

‘A moment of elation ... and painful’¹

The homecoming of slave and forced labourers after the Second World War

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The homecoming of former forced labourers was an extremely complicated process which in some cases lasted many years, was contingent on a number of different factors and, for some, was never actually achieved. Memories of family and home constituted for many forced labourers a crucial emotional reference point and a form of mental sustenance. In many ways, packages and letters received from home were a practical one. Repatriation was the internal vanishing point of a situation otherwise largely determined by external factors. The journey home has lost some of its significance as a life-history event amongst former forced labourers. However, it has not lost its fundamental impact in setting their future life courses. This chapter investigates this transition which, since most forced labourers were entering adulthood during their periods of forced labour, almost resembled a rite of passage.

Between total war and collapse

By the Normandy Landings and the Soviet Summer Offensive of 1944 at the latest, it became apparent that Germany would lose the war. For many forced labourers, this signalled the hope of survival and the possibility of escape. The confusion of allied bombings, evacuations and the relocation of industry presented forced labourers with a few practical possibilities of escape.² Those who escaped tried to hide in forests, sticking together wherever possible with their compatriots or with fellow victims from other countries. Others attempted to return home on foot, covering long distances in the process.³ Of course, most were re-captured or managed to make it only as far as the next farm, where they were forced back into labour, albeit under possibly better conditions and with better food than before.⁴ A few even managed to make it all the way home, although this did not necessarily mean an end to their difficulties. If their country was still occupied, they were forced to go into hiding. They could only hope that relatives, acquaintances or underground groups would conceal their hideouts and supply them with provisions. There are reports that former forced labourers, in this way, became partisans – without actually intending to and without having any particu-

1 Translated excerpt from International Forced Labourers Documentation Project (IFLDP) interviews with Andre D. (France, 23.6.2006), p.25.

2 See IFLDP interviews with Galina A. (Memorial, Russian, 19.6.2005).

3 See IFLDP interviews with Oleksa S. (Educational Initiatives Centre, Ukraine, 24.7.2005).

4 See IFLDP interviews with Valentina S. (Kharkiv University, Ukraine, 22.5.2005).

lar political ambitions.⁵ This could make a decisive difference to their subsequent destinies; indeed, in the victorious and liberated countries of both East and West Europe, having a history as a resistance fighter was held in higher esteem than being a 'mere' forced labourer.⁶ If forced labourers' homes were no longer habitable because they had been destroyed or were occupied by other people, their homecoming turned into another odyssey. Important factors in deciding whether to stay or go included whether family members had survived the war, where they were, in what sort of situation they found themselves and which social and political status they had held prior to and during the Second World War.⁷ In addition, repatriation in no way guaranteed that forced labourers would be welcome in their home countries. Even those refugees who had endless marching behind them, and had crossed several front lines along the way, were likely to be greeted as 'undignified traitors'. This was especially the case in the Soviet dominated territories.⁸

The situation was less severe for the Czechs, although they, too, could face discrimination. As reported by this former Czech female forced labourer, this discrimination, as in most other countries, frequently had a gender-specific dimension: 'For the girls who had been in the Reich [...] it was as if they had a symbol branded on their foreheads. They were considered to be inferior. Even when they behaved impeccably [...] That humiliated me the most.'⁹

During the war, it was in particular young Czechs born between 1918 and 1924 who were conscripted for forced labour or mobilised. Officially, some of them attended 10-month training programmes, following which they returned to the 'Reich Protectorate' where they were forced to work.¹⁰ Others were immediately drafted for unlimited periods of forced labour.¹¹ However, there were opportunities to return home long before the end of the war, even if, once there, they were mobilised again as forced labourers (although sometimes allowed to sleep at home).¹² Polish forced labours actively sought to be recruited for labour in their own country as it represented a semi-legal way to evade a threatened deportation to Germany.¹³

Liberation and the liberators

The increasing erosion of both the wartime economy and the general administration of the Third Reich presented forced labourers with an increasing number of uncontrolled spaces, with all the positive and negative consequences that these implied. Many fell victim to increased arbitrary violence, massacres and death marches or

5 See IFLDP interviews with Jakov A. (Croatia, 4.7.2005) and Dragica V. (Croatia, 8.7.2005).

6 See IFLDP interviews with Reshat S. (Macedonia, 9.12.2005).

7 See IFLDP interviews with Lucja S. (KARTA, Poland, 2.7.2005); interviews with Anna M. (Memorial, Russia, 25.12.2005).

8 See IFLDP interviews with Jevgenij R. (Kharkiv University, Ukraine, 22.4.2005).

9 From the Czech transcript of IFLDP interviews Mrs. M.U. (Czech Republic, 13.12.2005), p 48. I would like to thank Sharka Jarska for translating the passage.

10 See IFLDP interviews with Libuse H. (Czech Republic, 9.1.2006).

11 See IFLDP interviews with Ladislav M. (Czech Republic, 10.1.2006).

12 See IFLDP interviews with Boleslav W. (Czech Republic, 20.12.2005).

13 See IFLDP interviews with Lucjan P. (KARTA, Poland, 17.6.2005).

continued hunger, disease and exhaustion. However, more and more of the forced labourers were able to be liberated by the approaching allied troops. Which of the three main allied powers liberated them could make a crucial difference. Generally speaking, the British attempted to quickly repatriate all displaced persons – a large proportion of whom were former forced labourers – from their occupied zone so as to be able to withdraw their personnel as quickly as possible and minimize the costs of occupation. The Americans were the first to feel responsible for a reconciliation of interests between the victors, the Germans and the displaced persons (DPs). This required a longer – and financial – commitment. By contrast, the Soviet Union was directly affected by the problem in two ways: the former forced labourers, for the most part, came from their own territories, and they were urgently required as workers to reconstruct the war-ravaged country. This led to a collision of interests among political leaders since the repatriates were considered to be ‘enemies of the state’. At the same time, the Western allies on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other were at pains to secure the return of their own prisoners of war and use those of their counterparts as bargaining tool during negotiations. France adopted a special position since there were many DPs in the country. These were to leave France immediately. However, the French were in no great hurry to repatriate displaced persons from their zone of occupation in Germany as this would have involved considerable logistical and organisational efforts.¹⁴ What is striking in the accounts of former forced labourers is above all the strong contrast between the positive memories of in particular American soldiers, and the often negative depictions of Soviet soldiers.

Between displaced person (DP) camps and repatriation

Even the well-meaning liberators were not interested in uncontrolled mass migration. The French, Belgians and Dutch liberated in the west had the possibility of freely making their way back home. Thanks to the International Red Cross, special efforts were undertaken to repatriate Scandinavian slave and forced labourers, sometimes even during the final stages of the war.¹⁵ However, the majority of forced labourers were initially re-housed in collective accommodation. The inactivity, uncertainty and overcrowding in the camps quickly descended into a depressing and seemingly endless wait to be sent home, or whatever alternative arose. Now DPs, the former forced labourers again tried to accustom themselves to something resembling normal life. The majority of our interviewees arrived home in trains, lorries or other vehicles, some of which were only marginally better equipped than those in which they had been sent to Germany or the occupied territories all those years before. Now, however, they had different expectations and emotions. During their journeys, it was always advantageous to be with friends or acquaintances as the circumstances were still precarious. Food, for example, was sometimes scarce on leaving the areas covered by the United Nations’ aid organisation UNRRA. Travelling with acquaintances also meant that somebody was there with advice if, for example, a train stopped and either volunteers were needed for working with the occupied powers or if there was a possibility of rebuilding a livelihood in a settlement area. After all, the forced labourers

¹⁴ For general information on the French policy towards displaced persons, see Rinke, Andreas, *Le grand retour. Die französische Displaced Persons-Politik*, Microfiche-Edition, Hannover 1999.

¹⁵ See IFLDP interviews with Ruth H. (Norway, 6.5.2005).

might already have known at this point that their homes had been destroyed and/or abandoned. The interviews with those who returned home suggest that the Western military or administrative personnel allegedly frequently offered the prospect of possible expatriation, mostly to the USA, which they declined in order to prove their loyalty to the home country.¹⁶ This plays an important role especially in the accounts by Poles and (Western) Ukrainians, as returning to the Soviet occupied zone triggered the greatest rejections and for the returning forced labourers resulted in a particular pressure for legitimacy.

Homecoming and the reactions of home countries and host societies

Return to the Soviet Union

Those returning to the Soviet Union often faced an 'initial disappointment' as soon as they reached the border.¹⁷ The Soviet repression against former forced labourers seems to have been particularly harsh in western Ukraine, as the filtration of the repatriates was entangled with the war against the independence movement and the search for members of the Russian Liberation Army (the so-called Vlassov army).¹⁸ On the other hand, the female forced labourers who returned to the remote countryside had good chances of avoiding more detailed intelligence-service controls. However, they were almost inescapable for city dwellers, especially those with high education and career ambitions. Alongside the temporary detentions by the occupation troops, conscriptions to the Red Army, resettlements, expatriations, internments and renewed periods of forced labour which potentially caused further disfranchisement, humiliation or even dangers to life,¹⁹ it was in particular the interrogations by the intelligence services which became a symbol of continued persecution. During these, the intelligence services attempted to coerce former forced labourers into collaboration, especially given their precarious economic, social and political situation. But even without these experiences, there were repatriates who despite being able to return more or less unchallenged to their home villages suffered from lifelong fears which triggered strong individual uncertainties and social distrust.²⁰ Especially during the immediate post-war period, many former forced labourers reported having nightmares, flashbacks and feeling other traumatic effects of their war-time experiences.²¹ In accounts of their homecoming, female interviewees from Eastern Europe in particular

16 See IFLDP interviews with Ivan K. (Voronezh State Teacher Training University, Russia, 15./17.7.2005); IFLDP interviews with Iwan G. (RWTH Aachen, Belarus, 31.8.2005). By contrast, some requests from Jewish slave labourers were accepted.

17 See the translation of the IFLDP interviews with Angela D. (Slovenia, 18.3.2006), p. 3.

18 See IFLDP interviews with Petro G. (University of Lviv, Ukraine, 5.7.2006).

19 On temporary detentions, see Goeken, Ulrike, Von der Kooperation zur Konfrontation. Die sowjetischen Repatriierungsoffiziere in den westlichen Besatzungszonen, in: Müller, Klaus Dieter/ Nikischkin, Konstantin/ Wagenlehner, Günther, Die Tragödie der Gefangenschaft in Deutschland und der Sowjetunion, Köln/Weimar 1998, p 315-334, here p. 330 onwards. On conscription, see Naumov, Vladimir/ Reschin, Leonid, Repressionen gegen sowjetische Kriegsgefangene und zivile Repatrianten in der UdSSR 1941-1956, in: Müller/Nikischkin/Wagenlehner, Die Tragödie, p335-364, here p. 343. On repatriations, resettlements and internments see Naumov/Reschin, Repressionen, p.338.

20 See IFLDP interviews with Raisa B. (History Workshop Minsk, Belarus, 17.8.2005).

21 See, for example, the translation of the IFLDP interviews Pavel U. (Czech Republic, Sub-project Slovakia, 21.6.2006), p. 48.

also reported how, immediately after the end of the war, the frequently encountered contempt of native populations for repatriates manifested itself in more brutal gender relations. An example of this is the evidence for relations between the ultimately victorious and overwhelmingly male Red Army soldiers and the female forced labourers who had been compelled to support the losers.²² Interviewees often only hinted at the threats, attacks and even rapes perpetrated towards the end of the war in filtration camps or on the way home by soldiers initially perceived as liberators, because it was too difficult to talk about them directly.²³ The 'blemish' of forced labour continued to have an effect on gender relations later in life. The widely enforced silence sometimes isolated the victims from their husbands and could lead or contribute to marital breakdowns.²⁴ Or their biography became a 'burden' for the occupational, political or societal ambitions of their partners, which again put relationships under pressure.²⁵ However, there were relatively few relationships between former forced labourers. Rather, they sought people who for various reasons themselves occupied marginal positions in society.²⁶

Return to Eastern Europe

Poland developed only very subtle sanction strategies against former forced labourers. Upon their return, they as a rule did not suffer any further discrimination linked to their having worked for Germany. However, in individual cases, they suffered persecution and fear, lost their jobs or were barred from further school or vocational education.²⁷ However, having undertaken forced labour for Germany was – as in most East European countries apart from the Soviet Union – a rather flexible incriminating device that could be tacitly deployed, for example, when somebody attracted attention during the political unrest of 1956. Admittedly, there are also reports of active participation by former forced labourers in the communist parties of Eastern Europe, which at least points to a certain penetrability in the new political order. In the countries of former Yugoslavia, where the victors were still attempting to secure their positions of power in the wake of the Second World War, the repatriates were sometimes viewed with great distrust.²⁸ In Slovenia, for example, police controls were set up; however, these were not comparable to the Soviet filtration system in either logistical or systemic terms. Nonetheless, the immediate post-war period witnessed numerous revenge killings and uncontrolled punitive actions, involving many lines of confrontation. Especially virulent was the fundamental ethnic dimension, which set Serbs, Slovenians, Croats and Bosnians against each other (again). However, this could be

22 See IFLDP interviews with Regina L. (KARTA, Poland, 2.7.2005); IFLDP interviews with Ljudmila T. (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, 11.10.2005); IFLDP interviews with Bloeme E. (Netherlands, 30.6.2005).

23 See IFLDP interviews with Nadja S. (Germany, 2.11.2005); IFLDP interviews with Ermine J.-B. (Latvia, 31.8.2005).

24 See IFLDP interviews with Alexandra S. (Voronezh State Teacher Training University, Russia, 7./9.7.2005)

25 See IFLDP interviews with Jekaterina S. (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, 2.8.2006).

26 See IFLDP interviews with Nina D. (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, 14.7.2005).

27 See IFLDP interviews with Jozef S. (KARTA, Polen, 6.7.2005).

28 See IFLDP interviews with Janez B. (Slovenia, 8.8.2005).

undercut or intensified by concurrent religious, political and social tensions, depending on whether these developed analogously to or across ethnical conflicts, or were perceived as doing so.²⁹ The former forced labourers had to do nothing more than accept with the marginalised social positions marked out for them if they wanted to be able to live their lives to some degree unchallenged.

Return to Western Europe

Similar things can be observed with the return to Western Europe. For example, the best that Italian prisoners of war could hope for was to be left in peace. Following their capture by the German army in the autumn of 1943, they were particularly badly treated as ‘traitors to the axis’ when deployed in forced labour. Following their homecoming, they were largely ignored during the post-war period as they did not fit into the self-perception, increasingly propagated by state and society, of a resisting Italy. The French deported to Germany under the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* faced a similar situation. Despite their rapid occupational and social re-integration, society increasingly refused to recognise these forced labourers as victims of the National Socialist or Petain regimes. To some extent, this refusal lives on today. The specific problems linked to their situation – notably having been conscripted by the collaboration government of their own country to work for the war-time enemy – is reflected in accounts that document the strong pressures on former forced labourers to justify themselves to the many prisoners of war and those deported by the Germans.

... they picked me up, yes, that was, despite everything else, a sign ... They were friends of my age who were resistance fighters. They were older than me, a little, but after all, they were resistance fighters. No, but my integration was conducted quite well, but there were some who criticised us because we went to Germany to work.; but that was so easy to say, and more difficult... In 1943, if it had been possible for me not to go, I wouldn't have gone.³⁰

The situation for Spanish slave labourers who wanted to return home was even more complicated. Since they had generally either fled the Franco army for political reasons, had been interned or even sent to concentration camps, they were also further persecuted under Franco following 1945. As a result, they could enter Spain only illegally or had to remain in exile, sometimes until the late 1970s.³¹ Even if they returned to their home villages after the end of the war, they faced the threat of possible denunciation from resentful or Franco-supporting neighbours.

Forced labourers who remained in Germany

Those former forced labourers who remained in Germany paint a somewhat different picture of their situation. Initially, they were able to take advantage of the unclear occupation situation, the protection of the allied forces and existing contacts with

29 See IFLDP interviews with Joze B. (Slovenia, 15.9.2005); IFLDP interviews with Andrija M. (Serbia and Montenegro, 29.7.2005); IFLDP interviews with Milan D. (Serbia and Montenegro, 28.7.2005).

30 Translation of the IFLDP interviews with Andre D. (France, 23.6.2006), p. 25f.

31 See IFLDP interviews with Neus C. (Spain, 28.4./30.11.2005).

sympathetic Germans. However, they became increasingly marginalised and subjected to the quest for administrative order, on the one hand because of the passing of time since the end of the war and on the other hand because the Germans progressively assumed more and more administrative responsibilities. Following the re-installation of German authority, they were declared as 'homeless foreigners' in 1951. Even those who managed to integrate into mainstream society were accepted only begrudgingly. Even when they attempted not to overly stress or even actively concealed their origins or cultural identity, the relatives of their partners and their neighbours in many cases continued to refer to these for many years.³² Generally speaking, former forced labourers did not consciously sever links with their home countries; rather, they saw their displacement first as a temporary break determined by circumstances. However, as the years and decades passed, thoughts on returning home increasingly played a subordinate role in their life perspectives, to be replaced - in retrospect at least - by short-term but often highly symbolic visits home loaded with complex emotions. Only belatedly, and in the worst cases not at all, did they manage to step out from the shadows of the past which, from the perspective of many Germans, they still epitomised. As forced labourers have grown old and have once again increasingly contemplated their past war-time experiences, questions regarding home again play a more important role, linked to some extent to approaching death and the question of where they would like to be buried.³³

Emigrants

The former forced labourers who emigrated, and in particular the Jews among them, appear not to regret their decision. After years of humiliation and disfranchisement and the ensuing years of uncertainty and waiting, an atmosphere of optimism now broke out amongst emigrant displaced persons. Prevented from confronting themselves overly with their own past, not least by an environment that was often preoccupied with different memories and problems, they devoted themselves energetically to building a new existence.³⁴ They actively attempted to put the past behind them. As a result, their relationships with their home countries were also pushed into the background, which was counterbalanced by their largely successful attempts at integrating into their respective exile communities and/or host societies. The memory of their home country gave way to a comparatively sober sense of solidarity, just as they present forced labour as a whole in a generally detached manner.

Return and emigration of Jews

Jewish slave workers frequently experienced liberation as some sort of renaissance. As this Czech survivor puts it:

32 See IFLDP interviews with Nadja S. (Germany, 2.11.2005); IFLDP interviews with Josef B. (Germany, 13.12.2005).

33 See IFLDP interviews with Nadja S. (Germany, 2.11.2005); IFLDP interviews with Josef B. (Germany, 13.12.2005).

34 See IFLDP interviews with Charles G. (Breman Museum, USA, 16.8.2005); IFLDP Interviews with Harry R. (Breman Museum, USA, 17.8.2005).

*I'd made it. Everything ran wonderfully, I would make it home, and my father would take care of me, and my life would be as it had been before. And the surge of energy and the surge of hope overwhelmed everything. I was in the first truck that left Bergen-Belsen.*³⁵

At the same time, their future prospects were particularly poor. Returning home was not an option for those whose houses had been destroyed or whose families had been murdered. In addition, anti-Semitism was still rife – across the whole of Europe. If Jews did return home, this was almost exclusively for reasons of familiarity or feelings of togetherness. Despite increasingly anti-Semitic tendencies in the former Soviet territories since the late 1940s, our interviews reveal that some Jewish survivors had some impressive post-war careers, notably also in the former axis countries of Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary.³⁶ Since Jews in these countries were barred from positions of influence in the civil service and politics, they turned to industry, commerce and science. Moreover, strict bans were soon imposed on emigration to Israel.³⁷ The conditions of existence for Jewish communities were anything but favourable, such that personal successes are the exception rather than the rule. The emigration of Jews from displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria to the West or to Palestine or Israel was also restricted and difficult. Some countries were particularly reluctant to accept Jews from Eastern European countries.³⁸ Given these circumstances, many Jewish displaced persons did not necessarily remain in the first country to which they emigrated. Rather, they moved again in the immediate post-war period, in the 1950s or even later, to second or third countries of emigration.³⁹ In addition, Jewish emigrants in many cases considered emigration to Israel as a distant objective and saw their stays in other countries merely as intermediate stopovers. However, the opposite also occurred: Some Jewish emigrants did not feel able to cope with the living conditions of the pioneer and settler society taking shape in Israel, whose relationships with its neighbouring countries were highly fraught.⁴⁰ For the most part, the survivors followed their relatives who had emigrated either before or during the war, or they joined in exile the survivors of their own or other Jewish communities, or joined other communities of survivors.

Return of Roma

The return home was also an uncertain perspective for Roma since their countries of origin were not necessarily happy to see them (again). Their houses and families had also been destroyed, albeit not systematically, by the occupiers. In addition, the Roma

35 Translation of IFLDP interviews with Anita S. (Yale University, USA, 16.10.2005), p. 48.

36 See IFLDP interviews with Liviu B. (Romania, 15.6.2005); IFLDP interviews with David C. (Bulgaria, 8.6.2005); IFLDP Interviews with Ede Z. (Hungary, 11.5.2005); IFLDP interviews with Janos W. (Hungary, 28.4./5.5.2005).

37 See IFLDP interviews with Nandor H. (Hungary, sub-project Slovakia, 10./11.7. and 22.8.2005).

38 See paper presented by Suzanne Rutland (Sydney) 'Sanctuary for whom? Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators in post-war Australian migrant camps' to the conference 'Beyond camps and forced labour' in London, 11- 13 January 2006.

39 See IFLDP interviews with Violette F. (South Africa, 5.3.2006).

40 See IFLDP interviews with Zoltan G. (Yale University, USA, 16.12.2005).

were not extensively or universally conscripted for forced labour. In Macedonia, for example, they faced repression from the Bulgarian occupying forces, who indiscriminately forced them to work, mostly on construction projects, before allowing them to return home a few months later. Some Roma used this opportunity to join partisan groups.⁴¹ For the Roma, persecution during the Second World War did not appear to be such an unusual experience: it did not necessarily trigger biographical or social disruption, and did not demand a new start in life after the war. For the most part, the Roma returned to join the survivors of a Roma community, or they established new communities and attempted to live their lives as before. Despite the deep political changes in both Eastern and Western Europe, this could still mean continued discrimination. In some cases, such as in the Soviet Union, they were deported again since their lifestyle and their cultural and religious background was not necessarily compatible with Soviet communism.⁴² Especially in the case of Bosnian Roma who fled to, amongst other countries, Germany before the civil war between the countries of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, memories of forced labour and the Second World War were overshadowed by new experiences of war and persecution, or were updated in a changed context.⁴³ In these cases, memories are repeatedly refracted as Germany, formerly a country of persecution, now offers safety in times of contemporary violence, even if the country shows conflicting attitudes towards refugees.

Remembering and dealing with forced labour between homecoming and emigration

The former National Socialist forced labourers, longing to return home or build new homes, were after the war largely received across all countries in a either rejecting or neutral manner. Whilst very heterogeneous paths from repatriation to emigration can be traced, some general tendencies are nonetheless observable. After the war, repatriates attempted to organise themselves as former forced labourers, inasmuch as this was permitted by political framework conditions. As a result, memorial communities were established, leaving visible marks in respective individual representations. There emerged amongst them a strong biographical connection to the pre-war or wartime periods. They remember forced labour predominantly as a loss of life chances. Recent investigations, however, point to an increasing number of survivors who, beneath the enforced deportation and exploitation, refer to gains in personal orientation and the meaningful life-history experiences that remain from surviving this existential threat.⁴⁴ Behaviour patterns acquired during periods of forced labourer proved to be useful, especially in societies where victims were again confronted with repression. In individual cases, there is even evidence of work-related benefits that arose from forced labour in Germany.⁴⁵ The majority of former forced labourers wanted to return home, despite the serious warnings of negative consequences. However, the decision

41 See IFLDP interviews with Redzep E. (Macedonia, 23./26.12.2005).

42 See IFLDP interviews with Konstantins C. (Latvia, 29.8.2005).

43 See IFLDP interviews with Omer A. (Bosnia, 16.5.2005); IFLDP interviews with Osman H. (Bosnia, 23.7.2005).

44 See IFLDP interviews with Jurij C. (Voronezh State Teacher Training University, Russia, 4.4.2006).

45 See IFLDP interviews with Michail B. (History Workshop, Minsk, Belarus, 16.8/5.10.2005).

by some to stay in Germany or emigrate was mainly informed by fears of repression in their home countries, by economic or political considerations, or simply because they had found a foreign partner.⁴⁶ Although the former forced labourers who stayed in Germany remained strongly attached to their home countries, they nonetheless attempted to integrate as quickly as possible and without attracting attention to themselves. Such endeavours were also generally observable amongst repatriates, although in many cases they were denied equally successful outcomes. The former forced labourers who remained in Germany, in common with those who emigrated, tended to stick together with their compatriots. In retrospect, they tended to consider forced labour as a fateful intrusion, which they sought to deal with as pragmatically as possible. Their decision to remain in a country where they had been subordinated and exploited for so many years was generally a result of growing personal relationships or job offers following the war. By contrast, emigrants wanted to separate themselves clearly from the country in which they have undertaken forced labour and begin a new life. They attempted actively to assimilate themselves into their host societies, even more so than those former forced labourers who remained in Germany. These attempts at assimilation were aided by engaging with and in some cases appropriating the political and cultural opportunities offered by their host societies for dealing with their past. The severing of links with their countries of origin led former forced labourers to conserve many pre-war and wartime impressions of their home countries or Germany. These impressions continue to have a strong influence over their contemporary accounts. In general, however, these impressions are more pronounced among emigrants than among those who remained in Germany. For the emigrants, forced labour has become something of a springboard into a new life. Unlike the Jewish survivors, the Roma ultimately rarely organised themselves as victims, undertook few public attempts at obtaining compensation and only to a small extent formed noticeable memorial communities. By actively pursuing such matters, the Jewish survivors have forged a strong new identity, or at least maintained their identity.

46 See IFLDP interviews with Nadja S. (Germany, 2.11.2005); IFLDP interviews with Josef B. (Germany, 13.12.2005).