

Summer 2019 IRIS Fieldwork Award

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the generosity of the Institute for Regional and International Studies, in providing me with financial support to pursue the final stage of my fieldwork in Thailand in summer 2019. My dissertation investigates how the regime governing urban forcibly displaced persons—people who have left their country of origin due to fear of persecution to seek refuge in another country’s urban settings—in Thailand has emerged, developed, and shaped the lived experiences of displacement and refuge.

Before the final fieldwork, I traveled to Thailand four times. For each visit, I conducted interviews with officials in the Thai government, NGOs, international organizations, and also with urban forcibly displaced persons, as well as pursued archival research to investigate documents related to forced migration management in Thailand. Starting from my third field trip into Thailand, which lasted for eight months, I also performed participant observation with a different group of urban forcibly displaced persons, mainly the Palestinian and the Hmong. I would regularly visit their community and took part in their daily activities.

Because participant observation became an integral part of my investigation, I wanted to return to Thailand again in March 2019, and in May 2019, to reinforce my ties with informants, as well as to conduct follow-up interviews and observation in the community of urban forcibly displaced persons. The IRIS award allowed me to achieve my research goal. It provided me with an opportunity to be in Thailand for six weeks between May and June 2019. I reintegrated into the community of urban forcibly displaced persons, developed a closer tie with several community members, and got to know new people whom I never met in the previous visits. With the Hmong community, for example, I was able to take part in church services and had lunch and dinner with several families, as well as observed interactions between people in the community.

The opportunity to revisit the community of forcibly displaced persons provided me with a better understanding their daily patterns while they were in Thailand, which was focal to my analysis of their lived experiences. At the same time, it also broadened my cultural awareness and offered me a better picture of how forcibly displaced persons construct their livelihood construction—new insights which I could not obtain from a single visit, an engagement during a short period, or an interview. Most importantly, the fieldwork in summer 2019 also taught me to appreciate and value trust and friendship. A regular presence in the community of urban forcibly displaced persons allowed me to show my commitment to the community members that did not travel into their community to only conduct interviews, and leave, but to have meaningful exchanges and to better document knowledge of their survival and struggle in Thailand.