

Laidlaw Programme Reflective Research Report

Table of contents:

1: Research Report:

1.1: Introduction

1.2: Methodology

1.3: Results

1.4: Discussion/ Conclusion

2: Reflective Report:

2.1: What Impact Conducting Research Has Had on Me

2.2: Leadership Skills

2.3: Dissemination of My Research

2.4: The Impact of this Experience on my Future

Part 1: Research Report

1.1: Introduction

My project was a collaborative project, which I worked on alongside one other scholar from the University of Leeds 2026 Laidlaw Cohort. This project forms part of a wider research project that is ongoing and run by Professor Nina Wardleworth of the University of Leeds. The project surrounds the commemoration and memory of subjects and citizens from French colonies that participated in the French Internal Resistance. The French (Internal) Resistance refers to French forces fighting against the German occupation in WW2, which led to France becoming a free nation once again. However, the reason for this research (as a whole) is that the role of these men and women from French colonies has typically been overlooked within society and the contributions of these persons is essentially ignored; whereas the contributions of native French citizens and soldiers has been well represented and documented throughout history. Like myself, previously, several other scholars have worked on this research project, under the supervision of Nina Wardleworth – and we all have in common the aim of giving a voice to these men and women who have been marginalised, rejected and discriminated against by a nation they aided to become the flourishing country we recognise it as today.

Myself, and Thomas (my research partner) had the given aim of producing walking tours as the outcome of our project. The purpose of this wasn't to make a discovery or break-through in research, as may be suggested through it being a research project, but instead to provide a medium for the contributions and stories of these people to be presented. Through our walking tours we aim to provide an insight into the resistance activities that these people took place in and to allow our audience to gain a glimpse into the lives lived by these people.

1.2: Methodology

I will now outline the methodology used to carry out my research project. To begin the research project, it was essential that I became familiar with the French Internal Resistance and The Second World War as a whole, since the French Internal Resistance is an aspect of this wider history. To do this I consulted numerous articles and pieces of published academic literature, and verbal testimonies (these were first hand testimonies which were given by people that lived through World War Two). The Second World War in general: through reviewing and digesting online literature I gained a deeper understanding as to what happened during World War Two. This included many aspects such as; who The Allied Powers were and who The Axis powers were, the number of deaths (both military and civilian), how the war emerged, how the war developed and how the war ended – and much more. Similarly, through the research I undertook at the beginning of my project I gained an in depth understanding as to what the French (Internal) Resistance was and the relevance of colonial subjects. Again, this included numerous aspects such as; an awareness of the German Occupation of France, the knowledge that France was not united as a country but instead split into two (Vichy France and Occupied France), the history of migration from colonies to mainland France, the relationship between France and her colonies, ways in which colonial participants resisted in France and more.

Mid-way through this research, I undertook a trip to Paris. This was crucial to my research project as it allowed me to further develop my understanding of this research – both in relation to World War Two in general, and the participation of the men and women French colonies. Whilst in the Paris region I visited numerous places which included: Le Musée de la Libération de Paris, Le Mémorial du Mont-Valérien, Le Mémorial de la Shoah, Le Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation, Le Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and Le Mémorial de l'Ancienne Gare de Déportation de Bobigny. One place that I visited whilst staying in Paris, was completely different from all the other places – the Police Archives. The Police Archives was extremely different from the museums and memorials for the fact that the information wasn't presented to you – you had to have an idea as to what you was looking for and independently navigate your way through the mass of files and resources offered. However, this research provided crucial for our tours as it provided legitimate information and facts

which was not generalised unlike the information provided by the museums and memorials. Instead, it was specific and tailored to individuals from French colonies that participated in the Resistance. Moreover, this was a great way of collecting information since it was provided by what is recognised as a legitimate, government body – this validates the material. Similarly, my project supervisor provided me with invaluable access (digitally) to archival material that she has collected during her own periods of research in archives.

I have discussed the methods I used to expand my knowledge on the French Internal Resistance and World War Two, however it is also important to note that a part of this research project includes the aspect of presenting my research in the format of a walking tour. This is not something I was familiar with prior to the research project – it was not something I had ever created before, nor experienced – and so it was something that I had to investigate in depth. To do this, I had several meetings with my project supervisor. During our meetings we discussed what elements make up a walking tour, how to make it engaging for our audience(s), what information we may want to include etc. Similarly, (for which I am very grateful for) our supervisor put us in contact with one of her connections at the University of the Leeds (Cassie). Through a couple of meeting with Cassie, I gained an understanding not only as to what makes a walking tour different from other medians of presenting information (such as a podcast) but I also learned of different ways a walking tour can be presented – such as digitally as well as in person. Moreover, Cassie allowed Thomas and I to borrow a piece of equipment (360-degree camera) which proved very useful as it allowed us to incorporate another element into our tours.

I am going to further discuss the ‘walking tours aspect’ of my project in relation to the time spent in Paris. Whilst in Paris, in addition to expanding my knowledge of the French Internal Resistance and the Second World War, I also undertook crucial activities which allowed me to envision the walking tours. For example, along-side my research partner, I visited various arrondissements in Paris such as the 14th and 15th as well as the greater Paris region (Bobigny). This allowed me to gain an idea as to how the tours could be developed. This was crucial because it allowed me to gain an idea as to how I could imagine presenting the tours: this included beginning to plan out potential routes, gaining an understanding of the environment and how it looks today – compared to how I imagine these areas to have looked during the Occupation looked, gaining first-hand audio and visual content (images, videos and audio recordings) etc. In my opinion this was incredibly important as it allowed us to personalise these tours and add our own touch/ incorporate our own ideas beyond the redistribution of facts and resources that had already been collected via the previous research of others. I think this was incredibly important because it motivated us further to create purposeful, engaging tours since we had a much more individual experience through our visit to Paris which in a way allowed us to form a personal connection to the project.

I am now going to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of my research project. Immediately, the strengths of this include the data and information that is presented in these walking tours. This is because all of the information that is presented is the work of academics, shared by national (government) organisations such as museums and memorials, or material that was created by the government (for example the fact files which I accessed at the National Police Archives of Paris). This is a strength as it means that this information essentially comes from sources which are reliable. Another strength of this project is that it doesn't have any ethical concerns – instead it is incredibly ethical and in fact aims to give a voice to a group of people who have been marginalised for a prolonged period.

One weakness of my research project is; to prove effective and beneficial, the walking tours require public engagement (thus being able to inform the public of the contributions of colonial subjects and citizens to the French Internal Resistance). This is a weakness since it is something that is subjective and beyond my control as, although I may encourage people to engage with these tours, I cannot ensure that they do. However, to combat this I have, partially, and will continue to create the walking tours in multiple formats to make them more accessible. The outline of my research project states that the walking tours will use 'Echoes' as the platform for these walking tours to be accessed. However, whilst conducting our research, a limitation that my research partner and I found was that these tours functioned using geolocation and therefore had to be done in person. Whilst this is good as it requires people to walk around these areas and therefore potentially imagine the lives lived by these people, it makes the target audience relatively small as it would be (mostly) targeted at people in and around the Paris area. To combat this, we decided to create walking tours that were accessible online and could be done electronically; which means that regardless of location people can access these tours and therefore more people can participate and learn about the role of these men and women.

Similarly, to increase the levels of engagement of our walking tours, we decided to create them in both French and English (again) to make them more accessible to a wider audience. Another weakness of this project is that the resistance possessed minimal archival material, therefore a large amount of the information presented in these tours is based on verbal testimony that was given by these resisters and or those that encountered them. However, I argue that this information can be given validity for the fact that a lot of this verbal testimony is reinforced by multiple people. For example, in the case of Menahem Chouraqui his resistant act of assisting Jews and resistance fighters was reinforced by the testimony of those he aided and collaborated with such as Simon Halali (who he supposedly helped) and Ahmed

Somia who he collaborated with. Similarly, in the case of the Jackals this was a large network of people, and the verbal testimonies given by different people all reinforced similar ideas.

1.3: Results

Unlike what may be expected of a research project that is STEM based, this research project did not make any discoveries. However, it is also important to note that this was not my intended contribution of this wider research project. As was clarified by my research supervisor, the purpose of my research project was to synthesise the work and information of others – formatting it into walking tours with the aim of increasing public awareness of the marginalisation of colonial subjects and citizens during the Second World War. We had a successful outcome as we created walking tours which is exactly what was wanted from this project. However, the other part of this is public engagement, which is something we have no control over but instead hope will come naturally as a reflection of our hard work and attention to these tours.

1.4: Discussion/ Conclusion

As a reminder, this research project aimed to create a minimum of two walking tours using the app 'Echoes' - the walking tours aim to '[Tell] the Stories of Colonial Populations in the French Resistance.' I would say that this aim was met: two walking tours were created using the app 'Echoes' and these tours tell the stories of colonial populations in the French (Internal) Resistance since they discuss the resistant acts of these people and also discuss their lived experiences beyond the resistance. Previously, when discussing the strengths and weaknesses of this project, I alluded to the accuracy of this project – I stated that the information that is shared within these walking tours is accurate since it came from the work of reliable sources (academics and historians). The research I undertook for this project didn't discover or reveal anything (that wasn't already known) and so in that sense, I do not have any findings to discuss the significance of. However, in terms of formatting this information into walking tours, this is significant since the purpose of these tours is to inform the public and give a voice to a relatively voiceless, marginalised population. As I mentioned before, this project forms part of a wider research project under the supervision of Nina Wardleworth and in the past other scholars have worked on this project also – and created similar outputs such as podcasts. Our research projects are important because through each output that has been created within this research, we all have the collective aim of increasing public awareness and drawing our audiences' attention to the acts of these individuals: the more ways in which we present this information, the more public engagement can be expected.

Although the two walking tours have been created on Echoes, as is stated as the given outputs for this research project, my research partner and I have not yet finished creating the digital walking tours which we hope will further improve the engagement in our tours and increase public awareness. This is something we aim to have completed over the upcoming weeks. In terms of further action, to further improve these walking tours, we may ought to ask our peers to review our tours and suggest areas of improvement. This may prove beneficial to our project since it may improve the overall experience of our digital tours and public engagement. Similarly, we may leave an optional link (or similar) for our audience to provide us with feedback for our tours on the Echoes app which could then lead to improvements and consequently an increase in public engagement. Since the research project was only for the duration of summer, it would have been impossible to have learned all there is to know about World War 2 and the role of colonial participants in the French Resistance. However, when considering the future of this project, immediately what comes to mind is the fact that, as is stated by Nina Wardleworth, more than 2,500 men and women from the French empire participated in acts of resistance from the metropole. I believe that (granted it will more than likely take a while) each of these men and women deserve to have as much of their stories told as possible, and attention brought to their heroic acts.

Part 2: Reflective Report

2.1: What Impact Conducting Research Has Had on Me

This research has had a very big impact on me – both in a personal sense, and in an educational sense.

At the beginning of my Laidlaw journey, I was filled with excitement to have become a Laidlaw Scholar (which still feels somewhat surreal and I am very fortunate and grateful for this experience). Nevertheless, as we got closer to the research period it dawned on me that I have something to prove and that I must show that I was worthy of this opportunity – after all I am aware that I am very lucky to have been given this opportunity as I realise not only that it is very beneficial for me, but also that it was very competitive and many people would have been suitable for this opportunity. At the beginning of this research project (all the way until the end, albeit in a lesser degree) internally I worried that I would not be able to achieve a desirable outcome; I was unsure if this was due to my lack of working on a research project in the past, confidence in my ability or other factors. Similarly, at the beginning of the research period I felt as if I had something to prove to the Laidlaw community – this includes the Leeds Laidlaw Scholarship managers (Matt and Beccy), my supervisor (Nina Wardleworth), past Laidlaw Scholars who have all had incredible outputs and also my cohort. In a sense I kind of felt as if I had imposter syndrome, that I was surrounded by so many bright people with lots of potential,

who had already achieved so many great things – and I was unsure if I could fulfil this title and live up to the standards of what it meant being a Laidlaw Scholar (at least from my perspective).

Nevertheless, I had been chosen as a Laidlaw Scholar and the only option has been to work as hard as possible in attempt to produce an outcome that I can say I am proud of. This research project (so far) has provided me with so many invaluable experiences and skills of which I am now going to talk about some. I am going to discuss, arguably the most important, perseverance and determination. I couple these two terms together because I believe that they go hand in hand, in my experience of the research project.

As my first research project, throughout this whole experience I have had to be determined to do a good job and not allow any inconveniences, obstacles, nor my lack of experience to keep me down and inhibit me from making progress with my project. Throughout my research project, determination and perseverance have been qualities I have had to embody as I encountered many obstacles. I had to be determined to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject and become confident in my ability to present this information to others, despite at points questioning if I even understood this information myself. I had to persevere whilst in Paris as Thomas and I were alone and had to engage in conversation with French people, which proved difficult for us since at times we found it difficult to understand what people were saying and vice versa (most notably at the Police Archives). Similarly, at the Police Archives, we had to undertake multiple visits and persevere since we were struggling not only to communicate with the employees, but also with navigating the systems – however, we were determined to gather archival material. This is just to name a couple of examples.

Another instance where I had to show determination and perseverance was when I was unable to secure a booking for the military archives in Vincennes. This was (and still is) a huge regret of mine since it will have given us more access to archival material surrounding the people we were researching. Of course, I took a little while to feel sorry for myself and feel extremely regretful and silly to have not have succeeded in booking a reservation to consult this archive, however at the end of the day I still had a research project to fulfil and I couldn't allow this to prevent me from making further progress on the project. If anything, this motivated me further, as I become more determined to do a great job and prove to my supervisor that despite this inconvenience, I deserved to work on her project and would work to the best of my ability to create something that we could both be happy with.

Whilst I encountered difficulty during the research period, it is also worth noting that this has taught me many lessons which I can take on board for future projects. Throughout my time working on this project, I have learned many things such as; how to work in a collaborative environment, how to share my ideas effectively, how to interpret other people's ideas, how to accept criticism more openly, how to insert myself and adapt to a new environment, how to maximise my time management skills, that it is okay to ask for help (if anything people around you are incredibly supportive rather than not), how to take an idea/ concept and materialise it and much more.

Upon reflection towards the end of my research period, it is worth reminding myself that this is my first ever time taking part in a research project and that part of life involves taking risks even if that means making mistakes. After all we learn from our mistakes and by pushing ourselves/ taking risks which is what allows us to progress and develop as individuals which is something I have had to come to terms with during this period. Overall, this research period has majorly benefited me – in a personal sense as I have worked on and developed many qualities, but also in an academic sense since I have gained so many skills. Both will continue to benefit me throughout my studies, future career and in life.

I can't fully recall what I envisioned the project to be. However, I do think that as I am now toward the end of my research period, it is somewhat similar to how I imagined it to be in the beginning. I remember some of my first discussions with my supervisor (and also Thomas) where we mentioned the tours surrounding not only the discussion of resistant activities but also on a more personal level the lives lived by this people, in hopes of enabling our audience to imagine the lives these men and women lived. We also discussed incorporating pictures and audio which related to these tours. Whilst this is not something that has been fully achieved on the platform Echoes, this is something that will still be achieved – albeit via a different platform.

2.2: Leadership Skills

I would say that I have gained many leadership skills from this experience thus far. These leadership skills can be analysed through Laidlaw's '3 C's' - capacities, change-maker values and character. I am going to examine these through the values/ skills of **determination (changemaker), project management (capacity), humility (character) and wisdom (character)** just to name a few.

In my opinion it has been important for me to show humility and wisdom during this research project because the project is not completely independent or something that requires only my input – it requires the involvement of my supervisor and research partner. I would argue that

one way in which I have embodied the skill of humility is through my honesty with my research partner and supervisor throughout the experience as I have kept them both updated with what work I have completed and what I aim to do next. The aspect of humility stands out since I did not only share my successes, but I also mentioned areas which I have struggled in and felt as if I have needed assistance and clarification. Whilst being transparent, it is important to me not only to communicate strengths but also weaknesses since being part of a team involves supporting in each other in moments of need as well as moments of success. This highlights my display of wisdom as I made the sensible judgement of asking for help when necessary. Had I not been candid and humble enough to not only accept but ask for the help of others throughout this project, I imagine that I would have found it much more difficult to have succeeded in producing an output since it was not something that I will have achieved by myself as it required the input of others. After all it was a collaborative project, therefore it was extremely important not to try and do everything independently and to communicate openly – even if that meant having difficult conversations which involved communicating vulnerabilities and weaknesses (which at times was reliant on my embodiment of wisdom and ability to make good decisions).

My display of **project management** can be seen throughout this whole project. From start to finish, this project required planning and structure. I had a plan and order which would allow me to reach the finish line. This included deciding the order of when to do the readings given by supervisor, deciding when to do additional readings, when to research how to successfully make a walking tour, when it would be appropriate to organise meetings with those who have aided us throughout this project, when to go to Paris and what must be achieved prior to this. Similarly, before going to Paris, it was important to have a strategic plan as to what to do and when to do it because we were there for a limited amount of time – making it extremely important to utilise this time and benefit from it as much as possible (of which I think we did a fairly good job). Moreover, after returning from Paris it was crucial to plan what needed to be done and set achievable timeframes since we were given a deadline. This meant that I had to have an understanding as to what work I had yet to complete for this project and break it down into manageable chunks to be able to meet the deadline, without compromising the output and ticking off everything required. This included; digesting all the information that we gained whilst in Paris, deciding on routes for the tours, finalising a script for the tours, reaching a decision for how we would like to present the tours and finally creating the tours etc.

Finally, my determination can be seen through my desire to produce outcomes that I am proud of. Again, this was evident throughout the entirety of the six weeks of my research project, and beyond, since I was aware that to produce good outcomes, I would need to work extremely hard. At times this included overcoming obstacles – be it as simple as feeling burned out at times (which I am sure is something we all have had in common at one point or

another) or having difficulty with my research. However, I showed determination throughout this whole period as I was consistent and adamant that I would create good outputs and tackle all obstacles that I would be faced with. In addition, my determination can be seen through my dedication to the project as I am more than happy to spend additional time on the project in hopes of elevating the tours I have created/ by creating supplementary ones. Although in a sense my determination came from a desire to prove something (to myself), the main factor which catalysed my determination was my ability to essentially act as a spokesperson and representative for a marginalised group of people. This really encouraged me to do a great job of this project and pushed me to (at least attempt to) thrive on this project since the success of this project could lead to members of the general public becoming more informed on this topic, thus commemorating and remembering these neglected individuals for their positive contributions to society. I was driven by the fact that in a way, I could help to increase people's awareness of social inequalities and help to reduce them – which is exactly what I hope to achieve as much as possible.

2.3: Dissemination of My Research

As part of the Laidlaw Scholarship, it is mandatory that all scholars attend the annual Laidlaw Conference where they will have the opportunity to present their research. I hope to present my research at this event as it will be a great opportunity to share this research with other scholars and people who are interested in learning of other projects. Similarly, I hope to present my research at the University of Leeds 2027 Undergraduate Research Conference which again would be a great experience and opportunity to disseminate my research in hopes of increasing public awareness. Moreover, I was asked by my former head of Sixth Form if I would be interested in returning to give a presentation/ have a discussion with current students. If I do return, I think this would be a very good opportunity to present the research to a different audience as it would allow me to present my research firsthand to an audience that is not my peers/ people who have already undertaken research. This may also prove beneficial as it may highlight areas of accessibility for me to improve within the tours.

2.4: The Impact of this Experience on my Future

In terms of my plans for the future, this Laidlaw Research period has had a massive influence on me as it has made me re-evaluate what future experiences, I may aim towards achieving and also consider exploring career paths and educational pathways that I had not previously considered. For example, the French history that I examined throughout this research period is something that really interested me and is something that I think I would like to examine more in depth in the future. Similarly, it has really made me consider the type of person I want to be in this world and the role I want to play within society - I hope to attain a position where I use my internal compass to the best of my ability. I envision this as me potentially being a

person who advocates for marginalised people and (if possible) use my voice and position to fight for the rights and recognition of others where possible. In a similar manner to the two points stated above, this research project has influenced me in an academic sense. Whether that be through direct contributions to this humanitarian project (which is something that greatly interests me), or something similar I have started to consider potentially studying at University beyond an undergraduate degree. Should this be the case, I think that a topic linked to this subject would be of great interest to me. Moreover, I am aware that some of the past scholars who have worked on the same project as myself had the opportunity to undertake an internship (as part of their year abroad placement) at the Mont-Valerien Memorial in France, which is directly linked to this topic of the commemoration of colonial soldiers of the Second World War. This opportunity is something which particularly interests me and is something that I would like to explore in more depth with my supervisor since I thoroughly enjoyed working on her project and believe that this experience would be very fulfilling and enjoyable for me.