

Benjamin C. Fash  
PhD Candidate, Graduate School of Geography, Clark University

### Networked Community Economies as Alternatives to Extractivism in Honduras

My dissertation research examines how alternative economies have emerged in spite of—and in response to—one of the most aggressive resource extraction agendas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: that of Honduras. In the last decade, the Honduran state has sought to expand its extractive sectors (mining, forestry, industrial agriculture, energy, fisheries, and tourism) in a context of heavy militarization and little accountability for the human rights of those who oppose it. Yet, within this context, communities are successfully halting extractive projects and experimenting to make other worlds possible – promoting and practicing alternative ways to live well. I am interested not only in the experiments themselves, but also in the networking processes through which the ideas and practices that define them emerge and grow.

The CLAG Field Study Award has provided vital travel funds to begin what will be 18 months of collaborative research with the *Coalición Ambientalista de Copán*. The *Coalición* is a grassroots organization formed in 2016 in response to mining concessions in Copán Ruinas, where I grew up. Through its public opposition to mining, the Coalition has joined national and regional indigenous, environmental, and feminist networks. Drawing from community-organizing experiences using video with the *Coalición*, I am working with them to produce documentary films examining different community economies that position themselves as alternatives to the extractivist national development model. As part of the initial process to discuss conceptual possibilities and join film/video production networks, we have participated in two events: the first workshop of the *Escuela de Mujeres en Resistencia (EMUR)* in August and the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas (CLACPI)* film festival in Guatemala in October.

EMUR is a four-year alternative learning project in which 40 women from Central America and Southern Mexico – including two women from Copán – participate along with an organizing committee of eight women and men. EMUR has four focal areas: community-based communication, political autonomy, food sovereignty, and spirituality. Our group will convene three times per year, each time in a different territory where alternatives are actively being practiced. The first meeting took place in Vallecito, Colón, a Garífuna territory recently recovered from occupation by a palm oil company and drug cartel. Vallecito is a hub of experimentation with alternatives for the *Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH)*, one of the most influential organizations in Honduran social movements since the 1970s. After the first meeting, I was invited to join the organizing committee, which also includes Dr. Xochitl Leyva Solano, my external dissertation committee member.

The CLACPI film festival, this year called *FICMAYAB'*, was organized around similar themes, and produced on a larger scale with a public focus. There, I participated in film screenings, workshops, day trips, a Q'eqchi' ceremony, and a panel discussion among filmmakers. Issues around what it means to produce film from, for, and with communities were front and center, and it was invaluable to learn from numerous accomplished and emerging indigenous filmmakers over the course of two weeks.

I am incredibly grateful for CLAG's support, which enabled me to begin my field work with these two very inspiring events. Now in Copán Ruinas, Honduras, I am in regular meetings with Coalition members and charting out a path forward to produce several documentary shorts, including one on the history of how up- and down-stream villages in Copán have networked over the last three decades to protect and distribute water, resist mining, and develop alternatives. Analyses of such experiments will converge in my dissertation to speak to practical and theoretical questions within literatures on post-extractivism, community economies, and social movement networks.

