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# Exploring Pathways of (Forced) Migration, Resettlement Structures, and Displaced Persons' Agency: Document Holdings and Research Potentials of the Arolsen Archives

Henning Borggräfe \*

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**Abstract:** »Erkundung (erzwungener) Migrationswege, Strukturen der Neuansiedlung und Agency von Displaced Persons: Dokumentenbestände und Forschungspotentiale der Arolsen Archives«. As a consequence of Nazi persecution, millions of liberated forced laborers, camp prisoners, and others found themselves outside their countries of origin in May 1945. Dealing with these displaced persons (DPs) constituted one of the largest challenges the Allies faced after World War II. Allied aid organizations not only provided care for the DPs while preparing their repatriation or resettlement but also had to search for, and clarify the fate of, those missing. To achieve this goal, the International Tracing Service (ITS) was set up in Arolsen, Germany. This institution, which has recently been renamed the Arolsen Archives, developed into the world's largest repository of documents on Nazi persecution as well as on Allied efforts to manage the DP problem. Most of the holdings have already been digitized. Starting with a description of Allied registration procedures, this paper outlines the development and scope of DP collections held at Arolsen. Special focus is given to casefiles of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) regarding the care and maintenance of DPs living in occupied Germany. The paper discusses how the records can be used to explore pathways of (forced) migration, to research resettlement structures, and to address the issue of DPs' agency.

**Keywords:** Arolsen Archives, displaced person, Germany, registration records, archival processing, migration, forced laborer, resettlement, international refugee organization, international tracing service.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of displaced persons (DPs) has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Although for some time there were only a small number of basic studies in German and English, now “the subject has developed into a diverse and multi-faceted area of historiographical interest” (Höschler 2017, 17). This

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increased interest in the topic is also reflected in inquiries submitted to the Arolsen Archives (formerly known as the International Tracing Service [ITS]) by academic researchers. With more than thirty million documents, the Arolsen Archives hold one of the largest collections on the history of Nazi persecution and its aftermath. Besides the records held on concentration camps and Nazi forced labor, those on DPs are now attracting a great deal of attention. So far, most researchers have focused either on the history of certain DP camps or specific (mostly national) groups, or on individual aspects of DP life widely documented in the Arolsen Archives, such as the fates of DP children, or the search for missing relatives (Köhn 2012; Antons 2014; Borggräfe et al. 2017; Höschler 2017). However, thus far, there has been surprisingly little interest shown toward a core aspect of DP history that is represented in hundreds of thousands of records held at Arolsen, namely, the registration procedures of the Allied military and relief organizations, which were so crucial to receiving DP status and thus for the possibility to emigrate to the desired destination country. In this context, the article aims to highlight and examine selected documents held in the Arolsen Archives as well as to identify their potential for historical research.

The Arolsen Archives is a center for documenting Nazi persecution and postwar migration. Victims of Nazi persecution and their relatives receive information regarding incarceration, forced labor, and Allied DP assistance.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the archives provide the basis for research and education. Founded by the Allies under the name International Tracing Service (ITS), the Arolsen Archives have been located in the small German town Bad Arolsen since 1946. For the first ten years of its existence, the ITS was controlled by Allied organizations, however, later it was controlled by the International Committee of the Red Cross which, over subsequent decades, limited its activities to its own humanitarian mandate, thus closing the archives' doors to researchers and the public alike. While the archives have been open since 2007, the organization – now under the leadership of an international commission – is still in a state of transition toward a professional archive and documentation center (Borggräfe and Panek 2018). Unlike most state archives, for a long time the ITS – although collecting and preserving documents – did not make its holdings accessible to the public. Rather, the documents were used for very specific purposes – that is, to trace and document victims of Nazi persecution in order to reunite families, clarify the fates of individuals, or provide evidence for compensation, immigration, or citizenship procedures. Consequently, the millions of files and forms once generated by the Allied military and relief organizations in dealing with the DPs underwent a second processing at the ITS – a process that therefore also left its traces on the holdings. What are the char-

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<sup>1</sup> The Arolsen Archives still deal with requests on more than 20,000 persons per year. See <<https://www.its-arolsen.org/en/annual-report-2017/>> (Accessed June 22, 2018).

acteristic features of the holdings of the ITS on DPs, and which research approaches seem the most promising when engaging with the data held?

With regard to broader fields of historical research, DP research has been mainly connected to Holocaust studies, and is rooted in the emerging field of so-called aftermath studies, dealing with the various social and political consequences of Nazi persecution. While these fields are of obvious importance, they offer only limited theoretical-methodological impulses for working with registration records. Therefore, this paper also considers reflections as discussed in historical research on archives and archival knowledge systems, on communication in administrations, and on the social and cultural history of migration.

The paper is divided into four sections: Section 1 briefly reviews the Allied registration procedures prior to the archival processing at the ITS, which is discussed in section 2; Section 3 provides a quantitative and qualitative overview of one of the most important DP collections, the Care and Maintenance files (CM/1) of the International Refugee Organization (IRO); and finally, section 4 discusses the research potentials of these and other DP holdings as a means by which to explore pathways of (forced) migration, resettlement structures, and DP agency. The third and fourth section are connected to a project entitled “Transnational Remembrance of Nazi Forced Labor and Migration,” which has been developed by the Arolsen Archives in collaboration with the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, the Institute for Migration Studies at Osnabrück University, and the History Workshop in Minsk. Mainly based on CM/1 files and on a Geographical Information System (GIS), this project aims to create an online visualization – a map – of at least one thousand life paths of former Nazi forced laborers and other DPs who did not return to their home countries, but migrated to other countries. The online visualization of pathways will be enriched by qualitative sources, and users will be invited to contribute to the platform by collaboratively writing micro articles on the individuals concerned, as well as on places of persecution, DP life, and migration.<sup>2</sup>

While this paper should be understood as an invitation to visit the Arolsen Archives and further explore the holdings, it might also be seen as an exemplary contribution to researching the background of archival collections. As more and more documents and entire collections become available online, source-critical knowledge of their background is all the more important. Thus, this paper also serves to contextualize the online collections of the Arolsen Ar-

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<sup>2</sup> See <<https://transrem.arolsen-archives.org>> (Accessed September 17, 2019).

chives, via which the CM/1 files from Germany have recently become publicly accessible.<sup>3</sup>

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## 2. Allied Registration Procedures

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During their advance into the territories formally occupied by the Germans and into the German Third Reich, the Allies encountered millions of DPs. They were liberated from thousands of forced labor camps and more than 1,000 concentration camps and their sub-camps, although many were also found on the streets (Jacobmeyer 1985; Wyman 1998). The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) defined DPs as “civilians outside the national boundaries of their country by reasons of the war” who were “[d]esirous but unable to return home or find homes without assistance.”<sup>4</sup> At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allies had agreed to repatriate the DPs as quickly as possible. At Stalin’s insistence, this particularly affected Soviet citizens. Besides immediate care, one of the most important Allied concerns was the registration of DPs in order to control their movements, initially to prevent them from obstructing the ongoing military operations, but also to prepare them for their rapid return to the countries of origin.

However, during registration, Allied interests and the logic inherent to this process clashed with many DPs’ identities and goals. As will be shown via two early examples, issues of national identity and desired destination lay at the core of this process. While both issues appear superficially simple, when viewed in the context of repatriation, they proved rather more difficult and problematic for many DPs. A well-documented early situation in which the interests and intentions of the Allies clashed with those of the DPs under their protection was the registration of surviving camp prisoners in Dachau by the US Army a few days after liberation. When, on May 1, 1945, Captain M. A. Agather asked the delegates of the International Prisoners Committee to distribute questionnaires to their national groups – asking, among other things, for information about nationality and the places the released prisoners intended to go – he was swamped with questions. “Many people do not know whom they still have in the place where they want to return to,” said the Polish delegate, and he also explained “that the Jews are not quoted among the single nationalities, but mentioned separately [by the prisoners committee].” “Which rule does apply to Italian nationals who served as soldiers in the Yugoslav Army and, as

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<sup>3</sup> See <<https://digitalcollections.its-arolsen.org/03020101>> (Accessed June 22, 2018). Due to technical reasons, the related index data described in this paper can only partially be displayed online.

<sup>4</sup> SHAEF Administrative Memorandum No. 39, Revised Vision, April 16, 1945, 6.1.1/82495539/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

such, became prisoners-of-war?” the Yugoslav asked. “Our country has declared Dutch nationals who fought for Spain’s freedom to be stateless. Which country shall they indicate to be theirs?” a Dutch delegate continued. “There are cases of Polish, Yugoslav and other nationals who were living in Belgium and who would like to return to Belgium. What shall happen with them?” asked a Belgian.<sup>5</sup> Suddenly it became clear that national identities, citizenship, and perceptions of future life that, according to the logic of repatriation, should have been uniform, did not at all fit the actual situation of millions of people in postwar Europe.

While the above-mentioned questionnaires were only issued to concentration camp prisoners freed by the US Army, a different registration procedure was established for all DPs under British and US control, described in detail in the multi-lingual “Displaced Persons Registration Instructions” from June 1944 (Allied Expeditionary Force 1944). Registration took place in assembly centers by means of three forms, of which the “A.E.F. D.P. Registration Record” was the most important and comprehensive. This index card, which is also known as the DP2 card and can be found in the Arolsen Archives in very large numbers, shows that the issues surrounding nationality and perceptions of future life had actually been understood in all their complexity by Allied planners. As the registration instruction highlighted, the “Claimed Nationality” field was of particular importance: “The Registrar will assist the Registrant in the event of indecision regarding nationality but the nationality finally entered in this space *will be that claimed by the Registrant*” (Allied Expeditionary Force 1944, 4, emphasis in original). The index card also contained a field for “Desired Destination,” in which the registrar should record where “the Registrant desires to reside permanently” (Allied Expeditionary Force 1944, 5; also see Bienert 2014).

As the historian Lynne Taylor (2010) points out, the DP2 cards offered a space for self-disclosure. Accordingly, many DPs claimed Jewish, Ukrainian, or other nationalities that did not correspond to any citizenship as a Jewish or a Ukrainian state did not exist at that time. However, for the western Allies and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which took over the care of the DPs, this was rather counterproductive, as their own practices initially did not take these self-definitions into account. Taylor (2010, 43-4) convincingly argues that, in the Allies’ encounters with the DPs, frequently two opposing concepts of nationality met: the western concept of nationality – one equated with citizenship – clashed with a concept of nationality based on ethnicity and culture, dominating in Central and Eastern Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> Bericht über die 3. Sitzung des IPC am 1.5.1945 [Report on the Third Meeting of the IPC, May 1, 1945], 1.1.6.0/82089361ff./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives. Translation by the author. Thousands of these questionnaires can be found at Arolsen in collections on individual documents from prisoners of the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps.

When the UNRRA ceased its work in the summer of 1947 and despite repatriations – some of which had been enforced violently and against the will of those affected – more than 700,000 DPs still lived in the western areas of occupied Germany. These remaining DPs included not only former concentration camp prisoners and forced laborers from many European countries, but above all from Poland, who now refused to return to their former (now Soviet-controlled) home countries. Many people who had fled the advancing Red Army from the Baltics or the Ukrainian area of the Soviet Union also still lived in DP camps. Some had fought and committed crimes on the side of the Germans and they strictly rejected any return to their Soviet-controlled homeland. Not least, so-called Jewish “infiltrates,” who had initially returned to their places of origin from the camps or places of refuge in the Soviet Union, sought protection from anti-Semitic violence in postwar Central Europe, fleeing mainly to the US zone of Allied-occupied Germany (Cohen 2012, 5-6; Urban 2016, 33-7). When the IRO took over responsibility for the remaining DPs and refugees in the summer of 1947, it was obvious that the solution would be resettlement rather than repatriation (International Refugee Organization 1951, 19-25). In order to clarify who was eligible for care and maintenance, and how the DPs envisaged their future, another complete registration process was undertaken.

Over the next four years, all remaining DPs in Germany, Austria, Italy, and other countries had to fill in forms and were interviewed. While a file was opened for each individual applicant, families were registered together, and their case files structured according to the head of the family. Usually, applicants had to fill in a form, the “Application for IRO Assistance” – according to the imprinted document code also known as CM/1 – before the interview, during which IRO eligibility officers reviewed, corrected, and commented on the statements. However, often the forms were quite obviously filled in by the officers during the interview (Holborn 1956, 204-7; Schönemann 2012, 178-9). Based on the forms and interviews, IRO officers decided about the applicants’ eligibility for care and maintenance, and thereby about IRO assistance for emigration. Although the IRO officers did not settle the question of destination itself, the initial registration was crucial for both the applicants’ current status, and any future possibility to find a new home country.<sup>6</sup>

The collections of CM/1 files are certainly the most interesting holdings of the Arolsen Archives for researching DP registrations, as well as for DP research as a whole. Although they share certain similarities with previous registration documents and contain similar – or to some extent even the same – questions, they are much richer in the social-biographical information and data they hold about the applicants’ lives. Furthermore, as well as the eligibility officers’ appraisals and decisions, the files include political statements and

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<sup>6</sup> For a chart of the “IRO’s Pipeline: Processing for Migration,” see the inside rear cover of Holborn (1956).

perceptions of future life made by the applicants themselves. The collections at the Arolsen Archives comprise about 350,000 CM/1 files from Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and England, each dealing with the case of an individual DP or family. The sub-collection of files from occupied Germany alone contains 196,408 files on 415,604 persons, dating from mid-1947 until the dissolution of the IRO in December 1951.

For researching these files and other sources produced in the Allied interactions with the DPs, it seems helpful to take the basic theoretical ideas of administration research into consideration. Current research on communication in administrations helps to provide an understanding of the specific character and language of forms and other registration documents. In doing so, such research contributes to the avoidance of misinterpretations of applicants' statements. Historian Peter Becker (2011) explains: "Encounters taking place between officials and citizens in the sphere of administrative communication [ought to be] regarded as a joint negotiation of claims generating cases that have to meet programmatic requirements" (25). In a case study on immigrant registration at Ellis Island, Barbara Lüthi (2011) characterizes files and forms and their specific language. She notes that the personal file constitutes "a basic cultural practice of creating commitment and 'truth'. The question is not only about what is stated in the files, but also about how they come into existence" (Lüthi 2011, 187). The language of the forms "is neither clear, nor is its meaning evident, nor can the responses to a pertinent questioning be read as authentic reproductions of statements made by persons concerned" (Lüthi 2011, 193).

Consequently, applicants' statements in DP records cannot simply be read as expressions of their identities and beliefs, or as authentic accounts on their previous lives. Rather, the CM/1 forms have to be understood as two unequal partners negotiating a status. Within this process, IRO officers tried to generate cases that met the different categories of eligible and ineligible applicants, while most applicants tried to present a description of their identities, pasts, and political beliefs that fitted into these categories. The difficulty of classifying the applicants into the predefined categories is demonstrated by an extensive manual for eligibility officers, presenting dozens of contested categories and hundreds of related sample decisions (IRO circa 1950). However, in order to properly understand the setting of the CM/1 registration, more research needs to be conducted regarding the preparation and implementation of this process, the origins and development of the forms, and especially the social practice of the application procedure itself.

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### 3. Archival Processing at the ITS

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However, the specific structure of the CM/1 files, shaped by the registration procedure, is not the only aspect historians need to consider when working with



these files. Understanding their provenance and the archival processes involved is equally important, not least if any critical assessment of the collection is to be undertaken. This applies to archival collections in general, but especially to the collections within the Arolsen Archives, where the process-generated files went through a second process for tracing and documenting purposes. Archives do not simply record and take hold of history; every archive and every collection was created in, as part of, and marked by, specific political and cultural contexts – be it the collection (or non-collection) of sources, or the methods by which they are arranged and described. “[A]ccess to sources opens the possibility of teasing out their historical meaning only if a scholar understands what the archivists and their archives have been up to, and the historical contexts in which their sources were formed” (Blouin and Rosenberg 2001, 119). With regard to the documents collected by the ITS, the historian Dan Stone (2017) concludes: “[F]or historians using the ITS, teasing out historical meaning is especially challenging. Not only have the sources been, until recently, inaccessible, they are arranged in order to facilitate the tracing process and not historical research” (74). In order to trace missing persons and clarify fates, but also to document Nazi persecution for compensation claims, the ITS collected more than thirty million originals and copies of documents from Germany and all over Europe. From the perspective of the Allied aid organizations, there was a close connection between the task of the ITS and the overall challenge of managing the so-called “DP problem”:

The reunion of deported families, the return of children to their parents, and the re-establishment of contacts disrupted by years of occupation and war were viewed as a necessary prerequisite for any sound program of repatriation or resettlement [...] social reconstruction could not be attempted in any major sense until the basic human relationships had been restored.<sup>7</sup>

Within the Arolsen Archives, all DP documents form Record Group 3, which is one of three main record groups besides a group on concentration camps and other places of incarceration (Group 1), and a group mainly containing records on Nazi forced laborers (Group 2). Due to the nature of the ITS as a tracing service, most of these records – lists, forms, files, or index cards – were once created for registering and controlling people, and therefore primarily deal with names. For example, sub-group 3.1 contains the so-called postwar card file, a huge collection of more than three million DP2 and other DP registration cards; a collection of more than 100,000 registration lists from DP camps; and a collection of more than 150,000 emigration lists. The Tracing and Documentation files are another important part of the archives. There are almost three million

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<sup>7</sup> UNRRA, The Tracing of Missing Persons in Germany on an International Scale with Particular Reference to the Problem of U.N.R.R.A., circa 1946, 6.1.1/82492866/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

of these files, containing all ITS correspondence on individual Nazi victims from the early postwar years onwards.<sup>8</sup>

For decades, ITS staff were primarily interested in being able to find information quickly on certain individuals. Accordingly, documents had been restructured following a system of pertinence, often dissolving their original provenance. Another peculiarity of the Arolsen Archives, which substantially speeds up searches, is the high level of digitization – more than 85% of the holdings have already been scanned. Documents have been, and are still being, indexed on the level of individual pages, whereas the Arolsen Archives have only recently started to describe the holdings on higher levels (files and collections) according to professional archival standards. For this reason, researchers do not find a comprehensive archival description of the IRO CM/1 files from Germany in the ITS Digital Collections Online. Documents on the provenance and processing of this collection, however, can be found in those parts of the archives dealing with the broader institutional history of the organization. These documents confirm that the IRO area offices in West Germany, following the organization's dissolution, sent their remaining CM/1 files in batches to the Bonn-based United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) early in 1952.

However, the above did not apply to all of the CM/1 files created, as the IRO had actually made provisions for the destruction of the files after the DPs' emigration. While this was at least partially put into practice, West German compensation authorities started expressing their strong interest in the files as early as April 1951, urging that the destruction of the files be stopped. Compensation for Nazi victims was based on a territorial principle and was meant to benefit German citizens. Certain groups of foreign Nazi victims were only eligible if they had lived in Germany on a cut-off date after the end of the war (Goschler 2005, 201). While stating that they needed the CM/1 files in order to approve applications, the authorities equally hoped to find documentary evidence that might enable them to reject claims.<sup>9</sup> They suggested sending the files to the ITS, who would then be able to provide interested parties with respective information – as was already the case with regard to the concentration camp collections (Borggräfe and Leßau 2015). While the screening missions of host countries and Allied intelligence offices in 1952 also started to express an interest in the collection, the UNHCR and the ITS finally reached an agreement, and in December 1952, a truckload of 32 tons of documents, including the remaining CM/1 files from Germany and more than one million DP2 cards,

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<sup>8</sup> See the General Inventory for an extensive overview of the holdings: <<https://www.its-arolsen.org/en/archives/overview-of-the-archival-holdings/general-inventory/>> (Accessed July 4, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> A. J. Wittamer, Chief, Record Branch, Report on Meeting in Frankfurt, April 19, 1951, 6.1.1/82508859ff./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

was delivered to Arolsen.<sup>10</sup> While we can assume that people who immigrated relatively late or did not succeed in immigrating are overrepresented in the collection of CM/1 files available at Arolsen, unfortunately, the exact relation between the collection held in Arolsen and those files that were destroyed before the transfer of the remaining material to the UNHCR remains unclear.

However, only parts of the files were of interest for tracing and documenting – in particular the application forms. All files were therefore appraised by ITS staff, and non-relevant material was sifted out. According to an internal report from January 1953, about 10% of the material (original birth certificates, passports, etc.) was sent back to the UNHCR to be returned to their respective owners. Approximately 60% of the papers, in particular correspondence between IRO and the applicants, and copies of documents that were introduced as evidence in the registration, were destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the collection at Arolsen today does not contain the complete files as they were handed over from the IRO to the UNHCR and subsequently to the ITS, but rather only parts of them. Furthermore, when additional stocks of CM/1 files from other countries were brought to Arolsen in the early 1960s, staff took the opportunity to rearrange the collection from Germany as well. In this reorganization the original structure of the collection – by IRO area offices – was dissolved in favor of an alphabetical order, which allowed much easier access for tracing purposes. Further to this, the remaining material – for example, on an individual applicant or a family – was combined into new envelopes, supplemented by similar postwar documents on the same persons, i.e., from DP hospitals or other aid organizations, that were acquired in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> The envelopes were then labeled with biographical data of the persons concerned, and cross-references to existing Tracing and Documentation files (ITS 1961, 4-6).

Today, researchers working with the collection in the reading room do not usually use the original documents, but rather have access to digital images and related data. This is because the whole collection was scanned in the late 2000s and subject to deep indexing at file level from 2010 until 2012 in a collaborative project with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem – two of seven so-called “copyholders” of the ITS Digital Archives. Researchers cannot only search the collection via names, but also apply filters for people of a specific age, gender, place of origin, claimed nationality, religion, or the camps and dates where and when the applicants were registered. Files can also be searched for those containing applicant photographs. In line with the ITS indexing guidelines of that time, data was mainly entered in its original form and had not yet been standardized (Kühnel 2012; Afoumado

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR Bonn to ITS, April 28, 1952, 6.1.1/82512734/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>11</sup> ITS Office Memorandum, CM-1 Forms and Supporting Documents, January 15, 1953, 6.1.1/82512747/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the files also contain some documents on persons born after 1952.

2014). While this has the advantage that, for example, the self-disclosure of the DPs has been retained in form fields on claimed nationality or religion, it causes difficulties for researchers interested in registration locations, which were indexed variously at district level, local level, and also by camp names.

As a result, the collection of CM/1 files from Germany, as it is available to researchers today, was not only shaped by the IRO registration process as shown in section 1, but also by three phases of archival processing that have to be considered: In the early 1950s, the collection was appraised and more than half of the file contents was removed; in the 1960s, the collection was rearranged in favor of an alphabetical order; and in recent years, the collection was scanned and parts, but by no means all of the information, were indexed. Based on these insights, the next section provides a quantitative and qualitative overview of the collection.

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#### 4. The IRO Care and Maintenance Files from Germany

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The IRO Care and Maintenance files from Germany constitute by far the largest of all the collections of CM/1 files available at the Arolsen Archives. Of the approximately 350,000 files from IRO missions in Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and England, 196,408 files originate from the three West German occupation zones. At the heart of each CM/1 file is the “Application for IRO Assistance,” a form of four pages that differs slightly over time and between different languages and occupation zones. Besides the applicant’s name, date and place of birth, claimed and established nationality, religion, and marital status – and the same information for all accompanying family members – the form also asked for the places of residence and employment for the last ten or twelve years, as well as for present wages and financial resources, education and language skills, membership of organizations, future plans, including objections against repatriation and the country of preference, and a list of documents proving the applicant’s declaration. Not least, there is the officer’s decision whether or not the applicant fell within the mandate of the IRO.<sup>13</sup> Once accepted as eligible for care and maintenance, the applicants’ movements from one DP camp to another in the period following registration were also recorded on the application form.

The quantitative evaluation of the available indexing data for the CM/1 files from Germany shows that the collection contains registrations of 415,604 persons.<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, the files of registered families were structured by

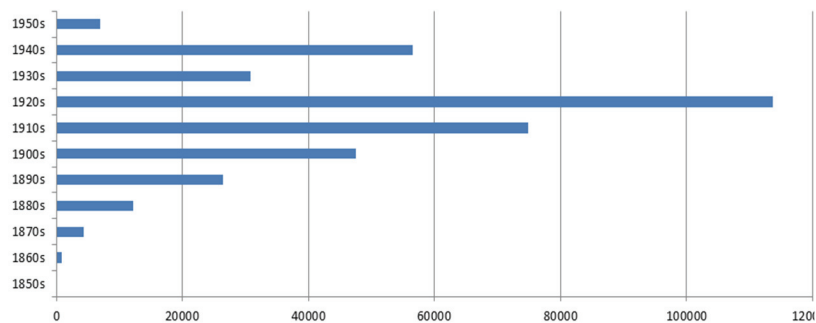
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<sup>13</sup> A collection of sample forms is available under 3.1.1.0/82384329ff./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives; see also Bienert 2014, 35–40.

<sup>14</sup> Counting all persons represented in the collection is not easy, due to different indexed name variants. More than 570,000 different names can be found in the data. To determine

the family head. Of the files, 105,694 relate to registrations of individuals, and 90,714 to the registrations of families. Two-person families constituted 34%, while 29% consisted of three persons, and another 32% of four to six persons. A total of 741 files refer to families with more than ten persons. When the IRO took over responsibility for the DPs and refugees in the summer of 1947, the average age of all persons represented in the collection was about 27 years, while the average age of the family heads was slightly higher (33 years). More than 116,000 persons (28%) were either still minors at the end of the war, or were born afterwards (also see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Persons in CM/1 Files from Germany, Birth by Decades**



While the given names, family names, and dates of birth were indexed for the vast majority of all persons represented in the files, additional socio-biographical information was most often indexed for the first person in a file only – the individual applicant or family head – although this was not always the case.<sup>15</sup> The following summary, therefore, refers only to the first persons in the files for whom data is available. Although it cannot provide an exact statistical overview, it does reveal some important trends.

According to the available index data, 83% of the individual applicants and heads were male and only 17% female. The ratio of individual applicants to heads is relatively similar: 52% to 48% for the men; and 46% to 54% for the women.<sup>16</sup> As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the available data on nationality/citizenship and religion of the individual applicants and heads offers an impressive picture of the heterogeneity of the DP population.<sup>17</sup>

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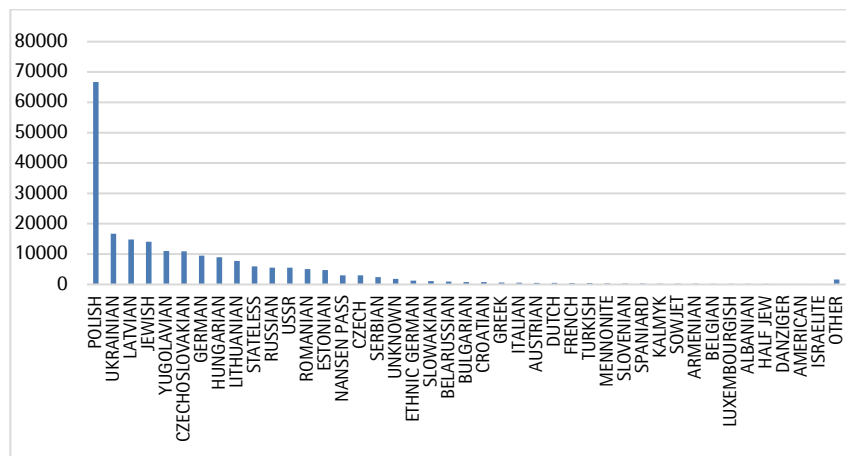
the number of persons, a combination of the unique Document IDs and Count IDs was used; the latter was attributed once for each person per file.

<sup>15</sup> There are first names and family names for all 415,604 persons, but only 90% have a date of birth.

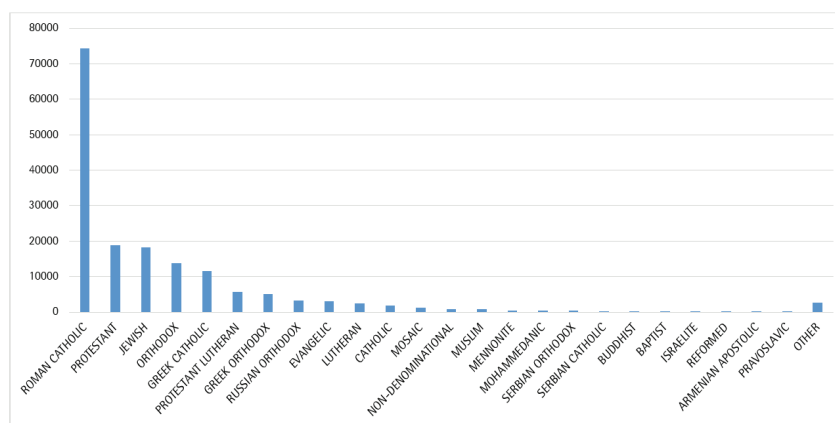
<sup>16</sup> Information on gender is only available for 162,861 heads (83%).

<sup>17</sup> Some CM/1 forms asked for nationality, some for citizenship; the information was indexed as nationality by the ITS and its partners. Figure 2 shows only nationalities represented in more than one hundred files; in total the data contains 159 different entries for the attrib-

**Figure 2: Individual Applicants and Heads in CM/1 Files from Germany, Claimed Nationality/Citizenship**



**Figure 3: Individual Applicants and Heads in CM/1 Files from Germany, Religion**



The available data also indicates that large groups highlighted by recent research showed different social profiles. Thus, the comparatively high average

ute nationality. Besides citizenship, some forms asked for ethnicity/national group. However, the number of entries is too small for a meaningful evaluation. Regarding the religion, data was indexed according to the original entries and not yet standardized. For this reason, in addition to "Jewish," for example, there are also entries for "Mosaic," or "Israelite." Figure 3 shows only religions represented in more than 50 files; in total the data contain 94 different entries for the attribute religion.

age and the presence of many elderly people are striking among the 67,028 non-Jewish Balts (11,517 individual applicants and 15,030 heads with 40,481 companions).<sup>18</sup> This seems to indicate that many of these persons were members of Baltic elites who had not been deported to German forced labor or concentration camps, but had fled the approaching Soviet Army with their families only at the end of the war.

The large majority of non-Jewish Poles – with 111,183 persons by far the largest group in the CM/1 files from Germany – was born in the 1910s and the 1920s, and thus belonged to those cohorts most affected by Nazi forced labor. In this group, the ratio of individual applicants (30,292) to heads (23,534 with 57,357 accompanying persons) was also significantly higher, which can probably be explained by the background of persecution.

It is striking that, despite the Nazi extermination machinery, the group of Jews of different nationalities (48,140 persons, among them 7,654 individual applicants and 12,292 heads with 28,194 companions), aside from the generally huge numbers of families, includes many relatively old people (more than 1,200 were over 60 at the end of the war) and children born during the war (almost 2,000).<sup>19</sup> This may be interpreted as meaning that there were not only camp survivors or Jews who survived in hiding, but also so-called “infiltrates” in this group, which had fled with their families from the approaching Germans into eastern areas of the Soviet Union and did not arrive in the US zone of Allied-occupied Germany until 1946 (Taylor 2017, 111-8).

However, the information contained in the CM/1 files goes far beyond the socio-biographical data described thus far, since the applicants also had to explain where they had worked and lived in the previous ten or twelve years. Rather than individually analyzing the immense variety of life stories told by the applicants, in order to give a broad insight, this paper presents the results of a random sample, focusing on five people introducing themselves to the IRO officers as Spaniards. The Spaniards were a comparatively small group that has so far received little attention in DP research. The official IRO statistics counted 9,988 Spaniards who emigrated with the help of the organization (Holborn 1956, 439). Yet, the collection of CM/1 files from Germany contains only 279 files of persons claiming a Spanish nationality for themselves or their families. Early on, the IRO was already aware of the Spanish Republicans, most of whom had fled to France before the beginning of World War II, and the need to distinguish them from other Spaniards who had been voluntarily recruited for

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<sup>18</sup> Strictly speaking, the figure refers to all people who applied together with heads claiming a Baltic, Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian nationality. There were certainly some people of other nationalities among them. The same also applies to the non-Jewish Poles mentioned in the proceeding paragraph.

<sup>19</sup> Here, the entries “Jewish,” “Israelite,” and “Mosaic” were added. In addition, it was checked whether all entries of “Jewish” in the attribute “nationality” are covered.

work under a German-Spanish agreement. For these individuals, the manual for eligibility officers stated: “The mere fact of being a Spaniard outside Spain does not bring a person into this category [...] Only the victims of the Falangist regime are the concern of IRO” (IRO circa 1950, 15).

The first case study in the small sample regards a man who described himself as a member of the target group. Germiniano B., a Spanish Republican from Leon, told the IRO that he fought against Franco. At the age of 26, he fled to France in 1938 and was interned in Perpignan until 1941. Then he was deported to Germany and performed forced labor as a butcher in Kiel until 1945. After the war, he married a former Polish forced laborer, became father to a son, and still lived in a DP camp in Kiel when he applied for IRO assistance in 1949.<sup>20</sup>

The case of Agustin A., born in La Rambla in 1922, was different from the officer’s point of view. When applying for IRO assistance in September 1947, A. stated that he had come from Barcelona to the town of Bitterfeld in 1941, where he worked for IG Farben (a German chemical manufacturer). From 1945 onwards, he had been living in a large DP camp in Munich. A.’s statement that he was forced to move to Germany was doubted by the IRO officer, who categorized him as a voluntary worker, although at the same time, the IRO officer also stated that there were no objections against his migration to South America.<sup>21</sup>

Another biographical background is shown by the third example: the case of Luis Mateo A., a son of Spanish citizens who had been born in Dresden, Germany, in 1913. Married to a German citizen, he stated that he had worked as a merchant in Munich, already since 1934. From the IRO’s point of view, he was not part of the target group, as he had obviously lived voluntarily in Germany. He still lived in Munich when he, together with his wife and their son, unsuccessfully applied for IRO assistance in order to immigrate to Argentina in the summer of 1948.<sup>22</sup>

Yet another completely different background can be observed in the fourth example: the case of the 25-year-old Francisco A., who stated that he had lived continuously in Spain until he moved to France in the late 1940s. Searching for a job and/or help, he moved on to West Germany in 1950 and tried to receive IRO assistance in order to emigrate to Canada or Australia. He answered the question of why he refused to return to Spain by claiming political and eco-

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<sup>20</sup> CM/1 form of Germiniano B., August 26, 1949, 3.2.1.1/78951291f./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>21</sup> CM/1 form of Agustin A., September 6, 1947, 3.2.1.1/78871044f./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>22</sup> CM/1 form of Luis Mateo A., August 4, 1948, 3.2.1.1/78868059f./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.



nomic reasons. Consequently, he was not accepted as a DP, but instead received IRO legal protection as a refugee.<sup>23</sup>

The fifth example, the case of Rodolfo B., represents another important group in Spanish contemporary history, namely, men and women who came to the country as supporters of the Spanish Republic and fought against the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. Born in Mostar, Yugoslavia, in 1914, Rodolfo B. stated that he had gone to Spain in 1937, where he not only fought in the international brigades, but also became a Spanish citizen. After fleeing to France in 1939, he was interned, but decided to join the foreign legion and fought the Wehrmacht in Northern Africa. In 1940, he became a prisoner of war (POW), fled from a POW camp, but was again arrested by the Germans and suffered the next five years in the Dachau and Mauthausen concentration camps. After the war, he married a German citizen, adopted her two daughters, and lived in Augsburg until 1947, waiting for an opportunity to migrate to Venezuela.<sup>24</sup>

As illustrated by these five examples, an analysis of the biographical information contained in the CM/1 files reveals the enormous diversity of the DP population – even within national groups – reaching much further than the official IRO statistics showed. The case of Rodolfo B. also provides a good example of the possibilities to explore pathways of persecution and life in the aftermath of the war via the ITS collections. This is made feasible by the Central Name Index (CNI), the key for person-related searches within the Arolsen Archives. Whenever documents or inquiries reached the ITS, person-related information was “carded,” and these index cards were then sorted into the CNI in an alphabetic-phonetic order. Today, the now digitized CNI includes more than 50 million references to approximately 17.5 million persons. As all references to an individual are stored in one place within the CNI, it offers a unique potential for searching persons across collections.

According to the CNI, there are 32 additional documents on Rodolfo B. in different parts of the ITS archives. From these documents, we not only learn more details about his persecution – for example that he was imprisoned for a short period of time in Gestapo prisons in Brussels and Linz before he was sent to Dachau – but also about his postwar life. For example, his marriage certificate, issued in August 1945, shows that he worked as special investigator for the US secret police.<sup>25</sup> Among the other documents on Rodolfo B. is a Tracing and Documentation file of the ITS, showing that he indeed managed to migrate

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<sup>23</sup> CM/1 form of Francisco A., October 9, 1950, 3.2.1.1/78869027f./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>24</sup> CM/1 form of Rodolfo B., September 5, 1947, 3.2.1.1/78940227f./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Marriage Certificate Rudolf B. and Frieda E., January 26, 1948, 2.2.2.2/76707283/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

to Venezuela (on resettlement to Venezuela, see Huhn and Rass 2018), where he still lived in the late 1950s when he applied for German compensation.<sup>26</sup>

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## 5. Exploring Pathways, Resettlement Structures, and DP's Agency

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What is there to do with these voluminous collections of person-related documents, and how can they be approached? So far, most users either search for certain persons or for documents related to the camps or towns they are interested in. Of course, the collections at Arolsen are well suited for both approaches – the biographical and the local-historical. However, considering the huge extent of the collections, there is much more that can be done with regard to the specific order of documents, the degree of digitization, and document-level indexing. On the one hand, the collections allow the reconstruction of the (forced) movements of large groups of people through space and time, although, of course, such a research is not an end in itself, but rather serves the identification of patterns helping us to better understand and explain the resettlement process. While on the other hand – yet closely related to this goal – there is the potential to tackle the difficult issue of DPs' agency. Finally, it seems possible to construct a history of DPs' experiences based on these process-generated files.

Before further discussing these points, it would be prudent to comment upon the use of archival indexing data. While indexing at document level offers new opportunities for searching and filtering collections, and also simplifies research as the data can be re-used, it is not without risk, since it guides the researcher's attention in a certain direction, namely to approaches that could be easier conducted with the existing data. However, we do not yet know whether the information selected and typed up by the archivists really is decisive for understanding and explaining the historical processes under investigation. The indexing of the CM/1 files, for example, focused on limited socio-biographical information, including nationality, which had already been crucial for the IRO as its official statistics indicate. However, were these criteria also decisive to subsequent migration movements and the DPs' agency in the process? What about other factors about which the applicants gave information, such as marital status and the number of children, language and occupational skills, information on financial resources, or relatives and other supporters in the desired countries of destination? As far as the methodology for working with CM/1 files or other process-generated files is concerned, it would be preferable to

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<sup>26</sup> Request for Incarceration Certificate for Rudolf B., July 22, 1957, 6.3.3.2/103921515ff./ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

conduct research with large random samples rather than to be led – and perhaps misled – only by the existing indexing data.

Taking this into consideration, how might one explore pathways of (forced) migration? Most promising seems to be the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), as demonstrated in current Holocaust research (Kelly Knowles, Cole, and Giordano 2014) and pilot studies on other victims of Nazi persecution (Borggräfe 2016) or postwar migration (Bondzio, Rass, and Tames 2016). Creatively used, GIS software enables a dynamic visualization of the movements of large groups of people. Of course, for itineraries from registration to arrival in a new home country, in addition to CM/1 files, other documents must be consulted. Here, too, the Arolsen Archives with its collections of different DP index cards and passenger lists, as well as the Tracing and Documentation files, offer a wealth of material. Extracted from the documents, collected in a database, and imported into a GIS, a dynamic visualization of the resettlement process can be created from the biographical data of the individual DPs. Such a model serves to identify patterns in space and time, and thereby permits the exploration of resettlement structures beyond official IRO statistics. Were there connections between migration to certain countries at certain times and socio-biographical similarities of the DPs involved?

In addition, we need to consider people about whom we cannot find any immigration data. It could be assumed – as is documented in many cases – that they did not find a host country and had to remain in West Germany as so-called *Heimatlose Ausländer* (homeless foreigners). This refers to the practices of recruitment commissions of host countries and the economic driving force behind the resettlement process. The host countries were primarily looking for young, single, healthy male workers who would help the country's economy, but would not be a burden on it (von Holleuffer 2005, 161-3). Despite some pioneering studies (Stepien 1989; Pegel 1997) little is known about the fates of those who remained – the so-called “hard core” (for a new case study on the local level, see Hennies, Huhn, and Rass 2018).

When exploring pathways of (forced) migration based on CM/1 files and other archival documents, an important methodological distinction emerges. Applicants' statements about past movements and their reasons cannot be treated in the same way as postwar movements documented by Allied relief organizations in registration or emigration records. However, this does not mean ignoring or generally distrusting applicants' statements in CM/1 forms. On the contrary, they are an important source, but need to be treated as narrations. Keeping this distinction in mind, GIS software seems well suited for visualizing and searching for patterns in narrated pathways as well. Did successful applicants present similar narratives about their (forced) movements during the war? Did people who emigrated to certain countries at certain times, or people who did not find a host country, share certain narratives? Can elements of narrated pathways be identified that appeared problematic (or equally, rather

unproblematic) to IRO officers? This leads us to the second topic to be dealt with in this section, namely the question of DPs' agency within the registration procedure, and the ways in which this can be explored.

For exploring this important but rather difficult topic, besides research on communication in administrations, it seems helpful to take current migration research into account, which also addresses the question of agency. As historian Peter Gatrell (2016) points out by defining his conceptual term of "refugeedom," this includes

categorical practices, legal frameworks, bureaucratic instruments and humanitarian relief work, whilst enabling us to relate refugees' experiences, conduct and responses to those prevailing institutions and norms [...] Refugeedom can be conceived as a system that governs but does not necessarily bind refugees in an inescapable vice [...] Under what conditions did refugees break free of the designation they were assigned? (179)

Well-known in this regard is the example of liberated Jewish survivors who refused to register as Poles, Hungarians, or Soviet citizens and, on the contrary, claimed a Jewish nationality, which then led to the Allied acceptance of this nationality as well as the establishment of Jewish DP camps (Taylor 2010, 37-9). Yet what about other groups who probably also tried to influence the registration process, and thereby the whole issue of managing the so-called "DP problem"?

Even more frequent than the impressive act of collective self-definition of thousands of surviving Jews were the individual strategies of adaptation to the registration procedure. We can assume that most DPs were not naïve objects of registration, but actively tried to fit Allied expectations. Polish Jews who survived Nazi persecution by fleeing to the eastern parts of the Soviet Union provide a good example. When coming from Poland to the US zone of Allied-occupied Germany in 1946, some of them rewrote their war experiences by claiming an imprisonment in concentration camps or ghettos, or even by inventing places of incarceration to make it through registration (Nesselrodt 2014, 193-4). Another example, although not as successful, is that of the above-mentioned Spaniard who tried in vain to convince the IRO officers that he had been forced to come to Germany in 1941 to work in a factory.

Yet how can the issue of DPs' agency be studied systematically beyond such episodes? The classical approach is built upon contemporary discussions of the Allies and the IRO on the challenges of registering and categorizing DPs, and the sources produced there, such as the previously mentioned manual for eligibility officers. Where groups and sample cases were discussed in detail, there was obviously a need for regulation. However, as this approach only allows us to see what had come into view at a higher organizational level at the time, it also seems worthwhile to examine the CM/1 files in order to find out if (and if so, how) DPs were able to influence IRO registration procedures and, consequently, resettlement programs.

In this respect, four approaches seem possible: First, we can look for inconsistencies in the applicants' statements that the officials noticed during the interviews and recorded in the CM/1 files; second, we can compare applicants' statements in the files with other DP registrations of the same persons documented in the Arolsen Archives – that is, Allied questionnaires of liberated concentration camp survivors, or DP2 registration cards; third, we can conduct a comparison with documents on Nazi persecution and other wartime experiences available on the persons in the Arolsen Archive and other archives, such as concentration camp and forced labor records, or state registrations of foreigners, as well as records of refugee relief organizations; finally, a fourth option is to compare applicants' statements in CM/1 files with information provided later in other contexts. Examples might be registrations and interviews by host countries in the course of immigration, declarations in compensation proceedings, and written memoirs or oral history interviews.<sup>27</sup> Where do we observe differences between the narratives in the CM/1 files and information on the same persons in other sources? Can we identify certain narrations or narrative elements that proved particularly successful or unsuccessful during registration? And did those who presented themselves and their past in a certain way have a higher chance of reaching their desired country?

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## 6. Conclusion

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In conclusion, I offer three points regarding the possibility of contributing to a history of DPs' experiences by analyzing large samples of process-generated files. First, an analysis of DP movements between the end of the war and the arrival in a new home country, combined with a comparison of the desired and actual destinations, allows us to learn more about the variety of DPs' experiences in postwar Germany, including the duration of displacement, the frequency of movements from camp to camp, more typical or atypical pathways, and the challenges and obstacles of a new beginning.

Second, an analysis of the extensive socio-biographical data and information on lives before the end of the war as reported by the applicants allows us to better see the diversity of political and social backgrounds of the DPs, even within national groups. Understanding this diversity seems crucial to any further exploration of the everyday experiences, political expressions, and social conflicts in the DP camps, also taking the organization of most camps along the nationalities of the displaced persons into account.

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<sup>27</sup> The reflections on this topic go back to a discussion with Antoine Burgard when he presented on *Imposed and Contested Identities of Holocaust Child Survivors* at the international conference *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour* in London, January 11, 2018.

Third, an analysis of applicants' narrations might not only be interesting for researching DPs' agency, but also for gaining insight into the possibilities and limits of talking about war experiences. For example, describing movements to Germany as forced movements triggered by the Nazi labor regime obviously reflected the experiences of many DPs, but also matched Allied expectations and, therefore, emerged as a very dominant narrative. Taking into account that developing and maintaining a legitimate story of one's own past was very important with regard to a person's legal status, in cases in which we observe differences between narrations in CM/1 files and pathways of (forced) migration as documented in wartime records or previous DP registrations, as a next step, it would be interesting to consult later testimonies in order to learn more about the persistence of narrations developed in the process of DP registration.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In her dissertation on the history of denazification (Leßau 2018), which is mainly based on case files and related material, historian Hanne Leßau demonstrates the benefits of such an approach.

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