

Honduras: Resistance with the Scent of a Woman

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"THEY'RE AFRAID OF us because we're not afraid. They think, act, and are going backwards as they stay behind their military armor. They see us laughing, struggling, loving, playing as they watch us from behind their military armor."

This song by Liliana Felipe, an Argentinean, is sung during many of the Honduran resistance actions. It reflects the feelings of the women in resistance. The protests against the coup in our country have been characterized from the outset by sizable women's participation.

Women, who make up more than 50% of the Honduran population and are the main victims of poverty and violence, left their homes in the rural areas, mountains, cities and neighborhoods. Defying the cultural patriarchy of a system in which men occupy the public spaces and women stay home with the families, the women of Honduras came out into the streets. It's a promising new development.

Color, Smell and Taste

The participation of these women — peasants, workers, professionals, black, indigenous, poor, religious, feminists — is evidence that Honduras' shattered constitutional order has provided the opportunity to begin to write a new history. The women have given color to the protests, coming with their colorful sunhats of all sizes to protect themselves from the sun.

They have also given smell and taste: in their handbags and satchels they always carry tortillas, bread and cheese to share with others. When it's time to rest and eat, there's always a tight knot of people around them. Looking at all these women, I wonder how many of them had to get up at dawn, leave everything ready for their families and even defy their partners in order to come out into the streets.

Women have directed and encouraged many of the Honduran protests. To listen to Margarita Murillo, who coordinates the resistance movement in Villanueva, is to listen to hope.

There are many others like her: Esly Banegas from Aguán, Margarita López from Cortés, Araminta Pereirai from El Progreso, Bertha Cáceres in Intibucá, Marcia Mildred Vargas in Atlántida, Miriam Miranda who leads the Black women. They are in the leadership and on planning committees. And most of them are anonymous.

In some places the women have formed solidarity networks, since they're good strategists. They did this in Yoro, a barrio of Suazo Córdova in El Progreso. Those who don't go to the demonstrations stay home to take care of the children of those who do. Others get up really early to make the tamales, drinks and chicken and rice and to collect the fruit that is shared among the men and women protesting under the hot sun, in the rain, in the presence of the mostly indifferent news media.

Since the patriarchal culture makes women solely responsible for the children, many attend the

protests with theirs. Men have it easier: they attend unburdened, free to be with their friends. Appreciating women's participation in the resistance means understanding the double and triple effort they must make to participate.

As in all struggles for justice the poor have the most to lose, and among the poor the women most of all. From the first day the police and army sent the women a clear warning: "You'll see what happens to you if you go to the streets."

Tears are streaming down the cheeks of a young girl as she describes the horror she experienced after the police detained her and put her in their car. "Now you're going to see what happens when you take to the street," they kept saying to her. What "happened" was that the four of them raped her in a field, then pushed a police billy club into her vagina and left her abandoned in that isolated place. Sexual intimidation with billy clubs as a phallic symbol has been the brutal expression of the perpetrators of the coup.

On Radio Progreso you hear the testimonies of women of different ages who recount how they were beaten, humiliated and illegally arrested while the police fondled them or made fun of them.

It's a challenge to break the silence and report what they've done to us. At this stage of resistance we need to build a democracy expressed not only in public spaces but also in the homes, which have become jails for thousands of women. It must reach into the marriage bedrooms, which are also places of violence for a great many women. And it must reach the churches where women aren't allowed to speak without permission.

It must also reach into the minds of men, both those who support the coup and those who support the resistance. Many of them, abusing the power that the patriarchal culture affords them just for being men, continue to strengthen the concept of machismo with both words and actions. We are gambling on this: the true democracy in Honduras that we women are fighting for — not without fear or tears or a lump in our throats, but also with hearts filled with hope — is beginning to be possible.

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P.S.

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