



**UNIVERSITY
OF LEEDS**

Laidlaw Research and Reflective Report

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Project: Telling the Stories of Colonial Populations through Self-Guided Heritage Walking Tours

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My Research Introduction and Aims:

This summer, I have been fortunate to work on Professor Nina Wardleworth's research project: 'Telling the stories of Colonial Populations in the French Resistance through self-guided heritage walking tours'.

World War II and the French Resistance have been extensively studied by academics, yet the involvement of colonial populations remains fundamentally neglected and underreported. During my preliminary reading, it became evident that existing literature, when discussing colonial populations in the French Resistance, focuses heavily on Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces and colonial troops fighting from the empire. This project, by contrast, focuses on colonial subjects and citizens from France's empire who were already living in the metropole before the war: those who worked, socialised, and were established in Paris before 1940. It examines how these individuals participated in local, internal forms of resistance. Alongside my research partner Jamiel Bakari, we endeavoured to reflect the multifaceted, diverse nature of resistance through the creation of two walking tours in Paris.

For many, the overwhelming narrative is that resistance during the war exclusively consisted of armed, grand acts of sabotage. By incorporating seemingly unsuspecting locations into the walking tours (such as a café-restaurant), this research conveys that resistance can also operate through a subtler framework, something that is more broadly rooted in everyday society. By examining how cafés, workplaces, and specific neighbourhoods functioned as sites of resistance, and how roles such as hospital staff and restaurant owners enabled acts of defiance, the project expands the semantics of resistance beyond violence to include the quiet, routine practices that silently acted against the occupation. In doing so, it places strong emphasis on the localised ecosystems of colonial populations, showing how their everyday hotspots were in fact ideal hubs for resistance.

This project forms part of Professor Nina Wardleworth's ongoing research which focusses on identifying members of the French Internal Resistance who came from the French Empire, closely associated with the idea of commemoration and memory. For me, the format of a walking tour was ideal as it allowed us to focus on individual stories as opposed to generalisations. Although numbers are important in helping us understand the scale and size of a movement, it can often act as a barrier for individual connection and recognition. Through my walking tours, I aimed to create engaging and emotive narratives to bring resisters' stories to life in the streets of Paris, as opposed to remaining buried deep in the archives. Showcasing where these people lived, worked and socialised hopefully creates a more personal and real experience, helping people

truly envision and feel the bravery (and fear) of the colonial citizens who opposed an occupied France. In a commitment to diversifying the range of voices commemorated in the French Resistance, it was important to ensure the role of women was adequately represented too. Again, as is the same for colonial populations, the role of women in the French Resistance is not adequately documented or recognised. Since the basis of this project is to allocate a voice to marginalised groups and those unduly recognised throughout history, a non-negotiable of mine was to ensure that different groups and stories were represented, commemorated and celebrated.

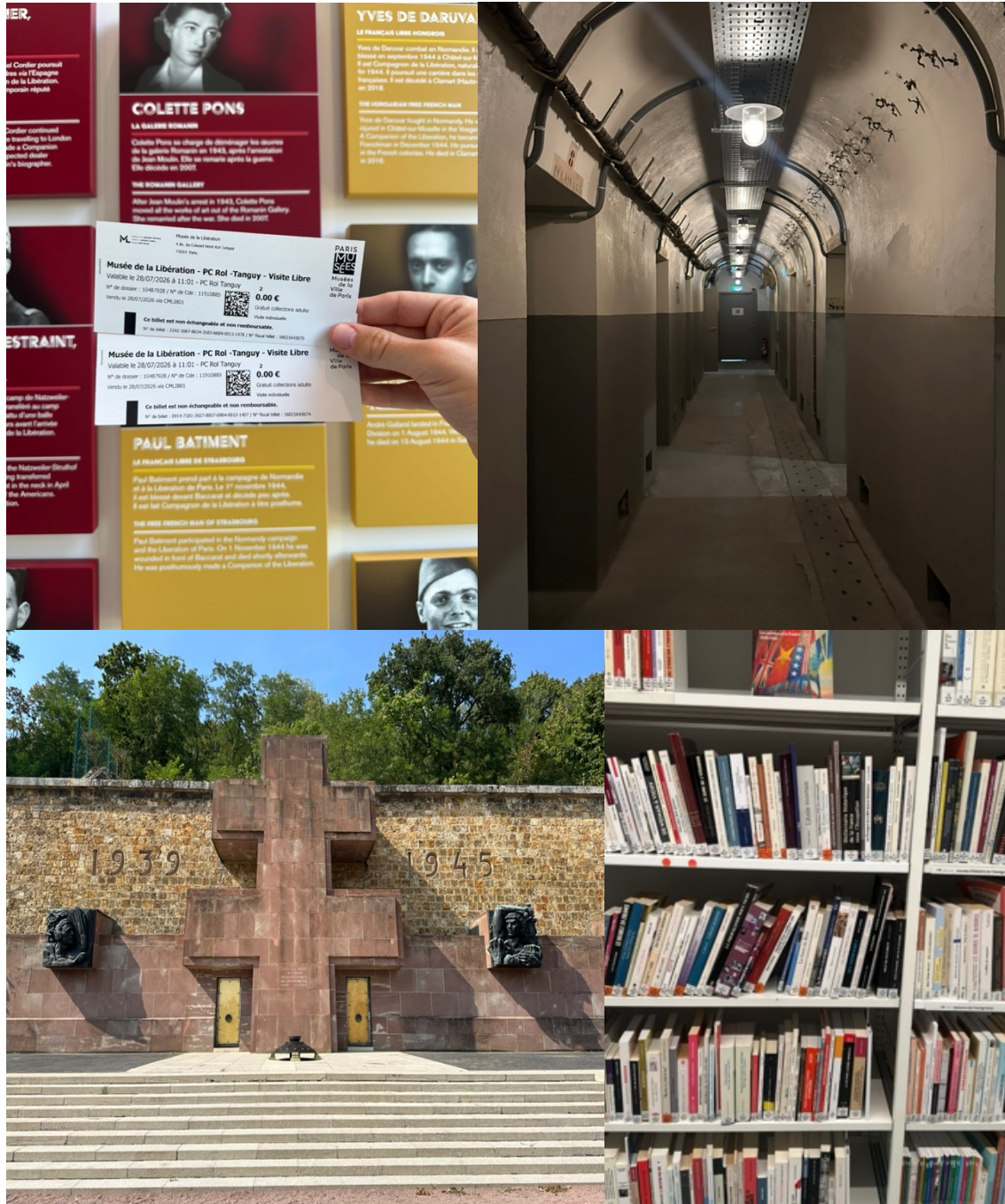
Methodology and Process:

My research period began with a thorough reading list consisting of journal articles, podcasts and books. These ranged from an overview of the French Resistance to the lives of colonial populations in Paris. Not only were these readings interesting and engaging, but they were entirely necessary before progressing with my project. Although the purpose of the tours wasn't to give an overview of the French Resistance, understanding the history of Occupied France during World War II provided integral context to the lives and stories of the colonial resisters, and ensured that I was well-equipped to create cohesive and historically accurate walking tours.

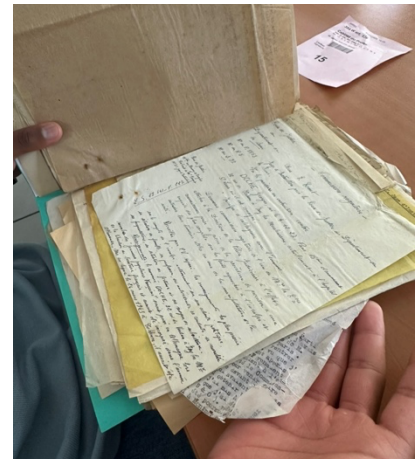
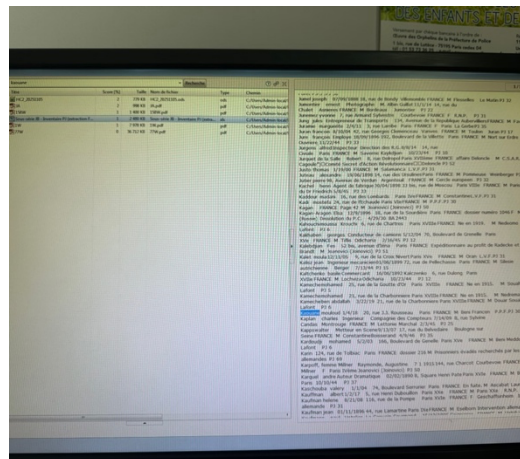
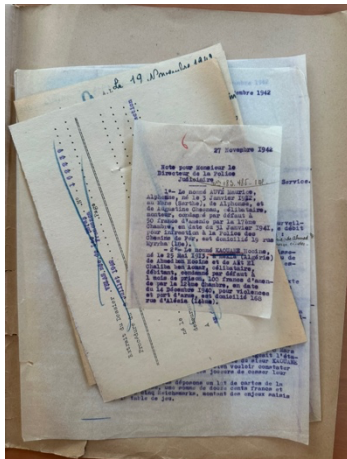
Throughout the process, myself and Jamiel had various meetings with our project supervisor, Nina. During one of our earlier meetings, we were introduced to her spreadsheet which contained the names and information of thousands of colonial resisters. This, alongside other archival materials she had gathered, was helpful in providing potential subjects for the walking tours. At this point, we could use their names and GR16p numbers to view their files digitally online via the Ministry of Defence's 'Mémoire des Hommes'. Amidst this research, I also needed to consider the technical side of the tours, where I met with Dr Cassie Ulph from the university's Digital Creativity and Cultures Hub. We discussed the best format to publish the tours (the app 'Echoes') and also decided that bringing a 360° camera would be a good addition to our output.

Midway through the project, I was incredibly fortunate that I was offered the opportunity to travel to Paris to conduct further research and collect archival material for the tours. Jamiel and I were in Paris for 7 days, where we visited an array of sites and monuments relating to our research, providing a stronger basis and understanding for the tours: Musée de la Libération de Paris, Mémorial des martyrs de la déportation, Mémorial de la Shoah, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, etc. We received a private tour of the Mémorial du Mont-Valérien, which was a personal highlight of mine. While providing helpful background information for the tours, it also allowed us to see

the different ways people were commemorated, how their memory is prolonged and respected, and how we can similarly honour the people in our own tours.



The second half of our trip to Paris involved visiting the Préfecture de Police (Police Archives) in Bobigny. We visited this site twice, navigating the archival system and requesting specific documents which could provide useful information for the walking tour narratives. This was an incredibly formative and enriching experience as we were able to interact with physical material from the Resistance, whilst gaining valuable archival experience.



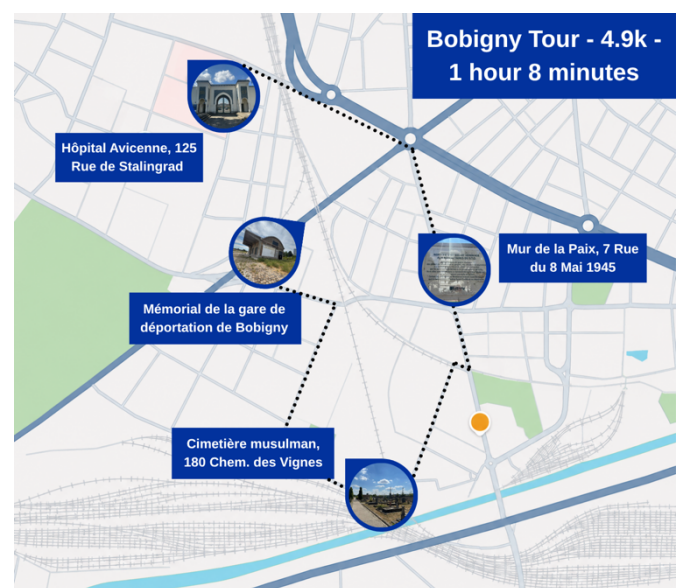
As Bobigny is home to various locations associated with World War II and the French Resistance, here we trialled a potential route for one of our tours. We needed to consider multiple things: walking distance, accessibility, and points of interest. By the end of the day, we had at least 3 conclusive stops to include (Hôpital Avicenne, ancien hôpital franco-musulman - Mur de la Paix - Le cimetière musulman de Bobigny) and we also had time to visit Bobigny's Deportation Memorial which is closely linked to the project. For each site, I was able to gather engaging 360° imaging which will be published following the release of the tours.



Similarly, I visited Paris' 14th arrondissement (in particular, the Plaisance Quarter) to gather materials for the second walking tour, and again test-run the route. The locations of this tour were in a more concentrated area, and therefore required less walking between stops. Although many of the boarding houses and cafés frequented by colonial populations during World War II have now been converted to shops, apartments and restaurants, it was important that these sites are still included. In fact, we used this as a point of contrast in our tour, prompting listeners to envision these streets 80 years ago – why might it be difficult? For me, it was important that people recognise that although now it may seem like a highly affluent, desirable area to live and work, this was not always the case.



Upon my return, I sketched out two draft maps (one for Bobigny, another for the 14th arrondissement) and began to consider script writing. To manage the workload, I wrote the first script (The 14th Arrondissement: The Jackals & Women in the Resistance), while Jamiel worked on the Bobigny script. After edits and amendments, we recorded our tours in both English and French at the University's Digital Innovation Hub (Helix). As we had worked so closely together on research and planning, Jamiel and I decided to alternate narration across the two tours (for example, I narrated Tour 1 in English and Tour 2 in French) to ensure balanced coverage of our work and to reflect our shared contribution. The final step involves uploading the audio files to the Echoes app, pin-pointing the geolocation, and publishing.



Results and Findings:

For this project, the primary aim was less about uncovering new information about the French Resistance than about developing a new format for commemorating colonial populations who participated in the resistance, particularly through self-guided heritage walking tours.

Through my pre-reading reading and research, I was particularly interested in one Resistance group: the Jackals. The Jackals (or in French, les Chacals) were comprised mainly of North African men, and their resistance activities were heavily supported by community ties and group solidarity. When examining their resistance files, it became clear that many of them lived in close proximity to one another, often sharing boarding houses (meublés/garnis) where resistance activities took place. Practically, this area was an ideal location and hence formed the basis for our first tour - *The 14th Arrondissement: The Jackals & Women in the Resistance*. Between stops 3 and 4, there was a slightly longer walk between locations. As such, I decided to branch out beyond Paris and link to other colonial resisters (particularly women) to diversify the range of voices commemorated and to reflect how the Resistance was a nationwide movement.

Our second tour takes place in Bobigny, in the Greater Paris region. Bobigny was selected because it was (and still is) home to a significant proportion of France's North African population, many of whom participated in the Resistance. One pertinent stop on this tour is the Avicenne Hospital (formerly Bobigny's Franco-Muslim Hospital), which was initially created to segregate North Africans from the rest of the Parisian population. Due to colonial propaganda, French people feared a supposed lack of hygiene and believed that North Africans carried infectious diseases such as tuberculosis. The hospital is an important stop for reflecting on France's institutional racism during this era. What's more, because the area was largely unmonitored, it became a key site for resistance activities. Our tour begins here, following resisters such as Ahmed Somia and Ali El Obky, and explores Bobigny's close relationship with the Resistance.

Discussion and Conclusion:

I am proud to say that my research project establishes a new way of contributing to the commemoration and memory of colonial populations in the French (Internal) Resistance, through the means of self-guided heritage walking tours. The tours create engaging and emotive narratives, giving a platform to individuals who have been neglected, overlooked, and marginalised throughout history. This research establishes a strong connection between physical location and individual stories, strengthening public understanding of how everyday spaces functioned as sites of resistance and how the localised ecosystems of colonial subjects and citizens contributed to the liberation

of France. One area I found particularly interesting to explore was how the various aspects of their identities influenced their decision to resist. Both tours consider how elements such as race, religion, and citizenship status shaped their resistance activities.

Additionally, the project emphasises that many colonial resistance fighters who took part in France's Internal Resistance were not adequately recognised. It details how their resistance files often record only their periods of active fighting, overlooking the fact that a large proportion of their resistance activities were clandestine and non-armed. It was not only the fact that their resistance took place outside the typical framework that made it difficult for their full period of service to be recognised. As many colonial resistance fighters did not possess the linguistic capabilities to compile and advocate for the full recognition of their service, it was often their French or European wives who compiled documents and assisted with the bureaucratic elements of the process. In this regard, the project also acknowledges the role of French and European women during the Resistance. Together, the walking tours offer a comprehensive understanding of the diverse forms of resistance during the Occupation.

Finally, as Jamiel and I personally connected with the project, we decided to expand the outputs beyond the Laidlaw submission. Over the coming weeks, in addition to the two walking tours, we aim to create a digital platform to publish our audio recordings, 360° footage, and images from our research trip in Paris. Not only is this beneficial for accessibility, enabling those unable to physically walk the tours to engage with the content, but it also prolongs the memory and recognition of colonial populations in the French Internal Resistance and acts as a permanent reminder of their service.

What Impact Conducting Research Has Had on You:

Conducting this research has impacted me on an academic, professional, and personal level. Prior to this project, my knowledge of French history during World War II was limited; I was initially apprehensive that I would not be able to do it justice, especially as I was dealing with the stories of real people. With the support of my supervisor, I was provided with an abundance of materials to develop my knowledge and gain a comprehensive understanding of colonial populations during the French Resistance. During the research, I found myself intensely interested in the history of Occupied France, and more particularly in its community dimensions. Studying how localised ecosystems and community ties were so impactful during the Resistance is a theme I am keen to explore in other work, across different settings and time periods. Without this experience and the invaluable guidance of Professor Nina Wardleworth, I would not have developed the confidence and research skills necessary to pursue this area

further, where I now feel well prepared to integrate these insights into my future academic work.

From a professional perspective, the opportunity to gain archival experience at the Préfecture de Police in Bobigny was a personal highlight. Not only did I succeed in navigating a complex system in a second language, but working with these materials allowed me to develop a specific skillset that will be particularly valuable if I pursue a career in research. One element of the trip that impacted me especially was my tour of the Mémorial du Mont-Valérien. Walking around the grounds and seeing where members of the French Resistance were executed was particularly hard-hitting and emotional. This experience allowed me to reflect on commemoration as a whole, and on its significance for our own walking tours. When constructing the tours, it was also beneficial that I gained experience in the development of digital resources. Beyond the technical aspect, my seven days in Paris thoroughly improved my French language proficiency and comprehension; reading, listening, and communicating in French was a fully immersive experience. As I embark on my university year abroad this month, the language skills I developed during the project will be helpful ahead of my work placement in France.

This research has transformed me on a personal level, particularly in the way I approach work and carry out tasks. Firstly, I was incredibly fortunate to have a research partner for this project. Working alongside my fellow scholar, Jamiel, we were able to support each other whenever either of us faced difficulties. Our strengths complemented each other well and we were united in our determination to create two impactful and engaging walking tours. For me, our collaboration was an incredibly rewarding experience. During my research period, I also had the privilege of meeting Lord Laidlaw and Susanna Kempe, where I was able to share my summer of research with them. The support of the wider Laidlaw Foundation, and of the Leeds-specific cohort, has transformed my confidence, speaking skills and research ability exponentially.

Leadership skills:

Taking into account the Laidlaw Foundation's Leadership Capacities, it is clear to me that this project has strengthened my prioritisation and time management skills. I learned early on that, to complete this research to the best of my ability, I needed to be highly organised. Between arranging supervisor meetings, consultations with the University's Digital Creativity and Cultures Hub, visits to the Helix recording studio, borrowing camera equipment, and coordinating with the schedule of my project partner, I also needed to conduct my research for the project. This balancing of tasks was similar when planning our trip to Paris. Although seven days in Paris may seem long, we created a rigid itinerary that we were determined to fulfil. In addition to

completing risk assessments and organising travel and accommodation, we needed to consider the location of museums, transport links, the specific opening hours of certain sites, and arrange bookings for pre-scheduled tours. This is an experience I am immensely grateful for, which is why I wanted to maximise the productivity and value of our trip to Paris. As a result, my organisational and prioritisation skills were significantly strengthened.

Another leadership skill I developed during this research period was problem solving and adaptability. One site we were extremely keen to visit during our trip to Paris was the Vincennes Military Archives (Service historique de la défense). During our planning, we had difficulty navigating the website and booking system, and by the time these issues were resolved, all the available slots for our stay had been taken. Initially, I felt incredibly defeated and deflated, as this was supposed to be a key element of our trip. However, after discussing the situation with our supervisor, we proposed visiting the Bobigny Police Archives as an alternative. We were fortunate that our supervisor already held many of the Vincennes materials, and that we were still able to gain experience of visiting an archival site. Although the Préfecture de Police was an incredibly valuable and exciting experience, it was by no means straightforward either. This was the first time Jamiel and I had visited any kind of archive, and attempting to understand instructions and navigate procedures in a second language proved difficult. Our first visit was unsuccessful, yet we returned the next day and were able to locate many interesting materials. This taught me the importance of resilience.

Dissemination of Research and Future Plans:

The two walking tours created for this research project (*The 14th Arrondissement: The Jackals & Women in the Resistance* and *Bobigny in the French Resistance*) will be published via the walking tour app: Echoes. Echoes is based on geolocation and will be available for those in the Paris region. As previously mentioned, we have decided to expand the project output, and our ‘walking’ tours will be available as audio files (accompanied by 360 imaging and relevant archival photographs) online in the coming weeks. This is in effort to hopefully reach a wider audience and increase accessibility to the project.

Unfortunately, as I am set to begin my year abroad in France, I will not be able to present my research at the Laidlaw Annual Conference at Imperial College London this year. Albeit it disappointing, I am keen to present this research at other upcoming conferences in the future, such as the likes of Leeds’ Undergraduate Research Conference.

Regarding my future plans, my summer research project with the Laidlaw Foundation has opened my eyes to the possibility of pursuing a master's or PhD. Previously, I was not fully aware of what a career in research would look like, but after spending time with my supervisor and meeting one of her current master's students (and previous Laidlaw Scholar), I was inspired by this possibility. I would love the opportunity to explore the experiences of marginalised groups, commemoration, and the impact of collective networks and ecosystems as acts of resistance.

At the same time, this project has shown me how research and heritage can inform public policy and decision making. By uncovering marginalised stories of colonial populations and reflecting on how commemoration currently works, I have seen how evidence-based narratives can shape which histories are recognised and how public resources for heritage are allocated. With my degree in English Literature and French, I am increasingly interested in careers in government or the civil service, particularly in areas related to culture, heritage, and social inclusion. Understanding how marginalised communities are represented (or excluded) from national narratives has made me aware of the importance of policies that recognise diverse histories and support inclusive commemoration.