This summer my group went to Peru; specifically, in the cities of Lima and Tarapoto. We were there for two weeks. During the first half of the trip we were in Lima. We were gathering supplies for our field site and getting situated to Peru. After Lima, we traveled to Tarapoto. We met various health professionals and learned about the changing conditions in Peru and South America. We had the opportunity to work with an entomologist; he took us at night to catch mosquitos. This was a really informative excursion because we learned how to distinguish between the mosquitoes that transmit malaria in the field. The field site we collected bugs was informative from a climate perspective because we saw palm oil trees. While in the countryside we also got to see shade-grown coffee and other agricultural exports. This was really important to me because it connected a lot of the themes I have been exploring in class. We got to meet a lot of people involved in these fields, which gave a perspective to issues discussed in class. We also hoped to collect data from the dogs previously identified with leishmania, but they were not alive when we arrived. However, from talking to families about their dogs it helped us understand the culture surrounding Peruvian families. In addition, we went with a public health worker to give home visits to try to document communicable disease. From that interaction we learned how families interacted with their livestock in close proximity and how that increased rates of transmission of disease.

The purpose of our trip was to collect blood slides from various weather stations in the country and to conduct a conference with leaders in Lima. We got blood slides from three different regions in Peru. Two other members from our team collected slides in Ecuador. These slides were brought back with us to genotype. The hope is that by genotyping the slides, we can create a profile of the strains of mosquitoes in Peru. This is an important goal because of the current influx of migrants into Peru from Venezuela. The impending climate crisis is making it easier for mosquitoes to exist because it’s warmer and wetter in Peru. Because of more people and the warming climate, malaria is becoming a real problem. By knowing the strains in Peru, it will make it easier for other researchers to target therapies.

We accomplished obtaining blood slides and holding a conference. During the conference, we learned from various leaders in malaria research in Peru. It opened up collaboration between various universities in Peru and the US. I got to see firsthand how important collaboration is, because people were starting to learn about other conditions in the different regions of Peru. It also allowed for groups that were new to grant applications to learn how to effectively receive funding for these projects.

What I enjoyed most about this trip was seeing what research looks like in different countries. It was so similar to the US, which I think challenged my Eurocentric notions of what research looks like. Research was definitely less wasteful and more resourceful which I found inspiring. I think the hardest thing for me during the trip was dealing with travel as a Black woman. My blackness was very apparent, and I received a lot of stares and comments. This isn’t new to Peru or any country for that matter, but this was my first time outside of the US as an adult. In general there were no bad incidences, but I definitely felt self-aware during my time in Peru.