**ECR Travel Prize Report: Elizabeth Benjamin**

The intention of the travel prize was to fund a short fieldwork visit to carry out key primary research for my new project ‘Mediating Memory through the Monuments of Paris’, which will address issues in accessibility and representation in monuments and memorials.

The initial purposes were as follows. Firstly, to visit the collections and archives of the Musée Carnavalet to explore documentation pertaining to the planning, commissioning and financing of the city’s monuments as well as consult with director Valérie Guillaume. Secondly, to meet and consult with representatives at the Mayor’s office and city/arrondissement planning teams. Finally, to begin documenting memorial sites, starting with the Place de la République, with the aim to seek further funding from the AHRC to construct 3D renders for public workshops and interactive resources.

The trip was predominantly successful, with a few key changes to the initial aims.

**Challenges and Issues**

I encountered a few key issues during the trip, providing challenges but also instructive opportunities and adding greater depth to the value of the research process.

Firstly, due to pandemic-related restrictions at my institution, the trip had to be postponed by several months (April – July). This had the knock-on effect that the individuals I was due to meet with were no longer available. While this was disappointing, I have pursued other means of communication; two members of the Mayor’s office have agreed to respond to my emails via email; I have been put in contact with the service culturel to gain more insights into the decision-making processes involved in the renovation of the Musée Carnavalet. The intention is to follow up these a-synchronous interactions in person at a later date.

An unexpected advantage came from the postponement of the trip; the tickets and apartment were cheaper, and combined with the timing (being outside of the school year) this meant I was able to go for longer, and carry out more documentation.

**Achievements of the Trip**

The unavailability of the interviewees unexpectedly liberated some time on the ground, which I used to my advantage. I decided to carry out more museum documentation, and selected three that I felt would contribute most to the project, of which Carnavalet remained one. The other two were Cité de l’Architecture and the museum section of the city-centre Archives Nationales. In each case I documented – in written and photographic form – the collections, noting themes and trends, missing strands and problematic elements. Carnavalet was the most time-consuming of these, requiring three separate visits, as well as being the most relevant, given its focus on Paris itself. The collections dominated my study, and, as a result, archival work will be pursued further along the line.

The increased length of the trip allowed me to increase the amount of non-travel time, which meant I was also able to spend time documenting sites outside of the three main museums. These included Place de la République, Père Lachaise cemetery, Place de la Bastille, and Place de la Nation. I took this opportunity to expand on my aims (outlined above) to document memorial sites, and to feed into a further funding application. While the eventual aim remains to apply to the AHRC for a large bid, this work has allowed me to put in place ideas for an interim application to the BA/Leverhulme small grants scheme, which I would use to develop the ideas and pilot some of the resources I would create.

**Outcomes and Outputs**

This research trip has facilitated work leading to a number of outputs.

It was initially intended that two of the three data elements (archival/museum work and interviews with planning teams) would lead to a synthesising article. Owing to the changes detailed above, this article will now be a future publication.

Instead, the significantly expanded museum documentation process will provide the data for an entire section of my monograph, *Mediating Memory through the Monuments of Paris*. In particular, the work carried out at the Carnavalet will allow for a significant new narrative thread, comparing and contrasting the ways in which the city represents itself as both official museum, and as a living urban memoryscape.

As outlined above, the documentation work to be commenced during the trip will provide test material for future projects which may include AR/VR digital renderings of monuments, which would be developed at outreach workshops. This is now in its early stages, and I have begun work in immersive technology to decide on platforms and media to be used, as well as integrating my experience into work with Andy Serkis and the Gallery of Living History. This contributes to my development of an Impact Case Study on the daily experience of monuments in the city.

**Lessons Learned**

Although no one could have predicted the changes in travel restrictions in the wake of the pandemic, going forward I will be more aware of potential issues of availability, particularly when it comes to organising research trips around the school year. Any future trips would need to avoid this period, or be booked further in advance.

The trip provided an opportunity for me to develop valuable field-work skills, including project management, museum documentation methods, as well as travel planning and time allocation. This has allowed me to develop my confidence in carrying out further projects in the future.

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I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Association for funding my trip, without which this research would not have been possible.