’ death squad, did not see teachers’ organizing efforts in this light. Instead, the tactic of the 316 was to scare, threaten, and disappear those *magisterio dirigentes* who had organizing power, using the threat posed by the FMLN and FSLN as a scapegoat.

During his time at the south-eastern border town – in close proximity to the militarized border with El Salvador – Luis held a leadership position as a *dirigente* for the *Colegio de Profesores de Educación Media de Honduras* (COPEMH, College of Secondary Education Teachers of Honduras).

There were several occasions when the 316 came through town looking for Luis. They often wore their uniforms, but sometimes arrived in civilian clothing. Local residents could easily recognize outsiders, however, and news of their presence circulated quickly. Whenever 316 members were detected, community members friendly with Luis would allow him to hide in their homes until the danger had passed. Since these operatives detained, tortured, and disappeared civilians without any formal legal arrest, their tactic was to take teachers away at night, when few people would be able to witness their actions. For Luis, this made his usual work routine of driving home in the dark, after closing the school, a dangerous task. Especially when word spread of 316 presence in the town, Luis would often spend the night hiding in a friend’s home, rather than return to San Lorenzo.
On one occasion Luis was at the school late with his young son who became tired and wanted to go home. Despite the threat of 316 members, Luis decided to make the trip. He asked the colegio security guard to accompany them to the end of the dirt road connecting the community with the Pan-American Highway. Before they reached the highway, however, the 316 members were waiting for Luis – standing in a line across the road with guns in hand. They took him to a Nacaome jail for questioning. Luis was terrified, but as he was being hauled away he managed to ask the security guard to take his car (and his son) to San Lorenzo that night to tell his wife what had happened. At the jailhouse the 316 members stopped short of torturing Luis, but did abuse him verbally. They called him a ‘lazy teacher,’ a ‘subversive anarchist,’ a ‘communist piece-of-shit,’ and a ‘traidor a la patria hondureña’ (traitor to the Honduran fatherland). Luis, scared that he would be murdered, pleaded with the 316 members, telling them that he had done nothing illegal, and that he was a simple schoolteacher, not a member of any communist movement.

When they insisted that he was a ‘subversive’ and a ‘communist,’ Luis explained that while he was a departmental magisterio dirigente, all he had been doing was organizing schoolteachers in order to negotiate teachers’ working rights with the Ministry of Education – nothing illegal. As the 316 members continued to insult him, Luis screamed out that they had no right to treat him this way, as a Honduran citizen without any criminal record. Luis remained in the Nacaome jail under these conditions for several more hours until the 316 members received a phone call from one of their high-ranking counterparts in Tegucigalpa. To Luis’ surprise, the 316 members suddenly removed his handcuffs and apologized for having arrested him without justification, telling him that
he was free to go. Luis hitch-hiked home to San Lorenzo, bewildered and still frightened. He later learned that his release was made possible through his personal network. Once the school’s security guard told Luis’ wife about his arrest, she called a distant uncle of hers who was a high-ranking military officer. She pleaded with her uncle to use his influence to secure her husband’s release. And it worked.

As the repression against schoolteachers continued throughout the 1980s, Luis and his wife concluded that distant familial connections with one military officer did not provide enough security. They both had colleagues and friends who had been disappeared. And as 316 members were regularly spotted in the border town, Luis’ wife gave him an ultimatum: either they both move to her hometown of Santa Bárbara, or he ask to be transferred to a different school, somewhere outside of the south. Either way, she insisted that Luis give up his position as a Valle dirigente and that he move away from the south, where most people knew who he was. Luis agreed that he would have to move someplace where few people knew him. Although upset to leave the leadership positions he had earned through experience (his appointed position as director of the high school), and through election by his colleagues (as a Valle dirigente for COPEMH), Luis asked the Ministry for a transfer and explained that it was for ‘security’ reasons. He was not the first schoolteacher in the 1980s to do this. According to Luis, the Ministry of Education knew that the 316 had been disappearing Honduran teachers, and they therefore granted various transfers during this time when an applicant said it was for security reasons (which points to the contradictions and variability among state institutions).
Luis was assigned a natural science teaching position at the ‘Escuela Normal de Varones ‘Centroamérica’ – an all-male live-in normal school in Comayagua. Although this position was a demotion to a lower level teaching job, Luis considered his involvement at this normal school more prestigious, given how large it was. The normal school’s campus had roughly 40 hectares of land where the students cultivated crops and raised livestock, producing enough food for its own population and also generating a surplus to sell in the Comayagua market. The ‘Ciudad Normalista’ (‘Normalist City’) – as it was referred to locally because of its immense campus – became known for the quality of its food products. The school often filled orders from local vendors, generating revenues which were dedicated to expenditures beyond those supported by the Ministry. Luis received the same salary at the normal school in Comayagua as he did while working as the director of the high school in the border town, but he also received subsidized room and board to live on campus at a negligible cost. He was therefore able to travel home to San Lorenzo every weekend, where he still tried to keep a low profile.

One weekend in San Lorenzo while running an errand, Luis noticed a van with dark tinted windows driven by military personnel. It stopped and a 316 member grabbed him and arrested him in broad daylight. The 316 member was wearing dark sunglasses and told Luis not to look at his face and not to ask why he was being arrested. They threw Luis in the back of their van, where three other 316 members were sitting. They told him to pray and ask God for one last wish, because this was ‘the last time that he would see the light of day.’ Then the driver said that teachers such as Luis aren’t always all that bad, and that he should be permitted to sit in the front seat next to him, instead of the back of the van. Luis was terrified and moved to the front seat as instructed. But he couldn’t help
asking himself why a young 316 member had invited him, the detainee, to sit next to
him…. As they began to drive outside of San Lorenzo, the other 316 members called
Luis a ‘lazy teacher’ and a ‘subversive.’ They told him once again that they were going to
shoot him in the head, just as soon as they were further outside of town.

When they stopped to have lunch, all of a sudden the driver said to Luis: “Profè!
How soon you have forgotten about some of your best students, eh?” Shaken up, Luis
replied, “I am so sorry, but I don’t know what you mean….” The 316 member took off
his glasses and said, “It’s me! From the Escuela Normal Centroamérica! Don’t you
remember me? You taught me chemistry classes a couple of years back! Look, I’m now
in the special operations of the armed forces.” It was then that all of the 316 members
admitted to Luis that when they saw him in San Lorenzo, the driver insisted on playing a
practical joke on him. The 316 members finished their meal, and said good-bye to Luis.
He was not at all amused.

Not every Honduran schoolteacher had such a fortunate escape from the infamous
316 and other special operations units during the 1980s. Luis had teacher friends who
were disappeared during this time. He himself tried to avoid attracting any significant
attention as a teacher or a former COPEMH dirigente. This was not always an easy task,
for at the normal school in Comayagua he was again elected to be a regional dirigente for
COPEMH – this time, even to hold the prestigious position of departmental president for
the colegio – but he chose to decline the offer for his own safety. Since teachers involved
in organizing were accused of being ‘communists,’ Luis chose to avoid common
identifiers of communist ideas or symbols. For instance, he had a red automobile that he

______________________________

36 Interview, 31 December 2012.
used to travel from Comayagua to San Lorenzo. After explaining to his wife what had happened that day in San Lorenzo with the 316 members, they decided to paint the car brown, as to not appear in support of communism.

In the late 1980s Luis gave up what could have been the most prestigious position of his career. The director of the Escuela Normal de Varones ‘Centroamérica’ passed away due to illness and the sub-director refused to run such a large enterprise. The job was subsequently offered to Luis by the Comayagua director departamental. Although it was a highly prestigious position, it also included additional levels of stress (as normal school directors endure various kinds of criticisms emanating from different fronts). For Luis, taking on such a position would have certainly raised his public profile, which would have been counterproductive for his goal not to attract the attention of 316. Although this position also would have implied an increase in salary, this was not enough to convince Luis that the risk was worth taking.

In the 1990s, once the effects of the Cold War and violence against teachers began to decline, Luis asked for a transfer somewhere closer to San Lorenzo. At first, it appeared as though there were not any positions available. But within the first six months of his search, the director of a colegio in the department of Choluteca told him about a natural science teacher who wanted to move someplace else. He and Luis agreed to switch positions through a permutua (an ‘exchange’ approved by the Ministry), and the teacher from Choluteca was delighted to be able to move to Comayagua and teach at the Escuela Normal de Varones ‘Centroamérica’. While not nearly as prestigious as his position at the normal school, Luis was happy to take on the position at the colegio in
Choluteca simply because it was much closer to his family, and he could once again live in San Lorenzo and commute to the town in Choluteca.

In the latter part of the 1990s when the natural science laboratory director retired, Luis applied through the concurso process for this position and successfully obtained it. In the early 2000s, the colegio director retired, and the Choluteca director departamental placed Luis in charge of the colegio as director, insisting that he was the only qualified applicant in the area, given his previous experiences as director. Luis had once again found employment stability, and began to pursue other professional interests. He started to work part-time as a journalist – something which had interested him during his undergraduate studies, even though he choose to major in natural sciences since it was more likely to lead to employment as a teacher. By 2002 Luis was working as a local radio correspondent. For this position, he attended different kinds of newsworthy events and reported his findings to the national radio headquarters and during news programs. This has resulted in a unique situation in which Luis is invited to magisterio events (like protests) where he both participates as a teacher and observes as a journalist reporting on the event.

Luis’ dual position as colegio director and radio correspondent has afforded him other opportunities to follow newsworthy events. In the immediate aftermath of the June 2009 kidnapping of Mel, Luis attended local marches, reporting on the formation of the Resistencia movement in the south. Since he became known as a high school director in solidarity with the movement, different Resistencia dirigentes have seen Luis as a resource for their activities. During one occasion in late 2009, the Resistencia planned a nation-wide event in which participants from different regions of the country walked to
Tegucigalpa to protest the coup-installed government, and to demand that Mel be reinstated as president. Luis was asked to allow the participants to sleep in the classrooms of his high school while walking from Choluteca to Tegucigalpa – a common request made of teachers during this time. Meanwhile, Luis had also followed the orders of the *Federación de Organizaciones Magisteriales de Honduras* (FOMH, Federation of Teachers’ Organizations of Honduras) – a committee composed of the presidents of all six *colegios magisteriales* – to hold a nation-wide *paro* to protest against the coup. As a result, Luis had closed down the high school campus, and many of his colleagues at the school had travelled to Tegucigalpa to protest the coup. Luis stayed behind at the school, not to conduct classes but to help house hundreds of *Resistencia* members in his *colegio*.

Soon enough the armed forces arrived and insisted that Luis remove the protesters from his school, the property of the Honduran state. The soldiers argued that if the school was closed due to a *magisterio paro*, then Luis would therefore be prohibited from entering the school premises, just as all the *Resistencia* members would also be prohibited from entering. Luis disagreed, and insisted that by Honduran law, the director of a *centro educativo* (education centre) has the authority to grant or deny permission to enter the school property. Luis insisted that the *Resistencia* members were welcome, and that armed forces personnel were not. Luis then entered the school himself, and while closing the gate with a deadbolt lock, he said: “This is my high school, where I am the director. As the law states, from this line inward, I am in charge. You and your fellow
soldiers can stay out there and be in charge of whomever you find out there, ¡pero aquí el que manda soy yo! (but here I am the one in charge!)"  

3.4 Profesora Mercedes

Similar to Luis’ background, Mercedes is another teacher who grew up in a household with limited financial resources. Born into a Tegucigalpa working class family in 1962, she was the youngest of four children. Mercedes has little memory of her Salvadoran (immigrant) father, since by 1969 he was forcibly removed from Honduras during the events leading up to the Football War. According to Mercedes, her father had intended to return to Honduras, but even several years after the war had ended, neither she nor any of her immediate family members had heard anything from their father. Her mother eventually remarried and Mercedes was able to complete primary school in Tegucigalpa, in spite of significant financial difficulties. Her mother’s expectation was that Mercedes was either to find work, or get married, shortly after graduating from primary school. However, Mercedes wanted to pursue a secondary education and she began taking ciclo común courses in Tegucigalpa – amidst familial pressure to find either employment or a male partner to support her.

While in ciclo común a distant cousin of Mercedes, who had political connections with the armed forces and the government of Coronel Juan Alberto Melgar Castro, told her about scholarships available for aspiring young women at the Escuela Normal de

37 Interview, 23 August 2012.
38 Women, as a group, have been seen by state planners in different Latin American countries as the ideal candidates for the teaching profession, following perceptions which hold that women: 1) are good at transmitting moral standards; and 2) could be paid less than men, and would thus comprise a continual source of cheap labour (Palmer & Chaves 1998: 49). Indeed, the majority of Honduran schoolteachers with whom I work are women (and the majority of teachers
Señoritas ‘España’ in Danlí, in the Department of El Paraíso. All of Mercedes’ extended family members were from the Department of Francisco Morazán; she did not have any relatives in Danlí. But her cousin was able to put in a good word for her to the appropriate military government authorities overseeing the education budget, which led to extensive funding for Mercedes during her normal school studies.

During the late 1970s, Honduras saw a general increase in government funding allotted to the national public education system in an overall effort to increase the number of teachers, and the quality of their education at the normal schools. Mercedes thus entered the Danlí normal school during a period when the Honduran Ministry of Education was investing more resources in schoolteacher training.

UPNFM professor and scholar of Honduran magisterio history, Mario Membreño, cites that during this period the Honduran state was spending a total of 56.4 percent of its education budget on normal schools, and that 46 percent of registered secondary school students were normalistas (1989: 10), while the rest were students enrolled in other kinds of high school specialization programs. The Plan of Consolidation of Normal School Education, implemented during the military government of General Oswaldo López Arellano, stipulated that four important normal schools in strategic locations (La Esperanza, Comayagua, Tegucigalpa, and Danlí) would serve as model normal schools who held leadership positions as school administrators and magisterio dirigentes are men). However, far from being passive recipients of what has largely been a patriarchal order, women Honduran schoolteachers (such as Mercedes) have become influential agents of social transformation. As historians Steven Palmer and Gladys Rojas Chaves have argued in the case of Costa Rica, the women teachers trained at the Colegio de Señoritas normal school in the early 1920s perceived themselves as privileged agents of modernity. Palmer and Chaves go on to argue that these normalistas were integral to the emerging conviction that women had an important place in the public sphere, and were thus essential agents of the birth of Costa Rican feminism (1998: 82). While I am interested in anthropological questions related to gender, and I am conscious of the gender inequalities within the Honduran magisterio, specific inquiries about gender are not a focus of mine in this particular research project.
for producing Honduras’ new teachers, who were to be better educated and more capable of solving the nation’s social problems (see Membreño 1989 for a description of this in Honduras, which also resonates with what Luykx 1999 reports on normal schools in Bolivia).

The year that Mercedes entered the normal school, 1977, was one year after the first cohort graduated under this new plan for normal school students. Mercedes’ scholarship from the military government (which fully covered tuition as well as room and board at the all-female normal school) can be seen as a reflection of this emphasis on training more schoolteachers and expanding the public education sector.

While living and studying in Danlí, Mercedes met the man she would later marry. He was not a normal school student, but rather was an albañil (brick layer/construction worker), and he was supportive of Mercedes’ desire to continue her own education. Mercedes’ good academic record demonstrated her potential for further study, and her teachers at the normal school encouraged her to pursue an undergraduate degree. After graduating in 1980 she was successful in gaining admission to the mathematics program at the UPNFM. At the same time, she applied through the concurso process for a position as a primary school teacher in Tegucigalpa, to support herself while studying full time. She received a high enough score on the concurso exam to secure a year-long licencia as a primary school teacher in Tegucigalpa during her first year of undergraduate studies. The young couple thus relocated to Tegucigalpa where Mercedes began to work as a primary school teacher and study to become a secondary school math teacher; her boyfriend was also able to continue working in construction in Tegucigalpa.
Toward the end of her licencia and first year in undergraduate studies, Mercedes began to apply for other licencias and plazas – whatever was available in Tegucigalpa. But she was unable to secure employment, and risked losing the income that supported her living expenses while at the UPNFM. In the midst of re-applying for a licencia she experienced what other female schoolteachers have also all-too-frequently experienced: Mercedes’ boss, the director of the primary school, who was also a colegio dirigente for PRICMAH, offered her a plaza at his school (through his political connections) in exchange for sexual favours. Mercedes refused and attempted to denounce her superior’s inappropriate actions. While she found solidarity among some of her colleagues, including some male teachers at the school, neither authorities at the departmental Ministry office nor leaders of PRICMAH would listen to her complaint.

Even without a job, Mercedes continued her enrolment at the UPNFM. However, early in her second year at university she became pregnant. Mercedes was subsequently subject to social pressure from her family to get married, to set aside her professional goals, and instead to dedicate her time to raising her child. She complied. After getting married, right before her first child was born, Mercedes and her husband decided that it would be most convenient for them to relocate to Nacaome, where her husband was from, and where they would be close to his extended family who could assist with child care. Mercedes agreed, as long as she could look for work as a primary school teacher near Nacaome. Her husband and in-laws were all supportive of this, and Mercedes applied through the concurso process at the Valle departmental level for a position in primary education.
In 1982 Mercedes had her first child and received her first plaza as a schoolteacher. However, the position was in a rural community far from her home in Nacaome. Transportation into the community was via a dirt road that could only be traversed by foot, on horseback, or with a four-wheel drive truck. The latter two options were not readily available to Mercedes, and from the Pan-American Highway outside of Nacaome, it would take her close to seven hours to walk to the rural community. Thus it was not practical for Mercedes to commute daily from her home in Nacaome and she decided to instead rent a room in the community and to live there during the workweek. This was a difficult decision, since it meant leaving her newborn baby in the care of her mother-in-law in Nacaome and only seeing her husband and child on the weekends.

To make matters more difficult, the rural community where Mercedes worked was very poor, even in the context of the familiar conditions of poverty in the Honduran south. So poor were the children of the families that Mercedes taught, she says, that they would almost always arrive to classes without having eaten breakfast, and often without having eaten dinner the night before. Mercedes, herself a cash-strapped beginning teacher and wife of an albañil, did not have the financial means to feed her students. Yet she herself had to eat something during the day while at the school. In order to avoid eating in front of the already-hungry children, she would hide her food under her shirt and go to the latrine to eat in solitude.

Article 51 in the 1982 Estatuto del Docente law establishes that in addition to the base wage, five other factors increase a teacher’s monthly salary: 1) the position held; 2) years of service; 3) academic degrees earned; 4) professional merits earned; and 5) working zone (República de Honduras 1997 [1982]). Number five means that teachers
working in a rural area should receive a ‘rural bonus,’ to help compensate for their additional transportation or living expenses given the remote locations of their schools.39 This extra amount was however not enough for Mercedes to feel that it was a favourable situation: after two years of living and working under these circumstances, she solicited a traslado from the departmental Ministry. She asked to take her plaza to some other school closer to Nacaome, in order to live in the city with her family. Once this became available, Mercedes was offered a position at a rural primary school within a half hour bus ride from Nacaome. This was again a small school, where Mercedes had only three teacher colleagues, one of whom was the school director. However, accepting this position meant that Mercedes could once again live with her family.

After a few years, in the latter half of the 1980s, Mercedes was asked by the departmental Ministry to accept a transfer to the (then) primary school Carías Andino in the rural community of El Garrobo (the school where I conducted most of my fieldwork). She accepted this traslado, which consisted of an afternoon shift further away from her house in Nacaome, but still less than an hour-long bus ride. After a couple of years of working just this afternoon shift, Mercedes applied for another job in the morning shift, again within an hour of Nacaome so that she could commute. She was offered a position teaching kindergarten classes, something that she had not done since her initial training at the Escuela Normal de Señoritas ‘España.’ Yet making the sacrifice of working with kindergarten students was well worth it for Mercedes, because the kindergarten was within the city limits of Nacaome. Mercedes could thus work the morning shift, and then

39 While some teachers told me that this rural bonus does exist, others have told me that they have never actually experienced it. What teachers do commonly receive when working in a rural area, as an incentive, is an increase in salary every three years rather than every five years.
take the bus to El Garrobo in the afternoon. At both schools Mercedes was well received
among her colleagues, and she began to take an interest in the local leadership of her
colegio magisterial, COLPROSUMAH. In the late 1980s she was elected to become a
regional magisterio dirigente.

In addition to, and partially resulting from, the violence against schoolteachers in
the 1980s, the decade was also a period when Honduran schoolteachers experienced
different kinds of attempts to divide their colegios. This had also been the case, although
arguably to lesser degrees, in the 1970s and 1960s. So great was the potential for factions
within the colegios to break off and form a new colegio, or to simply disrupt the
organizing efforts of the colegio leaders, that Mercedes and other such dirigentes at the
time considered it a tremendous achievement when at the end of a given dispute, their
colegio still existed as one COLPROSUMAH. As Mercedes explained, “The magisterio
was weakened during the 1980s. Unfortunately some of our dirigentes were bought-out
by the oligarchy, and the ones who were verdaderos maestros del corazón [real teachers
at heart], we had to focus on not becoming divided. Remaining united was our main
achievement. This is what we ended up fighting against, el dividismo.”

The other major aspect of Mercedes’ leadership position with COLPROSUMAH
during this time was that it came with the danger of being associated with ‘communism,’
and indeed Mercedes had numerous colleagues who were disappeared during this time. In
its official summaries of this history, her colegio claims that 189 of their members were
disappeared by paramilitary organizations during the 1980s (COLPROSUMAH 2011).
Mercedes was nonetheless committed to participating in the nation-wide labour struggle

---

40 Interview, 10 February 2012.
to further the rights of Honduran schoolteachers, and she herself was fortunate not to experience any violence directed at her specifically.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the director of Carías Andino retired, and the sub-director took on the position of director. Mercedes applied through the concurso process for the position of sub-director and was successful. Since then she has been the sub-directora of Carías Andino. This has implied an increase in her responsibilities to help the director administer curricular activities and supervise the staff. While this position does imply a slight increase in salary, Mercedes maintains her morning job at the kindergarten in order to make ends meet. In the early 2000s, she was also offered an additional part-time job teaching adult literacy classes in the evenings to adults in the El Garrobo community. This position is somewhat unregulated by the magisterio: her salary comes directly from an international development fund, and there is no formal concurso process. Rather, a Valle diputado recommended Mercedes for the position, and the current director of Carías Andino allows her to use her classroom at the school, even though he and all the other teachers leave and officially close the school at 5 pm. The earnings from this evening position are meagre, and Mercedes complains that although it is not regulated by the magisterio, the government still deducts the standard amount from this pay to go toward teachers’ retirement and life insurance funds.

There is no standard curriculum design or didactic material for Mercedes to follow in this position. She has thus had to tackle the difficulties of teaching adult literacy on her own. Mercedes says that despite the influence of the radio school movement during the 1960s, in which teachers would attempt to teach adult literacy classes over the radio (see White 1972), her adult students are not well prepared to learn how to read and
write, and some of them are embarrassed about this fact. She spends a good deal of time
going to their houses and encouraging them to come to class. All too often however
Mercedes is left with less than half of her class present. She has also offered to teach
private lessons to those adult students who would rather not be associated with illiteracy
locally by coming to the group. Mercedes herself was influenced by the writings of Paulo
Freire (1994 [1970]), and despite these complications with the job, she finds working
with adults rewarding, and considers it to be a good service to ‘poor peasants’ of the El
Garrobo community, who she says, “have their own experiences as adults that I need to
recognize as important”\(^41\) (which according to Freire, (1994 [1970]) is a necessary
pedagogical approach for such work).

After years of putting up with her husband’s infidelity, in early 2009 Mercedes
initiated divorce proceedings when her husband announced that he would be moving in
with his mistress. Mercedes had never lived on her own, but she was the primary income
earner of her household and didn’t fear financial repercussions from not living with her
husband. In fact, she told me, “I am the professional here, and I can say what I am going
to do. My ex-husband is only an albañil; he doesn’t even have the education [degree] that
I have.”\(^42\)

Once the Resistencia consolidated following the June 2009 coup, Mercedes
became active in the movement. She frequently participated in the marches and protests
in Tegucigalpa and other distant cities, where she said her husband would not have
allowed her to travel by herself. In fact, Mercedes had never travelled outside of

\(^{41}\) Interview, 10 February 2012.
\(^{42}\) Interview, 29 March 2012.
Francisco Morazán, El Paraíso, Choluteca, and Valle (which is quite uncommon for most teachers, especially dirigentes) until she became involved with the Resistencia. Her first time visiting Amapala was not until she accompanied a group of Resistencia leaders in their visit to a peasant community in Zacate Grande, to demonstrate solidarity with the campesinos’ struggles for land tenure there. Mercedes became an active participant in such acts of solidarity and began to incorporate her political views of the June 2009 coup during conversations that she had with community members in El Garrobo – within and beyond her adult literacy classes.

For Mercedes, becoming active with the Resistencia coincided with what she considered to be another liberating change in her own life: her divorce. She became especially interested in women’s rights, and has since attempted to incorporate into the Resistencia movement dialogue about abuses against women and about family disintegration in general. In early 2010, in the midst of her active involvement with the Resistencia, Mercedes decided to return to the UPNFM to take weekend classes at the Nacaome campus and pursue an undergraduate degree in ‘administración educativa’ (educational administration). There she has been able to fulfill her professional educational goals that she had previously given up because of her pregnancy and marriage.

3.5 Profesor Marlon

A third teacher who was raised partially by extended family members is Marlon. Born into a middle-class family in Choluteca in 1972, Marlon’s parents divorced when he was very young, and his mother (a schoolteacher) decided to raise him at her mother’s
home in Tegucigalpa, where they would have more financial stability. There Marlon finished primary school, and began his ciclo común education in the mid-1980s. As a rebellious teenager during his ciclo común studies, Marlon often disobeyed his mother and grandmother. He frequently skipped class to engage in other activities with his peers throughout the city. At that point in his education, Marlon did not have any interest in continuing on to pursue a secondary school carrera. But he had made friends with older adolescents, some of whom were normalistas. A group of these normalistas, who Marlon says self-identified as Marxists, encouraged him to join a student group of the Honduran Left that promoted socialist policies for Honduras and Latin America in general.

Although this group expressed solidarity with the FMLN and FSLN, its activism was aimed toward furthering the rights of different urban working class, campesino, and indigenous movements within Honduras – showing broad solidarity despite the divisions between these groups themselves. The normalista student group travelled extensively throughout Honduras to engage in protests, and at the young age of 14, Marlon began to receive invitations to come along to these excursions, which as he said: “forged political consciousness among young people.”

One day during his last year of ciclo común studies, Marlon left his home – without telling anyone – to travel with the student political group for a week-long meeting in Siguatepeque. The group’s goal was to ‘tomar’ (take over) a high school there, out of protest against the national security doctrine and the Honduran government’s collaboration with the US military invasion of Nicaragua and El Salvador. This sort of political action was a frequent occurrence among some of the senior members of the

43 Interview, 20 December 2012.
group, but it was the first time that Marlon was invited to participate. Marlon didn’t tell
his mother, his grandmother, or any of his teachers where he was going or what he was
doing. In the end the Honduran national police repressed the group during their protests
in Siguatepeque, and several of Marlon’s friends were imprisoned. Marlon himself was
injured during the police raid. He remembers that although some of his friends responded
violently in reaction to the police violence, he refrained, as he had promised himself to
never use violence in such situations.

When Marlon came back to his home in Tegucigalpa he was reprimanded by his
mother, who noticed his injuries. She scolded him both for what he did, and for not
letting her know where he was. Marlon’s last year in ciclo común was also a difficult
time at home in general. The only common ground that he seemed to share with his
mother was the fact that she was a schoolteacher – a profession that he considered to be
in alignment with his own political orientations. Marlon’s decision to study a carrera del
magisterio was not due however to pressure from his mother (as other daughters and sons
of teachers do experience), but rather, based on advice from his older normalista friends
from the student political group who convinced him that becoming a teacher was an
acceptable professional goal.

Upon graduating from ciclo común Marlon enrolled in the Escuela Normal de
Varones ‘Pedro Nufio’ where he continued to be involved with Left student groups in
Tegucigalpa. He received a scholarship which covered all academic-related expenses, and
he was able to continue living at home with his mother, although by then his grandmother
had passed away. At the normal school, Marlon began to develop connections between
what he was being taught to become a teacher, and the political struggles his student
group was fighting for: the end of US imperialism in Central America and more dignified labour conditions for Honduran workers. Marlon became a leader of the group and invited specific normalista colleagues to join exclusive planning committees. For Marlon, learning about schoolteachers’ labour struggles and the history of their organizing during his normal school studies was one way that he felt he himself could fit into the shifting political environment at the end of the 1980s in Central America.

By the end of his normal school career Marlon felt that he could best contribute toward his personal political goals by becoming a secondary mathematics teacher and teaching Honduran youth about how macro-level political-economic processes affect their everyday living standards. He believed that the student group he belonged to was integral to developing his own political awareness and was linked to what he had learned about political-economic processes during his normal school years.

Having graduated with good marks, Marlon was accepted into the UPNFM mathematics program in Tegucigalpa. He was therefore able to continue living with his mother (affording him the luxury of not having to work to pay for his own living expenses), and pursue his undergraduate degree full-time. At the UPNFM Marlon again became involved with Left student groups, now at the university level. With them he frequently engaged in political protests, and travelled to other regions of the country for different kinds of meetings with other Left political groups, and what he describes as “solidarity educational tours,” during the early 1990s.

While at the UPNFM Marlon met the woman he would later marry, who happened to also be from Choluteca. Upon graduating both teachers were successful in

44 Interview, 20 December 2012.
their applications through the *concurso* process for *licencias* in Choluteca. For Marlon, this meant beginning to teach math classes at a high school. After two years of working in this temporary position, Marlon was offered a *plaza* at the same high school. Since this was only a morning shift however, he subsequently applied for another job elsewhere in the south. This was difficult to obtain, at first, because the only positions available to him were distant and he would not have been able to make the commute. Then in 2007 Marlon was able to secure a second job, working an afternoon shift, at the Carías Andino school. This does require him to commute, but it is within an hour and a half drive from Choluteca. Marlon was pleased to have the opportunity to hold two positions, and owning his own vehicle facilitates this commute. At Carías Andino, Marlon became one of the first secondary school teachers to work there during the time that it was transformed from an *escuela* into a *Centro de Educación Básica* (Basic Education Centre), a process I describe in detail in Chapter 5. The Valle *director departamental* subsequently asked Marlon to teach natural science classes, despite his lack of experience in this area.

By the late 2000s Marlon had an established career and two *plazas* (permanent jobs). He then began to volunteer his time with a local credit cooperative, where, he explained, they have been delighted to have someone with an undergraduate degree in mathematics. He also became active within his *colegio magisterial*, COPEMH, after having followed his interest in their internal politics since his undergraduate studies. Marlon has however refused to run for an elected leadership position for the *colegio*, because he disagrees with the politics of the ‘*Frente ‘Fre’ de COPEMH*’ – the faction within the *colegio* that has consistently won *colegio* leadership elections on a national
level. Instead, Marlon has sided with what he considers to be the ‘most revolutionary’ of teacher groups, the ‘Frente Unitario de COPEMH.’

Marlon is aware that the *magisterio* has been plagued with *dividismo*, and understands that most of his colleagues have struggled to keep their *colegios* united. From his perspective, this has implied a weak *colegio magisterial* leadership, which has translated into mediocre labour organizing achievements for Honduran schoolteachers (a subject I return to in Chapter 6). As part of a Left minority within the most powerful of Honduras’ six *colegios magisteriales*, Marlon has been disappointed with what his *colegio* leaders have called ‘achievements’; he feels that they could do much better. In the latter part of the 2000s Marlon engaged in various protests against the policies of both the Ricardo Maduro and the Mel Zelaya governments. He is adamantly against the June 2009 coup and its outcomes; he identifies as ‘*de Resistencia*.’ But, as Marlon continues to remind those who ask him: “I, just like so many other Hondurans, have been ‘*de Resistencia*’ since long before anything to do with Mel Zelaya or *el 28 de junio.*” As he told me when discussing teachers’ positions with the *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party:

You know I’ve been *de Resistencia* since long before June 2009. I’ve always been a revolutionary, ever since I was in the normal school. But at these marches you see all sorts of people, not just people from the Left; all sorts of teachers from other regions of the country. What we share in common is that we are all so fed-up. People outside the *magisterio* might tell you that we teachers just want higher wages, but that’s not it. We march on the streets because the governments that we have had don’t respect our rights – they disregard the laws that we fought to pass. No government has given us the respect that we deserve, not even that of Mel…. It was a little better with Mel, but not much – we still had our struggles. But now it’s much worse. Ever since the *golpe de estado* things have become much worse. There will be a moment when things will just explode. The state is putting itself in
jeopardy with these reforms. They know they can’t continue like this. The truth is every one of these golpistas should be in prison for what they have done. They violate the constitution and all of the laws. But they have impunity. The armed forces protects them. The police in this country beat up the common folk and protect the criminals. And that’s what they are: criminals. Everyone knows it! So we are out there marching against all of these injustices and hoping that we might reverse the reforms. With a LIBRE government we might be able to. Honduras has never had a popular revolution, but this is the real deal! I have faith. I also have some critiques, which I will tell you some other time… but I do think it would be good for this country, a step away from neoliberalism…. Xiomara is a good candidate. We’ll talk more later. Right now I’ve got to go to class, and then we have a meeting with the director to talk about the events for this civic activity next week – the students’ parents are coming and we always have to receive them well.45

3.6 Conclusion

These individuals of slightly different ages and of distinct family backgrounds have had unique experiences with the carrera del magisterio. They do however share specific experiences and characteristics in common. Mercedes, and especially Luis, come from humble families of limited economic resources. For them, pursuing a secondary education was difficult, as their families needed to prioritize covering the expenses of more immediate needs, such the costs of food and housing. This did not seem to be the case for Marlon, although his mother did relocate to Tegucigalpa for financial reasons. In any case, these experiences of growing up with limited economic resources, and then experiencing the benefits of a formal public education (especially that of having a full-

45 Interview, 24 October 2012.
time professional position and monthly salary) contribute to why Honduran schoolteachers as a group have developed a discourse about how ‘education is the only way to escape poverty.’

Throughout this thesis we will see ethnographic examples where teachers use this line of thought as a tool for promoting the public education system in different contexts. Whether or not all Honduran schoolteachers believe the public schooling system can alleviate Hondurans from the shackles of poverty is not the point. Rather, we should recognize that schoolteachers exemplify how success in the Honduran public education system can lead to a better life. Moreover, while some of the labour achievements that teachers have won are directly related to their own rights and benefits as workers – as they so often claim, ‘todo lo que tiene el magisterio lo ha ganado a través de la lucha’ (everything that the magisterio has, it has won through its struggles) – other aspects such as the idea that education remain public, are also seen as broader social policy achievements that benefit the general Honduran population.

Schoolteachers recognize that not everyone has the same opportunities to access the national public education system. Indeed, all of these individuals had extended family members in different regions of the country, and were all fortunate enough to have had at least one family member in Tegucigalpa, which facilitated their pursuit of secondary education. Living in the capital city provided opportunities to pursue their education, even if it came with other sacrifices (such as working at a cleaning job while in the normal school). One of the central arguments of this thesis is that teachers are reflecting on their own experiences with the national public education system as they envision what it should be like. As they talked amongst themselves about the reforms, they recognized
that equal access to education is necessary if Hondurans from humble backgrounds are to take full advantage of what the public schooling system can offer.

Another commonality among the teachers examined here is that they all come from families whose livelihood strategies depended upon an urban setting. Luis’ mother was quite poor, and she lived on the outskirts of a small town in a marginalized region of the country, but subsistence agriculture or farming was never one of her livelihood strategies. Luis was therefore never expected to assist with planting or harvesting (as is generally the case with adolescent males in the countryside). Likewise, it was acceptable, if not expected, that Luis would someday seek employment opportunities in a distant city. Indeed, beyond these few examples, more generally too the typical Honduran schoolteacher does not come from a wealthy family, or even an upper-middle class household, but at the same time she/he is generally not the daughter/son of campesinos either. This is an important insight as we proceed to analyze how teachers view their own positions, and work in the name of the Honduran state, in the post-coup political context.

Several of my research participants claim that: ‘el magisterio es la carrera de los pobres’ (the magisterio is the career of the poor). This does seem to be the case, for the type of individual who pursues a career as schoolteacher generally does not have the financial means to study one of the ‘more expensive majors’ (such as medicine, law, or engineering). I would add to this phrase nonetheless, that the magisterio is also a career of those who are able to pursue a career in the first place. During the periods observed, studying at the normal school did imply that some form of paid employment would become available after graduating. The allure of a permanent job with a steady monthly
income cannot be underestimated in assessing what is meant by the phrase ‘la carrera de los pobres.’

Many of the later generations of Honduran schoolteachers (born in the late 1970s or early 1980s) are children of other schoolteachers. There is a point to be made therefore about how frequently these newer generations of schoolteachers have followed the same professional pathways as their parents. We should keep in mind however that this is not the only variable in their desires to become schoolteachers. For these younger teachers, other types of individual interests can be more important than parental pressure to pursue the career (as we saw was the case with Marlon, who considered his political orientations to be a major factor in his decision to enter the profession). In summary, the carrera del magisterio does seem to have been a viable option for the poor to become educated professionals historically. Now however we see that this is no longer the case.

Aside from Honduran schoolteachers’ social profiles as individuals who chose to pursue this career, the other question this chapter has addressed is how the profession was experienced during these time periods. It is significant to note that all three individuals entered the normal school when it was still common to receive scholarships that covered at least their tuition and educational expenses. This is no longer the case. The experience of Mercedes is especially noteworthy, as she received three years of paid living expenses while in Danlí (something not to be taken lightly in the context of poverty). All of this would lead us to conclude that the 1970s was a time of expansion of the public education sector, when the Honduran state sought to increase its number of schoolteachers by investing in the training of normal school students.
These levels of state investment had decreased by the mid-1980s, during the period of US-supported militarization. Likewise, when Luis graduated from the normal school in 1973, he was offered two different positions as a secondary school teacher even before earning his undergraduate degree. This reflects the fact that schoolteachers with UPNFM degrees used to be relatively scarce, whereas today, there is a surplus of teachers who have their undergraduate degrees and who are still unable to find work (even in the undesirable rural areas). As Marlon put it: “antes el estado carecía de profesores… ahora está totalmente saturado”,46 (before the state lacked teachers… now it’s totally saturated).

The fact that Luis was offered the position in Roatán directly by Minister Williams de Arias also demonstrates that the concurso process, while functioning in certain areas, was not the only means by which a teacher could secure a job. Here we saw that the minister chose to override the concurso process to assign a teacher with experience in natural science to an emerging high school in the Bay Islands. We might infer that this was due to the overall scarcity of schoolteachers with undergraduate degrees during this time period, but in any case this type of situation is far from the standard in contemporary Honduras. Today there are far more applicants than vacant positions – even for those in the most undesirable rural locations.

The experiences of all three individuals during the 1980s are also significant. On the one hand they show how some teachers were affected by the environment of the national security doctrine and the fear that ‘communism’ would penetrate Honduras, during which time they as individuals formed certain opinions about what their everyday

46 Interview, 18 September 2012.
work lives should, or should not, be like. On the other hand these collective experiences of being associated with ‘subversion’ are also important because they are remembered and referenced by schoolteachers in the current historical conjuncture. Today when schoolteachers organize around magisterio-related goals, or demonstrate their support for broader nationally-focused political causes such as the goals of the Resistencia/LIBRE Party, they are often referred to by national media outlets, politicians, entrepreneurs or otherwise as ‘antipatriotic,’ ‘criminal,’ or even ‘communist.’

Schoolteachers as a group have certain shared experiences from the 1980s which they can reference and compare with the strategies of post-coup governments for repressing schoolteachers in Honduras (which in fact are shockingly similar). As one knowledgeable COLPROSUMAH member told me: “In the 1980s the state would disappear teachers for organizing, and they would blame the violence on the FMLN or the FSLN. Now they continue to kill us and they place all the blame on the mareros (gang members).”

Finally, it is important to understand that Honduran schoolteachers are a group of people who have engaged different state institutions through various techniques – often seeing certain traditions and laws as useful resources, while recognizing that others are working against their interests as education workers. This occurs in ways beyond simply funding national public education and teachers’ own education credentials. For instance, while the 316 members were disappearing Honduran schoolteachers during the 1980s, the Ministry of Education was sympathetic to their petitions to be transferred because of this practice. Another example of how the state can be seen as a resource for teachers is with

---

47 Interview, 13 March 2012.
the different kinds of laws that it passes. We saw that in the aftermath of the June 2009 coup when members of the armed forces demanded that Luis remove Resistencia members from the premise of his school, he announced that ‘by Honduran law’ he had the right to grant or deny permission to the school (which was his own interpretation of the Estatuto del Docente).

In this next chapter we will see various ways in which teachers are interpreting the significance of different kinds of laws – determining which ones are favourable or not, and why. In Chapter 7 I will return to this idea that the state can be seen as a resource for schoolteachers, as they seek to promote the expansion of state services in general, while criticizing post-coup governance in the current context.

The stories of how these three individuals became involved with a carrera del magisterio and began to pursue distinct professional paths has shown us details about how some differently-situated individuals have experienced the profession of schoolteacher in Honduras historically. Such ethnographic details underscore the different types of aspirations that these individuals have had, and what sorts of understandings they have had about how their profession worked in the past. We have seen important commonalities and shared experiences among them, and we have observed how the profession functioned historically. These are important insights as we begin to explore how teachers understand the significance of the reforms and the current post-coup political environment; as we study their strategies for implementing their own visions for what governing policies and the state in Honduras should be like; and examine their actions as ‘trabajadores de educación’ (education workers), and as agents both of state formation and of social and political change.
4 Reading the Political Landscape and Navigating the Reforms

4.1 Introduction

This chapter initiates my ethnographic analysis of how Honduran schoolteachers were reading the post-coup political landscape; learning what each new law entailed; and navigating through these changes to the education sector during the 2012 school year. Rather than merely announce what the new laws are, here I aim to show how Honduran schoolteachers themselves were learning about what each new law entailed – a process that took place during the entire school year as they read the political landscape and made decisions based on the information they knew at the time. I was thus learning about the dynamics of the *magisterio* and these new laws in contemporary Honduras during a time when my research participants themselves were also learning about all the changes that the reforms implied. Here I hope to capture the process of reflection and re-evaluation that this involved for the teachers with whom I work.

I begin by describing how I met Esdras – the director of Carías Andino – and my first trip to his school, in which he shares with me his interpretation of the significance of the reforms. I then use Esdras’ words as a guide for exploring the extent to which policies written in legislation do or do not become a lived reality on the ground. To this end, I examine the ways in which teachers attempted to openly demonstrate that they were abiding by the reforms through: 1) increasing the student population of their schools; 2) monitoring the behaviour of their own colleagues; and 3) soliciting local funding for school infrastructure projects. For the third point, in addition to reflecting on the experience of rural Carías Andino school, I discuss comparable processes at the second school where I did research, José Cecilio del Valle in the city of San Lorenzo.
4.2 Meeting Director Esdras

Since my MA fieldwork in 2009 during the outbreak of the coup I had heard stories of Esdras – a humble schoolteacher whose bravery and resilience made him a well-known and active participant of the Resistencia. Because of his tireless involvement, however, Esdras was rarely in San Lorenzo during this time. Most of the stories I heard about him were through his mother, who would come to my house after each major violent act against Resistencia members. She would discuss how she believed his involvement with the movement had gone too far, explaining that she was worried about his safety (see Levy 2010).

In the immediate eruption of the coup Esdras joined many teachers across the country in a national paro to protest the illegal and violent overthrow of President Mel Zelaya. For this purpose, he frequently travelled to Tegucigalpa to participate in protests on the streets of the capital city. Later, when Mel was in Nicaragua gaining support for his return to Honduras, Esdras crossed the land border clandestinely and travelled to Ocotal and later to Managua as part of a group of Resistencia supporters who joined their overthrown president in his attempts to return to Honduras by land (a story I tell in Chapter 7). Once United Nations and Organization of American States resolution talks began to occur outside of Central America and Mel attempted to fly from Washington to Tegucigalpa, Esdras was also one of several Resistencia members who travelled to Tegucigalpa’s airport on July 5 to await the plane, which did not land because the Honduran armed forces placed a military Jeep on the runway, and shot at the many
civilians who awaited their president, murdering a twelve year-old boy.\footnote{The name of the aforementioned ‘5\textsuperscript{th} of July movement’ within LIBRE comes from this horrific experience.} In September 2009, once Mel Zelaya returned to Honduras through a \textit{punto ciego} (blind spot) in the border between Honduras and Nicaragua and sought refuge at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Esdras was also one of several supporters who remained at the embassy alongside Mel, during moments when the order from the movement was to protect the president in case of any assassination attempts. In summary, this humble schoolteacher from San Lorenzo did not miss a formal, although dangerous, \textit{Resistencia} event.

It was in this context of Esdras’ family members expressing their concerns for his safety that I would hear stories about his involvement with the \textit{Resistencia} – his perseverance toward obtaining his goals, how this influenced his strong dedication to the movement, and the fact that he was one of several teachers from the south who had joined the FNRP in order to defy the coup peacefully, in a popular struggle to demand the return of democracy to Honduras. Despite my previously-established network of schoolteachers in the region, I had yet to actually meet and talk with Esdras until January 2012 when he came by my house to speak with my father-in-law about the reforms. Esdras wanted to share his knowledge about the implications that one of the new laws would have for teachers’ economic benefits and their pension plans in particular:

\begin{quote}
Did you hear that with the new INPREMA law, they will be taking out twice as much from our wages, and we’ll only get back eighty percent [instead of ninety percent] when we retire! I can’t believe these guys. Who do they think they are? My mother is close to retirement anyways. She says that COLPROSUMAH has a lawyer who can help with the process of submitting retirement paperwork, but that we have to act fast. I don’t know about you, but we’re going to Tegus next
\end{quote}
week to hurry up and submit her retirement paperwork. They say if you do this in the next two weeks, you can bypass the new law.\(^49\)

“INPREMA” or the Instituto Nacional de Previsión del Magisterio (Teachers’ National Pension Institute) is a state-run financial institute that manages the benefits that all schoolteachers have access to, such as loans, insurance plans, and retirement benefits/pension plans. The new Ley General del INPREMA (General Law of INPREMA) takes away several financial benefits from teachers and changes the terms of their retirement plans. Articles 27 and 28 of the new law stipulate that teachers will now pay eight percent of their salaries to the institute, while the government continues to contribute twelve percent. Previously, teachers would only pay four percent of their monthly earnings (see República de Honduras 2011b).

In addition to having to pay more into INPREMA from their already meagre salaries, teachers will receive less “basic monthly salary” from their pension funds once retired. Whereas previously, a teacher’s monthly salary once retired was calculated based on the average of the last 36 months of service, Article 126 of the new law stipulates that this amount will be calculated based on the average of between the last 120 and 180 months of service. Since most teachers receive a higher salary toward the end of their careers – due to raises based on years of service, additional education credentials, and taking on higher paying positions, such as school director – Article 126 represents a major reduction in the actual amount of “basic monthly salary” a teacher receives after retirement. Furthermore, as Esdras explained to my father-in-law, Articles 78 and 79 of the new law establish that the “basic monthly salary” can only reach a maximum of

\(^{49}\) Informal gathering among schoolteachers, 31 January 2012.
eighty percent of what teachers were making at the time of retirement, if the teacher retires between the ages of 58 and 65 (see República de Honduras 2011b). Only after age 65, can this average calculation reach ninety percent of the teacher’s salary at the time of retirement (as was previously allowed at 58 years of age with the old INPREMA law). The new law thus negatively affects Honduran schoolteachers’ livelihoods both immediately (by decreasing their net salaries) and in the long term (by decreasing the overall funding available for retirement and life insurance).

My father-in-law’s 40 years of service had prepared him for a frugal yet stable retirement. With the new INPREMA law however, he would lose a significant amount of the post-retirement income and benefits he had been counting on. The idea that he could avoid this from happening, even if it meant retiring sooner than he had planned, motivated him to contact his colegio magisterial COPEMH, and enquire about their lawyers and how they could help members with the process of submitting retirement paperwork before the law took effect.

As he and Esdras continued to talk about the many teachers who were rushing to retire, I waited patiently for a chance to join in the conversation and finally introduce myself to Esdras. As I was still just beginning to learn about the many acronyms for the different teacher organizations and services, this was no easy task. I did remember hearing, however, that whenever Esdras was not working he spent his free time fishing at San Lorenzo’s industrial cargo ship port, el Puerto de Henecán. Despite my prolonged and frequent visits to the region since 2001, I had never actually participated in this common pastime of many men from the region. In fact, I had only fished a few times as a kid and knew next to nothing about it. Still, I used this topic to break the ice with Esdras,
as it was certainly a less intrusive subject than his well-known and controversial involvement with the Resistencia or his opinions on the reforms for that matter.

As a foreigner, even a well-adapted semi-insider, I still considered it wise to tread lightly when discussing politically-sensitive subjects with people I didn’t know. The fact that Esdras planned to travel with his mother to Tegucigalpa and seek out the services of COLPROSUMAH lawyers and defy the terms of the new INPREMA law could very well have been considered information too private to share with a North American whom he had never met. As I would later learn, there are many sensitive subjects about teachers’ work and personal involvement with resisting policies of governance that they would not discuss openly without the prior establishment of strong levels of trust.

Esdras and I thus began our new friendship discussing the types of fish I could expect to catch in the Gulf of Fonseca, and how fishing helps to subsidize his family’s food budget. He explained to me that teachers in Honduras, despite their status as educated professionals, are still underpaid workers. He described how because of this most teachers try to engage in some other activity to subsidize their family’s income, such as running small businesses, subsistence farming, or even fishing. This led to further conversations about teachers’ positioning in Honduran society, and the work that schoolteachers do.

Esdras recognizes that teachers are generally more financially solvent than the majority of Honduran working-class families, which is why he considers teachers to be members of the middle class. Schoolteachers are able to save for specific material goals, such as the purchase of a car or house. But, on a monthly basis, many teachers struggle to get by and – especially when they are not paid on time – this results in taking out loans to
be able to meet their basic subsistence needs. Once Esdras understood my research project on teachers’ work and positioning in Honduran society, he offered to take me to the rural school where he held the position of director. He explained that if I really wanted to understand teachers’ work, I would have to visit them at their place of work, in order to see and feel the environment at their school and understand the projects in which they were engaged on a daily basis.

The Carías Andino school located in El Garrobo lies between three different rural communities, about twenty minutes outside of San Lorenzo by car. The school itself is only a few kilometres from the Pan-American Highway, but most of its students reside significantly further away, deep within the countryside. Aside from a few eateries and auto mechanic workshops along the highway near the bus stop, the residents of these communities make their living through subsistence agriculture, selling watermelons near the highway during harvest season, and low-paying temporary manual labour jobs (such as construction workers, security guards, janitors, or shrimp packers) in the cities of San Lorenzo and Nacaome. The area also has a reputation for high levels of violence, drugs, and prostitution, attributed locally to the effects of poverty (despite the fact that these problems are usually associated with urban rather than rural areas).

4.3 Teacher Poverty under the Pepe Lobo Regime

Shortly after Esdras offered to take me to his school, he confessed that he actually did not have enough gas money to take me in his car, given that he still had not been paid for the month of January. He was embarrassed to have to tell me that if I wanted to go that day, it would have to be in my car. When we arrived to El Garrobo, Esdras rolled down his window and asked me to drive slowly over the dirt road that leads up to the
school. As we drove along, Esdras shouted greetings to everyone we passed, announcing that he was on his way to the centro and that he would need his security guard to unlock the front gate. We arrived with a group of roughly thirty children, five or six adult women, and even some elderly men behind us, all gathered because of Esdras’ presence. While we waited for the security guard to come, Esdras took advantage of his presence in the community to announce that classes would start on February 6 (the first day of the school year), something that seemed otherwise unconfirmed for the community members.

Esdras told the security guard that he was just there to pick up some documents, and that I was a friend of his from San Lorenzo. The security guard drove in with us, locking the gate (and the community members) behind us. Esdras asked the guard to open the doors to the director’s office and the computer lab. Inside his office, Esdras had on display a map of Honduras, the Honduran flag, a framed copy of the Honduran national anthem, and framed copies of the school’s history, vision statement, and mission statement. He spent about an hour showing me digital photos of what the school looked like previously – proudly showing me how the school’s physical structure has changed over the years. Outside Esdras then gave me a tour of the courtyard, and showed me the walkway that was constructed in 2009, the gardens and trees planted in 2010, and the new roofs installed over various classrooms in 2011, all under his mandate. Esdras explained that as the director, part of his responsibility was to make sure that each year he completed at least one construction project to improve the infrastructure of the school. He was most proud of the computer lab that was inaugurated in late 2010, after he secured funding from different Honduran NGOs and the Japanese Embassy. Esdras was excited to show me the roughly thirty computers that the school has and the two air conditioners
that came with the room. He said that his dream is to someday get an LED projector so students can give Power Point presentations with the school’s computers.

With both air conditioners on, Esdras continued to show me digital photos he had of the Carías Andino staff on a computer in the lab, explaining how long each teacher had been working at the school and which subjects they taught. He said that if I was interested, I could come meet Mercedes, the sub-director, during a formal planning meeting they would have together the next day, explaining that as long as it was OK with her, I could have a regular presence at the centro in order to conduct my research and interview whichever teachers were interested in talking with me.

While my mind wandered about all the ethnographic opportunities this arrangement would afford me, I took advantage of interviewing Esdras further about the reforms. I asked him what he thought about the Ley Fundamental de Educación (Fundamental Law of Education) – the new law that most directly affects how teachers go about doing their jobs. Through ambiguous criteria it says that Honduras will increase its academic standards and now offer new subjects in schools. It also demands that teachers solicit funding from municipal and departmental governments and from the private sector, to fund both their school infrastructure projects and new academic programs such as computer literacy, which they are now required to teach (see República de Honduras 2012). While the move toward a privatized and decentralized system is gradual, regional governments already had funding they could allocate toward education expenses, and teachers were already expected to seek out this funding and abide by this law as of 2012.
Esdras explained to me that in his opinion, the *Ley Fundamental* is part of the post-coup government’s effort to remain on good terms with international finance institutions, by creating a meaner, leaner, neoliberal state. He went on to say that:

These guys [in the government] want to make things seem much more efficient by bringing us toward a decentralized, privatized system. They’re not going to be happy until they’ve privatized everything! But you know, there are some good things about these reforms; we should be more efficient with our work. The thing is, we’re underdeveloped here. And education is the only way out of poverty. But this law asks us to do things that we could never really do. Look around you. Do you think that every school here in Honduras has a computer lab like this one? Ha! We are lucky to have this here, because the Japanese Embassy approved my funding request. But most schools here in the south do not have such a luxury. There are plenty of schools further inward, deep within the communities, that don’t even have electricity! And then there’s this law, which states that we are now going to teach computer literacy to every Honduran child. It says that if a given school doesn’t teach computer literacy to the students, then its teachers can be fired. Imagine if you were a teacher in one of those rural communities… what are you going to do? So you see, there is no agreement between the law and our reality. We see this time and again here in Honduras. Those who are really high up, you know, people like the president and those in the congress, they always make up these new laws to please the World Bank. But these laws aren’t consistent with the Honduran reality. I doubt if those who wrote the reforms even know where my school is! You know, these guys have probably never even taught a class themselves! That’s just the thing. The *Ley Fundamental de Educación* can never get fully realized. It’s impossible – even if we all really wanted to. Not here in Honduras. We have good ideas sometimes, but they don’t ever materialize into anything. Here, there’s always a huge difference between theory and practice.  

---

50 Interview, 31 January 2012.
Esdras’ comments about the difference between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ of governing policies serve as a guide for understanding two key themes of this thesis which I will begin to examine in this chapter.

First is the fact that state institutions in Honduras continue to make unrealistic promises to the population about how they will improve public services. These promises often go unfulfilled, especially under post-coup regimes of neoliberal governance.51 Indeed, one of the major components of the Resistencia movement and its members’ vision to re-found the state is to rethink the proper use of government revenues, and to realign promises for state services with achievable policy goals that benefit the majority of the Honduran population (as opposed to an elite few). The teachers with whom I work want to forge a society in which education and opportunities for youth are prioritized, where the state has a central role in funding and overseeing this social investment, and where access to national public education is fair and equal.

The second major theme that Esdras’ comments allude to is the extent to which policies of governance on paper and in ‘theory’ actually do get implemented in ‘practice,’ on the ground. Despite its significance for the study of state formation, we continue to know more about policies themselves as they are written in legislation than we do about the processes through which they are actually implemented by real people through mundane everyday practices (but see Heyman 1995 and Smart 2002 for notable exceptions). With the ethnographic examples that follow, I show that although Honduran

51 As the work of James Scott shows, these unfulfilled promises are not necessarily intentional (1998). In fact, even some of the best intentions for good governance by state planners have had unintended negative consequences. The polarizing political environment of post-coup Honduras has however generated considerable everyday discussion about which specific governments, and which policies in particular, are to be blamed for specific failures and unfulfilled promises.
schoolteachers reject the overall neoliberal spirit of the education reforms, there are still certain elements of these new laws they find useful for meeting basic schooling needs in the context of widespread poverty and political uncertainty – realities that affect both teachers as workers and the populations with whom they work. Here I suggest that as these front-line state agents necessarily implement aspects of the reforms, they are also enacting their own visions for what the state in Honduras could be like – one that fulfills realistic promises and meets certain basic needs of the majority. These themes will become important throughout this thesis as we continue the story about how teachers navigated the reforms.

As Esdras and I drove back to San Lorenzo that day he asked to use my cell phone. He said that he didn’t have any credit on his, but that he was tired of just waiting – he needed to call the bank and see if he had been paid for January. He explained that his wife and parents were all teachers too, and that nobody in his household had been paid. After the bank’s negative response to his query, he shouted in frustration, “Dammit! This Pepe Lobo. He doesn’t know who he’s dealing with. People like that have it coming to them. With Mel, we were always paid on time. It was always on the 20th of every month. With Lobo, who knows when or if they’ll pay us.” It was already January 31.

Esdras’ experience of not being paid on time – of lacking money to drive to his school or even to make a phone call – highlights the fact that teachers’ work is chronically underpaid. In proceeding to analyze teachers’ actions and their challenges to the post-coup government, it is important to remember that despite their status as educated professionals, many Honduran teachers live in poverty. Even where their employment status is stable, their situations are often experienced as precarious. If
Honduran schoolteachers are not paid fully and punctually, their families cannot meet their basic subsistence needs.

The rest of our trip back was spent discussing the Honduran political environment under Pepe Lobo. Esdras and I talked about how even two and half years after the coup the violent repression against Resistencia leaders continues, and how teachers as a group are key figures of the movement. We also discussed the success of the Resistencia – how the movement had produced a strong presidential candidate, and that while we still did not know what the results of the presidential elections would be, LIBRE had already been successful in forming political consciousness among the Honduran population. Esdras characterized this as an ‘awakening’ – explaining that a good portion of the Honduran population has now been enlightened about the injustices implicit in certain governing policies and state practices, while others have still not ‘woken up,’ ‘opened their eyes,’ and ‘seen the light.’ Such political consciousness has enabled those in solidarity with the movement to criticize ‘the oligarchy’ in general, and even identify specific landed elite families who have benefited from structural mechanisms that keep the majority in poverty.

This awareness of the alignment between the government and ‘the oligarchy’ has led teachers and other Resistencia supporters to speak of what they call an ‘inevitable revolution’ in post-coup Honduras – based on socialist ideals, but also based on creating state institutions that work well, and that are capable of grasping the ‘Honduran reality.’ LIBRE supporters understand these goals as achievable through ‘re-founding the state and society.’ In 2012 the party was making concrete plans about how to achieve this through a national constituent assembly to re-write the constitution.
Yet state formation occurs not only through such formal projects but also through everyday activities. It is within this context of people’s envisioning what the state could be, what social and economic policies Honduras should have, and their actions toward that end in their everyday lives, that we can discern a certain revolutionary spirit in this particular moment of Honduran history. One of the arguments of this thesis is that Honduran schoolteachers are the everyday leaders of the *Resistencia* political movement, and that through their social roles as thinkers and community organizers, they use their mobility and connectedness with national and international communities to cultivate this revolutionary spirit among those who continue to resist post-coup policies and envision a fundamentally different path for the country. An examination of schoolteachers’ everyday practices helps us grasp these broader processes.

4.4 Directors’ Meeting in Preparation for Teachers’ Council Meeting

Esdras followed through with his promise to introduce me to Mercedes, inviting me to accompany him to a private meeting between them on February 1, in preparation for their first teachers’ council meeting the following day. The purpose of the school administrators’ meeting was to plan together what to say to their staff about the reforms, and to prepare themselves for supervising the upcoming school year in light of these changes.

At age 38, Esdras was still considered a relatively young school director. His 50-year-old sub-director, Mercedes, had significantly more teaching experience than him. According to Esdras, Mercedes sometimes has the final word in school-related events, even though he was the director. This is why Esdras deferred to sub-director Mercedes
before giving me permission to conduct research at the school. The meeting took place in the school’s air-conditioned computer lab, with the security guard standing outside the room, monitoring the door and telling community members who had gathered outside that the directors were in a meeting. It was clear to me that Esdras and Mercedes were collegial, but not friendly enough to have socialized together outside the workplace over the December 2011 – January 2012 break. After they briefly asked each other how their vacations were and commented that they still had not been paid, Esdras introduced me to Mercedes:

This is Jordan, from the US. He has a master’s degree in anthropology, and now he’s going for his doctorate. He lives in Canada, but he’s married to a Sanlorenzana. He’s been coming here for like thirteen years. He knows his way around. And he’s writing this thesis about the magisterio here in Honduras. His father-in-law is a schoolteacher too. In any case, he is interested in writing a thesis about teachers and politics in Honduras. He was talking to me yesterday about the Ley Fundamental and its implications for education in Honduras. He likes talking about that stuff. He’s actually quite knowledgeable about these reforms. You know, most gringos don’t even speak much Spanish. So I told him that he could come to our centro….52

Sub-director Mercedes interrupted Esdras: “But he should know that our education system here in Honduras is very different from that of Canada. We don’t have a very good system here for him to look at.” Esdras continued by saying: “Well that’s just the thing, he’s interested in the Honduran magisterio.”

I was eager to clarify my research intentions to the sub-director, but Esdras continued talking about me (rather accurately) on my behalf. Mercedes continued to

52 Meeting among school directors, 1 February 2012.
question Esdras why I, as a foreign doctoral student, would want to come to their centro in rural Honduras: “If he wants to know about Honduran education, why doesn’t he just talk with his wife, or read a book, or something like this? Didn’t she go to school here [in Honduras]?” Esdras continued to talk about me to Mercedes, mentioning things that he had heard about me, without me having told him. They maintained a dialogue about me as if I was not present in the room:

Well the thing is that Jordan has interest in talking with our teachers. He actually does know some teachers, you know. He has experiences with the NGO, you know that one in San Lorenzo, *Save the Children*. He’s done volunteer work for them in the past. So Jordan actually does have a lot of experience here. He’s not just any backpacking gringo, that is. He can look after himself.  

At this point Mercedes still did not seem very convinced. She had yet to look me in the eyes, speak directly to me, or even offer to shake my hand….

Oh yeah, and one more thing about Jordan… he is whole-heartedly ¡de pura Resistencia! You know, he was here on June 28 when they kidnapped Mel.

Upon finding out that I supported the Resistencia and was in solidarity with their movement, Mercedes’ attitude toward my presence radically changed. She suddenly hugged me, looked me in the eye, and said that it would be a pleasure to have me do research at their centro. I was surprised how drastically her attitude toward me and my research had changed. Mercedes suddenly welcomed my questions with enthusiasm. We began to share stories about where we each were when we learned about Mel’s

---

53 Meeting among school directors, 1 February 2012.  
54 Meeting among school directors, 1 February 2012.
kidnapping, and how confusing daily life was during the outbreak of the coup, and
generally the difficulties of coming to grips with such sudden political change.

This anecdote illuminates how meaningful solidarities with the Resistencia can be
for certain teachers, as well as how trust in an ethnographer is established in
contemporary Honduras. Indeed, Mercedes did not seem to care that I had been coming
to southern Honduras since 2001, that I had previous NGO experience working among
teachers, or even that I had married a Honduran woman from the region whose parents
were both well-known schoolteachers. All Mercedes seemed to care about was the fact
that I was ‘de Resistencia.’ Throughout the 2012 school year, when introducing me to
specific Resistencia-supporting individuals, Esdras continued to present me as ‘de pura
Resistencia’ (about which I learned to trust his judgment).

Mercedes sat next to me during the meeting and talked enthusiastically with me
about her political opinions and how the experience of the 2009 coup changed her life.
While Esdras wrote ideas on the blackboard about what their CEB should aim to achieve
during the 2012 school year in light of the reforms, Mercedes whispered to me her
opinions on the strong golpista campaign to defame and discredit schoolteachers. She
explained that the country’s mainstream news media outlets are blaming schoolteachers
for all aspects of Honduras’ dysfunctional education system. Mercedes spoke about how
El Heraldo, the most popular national (golpista) newspaper, has been publishing
misleading articles about how teachers plan to walk out on the first day of classes. She
underscored that despite the fact that there has been no official FOMH order for teachers
to withhold their labour, there are many who quite simply won’t be able to afford the
transportation expense of travelling to work for the first day of classes, if they are not
paid beforehand. Mercedes said that here they were, twelve days late for the first payment of the year, and yet the Ministry of Education expects everyone to come to work on February 6. She said that the only way she was able to pay for her bus fare from Nacaome, to attend the meeting, was because her daughter had been working as a street vendor of cell phone SIM cards, and managed to give her enough money for the bus. “So you see, there is the state, brainwashing the Honduran. Where is the news article about how we are still not paid!? There’s a strong campaign against us and our work,” she said.

Esdras explained to Mercedes that this year he will be working hard to *gestionar* (seek out and negotiate) more funds to refurbish a classroom, and hopefully to make a multi-sport court where students can play basketball and other sports on a cement pad. He asked Mercedes to be in charge of all the pedagogical aspects of running the school, and told her that this year they will have to make sure that all Carías Andino teachers keep up with their academic statistic log books. Esdras said that there are some aspects of the new law – the *Ley Fundamental* – that he likes:

As you know Mercedes, we do have a few problematic teachers here. You know, as do I, that we have some lazy people working here. That one teacher, Marilu, hardly ever shows up! She’s always asking me for permission to take yet another personal day…. We can no longer put up with that kind of attitude. Do you have any idea how easy it will be for them [the district and departmental directors] to fire us now? We have a very delicate situation on our hands. But I think we can be smart about how we move forward from here.55

Mercedes seemed to agree with the director’s statement. She turned toward me, speaking loud enough for Esdras to hear her, and said: “Here, we’re not afraid of this new law.”

55 Meeting among school directors, 1 February 2012.
4.5 First Teachers’ Council Meeting

The next day, before reading over the agenda, Esdras introduced me to the group of Carías Andino teachers – explaining that I am in solidarity with the Resistencia, and would be writing about the Honduran magisterio for my PhD. He announced that any teacher interested in talking with me could do so on an individual basis, and that he and Mercedes as directors had given me permission to come and go at Carías Andino throughout the school year. I briefly introduced myself to the group, clarifying my intentions as a researcher, and saying that I hoped to get to know each and every one of them, and that I was happy to be able to participate in their meeting. Esdras then began his first teachers’ council meeting on February 2 with stern messages and instructions for his staff:

Compañeros maestros [teacher colleagues], I can assure you that we have now officially lost our job security. This is a very delicate situation, and we must proceed cautiously. 2011 has already come and gone; we must now think about 2012. I want everyone to do their own analysis of what the COMDEs mean for us, and then reflect upon how you can each improve your own: a) personal behaviour, and b) pedagogical activities [writing these two items on the black board]. I am telling you that these reforms are a reality; in fact, they are already here! We all have to do a better job, because I warn you that the criticisms, evaluations, and the supervisions are coming! And I can assure you that I am not going to lose my job due to someone else’s mistake. I am here asking you today from the bottom of my heart that we all change. And please don’t see me as the ogre here either – this is not my doing, it’s the law.⁵⁶

---

⁵⁶ Teachers’ council meeting, 2 February 2012.
Esdras’ opening statement was met with anger and frustration from the other teachers at Carías Andino. At this point most of the teachers present had already been informed by their colegio leaders – or had heard via word-of-mouth – about the implications of the March 2011 Ley de Incentivo a la Participación Comunitaria para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad de Educación (Law of Incentive for Community Participation for the Improvement of Education Quality). As the first new law of the post-coup education reforms that aimed specifically to discipline teachers as workers, the ‘Ley de Participación Comunitaria’ (as teachers call it) creates the “COMDE” or the Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo Educativo (Municipal Council of Education Development) and its more fluid counterpart the “CED” Consejo Escolar de Desarrollo (School Development Council). Teachers were learning about the implications of this new law by talking with each other during these initial meetings.

The COMDE consists of different local interested parties including one representative from the municipal government; one local school district official; one member of the school directors’ council; one member of a student government association; one dirigente magisterial; one parent from the Sociedad de Padres de Familia; one member of the municipal sponsorship council; and finally, one representative from a municipal government-supported NGO (see República de Honduras 2011a). The CED is simply a group of COMDE supporters, and has rather open membership. Whereas anyone can become part of the CED, the COMDE has appointed leadership positions.

The Ley de Participación Comunitaria stipulates that, with the purpose of promoting parental and local participation to create quality education, the COMDEs will
be involved in soliciting and allocating funding for school projects, approving local school policies, and creating relations with regional development councils. Further, as Article 2 of the law states, the COMDEs will also serve as a ‘veeduría social’ or ‘social inspector’ which verifies that: 1) teachers show up to teach their classes, 2) their schools fulfill the required 200 days of instruction during the academic year; 3) they are operating in conformity with municipal and national education guidelines; and 4) no schools are over staffed (relative to their enrolment numbers) at any point (see República de Honduras 2011a).

Teachers also point out that when and if the COMDEs communicate that teachers are complying with the guidelines, their schools will receive ‘incentives’ for such good behaviour. According to Article 12, such incentives include financial resources allocated from the central government (for school infrastructure projects), teaching resources (such as computers, text books, and library materials), and public recognition of their success (see República de Honduras 2011a). This means that only schools successful under the stipulations of the reforms will have full access to basic educational resources they need to function. Together these organizations serve as a powerful mechanism to supervise and discipline teachers, with the legal right to audit those teachers whose behaviour they suspect is illegal, immoral, or simply not supporting the goals of the current government’s broader plan de nación (nation plan). Most schoolteachers, in turn, consider these organizations to be a network of coup-supporting orejas (ears for espionage) that should be feared. Teachers were thus talking adamantly about the effects of these laws by learning about each other’s experiences and hearing stories of how the COMDE had affected fellow schoolteachers.
During the first teachers’ council meeting, several Carías Andino teachers spoke out to Director Esdras about how it is unfair to allow someone who is not even a teacher, and likely has not even visited their school, evaluate their performance and professional conduct. Marlon stood up and argued: “How can it be that some empresario (entrepreneur or business owner) from Nacaome can now tell me how to teach? I’ve been working with the people of this community for the last five years. He probably doesn’t even know where El Garrobo is, let alone anything about the dynamics of our centro!” Other teachers whispered among themselves about how the new INPREMA law was already reducing their wages and benefits – how it had become clear that the state no longer needs teachers and that Honduras’ education system would soon be reduced in size through budget cuts and eventually be completely privatized. As the anger of the group continued to grow, Sub-director Mercedes stood up to share her own analysis of Honduras’ political landscape vis-à-vis public education policies. Mercedes’ loud, clear speech was met with prompt silence from her angry subordinates:

Look here compañeros, Director Esdras and I are well aware, as I imagine all of you are too, that these reforms are in fact one step further toward the privatization of our education system. By passing the Ley Fundamental, the state has put itself in jeopardy! We are all a part of this country, but it seems that now the rich empresarios of the oligarchy want to take over our education system too, and see that the state has less of a role to play in what happens here. And we need to be prepared. Nobody has done an analysis of what this all means – the fact that they are now treating us like a private company. But even though this will be a slow process, we all need to be prepared. Our purpose here today is to help you. Let’s be honest. We have been at fault here too. We are all guilty of being more familiar with what our rights and benefits are, than with what our obligations are. The Estatuto del Docente grants us certain rights, it’s true, but this same law also
implies that we have certain obligations and responsibilities. We need to be prepared. Just as the campesino doesn’t go out to the field without his machete, neither should we come into our centro without knowledge of these laws.\textsuperscript{57}

While Mercedes spoke, Esdras stepped outside to talk with students’ parents who had come uninvited onto the school’s campus to insist that teachers clarify whether or not there would be class that upcoming Monday, February 6. When Esdras stepped back inside, he took over the meeting once again, and echoed his previous statements about the need for teachers to change their own conduct:

I am asking you please; let’s change our attitudes. We need to be more careful with everything we do. One little mistake, even the tiniest, could cost us our jobs. I for one am not going to lose my job due to someone else’s error. You need to keep up with your daily class attendance logs, and your pedagogical control notebooks. We did a good job overall with this stuff last year, but we need to be prepared for any inspection. The Sociedad de Padres de Familia is observing us with more vigilance now, but we’re going to make sure that they sign their Acta de Compromiso (Act of Commitment) whereby they will swear to make their children abide by the code of conduct in our centro. Just as the parents are strict with us, let’s be strict with them. But we do need to change, compañeros maestros. Where is the conduct of the teacher? Who is in charge of the classroom – the students, or you? If you have problematic students, kick them out of class! If their parents come here to complain, remind them of the Acta that they signed.\textsuperscript{58}

At this point teachers began to talk among themselves about which students had behaviour problems in the past, which parents could be considered allies, and which ones were more likely to denounce teachers’ actions as part of the COMDEs or otherwise.

\textsuperscript{57} Teachers’ council meeting, 2 February 2012.
\textsuperscript{58} Teachers’ council meeting, 2 February 2012.
Both directors joined in the conversation about particular parents who had been helpful in the past, while mentioning others who were always ready to criticise their work and who did not support school projects in general, but how the *Acta de Compromiso* might help to give them some leverage when disputes arose with the parents.

A discussion emerged about what infrastructural projects they could propose for the 2012 school year. Director Esdras already had some possibilities in mind:

We have to sell the image of our centro. And it’s all about soliciting funds for new projects. This is how it is compañeros. We need to grow our centro and attract new students. We have had some students from Nacaome here before, which was a success, but we have also had some students from these same communities at *El Garrobo* drop out of our centro…. I don’t see how, but I have heard that some even would rather to go school in San Lorenzo. We cannot permit students to leave our centro any longer, regardless of the reason. They need to stay here until they graduate. So I have been thinking that what we need is a music band, and a multi-sport court. I know it seems like a big goal for us, but only he who never tries will not achieve anything. This could go over well with the parents. People like that stuff. These people here in the communities, they live for soccer – that’s a sure thing. But some people like basketball too. So let’s do it. And it’s all about making an accurate, real budget. You need to have researched exactly what the costs will be, not just an estimate. You need to already have an albañil, and know the input costs. When I went to the Japanese Embassy for the funds for our computer lab, this is what I had to do: make a real budget and follow through. Those of you who are on the committee for gestión (fundraising) will need to work closely with me this year so that we can get the municipal government to give us this money. Let’s plan to have a rough outline of these budgets by February 29. We can’t just walk up to the mayor’s office and say ‘give us money,’ we have to make it look professional.\(^{59}\)

---

\(^{59}\) Teachers’ council meeting, 2 February 2012.
Most of the teachers at Carías Andino live in Nacaome proper, and everyone knows the mayor and other municipal government officials. This prompted discussions about how cheap the Nacaome mayor had been with other kinds of municipal projects, how he was not someone very likely to support a rural school like Carías Andino. Some teachers then argued that since several of them are self-identifying members of the Resistencia/LIBRE Party, and that since the current government in Nacaome is of the Liberal Party, it might be more difficult for them to secure funding. After all, as Resistencia members, many of these teachers participated in a boycott of the 2010 elections – during the coup-installed government – that put these politicians in power. Some teachers commented that with these reforms, they would have to maintain strong personal relationships with the mayor in power or else they could forget about securing funding for their centro. Other teachers discussed how impractical the Ley Fundamental is for the Honduran reality, highlighting that while politicians never keep their promises to fund infrastructural projects, if they as teachers failed to complete a project for their school they would be criticized. Still others commented that although there are sometimes great ideas for how to make things better, such as designing computer literacy courses, these ideas are rarely put into practice in Honduras.

In the context of discussing which politicians do not comply with their duties, some teachers mentioned that the Lobo government had not even distributed current textbooks, and that they were still using textbooks published during previous

---

60 Textbooks in Honduras are normally updated with each new government, and each incoming president has the power to appoint the Minister of education who oversees this process, even though Honduran teachers themselves can contribute to writing the textbooks. While this certainly does raise interesting questions about what is taught in the
governments. They argued that if the government was not even competent enough to provide updated teaching materials, then how could they as individual workers be expected to solicit funding not only for school infrastructure projects, but even for their own teaching materials. Sub-director Mercedes shared her views on the subject:

Director Esdras and I have decided that I will be in charge of supervising your pedagogical activities, and that he will be in charge of gestión. Just as they [the Ministry] are de-centralizing authority, so are we.... I am well aware that no textbooks have arrived. This is one of many areas in which this government has failed us compañeros, I know. Then they look to us and insist that we are to blame for the poor quality of education in this country. We’re going to have to make do with what little resources we have. As we are all still learning, we can no longer depend upon the state. This is all part of what they call globalization and the neoliberal system. You all have the right to be upset about these reforms, but your criticisms need to fall within the law. We still have a job to do compañeros maestros. And let me say, it’s a beautiful thing. Our role is not just to informar (inform), but also to formar (form) citizens, in order to enrich Honduras. Yes, there is a national curriculum standard, which says that we need to use current teaching materials, but we each also have our own libertad de catédra (academic freedom) too. The lazy teacher who doesn’t go out of her way to find her own teaching materials will not continue forward. Each one of you should consult each other about classroom strategies. You do have resources. If you feel that you don’t have the materials that you need, then I would encourage you to gestionar your own funding to purchase them. The purpose of the director and I today is to help you. The law says that we should all become autodidácticos (self-taught). We classroom, my focus here is on policies that affect education funding, not curriculum design. Mercedes and the other teachers with whom I work had little interest in talking with me about what ideologies their textbooks produced, and a lot more interest in using the subject of textbooks to illustrate how post-coup governments had abandoned their responsibilities for national public education, while blaming teachers for all the shortcomings.
therefore need to go out of our way to get the resources that we need. That is our goal today: to help you all become *autodidácticos* in your daily work.61

4.6 Creating Neoliberal Subjectivities?

Different events from this initial teachers’ council meeting allude to the process of forming neoliberal subjectivities among teachers themselves – including making individuals responsible for creating the conditions that allow them to do their jobs. For instance, Mercedes’ comments affirming the notion that schoolteachers are now expected to go out of their way to seek their own funding for basic school materials (which includes seeking money from the NGO and private sector), work to create self-regulating agents. Likewise, Esdras’ comments about not losing his own job because of someone else’s fault point toward the general environment of competition in the context of reduced job security and the practice of assigning blame to individuals while ignoring structural variables – processes which are not limited only to neoliberal contexts, but consistently observable in them nonetheless.

On the one hand such comments from two school directors do encourage self-governance among their staff. On the other hand however, Honduran schoolteachers are not easily manipulated into believing that it is a good thing that the central government is no longer willing to pay the full cost of such expenses and that schools should therefore compete with each other for basic schooling materials. In fact, Mercedes and Esdras as directors have themselves criticized these new policies as a neoliberal *golpista* manoeuvre and a step in the wrong direction for their country. At the same time however everyone was conscious of the implications if they as teachers appeared non-compliant

---

61 Teachers’ council meeting, 2 February 2012.
with the reforms – or worse, if they were portrayed as incompetent educators or unaccountable workers. As we will see throughout this thesis, teachers’ navigation through the reforms are shot-through with political actions aimed at criticizing neoliberal development policies.

Through these initial teacher council meetings, schoolteachers at Carías Andino were beginning to assess what the reforms would imply for their daily work lives. In this sense, teachers were working the new policies into the particular contexts of their school during this time, creating specific (not always intentional) outcomes. As Cris Shore and Susan Wright have argued, “… policies are not simply external, generalised or constraining forces, nor are they confined to texts. Rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested. A policy finds expression through sequences of events; it creates new social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects and new webs of meaning” (2011: 1). Here I present the ways in which these neoliberal education policies are interpreted, contested, and then reproduced by those responsible for their implementation.

The idea that Ministry authorities at different levels, private funders, and students’ parents are looking over the shoulders of schoolteachers in Honduras is nothing new. Rather, what has changed is the political environment encouraging these interested parties to supervise teachers’ behaviour as workers in an attempt to discipline them; giving these local interested parties a new set of legal tools – such as the COMDES and CED – to denounce any actions they understand as incongruent with the objectives of

---

62 Such denunciations can also be made online through the website of the coup-supporting NGO Transformemos Honduras: [http://transformemoshonduras.com/CP/monitoreo.php](http://transformemoshonduras.com/CP/monitoreo.php). While supporters of the reforms argue that this website operates to increase transparency and to prevent ghost teachers (who receive a salary for a position they do not...
national public education as defined by the post-coup government; and an explicit and continual communication that at any moment nearly anybody can audit Honduran schoolteachers. The notion of an “audit society” (Power 1996; 1994) for performing “rituals of verification” (Power 1997) in an “audit culture” (Strathern, ed. 2000) is therefore a useful theoretical concept for analyzing how teachers were reading the political landscape and navigating through the instruments used to measure their accountability and effectiveness during the 2012 school year.

As both audited and auditors (of their colleagues’ work), schoolteachers were still trying to figure out questions such as: “What kinds of activities should be checked? How much explicit checking is enough? How does checking affect those who are checked…? Can the benefits be clearly demonstrated?” (Power 1997: 2). In the remainder of this chapter I present examples of how school administrators engaged these aspects of the reforms that aim to monitor their behaviour and discipline teachers as workers.

The directors would bear most of the burden of not securing adequate funding from local sources for basic school infrastructure projects, and in order to do this they also needed to verify that their staff was acting in accordance with the reforms. This was the way in which the directors could promote an image of their school as dependable and thus fundable, hence the significance of an audit culture to maintain good behaviour.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, questions of funding are the primary concern of Honduran schoolteachers at this current historical conjuncture. Studying these

actually work at), many teachers commented about the ease with which anyone can denounce a schoolteacher, without even proper documentation of the inappropriate action.
practices therefore helps us to understand the particulars of the Honduran case, but it also illuminates how policies of governance are implemented in practice more broadly (cf. Painter 2006). My aim here is to show how teachers were interpreting the theory of state projects and policies of governance and then – following Esdras’ comments – attempting to merge the “huge difference between theory and practice” by selectively implementing certain aspects of the laws into practice within and through the social and economic realities on-the-ground. Despite their explicit critiques of the overall neoliberal spirit of the education reforms, there are still certain elements of these new laws that schoolteachers find useful for meeting basic schooling needs in the context of widespread poverty and political uncertainty.

Teachers approached implementing these new laws not through blind acceptance of the (neoliberal) justification for the reforms, but through conscious rejection of the broader neoliberal state project, which they believe will negatively affect the majority of the Honduran population. Yet school directors in particular were able to recognize certain aspects of the new laws as useful, as they also sought to project an image of their compliance in the 2012 political environment. These processes inform another broader argument of this thesis: as teachers necessarily implement aspects of the reforms, they are also enacting their own visions for what the state in Honduras could be like – one that fulfills realistic promises and meets certain basic needs of the majority.

4.7 Monitoring Schoolteachers’ Behaviour

As we have seen with the description of the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria*, the reforms closely scrutinize the work of teachers and their behaviour – making sure they solicit local funds and expand their school’s enrolment, but also verifying that they
come to work on time and complete their academic duties. This includes taking responsibility for those students who don’t come to school for whatever reason; teachers are often blamed when adolescents drop out of school. Understanding this, from their reading of the political landscape, the directors of Carías Andino took action to show local interested parties that they were indeed increasing student numbers and closely monitoring their staff, just as agents in any audit culture would do (see Strathern, ed. 2000).

Ensuring that the school’s enrolment did not drop below previous levels was no easy task. As the teachers at this rural school were well aware, student drop-out rates are generally higher in poorer regions and in areas where subsistence farmers opt to keep their adolescent children at home to help with agricultural activities instead of paying fees to send them to school. The directors were proactive by visiting the rural communities where they suspected potential students were living. They reminded residents that by law all Hondurans must be in school until the age of 16, after which they could choose to discontinue their schooling (an example of how teachers speak with the authority of the state). They further argued that since education is the only way to escape poverty, and they were now offering training in practical skills, adolescents from the community would someday financially benefit from attending. This strategy worked. By the second month of classes – just in time to submit these figures to their superiors – the school’s enrolment numbers had increased above what they were during the previous two years. The teachers posted a graph in the director’s office (a semi-public space) demonstrating the growth of their student population just as the reforms demand (see Appendix E).
As the school year progressed, Esdras began to dedicate more of his time toward soliciting local funding for school projects and could no longer monitor the work of each teacher at the school. At the same time, he was already dealing with previously-existing disciplinary problems with specific teachers who habitually arrived late or sometimes not at all. He therefore maintained his decision to assign all supervisory tasks to the sub-director, so that he could focus on fundraising. In order to show other teachers and local interested parties how they were restructuring the ways in which the school’s teachers were supervised, Esdras posted an open letter indicating that he had turned over all pedagogical and curricular supervision to the sub-director, and detailing how Mercedes would verify that teachers maintained their academic log books, which include student attendance sheets, marks, and classroom lecture plans. At the end of the letter, Esdras reminded his staff that all Honduran schoolteachers must fulfill these duties by law (see Appendix F).

In a similar fashion, the directors attempted to communicate transparently the behaviour of their teachers by posting a list of the personal days each teacher in the school had taken (see Appendix G). The list detailed the exact date when permission was given to a teacher for missing class, and also underscored the fact that Honduran law only permits personal days with legitimate excuses, which must first be pre-approved by the school director. As Esdras and Mercedes later explained to me, posting these signs in the director’s office was a good way for parents and other interested parties to see that their teachers were being supervised. They also explained that they hoped this would encourage teachers to always come to work on time, teach effectively, and not distract the director from fundraising for school projects.
By citing the new laws as the reason for this public disclosure of teachers’ work activities, these directors were able to resolve some pre-existing disciplinary problems while communicating to their colleagues that such micro-management of their work was required by the reforms. At the same time they were able to communicate to local interested parties and potential auditors that they as school administrators were fulfilling their responsibilities under the law. This pro-active attempt to show that the school was being run efficiently and in accordance with the reforms was an effective strategy for the teachers with whom I worked in this rural context. If the directors there were ever accused of not abiding by the reforms – if it were proven that their school’s teachers were not competent workers, or that their school was not increasing in size – the school could be forced to close and the teachers could be fired (something that teachers confirmed did happen elsewhere in the region during the 2012 school year).

4.8 School Infrastructure Projects – Carías Andino

In order to please students’ parents and other local interested parties, and in order to show their superiors at the regional Ministry offices that they were abiding by the reforms, these directors also needed to maintain and expand the physical structure of their schools. Both schools in the urban setting of San Lorenzo and the rural communities in the municipality of Nacaome competed for funding among other schools in Valle for basic projects such as fixing roofs to prevent flooding, fixing doors and windows to prevent theft, and constructing new classrooms to accommodate their growing student population.

Despite the requirement of the education reforms to solicit funding from municipal governments, teachers were conscious that any commitments obtained from
municipal authorities could well go unfulfilled, and were therefore cautious about making promises to parents and community members. At Carías Andino, municipal authorities indeed backed down from initial commitments made in conversation with the directors to help fund the reconstruction of two classrooms. The school directors and teachers’ council were afraid that such actions would upset not only their superiors at the regional Ministry of Education offices, but also the Sociedad de Padres de Familia at their school. As a result they sought funding from the daughter of a multi-millionaire cantaloupe melon exporter who ran a foundation to support local development initiatives. Despite the initial positive interactions with this potential donor, she declined an invitation to visit the school and the directors thus lost the chance to ask her formally to help fund their project.

These interactions with the melon company’s foundation took place over several months and were therefore time-consuming for the directors and the rest of the Carías Andino teachers. During this time they held numerous meetings with the Sociedad de Padres de Familia, explaining their initiatives and progress with soliciting the funds. At one point the entire student body and teachers were preparing an elaborate welcome party with food, dancing, and games for this potential funder, all of which was cancelled when she declined to come.

Once both the municipal government and the daughter of this melon exporter failed to provide funding, the third option for these teachers was a sugar cane export company that ran a similar foundation for community development projects in the regions where they operate. The sugar-cane company foundation agreed to support half of the

---

63 We should not misinterpret such oral agreements to fund school projects as always untrue or invalid. They are often the real ways through which such funding actually reaches the schools – based on conversations with politicians over beer (a very gendered activity), at soccer matches, or even over the phone (as we will see in Chapter 5).
budget for the project, but this was not achieved without conflict. The company has its own reasons for donating this money to the school: any such donations function as tax write-offs, reducing the taxable revenue of the company. Conflicts arose when the company needed the directors to sign corresponding paperwork confirming that they were receiving the amount claimed. After review of the documents detailing the budget for the construction project, Mercedes initially refused to sign them. According to her analysis, the company would be claiming a higher amount donated than they were actually paying toward the school project.

In the context of this dispute Carías Andino teachers also voiced their broader disagreement with the very idea that a sugar cane company was needed to fund their school projects. Honduran schoolteachers’ struggles against these reforms have included the demand that the state pay for such necessities. They want the post-coup government to see education as a social investment, not an expense to be minimized in nation-wide budgetary planning (a topic I examine in Chapter 7, by returning to this example to analyze a different set of processes after the construction project was complete). Teachers did recognize however that the leaner, meaner, post-coup neoliberal state is not going to pay to fix the holes in their roof anytime soon. They needed to act with what resources were available to them, to meet urgent needs at the school. Even despite the misleading tax claims, Profe Mercedes and other teachers at this rural school set aside aspects of their own political opinions on how education ought to be funded, in order to work through the challenges they were facing in their everyday work, as they navigated through the beginnings of these reforms.
As a strategy to pay for the other half of the project, these school administrators asked the Sociedad de Padres de Familia not to donate money themselves, but rather to organize a Bingo fundraising event. Teachers instructed the parents and students about how to approach selling the Bingo tickets, and how to properly ask businesses and numerous individuals in the region to donate prize items, drafting a formal letter on their behalf (see Appendix H). The teachers, parents and students spent their time asking everyone possible for a donation, even me. And the event managed to gather the remaining funds.

4.9 School Infrastructure Projects – José Cecilio del Valle

At José Cecilio del Valle, the other school where I conducted research in the urban setting of San Lorenzo (which I gained access to through family connections), teachers were already struggling to rebuild the main classroom since before the 2012 school year. When I began participant observation there, teachers would show me the holes in the roof that caused the classroom to flood during the rainy season, and the broken metal window coverings which they feared would invite theft of valuable school materials. This school already had a well-established fundraising committee composed of several teachers and the school director, Aníbal. During the first half of the school year the committee was able to secure funding from three different local sources: 1) a sugar-cane export company, 2) the municipal government of San Lorenzo, and 3) parents of students. While in the end the sugar-cane company did pay for forty percent of the project, the municipal government another forty percent, and the parents of students the

\[64\] While such fundraising activities are common at North American schools, too, they are more likely to be in support of extra activities than aimed at urgent repairs such as fixing a roof.
remaining twenty percent, director Aníbal and the teachers at this urban school had to negotiate through conflicts with each group in the process of receiving funds for this urgent school infrastructure project.

Since municipal governments now decide how to administer the school infrastructure funding they receive from the central government, and different schools are now expected to compete for a finite amount of funding, the municipal government in San Lorenzo first wanted to see that teachers were soliciting funds from other sources. According to some teachers this was so that municipal governments could then report to the central government that they were managing the transferred funds in an effective manner that also distributes the cost of these projects to other non-state entities. The teachers’ fundraising committee therefore approached the sugar-cane company first, and negotiated the amount of money it would donate toward the project of reconstructing the classroom. The municipal government of San Lorenzo then offered to match the funding that the sugar-cane company had donated. The parents of students were sought out as a last resort for the remaining funds necessary to complete the project. Most teachers find asking parents for money to support a school project to be one of the most difficult aspects of their job.

In order to convince students’ parents to contribute toward financing school projects, teachers relied on their argument that ‘education is the only way for their children and for future generations of Hondurans to escape poverty.’ Reflecting on their own personal and collective lived experiences – and speaking with the authority of the state – teachers develop a well-rehearsed argument as to why parents should consider investing in the future of their communities by contributing to an essential public service.
This is nonetheless a difficult task, especially when poor parents say they cannot afford the extra expense, or when outspoken parents contest teachers’ arguments with the counterpoint that the central government should be financing all aspects of national ‘public’ education, including infrastructural projects – something with which most teachers agree.

Even while working against these elements of their own political opinions, the teachers at this San Lorenzo urban school were able to convince parents to finance twenty percent of the project. They were even able to persuade them to keep financing it after a heated interaction among some parents and Director Aníbal during which the parents demanded that he show them official receipts and justifications for the purchase of construction materials. By citing the Ley de Participación Comunitaria and saying that they were at the school to demand to see the receipts “not as organized parents of students” but as members of the “CED” these parents enacted their recently-established legal right to audit the school director.  

Both the sugar-cane company and San Lorenzo municipal government also presented obstacles for the teachers, given that they demanded public recognition of their contributions as philanthropic. This occurred in a variety of ways. Both entities received large paintings of their official emblems on the front wall of the classroom (see Appendix I). This happened despite the fact that no other emblems or symbols were painted on the classroom walls, not even that of the school itself.

---

65 In Chapter 5 I discuss some of the background of the José Cecilio del Valle school that informs instances like this when parents began to question the use of the school’s internal funds. Here my emphasis on this outcome is intended to demonstrate that such audits of schoolteachers’ behaviour do indeed occur.
In a similar fashion the company and municipal government received additional paintings of their emblems in the form of a sign constructed outside the school premises. The sign points toward the school, but the letters of the school’s name are miniscule in size compared to those of its sponsors (see Appendix J). Similar signs appear throughout the south wherever the sugar company has funded a school project. In addition to these physical representations, both the sugar-cane company and municipal government received formal invitations to attend the inauguration ceremony of the classroom. At this important event teachers gave their sponsors a warm welcome, providing them with entertainment from the students’ dance and music organizations, during a televised ceremony where teachers, parents, and students thanked them with certificates honouring their donations. The sponsors were then invited to a formal lunch with the fundraising committee in the school’s air-conditioned computer lab, while everyone else stayed outside in the hot sun without any refreshments.

In other contexts these same teachers had protested in the streets against powerful actors like these *empresarios* and politicians. Honduran schoolteachers who are also members of the *Resistencia* in fact have led the condemnation of politicians elected to office during the coup-installed government. Moreover, the FNRP and the LIBRE Party argue that large companies should pay a higher percentage of their revenues toward tax, not devise clever schemes for offsetting their tax obligations (in which they also receive free advertising opportunities). It was thus surprising for me to see teachers welcome these powerful individuals with such open arms. In fact, one of the politicians present
was José Alfredo Saavedra, the former president of the national congress who was appointed by the coup-installed de facto government. There was no mistaking this man’s identity, every teacher present knew who he was. Nonetheless my research participants stood up in front of everyone, shook his hand, kissed him on the cheek, and thanked him for supporting “a poor school in the south.” I sat next to the sub-director throughout the ceremony where he whispered to me the reasons why he believes Saavedra has betrayed the Honduran population. Yet as the infamous politician approached us, the sub-director joined his colleagues in welcoming him with a firm handshake. He even took the time to introduce me, as their “foreign friend” who “enjoys hanging around the school” and “learning about education in Honduras.”

We might analyze these actions as a performance in which these teachers believed it strategic to promote the image of their cooperation with other state and non-state actors for the benefit of their school. After all, they had different supervisors and interested parties to please. Such actions should not be interpreted to mean that these teachers are easily manipulated. They were conscious of the political implications of seeking out funding for school projects from a municipal government and sugar-cane company rather than the central government. They were keenly aware that this is precisely what the reforms are demanding that they do. In fact, they often expressed frustration about the extent to which Honduran schoolteachers ended up supporting neoliberal state projects, even though they disagreed with the underlying premises. At the same time however they

66 As I show in my MA thesis, Saavedra was also a Valle diputado (departmental delegate to the national congress) during a previous four-year term, up until the time of the June 2009 coup when he was appointed to the national congress (Levy 2010). Saavedra is thus well known locally, and his support for the golpe de estado has provoked resentment among Resistencia supporters who thought of him in the pre-coup context as a rather progressive politician who later betrayed the population and became a key figure in the Micheletti regime.
were working diligently to meet basic schooling needs. As Director Aníbal explained to me one day while the classroom was still being constructed:

Look, here the state doesn’t take care of the people. The corrupt, indebted governments that we have had, and this political crisis that has been going on since 2009, makes each president try to avoid any unnecessary expense. And that’s just the thing – they are thinking about education as just another expense for the state. They should be thinking about it as a social investment in our nation’s future. These children are the future of Honduras. But who does this government blame for all the shortcomings and structural problems that we have with education? Us teachers! They demand quality education, and they pass laws to demand it… but they don’t want to pay for it! Here in Honduras all the politicians care about are their own careers, and taking care of their own families, and their own wallets. And who knows what this next government [after the November 2013 elections] will tell us, or what changes it will want. But meanwhile, here [at this school] we have some big holes in the roof of our largest classroom, which we need for assemblies and important events. The students can never focus if there is water leaking from the roof. This is one reason why they misbehave. And parents will complain if their children come home with wet clothes. We can’t teach class like this. Nobody can. Look at the conditions in which we work here.67

During the 2012 school year, schoolteachers were still working through the implications of these new laws by reading the implicit and explicit signals of the Lobo government and the overall political climate since the June 2009 coup (cf. Schwegler 2012). As we will see in the remainder of this thesis, teachers’ selective implementation of these new laws and resistance to certain aspects of them are shot-through with political action, which often occurred in very confined political spaces and in subtle contexts.

67 Interview, 11 July 2012.
4.10 Conclusion

As leaders of the nation-wide social movement that proposes to re-found the state, Honduran schoolteachers are thinking through the ways policies of governance can serve the needs of the majority. Ensuring that rural schools continue to exist, that teachers are competent, that school infrastructure is adequate, and that academic programs connect with local aspirations, are all things that most teachers would otherwise want – hence the difficulty in disagreeing with an “audit culture” (cf. Strathern, ed. 2000). In attempting to meet basic needs for schooling in the context of wide-spread poverty and political uncertainty, the schoolteachers with whom I work set aside aspects of their own political opinions on how education ought to be funded, in order to work through what challenges they were facing in their everyday work activities. In the process they ended up implementing certain elements of the new laws they found useful, even desirable, while they simultaneously rejected the neoliberal spirit of the reforms as a whole. As Esdras told me, “If I don’t go to these politicians for the money, se me cae la escuela [the school will fall down around me].”

These front-line state agents found themselves entangled in a complex web of bureaucratic mandates where they needed to develop strategies to keep their jobs and carry out national public education in the name of the state. Taking advantage of certain aspects of the new laws in order to deal with previously-existing problems, attempting to maintain positive relations with students’ parents, and working with what financial resources did exist locally should not be interpreted as teachers’ enthusiasm or support for the reforms, but an insight into the complex and contradictory ways in which neoliberal policies are actually put into practice. From these ethnographic examples we
can observe that Honduran schoolteachers’ conscious rejection of neoliberal policies does not directly undermine this legislation, but rather contributes to the contradictory ways these policies play out in practice in specific places. As we will continue to observe, teachers chose to speak out explicitly against governing policies in a variety venues – such as parents’ meetings – at the same time that they were implementing them selectively. The implementation of any new legislation is never a straightforward matter, as those responsible for carrying out the policies have their own lived experiences and political opinions which influence how they interpret the significance of laws and approach how to best enact them in varied local contexts.

We have seen here that such local particularities and the agency of the actors involved have a keen influence on the ways that legislation becomes a lived reality. Esdras, Aníbal, and the other teachers referenced here each have particular experiences that inform their political opinions and their development of visions about what the education system should be in Honduras. When they were normal school students, for instance, these schoolteachers learned that the central offices of the Ministry of Education is the principal provider of education services and that their work is in the name of the state and its project of forming subjects who are able to fully participate in civic life, as the common slogan for each civic event illustrates: ‘formando ciudadanos para engrandecer a Honduras’ (forming citizens to enrich Honduras). We should also keep in mind that both of the schools examined here had the privilege of already having access to electricity and their own computer labs, which permitted their teachers to comply with these particular demands of the Ley Fundamental. But as Esdras pointed out, access to such resources is far from the standard for schools in rural Honduras. We can therefore
see the potential for a range in reception of legislation – not only by members of ‘society’ but also by front-line agents of the state – the individuals responsible for policy implementation.

Insights from the examples presented here support the broader theoretical premise of this thesis: processes of governance and state formation are socially produced and variable depending on the context in question. The ways schoolteachers in Honduras have interpreted and acted upon these new laws interact with their positions as leaders of a social movement and political party that seek to re-found the state. The ethnographic examples described here support the notion that state formation occurs not only through such formal projects as re-writing the constitution, but also through everyday discussions and actions in mundane situations (for very clear examples of how this happens see Joseph and Nugent, 1994 and Painter, 2006).

It is in contexts such as local schools – places that can be included in what John Clarke calls the “dispersed outposts through which projects are turned into practices” (2012: 211) – that legislation becomes a lived reality. Such important aspects of state formation merit sustained ethnographic analysis, especially in Latin American countries experiencing the deepening of neoliberal development policies, as is the case of post-coup Honduras. The ethnographic method directs our attention to the everyday activities of those who are responsible for implementing policies of governance, which they are likely to do in ways that connect and translate between the desires of the designers of those policies and the needs and desires of the recipients of those services, a process that necessarily transforms those policies at least in part. The remaining chapters of this thesis will continue to reveal the various ways in which Honduran schoolteachers, as front-line
state agents, navigated through “the huge difference” between the “theory” of state policies and their implementation “in practice.”
5   New Responsibilities to Fund Primary Education

5.1   Introduction

In 2012 Honduran schoolteachers were primarily concerned with how to secure funding locally and prove to local interested parties that they were abiding by the new laws governing the education sector. In so doing they began to take on new responsibilities not previously associated with their positions. This happened in a variety of ways. Whereas in Chapter 4 we saw examples of how teachers sought funding for school infrastructure projects, this chapter will present examples of how teachers sought funding for two different kinds of academic-related school projects. This will illuminate a different set of political processes involved with what Esdras meant by the difference between “theory” and “practice.” These examples will also underscore how the heightened levels of scrutiny of schoolteachers’ everyday work played out in the context of them soliciting funding for local academic projects. These projects included: 1) the expansion of curriculum and of the number of teachers in primary schools, to offer courses for completing grades seven, eight, and nine; and 2) extra-curricular education programs that aim to provide practical skills that could potentially enhance local employment opportunities, which were each sought through different avenues.

While these projects differ in important ways, they both require funding; because teachers are now required to seek such support locally, this process is dependent upon the maintenance of positive relationships with local politicians and other potential donors. Here I examine what it means for schoolteachers to solicit promises from politicians for different kinds of school projects that teachers themselves have wanted to promote among the people from the communities in which they work. In showing this relationship
between teachers and local politicians in the context of the reforms, my aim is to reveal how teachers are manoeuvring within the neoliberal system to find ways to make education useful for the populations with whom they work. This can be considered simultaneously resistance to a repressive neoliberal education system and conformity with the reforms, given that the new laws require teachers to be innovative and develop new school projects while seeking funding locally. The ethnographic examples to follow illuminate some of these contradictions.

Based on their own reading of the political landscape, teachers are conscious that they now have less job security. As they attempted to maintain positive relations with parents and other local interested parties in 2012, they also tried to find ways to make education and opportunities for youth a priority – two processes that are not mutually exclusive. The examples presented in this chapter thus support another larger argument of this thesis: as Honduran schoolteachers manoeuvred through the reforms, they were also enacting their own visions for what the national public education system could be with FNRP/LIBRE-initiated state re-foundation projects. By showing the particulars of how teachers at these two schools worked to forge a society in which the state plays a central role in funding education, and by showing the significance of teachers’ political connections in order to secure local funds, this chapter also lays more of the groundwork for my analysis in Chapter 7 of how teachers’ daily acts of resistance merge into broader visions of what the Honduran state itself should be like.

5.2 Primarización and Centros de Educación Básica

What is the significance of the relationship between local political authorities and schoolteachers in Honduras? How do broader neoliberal policies toward national public
education manifest in local schools? Here I address these questions by focusing on the expansion of curriculum and staffing numbers in primary schools within the framework of the broader process of ‘primarización,’ or an increased emphasis on government investment in primary education. This concept was introduced into Honduras’ national public education system in the latter half of the 1990s.

The logic of this broader regional phenomenon was that although poor countries should cut their public service budgets to pay off foreign debt and attract foreign investment, even these cash-strapped governments still need their populations fluent in basic literary and numeracy skills in order to create a productive workforce.

Subsequently, poor countries – such as Honduras – would receive a “higher rate of return to investment” with a primary education system than with a secondary (much less a post-secondary) system (Arnove 1997: 87, 90; cf. Gershberg 1999 on Nicaragua); they should thus focus their limited education budgets on primary education. Under this view, public investment in secondary education is an unaffordable luxury for poor countries. In Honduras, this transformation toward funding mostly primary education occurred in a variety of ways, and it has contributed to conflicts within the magisterio among schoolteachers who live through this process.

In this section I write about centros de educación básica (CEBs), also known as centros básicos. I explain how both Carías Andino and José Cecilio del Valle became

---

68 Another phenomenon that emerged in Honduras during this time, which we might also think about in terms of ‘primarización,’ were the community-managed semi-private primary schools known as Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria (Honduran Community Education Program, PROHECO) about which Daniel Altschuler has written (2010a, 2010b). These schools have been modeled on their success in neighbouring countries (cf. Arnove 1997; Gershberg 1999 on Nicaragua), and are jointly funded by the private sector, municipal governments, parents, and churches – much like what the Lobo reforms envision for the public education system on a national level. Here my focus is on CEBs, since they are the type of school where I conducted almost all of my fieldwork, and because they are more widespread than the limited number of PROHECO pilot projects.
CEBs, and analyze the phenomenon both as part of this general framework of a move toward ‘primarización,’ and in terms of the relationships between schoolteachers and local politicians in Honduras. We must first begin by describing the theory of CEBs in order to then analyze their effects in practice. The initial argument in favour of the development and maintenance of centros de educación básica was to provide school children in rural areas, where there are no high schools (grades 7-12), the opportunity to get some secondary education in the form of ‘ciclo común’ or ‘ciclo básico’ – the first three years of secondary education (grades 7-9) – without the need to travel to a colegio outside their communities. As the logic goes, more poor peasant children will get at least some secondary education with CEBs, whereas if they had to support the costs of transportation and food while outside their communities, they would be less likely to continue studying ciclo básico.

Following this line of reasoning, the opening of the first 35 CEBs in 1996 (Hernández 2004) signified a new attempt to provide much-needed access to some secondary education for poor youth from rural areas in Honduras. Although in some cases there were attempts to establish and maintain CEBs in this spirit of meeting local desires for some secondary education, in many cases CEBs were actually started and maintained based on other variables – including relationships with local politicians. The remainder of this section shows how some of these contradictions of CEBs played out in practice at the two centros de educación básica where I conducted research, as teachers

---

69 I use these terms interchangeably, as do Honduran schoolteachers.

70 Some Honduran schoolteachers say that the idea of a CEB originates in Chile. I am unfamiliar with the complete history of CEBs in Latin America broadly, but attributing these ideas to Chilean policies during this moment in Honduras is an understandable perception given that the Chilean carabineros were invited by Pepe Lobo during this time to reform that Honduran police, and people who opposed this process were critical of the influence of Chilean governing policies in Honduras in general.
navigated through a complex web of political and social relations. As elsewhere in this thesis, we will see here how schoolteachers were reading the political landscape and making difficult, yet sometimes opportunistic, decisions by assessing the resources, constraints, and possibilities available locally.

5.3 The Formation of CEB Carías Andino in Rural El Garrobo

During the initial tour that Esdras gave me of his rural school (as I briefly describe in Chapter 4), he took the time to explain that when he first started working there it was just an ‘escuela’ and that under his mandate as director he was responsible for its conversion to a CEB in 2007. The story of how this happened reveals how Honduran schoolteachers’ specific political connections directly influenced the means through which the state project of public education has been carried out in practice. In early September, after eight months of experience conducting participant observation at his centro, I asked Esdras to describe to me exactly how it was transformed from an escuela into a CEB. In the informal environment of cooking seafood chowder at his home on a Sunday afternoon, Esdras explained to me:

Saavedra and I were on good terms back then, you know, before the golpe de estado. Now he’s a total golpista jerk, and he knows that I am mera-resistencia. Now there’s no way he would have anything to do with me, but back then I thought he was an alright guy. Anyway, he was in charge of determining which rural schools in Valle would become centros de educación básica. Since there was only enough money to change a few, it was his job to figure out which ones.
As a diputado for Valle, Saavedra ran the budget for changing them into centros básicos.  

I asked Esdras whether the Valle Ministry wouldn’t look at population levels and proximity of existing colegios in making these decisions (which would be consistent with the initial logic for their creation).

Ha! Maybe in theory, but that’s not the way it works here in practice. Here it’s all about politics. Here in Honduras things only move because of politics. So, Saavedra was a Liberal Party diputado and I used to be a Liberal too, you know, before the golpe. I even voted for him. So we got along OK. But he didn’t even really know me that well. He just knew I was a school director. So one day he calls me up on the phone and asks if I knew this other school director from outside of Alianza [a rural municipality in Valle]. Saavedra told me that he needed to get in touch with this guy to talk with him about important matters to do with his school. I already knew that he was going around changing certain schools into centros básicos, so I lied a little bit – I told him that I had no idea what the other director’s phone number was…. And then I said that in the meantime, he should come out to my school, which serves the needs of other children in the neighbouring [rural] communities too. I told him that I had been wanting to ask the departmental director what needed to happen in order to change my school into a centro básico, since we already had so many graduates who wanted to study ciclo básico, yet only a handful of them could actually afford to travel to Nacaome. 

Since teachers often receive an increase in salary for the new positions they take on, I asked Esdras why he wanted his escuela to become a centro básico in the first place, and if there was any increase in salary for him as the director of a CEB.

71 Interview, 2 September 2012.
72 Interview, 2 September 2012.
No. There’s no increase in salary at all. Maybe there should be… it’s a lot more work! But every [primary school] director wants to be in charge of a centro básico. It’s much more prestigious. And you can be known as the person who changed the community forever. Imagine all of those poor children who would otherwise just leave school after sixth grade. Thanks to me killing myself out there, they can now study seventh, eighth and ninth grade too. And their parents are happy about it. More education means that someday they can escape the shackles of poverty. Everyone prefers a centro básico to an escuela – there are more opportunities to grow and do things. Look at all the soccer tournaments we have. People love that stuff. And the possibility exists that someday it will become a colegio. Imagine that. You see, it’s easier for the state to change a centro básico into a colegio than just a primary school into a colegio. Those students of ours who want to study a [high school] carrera afterward can do so. Our centro has a great reputation with the high schools in San Lorenzo, Nacaome, and Pespire. We have had students go on to all of these places. They are few and far between, but we do produce them. The majority leave school after ninth grade – you know, people are quite poor in El Garrobo. But at least now they have a ninth grade education, and not just a sixth grade education. So anyway, Saavedra came out a few days later. I guess he was never able to get a hold of that other director over the phone…. And there I was, persistently asking him to come out to our school. And we received him really well. You would have enjoyed it – we had students’ mothers cooking tamales and sopa de frijoles, and I invited a group of students who had already graduated, but who didn’t go on to study ciclo básico. And he approved it. But then it was an uphill battle with the departmental Ministry offices to get them to approve the budgets for ciclo básico teachers. Profe Marlon was the first one there, you know. First we needed a math teacher – someone with an undergraduate degree in math. Later we had Profe Laura for food security, Profe Marilu and Profe Katrina for the Spanish reading and writing classes. Profe Marlon has two jobs, you know: one at Carías Andino and one at a high school where he also teaches math. So, Saavedra and I got along well before. I even went drinking with him after that meeting, back when I would drink a lot.
And I told him that I was grateful for the nice gesture…. But now he’s a total *golpista* asshole. You know that he was president of the de-facto national congress during Micheletti? And he knows that I am *mera Resistencia*. Now there’s no way I would let him into my centro! I don’t care what he offers me.  

This account illuminates several important phenomena. First is the general understanding among teachers that political connections – not just the needs of the community – are necessary in order to form a CEB. Indeed, this reflects teachers’ general understanding that they need to maintain positive political connections in order to accomplish *any* kind of school project. However, Esdras also emphasized his separation from Saavedra’s realm of influence as a result of the polarizing of political relationships after the 2009 coup. Esdras is well aware that his current positioning as a local leader of the *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party undermines his previous connections with *diputados* in charge of departmental education budgets, as by definition they are all *golpistas*.

Esdras’ reading of the political environment, his fluency in the type of language needed to work within this web of connections, is clear in this account. Esdras assessed realistically the possibilities available, and did not hesitate to put his school’s and students’ interests ahead of others, by neglecting to give the *diputado* his colleague’s contact information in what he knew was a zero-sum game. Esdras also knew how he needed to represent his school (as serving other rural communities in the area) and his students (without the means to study *ciclo básico* in the distant *colegios*) to align his description with the logic for establishing *centros de educación básica*. He added a final strategic touch by inviting some of the school’s sixth-grade graduates to be present when

---

73 Interview, 2 September 2012.
the politician came to visit. The combination of these factors contributed to achieving CEB status at Carías Andino. Rather than being a technical exercise, this process was shot-through with political understandings, connections, and calculations. This is consistent with the ways in which Honduran schoolteachers conduct business with local political authorities in general.

In subsequent years it was up to Esdras to negotiate with officials from the departmental Ministry the staffing levels at the school to meet CEB needs. Esdras considered this a slow process, as each year officials had to re-evaluate the need for CEB teachers. This resulted in prioritizing which teachers were most needed – first one with an undergraduate degree in mathematics, and later those with degrees in food security and Spanish to teach home economics, reading and writing courses. During this initial period, students taking natural science, social science, and physical education courses at the ciclo básico (secondary education) level therefore were taught by teachers without specialized undergraduate degrees, who had only graduated from the normal school.

Herein lies some Honduran schoolteachers’ strongest critique of centros de educación básica: the Ministry of Education approves schools with CEB status, but the approval of departmental ministry budgets for hiring qualified teachers for secondary education courses in these new CEBs happens much later. Teachers themselves speculate that this occurs whenever a diputado gets around to doing it; there are probably operational constraints also at work. In any case, during this time of what I call the ‘CEB limbo period,’ students taking ciclo básico at CEBs receive instruction for these courses from teachers who do not have the Ministry-defined credentials for these positions.
A ‘CEB limbo period’ is widespread in Honduras, and the resources provided to CEBs vary considerably, another example of what Esdras astutely pointed to as the chronic distance between theory and practice in Honduran education. Teachers also criticize the Ministry practice of appointing a teacher with an undergraduate degree in one subject and expecting her/him to teach courses that do not correspond to her/his degree. For instance, frequently teachers with mathematics degrees are asked to teach courses in physics, chemistry, and biology. This critique of the centros de educación básica is especially common among secondary schoolteachers – who have sacrificed in order to obtain their own university degrees – who complain that CEB students arrive at their colegios ill-prepared academically, especially when compared to students who completed ciclo básico at their high schools. Teachers who work at CEBs are also critical of this practice because of the effect on their workload of being asked to teach courses outside of their areas of expertise. They recognize that, at the expense of their own workloads, they are contributing to the government being able to claim it is expanding education opportunities without investing in training and employing more schoolteachers with advanced degrees.

5.4 The Formation of CEB José Cecilio del Valle in Urban San Lorenzo

During my fieldwork at the centro de educación básica José Cecilio del Valle, the ‘CEB limbo period’ had already continued for three years, after a Liberal Party diputado promised Director Aníbal that his school would become a CEB in late 2009 (during the de-facto coup government of Roberto Micheletti). Whereas by 2012 the CEB Carías Andino already had enough secondary education teachers to cover its CEB
courses, the teaching staff at José Cecilio del Valle did not include any full-time secondary teachers for their CEB courses. Director Aníbal, a coup-supporting Liberal himself, attributed the limbo status of his CEB to the fact that the National Party government of Pepe Lobo chose for political reasons not to respect the changes that a Liberal Party diputado made during the preceding de-facto government. He also expressed commonly-held views among schoolteachers during one of conversations about the ‘CEB limbo status’:

It is ridiculous what our education system has come to in this country. Can you believe it? I have to ask a sugar company to come in here and fix the roof! This is the responsibility of the state. Now they want to privatize toditito (every little thing). I know that the education system in the US is decentralized too, but there they have a tradition of respecting laws. It’s not like Honduras. Here nobody cares about respecting the laws, even though that’s the way things should be. This is why the Honduran is so accustomed to begging. We are told to go out of our way, to ask if some rich people might want to help us. The state wants quality education, but they don’t ever give us the materials to carry it out. They just look to blame us teachers. It’s as if you were a pilot, and I’m there flying with you in your plane. And then you say, ‘here Aníbal, you take the controls,’ and I tell you that I don’t know how to fly, and that you should do the flying. But you insist that I fly the plane. And then, once we start to crash, you yell at me and say that I had better look for some [body of] water before we both die, because it will be my fault!74

Director Aníbal’s comments express the frustration among teachers that the Honduran state is divesting itself of its responsibility to fund national public education.

We spoke in a moment of desperation for Aníbal as he was struggling to maintain the

---

74 Interview, 20 September 2012
CEB limbo status of his school in the hope that it would someday become fully funded. To this end Director Aníbal appointed CEB teachers ‘ad honorem’ (pro bono), asking them to teach CEB courses (grades 7-9) as volunteers, without any contract but sometimes with a small stipend from the school’s internal funds. The exact amount of money depended on the individual’s situation, and ranged from simply paying her/his taxi fare and lunch, to paying her/him close to half of what beginning primary education schoolteachers make. This situation resulted in criticism of Aníbal on several fronts. On one level, the ‘teachers’ who he hired were not qualified as such. On another level, as a school administrator, Aníbal was criticized by teachers and parents for using so much of the internal budget on teachers’ salaries.

In Honduras, a school’s internal budget is completely independent from the Ministry of Education, and since well before the reforms has been used to pay for expenses that the central government has never sought to fund. These expenses include janitorial services, hiring a school security guard, and supplying bottled water in communal areas for teachers and visitors. The funds are managed by a joint committee of teachers and parent representatives from the Sociedad de Padres de Familia. Together they usually elect a teacher to manage this budget as treasurer of the school’s internal funds. If there is any surplus left after funding basic expenses, additional expenses may be approved by the committee. For instance, some teachers have received stipends from their school’s internal funds to help cover the costs of attending conferences; some schools will also use these funds for special school events. While the size of schools’ internal budgets is highly variable, the money usually comes from the proceeds earned by renting out glorietas to venders, donations from teachers and parents alike, and from
fund-raising activities which can vary widely (from Bingo nights to selling produce from a school garden, as was the case with the Comayagua normal school).

While internal budgets for these types of expenses have existed for some time, since the reforms teachers are pressed to seek out more funding locally. It is through the careful management of internal budgets that schools contribute their portion of any infrastructure projects (as we saw in Chapter 4), and these funds are also how schools have begun to pay for the kinds of projects presented in this chapter. At first, the CEB José Cecilio del Valle had enough surplus in their internal budget to allow Director Aníbal to pay a small stipend to the teachers he hired ‘ad honorem.’ Initially, teachers and parents alike were in favour of spending some internal funds as an interim measure to pay CEB teachers until the school received its official and complete CEB status and the Ministry of Education began to pay the salaries of CEB teachers.

Finding a mathematics teacher was the most difficult task. During the first half of 2012, CEB mathematics classes at José Cecilio del Valle were taught by the parent of a primary school student, who worked as the manager of a retail establishment in San Lorenzo. While this man had studied at the normal school in Choluteca, he took a different career path after graduating and had no experience teaching school children. He also did not have an undergraduate degree in math from the UPNFM as all secondary teachers at colegios are required to have. At the time of his volunteer appointment at José Cecilio del Valle, he was pursuing an undergraduate degree in business administration at a private institute. At first this was a convenient arrangement for Director Aníbal since this volunteer did not require any payment at all: he offered his services as a concerned parent and normal school graduate. A few months into the 2012 school year, however,
the math teacher decided to emigrate to the United States, leaving his position on very short notice.

Director Aníbal frantically sought a new math teacher, worried about potential criticisms of his *centro*. Especially in the context of the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria* and the fear of teachers and schools being spied on by the network of the COMDE and the CED, Director Aníbal was fearful of repercussions. He even asked me if I knew of any mathematics teachers in the region who might be willing to volunteer. While he put in a request for a volunteer from the Japan International Cooperation Agency ‘JICA’, he still needed a full-time Honduran mathematics teacher.

The 2012 school year was particularly important for Aníbal, not only because of the political environment of heightened public criticisms of schoolteachers’ work, but also because this was the first year that CEB José Cecilio del Valle was to produce graduates from the *ciclo básico* cohort, three years after its initial founding in January 2010. Within a few weeks of the departure of the first mathematics ‘teacher,’ Aníbal was able to convince an unemployed civil engineer to teach the CEB math classes. This engineer had no training in a classroom environment, he had never studied at the normal school, and he only had minimal experience in public speaking. To make matters even more difficult for the school, the engineer insisted on receiving a generous stipend paid twice per month.

When the internal budget committee and Director Aníbal initially agreed to pay the stipend demanded by the engineer, the school’s internal budget had a surplus. Once the classroom re-construction project was underway, however, the *albañiles* told Director Aníbal that the project would require both significantly more construction materials and
labour time than anticipated. The combination of unforeseen construction costs and the
demands of the volunteer math teacher quickly exhausted the school’s internal budget.

By the engineer’s second month teaching math, Director Aníbal had to tell him that there
were not enough funds to continue paying him the agreed-upon amount. Aníbal tried to
entice the engineer to stay with an argument about the benevolent service he would be
providing the community’s children during a time of economic crisis, but the engineer
threatened to withdraw his services. Aníbal, worried about potential criticism of a
situation he himself had helped to create (as the school’s director), took out a bank loan
in his own name to pay the engineer.

Meanwhile, the school’s treasurer, teacher María Elena, asked to speak at the
next teachers’ council meeting about the matter, where she described the deficit in the
school’s internal budget to her colleagues. It was there that Aníbal explained that a group
of parents had confronted him, demanding to see itemized receipts for construction costs
paid through the internal budget, given that the parents had donated monies for the
classroom reconstruction, but not for paying a math teacher. As Aníbal put it:

These people… this group of parents who have been critical of me, they came in
to my office the other day demanding to see the details of our internal budget.
And the thing that really upset me was that they said they were here to check our
school’s budget – not as the Sociedad de Padres de Familia, but as the CED!
This is what really pissed me off! We have known these people for years…. So
we have a very delicate situation on our hands, and I am here telling you all that
I am fed up. I don’t know what to do. I have been taking out loans in my own
name for some time now; few of you know the details of this, but those who do,
know that I have been suffering. As María Elena describes, we cannot continue
like this. We need to somehow cut down on our expenses. But as I have told
these parents with the CED, our expenses here at this school are not for any
luxuries – they are for things of necessity! How can we not pay our math teacher? How can we not pay for our security guard in times like these?\textsuperscript{75}

Director Aníbal went on to describe the receipts that he had on file. He asked specific teachers to gather other receipts they might have, in order to show them to the CED. He then asked teachers to turn in the donations that they had been collecting. Each classroom had been asked to contribute at least five Lempiras per child, to help off-set the internal budget deficit. The teachers had asked the students to go home and ask their parents for more money above and beyond the initial donations each family had made. None of the dozen teachers present had received complete funding from all of their students. This provoked discussion of parents’ argument that they shouldn’t be expected to pay for a ‘public’ school system. As teachers described in turn the particulars of the situation in their classrooms and the reasons some students were unable to pay the money, María Elena redirected the conversation to suggest that the teachers themselves cover the budget deficit. She and Aníbal asked their colleagues if everyone would agree to each donate an extra hundred Lempiras per month toward the school’s internal budget. Not everyone agreed. As consensus could not be reached, they decided instead to consider firing a part-time janitor who several teachers believed wasn’t doing a good job in any case. This was a more popular option, but required developing a rotating schedule for students from different grades to clean the restrooms themselves.

I described this discussion at length because it shows the difficulty of balancing previously-existing inadequate financial resources with the various increasing demands

\textsuperscript{75} Teachers’ council meeting, 1 June 2012.
on schools and teachers with the onset of the reforms. Without more resources, services would have to be reduced, and this involved a downloading of responsibility onto the shoulders of teachers, parents, and students in a range of ways. Aníbal was well aware that it was the school director who would become the lightning rod for criticism when attempts to manage these conflicting pressures – such as the need to offer a higher level of training without the funds to do so – failed.

The debates surrounding the CEB limbo status of José Cecilio del Valle continued throughout the 2012 school year. Some teachers donated an extra amount to the internal budget even though no consensus was reached to require this of everyone. This led to internal tensions between those who had donated and others who had not yet done so. Indeed, this was so divisive that I would often arrive to conduct participant observation only to find most teachers too upset to talk with me about the implications of the reforms. Instead, many teachers used their conversations with me as an opportunity to express frustration about their colleagues. Internal tensions became so extreme that a teacher was suspended from work for disciplinary reasons after having thrown a pot of boiling beans on the sub-director, which resulted in scalding that required immediate medical attention. In the rumours that circulated about the cause of this dispute, some teachers acknowledged that such behaviour was inexcusable but explained it as a result of the sub-director pressuring the teacher to donate her extra hundred Lempiras. The effects of these pressures on the working environment and collegial relations were profound.

In addition to these internal budget problems caused in part by the need to hire CEB teachers, a deeper critique of centros de educación básica can be observed through the case of the José Cecilio del Valle school. Whereas the initial rationale for establishing
CEBs was to provide poor rural children with access to some secondary education without shouldering the expense of traveling to an urban colegio, the CEB José Cecilio del Valle is located within urban San Lorenzo where the colegio El Felipe (the largest in Valle) is located. The fact that José Cecilio del Valle was granted CEB status at all contradicts this logic, hence the difference between “theory” and “practice” of governing policies in Honduras. However, it would be inappropriate to blame Director Aníbal for these problems, since a Valle diputado told him that the Ministry of Education would be changing his escuela into a centro básico.

Director Aníbal has been caught in the middle of the dilemma of trying to convert his school into a fully-funded centro de educación básica while it has become evident that in practice the resources for CEB classes simply have not been allocated to his school. In 2012 he was fearful that if he discontinues the CEB courses, the Ministry would eliminate the plan to change his centro into a CEB, which would have probably led to understandable criticism from those parents who had sent their children to José Cecilio del Valle for ciclo básico. An additional component to Aníbal’s willingness to hold on was his hope for a Liberal Party victory in the November 2013 presidential and congressional elections, which he believed would have been a way for his CEB to become fully funded. Given his on-going political connections with regional Liberal Party politicians, Aníbal considered this his best chance at full funding. As he understood it, “the problem is that I am a Liberal and these Nationalists don’t want to give it to me” (an example of how the allocation of education funding in Honduras is a political, rather than a technical exercise). In the meantime, Aníbal continued to work on funding possibilities and tried to keep the ad honorem teachers from leaving.
During the 2012 school year, Director Aníbal made frequent trips to the central Ministry of Education offices in Tegucigalpa. Paying for his own transportation expenses, he drove to the head offices in the capital city hoping to convince someone there that his centro needed to be properly funded, persistently reminding the Ministry authorities that a diputado awarded his school CEB status in 2009. As he told me:

> When I go to Tegus, I am told not to worry, that soon they will approve the budget for my centro básico teachers. It’s as if they just want to see me smile, come back here, and continue waiting. And it’s not easy to get in to see these guys. You have to go really early in the morning, and wait in line all day. And I have to pay for the gas myself – nobody is going to reimburse me. But after every visit, nothing ever gets done at the departmental level. I don’t have any connections there right now. So we’ll see what this next government does. 76

Director Aníbal’s experiences with waiting in the central Ministry offices resonate with the analysis of political scientist Javier Auyero, who has argued that waiting for state services produces a particular type of knowledge among citizens about how to interact with different kinds of state bureaucrats. He writes about how the poor in Argentina learn to manage the demands of local bureaucrats when seeking out welfare services (2012). Here we see a similar process among a different group, schoolteachers, who themselves work for the state. Aníbal has learned that waiting for Ministry of Education funding, and keeping the needs of his school before the eyes of government officials despite the lack of effective response to his petitions, is simply part of the job of

---

76 Interview, 20 September 2012.
being a director of a school in ‘CEB limbo status.’ And he continues to see the state, rather than the private sector, as the answer.

Amidst the circumstances described here, while still waiting for the central ministry to fund his CEB, Aníbal began to ask fellow CEB directors for advice. He even called Esdras one day to ask how he managed to change Carías Andino from an escuela into a centro de educación básica. I was with Esdras when he received this call. Esdras urged Aníbal to remember that in addition to the common practice of disregarding promises made under a previous government, any Ministry official at the Tegucigalpa level would be unfamiliar with and indifferent toward what happens to a CEB in peripheral Valle. He reminded Aníbal of the implications of a decentralized, semi-privatized education system, and advised him to discontinue his efforts in Tegucigalpa, and to instead channel his energy to influence those officials at the Valle departmental Ministry. Esdras suggested that Aníbal should remind the departmental Ministry officials that a new CEB cohort would be graduating soon, and that if they did not act quickly to adjust their budgets, they would be at fault for misleading a group of students and their parents. Esdras further recommended that Aníbal try to manoeuvre a politician to commit publicly to funding their CEB budget – perhaps on local television or over the radio.

Finally, Esdras reminded Aníbal that additional criticism would be levelled at him, if he were to lose the volunteer math teacher before the end of the 2012 school year.

Throughout the 2012 school year, Aníbal, María Elena, and other teachers on the CEB José Cecilio del Valle fundraising committee continued to seek funds to pay the ad honorem teachers. This was no easy task, as they were already paying for unforeseen construction fees. To gather these extra internal funds the schoolteachers decided to have
a ‘día de colores’ in which students were allowed to come to class without their uniforms (dressed ‘in colours’), provided that they pay a fee for such a privilege. They also asked fellow teachers and mothers of students alike to prepare traditional, labour-intensive Honduran dishes and sell them to other parents and community members at school events, just as they also hosted a community-wide raffle together with the Sociedad de Padres de Familia.

The kinds of fund-raising activities that the José Cecilio del Valle staff engaged in were common in Honduras prior to the reforms, just as they are common practices outside of Honduras. However, these efforts are now designed to help cover the costs of basic schooling needs in Honduras, rather than extra, non-essential expenditures. At this CEB, since these events didn’t produce enough money to fund the mounting of additional expenses, teachers developed new ideas for generating funds for the internal budget. One controversial way they did so was by altering how the CEB would elect a ‘school queen’ for the September 15 Independence Day parade. For the first time in the school’s history, teachers at the CEB José Cecilio del Valle made the election of school queen among female student candidates dependent not on student votes during the beauty pageant event, but rather it was determined by which candidate collected the largest amount of money in sponsorships. One Lempira equalled one vote.

These initiatives were not well received by some students and parents, who saw this tradition as a source of prestige. Determining who gets to march in the parade, and who is the school queen, has been a question of social status locally. As hundreds of community members gathered to watch the Independence Day parades, the participation of school children is viewed as a reflection on their parents. Comments about how well
dressed, well behaved, or handsome a child is tend to create a sense of pride among parents (see, also, Fiona Wilson 2001: 337 on how Peruvian teachers recognize the importance of these civic events).

The sudden change in the criteria for the most prestigious position of school queen was not popular. As school treasurer María Elena explained to me: “This is the first year that we have done the election of the queen this way. Usually it is based on which one is prettiest. But this year they have to go collect funds themselves. Whoever has the most Lempiras wins. Some parents don’t think it should be based on money, but I can tell you that we are basically without other options.” The schoolteachers at CEB José Cecilio del Valle were well aware of the local repercussions against them for changing this beauty pageant, yet they had decided that these changes were necessary, given the limbo status of their CEB, the deficit of their internal budget, and the political environment of scrutiny of schoolteachers’ work. Under far from ideal circumstances, they had to weigh whether they would be more criticized for changing this tradition, or for not being able to reconstruct a classroom and pay CEB teachers. They were, as Hondurans often say, “entre la espada y la pared” (between a rock and a hard place).

At the end of the school year, Aníbal and the teachers at the CEB José Cecilio del Valle had managed to keep the school operating under these considerable constraints, and they graduated the first CEB cohort. The CEB limbo status did however continue, without any resolution. It was cause for greater internal tensions among the teachers, and the issue of whether it made sense to maintain a CEB so close to El Felipe seemed to be a constant question on the minds of staff. Aníbal told me that in his opinion it did make sense. He argued that the students at CEB José Cecilio del Valle choose to attend his
school rather than the *colegio* in San Lorenzo because they could offer smaller class sizes; their teachers know the students by name and have known them since the first grade. He further argued that El Felipe requires students to pay higher student fees which go toward the construction and maintenance of a growing high school, whereas such fees are lower at his CEB. Overall, Aníbal argued that the students at his CEB are better off with a smaller class size, at a slightly more affordable price.

Other teachers at the CEB José Cecilio del Valle were more critical of what they recognized as a lower-quality education, even if that meant putting their own work and qualifications into question. The CEB English class teacher is a prime example. Profe Norma was always quite supportive of my presence at the CEB José Cecilio del Valle. She was however critically conscious of the status of her *centro* and the implications of the reforms. She has been a primary education schoolteacher during her entire career, and was asked to teach CEB English classes once the school received CEB status. Norma cannot hold a conversation in English; she cannot write full sentences in English; she does not understand the majority of spoken English; and she is aware that she lacks the knowledge to teach English. She didn’t want to be assigned the English classes in the first place. Rather, she was selected by Aníbal to teach CEB-level English classes because she had taken a couple of weekend English workshops in the past, and because she had traveled to the United States to visit family during school holidays. She was quick to see me as a useful resource. Throughout the school year we spent considerable time discussing pronunciation and grammar. Norma also asked me to give occasional guest lectures to her CEB English students.
Throughout my fieldwork Profe Norma and I discussed the implications of the reforms, and how she interpreted the recent political changes. She often spoke about how “even if we do get the teachers we need, centros básicos are not respectable institutions. Every good teacher knows that!” When I enquired with other teachers about this, many agreed with Norma’s sentiments; some even told me that they would not risk their own children’s education at a CEB.

For Honduran schoolteachers critical of centros de educación básica, these schools represent a lower-quality education at the secondary level of ciclo común. This understanding has several implications. At one level these teachers question what this means for the poor peasant students of Honduras, who they believe already receive lower-quality primary education, given the commonly-held perception that the best teachers opt for jobs in the urban setting. They wonder if rural students who graduate from CEBs will ever be as competitive as those who graduate from colegios. Although these schoolteachers recognize that a ciclo básico education is better than nothing at all, the argument is that CEBs have not solved the problems of poor peasant children accessing the secondary education system. Thus under this conception, an education from a CEB offers little room for class mobility and access to the job market based on education credentials. Chapter 3 demonstrated that most schoolteachers themselves have experienced the benefits of having gone through the education system successfully and obtained good jobs despite their humble backgrounds; they want others to have similar opportunities. These arguments connect with a concern that with only a poor quality education and no high school carrera (to enter a specific trade) poor peasant children will be more likely to join the pool of cheap labourers employed precariously by multinational
corporations. Thus discussions of CEBs also connect with schoolteachers’ overall 
solidarity with the Honduran working class and peasantry.

At another level, teachers who criticize CEBs view them as complementary to 
and a product of the current neoliberal reforms to the education sector and the reduction 
in public funding for national public education in general, which they see as regressive. 
They are aware that it is significantly less expensive for the Honduran state to change 
*escuelas* into CEBs than to properly invest in hiring more (qualified) secondary education 
schoolteachers and building more high schools in rural areas. Secondary schoolteachers 
are, on the whole, better paid because of their specialized undergraduate degrees, and the 
construction of a new high school is far more expensive than simply an extra classroom 
or two in an already-existing *escuela* to house the addition of *ciclo común* students, as 
Esdras attested. As we have seen however, in Honduras the mere construction of an extra 
classroom or getting the official status of ‘CEB’ – even while funds for teachers are 
pending – all depend upon a school administrator’s political connections.

While there were less internal conflicts surrounding the *centro básico* debate at 
CEB Carías Andino, and they had enough CEB teachers to teach the necessary *ciclo 
básico* courses, schoolteachers there were conscious of the controversy surrounding 
CEBs. Yet this was never an unambiguous situation. Profe Marlon for instance, who also 
held a position at a *colegio*, echoed on different occasions the same set of arguments in 
favour of CEBs as Director Aníbal expressed (smaller class sizes, lower fees). Yet when 
Director Esdras attempted to expand CEB Carías Andino – as the reforms require him to 
do – by encouraging students who have dropped out after sixth grade to come back and
finish *ciclo común*, and by convincing students in sixth grade to stay at CEB Carías Andino for their *ciclo común* studies, Sub-director Mercedes had a different agenda.

As a sixth-grade teacher, Sub-director Mercedes was acutely aware of which students showed the academic potential to continue on and study a high school *carrera*. And she was of the opinion that their CEB would not prepare students well enough to go on to compete with students who studied *ciclo común* at high schools in Nacaome, San Lorenzo, or Choluteca. To the dismay of Director Esdras and other teachers at CEB Carías Andino, who had gone out to rural communities to convince students who had dropped out of *ciclo común* to come back to finish and who had worked to convince others finishing sixth grade to stay on, Profe Mercedes attempted to convince some students to pursue their *ciclo común* studies elsewhere. This situation generated conflicts between Mercedes and other Carías Andino teachers who agreed with Esdras’s argument that most of their students, from peasant backgrounds, were too poor to travel elsewhere for their *ciclo básico* education, and that therefore they were doing the community a great service in providing otherwise unavailable secondary education at CEB Carías Andino. While the issue of how to promote the best interests of students is a matter about which reasonable people can disagree, these tensions were heightened because of the need under the reforms to increase student enrolment numbers. While Esdras and other teachers travelled to neighbouring rural communities to argue that their *centro* has the potential to bring these children out of poverty, Mercedes argued otherwise.

During the 2012 school year, Sub-director Mercedes was not completely successful in convincing students to go to elsewhere for their *ciclo común* education. This can be partly attributed to the fact that area students were indeed from poor households
that really could not finance the extra transportation and food expenses (supporting Esdras’ position), and partly due to Esdras’ campaign to promote the image of their CEB in the community. In either case, this on-going conflict between Esdras and Mercedes highlights again the internal tensions among schoolteachers that have been deepened by new pressures upon them, even two school administrators who have shared interests in supporting each other in the current political environment.

As we proceed to analyze how Honduran schoolteachers navigated the reforms and competed for limited funding to build their schools and maintain their internal budgets, we must keep in mind these internal contradictions and politics within the magisterio about centros de educación básica. We should remember that although CEBs do offer some secondary education (grades 7-9), for teachers critical of centros básicos they vividly represent a withdrawal of state funding for national public education in general, especially for pursuing the ultimate goals of secondary education, like training for a specific trade through a high school carrera. For these teachers, CEBs thus represent a move toward the primarización of the Honduran public education system. They argue that this process is complementary to the post-coup government’s reduction in funding for secondary education, which in turn encourages high schools to charge higher tuition fees. This situation as a whole, they argue, is likely to discourage or prevent poor students from pursuing a high school carrera, and thus only the wealthy youth of Honduras will have access to a specialized diploma; the rest will enter the work force with only a primary school (or CEB) education, which they feel is inadequate.

These arguments are connected to the widespread understanding in the magisterio that with decentralization and privatization of education funding, not only will
schools in the rural areas be forced to close due to low enrolment numbers, but cash-strapped municipal governments will only be willing (and able) to support education in the urban areas (although even there such support is inadequate). As this happens, teachers fear that high schools (colegios and normal schools) will receive the least amount of funding, as poor municipalities will seek to prioritize and will only support primary education (escuelas and centros de educación básica).

Even teachers who strictly teach primary education and support CEBs see clear connections between the overall decrease in government support for the national public education system and this process of ‘primarización.’ Most Honduran schoolteachers today therefore argue that the reforms will eventually lead to abolishing the high-school carrera and perhaps public secondary education in general. They fear that as is the case with other neoliberal processes, the poor will have less access to basic services, while the rich will continue to benefit from such arrangements. As one teacher reflected on this aspect of the implications of the reforms, she told me: “The message from this government is clear: If you want an education, you have to buy it yourself. If you don’t have the money, then go work in the maquilas [sweat-shops].”

5.5 Education Initiatives to Create Opportunities for Poor Rural Youth

The schoolteachers with whom I work are vehemently against the idea that their students – many of whom come to class without having eaten breakfast or dinner the night before – should simply give up after primary education and find poorly-paid work. As part of their own visions for what the state could be (a subject I expand upon in

---

77 Interview, 29 March 2012.
Chapter 7), schoolteachers want to forge a society in which education is seen as the responsibility of the state and in which opportunity for youth is prioritized. They contrast this hope with the current reality of a government that divests itself of its responsibilities for national public education. Teachers criticize this situation as a *golpista*-initiated privatization scheme, and argue that it will result in more unequal access to the education system, which they consider a basic human right. They say this will result in more social inequities, and the abandonment of the majority of Honduran youth (as Wolseth 2011 illustrates so vividly when these youth resort to joining gangs).

To combat this reality during the 2012 school year, teachers at Carías Andino designed workshops for students to learn practical skills to enter a specific trade, and encouraged even the poorest of their students to apply to high school, telling me they hoped that despite the cutbacks to their own wages and benefits, some of their students might still want to study at the normal school and become schoolteachers. Most significantly, teachers at this rural school held meetings to talk with students’ parents about how the reforms would negatively affect their children’s futures if there is no longer a public secondary education system. They took advantage of these discussions to communicate to parents that they were doing everything they could to combat the reforms, communicating that *magisterio* struggles are in the interest of working class and *campesino* (peasant) struggles, and that they would be stronger with parental support. Such an astute approach to generating parental support for teachers’ struggles did not happen in the urban José Cecilio del Valle school – perhaps partly due to the internal conflicts generated from the CEB limbo status at that school – but it did take hold at the Carías Andino rural school.
At Carías Andino, conversations about how education can provide meaningful opportunities for young people culminated with two inter-related projects: extracurricular clubs and contacts with a state-run trade school that offered technical degrees. The following two ethnographic examples illuminate how teachers were navigating the new pressures of the reforms and attempting to maintain a positive image of their efforts among local interested parties, while also trying – with the limited resources they had – to work within the current repressive neoliberal system in ways that forge a model of what education could be (which includes the ability to use education to find dignified employment). This includes training students with practical skills they could use ‘beyond the four walls of the classroom,’ as teachers would put it.

Understanding quite well the political environment aimed at blaming teachers for all the problems with the public education system, Esdras decided to explain to parents directly that although certain aspects of the reforms will be unattainable for some schools, he and teachers at Carías Andino would be improving the academic programs offered. He even went a step further than what the reforms require, and developed extra-curricular programs that he said would teach practical knowledge to members of the community, which could then be used to generate employment locally. After the first month of classes Esdras explained his plans at the first meeting between the teachers’ council and the Sociedad de Padres de Familia:

The new law states that every child in Honduras will now be taught English, computer literacy, and that we will soon reach the same academic levels in Math and Spanish as all the most developed countries… that’s a total lie! You all should know by now that this government lies to us – they haven’t followed through with even one of their promises. Not every school in Honduras has the resources to be able to do something like this from one day to the next…. But I’ll
tell you what we will do here at our school: we’re going to continue teaching computer literacy in our regular curricular program, and more. We plan to work really hard for you by organizing extra-curricular clubs to teach your children practical things that can be used beyond the four walls of the classroom. We’re going to have a natural science club, a sports club, a home-economics and food security club, a dance club, a math club, and even an English club. We’ve seen the need for this sort of thing here in the community, and the parents with whom I have spoken seem to like this idea. This way your children can learn how to run their own small business and contribute to the economic development of this community. 78

Esdras’ initiative was met with an adequate amount of parental support for him and his fellow teachers to begin the extra-curricular clubs. He even asked me to help design the English club and teach English classes to the club participants, just as he also recruited a volunteer math teacher from JICA to help with the math clubs. After a few months had passed and the clubs became an established program, Esdras and the sub-director of the school invited their municipal and regional Ministry directors to come out and inspect their work.

This self-initiated evaluation went over well: the supervisors liked Esdras’ enthusiasm and ingenuity for new ideas for education projects at his school. Esdras and teachers at the rural school were in turn able to rest assured that, at least for the moment, their efforts to maintain positive relations with local interested parties had been successful. In addition to going over well with these local interested parties, Esdras and other teachers from the Carías Andino CEB also commented how such clubs work toward providing students with practical training that could hopefully become relevant

78 Meeting between teachers and students’ parents, 2 March 2012.
for their lives after they graduated. These ideas were further extended with a second project, involving the trade school technical degree initiatives.

While Director Esdras was being interviewed on local television about his school, he was able to recruit a state-managed trade school, *El Instituto Nacional de Formación Professional* (INFOP, the National Institute of Professional Formation) to offer extension courses at Carías Andino. The LIBRE-supporting journalist was asking him to comment on the effects of the reforms and of the decentralization project for his school in poor rural El Garrobo. As Esdras explained that less state funding is being allotted to poor areas in general, he took advantage of the opportunity to promote his efforts to make education opportunities useful for local youth, and the journalist asked him what he thought about the work of INFOP. He responded positively and then asked the journalist if they could call the regional manager of INFOP together over the air to ask if they would help with initiatives at Carías Andino. Once the INFOP manager realized that his conversation with Esdras was being transmitted on live television, he accepted the proposal. Director Esdras later boasted to his colleagues about how this strategic idea just came to him during the interview, and how he considered it to be a success in their struggle to get a state institution to contribute *something* to the youth of the poor rural community where they are working.

Normally people pay some tuition money and travel to the INFOP offices for their services – a commute which most young people from the rural community would not be able to afford. Conscious of this reality, Esdras persuaded the institute to come directly to Carías Andino in the rural community, thereby itself incurring the transportation expense. He asked them to facilitate free six-week technical training workshops for upper-year
students and graduates of the CEB to earn diplomas as ‘técnicos en refrigeración’ (refrigeration technicians) to be able to fix refrigerators and air-conditioners. Such jobs are considered more prestigious locally than working in the export sector, since the worker can determine his/her own fees and schedule, and because they depend on a specialized set of skills.

The extent to which these refrigeration technician diplomas actually provide employment locally is an open question. Nonetheless this is an example of how, under the education reforms, teachers have been going about their daily work in a different way and in the process assessing what should be the goals for education even before the state re-foundation they hope will come in the future. In 2012 they considered meaningful employment opportunities for young people to be an essential dimension of what an education system should do and were willing to work toward that end – even if it meant soliciting extra-curricular programs from a quasi-state institute outside of the traditional realm of the magisterio and the Ministry of Education.

This example illuminates some of the contradictory processes involved with this kind of work in the name of the state, and some of the debates within the magisterio in the current historical conjuncture. Teachers are dealing with the difficulties of attempting to manage daily issues with whatever resources do exist, all while understanding that some of these actions contradict the magisterio’s visions of what state institutions should be doing in general. As teachers think through what the state could be like in the future, and the different possible ways to make education helpful for local populations who seek dignified employment opportunities, they promote the advantages of bringing in an
institute outside the realm of the Ministry of Education, asking INFOP to train students and former graduates in the community.

On the one hand this practice goes against certain aspects of what Honduran schoolteachers ultimately want: a national public education system that assumes these responsibilities under the mandate of the central Ministry of Education. In this sense, asking local offices of INFOP to come in to one school could be seen as supporting the project of decentralization. Especially for those teachers who teach at high schools offering a technical carrera, this would mean asking INFOP to do their jobs. On the other hand however, at the CEB Carías Andino bringing in the trade school was something that these particular teachers did indeed want. Teachers at this rural school saw it as an achievement locally in their struggle to get something from a state institution, and in the process, do something that the community members felt was worthwhile in their hopes for more decent employment opportunities locally. In this sense recruiting INFOP could also be seen in the context of teachers’ critique of state practices and golpista authorities that chose to abandon national public education for neoliberal agendas which negatively affect the poor. In this sense, teachers were seeking out every possible space for political action as they necessarily implemented aspects of the reforms, in the process stretching the boundaries of the meanings of these policies. As Profe Marlon told me in relation to what INFOP means for Carías Andino:

There are many people in this government who would like to see these poor kids without any education at all. They pass these laws knowing full well what it is doing to the working class and the peasantry. They want the people to remain
ignorant and with no other choice but to work in places like the ciudad modelo (model city). But here in El Garrobo we’re not going to let that happen!\(^{79}\)

### 5.6 Conclusion

As teachers imagine the implications of abolishing the high school carrera for young poor Hondurans, they frequently talk about how they believe neoliberal development policies are a step in the wrong direction for Honduras. Teachers are against the idea that their students have no other choice but to sell their labour in the export economy under precarious working conditions.

The model city project that Marlon mentions is one example of this type of neoliberal economic development initiative promoted by the Pepe Lobo government. It was inspired by the ideas of US economist Paul Romer. The project consists of a specific geographic region within Honduran territory not subject to the jurisdiction of Honduran laws, but rather, completely in the hands of investors (whether foreign or national) through the concession of a large area of land, which Lobo said would be 33 square kilometres (Romer recommends 1,000; see Charter Cities 2011). As an ‘autonomous zone,’ the area would have its own bureaucratic authorities, private security forces, legal and judicial system to realize its governance of Honduran industrial workers – in whatever ways the investors see fit, using whichever currency and language the investors themselves decide. The workers would live within the boundaries of the ciudad modelo, and would have to rent their own living quarters, as the land would be leased to the investors and thus not for sale to the Honduran workers who would live there.

---

\(^{79}\) Interview, 20 December 2012.
The model city project resonates with Aiwa Ong’s descriptions of similar neoliberal projects already underway in various Southeast Asian countries. This anthropologist writes of “Export-Processing Zones” (EPZs) first established in Asia during the 1960s through UN and World Bank mandates as a “combination of old customs areas and export-oriented manufacturing. Thus EPZs combine tax-free holidays with other incentives for foreign investors to set up factories that produce export goods, train low-skill workers, and facilitate technology transfer” (Ong 2006: 103).

Not only are Honduran schoolteachers, as a group, against this type of development project, but they also seek a new model for what the education system should be about – providing practical benefits for students that can hopefully be translated into dignified employment opportunities. They want the state to play a central role in funding national public education, but they recognize the power that any given government in office has in dismantling this broader state project (as has been the case since June 2009). Honduran schoolteachers themselves exemplify how life projects can be realized through the national public education system. They believe that maintenance of the high school carrera – be it through the normal school or otherwise – is the method for assuring that the Ministry of Education continues to provide such opportunities to Honduran youth.

One of the primary arguments that the magisterio has been making against the Ley Fundamental de Educación is that it will lead to the abolition of the high school carrera. While this has been one way in which teachers have been successful at gaining support from parents – by telling them that these reforms put their children at a disadvantage – such solidarity is not enough. The magisterio has not been able to reverse
the reforms, despite their *paros* and protests on the streets. In 2012, teachers saw the potential for a LIBRE government (if elected in the November 2013 elections) to reverse the reforms and forge a state that takes responsibility for funding its national public education system. Despite this recognition, not every teacher was a supporter of LIBRE in 2012, and the divisions within the party and the FNRP movement interacted with the divisions within the *magisterio* in ways that were often counter-productive to other goals of the *Resistencia* and the *magisterio*. We now turn to a chapter with ethnographic examples that capture these debates and illuminate how teachers were assigning blame for the reforms – not only to *golpista* politicians, but to their own *magisterio dirigentes* as well.
6 Conflicts within the *Magisterio*

6.1 Introduction

In September 2012, the official order from the *Federación de Organizaciones Magisteriales de Honduras* (FOMH, Federation of Teachers’ Organizations of Honduras) was to refrain from participating in local September 15 Independence Day parades. The presidents of all six *colegios magisteriales* asked teachers to suspend their usual civic holiday celebrations in order to protest the reforms – just as the *magisterio* had done in September 2009 to protest the coup. While some school directors abided by these instructions, the teachers at both Carías Andino and José Cecilio del Valle decided to participate in the civic celebrations, thereby defying the official instructions from their profession’s national leaders in the FOMH.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which divisions within the *magisterio* articulated with teachers’ abilities to challenge the reforms, and how at the onset of these laws teachers were beginning to question the sincerity of their own leaders and colleagues. The examples presented here direct our attention to questions such as: How do divisions within the *magisterio* manifest in the daily lives of regular schoolteachers? How is association with the *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party debated at *magisterio* events? How do the experiences teachers have had with their *dirigentes* and *colegio* leaders affect their enthusiasm or inertia for collective political actions? How do seemingly banal interpersonal conflicts among co-workers connect with broader conflicts within the *magisterio* in the current historical conjuncture? In this chapter I aim to explore some of these processes as teachers sought to reverse the 2012 reforms and began to see LIBRE as a vehicle for creating viable solutions to these problems. Whereas Chapter 5
illuminated the controversies among teachers regarding questions of how to administer primary and secondary education, this chapter shows how internal conflicts in general can hamper teachers’ abilities to unite and achieve their goals as a gremio. In support of this analysis, I will present ethnographic examples from three different arenas: 1) the difficulties in carrying out a nation-wide paro and organized public protest; 2) the relationships between magisterio dirigentes/members of the FOMH and common schoolteachers who are not in leadership positions; and 3) the ways teachers are using the laws as tools to criticize each other during workplace disputes. I have deliberately attempted to separate these three categories for the analytical purposes of this chapter, although in teachers’ everyday work such experiences are more fluid.

While the José Cecilio del Valle school had its own band and was able to parade through San Lorenzo, the Carías Andino school was not so fortunate. Since they did not have their own band they first attempted to borrow one from another school. When that fell through at the last moment they had to cancel their plans for a community-wide parade. In both cases however, the directors and teachers at these CEBs all intended to participate fully in the September 15 celebrations, and they developed well-articulated arguments to explain their decision to disobey the direct orders of the FOMH. As teachers talked amongst themselves about these issues, I enquired about their decision to disregard the FOMH orders regarding the parades. There seemed to be a consensus that a key consideration was that, given the popularity of these events locally, participating would help them to maintain positive relations with community members and the Sociedad de Padres de Familia. Teachers also referred to recent post-coup September 15 celebrations where there have been two different parades, one for Resistencia supporters
and one for golpistas. This highlights how complex the decision to march in any civic holiday parade is currently in Honduras, especially for the magisterio. As one teacher at Cañas Andino described his sense of the situation:

Look here… Even though the golpistas try to make patriotism theirs – saying that LIBRE is anti-Honduran – we can show people that this is not the case. We are still going to march in the name of Honduras, for the day of independence, even though we are LIBRE… well, the majority of us. And we can promote our own schools in the process. Those in the FOMH have no idea what we are dealing with here every day due to the reforms…. They just think about causing a ruckus, but we’re the ones who have to go back to work tomorrow, and face the angry parents, and the COMDEs and the CED. So we’re going to parade. People like this stuff. They love seeing their children out there waving to everyone. Electing a school queen, that’s a big deal here in Latin America – it’s not like in the United States. Parades are a big deal to us – people go crazy for them. That’s why we’re going to march – to promote our centro. And to show the people of this community that even though we have our own struggles as a gremio, and we strike and hold paros, we’re still a part of this community, and we care about these events just as much as they do…. Some [teachers] will say that we’re golpistas just for participating in the Independence Day parades, but that’s simply not true.80

This teacher’s comments point us to additional ways that teachers are caught between conflicting mandates: their professional leaders gave them specific instructions not to participate in the September 15 civic events; some LIBRE Party members and Resistencia supporters viewed these events as associated with the golpistas; and yet maintaining good relations with community members has taken on heightened

80 Interview, 12 September 2012.
importance for Honduran teachers in the political environment of the education reforms. These processes were especially relevant during moments in which teachers withheld their labour by choosing to not conduct classes.

6.2 *Paros Nacionales* (Nation-Wide Work Stoppages)

*Paros* were rather frequent throughout my fieldwork, occurring about once every other month.\(^{81}\) While attending *asambleas* – the *colegio*-initiated formal meetings where *dirigentes* rally support for subsequent protests on the streets – I noticed that less than a third of the teachers participating in my research joined the *paros* on a regular basis. Teachers who were present would also criticize their colleagues who chose not to come. There seemed to be a sense of disillusionment and apathy among most teachers, many of whom treated the *paro* as simply another day off of work. Especially when the FOMH would call for a *paro* on a Friday, the event seemed rather ineffective. My closest research participants would usually go fishing.

When I inquired about this, many teachers explained that this is how their *paros* usually work – the teachers who are known for protesting come, but most stay home. And in many cases economic factors played a role. The *asamblea* was usually held in either Nacaome or San Lorenzo, which for a good portion of the teachers were locations even farther away from their homes than their workplaces were (which as described earlier often involved difficult commutes). Yet there is more to teachers’ decisions than just matters of convenience and expense. There is also a deeper debate occurring within the *magisterio* today, which deters some teachers from attending these events. At the centre

\(^{81}\) However, as I suggest in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I do consider *paros* and protests on the streets to be extraordinary activities, and thus they do not constitute the type of everyday work that I am most interested in studying.
of the debate is whether or not it is appropriate to support LIBRE and the FNRP at a magisterio protest.

In this section I describe how these conflicts take shape in the magisterio, as teachers attempt to situate their struggles within the context of broader popular struggles, while debating the extent to which the magisterio should be associated with the FNRP/LIBRE Party. Far from simply a matter of congruence with a teacher’s support for the party, some LIBRE-oriented teachers also argue that magisterio paros should strictly be about the challenges facing the magisterio rather than demonstrating support for any political party. On the one hand, those who agree with this argument are quick to remind people that the magisterio has never had a good relationship with any government, and that they should therefore not endorse any political party. They also suggest that since not all teachers are LIBRE supporters, associating their paros with a LIBRE event would discourage other teachers who are against the reforms and who do wish to protest. As one LIBRE-supporting recent normal school graduate told me:

The magisterio paros are for teachers – they’re about our rights and benefits. I am LIBRE and will vote for Xiomara, but that support should be shown at LIBRE and Resistencia marches, not at those of the magisterio. It’s OK to support one’s colegio, I’ll proudly say that I am COLPROSUMAH. But if I say that I am out there because I am LIBRE, there will be some [teachers] who will criticize this. 82

On the other hand, during the 2012 school year, most teachers recognized that electing a LIBRE government to power was the only hope that the magisterio had to reverse the reforms. Even teachers who were not strong LIBRE supporters themselves (a

82 Interview, 3 December 2012.
minority) recognized this as fact. As Profe María Elena explained to me when I asked her about her opinions on these issues proceeding the November 2012 *elecciones internas* (primary elections):

I’m not sure yet who I will vote for. Xiomara seems like a good candidate but I have always been a Liberal my entire life. My parents were Liberals and we are from a family with that tradition…. But I’ll tell you one thing: a LIBRE government would be the best thing for the *magisterio* right now. Every teacher should vote LIBRE. It would be to our own benefit as education workers.\(^\text{83}\)

María Elena’s comments express a general consciousness that teachers had in 2012: if elected to power, LIBRE would be the political party most likely to support the interests of the *magisterio* (although in the end the party was not successful in winning all teachers’ votes, as I discuss in the concluding chapter).

More important than the fact that there was a minority of teachers who were not strong LIBRE supporters in 2012, a more fundamental debate was occurring in 2012 through discussion about why the *magisterio* should not formally support LIBRE at their events. As Esdras himself – one of the strongest LIBRE-supporting teachers I knew – told me while entering an *asamblea* before a march:

I took off my FNRP headscarf at the last minute because I knew others would criticize me for bringing LIBRE propaganda to the march. I am *mera-Resistencia* and everyone knows that. They all know about me – and my time in Nicaragua and at the Brazilian Embassy…. But they also know that I am the director of a *centro básico*. Look here, this *paro* is about the *magisterio* struggle against the

\(^{83}\) Interview, 29 October 2012.
privatization of our education system. And it’s to protest against these golpistas who haven’t paid our vacation pay. It’s not about LIBRE.\textsuperscript{84}

Another reason why some teachers decided to not participate in the paros was their fear of receiving harsh criticism from students’ parents. The conflicts between parents and teachers at the José Cecilio del Valle school led teachers there to ask the Sociedad de Padres de Familia if they would support their causes in holding a paro. This had been an effective strategy for Honduran teachers in the past, during moments of prolonged nation-wide strikes. While conducting NGO work in 2004, for instance, I attended numerous meetings between community members and schoolteachers in various rural communities, where the teachers were trying to determine whether or not the community would support them during a prolonged strike. But a paro is not a strike, and in the post-coup political environment, magisterio struggles are viewed by many student parents as in support of LIBRE. In 2012 the magisterio held no strikes.\textsuperscript{85} And while the parents at José Cecilio del Valle initially supported teachers’ reasons for cancelling classes and holding a paro – as teachers convinced them that a privatized system is not in their own interest – as the school year progressed and the CED began to increasingly

\textsuperscript{84} Interview, 24 July 2012.  
\textsuperscript{85} Whereas in some other Latin American countries a ‘paro’ (work stoppage) and a ‘huelga’ (strike) may be synonymous, in Honduras these are two different kinds of actions. For the magisterio, a paro refers to a period in which workers withhold their labour to protest a given situation on a particular day. After the demonstration is over, teachers usually return to work – sometimes even the next day – even if no resolution is reached. For instance, during my fieldwork schoolteachers would often hold their paros for only one day at a time, march through the streets with signs and cries demanding that the state pay for public education, but then return to class the next day without having achieved any change in policy. On the other hand, in Honduras, a huelga is when workers withhold their labour until specific demands (a change in policy, respect for a previous law, or even an increase in salary or benefit) have been made, or a compromise has been reached. This also means that in Honduras paros usually only last one day (although they can be extended for longer periods as was seen immediately after the coup), while huelgas generally last for longer periods, until a resolution is reached.
scrutinize the decisions of Director Aníbal, the teachers at José Cecilio del Valle lost parental support.

While other schools respected the FOMH’s decision to hold a *paro*, on several occasions there were still classes at José Cecilio del Valle. For Profe Suyapa, one of the few teachers who never missed a *paro*, this situation posed a particular problem. Like several of my research participants, Suyapa worked shifts in two schools. Her morning shift was at another San Lorenzo school that would always respect the FOMH’s orders and would therefore always cancel classes because of the *paro*, yet she had to arrive to José Cecilio del Valle at noon regardless. Suyapa’s situation was further complicated by the fact that she lives in Nacaome, and both of her schools were in San Lorenzo. Despite her desire to march on the streets against the reforms, she told me that her participation would only be possible when the FOMH announced a march in San Lorenzo:

When they gather in Nacaome, you can imagine my excitement and desire to march with my own neighbours. It would otherwise be easiest for me to march there, since I live there. But I have to think about my job here [at José Cecilio del Valle]. Between the police checkpoints and our own roadblocks, there is no way I could attempt to protest in Nacaome in the morning and then reach San Lorenzo in the afternoon. You never know what will happen at these events. So I have to miss all the marches that happen there, which are the majority. It is only rarely that the FOMH announces San Lorenzo as our home base – those are the times that I am able to get out on the streets and march, because I can just walk off the streets and right into my classroom here.\(^86\)

Suyapa is a well-known *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party organizer. After the 2009 coup she became one of several teachers from the south to organize nation-wide *magisterio*

\(^86\) Interview, 24 July 2012.
movements to protest post-coup governing policies. It is frustrating for her to see such limited support from her colleagues for the *paros*, although she understands the dire situation of José Cecilio del Valle (and argues in favour of CEBs).

An additional reason why some teachers do not participate in the *paros* is because the Lobo government often declared a given *magisterio paro* illegal, threatening to suspend or fire any teacher who participated. Some schoolteachers told me quite simply that a *paro*, without a greater likelihood of being able to reverse the reforms, was not worth risking their jobs for. Yet even if these teachers wanted to go to work, if their school administrators decided to recognize the orders from the FOMH and thus closed the school, then they couldn’t work in any case. Such variables caused frustration and apathy about the *paros* among those teachers who chose not to participate.

In recognition of this situation Director Esdras took it upon himself to devise a creative strategy during one *paro* that teachers predicted would be subject to additional scrutiny by the Ministry of Education. 87 The day before the *paro* he held a meeting with the *Sociedad de Padres de Familia* to announce that the decision to hold a nation-wide *paro* was not his choice, but a direct order from his superiors at the FOMH. That afternoon before all the teachers left for the day, Director Esdras called an emergency teachers’ council meeting. There he told every teacher that if all agreed, he would allow them to sign in for the next day’s work before leaving that day. Thus he could submit this paperwork at the end of the month to the departmental Ministry directors showing that they taught classes that day. He explained:

87 This was prior to, but in the same political environment of, the unprecedented firing of several teachers in other departments for ‘not showing up to teach classes.’ The teachers with whom I work knew many of these individuals, despite the fact that few teachers from Valle were fired. The event provoked additional fear of participating in the *paros*, as was undoubtedly intended.
I know that it’s not the most ethical practice, compañeros, and please don’t take this to mean that you can always skip classes – we need you here, and some of you have had real attendance problems in the past. But what these golpistas are doing to us is una barbariedad completa (complete barbarity) and we have to fight back. I’ll gladly stamp these hour logs with the official stamp of our centro if you do your part in helping your fellow teachers and go out to the march. Profe Marlon has offered to take people to Tegus. So get out there and protest – either in Nacaome or Tegus! And don’t worry about your log in sheets, I’ll send these off to the departmental supervisors as if you were really here. 88

A slightly higher than usual number of teachers from Carías Andino participated in the paro marches on that occasion. But when I inquired about their experiences, the responses from most teachers emphasized yet another complication. As Marlon and others reported, in Tegucigalpa there were some well-known dirigentes who participated in the marches during the morning, and abandoned their colleagues in the afternoon. When a few teachers investigated their whereabouts, they reported that the dirigentes had gone to work during their afternoon shifts at their nearby schools – out of fear of losing their own jobs. Despite having a school director sympathetic to their participation in the paro, amidst their preoccupations about the probability of getting fired, teachers at Carías Andino began to ask: How can it be that the FOMH declares a paro and then our own dirigentes are fearful of participating? As Marlon later put it:

I usually go with a bunch of people from COPEMH, my colegio. The last time we woke up at dawn to get to Tegucigalpa on time for the march. We had a truck full of people from the south – the more teachers who go the less it costs everyone for gas. Some people can’t make that kind of sacrifice to travel the entire day, but I

88 Teachers’ council meeting, 27 September 2012.
am fortunate to be able to. We marched through Plaza Miraflores to really show those damn *golpistas* who they’re messing with. We were right next to the *dirigentes*, which I love to do – I like to see what they say and how they act… when they participate, that is. Some *dirigentes* have been bought.89

Teachers’ comments about this event were connected to their broader critique of the *magisterio* leadership at that conjuncture – although teachers also recognized that internal divisions left them weak and that the *golpistas* wanted them to distrust their own *dirigentes*. As Profe Larissa from Carías Andino told me in the privacy of her classroom:

I know that we should trust our *dirigentes* and that the *magisterio* has been plagued with *dividismo*…. But, I’ll tell you, I often wonder just what the hell our *dirigentes* are doing with all their time and money…. I pay good, hard-earned money to my *colegio*, and for what? I am killing myself out here, putting up with all these new demands and disgruntled parents who are always looking over my shoulder. I am one of the few colleagues who never misses a protest: in Nacaome, in Tegus, I’m always there, fighting against the police, the military, putting up with the hot sun on the streets all day long…. And meanwhile, our *dirigencia* and those from the FOMH are in some air-conditioned office in Tegus taking it easy!90

In 2012 Honduran teachers were questioning whether or not their leaders had been paid off by the Lobo regime. They were frustrated by the fact that their own colleagues made promises to fight on their behalf, claiming to be strong supporters of *magisterio* causes (and those of the *Resistencia* in most cases), and yet once teachers elected them to the leadership positions of the FOMH, they failed to deliver on such promises. My

89 Interview, 28 November 2012.
90 Interview, 24 October 2012.
research participants found an intolerable irony in the fact that after the June 2009 coup they became more aware of who was a Resistencia-oriented activist, and despite their best intentions to elect such progressive leaders, the new laws passed in 2011 were the worst setback their gremio had ever experienced.

6.3 The Relationship between Dirigentes and Common Teachers

The teachers with whom I work criticize the fact that some teachers are treated with political favouritism – receiving their plazas because of their party affiliation, and even their leadership positions based on political alliances they form, not merit. In 2012 some teachers also recognized that they themselves participated in a similar practice when securing local funding and promoting the image of their schools. In the next chapter I examine how teachers envision a new type of Honduran politician with state re-foundation. Here I want to emphasize that this relationship with politicians has affected magisterio leadership. In fact, the teachers with whom I work were questioning the motives of their dirigentes, asking if they have been paid off (through bribes or promises for political positions) by politicians in the Lobo government. Ultimately they asked, how is it that our Resistencia-oriented dirigentes have allowed this golpista government to pass these reforms?

As much as teachers criticize their leaders, when it comes time to meet with them to discuss their progress with battling the reforms, a similar type of performance occurs as when teachers meet with politicians who promise funding for their schools: they smile, shake hands, and talk about non-controversial subjects. Honduran schoolteachers are conscious that their elected dirigentes in the FOMH are trying to reverse the reforms, and
that it is in their interest to get along with them. The following ethnographic example comes from my participation in a weekend class at the Choluteca campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH, the National Autonomous University of Honduras). These classes were designed for teachers to earn their undergraduate degrees in pedagogía (pedagogy) in order to have the option of subsequently becoming a member of the Colegio de Pedagogos de Honduras (COLPEDAGOGOSH, College of Pedagogues of Honduras).

Normally any undergraduate degree for schoolteachers is earned from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán (UPNFM, Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University), and teachers study a specific subject that they can then apply in their classrooms. They study the subject in order to learn how to teach it. The carrera de pedagogía at the UNAH is controversial among the magisterio as a whole. Part of this controversy has to do with the idea that the UNAH is now offering a major for schoolteachers, when historically the UPNFM was the only post-secondary education institution accredited to offer an undergraduate education specifically for schoolteachers. Some of these arguments against the UNAH offering this degree also carry over to a movement within the UPNFM to separate from the academic oversight of the UNAH (arguing that this would facilitate more academic and financial autonomy for the UPNFM).

These aspects of the debates aside, secondary education teachers with UPNFM degrees in particular see the carrera de pedagogía as a nonsense major. As one high school social studies teacher put it:

We [teachers] have made all sorts of mistakes in recent years. Allowing our dirigentes to approve CEBs, for instance, has been a real step backwards. Another
horrible mistake is this carrera de pedagogía – now we have all sorts of
‘pedagogues’ who don’t really study anything important. What nonsense!91

Teachers who have sacrificed to earn their undergraduate degrees from the UPNFM, who are critical of this new career, would often tell me that these teachers do not really studying pedagogy per se. Instead, they see the degree as closely aligned with what the UPNFM Nacaome campus is also offering, administración educativa (education administration). While in classes for both degrees, I also sensed that these majors are designed to orient teachers in becoming competent school directors – fluent in the latest Honduran education laws and capable of managing a staff under these changing circumstances. This also made it a valuable dimension of my fieldwork.

The teachers with whom I spoke about these two majors – beyond Esdras and Mercedes – also seemed to agree that these majors do indeed train teachers to become better directors. However, as they point out, these are the only two viable options for distance education in the south that could be undertaken while working full-time. The teachers I knew who were taking these university courses were doing so primarily because they wanted to earn a degree that would in principle allow them to become a sub-director, a director, or at least have an increase in salary. But they also did seem to receive useful information during the process of their studies. The subject matter of all classes for both majors at both instructions was grounded in different aspects of teachers’ daily work in the context of the reforms. The following example comes from one of the last days at the UNAH Choluteca campus when the teachers taking the course had to

---

91 Interview, 23 August 2012.
deliver group presentations on the impacts of each new law and stimulate group discussion.

In April 2012 when I accompanied Esdras to this class at the Choluteca campus of the UNAH he was making last-minute preparations for his group presentation and final project for the course *Macro-Educación* (Macro Education), while the instructor spoke about what teachers should expect after earning their undergraduate degrees in Pedagogy. Similar to other weekend university courses offered to normal school graduates already employed as schoolteachers, this one asked experienced professionals to rethink how they approach their work in light of the reforms.

While Esdras waited for his turn to speak, other teachers presented on how the *magisterio* has responded to these neoliberal reforms. One group presented on the unconstitutionality of the new *Ley de INPREMA*, the law which increases the contributions that teachers are required to make to the state-run pension institute, while allowing the Ministry of Education to pay less overall toward their retirement funds and life insurance. The teachers discussed the on-going efforts of the FOMH and other *dirigentes magisteriales* to hire lawyers to pressure the Honduran Supreme Court to deem the law illegal, on the grounds that it negated the labour achievements institutionalized in legislation that as a *gremio* they had won through previous struggles.

These presentations point us to the FOMH and their efforts to reverse the new INPREMA Law. Since February 2012 the *dirigentes magisteriales* had been telling their members that they were working diligently with lawyers to present arguments to the national congress that this law reducing teachers’ retirement funds was unconstitutional. This is an interesting premise, especially since members of the *Resistencia* and LIBRE
Party argued that the current constitution is obsolete and does not represent the interests of the vast majority of Honduras. Nonetheless in this case a group of (mainly) Resistencia supporters used aspects of this same constitution as the basis for their arguments, as they sought to fight the educational reforms on multiple fronts.

The arguments as to why the INPREMA law was considered unconstitutional were not clearly articulated by the majority of teachers. When I probed further, many of my participants told me that it was illegal to take away the rights of a gremio; others would simply say that Lobo’s government was elected during a coup-installed government, and that therefore every law it passed was illegal. While these arguments are persuasive to people in solidarity with the magisterio and the Resistencia broadly, many teachers recognized that they would need a better-articulated argument about unconstitutionality if they were to have a chance to reverse the law while the Lobo government was in power.

Another incident from this same UNAH Choluteca class that highlights these difficulties was when the professor invited the president of COLPEDAGOGOSH to speak to teachers in the class on this very subject. The teachers had paid to rent a hotel ballroom with a catering service for their final presentations (each paying enough to cover the cost of the food for their professor and the president of this colegio, as well as their own meals). Once their presentations were finished, the teachers waited patiently for the president of COLPEDAGOGOSH to arrive. As the clocked ticked on, the course instructor reminded the students that their guest was a busy man, and that travelling from Tegucigalpa just to speak with them about the efforts of the FOMH was a huge sacrifice (insinuating that they should be grateful that he took the time to come to the south and
speak with them). The president of the colegio finally arrived, nearly a half hour late, close to the time that the catering service was to serve the meal.

The guest began by saying that the Constitution of the Republic prohibits any government from taking away the benefits that a gremio has won in their labour struggles. Since the reforms aimed to do just this, he said, the FOMH was arguing that they were unconstitutional. He then gave examples of teachers who had been negatively affected by the law. This colegio president articulated very clearly the shared sense that the law was unjust, in a similar fashion that many of my own research participants would do. His comments were well received, although few people found them original.

However, this FOMH member failed to inform his fellow teachers (and as pedagogos, future colegio members) about the progress the FOMH had made with their arguments before the national congress, leaving the teachers in the class with several questions about what exactly the FOMH was doing. Following his talk the teachers lined up to ask their most pressing questions. Esdras was one of the first to rush up to the microphone. He wanted to ask what common teachers (without leadership positions) could do to support the effort to challenge the constitutionality of the law. He and his group members were also curious to understand the exact process through which the FOMH solicited their lawyers, and when they could expect news about their progress. However, just as the teachers were about to ask their questions, the catering service arrived.

The professor of the class announced that first lunch would be served, and after the meal the teachers could approach the microphone in another single-file line. Nearly an hour went by during lunch, with the colegio president and course instructor at their
own table on the stage and all the other teachers below. Nobody approached the colegio president until after lunch was over and it was officially time to ask questions. By then Esdras’ eagerness had dissipated. Instead of demanding an explanation of the progress with the FOMH he simply asked the colegio president if he was hopeful that they could reverse the law. The dirigente enthusiastically said yes, without giving any concrete details of the progress. None of the other teachers present asked any questions about the FOMH’s progress. In any case, the number of students who lined up after lunch was less than half the number who had lined up initially. After only a few minutes of questions, the colegio president announced that he needed to leave to attend another meeting while in Choluteca.

No doubt this colegio president really was pressed for time, and he probably did have some answers to share with the group beyond what we heard that day. But the fact that his answers were brief and vague, and without the possibility for any follow-up questions, is revealing of the type of relationship that regular schoolteachers have with members of the FOMH. The professor’s announcement that the colegio president “will now eat lunch,” combined with the teachers’ nervousness and hesitation in talking with him, suggested a treatment of this teacher as a superior rather than as an equal. This distance between members of the FOMH and teachers who did not hold elected positions was also reflected in many teachers’ sense of distrust of their colegio leaders, expressed when they question if they may have been paid off by the Lobo government to not take the type of legal action that they could. Several of my research consultants – none of whom held positions as dirigentes in 2012 – were questioning if their magisterio leaders were corrupt. As one teacher told me, in desperate frustration: “I don’t have the slightest
doubt that our diriencias has been bought by the oligarchy!” Similarly, as Marlon commented at the end of November:

We teachers have never been able to work through our differences for the good of the group. We’ve also always been so individualistic – always looking to see what we each can get at the expense of the majority. This is why there has been so much dividismo historically. This is why we are not able to reverse these reforms.92

What the FOMH did manage to do with the problems resulting from the new INPREMA law was something that helped move the retirement process along, but also could be the source of more dividismo between members of different colegios. They established that an equal number of teachers from each colegio could retire, rather than basing the process on who had submitted their retirement paperwork first, independent of their colegio affiliation. Even though teachers are against these reforms for reasons beyond their own rights and benefits as workers – they see them as a step in the wrong direction for the country’s national public education system – these action regarding the INPREMA law deserve our examination given that the new law remains a primary concern of the magisterio and is a key source of internal conflict.

Right before the law took effect teachers who were qualified for retirement under the old law raced to Tegucigalpa in January 2012 to submit their retirement paperwork (my father-in-law included). The official response of INPREMA was that there were too many retirement applications to process all at once, and that therefore only a handful of teachers would be able to retire during the 2012 school year. This response was supported by the reform-supporting argument that ‘INPREMA is bankrupt’ – a misleading

92 Interview, 28 November 2012.
statement that the Lobo government had been making to justify the new law. However, from the perspective of teachers, the reality of INPREMA is the following: because it is a state-managed institute, governments can remove money from INPREMA to loan it to other government programs, provided that they pay back the funds with interest. The problem, they say, is that Micheletti withdrew an unprecedented amount of money from INPREMA, an estimated 3.7 million Lempiras (roughly $194,000 USD), and never paid it back (see, also, Honduras Culture and Politics 2010). Teachers mention that previous governments had also borrowed money without paying it back in full, or without paying any interest to the institute, but that the de-facto government of Roberto Micheletti Bain was by far the worst case in recent history. Thus from the standpoint of schoolteachers, rather than INPREMA being ‘bankrupt,’ it was bankrupted. As Marlon told me:

Micheletti and all the golpistas stole this money because they knew they could…. They knew that nobody was going to investigate them, or do anything about it. These guys really should be in prison for this and so many other things that they have done, but they’re free. They have impunity…. INPREMA is a state-managed institute, and Micheletti was the de-facto head of state. Nobody has put him on trial. The truth commission is a total fraud. There is no justice in Honduras…. Now they tell us that our institute is bankrupt, and that there are simply not enough funds for us to retire.\(^{93}\)

 Without question, the new INPREMA law is of primary concern to schoolteachers as it directly affects their current livelihoods and financial futures. Several other teachers (including the president of COLPEDAGOGOSH) echoed these sentiments. As so many teachers rushed to retire during a moment when the INPREMA funds really were in fact

---

\(^{93}\) Interview, 28 November 2012.
low, it probably is true that there were not enough funds for everyone to retire at once. But, as Marlon points out, this happened for a reason. And the golpistas who stole from INPREMA now have impunity under post-coup regimes.

As teachers rushed to submit their retirement paperwork in January – before the new law came into effect – an estimated 7,000 were qualified to retire, of which 3,500 submitted their requests to begin the process. Regardless of how INPREMA became bankrupt, as the situation stood in 2012, they simply could not afford to process all the 3,500 retirement requests that they received. According to my research participants who were fortunate enough to have their retirement paperwork processed during 2012, the FOMH was able to negotiate the following scenario with INPREMA: they would process a total of 1,800 retirement applications in the 2012 school year, which would be divided evenly among the six colegios (at 300 per colegio). Each colegio would allow processing of the first 300 of its members who had submitted retirement paperwork.

This action was celebrated among the FOMH and among some teachers as a victory. Teachers who supported this decision said that it was necessary because of the fact that lawyers from different colegios were competing against each other for the rights of their own members and had reached a standstill. However, instead of designing a retirement process based on who submitted their paperwork first among all teachers, what the FOMH designed negatively affected teachers who submitted their paperwork earlier than those from other colegios, but whose own colegio had already reached its established limit. For example, one of my research participants was far past the first 1,800 total number of teachers to retire, and would have otherwise been disqualified to retire under the old law, but since he was among the first 300 in his particular colegio, he
was able to retire. This decision from the FOMH was thus beneficial for members of colegios with fewer members, while several teachers from the larger colegios (such as COLPROSUMAH and COPEMH) who had submitted their retirement paperwork early were told they had to wait, and therefore retire with significantly reduced benefits under the new INPREMA law. By departing from past practice that informed teachers’ expectations of how their applications would be processed, this provided yet another reason for division among teachers from different colegios. As one COPEMH member in this situation put it:

I travelled to Tegus during the second week of January to submit my retirement paperwork with a group of friends from the south. One of them just made the cut off and will soon retire…. But I and others who were also there with him that day just missed it…. I think we would have all made it if we were COPRUMH!94 Now who knows when we’ll be able to retire, and under what conditions. This new law is screwing us all. Imagine all of what I could have saved myself if I had put that money away in a private fund.95

This set of internal conflicts affects teachers’ most immediate concerns with the negative financial consequences that the Nueva Ley de INPREMA imposes on them. However, most of the Honduran teachers with whom I worked were not even in a position to retire in 2012, and thus had to continue working under different pension plan conditions with these reforms. Teachers have reduced financial benefits and job security at the same time they are now expected to abide by new standards of soliciting local

94 COPRUMH is the Colegio Profesional Unión Magisterial de Honduras (Professional College of Teacher Union of Honduras), and is much smaller in size than most colegios. Both primary and secondary education teachers can become members, but usually find their colegio-specific benefits (such as loans from the colegio, or even lower colegio membership fees to fund such programs) to not be as good as those of larger colegios.

95 Interview, 22 December 2012.
funds for new types of resources and the new requirements of the *Ley Fundamental de Educación*. We now turn to analyze the ways that these tensions at the workplace played out at the CEB Carías Andino, where teachers’ interpretations of different laws and the political environment of the reforms intensified previously-existing internal conflicts.

### 6.4 Workplace Disputes

When Esdras recognized at the beginning of the school year that aspects of the reforms aiming to monitor schoolteachers’ behaviour could in fact be useful to him as a school administrator, this was neither random nor abstract – he had specific teachers in mind at his *centro*. The chart he used to depict teachers’ absences in his office was a method for publicly communicating to potential interested parties that he and Mercedes were supervising their staff. It was also a way of communicating to other teachers that he was aware of the behaviour of those CEB Carías Andino teachers who already had high numbers of absences. Throughout my fieldwork, Esdras had continuous disputes with teachers who the departmental Ministry officials had assigned to Carías Andino, but whom he suspected did not want to be there. Here I aim to show how these previously-existing conflicts among personnel at Carías Andino intersected with the reforms.

According to Esdras, he and these teachers never got along. Esdras attributes this to the fact that they had also applied through the *concurso* process to go to other schools, but failed (at which point they were then offered their positions at the CEB Carías Andino). Esdras’ personal conflicts with these teachers worsened when in early 2010 they organized a group of students’ parents against him. That year they held clandestine meetings with the *Sociedad de Padres de Familia* at night, where they argued that Esdras was unfit to run the CEB Carías Andino. Indeed they convinced a group of parents that it
was necessary to replace Esdras, collecting signatures from many parents on a letter that they wrote themselves and later submitted to departmental Ministry officials. Esdras was subsequently called into a meeting in Nacaome. But the Ministry was not in a position to oust Esdras, given that there was no substantial evidence of misconduct, and as he pointed out, any disciplinary action against him needed to be based on such evidence.

The departmental Ministry directors did warn Esdras of the dangers of attempting to run a dysfunctional centro, and that having teachers organize against him is often a sign of poor management. Esdras argued that these teachers were jealous of his position and that this was the source of their problem (reminding them that at least one of these teachers had applied to become a school director in the past, and was unsuccessful).

At the end of the 2010 school year when the CEB Carías Andino inaugurated its computer lab, several teachers asked Esdras if they could be in charge of teaching computer literacy classes. Being in charge of the computer lab means being in charge of expensive equipment, and teaching courses that both students and parents find exciting and useful. The teacher in charge of computer literacy also spends her/his entire shift in an air-conditioned room, the most desirable location in the entire centro. Indeed, meetings between the school directors and important visitors always take place in the computer lab, as it is considered the most comfortable room in the school. That year two teachers in the afternoon shift stood out as potential candidates to teach computer literacy, one of whom Esdras got along well with, and the other of whom was one of the teachers involved in organizing against him. Both teachers had taken seminars in how to

---

96 Whereas teachers apply through the concurso process to teach certain subjects such as math, Spanish, and natural science, by contrast, computer literacy is something that each school director can decide which teacher is most qualified to teach.
teach computer literacy, but Esdras assigned the classes to the teacher with whom he was friendly, who in fact did have some actual experience teaching computer literacy at her previous job.

Putting this person in charge of the newly-inaugurated computer lab for the entire 2011 school year made the other teacher furious with Esdras. She then enrolled in another seminar on teaching the latest computer programs (thus arguably becoming more up to date than the teacher who was assigned to it), and once again asked to be assigned the computer classes (for the 2012 school year). In early February 2012 following the first teachers’ council meeting – in which I was introduced to everyone – Esdras gave his staff their teaching assignments. He once again assigned the computer literacy classes to this same teacher who he had chosen before. By March 2012, some teachers presented an argument to the departmental Ministry officials that Esdras was an incompetent director because he had made a poor decision in deciding who should be in charge of computer classes.

During the first half of the 2012 school year, while Esdras was submitting funding requests to Nacaome and Valle politicians and the departmental Ministry directors, this internal dispute at his centro was well underway. Esdras would enter the departmental Ministry offices in Nacaome to discuss funding (as the reforms require him to do), but also to discuss his problems with these teachers. Since the case was still under consideration during the first half of the school year, these conversations did not resolve anything. Rather, they were a way for Esdras to become aware of the situation. Throughout the school year he was worried that his disputes with these teachers could limit his ability to solicit funding from Ministry directors who might associate his school
with such internal conflicts. His self-initiated evaluation of the centro – where he asked the departmental Ministry directors to come observe that they were abiding by the reforms – can thus also be seen in this context: the reforms imply more scrutiny of teachers’ work, and this complaint against Esdras meant that he was being observed more closely anyway.

When the departmental Ministry directors came to Carías Andino and Esdras described the extra-curricular clubs he had designed (boasting to his superiors that he had a ‘foreign volunteer’ to help with the English clubs), he was quick to emphasize the importance of the computer literacy club that he and other teachers had designed for students’ parents and other adults from the El Garrobo community. The directors were impressed by the clubs themselves, and Esdras was able to emphasize that the ideas for the computer literacy classes for adults were thanks to the teacher he had assigned to teach those classes.

In subsequent months the teachers involved with this dispute continued to insist that the departmental Ministry directors reconsider Esdras’ decision on the computer classes, and Esdras continued to travel to the Nacaome Ministry offices both to see what might happen with this case, and to solicit local funding. He argued that the Estatuto del Docente granted him the right (and the obligation) to determine which of his teachers was most qualified to teach which subjects. He communicated his enthusiasm for the Ley Fundamental de Educación in the presence of these Ministry directors, arguing that he had taken the initiative to go above and beyond the requirements of teaching computer literacy to students: he had put a qualified teacher in charge of teaching adults too through the extra-curricular clubs. By September the departmental Ministry directors told
Esdras they agreed with his interpretation of the *Estatuto del Docente* – that these decisions about who should teach the computer literacy classes were within his mandate as the CEB director. The Ministry officials further pointed out that Esdras was following the *Ley Fundamental* by soliciting funds for construction projects and education initiatives.

As rumours began to spread within the centro about who would take over the computer literacy classes for the 2013 school year, Esdras decided to hold a teachers’ council meeting to discuss teacher behaviour. That day everyone gathered in the air-conditioned computer lab, awaiting Esdras’ arrival. At first it appeared as though he was late, but the school’s security guard came to let everyone know that Esdras had requested the meeting take place in his office, instead of the computer lab. Esdras managed to squeeze enough chairs into his office to accompany most of the teachers, although many stood up near the wall during the meeting. The teachers who had organized against Esdras were standing toward the back of the room. Esdras began to talk with his staff:

> I have called you all to this room specifically, because I want you to look at this attendance chart together. As you can see compañeros maestros, some of you have been doing better with missing less days of class. But others of you are very close to maxing-out your excused absences. Throughout this school year I have been telling you to please change your conduct. I am here today telling you, again, that if any of you have unexcused absences I will have to report this to the directores departamentales. If I don’t do this, then I will be the one who gets into trouble. By now you should all know how these new laws are affecting us.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Teachers’ council meeting, 31 October 2012
At the time of this teachers’ council meeting some of these teachers who had organized against Esdras had in fact already accumulated their maximum amount of excused absences. Upon hearing this message from the director one of them left the room, got into her car, and drove away from the school. While everyone was commenting about how that teacher had just left, Esdras continued the meeting with a loud, stern voice:

I also want to remind all of you that the *Estatuto del Docente* establishes that it is within the mandate of any director of a centro educativo to determine which teacher is most qualified to teach which class. Our directores departamentales have recently confirmed what I have already known about this. And the *Ley Fundamental* requires us to *gestionar* funding from the municipal government and from the private sector, which I have been doing since January. It also requires that we teach computer literacy, and fortunately we have our own computer lab here. I want you all to know – and you can communicate this to those teachers who are irresponsible enough to have failed to come to this required meeting – that I will continue to assign the computer literacy courses of the afternoon shift as I see fit – to the most qualified among you to do this job, and it is my decision, as the director of this centro educativo.\(^98\)

These micro-level processes illuminate how the reforms intersected with what teachers were already dealing with, and how even the most mundane internal disputes among personnel at a rural school became interconnected with broader processes that the gremio was dealing with. How to best administer new resources – such as a computer laboratory – while projecting an image of the school as completely functional and effective (despite these internal conflicts) has become a more pertinent question with the

\(^{98}\) Teachers’ council meeting, 31 October 2012.
political environment of the reforms. If it were ever determined that the Carías Andino school had a dysfunctional staff due to poor management, departmental Ministry directors could have easily chastised Esdras or forced teachers to relocate. Likewise, as the school director, Esdras needed to project an image of efficiency and innovative approaches to education among his staff, not one of internal tensions and disputes.

During the last teachers’ council meeting of the school year, teachers at Carías Andino took the initiative to offer their critical feedback to Esdras about how to improve his gestión (solicitation of funding and management). The group began by congratulating Esdras and Mercedes in their efforts to improve the main classroom. While they mentioned that the funding for the multi-sport court never came through, there was recognition that as local funders prioritize, they would not be likely to receive money for such a project in the near future.

Esdras’ staff had an additional message for him: in spending so much of his time soliciting funding from local sources, they argued, he had abandoned his responsibilities to supervise personnel. These teachers felt they needed their director at the school more often. Some teachers mentioned how Esdras’ personal conflict with some teachers (who were absent from the meeting) could have been handled better if he had been physically present at the centro more often throughout the school year.

Esdras responded to the critical feedback, recognizing the concerns of many teachers, but he also reminded them that he is doing exactly what the reforms are asking directors to do by spending more of his time soliciting funding and less time supervising his staff. He mentioned how nonetheless he thought of everyone as mature adults, competent teachers, and that from his viewpoint the only major problem they were
having was that of attendance and tardiness. Esdras once again emphasized the importance of always coming to work in order to fulfill the 200 days of class required by law, but to also promote the image of their centro as one staffed by responsible teachers.

A discussion emerged among some teachers about Esdras’ hypocrisy with the publicly-displayed attendance log sheets, and some teachers commented among themselves, but in a voice loud enough for Esdras to hear, that Esdras himself had missed quite a number of days. Esdras responded by saying that in the 2012 school year he had not missed more than a few days in total. One teacher stood up and told Esdras, in front of everyone, that while Esdras had improved his own behaviour for the 2012 school year because of the reforms, he had missed nearly a month of classes during the summer of 2009, which was more consecutive days than anyone else had ever missed. Another teacher responded by saying that Esdras had a pre-approved personal emergency, and the first teacher snickered at the remark. Esdras stood up in front of everyone and defended his actions:

Compañeros maestros, it is true that I was absent for a prolonged period of time in 2009, but I had good reason to do so: I was in Nicaragua defending our democracy during the first coup of the 21st century! Only a few of you have known the truth about this, but all of you – everyone that is – know that I am mera-Resistencia, and I am proud to say that I made this brave decision. What is more, I was accompanying a group of teachers from our country who wanted to support Mel. I was one of many teachers who made the personal sacrifice to travel. But that was three years ago.99

99 Teachers’ council meeting, 15 November 2012.
In the next chapter I relay Esdras’ story in Nicaragua as part of a broader analysis of how recent experiences among teachers are allowing for reflection and the development of visions for what national public education and broader governing practices should be like with LIBRE-initiated re-foundation projects. Here we should recognize that arriving to the point of unity in these decisions remains the difficult task at hand for the Honduran *magisterio* as they deal with the ways in which the reforms have intensified previously-existing conflicts they have had.

### 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter presents internal conflicts at various levels and in different venues that connect with the education reforms that teachers were struggling to manage in the 2012 school year. On the one hand such divisions weakened teachers’ labour organizing efforts, and as Chapter 3 demonstrates, there is a history in Honduras of *dirigentes magisteriales* fighting to ensure that their *colegios* remain united. On the other hand however, these internal conflicts can lead to reflection about what has been important to the *magisterio* as a whole, and how teachers have been successful (or not) during previous and on-going struggles. That is, these internal conflicts might strengthen the ways in which teachers are able to “fight like a community” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009).

As anthropologist Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld argues, this means replicating a limited political repertoire across dozens or hundreds of localities. Operating without central control from an overarching leadership, decisions are made and enforced in parallel, with power growing as separate collectivities reinforce each other (2009: 209).

As teachers struggle against post-coup policies together, this can happen despite (or even in terms of) the internal conflicts they are experiencing as a *gremio*. Yet as this chapter
reveals, such an endeavour is not without considerable struggle as teachers find ways to unite their colleagues in order to then connect their interests with the broader goals of the Resistencia and LIBRE Party.

Lessons from Antonio Gramsci are instructive in this regard, in as much as the “subaltern classes” are divided by definition (1971). In order to successfully win control of the state they must find ways to work around their divisions by forging hegemonic projects (however fragile) capable of resonating with the lived experiences of the majority (see Grasmsci 1971; Crehan 2002). In 2012 Honduran schoolteachers were struggling to first reach a consensus about what their own goals for the gremio should be, and the best ways to fight for them together. These internal conflicts within the magisterio thus seemed to act as deterrents for teachers’ abilities to realize fully their own visions for what the state in Honduras should be like through LIBRE-initiated re-foundation projects, although they certainly developed such visions while they navigated the reforms. The next chapter will examine this process in more detail.
7 Resistance and State

7.1 Introduction

This chapter foregrounds the ways in which schoolteachers were developing their own visions for what re-founding the state should mean during the 2012 school year. Drawing on concepts and examples introduced in the six previous chapters, here I show how teachers’ range of experiences with the carrera del magisterio, these neoliberal education reforms, and the Resistencia movement and LIBRE Party merge together in a process of reflection about what their roles should be as front-line state agents who deliver a service that the population seeks out, and which they believe the state has a responsibility to provide.

The 2012 school year was a unique time to observe these processes, given that the Resistencia had already formed in the immediate aftermath of the coup to support Mel following his ousting, and then developed additional goals for the movement and a political party that was projected to win the November 2013 presidential and congressional elections. As we saw in Chapter 3 there were no clearly-defined political paths in the immediate outbreak and aftermath of the coup. Three years afterward, however, it was clear who had sided with the golpistas and who was in support of the new Resistencia-initiated political party.

The 2012 school year was thus significant for teachers not only because it was the first year in which they were expected to implement these unprecedented education reforms, but also because with the emergence of Xiomara Castro as a strong presidential candidate and the increasing popular support for LIBRE, it was the climax of teachers’ own leadership with the FNRP since its foundation in June 2009. However, as Chapter 6
demonstrates, the 2012 school year was also a time of considerable internal conflict within the *magisterio*, which many teachers understood as a hindrance to their abilities to organize (even though they were conscious of the implications of such conflicts and could point to specific reasons as to their occurrence). To the extent that 2012 was a time for reflection on the many different achievements of the *Resistencia*, we should understand that from the perspective of teachers, such achievements were viewed in the context of the bleak reality of the reforms on the one hand, and the possibility of radical political change with LIBRE on the other.

The ethnographic examples to follow are organized into four different sections. I begin by sharing the story of Esdras’ initial involvement with the *Resistencia* movement immediately after the coup, when he travelled to Nicaragua in support of Mel. Esdras shared the details of his experience not only with me, but in the presence of other schoolteachers who were fellow *Resistencia* supporters. The details of his experiences reveal not only the ways in which some teachers’ initial experiences with the movement continue to inform their understandings of LIBRE and the meaning of re-foundation in 2012, but also of how teachers themselves see their own positions in Honduran society (to which I have alluded throughout this thesis). This chapter thus also shows how teachers were reflecting together about what their positions meant in the post-coup political context.

From this story of formal resistance – in *La Resistencia* – I move to the second section of this chapter that focuses on more subtle everyday actions at the school where teachers refused to conform to specific aspects of what the reforms mandated. Here I return to the process of soliciting funding for the classroom reconstruction project at
Carías Andino, to examine what happened after the local politicians found out that teachers were able to build the classroom without their patronage. I analyze teachers’ responses to this situation not only in terms of their challenges to aspects of the reforms, but also in terms of how this instance connected with other experiences they had in the political environment of 2012 when many LIBRE Party members were asking themselves what kind of politician would be needed for real change in state practices to be achieved.

The third section analyses similar processes about what the role of the Honduran state should be in promoting national public education – and what the roles of teachers are in a privatized, de-centralized education system – with ethnographic examples of how teachers were using what they learned at the UNAH and UPNFM to reflect upon such questions. Here I return to the Macro-Educación UNAH class in Choluteca, and also introduce the Gestión y Administración Educativa class at the UPNFM in Nacaome. I show how both classes aimed to teach teachers the best ways to approach implementing these new laws, although the most experienced teachers enrolled in these classes were quick to see these new ideas through the lens of schoolteachers’ everyday realities at the schools where they work. Then I show how teachers were thinking through the implications of conceptualizing their own work as funded by the state versus funded by private entities, and what that implied.

The fourth and final section analyzes the strategies through which teachers in Valle negotiated with departmental Ministry officials about when the last day of school should be. In this process they challenged the orders from Minister of Education, Marlon Escoto, to extend the last day of classes until December 21, convincing departmental Ministry officials that such a measure was in fact not necessary for them to comply with
the new education laws. As teachers from different schools talked among themselves about education governing policies, they shared ideas for developing strategies for challenging these unprecedented actions by the Minister of Education. In this section I describe ethnographically a meeting that took place in late November in a Nacaome school between Valle departmental Ministry officials and all the different school directors in Valle. The departmental Ministry officials called the meeting to discuss how directors should properly submit their year-end paperwork (one of the ways in which directors and teachers alike can be audited), while the Valle school directors had the agenda of convincing their superiors to disregard the orders from Minister Marlon Escoto.\footnote{The installment of Minister Marlon Escoto was an interesting case in point because he had a reputation as supporting the Resistencia and LIBRE Party, having protested against the coup in the streets of Tegucigalpa. Once in power as Minister he even used his affiliations with LIBRE as an argument about how other members of the Lobo government are to blame for poor education policies, not him, as a LIBRE supporter. Now however he is responsible for helping to design and implement these neoliberal education reforms. Many schoolteachers use the example of Escoto to show how post-coup governments can buy out Resistencia supporters (which they fear has also happened to some of their dirigentes in the FOMH, as alluded to in Chapter 6).}

7.2 Esdras’ Experiences in Nicaragua

It wasn’t until the end of March 2012 – three months after having been formally introduced to Director Esdras and well into my research at his school – that he decided to share with me details of his experiences joining the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular ‘La Resistencia’ (FNRP, National Front of Popular Resistance) in the immediate aftermath of the 28 June 2009 coup d’etat. When I had asked him about it before, he only briefly mentioned that he was in Nicaragua. Most of my knowledge of this story had in fact come from the perspective of his mother, who worried about his safety during this time (see Levy 2010). In the context of talking about how Nicaragua’s highways have no
potholes, that their healthcare and education systems seem to work better than those of Honduras, and how if elected LIBRE would have to attempt to fund public services similar to the ways that the government of Daniel Ortega achieved (despite however these policies may be viewed by Nicaraguans themselves), Esdras began talking about his admiration for what he considers progress and good policies of governance in Nicaragua that he had observed during his brief visit. In the informal social setting of our backyard patio, among other FNRP-supporting friends and fellow schoolteachers, Esdras shared with us his experiences from late July 2009:

We made the decision to cross into Nicaragua and support Mel, but it was not without certain risks. The armed forces had military checkpoints set up every few kilometres and we heard that they were arresting anyone who was travelling outside of their place of residence without legitimate business. Our truck made it just past Choluteca. After having lied to so many cops along the way – saying that we were only going [to Choluteca] to run errands, we decided to get off the [Pan-American] highway. We managed to get closer to San Marcos de Colón through the back-roads, and then we had to continue by foot. There we knew that if any cop or soldier saw us we were screwed. They had orders to arrest anyone walking around so close to the border. But we continued through what are blind spots, trusting those who knew the area best. I remember calling my wife right before we crossed this one river, where I figured I would no longer have reception afterward. I told her that I was doing this for our Honduras – it was the first golpe de estado of the 21st century; how could I not participate in this great movement [against it]? We were making history! I felt like I had a responsibility to support our president and do whatever I could to demand that he be reinstated. Don’t get me wrong. I was scared. My youngest son was just born and I had certain responsibilities. And I didn’t have a whole lot of money with me either – just what I could manage to bring from the last vacation pay. I kept thinking about
how dangerous it was for me to make this trip and what I was risking. But then I
looked around me – at the others who were also crossing by foot. There were
dozens of us. I realized how many other compatriots were going hungry too, and I
saw humble – you know – really humble people. And then I thought to myself: if
all of those poor obreros and campesinos are going all the way to Managua for
Mel… then certainly I, with my higher social status as a teacher, could also make
the trip. 101

As Esdras continued to tell us about his journey to Managua, his words reveal some of
the ways in which schoolteachers view their positions in Honduran society: individuals
with a responsibility to take action against social injustice, who have limited resources
but who are better off than general labourers and the peasantry. This is an understanding
about themselves that continues to inform teachers’ actions today. Esdras continued to
describe what this meant for him as he travelled through Nicaragua.

When we finally crossed I didn’t even realize it – we were still hiking through the
mountains and it all looked the same to me. But people who knew the area began
to tell us that we were now on Nicaraguan soil, and we knew that we were safe.
The Honduran Armed Forces could no longer arrest us – as if what we were doing
was somehow illegal. But they sure made us feel that way. I felt as though I had
been a prisoner in my own land – imagine that! But once I got to Ocotal, I knew
we would be OK. And that’s where we met up with others from the Resistencia.
They hired buses to take us to Managua where we would meet up with Mel, el jefe
de jefes [the boss of bosses]. And when we finally got to him we were in this
plaza someplace in downtown Managua, and Mel asked us to all show our
cédulas de identidad [identification cards], to prove that we were Honduran. The
thing is, there were some Nicaraguans that had infiltrated our group clandestinely
– trying to pass as Hondurans, so Mel held up his identidad and we all showed

101 Informal gathering among teachers, 30 March 2012.
ours too. And one compañero behind us told Mel that he wanted to be there to support him, but that he didn’t have anything to support him with. And Mel reached into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred US dollar bill and gave it to him. And then everyone else said that they didn’t have money either, but Mel said ‘no… just the first person.’ And he told us about the meetings he was having with all of those big shots from the international community, and how they all said that he is the only real president of Honduras, and that we – since we were the ones who had come all this way to support him – were the true pueblo hondureño. You know how Mel talks right? I was right there next to him! And I remember that we were all hungry, and there was a huge mango tree above us in the plaza, and while Mel was talking one fell down right next to his feet. And I guess he was hungry too because he just picked it up and took a bite, while he was speaking, just like what I, as a poor person, would have done. He didn’t even bother to clean it off! There’s no other president like Mel.102

Everyone who was listening to Esdras’ story commented that although Mel was a president, and had lots of money, he is human too. Esdras continued to tell us about the meeting in Managua and how they rallied support for Mel during their time in Nicaragua, and received Nicaraguan and international press coverage of the events. Esdras described one instance when a fellow Resistencia member showed him a colour photograph from a mainstream Nicaraguan newspaper where he appeared with other members and Mel Zelaya. Esdras explained why he wasn’t able to bring this clipping back to Honduras with him:

Some people decided to stay in Nicaragua. I guess they figured it was better for them to stay longer than to come back to a country ruled by golpistas. But after the first ten days I had to come back. My family was worried about me, and the

102 Informal gathering among teachers, 30 March 2012.
truth is that I ran out of money too. A couple of compañeros were in the same situation and we decided to go back by ourselves. This was the hardest part. We knew that the [Honduran] armed forces had increased their surveillance of the border, and we knew that if we were caught crossing back in through a blind spot, then we would for sure be arrested. So we decided to cross back via the legal route, into San Marcos de Colón. This is why I knew that I didn’t want to bring anything with me that would suggest I was in Nicaragua to support Mel. I had a really nice Resistencia t-shirt that they gave us there; I gave it away to some humble guy. The compañero who was with me told me that I could tuck it inside my underwear, but I didn’t want to take any chances. So I had to leave the newspaper article there. But we figured the immigration officers would ask us where we were, so you know what we did [he says, chuckling]? We went to Somoto, to the town fair – which happened to be going on – and bought all sorts of crap from that town. You should have seen us, just like tourists. We spent our last Córdobas on all the artisan crap we could find. And it worked! They asked us if we were in Nicaragua to accompany Mel, and we just played dumb. We told them that we were in Somoto the entire time, and that we didn’t know about Mel or care where he might be…. It was a risk, but it worked. You know how these immigration officials only go through high school anyway, I don’t even think they have to graduate. And let’s not even talk about the lack of education of those in the armed forces – they only need to get through primary school! Idiots.  

Esdras continued to describe his return to San Lorenzo and the widespread interest that other Hondurans had in learning about his experiences in Nicaragua, and with the formation of the Resistencia movement. While others present continued to ask Esdras about his experiences with Mel in Nicaragua during this time, I asked him the more

---

103 Informal gathering among teachers, 30 March 2012
mundane question of what happened to the CEB Carías Andino while he was away. He explained:

The orders from the FOMH for the initial *paro* were already done. Officially, the *magisterio* was back at work, and Micheletti was making a fuss about how we weren’t conducting classes. Those teachers who continued to protest in Tegucigalpa and other places were beginning to be persecuted by the *golpistas*. We were supposed to be back in classes – and I was at first – until I left for Nicaragua with a group of other teachers and *Resistencia* supporters…. I didn’t tell any of my colleagues what I was doing. Well, I told Mercedes that I was sick, and that I was going to plan on being sick for a while…. She understood me. She knew what I was up to. That woman is *pura Resistencia*! She knew that I was going to Nicaragua, but I told her to tell everyone at the *centro* – the other teachers, the students, and the parents – that the director was out sick.\(^{104}\)

Despite the official orders from the FOMH to protest the coup, and the fact that most teachers supported, and became directly involved with, the *Resistencia* movement as it began to emerge in support of Mel, not every teacher at CEB Carías Andino supported the idea that their school director would leave for Nicaragua during the middle of the school year, as Chapter 6 demonstrates. Honduran teachers who become involved with the *Resistencia* are thus caught between what they perceive to be their social responsibility to participate (and be ‘out on the streets’ protesting post-coup policies of governance), and at the same time, not missing class because of their involvement.

Esdras’ story about accompanying Mel in Nicaragua merged into conversations that teachers frequently had in 2012 about what type of political leaders Honduras needs with the LIBRE-initiated re-foundation project. Everyone present that night agreed that in

\(^{104}\) Informal gathering among teachers, 30 March 2012.
order to move away from the ruling elite that has characterized governance in Honduras historically (see, also, Barahona 2005), the people would need to elect a politician from a humble background, who could relate to the economic realities of the majority of the Honduran population. Other teachers present commented how although Mel was a good president, neither he nor Xiomara even fit this category – they are still elite landowners. Nonetheless, teachers frequently mentioned how this is a difficult transition when the majority of the Honduran population is used to rule by politicians from wealthy backgrounds. As one LIBRE-supporting schoolteacher put it:

_"La gente está bien acostumbrada a la oligarquía"_ [people are well used to the oligarchy]. They know that when elections come, it means that rich politicians will give them stuff – promise them more crap. The people elect these guys to power, and then wonder why they don’t follow through…. Naturally it’s because they don’t have the same interests as the people – all they care about is getting elected, so they can enrich themselves. They don’t love Honduras. With LIBRE we are trying to get away from this. But it’s hard…. Who will vote for a poor guy from a [rural] community? Nobody here! Think about who are all the local LIBRE candidates – they aren’t _empresarios_, but they aren’t _campesinos_ either. People who are running with LIBRE, they are those who have small humble businesses…. They cannot afford to give away money, and the kind of stuff that the _Cachurecos_ [Nationalists] and the Liberals do, you know, like Juan _Hornilla_\(^{105}\)…. But here in Honduras people are used to that kind of stuff. There are some people who just haven’t woken up yet.\(^{106}\)

\(^{105}\) Juan _‘Hornilla’_ is a reference to the National Party’s 2013 presidential candidate Juan Orlando Hernández (who was the President of the Congress during the Lobo regime, and a strong supporter of neoliberal state projects). Throughout his campaign for president, Orlando Hernández gave away _hornillas_ (Lorena stoves) to poor families and displayed images of these actions in campaign ads. The understanding in LIBRE is that this was done in exchange for votes, and that by doing it publicly, Juan Orlando Hernández was promoting an image of himself as someone who cares about the poor. But as this teacher’s comments suggest, designing policies that benefit the poor goes far beyond simply giving away Lorena stoves.

\(^{106}\) Interview, 2 December 2012.
As teachers navigated through the first year of these reforms and the primary election season, they were particularly conscious of the negative consequences that unfulfilled promises by politicians have had.

7.3 Visions of What Kind of Politician Honduras Needs

Teachers see their success in securing local government funding as dependent upon knowing the right people in office and developing a positive relationship with those people (although they may disagree with the legitimacy of this process). This was no easy task in 2012, especially for LIBRE-supporting teachers who had developed reputations as de Resistencia – people who boycotted the very elections that brought these politicians to power. Moreover, most schoolteachers in the south already knew these local politicians, having had some interaction with them in the past. Honduran teachers in the south are especially conscious of who has been in support of (and responsible for) which post-coup policies; they are quick to mention who has collaborated with the golpistas.

While they may disagree with their policies, navigating through the reforms meant that teachers needed to maintain positive relations with golpista politicians to secure funding for their schools. Teachers also recognized that these politicians in turn needed to demonstrate that they were supporting public education with their regional budgets. In the interest of promoting the image of a state still capable of funding (however minimally) ‘public’ education, teachers engaged in a performance that communicates mutual cooperation with politicians. Honduran schoolteachers would appear to get along well with their local sponsors at school fund-raising events. They would smile, shake hands, and talk about non-controversial subjects – remaining on good terms with these authority figures publicly in order to get want they want for their
and once the golpista politicians would leave, teachers would tell me what they really think.

As schoolteachers envision a different type of state – one that forges economic policies that benefit the majority – they have become especially critical of unfulfilled promises. The following recurring joke that teachers tell illustrates this process:

The diputado candidate comes into the [poor, rural] community with gifts for those who were eager enough to want such crap – you know, blue [National Party] T-shirts and some of yesterday’s food. He begins to rally support at the town park. He screams out with his microphone a list of all the things he will plan to build for the people if elected to office, and everyone gets really excited. He says: ‘If you give me your vote, I’ll build you a school [and everyone cheered]; I’ll build you a health clinic [and they cheered]; and I’ll even build you a bridge!’ And the people reacted with confusion and frustration. Everyone was silent and then some people shouted: ‘Un puente... ¿para qué? ¡Aquí ni siquiera hay río! ¿Para qué ocupamos un puente?’ [‘A bridge, but what for? Here we don’t even have a river! What would we need a bridge for!’] And the politician responded: ‘Ay pues... ¡también les hago el río!’ [‘Oh... well then, I’ll make you a river too!’].

When talking about the promises that politicians would make for a given construction project in their school, some teachers recurrently communicated their disapproval (among themselves) with the phrase: ‘Les construyo un río.’ It was funny because it grasped everyone’s recognition that politicians in Honduras make unrealistic and irrelevant promises just to get elected.

107 This joke is supposedly based on a real story about a Valle candidate for diputado who went into a southeastern rural community where there was no river. Like any other oral story that gets retold among different people, with slightly different versions (with additional promises made before the promise for a bridge, and where ‘I’ll make you’ gets replaced with ‘I’ll give you’ (les doy) – which is sometimes communicated in the future tense. Here I have attempted to write the most common version.
As we saw in Chapter 4, when Nacaome municipal officials refused to fund the classroom remodelling project at Carías Andino, teachers sought funding from a private sugar cane company and donations from students’ parents by hosting a Bingo night.

There were several teachers at Carías Andino dissatisfied with this practice of securing funding for such a basic necessity, and Mercedes pointed out that the company was claiming a higher amount of money as a tax deduction than what these *empresarios* had actually donated toward the school construction project. That chapter sought to show how teachers were working with what limited resources they had access to in their efforts to meet the basic needs of schooling in the context of poverty. Here I wish to highlight another set of processes involved when front-line state agents approach implementing policies: they reflect upon the meaning of their interactions with these local political authorities, and think through what state practices and governing policies should be like.

When the classroom construction was completed and the news spread of the inauguration ceremony, aspiring candidates for Nacaome municipal positions and candidates for Valle *diputado* (including some running for re-election) decided that they wanted to attend the ceremony. Some parents suspected that if the politicians were to attend they might offer to donate money if elected. But because of their resentment about not receiving local government funds for the classroom reconstruction project, teachers convinced the organized parents to bar any politician from attending the ceremony, despite teachers’ overall attempt to maintain positive relations with local politicians for future fund-raising endeavours – thus expressing their discontent with the politicians and challenging the reforms in a mundane everyday context.
As a mechanism to prevent politicians from entering the public space that is the school campus, the teachers at Carías Andino asked one parent who was a police officer to instruct the local police to support them in their attempt to prevent political candidates from entering their school – using another state institution as a resource to prevent political authorities from entering what is in fact property of the state. During a spirited conversation about the matter, Esdras told the parents and his fellow colleagues:

I would love for us to have their money, but I know at this point it’s pura paja [total bullshit]. Where were they when we needed them for our re-construction projects? Now we’re in the primary election season. Unless they come with 100,000 Lempiras in cash, they are prohibited from entering the property of this school! This is the property of the state, for sure, but here I am the director, the one in charge, and no politician will come crash our party. I spoke with the police here in El Garrobo and they agreed to help us prevent those who are politiqueando [seeking political support] from entering our centro educativo. It’s election season, and these guys will say anything to get your vote – it’s as if they think we’re still the same ignorant people that we used to be. Not anymore. Now the people are awake.108

As they critically reflected upon their relationships with politicians in 2012 and acted upon their visions for what policies of governance could be like with state re-foundation, teachers were invoking the Resistencia discourse that with the coup, the people finally woke up. LIBRE-supporting teachers argued that Hondurans were becoming aware that a new type of politician is needed if real change in governance is to take place. They would say that this new politician should be from a more humble background; have some real experiences outside of politics; be completely familiar with

the Honduran reality on-the-ground; and understand what it means for a community to live through a history of unrealistic, unfulfilled promises.\textsuperscript{109}

With little discretion, Resistencia-supporting teachers would denounce certain politicians as ‘golpistas’ and ‘of the oligarchy’ in front of a wide range of people, some of whom might be coup- or Lobo-supporters themselves. Teachers were not afraid to defend their claims about what re-foundation should be like. Mercedes, one of my closest research participants and a true organic intellectual, told me in front of her students, some of their parents, and other teachers:

I have always told my colleagues that our role is not only to inform, but to form citizens. We need our young people to understand when a situation is exploitative. They need to know what happens in the maquilas [sweat shops]. They need to learn about the negative effects of gangs, of family disintegration; learn about rape, and violence. Honduras is living through a very difficult time, but we can change things, little by little. I have faith. We hope that with Doña Xiomara the government will be better. We hope that she will be a good president. But only God knows. Since the golpe de estado, I have seen my role as one that educates my compatriots about all the injustices that we, the poor, are living through. There is so much injustice in Honduras. But the people are becoming more conscious. We can no longer be conformists if we are ever going to re-found the state and change this country.\textsuperscript{110}

That same day Mercedes talked to me and other parents who were present about how granting concessions to large foreign companies has never brought the quantity

\textsuperscript{109} Through this same set of ideas some schoolteachers and others from humble backgrounds have entered the 2013 elections as political candidates. Unsurprisingly, this concept is not however limited to the LIBRE Party. I have teacher research participants from the National Party who also suggested that they were good candidates on the basis that they have not been ‘viviendo de la política’ (living off of politics).
\textsuperscript{110} Conversation among teachers, 29 March 2012.
much less the quality of jobs that it has promised. Through my fieldwork it was clear to me that Mercedes has shared the same ‘fundamental’ economic realities and political interests of the class for whom and about whom she seeks to develop awareness of their function in the economic and political arenas. I have observed her doing this by engaging colleagues, students, and community members in routine articulations of her own experiences (see, for instance, Crehan 2002: 115, developing the insights of Antonio Gramsci). As she told me in a subsequent conversation about the history of the banana enclave economy in Honduras:

That’s one of the lessons from Prisión Verde, you know the book the state would prohibit us from reading. This is why we need to become critically conscious of our politicians and the empresarios operating in our country. They should abide by all the same laws as everyone else. But now the empresarios have kidnapped our Honduras!

Several teachers who became involved with LIBRE during the 2012 school year began to develop arguments about why Honduras needs mechanisms to reprimand politicians who do not fulfill their promises during campaigns, and likewise, to hold empresarios accountable for paying taxes and abiding by all Honduran laws. The history of such powerful actors breaking the rules is nothing new in Honduras, but when teachers experience failed promises from local politicians and empresarios who devise clever schemes to avoid their tax obligations they reflect upon what type of state should be created with re-foundation.

---

111 As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the enclave economies of silver ores near Tegucigalpa and bananas on the north coast never produced the amount of state revenue or kind of development projects that the ruling elite of the Liberal oligarchic state had envisioned (cf. Barahona 1989; Euraque 2000, 1996, 1998; MacLeod 1973; Meza 1991).

112 Interview, 19 September 2012.
In the context of the problems that the reforms are causing, in 2012 teachers were analyzing their own positions as workers, as local intellectuals, and as agents responsible for the delivery of a state service that the local population seeks out. They were conscious of the fact that they now have less job security, that during the first year of these reforms it was especially important that they respond to local interested parties in new ways, as the central government is no longer going to support them in ways that they have been used to (however limited or fragile such support might have been in previous periods).

Although aspects of this consciousness are formed while seeking out funds locally, other components of such awareness are cultivated through the exchange of experiences with fellow schoolteachers. Classes at the local universities where teachers received training on how to approach implementing these polices created another space in which teachers could share their own experiences with the Resistencia and with these education reforms in an environment that was conducive to reflection on what sort of education system teachers should aim to forge.

7.4 University Classes

After the President of COLPEDAGOGOSH left the ballroom and teachers in the Macro-Educación class at the Choluteca UNAH campus presented on the Ley de Participación Comunitaria (Law of Community Participation), it provoked a group discussion about different teachers’ experiences with the COMDEs and the CED. Everyone seemed to agree that in practice this law creates a network of coup-supporting spies that seek to denounce those teachers whose actions they find do not support the reforms. The professor, a LIBRE-supporting dirigente for COLPROSUMAH herself, allowed everyone to describe their sense that Honduran teachers are no longer in charge
of their own classrooms due to this increase in scrutiny of their work. Further discussions emerged about how such new legislation undermines the achievements made by the Estatuto del Docente (Teachers’ Statute), a law which the magisterio considers a labour achievement and has struggled to defend since its initial passing in 1982. Such discussions are one of the many ways in which teachers were sharing their own experiences with one another in 2012 – a process that contributed to the development of their political consciousness and awareness of their own positions in Honduran society.

When Esdras and his group presented on the Ley Fundamental de Educación (the law that most directly affects how teachers go about doing their jobs by requiring that they solicit funding from local sources and offer new academic programs such as English and computer literacy), he and his group members spoke about how impractical many of the goals of the law were, given that the Lobo government was not willing to pay for these programs. Teachers in the audience also mentioned examples of how the Lobo regime demanded that they work harder to improve academic programs and school infrastructure at the same time the government itself withdraws funding from the Ministry of Education for that project – that although money is being transferred to municipal and departmental governments, the amount that actually reaches local schools is much less.

A discussion emerged about how in Honduras national public education occurs in the context of poverty and chronic underfunding, where teachers have to ‘ver cómo hacer’ (see how to manage) all by themselves – a phrase which also captures the Lobo government’s abandonment of the state’s responsibility to fund the national public

---

113 While 1982 was the year that the magisterio achieved the passing of this law, it has since been reformed numerous times with additional articles (see COLPROSUMAH 2011; República de Honduras 1997, 1999).
education system. Esdras’ group presentation reaffirmed the idea that these reforms are simply a way for the Lobo government to demand quality education at the same time it withdraws financial support for it. They contended that new academic programs such as computer literacy and English classes would be good, but that the reforms simply don’t account for the Honduran reality.

Esdras worked into his presentation to the group what he had previously told me about how computer literacy classes can’t happen when there are schools in rural areas without electricity. However, when discussing some of the new mechanisms to discipline teachers, Esdras argued:

There are good aspects about this law compañeros… the lazy teacher who doesn’t come to work – now there are mechanisms to punish this person. At my school the Padres de Familia get really angry whenever something like this happens. They come yell at me, as if it’s my fault. And up until now we’ve been paying to maintain people like that, and for what? We can no longer permit this sort of behaviour. We can no longer continue to pay the lazy teacher who doesn’t show up for work – it’s a waste of money for the state. In fact, permitting this is stealing from the state. And who is the state? Compañeros maestros, the state is every one of us!\textsuperscript{114}

Esdras’ sentiments were undoubtedly influenced by his experiences in dealing with attendance problems at Carías Andino (and with the teachers who had organized against him in particular). In the broader context of the reforms and attempts to re-found the state, such experiences coalesced into similar critiques that teachers have developed about politicians abusing authority in other contexts. Just as teachers opined that politicians need to fulfill their obligations to deliver relevant development projects that

\textsuperscript{114} Comments during university class designed for schoolteachers, 21 April 2012
benefit the majority of the Honduran population, they were also reflecting on the
disciplinary aspects of the reforms – not only to see how these could assist them in the
workplace – but in terms of the reality of chronic underfunding, and the problems
associated with any sort of public resource that is not put to optimal use. Esdras included
incompetent teachers in this general category; for him, it is considered ‘stealing from the
state.’ Such a position is beneficial for the _magisterio_ as those in favour of the reforms
often talked about teachers as ‘government employees’ who were ‘lazy’ and do not
conduct class. As misleading as these comments may be, teachers are reflecting on what
their own roles need to be with the re-foundation project. When individual teachers show
up late or do not come to class at all, it gives the _magisterio_ a bad name. In the context of
heightened scrutiny of teachers’ work, it is understandable that they wanted to prevent
such poor work ethic.

What teachers want is a state that has mechanisms to control any sort of abuse of
public funding (not just work-shy teachers!), but also one that prioritizes opportunities for
youth, and invests an adequate amount of funding to cover the basic necessities of
national public education. They are adamantly against the idea that they have to _ver cómo
hacer_, without the assistance of the central government, and they are reflecting on why
this is a bad thing.

One group at the UNAH class presented a counter-argument to the idea that
INPREMA is bankrupt (pointing out how Micheletti stole funds), and to the idea that the
central government cannot afford to pay for all aspects of national public education. The
group showed how much international development funds are devoted toward ‘security’
in Honduras – funding the armed forces and the national police, while the post-coup
government withdraws funding for basic public services. The group made a compelling argument about how easy it would be to fund all aspects of national public education by reducing the budget of the armed forces, including the salaries of elite military personnel, and diverting these funds toward school infrastructure projects. A discussion then emerged about how such a project would be possible with LIBRE, but that the right-wing post-coup governments would never allow such a project – how instead they prefer to blame schoolteachers for the shortcomings of the education system, and demand that individual schools solicit funding from the indebted municipal governments and private companies.

At Mercedes’ UPNFM class on Gestión y Administración (Education Management and Administration), teachers were learning exactly how to approach soliciting such local funds. The class focused on teaching teachers about the legal consequences of the Ley Fundamental, explaining what could happen if individual schools did not gain access to sufficient funding to cover such basic needs. The class had a practical module in which teachers accompanied NGO officials in their daily routines, and attended workshops led by NGO officials that aimed to show teachers how an NGO solicits funding for a range of development projects. This was a significant component of this UPNFM university course, and teachers were expected to write individual reports on how they planned to implement strategies they learned about from the NGO in their own gestión at the schools in which they worked.

When Mercedes enrolled in this workshop for the class, she was assigned to the San Lorenzo office of Save the Children (coincidentally the same NGO I had volunteered for in 2004 and 2001). Given my familiarity what that particular NGO, it was easy for
Mercedes and I to speak extensively about their practices. She would often comment to me that there were aspects of the NGO work that she admired, especially their efficiency and ability to complete a given construction project in a short period of time. But, she commented one day,

> I think this professor [in my UPNFM class] is expecting us to begin working like an NGO or a private company, and the reality is that our education system is not like this… much less now that we are left by ourselves. The state has abandoned the *magisterio*! Here we’re the ones who deal with disgruntled parents who complain if it’s one way, and complain if it’s the other. For example, I got these new textbooks last year, thanks in part to our own *gestión*. The Ministry never sends us the books we need – we have to go get them ourselves! And they are nice books, with lots of colourful pictures that the students like. But they also have lots of Mexican folklore, and things about what happens after one dies…. And there are many parents who do not like this; one parent told me it was satanic…. Personally I would like to see more Honduran folklore in the books. I agree with those parents – I don’t like reading about this Mexican stuff either. The students don’t even know where Yucatán is; they should be reading about Olancho instead! What about our Honduran authors?... But you see, this is not my fault. And yet the * Padres de Familia* treat us as if it were! Look here, this is something the NGO doesn’t know anything about…. The NGO is always well received by the people in the [rural] communities because they go in to give stuff away… a latrine here, a *pila*[^1] there…. I have seen them [the NGO officials] in San Lorenzo. I go there twice a week for workshops. They just sit there in these air-conditioned offices, thanks to the money they receive from the people who live in rich countries…. I wish I could someday be in an office in Tegus with my feet up doing the same thing! I hope to someday be working in a nice office like that – it would be great. I could imagine myself like that. But that’s not how our schooling system works. Here we are asked to plead with politicians for little amounts of

[^1]: These are cisterns – cement water storage units – considered a basic necessity in every Honduran household.
money, that they might spare if you are of their party, so that we can then ver cómo hacer, and maybe fix up our classrooms just a little bit more. Or else we go to the empresarios, who work for a profit…. The NGO doesn’t behave like this. So now what, we’re supposed to go gestionar to foreign entities too? How? 

Mercedes’ comments highlight the impracticality of teachers soliciting funding the way NGOs are accustomed to doing, and yet she is encouraged to adopt such practices. One of the messages from this UPNFM course was that with the Ley Fundamental, teachers will have to begin operating in much the same way and could therefore learn a good deal from how NGO officials are already soliciting funding. Mercedes recognized the good intentions of the instructor to ask that she learn from Save the Children, but she points out that these are two very different kinds of work. 

Although perhaps an unintended consequence, both of these university classes were successful in persuading teachers to critically think through how the new laws would affect their everyday activities – both through new policies and a political environment in which their work came under even more scrutiny on various fronts. In so doing, they shared their thoughts with other teacher colleagues who were their classmates, and together they pushed their political analyses of their situation forward.

7.5 Ending the 2012 School Year

Another way in which teachers’ work experience with the profession in 2012 was altered because of the reforms had to do with ending the school year. By early November, the time when schoolteachers would normally be finishing their regular course materials

116 Interview, 30 March 2012.
and preparing students for final exams, Minister Escoto called for the extension of the 2012 school year through December 21. Normally the school year ends in late November. The minister’s justification for this action was that by law, schoolteachers have to conduct classes during a total of 200 days – a requirement that was in fact established by the Estatuto del Docente, not one of the new laws that compose these reforms (see República de Honduras 1999, Artículo 12). Most teachers agree that 200 days of class is appropriate; where this becomes an issue is when there are labour disputes that lead to strikes or paros, which result in students missing class.

In principle (or in ‘theory’ to use Esdras’ words), students in Honduras always make up every day of class that they miss due to a paro or strike. In ‘practice’ however the final day of school is decided through a process in which different governments extend the school year for specific political reasons, and the final extension usually does not reflect the actual number of days missed. More often than not, the decision to extend the school year is a means for the government in power to leverage against schoolteachers’ demands they made through paros. For instance, the de facto government of Roberto Micheletti first threatened to extend the 2009 school year through January (far more time than teachers had actually spent on paro to protest of the outbreak of the coup), but then this government later ended the school year in October, earlier than normal, which in fact made students miss even more classes. While that particular instance was highly irregular, it illuminates the fact that there are more variables at work than simply a matter of how many classes were missed.

The final determination of the timing of the end of classes is thus never as straight-forward as teachers not wanting to conduct classes. It is a political process, rather
than a technical exercise. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, not every school, much less every teacher, participates in all *paros*. In this section I show how teachers at Carías Andino navigated through these variables, and negotiated the last day of class with departmental Ministry officials, thereby invoking the new laws in order to achieve their own particular goals.

Despite the fact that the decision to extend the school year is never made by individual schoolteachers, they have to endure angry parents who often have quite heterogeneous opinions on the matter. It is true that the *Padres de Familia* want their children to attend 200 days of class. It is quite understandable that for this reason students’ parents often do not support teachers’ *paros* and strikes. However, different Honduran governments have taken advantage of this in their arguments about why they extend the school year, and not all parents want the school year to be extended so long.

Especially in the rural setting, teachers told me that many parents disagreed with extending the school year through December because several labour-intensive agricultural activities take place early that month, when Honduran children are normally out of school. Teachers at Carías Andino found themselves entangled in a situation in which they had spent the school year convincing students’ parents that their children needed to come to school by law and leave their household farming chores until after the school year finished. Once the Minister extended the school year, they had to again tell parents that their children needed to remain at the school, and therefore not help with their usual agricultural chores (including harvesting the corn most families would eat during several months, and sowing the watermelon they would later sell in the local market).
During the last week of November, Mercedes and Esdras held a meeting with the Sociedad de Padres de Familia to discuss the matter. Esdras addressed the parents:

I want you all to understand that this is not our decision. For my part, I am tired and want to go visit my grandmother in Choluteca…. This minister wants us all to be here teaching classes even when we’re eating tamales and torejas! But what can I do? I have to abide by whatever final date our current minister orders…. And I know that many of you are also upset by this news because you have your milpas to attend to… but here at Carías Andino we follow the law.

Teachers at Carías Andino commented about how they had worked in December in previous years when there were many paros, but that no Minister of Education had ever extended the school year until December 21. As they exchanged comments and ideas about this situation with other teachers, this same day Marlon shared with everyone what the director at his other school planned on doing to end the school year:

Over there what we have done is calculate the exact number of days that we, at that school, were on paro during the entire school year…. We were absent for a total amount of nine days due to paros, which were of course orders from the FOMH…. This director that we have always respected any paro that our dirigentes called for. So what he and the sub-director have done is propose to the director departamental [the departmental (Ministry) director] that we extend our school year only until we will have fulfilled the required 200 days of class at our school…. At least this is what we have done, I don’t know about what the process will be or if they will accept it, but it’s unfair to ask that our students attend more than 200 days of class…. Normally we’re all at the beach by now!

---

117 Esdras was making a somewhat sarcastic reference to the idea that the Minister of Education wanted students to stay in classes until December 24, as these are common Christmas foods in Honduras.
118 This is a Nahuatl word for a farmer’s field.
119 Meeting between teachers and students’ parents, 28 November 2012
120 Meeting among teachers, 28 November 2012
Esdras, Mercedes, and the other teachers at CEB Carías Andino were enthusiastic about this type of strategy. However some teachers expressed their anxiety over not knowing when the last day of class would be. These teachers argued that it was important to know when their classes would end, in order to plan their teaching activities accordingly. A few days later, Esdras called the director of Marlon’s other school over the phone to discuss his strategy. Part of this conversation seemed to simply confirm what Marlon had told the group, while another part was about what specifically this school administrator planned to do, given that this was the first time that they, as individuals, had approached the debate about the last date of the school year in this manner. Normally the Minister of Education and the FOMH came to some sort of an agreement, and teachers trust that the FOMH had done all that it could to arrange a fair last day. With the exception of the case with the Micheletti government, this is usually a matter of a few days in the beginning of December in either case. However, given that the FOMH neglected to successfully renegotiate the last day of class, and given the unprecedented length of the Minister’s extension, Esdras liked the other director’s idea of proposing their own last day of class to the departmental Ministry officials.

In subsequent days after this phone conversation, teachers at Carías Andino were informed that other school directors in Valle had been utilizing similar strategies as what Marlon described, but they were also writing formal proposals about what specifically they would be doing during (what they calculated as) their last days of class at their schools – showing exactly when the students would prepare for and take their final exams. Esdras even heard of some schools collecting signatures from students’ parents to
complain about the extension of the school year. He was enthusiastic about all of these strategies, but in the end what he did was calculate the days his teachers were absent, a total of nine days, in which they had participated in nation-wide *paros* (while not counting the one occasion when he marked everyone as present, even though he asked them to go protest). Esdras then wrote a letter to the departmental Ministry officials describing why his school will have fulfilled their 200 days of class by December 13, and when they planned to administer final exams. He then submitted this letter to his superiors at the Nacaome Ministry office.

On December 6 Esdras invited me to accompany him to the final meeting between directors of all primary schools in Valle and the departmental Ministry officials in Nacaome. The official purpose of this meeting was to discuss new procedures for the school administrators to submit their year-end paperwork. This year the departmental Ministry officials had contracted out to a special commission of individuals in Nacaome to conduct the review of year-end paperwork. The departmental Ministry assigned the *director distrital* (district director) of the Nacaome municipality to run the meeting for directors from the entire department.

The *director distrital* had specific instructions he wanted to communicate to these primary school directors about how and by what date they must report on: their year-end student enrolment numbers; how many students had dropped out or changed schools; how many students would graduate; each teacher’s pedagogical activity log books for the entire year; the final amount of their internal budgets; individual teachers’ absences; any construction projects they completed and how; and students’ final grades in each course. He reminded them that it would be better to get a head start on this paperwork and be
able to find any errors prior to submitting it, because this special commission is diligent and would not accept excuses about inaccurate reports. They served as third-party auditors who would report directly to the central Ministry of Education offices.

While these were all important processes which schoolteachers have been interested in learning how to do well, in order to avoid reprimand with the heightened amounts of scrutiny in their work, during this meeting the school directors present had a different agenda to discuss. They demanded that the director distrital clarify their final schedules for the year, and explain why they had to continue until December 21. They began by reminding him when each of their individual schools would normally have finished the school year, once having completed their 200 days of class. Most directors concluded that after having made up the days missed during paros, this would mean ending during the second week of December. The director distrital informed everyone that the director departamental cannot grant individual schools different final dates, and that furthermore, these orders to end the school year on December 21 come directly from Minister Escoto. He further reminded them that his time was limited and that he needed to get through his agenda on how to submit their year-end paperwork. This did not go over well with the school administrators, especially considering that the director distrital himself had arrived nearly 45 minutes late to a meeting that he scheduled in his own town.

Different primary school directors raised distinct concerns they each had. Some directors argued that it was unfair to chastise their school when on different occasions
their teachers had chosen not to participate in a given *paro*\(^\text{121}\) arguing that they knew of schools in other departments that finished earlier than December 21 precisely for this reason. Other school directors underscored the unprecedented aspects of the Minister’s decisions to extend the school year until December 21. Esdras stood up and said the following:

I have a question for you, *Señor Director*. Does the final decision about when we end our duties come from you and the *Director Departmental*, or from Minister Escoto? I ask because several *compañeros* have calculated the days that we missed because of *paros* that the FOMH itself called for. It’s true that we need to make up for those missed days of class. But once we have done this, we will have fulfilled the required 200 days of class. We will have therefore followed the law. Where is the law that says we have to do more?\(^\text{122}\)

Other directors argued that it is ‘anti-pedagogical’ to continue prolonging the school year when teachers have already covered the materials they had planned to cover in the 200-day time-frame. This led to arguments about how they were simply keeping children in the classrooms longer for political reasons (the policies of the current Minister), and that ultimately it is the students and their parents who suffer because they cannot help with domestic and agricultural chores during this time.

The *director distrital* conceded these arguments, without explicitly answering Esdras’ question. He proposed that teachers figure out their own ways to finish their final classes and administer final exams. He explained that according to the Minister’s

---

\(^{121}\) This could be considered one way in which the reforms have in fact weakened the *magisterio* by creating divisions among different schools. It is now more difficult to conjure support for nation-wide *paros* (for reasons described in Chapter 6), and even schools that chose not to participate were asked to extend their school year.

\(^{122}\) Meeting between school directors and Valle Ministry officials, 6 December 2012.
schedule, the final exams and year-end paperwork duties should take place during the third and final week of the month (December 17 – 21). However, he explained if school directors in Valle were to finish these processes earlier, and they turned in their year-end paperwork during either December 12, 13, or 14, it would be OK with him and the director departamental. He explained that what he was more concerned with was making sure that the year-end paperwork was submitted by December 21 for their special commission to begin its work. Esdras clarified that by his own calculations they could begin to hold final exams and finish their duties by December 13. The director distrital gave him a stern look, but did not say that this would be unacceptable.

That afternoon at Carías Andino, Esdras held an ‘emergency’ teachers’ council meeting in the computer lab to discuss teachers’ duties during the upcoming week. There he explained what had occurred at the directors’ meeting in Nacaome, and proposed that teachers at Carías Andino finish their final exams and year-end paperwork by December 13. He emphasized the importance of finishing this paperwork on time, but said that if they were willing to get through the final exams in the next week, everyone could be done by December 13 (instead of December 21).

Surprisingly, this was not something every teacher at Carías Andino agreed with. Many had in fact put off preparing their students for the final exams, since they were under the impression that they had more time in the classroom. These concerns provoked further discussion about how many students were doing poorly, and the probability that some would not pass the exams. This too was connected with the reforms as schools that have higher rates of academic failure or disenrollment are less likely to receive funding, and can even face school closures. As Marlon commented:
Look here, we have been struggling with some students all year long. I didn’t want to pass a lot of my students, even though I know this Minister wants us to get students to graduate on time…. The thing is, there are some who really are not getting it…. But in the end, I know that they will fire me if my students don’t pass. I don’t know what to do. I have decided to share this with all of you today because I am really at a loss…. This year we have had some really bad upper-year students, some who are in gangs and who deal drugs. I cannot just pass anyone, and just graduate anyone. This is truly horrible behaviour. If they fire me, so be it!123

Esdras interjected, and addressed the entire group.

But who is at fault, Profe Marlon? The students, or the teachers? I understand your point, but we still have to think about what our values are. We have a student who wasn’t doing well at all, who was most likely to drop out, but who then took the INFOP workshop on refrigeration, and I believe this course saved him…. You’re right though – if so many of our students are not passing, then it’s a loss for the state. The state invests in educating young people, well, we all know that this is changing, but whoever the investors may be, they want to see results.124

In the context of these comments other teachers began to ask if by finishing the school year earlier than what Minister Escoto planned, they might be able to assign make-up work, or administer the final exam again to those students who failed. Mercedes was not in favour of this approach, and stood up to offer her viewpoints.

I agree with Profe Marlon, and worry about what might happen when they evaluate us and find out that we’ve been passing bad students, who really do not deserve to graduate. I worry that the image of our centro is going downhill, and

123 Teachers’ council meeting, 6 December 2012.
124 Teachers’ council meeting, 6 December 2012.
that people see us as easy and quick to give away diplomas. We can't just give out our degrees to anyone. Even if the Padres de Familia get mad at us, who cares? We could get evaluated and reprimanded for not passing students, just as we could get evaluated and reprimanded for passing students who do not deserve it. This Sociedad de Padres de Familia will not get affected by this, but we will be!

Esdras offered the opinion that if teachers were so preoccupied with their poorly achieving students, then they should have approached him or Mercedes earlier in the school year. He once again emphasized that there had been some teachers who had not been coming to class, who had not been putting in enough effort, and that since the beginning of the school year he had been saying that they would be under more pressure during 2012 because of these new laws.

Discussion continued about poor student behaviour and the effects of gangs and violence in the El Garrobo community. Marlon told a story about a student who had deliberately scratched his car after he gave the student a bad mark, and a female teacher then told a story about a student who had written sexually offensive comments on her car with a permanent marker. Mercedes addressed the group, offering her own opinions:

Excuse me if I offend any of you. I am sorry for what happened to your cars, but I do see that some of you are afraid of your own students. Let’s not forget that we are here in El Garrobo, not Tegus where there really are violent threats to teachers. Over there people are killed every day. I don’t know who to charge for the offense, but it is clear to me that many of you are upset. Talk to me with objective data. We are the authority here, not the parents, not the students. We can denounce this behaviour, but we have to be careful about how we do it. We need to be a centro that looks to rescue this community. I will once again say that with
education we can get out of poverty, and that we are doing the dignified labour of bringing Honduras forward through this political crisis.  

Teachers at Carías Andino decided to hold exams during the second week of December, and allow those students who completed the year successfully to return home. They allowed students who failed the final exam to re-write it during the third week of December, and chose to count this exam instead. They were unable however to finish all of their year-end paperwork by December 14, and instead, came into the centro during the third week of December to work on it together. During this time the teacher who wanted the computer literacy classes proposed completing everyone’s paperwork on a new computer program, if Esdras assigned her the computer literacy class for the 2013 school year. He refused to give it to her, and she then revoked her offer. They finished all the year-end paperwork by hand on December 19 (leaving before Minister Escoto said they could finish, but working longer than the departmental Ministry’s deadline for the year-end paperwork).

Esdras announced on everyone’s last day that he had been approached by the COMDE, and asked to participate in their organization. He refused, and told his colleagues why he chose to not become a member.

They wanted me to help them supervise other teachers, and said that they admire what I have done here at Carías Andino. I thanked them for the offer, but refused. My obligations are to this centro and to all of you. Besides, everyone knows that the COMDE serve as orejas (ears) for the oligarchy and for the golpistas!  

---

125 Teachers’ council meeting, 6 December 2012.
126 Meeting among teachers, 19 December 2012.
7.6 Conclusion

In contemporary Honduras resisting post-coup policies of governance and imagining the implications of re-foundation go hand-in-hand. From the formal acts of resistance with the FNRP, to the mundane daily tasks of finding ways to implement the reforms while protesting them, ethnographic analysis of the everyday work of schoolteachers illuminates how these processes also occur within the state itself when we consider the question of who is responsible for implementing policies of governance. Mercedes, Esdras, Marlon, and the other teachers mentioned here are in a unique mediating position between the Honduran population that has to ‘awaken’ and the state that has to undergo ‘re-foundation.’

By focusing on the ways in which teachers shared with each other their own experiences with the Resistencia and with the reforms, this chapter has shown the various ways in which teachers were relaying their experiences among themselves and reflecting on their own positionalities, to form opinions about what the education system and state re-foundation project should be like. They imagine a state in which education and opportunity for youth is a high priority, and in which politicians are held accountable for their promises to the population.

From Esdras’ experiences struggling to travel to Nicaragua, while recognizing that his position as an educated professional made him better situated to do so than many Hondurans; to Mercedes’ reflections on how teachers’ work is different and thus cannot be equated to NGO work when it comes to fund raising strategies; to Marlon’s suggestion that teachers could count the days they missed because of the paros and his concern over the school passing unprepared students – these formal acts of resistance and daily
undertakings merged into larger forms of nation-wide popular resistance, just as they also forged political consciousness among the *magisterio* as a *gremio*. As the political consciousness about the significance of the reforms within the *magisterio* articulated with the growing national political consciousness that the *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party have been forging in Honduran society broadly, we can see the vital role that teachers have been playing in the movement.

As educated professionals and local intellectuals who deliver a state service that connects with different aspirations of the Honduran population, schoolteachers are intimately aware of popular desires for political change in the post-coup context. They are the everyday leaders of the *Resistencia* and LIBRE Party. Through their social roles as thinkers and community organizers, they use their mobility and connectedness with national and international communities to cultivate the revolutionary spirit present among those who continue to resist post-coup policies, and envision a fundamentally different path for the country.
8 Conclusions

In 2012 Honduran schoolteachers were defending the *Estatuto del Docente* for all the rights and benefits it grants them; protesting against the new *Ley de INPREMA* due to the financial losses to their livelihoods that it implies; fearing the repercussions of the COMDE and the CED that the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria* creates; and becoming entangled in the complex web of the impractical expectations that the *Ley Fundamental de Educación* stipulates. They navigated through the political terrain of post-coup neoliberal state projects by reflecting on their own lived experiences with the profession of schoolteacher and with the Honduran state in general. This process was facilitated in large part through sharing with each other their own experiences, and asking how other teachers had dealt with similar problems (e.g., when Aníbal called Esdras to ask about how to properly fund a CEB; when Marlon told teachers at Carías Andino how his other school was attempting to negotiate the final day of classes to end the school year), which in turn forged group awareness of the implications of these processes and strengthened their strategies to deal with this undesirable situation.

Teachers’ own readings of the post-coup political landscape during the Lobo government informed the ways they approached implementing these new laws in practice, within and through the social relations they encountered on the ground in their everyday work in the name of the state, even when the government in power had reduced its own commitment to funding that project. Yet for as much as 2012 represented *un atraso* (a set-back) for progressive social policies in Honduras, it was also representative of the achievements made by the *Resistencia* since its initial formation in June 2009. Despite the controversy around institutionalizing the resistance movement into a formal
political party, in 2012 most LIBRE-supporting teachers believed the party really could take control of the government.

In this concluding chapter I provide the reader with an update to the Honduran political context since my fieldwork ended and LIBRE lost the elections, connecting insights that schoolteachers themselves had about LIBRE and electoral politics in general with the larger arguments and theoretical premises of this thesis. I then describe how the post-election political context has continued to change the working conditions of Honduran schoolteachers, and provide another example of how they continue to “fight against these policies from within.” I conclude by showing the significance of this research for scholarly understandings of Honduran political culture and for the anthropological study of the Latin American state.

8.1 LIBRE’s Electoral Loss

Despite the broad popular support for Xiomara Castro de Zelaya and for the party in general, LIBRE did not win the presidential elections. The reasons supporters mention for this electoral loss are wide-ranging – from electoral fraud, to deeper constraints to the possibilities for Hondurans to elect a socialist party to power in the contemporary historical context. During the night of 24 November 2013, National Party presidential candidate Juan Orlando Hernández prematurely declared himself the winner of the elections – before the Supreme Electoral Tribune had correctly counted every vote. When Orlando Hernández did this he was in fact in the lead according to the votes the Supreme Electoral Tribune had received in their Tegucigalpa offices.

The main problem with this scenario was that at the moment Orlando Hernández declared himself the winner, the Supreme Electoral Tribune still had not received votes
from several additional voting centres throughout the country. When LIBRE Party (and even some Liberal Party) officials at those locations counted their own voting records, LIBRE was in the lead (causing Xiomara to subsequently declare herself the winner on national television). In the end the numbers from the different regional voting centres did not add up to what the Supreme Electoral Tribune in Tegucigalpa claimed were the final number of votes for each candidate. LIBRE subsequently requested a re-count and the Supreme Electoral Tribune refused.

Various independent international observers commented that these were not ‘fair and free elections’ under such circumstances. There were also a series of questionable practices such as National Party and Liberal Party officials offering to bring voters in from the rural communities, during which time they bought them lunch and then were reported to have paid them large sums of cash in exchange for their votes (as several teachers told me was occurring during the primary elections in November 2012). Such bribing techniques have been common strategies in Honduras since long before the 2013 presidential and congressional elections. Indeed, many teachers criticized this practice saying that even if LIBRE politicians were rich enough to do this, they wouldn’t want their party to conduct itself in that manner. Beyond bribing voters, Hondurans also experienced newer forms of cheating during the November 2013 presidential and congressional elections. For instance, teachers have told me that several voters claimed that when they presented their cédulas de identidad (national identification cards) at their corresponding regional voting centres, the Supreme Electoral Tribune officials at these sites claimed that these Honduran citizens were not eligible to vote, because according to official state records they were already deceased.
The fact that LIBRE lost the 2013 elections does not mean that its members will stop thinking through how policies of governance can benefit the majority of Hondurans. LIBRE is now the primary opposition party in Honduras, which means that its diputados have a significant ability to influence future legislation by voting in the national congress. Moreover, the idea of serious constitutional reform by means of a national constituent assembly is not likely to go away any time soon. However, as I have argued in this thesis, it was not primarily through electoral politics that Honduran schoolteachers were pursuing change (although they did work toward a change of government). Rather, it was through everyday challenges to neoliberal state projects under the Lobo government that teachers saw the idea of the state as the answer to addressing the country’s problems with social inequalities. The feeling of excitement and hope when imagining all of what this future will entail – the revolutionary spirit experienced in contemporary Honduras – is still being forged through schoolteachers’ everyday practices, despite LIBRE’s electoral loss. This thesis provides an example of how this forging of political consciousness was already happening in 2012 among a group of public intellectuals who are also front-line state agents.

8.2 Concerns with LIBRE and Electoral Politics in General

Teachers identified different kinds of obstacles to electing LIBRE to power in 2013. Most prevalent was the idea that the Honduran population is used to politicians giving away material things (such as Lorena stoves) in exchange for political support. In their profound critique of what can be thought of as Honduran approaches to clientelist politics, teachers argued that LIBRE politicians could not afford to, and did not want to, engage in this type of practice. Teachers themselves were struggling with the idea that
they too needed to engage in a sort of clientelist politics with these regional political authorities, although they disagreed with the practice (as their reoccurring joke, ‘les construyo el rio!’ illustrates). These constraints notwithstanding, the majority of the teachers with whom I worked in 2012 believed that Xiomara had the popular support to be elected president. They did not doubt that LIBRE could gain the majority of votes. Rather, they worried that LIBRE would suffer an electoral loss at the hands of the same golpistas who were already in power.\footnote{127}

Given that Juan Orlando Hernández was the President of the National Congress during the Lobo government, teachers argued, it would be easy for the National Party to commit electoral fraud because they would surely demand that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal recount the votes once Xiomara had won. Despite its obligation to be a non-partisan state institution, these teachers considered the tribune to be an entity already under the control of the government in power. Since the election of Pepe Lobo members of the FNRP have argued that the Supreme Electoral Tribune is controlled by golpistas loyal to this group of National Party authorities.\footnote{128}

All of these variables provided a unique situation in 2012 as schoolteachers anticipated the crucial November 2013 presidential and congressional elections at the same time they navigated through unprecedented reforms to the education sector. A recurring question in everyone’s mind was whether or not these new laws would persist

\footnote{127 There are in fact divisions within what some Hondurans, and scholars of Honduran politics, have often referred to quite generally as ‘the golpistas’ – not only among common folk who supported the coup and who support post-coup policies, as I attempted to show in my MA thesis (Levy 2010), but among those National Party members who have been in control of the state since January 2010. The November 2012 firing of Honduran Supreme Court magistrates is an expression of these conflicts among the golpistas themselves. The Lobo government replaced these magistrates with others who were more aligned with their ideas for post-coup policies.}

\footnote{128 Indeed, the replacement of the Supreme Court magistrates was another example of how this could happen because any questions about the Supreme Electoral Tribunal’s recount would subsequently go to the Supreme Court, which by 2013 was in the hands of golpistas from the Lobo camp.}
during the incoming regime, or what other policies that government might pursue (as even Liberal Party and coup-supporting Director Aníbal expressed). In this sense, my research provides an example of what it means to study how people understand the range of political possibilities, when the probability of radical change appears imminent.

Schoolteachers developed opinions about what kind of politician Honduras needs with re-foundation. They also used their experiential knowledge about the difference between the ‘theory’ and the ‘practice’ of governing policies in Honduras as a method for understanding some of the difficulties that LIBRE was facing in 2012 (and would subsequently face if elected). In addition to the pressure to promise construction projects and present an image of the LIBRE Party as one capable of ruling the country, some teachers who were critical of the idea that the Resistencia form a political party in the first place reflected on how Honduran political authorities conduct themselves more generally through expression of their disagreement with LIBRE. For instance, some commented that new politicians who had suddenly appeared as LIBRE candidates were never Resistencia de corazón (full-hearted Resistencia members), and were thus diluting the progressive agenda that the FNRP had created.

Another common critique of LIBRE among some teachers was that its leaders were too optimistic and presented a false sense of hope. These teachers believed that such a political party could not be elected in Honduras, at least not at this time. This was juxtaposed against those teachers who did believe that LIBRE could win, arguing that if it was possible for the FMLN to win in El Salvador and the FSLN to win in Nicaragua, then surely the FNRP could win in Honduras. But as one teacher at the Nacaome campus of the UPNFM put it:
I am LIBRE and will vote for Xiomara, but… [he looks to see if anyone else is nearby] my colleagues would get really upset with me if I said the following: Between you and me… [he continues to look around], I don’t think we have a shot. In Honduras, the elections are always so entangled with business interests of the oligarchy. Just think about which companies fund the campaign ads. There are no empresarios in LIBRE, and while we like this aspect of the party, and we all want change, it’s not practical in Honduras, at least not right now. This is not El Salvador, and it is certainly not Nicaragua!129

Similar concerns about LIBRE reflect the idea that its politicians had been riding a wave of reactions against the coup and desires for re-foundation without actually coming to terms with the sacrifices and hard work that such a project implies. These arguments were often connected with reflections on Honduran history and the practices of ruling elites historically in a country that lacked a united front of popular resistance.

Some teachers argued that since the Resistencia is so young (that is, the awakening has yet to mature) it was too soon to attempt to take power. Most of the teachers with whom I worked did however see LIBRE as a viable solution to reversing the reforms; most thought they really could win the elections; and most voted for LIBRE in the 2013 elections. At the same time many developed the critique that LIBRE presents a distraction to the Resistencia in its more important task of grassroots political actions. Perhaps not coincidentally this has been the primary contribution of schoolteachers to the Resistencia movement, as agents of social and political change.

Through their capacities to organize local populations around common goals, and their abilities to communicate the relevance of good policies of governance to a wide

129 Interview, 22 September 2012.
range of people at Resistencia events and in public venues (as Mercedes does among different kinds of community members since her divorce, and as Esdras has done on local television), schoolteachers play a vital role as local intellectuals and organizers of the FNRP. Moreover, in 2012 Honduran teachers were cleverly finding ways to take political action in often quite mundane contexts as they selectively implemented the reforms.

Through primarily quotidian acts of resistance, teachers were creatively forging their visions of what the education system ought to be (through promoting projects like the INFOP refrigeration courses and adult computer literacy clubs). This was also seen in the ways they developed visions of what the state could be like. For instance, they prevented politicians from entering the school premises to send a message to these local golpista politicians and to the communities with whom they work that if political authorities were not willing to help fund their school’s basic needs, then they were not welcome on the school’s premises (despite their own needs to publicly show that they support education). Teachers did this while working within the confines of the undesired situation of the reforms and the oppressive post-coup neoliberal political context.

Although neoliberal policies in Honduras began to take hold during the Rafael Callejas administration (1990-1994), given the aims of these unprecedented reforms to the education sector (and the fact that they override policy achievements made over the last half century), I consider them to be an illustrative example of how neoliberal policies in post-coup Honduras are now more resilient than they were under the governments of Ricardo Maduro (2002-2005) and Carlos Flores Facussé (1998-2001). The case of the education sector is one example of how this is happening. While these policies began with the regime of Pepe Lobo, the government of Juan Orlando Hernández is continuing
this post-coup tradition of neoliberal state projects that continue to cause the erasure of social policy achievements made by different *gremios* since before the coup.

### 8.3 Continuing Changes to Teachers’ Working Conditions

Since its inauguration in January 2014, the Orlando Hernández government has maintained Marlon Escoto as Minister of Education (a somewhat uncommon occurrence). Thus far the regime has been successful in another (more devastating) attack against teachers’ livelihoods by altering their work schedules and decreasing the total number of hours that teachers are paid to work. Since at least the passing of the *Estatuto del Docente*, Honduran schoolteachers working in primary education could hold two different shifts of five hours (the amount of time students in primary education attend classes): either the ‘morning shift’ from 7 am to 12 pm, or the ‘afternoon shift’ from 12 to 5 pm. In contrast, under Juan Orlando Hernández, primary education class schedules will run from 8 am to 3 pm, with an hour dedicated for lunch (a total of six hours of paid work for instruction in class). Thus whereas during my fieldwork – and throughout the professional lives of the teachers with whom I work – it was common for teachers to hold two different jobs to meet their basic subsistence needs, this is no longer possible under Orlando Hernández.

From what teachers have told me since my fieldwork ended (via text messages and phone calls), the Juan Orlando Hernández government has argued that these actions were necessary in order to give primary education students more hours of class, and because it prevents teachers with two positions from either leaving their first jobs early, or arriving tardy to their second jobs. Primary education schoolteachers themselves are aware of the potential benefits of this new system (including allowing other teachers
access to vacant positions), but insist that they have long since been proponents of longer
class days for pedagogical reasons, and that parents often wanted their younger children
to either come home for lunch (and stay home for the rest of the day), or to leave for
school after having eaten lunch. Moreover, they tell me that that the shorter time allowed
in class has come about during previous periods of struggle not because teachers have
been work-shy – in fact, as educators and as workers, they have wanted more paid hours
in the classroom – but because no government has been willing to pay teachers an entire
eight-hour shift. Having access to two different five-hour shifts has thus allowed those
teachers who needed a second job to work up to 50 hours per week. Only having access
to 35 hours per week represents a major reduction in income for those teachers who now
have to give up their second job.

As I hope to have successfully illustrated in this thesis, Honduran schoolteachers
are quite adept at finding ways to challenge policies they feel are a step in the wrong
direction for their country’s education system. They do this not only as employees who
are protesting their working conditions, but as agents of the state, who criticize specific
oppressive policies and forms of governance with which they disagree, while forging
visions for what the state could be like – figuring out together what larger political
projects Hondurans should pursue.

While Honduran schoolteachers did not fully obtain those goals in 2012, I believe
that as a gremio they were able to reflect upon the effectiveness of their own strategies. In
the process they devised creative ways to improve their situations, even when they called
into question the sincerity and effectiveness of their organizations’ leaders in the FOMH.
These practices continue beyond the 2012 school year. One example of how this has played out since my fieldwork ended will suffice.

Esdras was once again approached by the COMDE after I returned to Canada. To my surprise, this time he did not reject their proposal to join (as he had previously done by claiming that he would never serve a group of orejas for the golpistas). When Esdras called me over the phone he described his enthusiasm for what he believed was an effective strategy for improving the situation of teachers at his school. Given what I knew about the COMDE, and the Ley de Participación Comunitaria, I was initially confused by this news. When I asked Esdras if he had changed his mind or opinion about what the COMDE do, he responded:

Ha! Not at all…. At first I didn’t want to join, but then later I did… not because I agree with the COMDE itself – we all know that they are against the magisterio – but because this is a good strategy for us at our centro, to stay on top of those who are attempting to supervise and denounce us. One has to know who they are, and what they are planning. I thus decided to join the COMDE to be able to fight against these policies from within.130

The 2012 school year represented a period in which schoolteachers were pushing the limits of these reforms and gaining experience in figuring out effective strategies to challenge these policies from within the state. As this example illustrates, teachers are keenly aware that some of their actions go directly against the intentions of these policies.

---

130 Phone conversation with Esdras, 26 January 2013.
8.4 Significance of These Data

The fact that Honduran schoolteachers are responsible for implementing policies with which they themselves disagree prompted me to ask how they understood their own work and approached it in the context of these new laws. While they challenged the state on its policies of governance, they also saw the Honduran state itself as an important part of the solution to a series of problems they identify with the country’s vast social inequities. In fact, Honduran schoolteachers are enthusiastic supporters of respect for state institutions and a robust legal system that establishes the same standards for all citizens, just as they are advocates for more social investment in state services in general, which they believe can help to alleviate the shackles of poverty.

Honduran teachers’ successful careers exemplify how the country’s public education system can afford humble people the ability to become salaried professionals. I found that they were reflecting upon their own experiences when assessing the significance of the withdrawal of government support for basic state services – hence the important anthropological question of who is responsible for implementing governing policies on the ground. Asking the anthropological question of what kind of person has become a front-line state agent has been a particularly productive line of enquiry in studying the state from an ethnographic perspective (e.g., Clark 2012a, 2012b; Heyman 1999; Martínez Novo 2006; Smart 2002), although studies of this kind are still quite limited.

Honduran schoolteachers’ persistent confidence in the state despite its post-coup policies of governance resonate with what historical sociologist Philip Abrams identified as the differences between a “state-system” or a “palpable nexus of practice and
institutional structure centered in government and more or less extensive, unified and
dominant in any given society” and a “state-idea, projected, purveyed and variously
believed in in different societies at different times” (1988: 82). Here we see that
Honduran schoolteachers’ understandings of their own positions were connected with
their vested interest and belief in the idea of the state, as they developed a series of
visions for how to make this particular state system better.

Once we demystify ‘the state’ and treat it as a multi-faceted, contradictory entity
made up of myriad goals and state actors, then we can aim to study its effects through
particular ethnographic sites (see Hansen and Stepputat eds. 2001 on what these sites can
include, and compare with Mitchell 1991 on the illusive power of state effects and how
these should be our focus in studying the state). For Honduran schoolteachers, in 2012,
the state was seen as a vehicle (or means) through which on the one hand they
experienced policies that created a series of undesirable situations, and on the other,
foresaw potential solutions to these problems.

The potential solutions teachers envisioned during the 2012 school year were
developed in part through reflection on their own lived experiences and in part through
observation of what policies of governance were occurring in neighbouring ‘sister
republics.’ They looked to Nicaragua and El Salvador as examples of what is politically
possible, while recognizing the inherent differences in history and political culture.

My research participants saw winning control of the state through LIBRE as a
potential method for reversing the reforms (although not guaranteed, as Mercedes and
others alluded). They also sought solutions to their undesirable situation through existing
state resources, even under the Lobo government (such as when they convinced students’
parents that by law their children needed to be in school, thus using the state’s legal system as an important resource to fulfill their mandates and prevent reprimand under the pressure to increase enrolment numbers). The myriad ways in which Honduran schoolteachers engaged the state during 2012 contributes to our knowledge of Honduran political culture and what it means to study the state anthropologically in neoliberal contexts. It is toward these two arenas that I will now direct our attention.

In terms of Honduran political culture, of significance are the ways in which teachers were consistently able to fill every possible – often very confined – political space with daily acts of resistance to voice their subtle, or very explicit, political manifestations. The most illuminating ethnographic example of this practice occurred when teachers at CEB Carías Andino refused to allow local political authorities to enter the premises of their school, and asked local police to support them in preventing anyone politiqueando (seeking support for electoral politics) from coming into this particular property of the Honduran state. In the process of sending this very politicized message to these local political authorities that because of their lack of support they were not welcome at CEB Carías Andino, these teachers consciously deviated from the logic of the reforms (acknowledging full well that they depended upon these same authorities for continual access to funding). As teachers reflected on how clientelist politics were not beneficial for the Honduran population – arguing that they did not want LIBRE to engage in these practices – they likewise chose not to fund their own school through similar practices when politicians chose to offer money only when it was convenient for their own purposes. It is ironic that they sent this message by way of the local police.
Another example of how teachers were filling limited space with political action was by announcing the betrayal of the Valle Diputado Jose Alfredo Saavedra to each other at the very moment they stood up in public venues to shake his hand, kiss him on the cheek, and thank him publicly. These teachers at CEB José Cecilio del Valle were aware of the fact that it was in their best interest to remain on good terms with local political authorities, even while they criticized their practices openly among themselves.

A third example of this type of political activism in confined spaces was seen at the beginning of the school year when teachers at Carías Andino held a meeting with the Sociedad de Padres de Familia to talk about what they would and would not be able to achieve in light of these reforms. On the one hand, as I showed in Chapter 4, these teachers held the meeting in an attempt to ward off parental criticism of their work and to explain the economic reality in which they were working (thereby communicating to the parents the difference between the ‘theory’ of governing policies as they are written on paper and the ‘practice’ of these new laws once they are implemented on the ground). On the other hand, however, telling the parents (some of whom could be with the COMDE or CED) that the Lobo government has lied to them, and warning them that they should be aware of what is practical and what is not in their school because of this reality of failed promises, is an explicit critique of governing authorities and state practices in Honduras.

These daily acts of resistance illuminate the ways in which Hondurans’ culture of popular resistance is evolving since June 2009 – not only at formal Resistencia events, but through everyday practices. Such mundane contexts were most of the ways through which schoolteachers were reading the political landscape in 2012 and coming to understand the significance of these reforms.
It was striking to see how few teachers were reading the actual laws; it would be more accurate to say that they were invoking these new laws in discussions with their colleagues. During my fieldwork I became a part of this conversation precisely because I had been reading the actual legislation and my research participants were aware of this. Teachers would often comment to their colleagues that I was surely familiar with the laws because I had read through the actual text. This resonates with what Tara Schwegler describes in a similar context of ethnographic research among state agents: “my informants were not simply imparting information to me. Instead, they were looking over my shoulder trying to read the cryptic patterns in the data that I had collected – in this endeavor, then, the distinction between expert and student dissolved and we were engaged in a joint inquiry” (2012: 40-41).

When I would ask teachers about particular articles or passages, they always had a response, even though most had not themselves read the actual law. A clear example of this was seen through teachers’ recurring argument that the new INPREMA law was ‘unconstitutional’ – something several teachers repeated to me throughout the school year. When I would ask individual teachers to explain to me which articles of the new law violated which articles of the current constitution, they would always respond with an argument about how it is illegal to take away the rights of a gremio, or how the Lobo government was elected during a coup-installed de facto government. These are arguments that magisterio dirigentes developed and repeated during assemblies. Teachers were thus deciphering and building on other teachers’ interpretations of the laws. The legislation had a large presence in their conversations, understandings, and work lives, despite the fact that they weren’t familiar with the ‘letter of the law.’
These recognitions are in no way intended to criticize my research participants for not having read through the laws (indeed, how many of us are familiar with the legislation or regulations governing our own work lives?). Rather, they are in the spirit of understanding the pressures these teachers were facing in their everyday work routines, and studying what they perceived to be relevant for them in their abilities to carry out their duties under these new constraints. Teachers knew from their previous experiences that it was not necessary to read through the laws themselves in order to understand what the Lobo government was demanding of them. They thus sought to learn about the reforms via word of mouth. It was understood that trusting the analyses of their colleagues and building upon such conceptualizations of the new laws was the best way to make their own decisions in their everyday work. Perhaps what is most striking is the strong presence of these legislative changes in teachers’ lives despite their lack of detailed knowledge of the laws – they were nonetheless using the laws, citing the laws, and protesting against the laws throughout the 2012 school year.

The UNAH and UPNFM courses provide an interesting exception to this phenomenon in the sense that it was a space in which teachers were explicitly encouraged to read through the laws (although even then it was profoundly clear to me that Esdras and Mercedes were integrating their own experiences as school administrators into their class discussions among fellow teachers). While perhaps designed to create successful entrepreneurial subjects whose self-regulation would result in the complete implementation of these new policies, the UNAH and UPNFM university classes also provided a space for discussion and criticism of the reforms. In this recurring social encounter, teachers who were already involved in school administration (or those who
aspired to become school directors) would meet with their peers and discuss together the implications of these new laws. There is thus never a single meaning of these courses, as the intention we might impute to them did not exhaust the actual experience teachers had in such courses. Here we see the production of this knowledge among front-line state agents who were coming to understand the implications of a new set of constraints and resources. Their own understandings of the ways things work informed their everyday practices as they went about implementing these new laws.

The dynamics inherent in the post-coup shifting strategies of governance in Honduras can afford rich insights into Honduran political culture and the ways in which state institutions can intervene and influence the daily lives of Hondurans. Currently in Honduras there are other groups of state employees who are navigating through similar neoliberal policies that aim to privatize formerly state-funded enterprises (such as health workers at ‘public’ hospitals). There are also other groups of public intellectuals (such as journalists) who play the important roles of interpreting polices of governance and communicating state practices to a variety of populations, thereby serving as another important group of everyday leaders of the Resistencia, responsible for thinking about their own positions in society and articulating the lived experiences of a particular class (see Gramsci 1971).

As the Resistencia and LIBRE Party continue to challenge certain policies of governance while recognizing the potential usefulness of the state system, these areas merit sustained ethnographic research in the post-coup political context. I recognize that projects of this sort can have methodological difficulties, as people with any kind of authority have “little to gain and more to lose from telling an outsider what really goes
on; it is safer to stick to the ‘party line’ and describe practice as completely in accord with official policies and regulations” (Smart 2002: 337; c.f., Nader 1969).

Another way to study how the state is relevant and present in the lives of Hondurans is through observance of how individuals from various backgrounds experience their encounters with the state by engaging public records offices of different kinds (such as at the Registro Nacional de las Personas). It is in places such as these that citizens learn how to “know and act accordingly, that when dealing with the state bureaucracies they have to patiently comply with the seemingly arbitrary, ambiguous, and always changing state requirements” (Ayuero 2012: 9). While accompanying teachers to various kinds of bureaucratic offices it became clear to me that they (and other people) in Honduras have an elaborate network of contacts and adept strategies when engaging these basic services – waiting in lines and coming into contact with other state officials in very mundane contexts. These sorts of research projects should aim to study the knowledge Hondurans have about these state institutions to understand the everyday effects of the Honduran state and its post-coup policies of neoliberal governance.

State practices in Honduras can change quite significantly with incoming governments. It is apparent nonetheless that since the June 2009 coup, the governments of Roberto Micheletti Bain (June – Dec. 2009) and Pepe Lobo (Jan. 2010 – Dec. 2013) have maintained Honduras on the same trajectory of neoliberal state projects and unprecedented levels of withdrawal of funding for basic public services. As schoolteachers read the political landscape and began to selectively implement the reforms on the ground they necessarily had to engage with aspects of these neoliberal
policies, some of which they even found useful for meeting the basic needs of schooling in the context of poverty.

One could read these stories as evidence that Honduran teachers have become entrepreneurial self-regulating neoliberal subjects, loyally abiding by the intentions of the reforms. Indeed, teachers solicited funding locally. However, these stories also illuminate a perfect example of how people are resisting neoliberalism, how front-line state agents are acting in ways that completely contradict the logic of neoliberalism by promoting the idea of the state with a general confidence that if the state’s system were changed – or as Resistencia members say, ‘re-founded’ – this would be the answer to solving Honduras’ problems with the education system. For as much as neoliberal policies are creating new forms of authority, these insights from the Honduran education case confirm that when it comes to delivering basic public services to a population, the authority of the state still matters a great deal to those who engage in this kind of work (as anthropologist Aradhana Sharma [2006: 70] so eloquently illustrates in a different neoliberal context).

This insight goes directly against the rather easy assumption that these teachers were doing what the neoliberal policy designers were asking them to do through a “neoliberal governmentality” (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002; and compare with Kipnis 2008). While the laws were written in a seemingly non-political style of efficiency, teachers have seen through the “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1990) and have politicized every possible aspect of these reforms – denouncing them as a neoliberal manoeuvre made by an illegal post-coup regime. The fact that front-line state agents work through these processes and resist neoliberal policies while selectively
implementing them, suggests that other contexts of implementation of neoliberal policies merit re-thinking.

All this points to the ways in which the state is considered a significant part of the solution – the state idea is promoted even when the state system has failed to provide. If we distinguish between the state idea and the state system, as Abrams would encourage us to do (1988), we see that in the case of Honduras the state idea is still considered vitally important and the state system is continually thought of as something that can be shaped, moulded, and ‘re-founded.’ This is especially interesting when we consider the irony that in Honduras the state has consistently proven to a range of populations that it is not up to the given task at hand. Yet it remains vitally important. There are other examples this phenomenon that an astute anthropology of the Latin American state has been able to capture (see, for instance, Clark 2012a, 2012b; Krupa 2010; Nugent 2001, 1999).

Even though different Honduran governments and their distinct programs and policies of governance have not always lived up to the expectations of the majority of the Honduran population, the state remains enormously important in their lives and as they imagine the range of political possibilities. Honduran schoolteachers are seeing the state as a means through which they can participate in this larger project of resistance to neoliberal policies in the region and still promote their own nationally-oriented projects. All this points toward the larger historically- and ethnographically-informed research question of why the state continues to be so important in Latin America.

From the perspective of FNRP and LIBRE supporters, and from the standpoint of schoolteachers, the current struggle of the Honduran population is to bring their state to
rejoin the broader project in the region to “interrupt” neoliberalism (see Goodale and Postero 2013, eds. whose edited volume illuminates the most recent forms of significant resistance to neoliberalism in the region). These insights demonstrate that even in neoliberal contexts the state still remains vitally important in Latin America – either as a mechanism to realize neoliberal projects or as a way for different populations to successfully devise alternatives.

It can be argued that in Honduras an interruption of neoliberalism was experienced (however briefly) during the recent government of ousted President Mel Zelaya through an engagement with ALBA, Petrocaribe, and a rejection of the erosion of workers’ rights in the name of transnational capital. Through their international connectedness and roles as local intellectuals, schoolteachers see inspiration in what is occurring in other Latin American countries and translate some of these broader political processes into everyday Honduran contexts. Approaching these new laws from the perspective of schoolteachers affords us the knowledge of how they have been working against neoliberalism and struggling to expand state services that local populations seek out. Honduran schoolteachers are fighting to make these types of state institutions more resilient in the post-coup context, just as they are striving to make governing policies benefit all Hondurans – not just the empresarios, the golpistas, or the oligarquía.
Honduran Government and *Colegio Magisterial* Documents


# Books, Articles, and Unpublished Reports


———. (2010b) Power to the Parents: Honduras and Guatemala Experiment with Community-Run Schools. Americas Quarterly (Summer), 1–5.


———. (1995) National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective:


Cualitativos organizadas en el Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social de Buenos Aires. Argentina, August.


Appendices

Appendix A: Political Map of Honduras
Appendix B: Research Ethics Approval Form
Appendix C: List of Acronyms

CEB
“Centro de Educación Básica” (Basic Education Centre). These are primary schools that also offer ciclo común – the first three years of secondary schooling (grades 6, 7, and 8). They are the types of schools where I conducted research, and whose significance I describe in Chapter 5. Teachers also refer to CEBs as simply ‘centros básicos.’

CED
“Consejo Escolares de Desarrollo” (School Development Council). These are groups of COMDE supporters who – thanks to the Ley de Participación Comunitaria – have the legal right to audit the work of schoolteachers. In Chapter 5 I write about Director Aníbal was approached by the CED.

COLPEDAGOGOSH
“Colegio de Pedagogos de Honduras” (College of Pedagogues of Honduras). This is a colegio magisterial designed specifically for teachers who hold university degrees in pedagogía or school administration.

COLPROSUMAH
“Colegio Profesional Superación Magisterial Hondureño” (Professional College of Honduran Teacher Improvement). This is the first and largest colegio magisterial in Honduras, and is currently designed specifically for teachers who work in primary education.

COMDE
“Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo Educativo” (Municipal Council of Education Development) is an organization resulting from the Ley de Participación Comunitaria designed to supervise, audit, and denounce the behaviour of schoolteachers. See Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of what this entails and how teachers understand the significance of the COMDE.

COPEMH
“Colegio de Profesores de Educación Media de Honduras” (College of Secondary Education Teachers of Honduras). This is the second largest colegio magisterial specifically designed for secondary education teachers, who hold undergraduate degrees in the subject they teach.
COPRUMH
“Colegio Profesional Unión Magisterial de Honduras” (Professional College of Teacher Union of Honduras). This is a small colegio magisterial for both primary and secondary education teachers.

FMLN
“Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional” (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation). This armed revolutionary movement attempted to overthrow the US-backed Salvadoran government of José Napoleón Duarte during the 1980s. It subsequently formed a political party and was in power in El Salvador at the time of this research.

FNRP
“Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular” ‘La Resistencia’” (National Front of Popular Resistance). This is a peaceful (non-armed) nation-wide anti-coup social and political movement that brought together previously-existing movements and organizations from different popular sectors to oppose the 28 June 2009 military coup. It has since broadened its agenda, calling for the ‘re-foundation’ of Honduran state and society through constitutional reform. The FNRP is the founder and ally of the LIBRE Party.

FOMH
“Federación de Organizaciones Magisteriales de Honduras” (Federation of Teachers’ Organizations of Honduras). This is a committee composed of the presidents of all six colegios magisteriales. Together they serve as the national leaders of the magisterio. The FOMH negotiates teachers’ working conditions with the Ministry of Education and the given government in power; they call for paros (work stoppages) and strikes.

FSLN
“Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional ‘Sandinistas’” (Sandinista National Liberation Front). This armed revolutionary movement successfully overthrew the US-supported Somoza oligarchy in Nicaragua in 1979. It subsequently formed a political party and was in power in Nicaragua at the time of this research.

INFOP
“Instituto Nacional de Formación Professional” (National Institute of Professional Formation) is a state-managed trade school. In Chapter 5 I show how Director Esdras convinced INFOP to offer free training to CEB Carías Andino students and graduates to earn certificates as refrigeration technicians.

INPREMA
“Instituto Nacional de Previsión del Magisterio” (Teachers’ National Pension Institute). This is a state-run financial institution that manages the benefits which all schoolteachers have access to, such as, loans, insurance plans, benefits/pension
plans. These benefits have now been significantly reduced by the new ‘General Law of INPREMA.’

JICA

“Japan Cooperation Agency” is a Japanese development agency in Honduras that provided volunteer mathematics teachers to the CEBs where I conducted research.

LIBRE

“Partido de Libertad y Refundación” (Freedom and Re-foundation Party). This is the official political party that emerged from the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular social and political movement in late 2011. Their 2013 presidential candidate was Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of ousted president José Manuel Zelaya Rosales. The party is considered by some members and adversaries alike to be of the Honduran Left.

PRICMAH

“Primer Colegio Profesional Hondureño de Maestros” (First Professional College of Teachers). According to COLPROSUMAH members, this colegio magisterial was formed by teachers who opposed COLPROSUMAH’s leadership and who were aligned with the National Party during the military government of General Oswaldo López Arellano. It is called the ‘first’ college, even though COLPROSUMAH already existed. Most teachers with whom I worked in 2012 consider PRICPMAH to be the most corrupt of all the six colegios magisteriales.

UNAH

“Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras” (National Autonomous University of Honduras) is the largest public university in Honduras, and the post-secondary education institution that validates degrees from other universities (including those from the UPNFM) as consistent with national standards.

UPNFM

“Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán” (Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University). This is the only university in Honduras specifically designed for graduates of normal schools who seek undergraduate degrees in a specific subject in order to teach it in secondary education classes.
Appendix D: List of Laws

_Estatuto del Docente_ (Teachers’ Statute)
This is a law that the _magisterio_ considers a labour achievement as it establishes teachers’ basic rights and obligations as professional educators. Since its initial passing in 1982, different governments prior to the 2009 coup have sought to dismantle aspects of this law, while teachers have fought to defend it. It has thus been reformed many times, although the post-coup education laws represent the most significant attempt to override most of its achievements.

“_Ley de Incentivo a la Participación Comunitaria para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad de Educación ‘Ley de Participación Comunitaria’”_ (Law of Incentive for Community Participation for the Improvement of Education Quality).
This post-coup law aims to discipline teachers as workers by creating the COMDE and the CED. While the law talks about the importance of involving community members in education decisions, schoolteachers have already been doing this, and thus consider this law to be a mechanism put in place by the post-coup government to control their behaviour as workers. The law was passed in early 2011 and overrides previous legislation in the area of how teachers are supervised.

“_Ley Fundamental de Educación_” (Fundamental Law of Education)
This post-coup law affects how teachers go about doing their jobs. Through ambiguous criteria it says that Honduras will increase its academic standards and now offer new subjects in schools. It also demands that teachers solicit funding from municipal and departmental governments and from the private sector. Teachers consider this law to be the principal method through which post-coup governments are attempting to privatize and de-centralize the national public education system. The law was passed in early 2012 and overrides previous legislation in the area of how teachers approach their work and how the national public education system is funded.

“_Ley General del INPREMA_” (General Law of INPREMA)
This post-coup law reforms the teachers’ pension institute, taking away several financial benefits that schoolteachers had achieved by fighting to pass previous legislation in these areas. (See Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation.) The FOMH has declared this new law unconstitutional and sought legal action to reverse it. The law was passed in early 2012 and overrides previous legislation in the area of teachers’ benefits with INPREMA.
Appendix E: Graph Showing Growth in Student Enrolment
CENTRO DE EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA

OFICIO CIRCULAR N° 1  26-03-2012

MAESTROS DEL:
CENTRO DE EDUCACION BASICA

Estimados profesoras y profesores:

El suscrito Director del Centro de Educación Básica de esta comunidad. En uso de las facultades que el ramo le confiere.
Les comunica que se le asigno a la sub directora la responsabilidad de la supervisión pedagógica – curricular; el cual ya es de su conocimiento que a partir del primero de marzo cada maestro debe tener en su aula de clases lo siguiente:

1. Instrumentos de trabajo
   a. Cuaderno control de acumulativo
   b. Lista de asistencia diaria
   c. Boletas de calificaciones
   d. Planes de clases, ejecutables en el aula de clases

2.- Horarios de clases
3.- Círculos de estudios
4.- Rincón de aprendizaje

El propósito del acompañamiento a los docentes es buscar mejorar la práctica educativa en el aula, detectando y canalizando las necesidades y dificultades que se presenten en el proceso educativo, ofreciendo el apoyo y seguimiento para garantizar el logro de los propósitos de nuestro Centro Educativo.
Lo anterior está contemplado en el estatuto del docente en los deberes y obligaciones del maestro.
Appendix G: Chart of Teacher Absences in Director’s Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Teacher Name</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Days Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/21</td>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/25</td>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/30</td>
<td>Mary Johnson</td>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>David Lee</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>Emma Brown</td>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>Robert White</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The chart continues with similar entries for the rest of the month.
Sr. Novales Levis - Zepeda.

ESTIMADO AMIGO (A).
Es de mucho agrado para nosotros directivos, Maestros y Alumnos dirigirnos a su respetable personalidad para saludarle y de paso solicitarle nos proporcione un regalo, para un BINGO, el cual se realizara el día sábado 14 de julio del año 2012; cuyos fondos serán para la reparación de dos aulas que albergan a más de 100 alumnos de los grados de primero "B", segundo "A", B" y sexto; en jornada matutina y vespertina.
Conociendo de la labor que desempeña y la colaboración que usted le brinda siempre a nuestro centro Educativo, le damos nuestro más sincero agradecimiento.

MUCHAS GRACIAS Y QUE DIOS LO (A) BENDIGA.
Appendix I: Emblems of School Sponsors on Classroom
Appendix J: Sign from Sponsors Pointing Toward School
Curriculum Vitae

Jordan Levy
Department of Anthropology
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

EDUCATION

PhD  Anthropology – University of Western Ontario. (ABD, Expected Completion: July 2014).


(Graduated Magna Cum Laude. Third year spent studying anthropology and Spanish in Santiago, Chile at La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile).

PUBLICATIONS

Article Submitted


CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Panels Organized


Papers Presented


Guest Lectures


TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant at The University of Western Ontario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2011/2014</td>
<td>Cultures of Latin America (upper-year regional option, twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Foundations of Anthropology (second-year required course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2013</td>
<td>Introduction to Linguistics (first-year required, for linguistics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics (third-year elective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter, Fall 2010</td>
<td>Sex, Sexuality, and Desire (upper-year elective, twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2009</td>
<td>Cultures of the Caribbean (upper-year regional option)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008/2009</td>
<td>Introduction to Socio-Cultural Anthropology (first-year required, twice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Development in Teaching


2013. Attended “Fall Perspectives on Teaching Conference,” Teaching Support Centre, University of Western Ontario. August 27.

2013. Attended “Spring Perspectives on Teaching Conference,” Teaching Support Centre, University of Western Ontario. May 14


ACADEMIC AWARDS AND HONORS


OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Work on Latin America

