

Listening to a chorus of voices

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I had the privilege of accompanying Nelly Del Cid, a Honduran Mercy Associate, during the first two stops on her recent 10-day, U.S. speaking tour. I also hosted her webinar during that span. (Watch the webinar [here](#).) Time with Nelly, and another recent experience, has me thinking about the voices we listen to.

The week after Nelly's webinar, I was interviewed by a friend with whom I have engaged in local anti-racism work. A'Jamal was interested in talking to me about what it is like to address racism and racial equity as a white person. In the lead up to our discussion, I sent him a link to Nelly's webinar, which he attended. Though I knew he had been present, I was still surprised when the first question A'Jamal posed to me was "why did you host a webinar and speaking tour with Nelly Del Cid?" There are a lot of answers to that question.

Nelly is a Mercy Associate. She engages with Sisters of Mercy in Honduras doing work that embodies the Mercy Charism, the spirit of Mercy. The efforts and the struggles of Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Associates in places like Honduras are of interest to the greater Mercy Community. From my experience, I believe Nelly to be a wise woman. Being a practitioner of nonviolence, a human rights advocate, and someone who works unceasingly for the empowerment of women, Nelly has a wide array of experiences to share, and she shares them through the lens of a native Honduran. Hers is a voice underrepresented in the chorus that most of us hear every day. As I have reflected on this time, I have realized that this type of underrepresentation is not unique.

During my conversation with A'Jamal, we talked about diversity: in workplaces, on campuses, in leadership groups and politics. We talked about the importance of diverse perspectives being raised up across all levels of society, not just among workers, student bodies, and constituencies, but also among directors, board members, elected officials, and other decision-makers. I recognize that the prevailing societal norms in the U.S. are typically those held by white people. As the demographic majority and the occupiers of most positions of power, white voices make the rules in this country. But our influence is not confined within our borders. Our U.S. wealth, military strength, and political standing are extensively used to influence and control the actions of other countries.

Over the course of her tour, Nelly addressed numerous topics. Among them was the 2009 coup in Honduras. Supported by military leaders trained at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, GA, the coup was not officially labeled as such by the Obama administration. As a result, our government continued to send military and police aid (i.e., weapons) to Honduras. Corruption following the coup led to increased activity by well-armed cartels and gangs and state violence against citizens, including internationally known environmental activist Berta Caceres.

Crime from gangs and cartels creates situations where some families have no place to go. Turning to migration, they end up at our border only to be treated as invaders when, in reality, they are fleeing from situations we have helped to create through our individual action and inaction and our U.S. policies.

Nelly also talked about the exploitation of Honduran resources by foreign companies. Mining and agricultural companies have been able to make deals with corrupt government officials and extract rich profits while native and indigenous citizens receive little benefit and must cope with environmental devastation and displacement. The fruit of this commerce often results in cheap products for people in countries like ours but results in the exploitation of workers and citizens who live elsewhere.

At the end of several of her presentations, more than one person asked Nelly how she maintains hope in the face of so many injustices. She told us that she found hope in the people who came to listen to her and in the efforts groups are making to be in solidarity with the people of Honduras. As she implored us to be hopeful, she asked us to consider who benefits if we lose hope.

Hearing Nelly explain these issues from a Honduran perspective reminded me how insular daily life in the Midwestern United States can be. Her experience and perspective are gifts that enable me to reframe issues and fuel my work towards social justice. Not unlike my collaborations with A'Jamal and others who work for racial equity, Nelly's voice helps to clarify for me the fact that so many people face realities much different than my own. Her stories can also help shift the popular narrative in the United States that blames immigrants for being victims of U.S. policies. We would do well to listen and understand.