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Research on Lockdown: Digital Scholarship in Madrid during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sara J. Brenneis

On March 10, 2020, the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid was as serene as usual: scholars quietly paging through texts in the María Moliner Reading Room, security guards scanning laptops, cafeteria staff serving up generous portions of paella. Unbeknownst to me then, this would be my last day at the Biblioteca Nacional or any other archive in Spain during my research leave. The next day, schools in Spain closed, and the day after that, the Biblioteca Nacional shut down indefinitely. For a few days, in corresponding with archivists in Spain, there was a sense that the two-week “state of alarm” would be a minor inconvenience and that we would all be back to work by the end of March. As I tried to navigate online periodicals only accessible via the Biblioteca Nacional’s computers, a friendly librarian promised me over email: “Cuidaremos de su pupitre hasta su regreso.” But as the pandemic curve grew, my hope that I could finish the project I’d come to Spain to research bottomed out.

Quickly moving from in person to online archival research during the remainder of my sabbatical in Spain revealed a number of resources about which I was previously unaware, while also motivating personal communication with other scholars in similar situations. The wealth of digital materials I encountered eased the transition away from in-person research and allowed me to maintain the momentum I had gained on my project. Nevertheless, my “remote turn,” was of necessity, not because I suddenly decided that it was the most thorough way to approach my project. Ultimately, the digital resources I found were more advantageous as supplements to the presential research in which I had been immersed. Reading Lara Putnam’s meditation on digital scholarship in her article “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast” through the vicissitudes of a global pandemic that forced academics worldwide into a form of online hiding reveals the limitations of a digital-only research strategy. Folding digital scholarship into archival digging and face-to-face collaboration, on the other hand, has enriched my research substantially. In the final tally, the radical substitution of digital for analog research imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is a poor substitute for the kind of in-person research our fields demand.

The focus here is on the methodology behind one case study: my own mandatory online repositioning. Yet it’s important to state clearly that any productive research was mitigated by young children at home, a lack of access to crucial texts and the pervasive anxiety of the unknown that accompanied the complete shutdown of all services in Madrid. The poet and scholar Alex

Saum-Pascual reflected on her own experience with this calamitous mix in Berkeley, California by describing the only work she was able to produce during the first weeks of the pandemic: a sock giraffe for her son.¹ As we consider how to do Iberian History during a time of global crisis, foregrounding the precariousness of maintaining a work/life balance is crucial. Researchers who carved out the physical and mental space to continue their scholarship during the COVID-19 pandemic—or any other personal crisis—are among the privileged few.

One report that burned through social media in the early days of the coronavirus crisis noted that single-author submissions by women to three academic journals had declined or flattened out during the first month of the pandemic. Gender imbalances apparent in the work/family juggling act in academia predate COVID-19 but, as the author notes, “the coronavirus has simply exacerbated these inequities by stripping away what supports women had in place to walk this tightrope, including childcare.”² Layer on top of this inequity the undue burdens that faculty of color carry, and it is clear that many female faculty are stealing research time whenever and however they can.³ The realities that divide the research “haves” from the research “have nots” must be made visible.⁴

I would like to write that once I shifted my research to a purely digital environment, seeking out online resources was a careful and conscientious process, but the reality is that I stumbled over internet archives, reference materials and databases in an entirely ad hoc manner, often while half-watching preschool videos alongside my 5-year-old. Indeed, Putnam spells out this methodological absence explicitly, writing that “[d]igital search offers disintermediated discovery,” which is to say that “historians can find without knowing where to look.”⁵ Roger L. Martínez-Dávila takes this assessment a step

¹ Alex Saum-Pascual, “ARC Fellows: Sore Thumbs,” Arts Research Center, University of California, Berkeley, posted April 13, 2020, <https://arts.berkeley.edu/arc-fellows-sore-thumbs/>

² Colleen Flaherty, “No Room of One's Own,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity>

³ See Emma Pettit, “Being a Woman in Academe Has Its Challenges. A Global Pandemic? Not Helping,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 26, 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Being-a-Woman-in-Academe-Has/248852>

⁴ Many academics on social media amplified these concerns during the first months of the COVID-19 outbreaks in Europe and North America, including Rose Casey, an assistant professor of English at West Virginia University, who tweeted: “For the record: trying to work while parenting and with no childcare IS harder than for colleagues without young children. Saying as much isn’t demanding special privileges but to acknowledge why childcare matters and one of the particular ways that the pandemic is affecting us,” @ARoseCasey, Twitter post, May 28, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ARoseCasey/status/1266063104426872833>

⁵ Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” *American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (April 2016): 377.

further in his case study of online archival resources in Spain, writing that the digital search that is commonly a scholar's first step, "[a]lthough it is a direct and effective method, [...] is neither exhaustive nor conclusive in terms of locating digital collections," particularly given the shortcomings of the Spanish archival system he lays out in his article.⁶ Putnam proposes that in the pre-digital era the taxonomy of steps taken to undertake a research project in the field of history start with a visit to the local institutional library and end up with a trip to the archives "near where it happened."⁷ In contrast, even before COVID-19, Putnam argues that research in the digital age effectively begins with a "sideways glance" that kicks off in the Google search box and proceeds to other digital resources in wide circulation, such as Wikipedia, JSTOR, and Ancestry.com. As researchers fall deeper into the internet rabbit hole, I would add digital resources available via national governments or cultural institutions to Putnam's list, should the historian be able to investigate in the local language. Mitigating factors to completing in-person research such as travel restrictions, lack of funding, absence of childcare, curtailed leave time, and limited access to housing are all part of the equation as we collectively look to the internet instead of the archive as our point of departure.

Surmounting the above obstacles, I set out to write a critical study combining literary, cultural and historical analysis of the Spanish Mauthausen survivor Carlos Rodríguez del Risco while on a year-long sabbatical in Spain during the 2019-20 academic year. I had completed the research for my previous books in private archives and the national libraries in Madrid and Barcelona, but it became clear that for this project, I would need to delve into the Spanish national archives.⁸ What began in September 2019 as a clear mission to transcribe, annotate and translate the articles Rodríguez del Risco published in the regime's official newspaper on his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp, by April 2020 was an odyssey through sources and methodologies I never could have imagined.

Born in 1907 in Vilanova i la Geltrú (Catalonia), Rodríguez del Risco was a sailor, the son of a career military officer. Despite a history of confrontations with his military superiors, which may have been exacerbated by his father's demotion when Manuel Azaña restructured the Armed Forces, Rodríguez del Risco defended the Republic during the Spanish Civil War. As the Republic's defeat became clear, he fled Spain by boat in January 1939 and ran aground in

⁶ Roger L. Martínez-Dávila, "Forum: Spanish Online Resources for Spanish and Latin American History," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 94-95.

⁷ Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable," 381.

⁸ Sara J. Brenneis, *Genre Fusion: A New Approach to History, Fiction, and Memory in Contemporary Spain* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue UP, 2014); Brenneis, *Spaniards in Mauthausen: Representations of a Nazi Concentration Camp, 1940-2015* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 2018).

France, where he was interned in the French refugee camps of Argelès-sur-Mer and Gurs. Prompted by the inhospitable conditions in the French camps and pressure from local authorities, Rodríguez del Risco joined the French Foreign Legion. He saw action along the Alsatian front in World War II before being captured at Saint-Germain, forced to march from France to the Netherlands and sent to a POW camp in Fallingbommel, Germany. On September 8, 1940, he was deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp near Linz, Austria. He details his trajectory from Spain to Austria in “Yo he estado en Mauthausen,” published in 34 installments in the Falangist newspaper *Arriba* in the spring of 1946. His riveting and historically-accurate account of his five years in the Nazi camp constitutes the first concentration camp narrative published in Spain. Nevertheless, his story is also undermined by the author’s antisemitic, denialist and apologist sentiments that at times negate what we would come to know as the Holocaust while lauding Hitler and Franco as saviors. Rodríguez del Risco would return to Spain shortly after the end of the Second World War, seemingly never to be heard from again. The contradictions inherent in the narrative coupled with the mystery surrounding the author and the publication of his account only deepen the need to unravel this formative text.⁹

My initial methodology in researching Rodríguez del Risco and his articles benefited from what Putnam calls the “experiential friction” that results from interacting with “in-country intellectuals” who opened doors and made suggestions that would prove to be consequential to my work.¹⁰ While I spent my days in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, requesting print materials as needed, in-person encounters with Spanish scholars and activists steered me toward novel sources. One Spanish colleague suggested that I request Rodríguez del Risco’s police file from the Ministerio del Interior, a process that bore fruit months after the initial query. A local activist’s invitation to attend the inauguration of a national monument to Spanish victims of the Nazis on January 30, 2020 at the Jardín de Nuevos Ministerios in Madrid gave me another vantage point into the experiences of the families of Spaniards who died in the camps. There, I spoke with Eufemio Jaime García, who was six when he, his mother and his older sister watched from the train convoy as his father entered Mauthausen, never to see him again; his advocacy as an 86-year-old was a testament to the survivors’ and their families’ urgency for some form of governmental resolution. And a colleague’s generous offer to use a personal connection in a regional Registro Civil office in

⁹ This research is the focus of a forthcoming critical edition of “Yo he estado en Mauthausen.” Though some of the details on Rodríguez del Risco and the *Arriba* articles warrant updating in light of new research discoveries, I first delved into the content and context of these articles in Sara J. Brenneis, “Carlos Rodríguez del Risco and the First Spanish Voice from the Holocaust,” *History & Memory* 25, No. 1 (2013), 51-76.

¹⁰ Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable,” 395.

Northern Spain led to Rodríguez del Risco's death certificate. What is more, we learned from the death certificate that Rodríguez del Risco had a daughter, Luisa Rodríguez, of whose existence I had been previously unaware. Along with conversations with librarians and archivists, these personal encounters were an invaluable boon to my research, and simply could not have happened in a purely digital realm. Putnam reminds us that analog research—and the unforeseen encounters that may accompany it—is inherently inefficient, as it depends on luck.¹¹ Nevertheless, this inefficiency has the potential to drive discoveries and make connections that we cannot count on achieving in the sterile world of the search engine.

In a similar vein, the time-consuming nature of in-person archival research also depends, at least in Spain, on good fortune. Navigating byzantine cataloging systems and untying endless archival knots, I did not always find what I was looking for, but I always found something extraordinary in the archives. A note from Antonio Machado to General Vicente Rojo in the Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN) in Madrid with a handwritten addendum erroneously stated that the poet died in a concentration camp after leaving Spain; ledgers, memos, correspondence and bills from the busy regime censorship offices during the 1940s at the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares drew a picture of the processes governing state-mandated press restrictions during the first decade of the Franco dictatorship; a 1938 letter from “TODAS LAS MADRES (no os quepa la menor duda)” in the town of Vilanova i la Geltrú protesting the use of men under twenty years of age at the front found at the Centro Documental de la Memória Histórica (CDMH) in Salamanca lent a collective female voice to the overwhelmingly masculine sources on the Spanish Civil War.¹² Although digital searches alone may point the scholar more directly to the desired source, Putnam writes that they “can permit us to string anecdotes into compelling tales without really seeing the terrain they span. Analog search both requires and provides crucial learning along the way to discovery.”¹³ I never did find a censorship file on Rodríguez del Risco's articles in AGA or see his name listed among refugees in the French internment camps in AHN, but the documents I encountered gave me a sense of the circumstances and context of his life that I would not have gleaned otherwise.

In addition to archival visits and fortunate encounters with colleagues, living in Madrid pre-pandemic allowed me to gain an at-times intangible

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Archivo Histórico Nacional, Fondo General Vicente Rojo, Caja 6/1, Subcarpeta Nº 1, M-5: Carta Antonio Machado; Archivo General de la Administración, files catalogued under Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Delegación Nacional de Prensa. Sección Información y Censura; Centro Documental de la Memória Histórica, PS Barcelona, C150, E012, p.18 “Al Comité del FRENTE POPULAR DE VILLANUEVA.”

¹³ Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable,” 399.

understanding of Rodríguez del Risco's family's milieu. Putnam writes that "[b]uilding deep place-based knowledge, then, is no longer the path of least resistance within our discipline—yet it may remain the path to greatest insight, even or especially for those pursuing the transnational angle."¹⁴ Even when the research focus is national as opposed to transnational, scholars benefit from experiencing the spaces that are formative for their research subjects. Perhaps one of the most iconic examples of this place-based commitment is Robert Caro's decision to move with his wife Ina to the Texas Hill Country for three years while researching his expansive biography of former US president Lyndon Johnson. It was, as Caro explains it, motivated by his need to gain a "sense of place" of the area where Johnson grew up, to be able to connect with the people there and thus deepen his understanding of a region that was formative for the future president. Being there, in turn, would allow Caro to transmit the scenes, spaces and intangible feel of the Texas Hill Country to his readers.¹⁵ In the process, however, Caro also learned about the realities of rural life in America in the 1930s and 1940s, which included a lack of basic health care, the absence of electrical infrastructure and the physical demands placed on women. He began to appreciate a sense of place that stood in direct opposition to what was portrayed in Hollywood movies of the era: "You hear a lot about gunfights in Westerns; you do not hear so much about hauling up the water after a perineal tear."¹⁶

Not everyone can do what Robert Caro did, for many if not all of the reasons of academic imbalances I mentioned previously. Nevertheless, an over-reliance on digital research can effectively obfuscate the "sense of place" that deepens biography and historical analysis alike. While David J. Bodenhamer lays out the array of geospatial technologies at the disposal of the historian to enable the creation of collaborative "deep maps" and other georeferencing tools, Putnam is clear that these digital mapping resources—however transformational—cannot substitute on-the-ground place-based knowledge.¹⁷ Even when we imagine we are dipping into a large urban area solely to mine institutional libraries or archives, she writes, "those cities have stories to tell."¹⁸ In my case, the story Madrid has to tell me about Rodríguez del Risco's life is still incomplete. In 1940, his father, General Pedro Rodríguez García, who served under Alfonso XIII but was summarily removed from his post as Military Governor of Alicante under Azaña, filed an inquiry through the Spanish Red Cross to locate his son, who was at that point imprisoned in the Mauthausen

¹⁴ Ibid., 397.

¹⁵ Robert Caro, *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing* (New York: Knopf, 2019) 141-42

¹⁶ Ibid., xviii.

¹⁷ David J. Bodenhamer, "The spatial humanities: Space, time and place in the new digital age," 23-38 in Toni Weller, ed., *History in the Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁸ Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable," 396.

concentration camp in Austria. The form lists “Calle Torrijos, 29” as the Rodríguez family residence. After finding a “Calle Torrijos” via Google Maps, I spent an afternoon walking through Madrid’s working-class Tetuán neighborhood trying to pinpoint the address. Although I located the short, diagonal Torrijos Street, number 29 did not exist. It was only when I consulted a print reference to Madrid’s cityscape in the Biblioteca Nacional that I realized the street I was looking for was across town: “Calle Torrijos” had been renamed “Calle Conde de Peñalver” in 1941 and was located in the Goya neighborhood. Although by then the Madrid lockdown prevented me from making a similar pilgrimage to Conde de Peñalver Street, this new information provided a window into the Rodríguez family’s relative wealth and status in the Spanish capital during the “years of hunger.” While walking in Tetuán, I had imagined a staunchly Republican family defiantly packed into a working-class neighborhood. A house along the wide tree-lined streets of the Goya neighborhood told a different story, one of postwar compliance, perhaps even collaboration. My spatial research coupled with a “sense of place” of Madrid allowed me to understand that Carlos Rodríguez del Risco’s family may have been more comfortable under the Franco regime than I had first presumed. It shed light on the pro-Franco tone of his articles and how they might have arrived on the doorstep of the regime’s official newspaper.

When the Madrid COVID-19 “hibernation” went into effect, however, my days of crawling the streets and archives were over. I moved into a mode of “term-searching,” in Putnam’s words, combing through the databases and digital repositories with which I was already familiar—having combined them with my analog research at the outset of my research—while also discovering new digital sources through what can only be characterized as hunches and happenstance. Of necessity, the transnational digital-only researcher must assume the role of librarian and archivist as well, with remote guidance from a library information specialist willing to answer queries, as we assess sources in the moment and chase down digitized archival documents. While digital historical scholarship marches ever forward, Martínez-Dávila’s assessment that, in Spain, “[t]he only manner to determine if the records are available in an electronic format from an institution is through a polite inquiry to the archive via postal correspondence, email, or a telephone call” is, in my experience, still largely accurate.¹⁹

Two online resources were part of my arsenal of digital reference material before the Biblioteca Nacional closed, as I discovered that the aggregated biographical information they contained was a more efficient means of learning about Spanish historical figures than scouring print reference materials. The [Diccionario Biográfico electrónico](#) (DB~e) provides biographic information on tens of thousands of Spaniards, with useful bibliographic references for further inquiry. A project of the Real Academia de la Historia in conjunction with Spain’s

¹⁹ Martínez-Dávila, “Forum: Spanish Online Resources,” 95.

Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, the DB~e is an electronic version of the Academy's multi-volume *Diccionario Biográfico Español*. With 50,000 historical figures from the 7th Century through today related to Spain and its former territories and entries written by Spanish historians, this is a reliable site for renowned and obscure historical figures alike.²⁰ A similar source for biographical information, the [Diccionario Biográfico del Socialismo Español](#), created by the Fundación Pablo Iglesias, focuses on Spanish Socialists since the foundation of the PSOE in 1879 through the end of the dictatorship in 1975. This collaborative biographic dictionary boasts more than 43,000 entries authored by dozens of Spanish scholars.²¹ Both sources helped me contextualize references Rodríguez del Risco made to leaders, politicians and writers of his era.

Before going fully online, I had also identified a suite of databases that catalogue Spanish victims of the Nazi concentration camps. Spain lacks a central, comprehensive database of Spaniards deported to Nazi camps akin to the Yad Vashem Archives or the Arolsen Archives. This absence is, at its core, an unfortunate byproduct of the lack of a national reckoning with the complicity of the Franco regime in the deportation of Spaniards to Nazi camps and the nonexistence of a central government agency to account for these victims. For a number of years the only reliable source on Spanish prisoners in Nazi camps was [Españoles deportados a Campos de Concentración Nazis \(1940-1945\)](#).²² This database is based on the Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte-initiated study by Benito Bermejo and Sandra Checa: *Libro Memorial: Españoles deportados a los campos nazis (1940-1945)*, published in a print edition in 2006.²³ Catalogued under the umbrella of the Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES), this database has been updated to correct errors in the print edition, but not to incorporate additional information uncovered in the intervening years.

The interface for the [Españoles deportados a Campos de Concentración Nazi](#) database suffers from some limitations for users who do not already possess substantial information about a deportee, including their complete name, surnames and home region. There are also a significant number of individuals who were imprisoned or died in Mauthausen who have not been catalogued. In searching for “Patricio Cruz,” a fellow Spanish Mauthausen prisoner whom

²⁰ “¿Qué es el DB~e?” <http://dbe.rah.es/db~e> and Diccionario Biográfico electrónico, <http://dbe.rah.es/> (accessed October 7, 2020).

²¹ Diccionario Biográfico del Socialismo Español, <https://www.fpabloiglesias.es/archivo-y-biblioteca/diccionario-biografico/> (accessed October 7, 2020).

²² [Españoles deportados a Campos de Concentración Nazis \(1940-1945\)](#), <http://pares.mcu.es/Deportados/servlets/ServletController> (accessed October 7, 2020).

²³ Benito Bermejo and Sandra Checa, *Libro memorial: Españoles deportados a los campos nazis (1940-1945)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, Subdirección General de Publicaciones, Información y Documentación, 2006).

Rodríguez del Risco mentions in the course of his articles, for instance, the database alerts the user that there are no results. Yet a subsequent search incorporating the second surname for “Cruz Coletó”—information I found in an entirely different source—turns up the listing for “Patricio Cruz Coletó,” native of Córdoba who survived until the camp’s liberation on May 5, 1945. The idiosyncratic and temperamental nature of this database makes it useful primarily to corroborate information gleaned elsewhere or as a digital source to use in conjunction with Bermejo and Checa’s print repository.

After years of institutional in-fighting and interrupted access to researchers, the Memorial Democràtic sector of the Catalan autonomous government made its [Banc de la Memòria Democràtica](#) available to the general public in 2020.²⁴ The [Deportats catalans i espanyols als camps de concentració nazis](#) subset is a joint effort by the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the Amical de Mauthausen and, with over 9,000 individual records, has quickly become a trusted source.²⁵ Moreover, this database attempts to capture each deportee’s trajectory, both before and after their deportation to a Nazi camp. Mining data from camp archives (Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, Mauthausen, Mittelbau-Dora, Natzweiler, Neuengamme, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Stutthof and Treblinka), the Arolsen Archives, the Amical de Mauthausen’s archive and ex-deportee Joan de Diego’s personal archive, the [Deportats catalans i espanyols](#) database not only includes prisoner information, but also an individual’s military record during the Spanish Civil War, date and place of death in France, and cross-references to other primary sources on the deportees, where available.²⁶ This database is particularly nimble and can be updated continuously. As Alfons Aragoneses, legal historian and coordinator of the Generalitat’s database, predicts: “El proyecto es posible que no se cierre nunca porque no pasa un año sin que se descubran nuevos datos, nuevos testigos de este capítulo fundamental de la historia europea.”²⁷

²⁴ Banc de la Memòria Democràtica, <https://banc.memoria.gencat.cat/ca/app/#/> (accessed October 8, 2020).

²⁵ <http://memoria.gencat.cat/ca/que-fem/banc-memoria-democratica/fons/deportats-catalans-i-espanyols-als-camps-nazis/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

²⁶ The Joan de Diego archive, catalogued at the Museu d’Història de Catalunya, includes an extensive list of Spanish victims gathered while De Diego worked in the Nazi administrative offices as a prisoner. This crucial documentation served as source material for elements of the appendices of Catalan Mauthausen victims in Montserrat Roig’s groundbreaking 1977 historiography, *Els catalans als camps nazis* (Barcelona: Edicions 62). See Brenneis, *Spaniards in Mauthausen*, 41-51.

²⁷ “Alfons Aragoneses: ‘Fue difícil hacer entender que la base de datos de deportados a los campos nazis era un proyecto de justicia y de reparación,’” Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, posted May 12, 2020.

More limited efforts to trace the Spanish survivors and victims of the Nazi camps from particular regions abound. These local databases include additional biographical information and often incorporate documents and anecdotes from family archives, which tend not to be represented in the larger databases. The Amical de Mauthausen's Barcelonins deportados a los campos nazis, for instance, adds data from the Barcelona Registro Civil to information gleaned from the Amical's own historical archive, the Joan de Diego archive and the Memorial Democràtic's database to compile a more narrowly-focused resource specifically trained on deportees from Barcelona.²⁸ Fifty entries include longer narrative biographical sketches with photos, in addition to the essential information on 1,100 victims and survivors deported to a Nazi camp.²⁹

At the other extreme, the vast [Arolsen Online Archive](#) – International Center on Nazi Persecution, formerly known as the International Tracing Service (ITS), has made great strides recently to digitize prisoner-of-war and concentration camp records as well as foreign worker documentation, with a fairly straightforward navigational interface in English.³⁰ The Arolsen Archive includes information on more than 17.5 million individuals in over 30 million original documents from the Nazis' records.³¹ Trained in particular on camp and ghetto detainees, forced laborers and displaced persons, the Arolsen Archive includes a wealth of original camp records on Spaniards, including digitized intake cards, forced labor assignments, and medical experimentation documentation, all in German. This database is particularly useful to fill in gaps in the Spanish databases, as it tends to include the full names of deportees as well as their birthplace and birth date as they were recorded when the deportee entered the camp. Although this means that some errors in Nazi recordkeeping have been duplicated, the information on the Spaniards is largely accurate. The depth of the Arolsen Archive continues to grow, in part through the committed contributions of volunteers indexing the documentation while in quarantine during the pandemic.³²

https://www.upf.edu/web/e-noticies/inicio/-/asset_publisher/wEpPxsVRD6Vt/content/id/234858783/maximized (accessed October 9, 2020).

²⁸ Barcelonins deportados a los campos nazis, <http://www.barceloninsdeportats.org/es/index.html> (accessed October 9, 2020).

²⁹ Data provided by Juan Calvo Gascón, Amical de Mauthausen historian, in email correspondence with the author, October 13, 2020.

³⁰ Arolsen Online Archive – International Center on Nazi Persecution, <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/> (accessed October 9, 2020)

³¹ "Who we are," <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/about-us/who-we-are/>; "Welcome to the Online Archive!" <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/search/> (accessed October 9, 2020)

³² Andrew Curry, "How Crowdsourcing Aided a Push to Preserve the Histories of Nazi Victims," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2020, <https://nyti.ms/2XVtPpl>

Curiously, although it was presented as a definitive accounting of Spanish victims, a national effort—the Spanish government’s Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática database [Españoles fallecidos en los campos de concentración nazis](#), which was simultaneously published online and in the Boletín Oficial del Estado in August 2019—is incomplete.³³ Relying exclusively on ten volumes of “Avisos oficiales de decesos de españoles fallecidos en los Campos de concentración de la Alemania Nazi” from the French authorities that were sent to Spain in the 1950s, this reference cites 4,427 “official” Spanish dead, but only records victims at Mauthausen and excludes additional victims absent from the French documents.³⁴ Efforts to identify Spanish deportees has become a crowded digital archival field, at times resulting in confusion and a false sense of thoroughness for researchers.

However, the absence of a single, definitive database on the Spanish deportees to Nazi camps also has positive consequences. The historian Julia Laite observes that, for her own research, “[d]igital searches across multiple library and archive platforms in various countries meant that I could identify faint trails of breadcrumbs that I could follow into physical archives, allowing me to take what would have once been a very time consuming and expensive risk—checking ‘just in case’—with substantially more chance of finding something.”³⁵ In a similar vein, the proliferation of digital databases and archives for Spanish Nazi concentration camp victims and survivors has allowed me to pinpoint individuals referenced in the context of the articles that Rodríguez del Risco wrote who would otherwise have been lost to history. By cross-checking the various databases mentioned above, including the Arolsen Archives, I have been able to determine that when the author references “un español apellidado Plans,” he is referring to Juan Plans Illa, who was gassed at Hartheim Castle in Austria on February 2, 1942. Or that when Rodríguez del Risco mentions “un tal Camp [sic]” and “un hijo suyo,” he means Antoni and Miquel Camps, father and son, who died within two weeks of one another at Gusen.³⁶ These discoveries not only shed light on the subject of my research, but also on the community of Spaniards in Mauthausen in the subcamps and slave labor commandos who suffered and died

³³ Españoles fallecidos en los campos de concentración nazis, <https://reescan.mjusticia.gob.es/reescan/Main.action> (accessed October 9, 2020); “Anuncio de notificación de 6 de agosto de 2019 en procedimiento Listado de españoles fallecidos en los campos de concentración de Mauthausen y Gusen,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 190 Supplement N (August 9, 2019): 1-153.

³⁴ Nicolás Pan-Montojo and Guiomar del Ser, “4.427 nombres españoles contra la barbarie nazi en Mauthausen,” *El País*, August 10, 2019, https://elpais.com/politica/2019/08/08/actualidad/1565283557_304513.html#lista

³⁵ Julia Laite, “The Emmet’s Inch: Small History in a Digital Age,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 53 no. 4, (2019): 972.

³⁶ Carlos Rodríguez del Risco, “Yo he estado en Mauthausen,” *Arriba*, May 15, 1946, 3.

together. In Laite's words, "[t]he potential to be able to place individuals within the fuller context of their own lives is being dramatically improved" (970) in the digital archive.

Additional digital resources have allowed me to flesh out other aspects of Rodríguez del Risco's trajectory, primarily via research into other people he mentions in the course of his writing. This focus on individuals, whom Laite sees as having the potential to "become significant, in and of themselves," in my case was also driven by my reliance on digital scholarship during quarantine.³⁷ Term-searching in the digital archives becomes unwieldy without proper names as anchors: searching "Republican soldiers in exile" elicits more information than is practically manageable, whereas a search for one named soldier has the potential to lead to more finite data. While the military archives in Ávila and Guadalajara remain resolutely analog, a few online portals have aided my progress in tracking these Spanish members of the military. One such source is the [Base de datos de militares republicanos con graduación](#), sponsored by the Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte and hosted by the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica in Salamanca.³⁸ With a name, this database provides information on members of the Spanish Armed Forces published in the Second Republic's official bulletins between 1936-39, which can be then requested via email (though the response time varies, depending on whether the source has been previously digitized).³⁹ Some of the same information from defense publications is more readily accessible through the Ministerio de Defensa's [Biblioteca Virtual de Defensa](#), where downloads are free.⁴⁰ The Biblioteca Virtual de Defensa is more expansive, however, as it encompasses additional primary sources from the Ministerio de Defensa, such as maps, photographs, scores and other documents relating to Spain's long history of scientific and military expeditions.

The recently-redesigned PARES system, a service of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte and confusing during the best of times, hosts a number of portals that were both useful and dead ends during a pandemic that closed down bricks and mortar archives. The [Portal de Víctimas de la Guerra Civil y Represaliados del Franquismo](#) is a clearinghouse for material on individual Civil

³⁷ Laite, "The Emmet's Inch," 975.

³⁸ Base de datos de militares republicanos con graduación, <http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/archivos/mc/archivos/cdmh/bases-de-datos/militares-republicanos.html> (accessed October 9, 2020).

³⁹ The periodicals indexed are *Gaceta de la República*, *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de Defensa*, *Boletín Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, *Boletín Oficial del Instituto de Carabineros* and *Boletín Oficial del Ministerio de Marina y Aire*. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Biblioteca Virtual de Defensa, <http://bibliotecavirtualdefensa.es/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

War and dictatorship-era victims.⁴¹ This portal, which complied with one of the mandates of the 2007 Ley de Memoria Histórica, provides a full name and birthplace after a query, and in turn points the user toward other books, archives and databases that reference the individual searched. As a result, although it is possible to glean useful information through this portal, many documents are only available in person or with an inquiry to the referenced archive.

Another joint-PARES project, [Movimientos Migratorios Iberoamericanos](#), gathers documentation from archives in Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Argentina and Uruguay of Spanish migration throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. A transnational effort by the Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, Movimientos Migratorios Iberoamericanos makes passenger identification cards, ship manifests and other original documentation easily available digitally.⁴²

Searching through hemerotecas—newspaper and periodical archives—though labor-intensive, tends to be a more digital-friendly realm. Although many of the periodicals in the Biblioteca Nacional's [Hemeroteca Digital](#) are only available for in-house users, others are freely accessible.⁴³ This transnational collection of periodicals stretches from 1683 to today, and includes the full text of regional and new world newspapers. In some cases, however, it is more expedient to go straight to the source. For instance, the Spanish daily *ABC* is only available to users at designated computers at the Biblioteca Nacional, but the Archivo ABC's [Hemeroteca Periódico ABC](#) runs back to 1903 and is always available online. Through full-text searches, watermarked page images are available, but users will have to register for an account and pay for high resolution and non-watermarked images.⁴⁴ The Barcelona-based daily *La Vanguardia*'s archive begins in 1888 and provides a full text search as well as free downloads of broadsheets.⁴⁵ Other more idiosyncratic periodicals are also available. I happily stumbled on the Catalan magazine [Triunfo digital](#) archive, where every last page has been digitized. A joint effort by the Universidad de Salamanca, José Ángel Ezcurra and Ediciones Pléyades, the *Triunfo* archive is particularly relevant to the late dictatorship and Spanish transition to democracy as it was felt in Cataluña.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Portal de Víctimas de la Guerra Civil y Represaliados del Franquismo, <http://pares.mcu.es/victimasGCFPortal/staticContent.form?viewName=presentacion> (accessed October 9, 2020).

⁴² Movimientos Migratorios Iberoamericano, <http://pares.mcu.es/MovimientosMigratorios/staticContent.form?viewName=presentacion> (accessed October 9, 2020).

⁴³ Biblioteca Nacional Hemeroteca Digital, <http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/index.vm> (accessed October 9, 2020).

⁴⁴ Archivo ABC's Hemeroteca Periódicos ABC, <https://www.abc.es/archivo/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

⁴⁵ La Vanguardia Hemeroteca, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/hemeroteca> (accessed October 9, 2020).

⁴⁶ *Triunfo* digital, <http://www.triunfodigital.com/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

However, often these resources are the exception, not the rule: many more Spanish historical newspapers have not been digitized. *Arriba*, published in its second incarnation as a daily newspaper from 1939 to 1979, is an invaluable source for tracking the political and cultural overtones of the Franco regime, but it is not available in a digital format. When in-person research is impossible, access to a wealth of periodicals is curtailed.

Putnam highlights the “massified web access to texts of and about the past” that provide ever-greater entry into the archive for scholars and those participating in what she refers to as “drive-by transnationalism.”⁴⁷ The aforementioned freely accessible digital repositories provide a plethora of information, yet it is information that arrives uncontextualized. My own experience attests to this. Rodríguez del Risco’s daughter—who, with the help of the historian Josep Calvet, I located and contacted in March 2020—became an amateur partner-in-arms in the quest to find more information about her family. Luisa Rodríguez and I first spoke on the phone from our respective lockdowns in April—she in Santander (where her father died in obscurity in 1959); I in Madrid—and have continued our correspondence via email ever since. Piqued by the revelation that her father had published his memoir in 1946, she turned to her “amigo Google” to learn more about her paternal relatives. Luisa scoured digital Spanish military and periodical archives for references to her grandfather, a prominent general who fought in Cuba in 1898 and served under Alfonso XIII. The layer upon layer of digital material she sent me provided insight into General Pedro Rodríguez García’s movements, but not the story underneath those movements. That is to say, although she was able to locate, download and email me dozens of references to her grandfather’s promotions, new postings, ceremonial participation and demotions over the course of decades of Spanish military bulletins, newspapers, and official state announcements, these glimpses lacked context. To be able to understand the story that the archival documents told—Why was the general demoted? Was there some underlying disagreement with the changes that Manuel Azaña instituted with the military during the Second Republic? Was the general’s role in the Franco regime purely honorific? —I needed more than just the hints that the digital archives offered to the patient researcher, or, in this case, family member. As Putnam summarizes: what we discover in our digital searches is “not coterminous with the content- and context-specific learning that analog search required.”⁴⁸ The bits and pieces of stories that I could piece together from the digitized documents I encountered and that Luisa Rodríguez kindly unearthed for me demonstrated the quantity of material available remotely while also underlining that I lacked sufficient historical context to actualize those documents for a fuller picture of my subject.

⁴⁷ Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable,” 397.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

That historical context, gleaned from reading print sources on the period as well as from learning from unforeseen discoveries in the library and archives, was for now out of reach.

As the countdown began for my family's premature return to the United States in May 2020, I made some of my most productive research gains by corresponding with scholars or archivists based in Spain who were working on similar topics or were generous enough to lend a hand with my investigation. After I reached out with an email or phone call, these individuals helped me navigate the recesses of Spain's Civil and Church Registries. From the confines of our Chamberí apartment, these fellow scholars found a few archival gems that they were kind enough to scan and email me. Some small archives that would have normally required an in-person request were also willing to circumvent these limitations during the pandemic. As helpful as online archival resources may be, sometimes person-to-person contact – even during a global crisis – allows us to see our scholarly pursuits from a new angle and access fresh sources. Ultimately, our collective “remote turn” in the Spring of 2020 can be interpreted as at once an opportunity for many scholars accustomed to paging through the archives to discover new digital resources while also a lesson in how working at an analog or digital extreme—solely with documents or solely with downloads—does a disservice to the careful in-between craft of historical research. For now, my Rodríguez del Risco book is on ice, waiting for the moment I can return to Spain to access those last few archival documents and library books I need to fill in the blanks in my research. I hope my desk at the Biblioteca Nacional is still warm when I return.