



Members in Profile

November 2015

Danielle Drozdzewski

To me, geography is about having an interest in the place(s) in which we live and move to and from, and the factors at play in these patterns of settlement and mobilities. As the granddaughter of four Polish migrants to Australia, understanding the linkages between people and place began as a personal investigation and flourished into a vocational one. Listening to their stories made me wonder how it was possible to migrate, to move such great distances, to leave people and things behind, and what would prompt people to make these moves. These are themes that I continue to pursue in my research today, both through forging better understandings of the linkages between memory, place and identity and in research on urban to rural mobilities.



My early interest in geography was fostered at school. In primary school I developed an appreciation of toponyms, which as a seven year old meant memorising places and capital cities on the globe. I was also slightly obsessed with playing the globe-trekking super sleuth game 'Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego' and 'fascinating' my parents and teachers with fun facts from the game about different global cities. My high school geography teachers, Mr Matthews and Mr Bone, continued to foster this appreciation for different places. My Senior Geography Project was an early foray into research and it considered the viability of the local rubbish tip in terms of its residential location and environmental implications. When I rang Gosford City Council to request traffic counts on the road leading to the rubbish tip and ask about soil testing, the waste disposal officer surely thought I was slightly insane; my father was coerced into filming me report from the rubbish tip for the final part of the project – an experience and smell we are likely never to forget.

Armed with these experiences of research and spurred by a growing interest in environmental science in the later nineties, I moved to Sydney and enrolled in a Bachelor of Environmental Sciences, majoring in Geography, at UNSW. I was very fortunate to have been taught undergraduate Human Geography by some fantastically enthusiastic and passionate geographers including Emeritus Professor Ian Burnley and Professor Kevin Dunn. Brett Scott also laid early foundations in feminist geography and practice, though I was slow to realise it at the time. To supplement the 'social' into what was otherwise a very science focused degree, I also enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Science and Technology Studies. I completed my Honours Thesis under the guidance

of Professors Chris Gibson and Kevin Dunn on 'Discourses of cultural identity and landscape in the Polish community in Sydney' in 2002. I deferred enrolment in my PhD and spent 2003 travelling Europe. During these travels my fascination with post-war landscapes, memory, memorialisation and my Polish heritage burgeoned. Being in place in some of these post-war landscapes invoked eeriness, loss and an overwhelming sense of futility, it concurrently answered a lot of lingering questions I had had about my grandparents' migration and that of their post-WWII contemporaries. And so the seeds of my research career were sown and watered with the completion of my doctorate in 2008 on 'Remembering Polishness'.

My ongoing research explores cultural memories and the interlinkages between memory, place and identity. I have explored this theme through research into Polish cultural memory as it has been articulated in public spaces through monuments and memorials, and in private spaces, between and within generations of Poles in Poland and in diaspora in Australia. I am interested in how mobilities affect the transferral and maintenance of cultural memory and how war and totalitarianism disrupts their transmission in public spheres. I have pursued these themes of memory and identity with research in Poland, and but also in Berlin and Singapore, two other post-war landscapes with traumatic histories and multilayered memorialisation.

Allied to these interests in mobility and identity, I am also keenly interested in domestic and interstate moves within NSW and other Australian states. Teaching an annual regional field school in Bathurst and Orange has afforded me the opportunity to witness the changing landscapes of these two regional towns over the past seven years. I have gone on to explore both the motivations and outcomes of treechange migration for the migrants themselves but also for these regional towns.

I am a longstanding UNSW resident, completing my undergraduate and doctoral studies, and now lecturing Human Geography there; I am also an Honours Coordinator in my school. I am the Convenor of the IAG Cultural Geography Study Group and am associated with various international Polish Studies Associations. The university sector is a challenging work environment, especially for women and parents, like me, attempting to achieve equitable work-life balances. One aspect of my research that I am most proud of is a focus on parenting in academia, which attempts to find spaces to work happily within current neoliberal modes of governance. Working in the university sector has nonetheless afforded me some wonderful opportunities, the best of which is the propensity to continue to travel and research in domestic and foreign fields. I firmly believe that fieldwork is integral to my practice of geography. Being in place, exploring articulations of identities, including my own, enriches our contributions as geographers to knowledge and spurs our students' interests in different places and in diversity more generally.