

Narrative Report

William Tait

Graduate Travel Research Grant Recipient

Ph.D Candidate, Department of History and Institute of Political Economy
Carleton University, Ottawa

With the support of the Centre of European Studies (CES) through awarding me the Graduate Travel Research Grant I was given the opportunity to carry out archival research at the Historical Archives of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium in July 2015.

The research investigated two aspects of Canadian – EEC / EU relations that directly relate to my dissertation, “Canada’s Foreign Aid in Transition: Christian Missionary Influence on Secular Non-Governmental Agencies 1933-1983” on the connections between Christian missionary enterprises, emerging Non-governmental organizations and foreign aid during the Cold War. One chapter of my dissertation considers government, religious and NGO responses to the humanitarian crisis in Biafra during the Nigerian Civil war of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Another chapter looks at the response of these same actors during the great Ethiopian famines of the 1980s.

Part of my research at the Commission was to examine EC commercial relations with Nigeria as well as political and humanitarian concerns of the Commission before and during the Nigerian War. Likewise, my research examined the political and commercial concerns of the Commission in Ethiopia prior to the massive injection of food and humanitarian aid to East Africa by European partners and others during the extensive famines of the 1980s. This research allowed for comparisons to my work conducted in Canada and in the UN archives in New York and provided important insights into the mechanisms and regimes of humanitarian assistance at various levels from the transnational to the local. In particular the systems of direct and indirect aid developed by the EC at this time provide an interesting point to consider both the similarities and differences between Canadian and European humanitarian responses during this period.

During the two weeks I was in Brussels I was given the assistance Mme. Jocelyne Collonval, senior archivist with the Commission, who provided invaluable advice and support in navigating through the extensive collection being consulted. After my initial request from Canada Mme. Collonval provided a detailed and very pertinent list of original and microfiche collections available at the various EC repositories. Throughout the process the staff at the Historical Archives of the EC provided exceptional suggestions and service that made the experience very productive and valuable.

The documents I accessed are not available online and can only be consulted through the Historical Archives of the Commission. Without the help of the generous grant provided by the EU Centre of Excellence, Centre of European Studies at Carleton University the trip required to conduct this research would not have taken place.