



US Centre Summer Research Grant

Recipient name: Fionntán O'Hara

Project title: Humanitarianism and the Cold War: Refugees in Honduras during the 1980s

Summary of the project:

This project looks at refugee camps in Honduras during the 1980s and examines the politics surrounding them and the experiences of those involved with them. During this decade a diverse range of actors were concerned with these camps - Salvadoran refugees, Nicaraguan refugees, Guatemalan refugees, international Non-Governmental Organisations, local NGOs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Honduran state, the United States, and eventually European governments. This research looks at the interactions between these groups.

This micro-study on Honduran refugee camps seeks to answer three overarching research questions. The first is on the relationship between the Cold War and humanitarianism and the way these differing ideological frameworks were simultaneously used to compliment and oppose each other. The second uses the refugee camps as a space in which the global nature of the Central American conflicts can be brought fully to life, in particular as spaces in which Central American campesino and indigenous groups had daily interaction with a diverse range of global actors. The third looks at the refugees themselves, examining their ability to act as agents and the way they experienced their status as refugees.

Phelan US Centre funded fieldwork

Fieldwork summary: Given travel difficulties arising from Covid, my US-based fieldwork took place during February and March 2021. During these two months I visited a range of archives across the US. These included the papers of NGOs and religious organisations, and the papers of academics, journalists, and former guerrillas.

Fieldwork objective: Prior to this trip my research was limited to online archival collections (such as the Digital National Security Archives), archives in the UK and Europe (such as the archives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva), and oral history interviews. Given the heavy involvement of US-based organisations within refugee camps in Honduras, visiting archives in the US was vital to obtaining a fuller historical picture. This is true in the case of Salvadoran refugee camps and especially so in the case of Nicaraguan refugee camps where US organisations were more involved than European ones. The role of the Ronald Reagan administration in both the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan conflicts firmly brought the issue of refugees from those conflicts into the US domestic political arena. Here, solidarity groups and activists utilised refugee stories and testimonies as a way to bolster their arguments regarding the Central American conflicts and Washington's involvement in them. As a result, papers of activists such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Bernard Nietschmann, and the archives of organisations such as the National Sanctuary Defence Fund, have allowed me to connect developments in Honduras with domestic US politics. Furthermore, collections relating directly to guerrilla groups – such as the Nidia Díaz papers and the Resistencia Nicaragüense records at the Hoover Institute – provide the much-needed perspective of those armed groups with which refugees were alleged to be linked.

Fieldwork results: The funding provided contributed toward flights to the US and covered accommodation during my time there. Thanks to the support of the Phelan US Centre I have greatly widened my archival source base. This will allow me to both achieve a more complete understanding of events and to analyse a wider range of perspectives. Thanks to the diversity of archival collections visited these perspectives are not solely those of US organisations and individuals but also of Salvadoran, Honduran, and Nicaraguan organisations and individuals whose records happen to be held in the US.

Archival collections visited during Phelan US Centre funded fieldwork:

Collection	Archive
Martin Diskin papers	MIT
Tipp O'Neill papers	Boston College
CARE records	New York Public Library
Moravian Board of World Mission records	Moravian archives, Bethlehem, PA
Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz papers	UC Berkeley
Bernard Nietschmann papers	UC Berkeley
Nicaragua Information Center records	UC Berkeley
National Sanctuary Defence Fund records	Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley
Gustav Schultz Sanctuary Collection	Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley
Honduras Subject Collection	Hoover Institute
Resistencia Nicaragüense records	Hoover Institute
Nidia Díaz papers	Hoover Institute
David Spencer collection	Hoover Institute
Council for Inter-American Security records	Hoover Institute
David Stoll collection	Hoover Institute

Expenditure breakdown:

Item	Description	Cost
Flights: London – Boston, Los Angeles - London	Travel to and from US	£454
Flight: New York – San Francisco	Travel to access archives on US West Coast	£35.69
Transport within the US	Train and bus transport between archive locations	\$200
Accommodation		£1743