

## Thomas Moran Travel Scholarship Report 2018

### Wordcount: 1000 words

Between July and September 2018, I carried out the proposed auto-ethnography as part of my dissertation in Social Anthropology. This involved conducting several auto-ethnographic interviews and twice using a method of participant observation. I used a sample of four families whom I spoke with mostly in person and via various social media. I used my bi-lingual skills in order to interview my informants and to transcribe the interviews into English. My sample of families consisted of Polish and Hungarian speakers most of whom live in Poland. As my research topic is *Unofficial story, Intergenerational memory and Migration in the context of the Second World War*, I asked them about their memories and experiences from the war period. The common key theme was migration and its different types. Most of my informants were living eye-witnesses of the Second World War but I also interviewed their descendants.

In my experience I was met with overwhelming generosity and interest especially from the older participants. I was impressed by some of my informants' outstanding ability to memorize in details, to focus on my topic questions and to complete interviews sometimes lasting up to an hour and a half without being interrupted. As an additional result of my research, on the basis of the information obtained from my informants I was able to update my family's genealogical tree. During my interviews, I was invited to my informants' houses or we went for walks and visited places of a family significance like graveyards and looked at old photographs, letters and postcards. Most of the time, I travelled to conduct interviews using public transport and by plane.

I started my research from going to England, Wolverhampton, where I completed my first participant observation. I completed three interviews from there via the Internet. I had a short trip to Belfast in the meantime where I completed another interview. Following this I flew to Poland and travelled within the borders to several different locations tracing the story of my deceased grandmother. I arrived in my home city, Elbląg, north of Poland, from where I made a one day trip to the coast, Sztutowo, from where I travelled to Mazovian centre of Poland. Golina was the destination for my second participant observation. The next town I visited was Sierpc and Warsaw and Płock cities. I returned to Elbląg from where I flew to Belfast and travelled to Prague in Czech Republic. In Elbląg, Sztutowo, Warsaw, Płock, Sierpc and Prague I visited museums, open museums and took city tours.

In Elbląg I saw a temporary exhibition titled *Testimonies* about people who were forced to relocate from Elbląg to Germany after 1945 and who re-encounter Elbląg today. I was interested in their stories and the artefacts including photographs and films which present Elbląg during the Second World War. I was able to discuss the ideas of migration and unofficial story with one of the organizers of the exhibition who further pointed me to other sources. In Sztutowo I went to visit a former Nazi death camp- Stutthof- along with two of my relatives, my father and my brother. In Warsaw I visited the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Polin. I was particularly interested in presented there the official story from period 1939-1945 and the subject of forced labour and migration. I also visited the Museum of Ethnography in Warsaw which displayed a temporary exhibition titled *Ordinary-Extraordinary*, about items of everyday use from Poland during the Second World War. In

Płock I visited the Mazovian Museum which displayed a permanent exhibition including ethnographic and historical sections of the history of Płock, a city which was a stop during the process of forced movement of my grandmother in 1939. I was able to view a digital exhibition of photographs of Płock once taken by Jewish photographers in years 1945 and after, presenting the city in the way it could have been seen by my grandmother. I visited the Museum of Mazovian Countryside in Sierpc which is an open museum and photographed houses and streets which remained since the Second World War. Sierpc was a destination I chose to research because it was significant for my grandmother throughout all her life. I was able to track two exact locations of her living there on the basis of the information elicited in the interviews but also on the basis of the archives held by a local parish in Sierpc.

While Sierpc and Płock were only temporary stops in the overall process of movement of my grandmother, it was Prague where she spent most of the war years. In Prague I took a walking tour of Prague titled *The Second World War* which told stories and presented lives of local inhabitants, Jews and other minorities and how they were affected by the events during 1939-1945. I took photographs of a display of photographs of Prague from the period, which was exhibited in the streets. I found the street names and city zones in Prague which are mentioned in correspondence to my grandmother which she kept since the Second World War. I was able to take a photograph of Vaclav's Square from an identical view point as one of my grandmother's postcards presents and compare these.

Interviews and participant observation were only two methods used in my research. The other two were visiting museums and sightseeing. The choice of exhibitions was closely related to my research topic i.e. *Unofficial story, Intergenerational Memory and Migration in the context of the Second World War*. In my research I was able to trace the unofficial story of my grandmother and members of three other families as told by the culturally, generationally and nationally various cross-cut of informants and on the basis of the analysis e.g. of letters. I was then able to compare these with the official narration of history as told by the museums and the archives. My research shows that unofficial story can often be contested by official history and both can be subjects to individual interpretation.