

August 27, 2016

Report: Summer Research in New York City (May 2-26, 2016)

Dear TIJS Grant Committee:

I would like to thank you for your generous support to conduct my summer research in New York City and attend the Seminar on Archival and Historical Research at the Center for Jewish History in May, 2016. It was a great experience where I gained both important knowledge for my academic future and wonderful personal impressions.

My MA-project highly benefited by the summer research and, in particular, the archives in the New York area. At the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research I have found and collected important historical material on *landsmanshaftn* with the help of Leo Greenbaum and Daniel Soyer. The New York Public Library had a great collection of *yizkher bikher*. My research activities focused mainly on the search for active immigrant societies in the New York area to investigate my hypothesis of a current redefinition of home in the American Jewish experience, in particular the meaning of Eastern Europe as homeland. Steve Stein from the Jewish Genealogical Society in New York helped me to look for current contacts and information on active societies in the Burial Societies Database. Here I could finally find the Chrzanower Young Men's Association which was involved in the restoration of their ancestors' Jewish cemetery in Poland in 2010. Moreover, I conducted interviews with members of current societies. Alan Silberstein and Rabbi Mark Kiel from the World Society of Czestochowa Jews gave me their personal accounts on the origin and development of the organization, and their current activities in Eastern Europe, mainly in Czestochowa. Their very positive view of contemporary Poland and its society surprised me and strengthened my argumentation in the thesis. Alan Bernstein from The Felshtin Society told me enthusiastically about his outreaches to Ukrainian organizations and the societies activities, in particular the Oral History Project. During a meeting with Elissa Sampson and Jonathan Boyarin I learned much about the Lower East Side, Jewish immigrant societies from Eastern Europe and their shuls in NY. As a result, I went to the Shabbat service at Stanton Street Shul which is one of the few remaining *landsmanshaftn*-shuls (Congregation Bnai Jacob Anshei Brzezan). Rabbi Aviad Bodner introduced me to the community and its members which today

has no connections to Eastern Europe. This revealed the dialectic of today's memory of Eastern Europe among American Jews between loss and invention, a perspective that was confirmed by a meeting with Rivka Schiller and her personal negative experience in current Kielce, Poland. Furthermore, Elissa Sampson introduced me to the people behind the very active virtual groups, mainly the Dobrowa and Rymanower groups. The virtual diaspora is an important chapter in my thesis.

With thanks to Deborah Lipstadt, I met the editor of *The Forward*, Sam Norich, who gave me the important contacts to the World Society of Czestochowa Jews. Moreover, I could learn about annual trips to Eastern Europe which are organized by the *Forward* in cooperation with the YIVO Institute. Further events contributed to new insights, in particular on the aspect of memorializing and community. A lecture on Holocaust survivor groups by David Slucki at YIVO informed about the place of Holocaust survivors in the American-Jewish consciousness, and their influence on immigrant societies. The important role of Yiddish as a form of connecting with the ancestors' world today became evident during a panel discussion on "Yiddish Culture in the Age of Start-Up" at the Eldridge Street Synagogue.

Furthermore, at the Seminar on Archival and Historical Research at the Center for Jewish History (May 23-26, 2016) I gathered important skills on how to conduct a successful research in archives and how to incorporate archival and library research in my project. Micki Kaufman and Nora Slonimsky presented very helpful tools in Digital Humanities, from topic modelling and conceptual maps to specific programs. This helped me to analyze the aspect of the virtual diaspora more in depth. Other speakers like Francesca Bregoli or Elissa Bemporad gave insightful remarks on working in archives from their own personal experiences. Moreover, all institutions involved in the Center for Jewish History presented their staff and work. After the lectures, we had enough time to conduct our own research with the helpful support from the CJH-staff.

During my free time I enjoyed the special atmosphere of New York City. Walking tours in Manhattan, the Lower East Side and East Village, trips to Brooklyn and on Long Island opened my eyes for this exciting and wonderful metropole. My personal highlight was Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" on Broadway with Ben Whishaw as John Proctor. In summary, the experiences in New York left some wonderful memories and a great impact on my MA-project. Moreover,

the summer research strengthened my decision to start an academic career with a PhD in the field of modern Jewish history. Again, thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Oskar Czendze

