



Report – Sandrew Travel Prize 2018-2019

Conference at Tulane University (New Orleans, LA) and archival research

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Thanks to the generous support of the Sandrew Travel Fund, which was awarded to me in 2019, I had the opportunity to travel to New Orleans last April, in order to give a paper at a two-day interdisciplinary and international conference hosted by Tulane University. This conference was combined with a longer research trip to the United States, which was essential to gather archival material and evidence for my doctoral thesis. The Sandrew Fund (£250), combined with small grants from the History Faculty and the conference itself, greatly facilitated the completion of a trip which had the double purpose to present my research, and to further feed into it.

The conference took place on April 11-12, with the heading ‘Water Logics’, and was aimed at stimulating interdisciplinary discussion and thinking about water spaces and water as an element across the Humanities. Turning away from visions of the sea as a setting in which to examine the intersection of the histories of empire and capital, “Water logics” proposed to delve into the materiality of the aqueous as a site of alternative epistemologies and experiences of being. This conference fitted perfectly with my own research on the global port cities of New Orleans (US) and Odessa (Russian Empire) and the role and agency of imagined communities in their history and development. My own paper, “Watershed cities - 19th c. New Orleans and Odessa as imperial borders and maritime centres,” was based on questions and issues I had been exploring while writing the third chapter of my doctoral thesis, and the conference allowed me to receive valuable suggestions and criticism while showcasing my research at this stage of my Dphil. I was particularly pleased to receive positive feedback regarding the originality of my research and approach, and a lot of interest for the avenues of investigation that my completed work could open. The conference also allowed me to establish several contacts within my field and beyond, and has the potential for a longer term impact on my own research and doctoral work, since the publication of an edited volume composed of the contributions presented at the conference is currently under discussion. More than anything, this conference provided a unique opportunity for scholarly interaction at this early stage of my academic career, since I was one out of two doctoral students in the conference programme, the remainder of the presenters ranging from early career researchers to more senior scholars from a variety of fields and countries.

Further to the conference, this trip allowed me to conduct almost three weeks of archival research in New Orleans, at a crucial stage in my doctoral degree, the trip taking place right after the completion of my confirmation of status. The confirmation of status interview had refocused and re-appraised some of my approaches to my research questions and methods; the possibility of a second research trip to New Orleans, twelve months after my first prolonged stay there, allowed me to have a more informed opportunity to locate important archival materials and engage with new sources.

