

The First Term at Trinity College

An update from Sarah Harper-Johnston, D5470's Global Grant Scholar

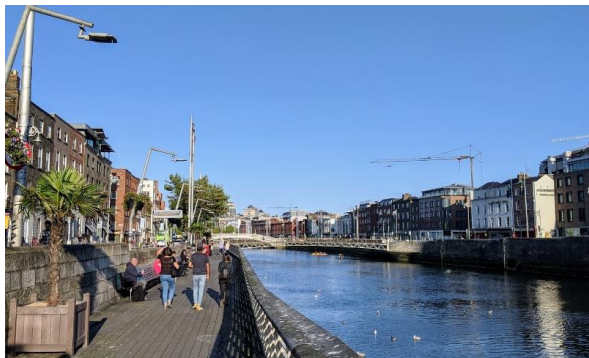
My first semester at Trinity College Dublin as district 5470's Global Grant Scholar was, as all things 2020, ambiguously challenging but full of immense personal growth. I am pursuing a Master of Philosophy in Race, Ethnicity, and Conflict thanks to Rotary's support, and upon graduation in August 2021 I hope to work in genocide and mass atrocity research and prevention. I arrived in Dublin in mid-September and after two weeks of quarantine attended my classes in person. Moving to a new country in the middle of a pandemic presents many facets of challenges both logistical and social, but fortunately I arrived in Dublin with a support system. Trinity College and my postgraduate student accommodation did their best to facilitate a safe way for students to meet and feel a part of the community. I spent my first few weeks in Dublin exploring the city on foot and getting to know my classmates and roommates from all over the world. After a month of classes in person, Covid cases became too high and Ireland went into a nation-wide lockdown.



The lockdown announcement although expected was a disappointment, but 2020 taught me resilience. I developed a routine, stayed active, and remained connected as best and as safest as I could. My program has only thirteen other students, so although classes were online, we

became close and relied on each other.

Fortunately, Trinity kept the library open at lower capacity and with a booking system, so I was still able to appreciate the 500-year-old beautiful campus. I attended weekly zoom meetings with my host club, Rotary Club of Fingal, and was warmly welcomed as they included me and the other Global Grant Scholar in weekly *Thoughts for Today* and asked us to share our perspectives



on the election and American holidays. Additionally, myself and the other Global Grant Scholars in the UK and Ireland created a virtual Rotaract Club where we hope to host virtual Ted Talks, networking events, and ways for scholars to connect when we may feel disconnected due to

lockdowns and zoom school. Although isolating at times, lockdown was the perfect distraction free environment to focus on my studies.

The first term of my M. Phil in Race, Ethnicity and Conflict was heavily focused on theory, while our assignments and discussion were about application of the theory to current events. Additionally, the course prepared us for the dissertation each student will be writing over the summer as we discussed research methods, reflexivity, and how our position as researchers and cultural baggage can influence sociological research. I will be writing my dissertation about Myanmar and the current genocide of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group. I will focus on how international



non-governmental organizations are working with the stateless Rohingya people and examine the underlying hierarchical western imperialist structures rooted in postcolonialism. I am especially interested in this area having worked with Peace Corps, an apolitical governmental organization in Myanmar where I lived for two years. Although I was far from the conflict, I witnessed its quotidian effects towards the Muslims in the community I lived in. Through exploring this topic, I hope to springboard into a career working with statelessness, genocide research and prevention in Myanmar.

As I prepare to begin my second term in Dublin, I am looking forward to taking more courses focused on application of theory and learning more about statelessness, forced migration, and the intersection of gender and conflict. I will have about a month of classes online and then hopefully finish the term attending classes in person. On February 19th, I will be the keynote speaker at the North American Youth Exchange Network Conference. The theme this year is 'Rotary Exchange Opens Opportunities' and I will speak about how my youth exchange propelled me to pursue my undergraduate degree at The American University of Paris, my experience in the Peace Corps in Myanmar, to where I am now, as a Global Grant Scholar. I am honored to have been chosen to represent Rotary Exchange and district 5470 at the conference. Despite the limitations and challenges presented by Covid, I am so thankful for the opportunity and continuous support from Rotary International. The program at Trinity fits perfectly in with my areas of interest and is providing the academic base necessary for work in conflict resolution. Being refreshed from the holidays I am motivated for this second term and elated to start the research for my dissertation this summer. As always, I am thankful to every single Rotarian for their support and am proud to represent this organization.