

## **Between the Great History and small histories. Popular genealogy in present-day Poland**

The main goal of the research project is to investigate the social and cultural phenomenon of popular genealogy in present-day Poland on various levels. For several years, searching for roots and family identity, collecting ancestry records and making family trees are more and more popular activities, able to reflect the spectrum of aspects of collective memory and identity, and to present attitudes towards the heritage. Put simply, in the case of Poland, the popular genealogical trend is a variety of cultural expressions resulting from the need for having confirmed and sustained identity.

However, the problem is more complex and it should be examined from the interdisciplinary perspective, combining anthropological, sociological and historical approaches, and by the use of relevant research tools. The hypothesis proposes that popular genealogy in Poland, as a way of appreciating locality and kinship is a democratic tool of 're-writing' and supplementing the history by ordinary people with the top-down support of contemporary archives. As a local manifestation of the 'memory fever' in Europe, it could be perceived as the mirror of Polish identity and the way of understanding family, local and national pasts, all overlapping and linking each other. Unfortunately, we have still no scientific research and publications focusing on popular genealogy in Poland, though the so-called *family history* is a very attractive subject studied by scholars in Western Europe and the United States in local contexts. Therefore, by using properly adjusted field research methods, I will try to describe and interpret the most important issues emerged from this phenomenon. The research contains two main levels: the presentation of several in-depth anthropological portraits of genealogists in various contexts of their memory practices (presenting various identity concepts supported by doing ancestral research), and, in parallel, the profound analysis of the socio-cultural background of popular genealogy in present-day Poland and its particular aspects (activity of genealogical associations, family history education, language-codes).

Family genealogists, by collecting heirlooms and documents, discovering family and local histories, as well as traveling the places of family origin, create a kind of unique historic palimpsest. Following the title of the project, this is the way how 'small family histories', confirmed by archive records, may find their place in the official 'Great History'. Today, when it is quite easy to 'find great-grandfather' on the Internet without leaving home, national and local archive institutions encourage to do ancestral research by offering a numerous of databases containing and indexing civil records and other sources. Practicing genealogy leads people also to adopt various attitudes towards their own complex origins and, through them, to ethnic and religious differentiation in Poland of old times, and understanding the national history as well. Besides, some Polish amateur genealogists look for gentry roots or want to confirm their gentry origins, which gives the impulse to re-interpret the myth of noble culture and 'Sarmatism' as the sources of Polish tradition. As a result of my ethnographic research, I would like to answer the question of how people in Poland create their identities on the basis of genealogical research today? Going further, another important issue appears to be how family things and archival records mediate between people and the family past, and influence the ways of its experiencing. My aim is to conduct in-depth analysis of all sources evoked in the course of ethnographic research and collected by both traditional and digital methods, in order to answer of those questions.

In light of all described phenomena, the ethnographic research on popular genealogy gives an opportunity to take a closer look at the problem of identity and the otherness in contemporary Polish society. The significance and validity of research questions justify the projected research and I hope that its subsequent results will be an important voice in the humanistic debate, locally and globally, especially the field of memory studies.