

Irish Latin American Research Fund
Application Form

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University or institutional affiliation (if any)	(Please specify department) Centre for Irish Studies, NUI, Galway
Student?	No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, rank: Ph.D candidate
Independent Scholar?	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Intended Product	Thesis <input type="checkbox"/> Dissertation <input type="checkbox"/> Book <input type="checkbox"/> Article <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> (describe)
Date degree expected or date of project completion	September 2010
Title or research topic (please include the time period being studied):	Irish Migration to Cuba 1835-1844 Drawing on post-colonial theory and theories of ethnicity and colonial labour, the position of a 'colony' of Irish railroad workers in Havana and their participation in strikes and slave revolts is examined against the Hispano-Cuban colonisation policy to 'whiten' island the island's black majority population.
How did you learn about this research grant opportunity? (Please be specific)	Through membership of SILAS.
Proposed field trip: purpose, destination, dates of travel and proposed duration of stay (may be changed)	On the basis of an initial survey of archival materials in Havana during Nov/ Dec 07, I propose to carry out an extended field trip to the National Cuban Archives, the National Library, and other special collections libraries, to more fully investigate the materials relating to Irish contract labourers who worked on the construction of the first stretch of railroad in Latin America. Destination: Havana, Cuba Travel dates: 12 th Dec 08 – 12 th April 09 Duration: 4 months

Estimate of actual expenses; please provide details of air, automobile, bus, rail, or other expenses and local accommodations (please add an itemized budget):	Flight: Air France, Shannon – Havana – Shannon1652€ Local Accommodation1,620€
Amount of grant support requested (in Euros)	1000€

Before submitting the application, did you attach:

- ✓ Your Project Description (max. 3 pages)?
- ✓ Your Curriculum Vitae (max. 3 pages)?
- ✓ Your Itemised Budget (1 page)?
- ✓ Your photo?
- ✓ UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS: A letter of recommendation from your principal faculty advisor (may be mailed separately)?
- ✓ The signed Grantee Agreement?
- ✓ Did you ensure that your research project is undoubtedly relevant within the Scope of Study of the Society for Irish Latin American Studies, i.e., "the migration of people from Ireland to Latin America, their settlement, lives, and achievements, as well as those of their descendants, together with contemporary presence of Ireland and people of Irish ancestry in the life and culture of Latin America, and the presence of Latin Americans in Ireland"?

INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

Signature Margaret Brehony Date 25.04.08

The application must be received (or postmarked) on or before the established deadline at:

The Society for Irish Latin American Studies
Maison Rouge
1268 Burtigny

SILAS Research Fund Application

Irish Migration to Cuba 1835-1845

Drawing on post-colonial theory and theories of ethnicity and colonial labour, the position of a 'colony' of Irish railroad workers in Havana and their participation in strikes and slave revolts is examined against the Hispano-Cuban colonisation policy to 'whiten' the island's black majority population.

This thesis breaks new ground in Irish Diaspora Studies by exploring Irish migration to Cuba between 1835 and 1845. Cuban and Spanish scholars describe a 'colony' of Irish workers contracted in New York in 1835 to work for the Cuban Railway Commission on the construction of the first stretch of railroad in Latin America. The Irish and other bonded labourers, particularly Canary Islanders, were forced into a brutal work regime under Spanish military rule where any attempt to abscond was treated as desertion punishable by prison or execution. Submitted to conditions similar to slavery, rebellion and protest by the Irish railroad workers led to their rejection by the authorities within months of their arrival. In 1844, British subjects, including natives of Ireland, were imprisoned and tortured, in a bloody crackdown by the Captain-General of the island, Leopold O'Donnell; they were accused of being involved in a plot to overthrow slavery and the Spanish Crown.

- **Aims and Objectives**

(a) This research contextualises the presence of Irish immigrants within the Iberian-British Atlantic system of slavery and colonial labour. It examines the societal imperatives in Ireland which readily adapted to the demand for migrant labour on the colonial networks, and it also examines colonial labour relations in Cuba with its growing dependence on foreign labour.

(b) By studying previously unexplored archival materials in Cuba, Madrid and New York, and applying a combination of sociological and historical approaches, my research provides an analysis of the complex ways in which Irish contract workers interacted with Cuban society of the time; how the authorities/elites viewed the Irish; how they were viewed by slaves and other labourers, both Creole and immigrant; and how they viewed themselves in a Spanish slave colony *vis-à-vis* the authorities.

- **Central research questions**

(c) The research uncovers how these Irish railroad workers became the vanguard of white immigrant wage labour in the context of the Hispano-Cuban 'colonisation' policy of 'whitening' the island's majority black population.

(d) The issue of Irish identity is elucidated through a consideration of how it was articulated and perceived in Cuban society given their position both as British subject and as colonial other. Unlike the Irish in Argentina who became *ingleses*, and therefore unequivocally 'white', the Irish who came to Cuba to work on the railroad were known as *irlandeses*. The Irish embrace of 'whiteness' in the Cuban context is examined and also the extent to which they contributed, as expected, to the structural process of inscribing white dominance.

(e) Cuban accounts of Irish railroad workers in the early part of the nineteenth century, suggest a divergence from the disassociation with black workers and slaves based on racial privilege, which took place in North and South America and other parts of the Caribbean. The significance of 'the wages of whiteness' to the Irish railroad workers in Cuba is analysed in the light of their identification with a subaltern position suggested by the alliances made with freed slaves and other workers from the Canary Islands, which led them to start the first strikes recorded on the island.

(f) Less than ten years later Irish immigrants were accused of conspiring with people of colour against the white population in the 1844 Escalera slave uprising. Through the prism of the broader question of the extent of connections between Irish oppositional discourse and other non-European subaltern discourse, this research also examines the nature and extent of opposition by Irish immigrants to slavery and colonial rule in Cuba.

Methodology and Theoretical framework

This interdisciplinary thesis investigates and critically analyses, within the field of Irish Studies, previously unexplored materials relating to Irish colonial labour in Cuba between 1835 and 1845. In a case study of Irish migration to Cuba, sociological theory and historical analysis are applied to a detailed account of Irish railroad workers who formed part of a transnational network of labour, in a highly racialized Atlantic trade between two very different colonial systems. The historiography of the Hispano-Cuban 'colonisation' project, which drove the importation of cheap white European labour towards the end of the eighteenth century, provides a unique opportunity to assess the interaction of Irish migrants with Spanish colonialism. As a small minority in the vanguard of white immigration, the documentation of their experience lays the ground for an analysis of

their influence on the political, economic, social and cultural life of the island. Irish opposition to slavery and colonial rule in Cuba is examined and critically analysed through a close reading of the historiography of black slavery, including the Escalera conspiracy of 1844, and the abolitionist movement of the period. Drawing on post-colonial theory and theories of ethnicity and colonial labour relations, the thesis explores the significance of 'the wages of whiteness' to the Irish, while relating this to Irish identification with subalternity, suggested by participation in strikes and slave revolts.

A survey of primary archival sources in both Spain and Cuba is proving to be a rich source of original documentation, with extensive detail from which to analyse the circumstances surrounding the recruitment, contracts and treatment of the Irish railroad workers in Cuba. It clearly locates Irish colonial labourers within the Hispano-Cuban policy to import cheap white labour from Europe, but it provokes further analysis of Irish ethnicity and their ambiguous contribution to inscribing white dominance in this migratory episode.

What is emerging from an initial reading of the documentation is a link between some of those involved in strikes on the railroad and the events of the Escalera uprising in 1844, in which Irish individuals appear again, accused of conspiring with people of colour against white colonists. While this suggests identification with a subaltern position and an anti-colonial stance by some Irish railroad workers, it demands further research and analysis to establish the nature and extent of their engagement with the social and political changes taking place at the time in Cuba.

This study of Irish bonded labourers in Cuba, notorious for starting the first strikes on the island, and conspiring against the Spanish Crown, opens fertile ground to research the highly significant and diverse Irish influence between 1835 and 1845, at every level of Cuban society, from O'Donnell, infamous repressor of slaves; O'Farrell, a wealthy slave owner; Richard Madden, prominent abolitionist, and the many artisans, mechanics and domestic servants seeking their fortune outside the British Empire.

Fortunately this research is proving to be a timely opportunity to investigate many sources, rich in detail, relating to Irish migration in a wide variety of Cuban archives; however, the pace of retrieval is slow and painstaking due to the lack of resources available to the Cuban archival and library systems. The deteriorated condition of the manuscripts lends a sense of urgency to the research, in the knowledge that the economic possibilities of restoration and preservation are remote, to say the least.