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Honduras: Travel Grant Reflection
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Into Words

Before departing for Honduras from the United States, I had no idea what I was about to encounter. Yes, I had read the required readings for the trip, but comprehending a third world country, even if only for a limited time, requires much more than reading socio-historical accounts of the people and trying to understand a culture through statistical analysis. I do not regret the research and reading I did before leaving on this experience, and even recommend reading, researching and watching documentaries before traveling abroad to attain basic knowledge about particular places. But I have found that reading, interpreting and analyzing texts are not enough. It is a beginning, but when given financial support and opportunity as CWIL has given so many Saint Mary's women, I say take the opportunity and leave the country. What I experienced in Honduras was eye-opening to say the least, and I am constantly reminded of my experience through memory. Fragments of conversations with various human rights advocates alongside flashbacks of people and living conditions flood my mind now when I encounter texts and stories within my women's studies courses.

While relying on memory for the most part, I can recall images, sounds, tastes and even smells that resonate with my Honduran experience. Yet, one experience remains in the forefront of my memories and is well documented in the journal I kept while traveling. Our group traveled to Langué, which is one of the southernmost cities in Honduras. This city was home to a human rights group called Fundacion Simiente, which is currently invested in linking five village communities in hopes to better

connections between these villages in implementing change in the living conditions and food production of the overall group. Our group met with presidents and coordinators linked to the Fundacion and Heifer project, most of who were women. I remember sitting in one village. All of the white plastic picnic chairs were given to us students and professors. Various people of the community spoke as we listened to the Spanish and the English translations offered. I remember eating my chicken and rice that was prepared by the women in the village and constantly tried to look around, listen, and meet the eyes of the members offering their stories. Remember this I kept reminding myself. Take it in. Memorize the faces, the people. For these are the people that radiate a sense of hope with community that remains somewhat foreign to me as a United States citizen. These are people who have a sense of faith in one another and their ability to overcome obstacles.

As the conversations continued and more and more community members spoke, one woman compared our group to disciples. I sat, frozen in my chair as goosebumps covered my body. I felt like these words were giving me a new sense of purpose as to my being in Honduras. I now felt a strong responsibility to share my experiences upon my return.

As I continued listening to the president of the Women's Project with the Fundacion, she continued reiterating the commonalities between our groups and our nations. It is here where I realized that the connections are present, and just have not been fully realized between the United States and Honduras. As the session went on, I continued sitting on the patio, plate in hand. Eventually, emotion took over what I was hearing people say and do. Our group was repeatedly thanked, and I had to ask myself

why we were being thanked. Shouldn't we thank these people for exposing a brand of hope that I often miss in the United States? Eventually the lump in my throat swelled to the point where tears started rolling down my cheeks in response. I was overwhelmed with the women, the men and the children of the community. I took notes, listened and swore that I would not forget what I saw and experienced that day.

As I am once again removed from my Honduran experience, I now understand that it is my responsibility to relay my experience back here in the United States to forge more connections, and at the least build a better sense of cultural awareness. My experience at Langue is one of many that I could discuss, but feel as though it left me with a sense of purpose upon returning from my experience to the United States. I am itching to go abroad again and feel as though my Honduran experience has created this urgency. In a mere three weeks, I have been changed to the point of altering future life plans and incorporating a sense of seeking and participating in making international connections. The impact of this trip was awesome in a way I am finding difficult to articulate. Yet, I encourage everyone I know, particularly underclasswomen, to take these opportunities in hopes we can connect on the ground of an exchange of experiences that results in an understanding of forging international connections.