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# "Not the Concern of the Organization?" The IRO and the Overseas Resettlement of Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II

Jannis Panagiotidis \*

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**Abstract:** »Not the Concern of the Organization? Die IRO und das Resettlement ethnischer Deutscher aus Osteuropa in Übersee nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg«. This article examines the postwar trajectories of ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) from Slovenia, Romania, and Ukraine who had ended up in Germany and Austria due to Nazi resettlement. Their story is usually told within the context of German "flight and expulsion," but is also part of the history of international refugee management. Although ethnic Germans were not eligible for care by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), some of them did seek assistance. This article analyzes the bureaucratic negotiation between IRO officials and applicants using different strategies of "ethnic conversion." Individual strategies consisted of claiming a nationality other than German, and trying to back up this claim with a convincing narrative. These efforts usually failed, petitioners living in mixed marriages being a partial exception. Collective conversion worked in the case of the Mennonites, thanks to their well-connected international relief organization, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The article also traces the overseas resettlement of ethnic Germans, focusing on supporting institutional and family networks. Taken together, these perspectives open a window on the postwar negotiation of violence-induced migration at the margins of the supposedly clearly distinguished categories of Germans and non-Germans.

**Keywords:** Displaced persons, ethnic Germans, migration, refugees, resettlement, migrant networks, emigration, Slovenia, Romania, Ukraine.

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## 1. Introduction

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It is now well established that the collective resettlement of ethnic Germans (so-called *Volksdeutsche*) from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe at the beginning of World War II was the first domino in a series of population

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movements involving people of many nationalities all over the region (Ahonen et al. 2008; Ther 2011). In the Nazi scheme for the ethnic and racial reordering of the continent, ethnic Germans were privileged pawns: the Nazi resettlement machinery moved them to places, mostly in annexed Poland (the so-called Warthegau), where they were supposed to fortify the frontiers of the expanded German Empire. For this purpose, members of other nationalities – mostly Jews and Poles – had to make space, triggering a sequence of displacements that, as Götz Aly (1995) argued, ultimately contributed to the Holocaust. The eventual defeat of the Nazis led to a reordering of the ethnic map of Eastern Europe which, in turn, caused the flight and expulsion of more than twelve million Germans from the region (Beer 2011). The movements of Germans and non-Germans during the great upheavals of World War II were thus intricately linked.

In the historiography of the aftermath of these wartime displacements, this integrated perspective usually gives way to a compartmentalized view in which the stories of Germans and non-Germans are told as essentially separate. The reception and integration of German “expellees and refugees” (*Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene*) in Germany has become the object of historiographical research since the 1990s (see, e.g., Hoffmann, Krauss, and Schwartz 2000; Kossert 2008). However, the growing body of literature on displaced persons (DPs) and their international postwar resettlement has developed quite separately from this, treating *Volksdeutsche* only insofar as they were the ones *not* within the care of the responsible international organizations, such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO; Shephard 2010, 120-37; Cohen 2012, 44-6). Research based on the recently opened archives of the International Tracing Service (ITS) has so far largely ignored the ethnic Germans within the files (Boehling, Urban, and Bienert 2014).

Such a compartmentalized approach reproduces contemporary administrative categories, which made a strict distinction between German and non-German refugees (Cohen 2012, 44). As the 1948 IRO constitution stated, “[p]ersons who will not be the concern of the Organization” included:

Persons of German ethnic origin, whether German nationals or members of German minorities in other countries, who a) have been or may be transferred to Germany from other countries; b) have been, during the second world war, evacuated from Germany to other countries; c) have fled from, or into, Germany, or from their places of residence into countries other than Germany in order to avoid falling into the hands of Allied armies.<sup>1</sup>

Ethnic Germans were to be the exclusive responsibility of the German refugee administration (Schraut 2000). However, taking these divisions and classifica-

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the International Refugee Organization, Annex I, Part II, No. 4, 16 February 1946, <<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000004-0284.pdf>>.

tions for granted ignores the fact that the category of *volksdeutsch* – similar to the category of DP – was both a bureaucratic construct and a legal status. Whether somebody fell into one or the other group was a matter of bureaucratic negotiation, rather than essential identity. Thus, while in theory there was a clear division of labor between German and international relief bodies regarding their respective clientele, eligibility for either category was by no means preconceived. This is precisely the reason why the IRO engaged in the extensive screening of “displaced” populations in postwar Europe, trying to sift the “deserving” from the “undeserving.”

In this article, I aim to integrate perspectives on ethnic Germans and international DP care and resettlement. I focus upon the fates of ethnic Germans who defied pre-ordained bureaucratic classifications and tried to gain access to international assistance by applying for DP status. Based on materials from the ITS Digital Archives, I show under which conditions ethnic Germans did, or in most cases did not, succeed in their attempts to change their assigned category. The most important sources related to these individuals were the so-called Care and Maintenance (CM/1) files of the IRO, which contain information on the bureaucratic negotiation of ethnic belonging as well as on individual migration trajectories and family networks.<sup>2</sup> In a second step, I use ITS emigration files as well as materials from the rich genealogical database of ancestry.com in order to trace the overseas onward migration of such *Volksdeutsche* who were successful (or not) in gaining IRO assistance.<sup>3</sup> Here, I am particularly interested in the supporting networks that enabled their migration – both institutional networks of a confessional or ethnic character, and family ties created through preceding migrations. Taken together, these perspectives open a window on the postwar negotiation of violence-induced migration at the margins of the supposedly clearly distinguished categories of Germans and non-Germans.

For my study, I draw on examples from different groups of ethnic German resettlers (*Umsiedler*) from Slovenia (Gottschee), Romania (Bessarabia), and the Soviet Union (Ukraine), with diverse characteristics and resettlement histories. I have constructed samples of these different groups from the ITS Digital Archives, searching for people from particular localities in their original regions of settlement.<sup>4</sup> German minorities from the Slovenian Gottschee/Kočevje

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<sup>2</sup> In the ITS archive, CM/1 records are filed under the registration 3.2.1.

<sup>3</sup> This information can be extracted from the Central Name Index (0.1) and from passenger lists (3.1.3.2). The Ancestry database contains, among other things, US census data, passenger lists, and naturalization records, which are particularly useful for the reconstruction of transatlantic migrations.

<sup>4</sup> These localities were: Lienfeld/Livold in the Gottschee region (16 cases); the colonies of Arzis, Beresina, Borodino, Friedenstal, Hoffnungstal, Klöstitz, Lichtental, Sarata, and Tarutino in Bessarabia (46 cases); and in Ukraine, villages from the mixed Protestant and Catholic Beresan (32 cases) and the predominantly Catholic Kutschurgan (31 cases) settlement blocs, as well as from the Mennonite colony of Chortitza (37 cases).

region and from Romanian Bessarabia were moved in their entirety by the Nazis within the framework of *Heim ins Reich* (“back home to the *Reich*”) resettlement operations in 1940–1941, after their regions had been occupied by Italy and the Soviet Union respectively. Ethnic Germans from German- and Romanian-occupied Ukraine moved later, in the years 1943–1944, under conditions of war and a retreating Eastern Front. The majority of these resettlers were repatriated to the Soviet Union after the war. The main factors linking these diverse groups are that they were all processed by the same Nazi resettlement bureaucracy, the *Einwandererzentralstelle* (EWZ), and were unilaterally awarded German citizenship. Among others, they were differentiated on grounds of their religious denomination: while the Gottscheers and the Bessarabians were, respectively, homogenous Catholic and Protestant communities, Germans from Ukraine were divided into Catholics, Protestants, and Mennonites. These denominational differences were to play an important role when it came to utilizing confessional networks for overseas emigration after the war.

In the following, I first give a brief overview of ethnic Germans in the context of the migration history of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. I show that they were an integral part of the overseas emigration movements that swept the region from the last quarter of the 19th century until World War I, and partly into the interwar period. As a consequence, prior to World War II, ethnic Germans were embedded in widespread transcontinental networks. I then elaborate how the war brought about their large-scale displacement, first as a result of Nazi resettlement schemes, then because of flight and expulsion. After the war, they were stranded as refugees in Germany (in the case of Ukrainian and Bessarabian Germans) and Austria (in the case of the Gottscheers). Faced with uncertainty, some of them turned to international organizations for help, despite their *a priori* exclusion. In its core empirical section, the article analyzes both the individual and the collective strategies of “national conversion” used by the petitioners in the hope of gaining recognition as DPs. As will be seen, while individual efforts to switch national identification before the authorities mostly failed, petitioners living in “mixed” marriages had some hope of success. The most successful strategy, however, was the “collective conversion” from German to Dutch nationality that the Mennonite refugees achieved thanks to the efforts of their well-organized overseas brethren of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). This ethno-confessional network was also decisive for the near-total overseas resettlement of Mennonites from Ukraine, while the other, less closely organized groups of ethnic German refugees had to rely on personal and generic confessional networks to accomplish emigration. The article concludes with some reflections on the place of postwar resettlement in the long-term migration histories of the groups in question.

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## 2. Ethnic Germans in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Migration History

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German-speaking minorities in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe had their origins in a long history of settlement migrations from the German lands that had been taking place since the 12th century (Petersen 2016). As part of the German eastward expansion, settlers moved into the eastern reaches of the Holy Roman Empire. Some were recruited by other rulers, like the Western German settlers moving into Hungarian Transylvania, where they would later become known as Transylvanian Saxons (*Siebenbürger Sachsen*). The Gottscheer minority originated from 14th-century migrations of Carinthian, Tyrolian, Franconian, and Thuringian peasants to Carniola. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, both the Habsburg and Russian Empires – by then dominant in the region – recruited settlers to fortify their grip on newly conquered or sparsely populated territories in the Balkans, the Black Sea region (including Bessarabia), and on the shores of the Volga (Bartlett 1979; Brandes 1993). In the Russian case, these settlers – who were awarded extensive privileges, including exemption from military service – came mainly from Central and Southwestern Germany and included Protestants as well as Catholics (Koch 1977; Myeshkov 2008). Mennonites moved into Russia from West Prussia (Urry 1989). Only in the 20th century would these heterogeneous colonists become known by the blanket term “Russian Germans” (*Russlanddeutsche*; Krieger 2015; Petersen 2017).

German speakers also became part of the major emigration movements that started to affect Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe from the 1870s onwards. More than three and a half million citizens belonging to all the different nationalities of the Habsburg Empire emigrated between 1876 and 1914 (Brunnbauer 2014, 37). Some 2.7 million subjects of the Czar left Russia between 1880 and 1910 (Lohr 2012, 195). In the Habsburg Empire, economically peripheral regions such as Galicia, Slovakia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, and Carniola became emigration hotspots. For example, in the Gottschee region, the population shrank by almost 10% between 1880 and 1910 (Drnovšek 2005, 13). Emigration continued after World War I, although at a lower rate due to immigration restrictions in the United States. By the eve of World War II, more Gottscheers lived in the United States than in the Gottschee region itself (Hösler 2011, 25). In pre-revolutionary Russia, where emigration was severely restricted by the state, ethnic minorities from the western periphery of the empire were the most likely to leave. Jews were most conspicuous among the emigrants from Russia, yet Poles and Germans were affected, too. In fact, German colonists from the Volga and Black Sea regions (including Bessarabia) had been among the first to emigrate from Russia to the Americas already in 1874, after their colonist privileges had been cancelled (Lohr 2012, 86-9;

Schmidt 2012, 250-3). Emigration reached its peak during the first decade of the 20th century, when 90,000 German colonists left Russia to settle overseas (Dönninghaus 2002, 160).

Migration and settlement patterns differed significantly between the groups under examination here. Gottscheer ethnic colonies developed in growing urban industrial centers in North America, mainly New York (Queens) and Cleveland. Russian Germans, by contrast, mainly moved to the Great Plains and the Canadian prairies, where they attempted to re-establish themselves in agricultural communities. To a lesser extent, they also moved to South America, mainly Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay (Koch 1977). From the 1890s onward, Russian-German colonists from all regions of prior settlement in Russia joined the Great Siberian Migration that was gathering pace at that time, creating new colonies beyond the Urals, in regions such as the Altai or the Kazakh steppes (Treadgold 1957). In the wake of revolution and civil war, a further 120,000 Germans left Russia for Germany, mostly moving on to the Americas (Oltmer 2006, 435). In 1929, approximately 5,700 mostly Mennonite colonists managed to overcome Soviet emigration restrictions and leave the country via Germany, many finding new homes in Paraguay (Oltmer 2006, 440). The majority, however, remained in the Soviet Union where they, until the beginning of the German-Soviet War in 1941, enjoyed a certain degree of cultural autonomy, including the existence of an Autonomous German Soviet Socialist Republic on the Volga (Mukhina 2007). Meanwhile, Bessarabia, which until 1918 had belonged to the Russian Empire, became part of Romania, thus isolating the Bessarabian Germans from the developments of the neighboring colonies in the Soviet Black Sea region (Schmidt 2003, ff. 85). Overseas emigration from this area continued into the interwar period (Schmidt 2012, 251-2). As a result of these sustained emigration movements, by the eve of World War II, the German minorities under examination here were embedded in extensive trans-continental networks.

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### 3. German Minorities and Nazi Resettlement Policies

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During the interwar period, ethnic Germans became part of the larger question of minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. In post-Habsburg Central Europe, the Wilsonian principle of “self-determination of peoples” led to the creation of several independent nation-states, all of which harbored significant ethnic minorities (Mazower 1997; Lemberg 2004) and in most of which Germans (as well as Jews) were present. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, devised an ethno-federalist architecture to re-structure the multi-ethnic Russian Empire into a pyramid of federal republics, autonomous republics, and other smaller units of self-administration for ethnically defined peoples (Martin 1999). The Volga German Republic was part of this structure, thus contributing to the ethno-

national homogenization of culturally and religiously heterogeneous colonists (Dönninghaus, Panagiotidis, and Petersen 2018).

The “problem” of German minorities was exacerbated by the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany and their increasingly aggressive embrace of German minorities all through Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe (Lumans 1993). German minorities played a key role in Nazi plans for the conquest of “living space in the East.” In Czechoslovakia and Poland, they served as pretexts for invasion and occupation (in 1938 and 1939, respectively). Shortly after the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the invasion of Poland, on October 6, 1939, Adolf Hitler announced his plans for the “reordering of the ethnographic conditions” of Europe, meaning a “resettlement of nationalities” with the intention of “better demarcation lines.” The idea was to remove “untenable splinters of German *Volkstum*” from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, which had served, and might in the future serve, as a source of conflict (Aly 1995, 36-7).

To further this project of “ethnographic reordering,” Germany, between 1939 and 1941, signed bilateral resettlement treaties with allied or friendly states, including Italy, Romania, and the Soviet Union (Ther 2011, 113-7). While the ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union within its pre-1939 boundaries were not included in these treaties and remained Soviet citizens, the minorities living in the territories that the Soviet Union annexed from the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania were sent on their way *Heim ins Reich*. This included more than 90,000 individuals from Bessarabia, who were first shipped to Germany, before being sent on to Polish territories annexed by Germany – the Warthegau and West Prussia – as vanguard settlers of the expanded German Empire (Schmidt 2003, ff. 127, ff. 199). From January 1945 onwards, they were on the run from the advancing Soviet Army towards the west, alongside millions of other Germans from east of the Oder-Neisse line (Schmidt 2003, ff. 255).

In October 1941, after the Gottschee had been annexed by Italy in the wake of the joint German-Italian invasion and destruction of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it was the Gottscheers turn to be resettled. After some initial hesitation, almost all Gottscheers (around 12,000 individuals) opted for resettlement and became German citizens. They were moved to Lower Styria, where they received new homes in the so-called “Ranner Dreieck,” the region around the town of Brežice (Rann) at the southeastern tip of German-annexed Slovenia (Frensing 1970). There they stayed until the end of the war. Evacuation of the region did not start until the very day of the German capitulation in May 1945. Some managed to escape to Austria by train, although many others fleeing north by train or wagon were overtaken by the Partisans and imprisoned. By the autumn of 1945, they were released and expelled to Austria (Hösler 2011, 36).



Germans in the Soviet Union suffered quite diverse fates. When Germany unilaterally broke the 1939 Treaty of Non-aggression and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, geography determined the fate of the 1.4 million Russian Germans in their different regions of settlement. A decree issued by the Soviet authorities on August 28, 1941 led to the abolishing of the Volga German Autonomous Republic and the subsequent deportation of approximately 900,000 Germans living in the Volga region and in the Caucasus who became subject to forced labor in the so-called labor army (*trudarmia*; Mukhina 2007). In contrast, the Germans in Ukraine came under German and Romanian occupation. They were the object of different resettlement plans within the larger framework of colonization, known as *Generalplan Ost* (Heinemann 2003). Initial plans to move the Ukrainian Germans west to the *Reich* gave way to projects of internal resettlement within Ukraine to the Zhitomir region, which materialized to a limited extent (Lower 2005). Germans from Romanian-occupied Transnistria were supposed to resettle in Crimea as part of the project to create a Germanic *Gotengau* (Strippel 2011, 255). Yet despite all of these plans, the retreat of the German forces, which began in the summer of 1943, eventually made the German authorities move more than 300,000 Ukrainian Germans in two major “treks” to the Warthegau. From the winter of 1945 onwards, they too fled westwards from the advancing Red Army, making them part of the massive stream of German refugees at the end of the war (Fleischhauer 1983).

What all these resettlers had in common, irrespective of their origin and the circumstances of their resettlement, was their processing by the *Einwandererzentralstelle* (EWZ). The EWZ was the main Nazi agency tasked with assessing the suitability of individuals for resettlement and the awarding of German citizenship based on physical, racial, social, and political criteria (Fiebrandt 2014; Leniger 2006; Strippel 2011). It was part of the complex structure of – often competing – Nazi institutions devoted to dealing with ethnic Germans abroad. Before their resettlement, Germans in Ukraine were, in fact, registered on several occasions by different SS and civilian institutions attempting to establish who could be considered *volksdeutsch*. For those living under German occupation in the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*, this included registration in the *Deutsche Volksliste* (“German People’s List”), an instrument of ethno-racial classification that was also implemented in annexed Poland (Strippel 2011, 258). Even so, they subsequently had to pass through the physical, racial, and political screening conducted by the EWZ. Resettlers who passed the screening received German citizenship, in some instances – mainly in cases of mixed marriages or mixed ascendancy – on probation (Leniger 2006, 201-4; Strippel 2011, 284).

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## 4. Negotiating Postwar Migration

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As a consequence of their processing by the EWZ, Gottscheers, Bessarabians, and Ukrainian Germans entered the postwar era as German citizens, at least in theory. What these naturalizations by a now defunct state were worth, however, was anything but clear. The Gottscheers had the additional problem that in their majority, they were not even in Germany, but in Austria, which after the restoration of its independence in 1945 assumed no responsibility for the refugees, even if they were “Old-Austrians” (*Altösterreicher*) from former Habsburg territories (Zahra 2010b). The predicament of Ukrainian Germans was even greater, because the Soviet Union did not recognize their German citizenship at all and claimed them as Soviet citizens who had to be repatriated. Some 80% of them – approximately 280,000 out of a total of 350,000 Russian-German resettlers – were forcibly returned to the Soviet Union (Goossen 2017, 177; see also Eisfeld and Martynenko 2012). There, they were not allowed to return to their places of origin, but were instead sent to the same places of banishment beyond the Urals where the Volga Germans were also still held in confinement (Mukhina 2007).

Yet even in these difficult postwar circumstances, displaced ethnic Germans still had certain options. For those in Germany, the most obvious choice was to seek help from the German refugee administration, which was emerging in the different states (*Länder*) of occupied Germany. Yet there could be compelling reasons not to stick to the “script,” according to which German refugees were the responsibility of German authorities and seek instead the DP status that, in principle, was reserved for non-Germans. The better conditions in DP camps were certainly one motivation. Another, arguably even more important reason was the prospect of being able to emigrate from Europe through assisted international resettlement schemes (Cohen 2012, 44). For the Gottscheers, emigration actually seemed the most promising way out of their Austrian limbo, not least because of the family ties most of them had to North America. Many Ukrainian and Bessarabian Germans had such ties, too. For those still fearing repatriation to the Soviet Union, overseas resettlement had the additional appeal of being definitely out of the Soviet authorities’ reach.

The most formidable obstacle for *Volksdeutsche* seeking international assistance was the fact that German citizens and people of German ethnic origin were explicitly excluded from the IRO mandate. This did not stop some of them from applying. Against the backdrop of various “national conversions” taking place in the postwar period, such a strategy was not completely unreasonable. The best-known postwar case of people being allowed to shift to another national identification was the “rehabilitation” of Polish “autochthones” – ethnically ambiguous Slavic-speaking inhabitants of the Polish-German borderlands – who had been registered on the German *Volksliste* in annexed Poland (Service 2013). For resettled *Volksdeutsche*, too, switching allegiance and

trying to pass for a nationality other than German could appear like a viable option when dealing with international aid organizations. It was, after all, not the first time in recent years that they had to convince officials of their ethnolnational belonging. A few years before, they had been required to prove their German credentials to the EWZ examiners, which involved telling the “right” kind of stories that would convince their interlocutors they were talking to “real” ethnic Germans (Leniger 2006, 204). This performative dimension of ethnic screening gave them a clear sense that their “ethnic Germanness” was not an objective condition and had not come to them naturally, as it were. Perhaps they could convince IRO officers that they were not Germans after all?

With hindsight, it is clear that in most cases, they could not. In his book on postwar refugee politics, Gerard D. Cohen (2012, 44-6) writes that ethnic Germans trying to access IRO care essentially stood no chance of being recognized, even if they boasted an anti-Nazi record. Not even the rising importance of Cold War anti-communism, which helped non-German Nazi collaborators from Eastern Europe gain DP status, changed the tough stance of the international aid bodies. However, this was not obvious to people negotiating their migration options at the time. While the cases examined for this article do not generally contradict Cohen’s claim, they do reveal certain strategies – both individual and collective – that ethnic Germans employed to try and work their way into the system, in some cases even successfully.

#### 4.1 Individual “Conversion”

One strategy consisted of individuals simply claiming an ethnicity other than German. To withstand the scrutiny of the IRO investigators, candidates had to try to back up such claims with convincing stories. For instance, they needed to creatively explain their stated migration trajectory, which was likely to identify them as German resettlers. The examiners might also test the linguistic skills the applicants had indicated in the application forms. They would also check documents the applicants provided for establishing their identities, while looking for supplementary wartime documentation elsewhere. The Berlin Document Center (BDC), which held the archives of several Nazi institutions, including the EWZ, turned out to be a key source of evidence in this regard. The subjective sympathies of the interviewers towards the interviewees also shaped the decision-making process to some extent, although, in the cases studied here, they did not decisively affect the final decisions reached.

For example, Anna Klun, a 52-year-old resettler from Lienfeld/Livold in the Gottschee, presented her case to the IRO officers in May 1949. While previous petitioners from her village had given their ethnic affiliation as *volksdeutsch*, Anna Klun claimed to be Slovenian. Aware of the importance of language as a criterion for nationality, she stated Slovenian to be her first language, claiming fluent speaking, reading, and writing skills. Describing her experiences during

the war, she alleged to have been resettled by the Italians (rather than the Germans) in 1941, and then expelled by the Yugoslav Partisans in 1945 for lack of right of residence (*Heimatrecht*) in Brežice. After adding more details to her story – including the alleged origin of her family from a region with no ethnic German population – and convincing her examiners of her supposedly good Slovenian language skills, she was deemed “within the mandate of IRO” in June 1949. Yet her eligibility was revoked in January 1950, as it had been established that she had become a German citizen in May 1942, and a member of the German *Kulturbund* in 1943.<sup>5</sup>

The applications of some young Russian-German petitioners produced similar results of initial success and eventual failure. For instance, Johan Bischoff, born in 1927 in the colony of Kandel – one of the Kutschurgan settlements northwest of Odessa – claimed Ukrainian ethnicity and Greek Orthodox faith in his CM/1 application of August 1949. He stated that he had moved from Pervomaisk, Ukraine, to Gollnow near Stettin in January 1944, where he worked for the railway. He characterized this move as “forcible deportation.” Since July 1945, he had worked in different jobs in and around Heidelberg. As language skills, he stated fluent Russian, but only slight knowledge of Ukrainian and German. Consequently, he gave the reason for his unwillingness to return to his country of origin in Russian, “*Iz za politicheskuiu rezhima*” (because of the political regime), and signed off in Cyrillic script as “Vania Bishof,” using the Russian diminutive form of his first name. His story was apparently convincing enough not to be rejected out of hand: his case was classified as “pending,” and further inquiries were conducted.<sup>6</sup> And indeed, given the advanced “Russification” of the youth that Nazi authorities had already noticed during the resettlement screening, Johan’s statements regarding his language skills might actually have been truthful (Strippel 2011, 284). However, they were not decisive; unfortunately for him, the investigating IRO officers were able to track down his EWZ naturalization files of March 1944 through the BDC. These documents clearly placed him in the *volksdeutsch* category and

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<sup>5</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Ana Klun, May 28, 1949, 3.2.1.3 / 80692106 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen. The applicant was my great aunt on my mother’s side. Despite the spelling of her name with one “n” in the IRO file, in the text I chose to spell it “Anna,” the way it can be found in her German and, later, American documentation. It is unclear whether the spelling in her IRO file was the result of the examiners using Yugoslav documents to establish her identity, or whether this was an active act on her part of trying to appear more “Slavic.” The *Kulturbund* the document refers to is likely the *Steierischer Heimatbund*, an organization created by the Nazis in occupied Lower Styria to register the ethnically German or “Germanizable” Slovenian population of the region. The Swabian-German *Kulturbund* – the association of ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia – was dissolved in 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Johan Bischoff, August 12, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78940318 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

arguably even made him a German citizen.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, he was found ineligible for support.<sup>8</sup>

Another young applicant from Ukraine, Veronika Traj/Treu, born in 1929 in Mannheim – another Kutschurgan colony – even achieved initial recognition. Claiming Russian nationality and fluent knowledge of Russian, German, and English as well as some Ukrainian, she stated that she had been “deported” by the Germans from her home in Donbas in December 1943, in order to work at the Buna factory in Schkopau near Halle. In June 1945, she transferred to the American occupation zone. The IRO gave her story a positive evaluation: as the responsible officer remarked on her CM/1 application of December 1949, she was of

Russian ethnic origin as proved by language test. Her family name is TRAJ, as proved by marriage certificate of her parents. The change of family name [to Treu] is made by Germans. [...] The applicant makes [a] good impression and her story seems to be true.<sup>9</sup>

With this recommendation, she was initially found “within the mandate” and “eligible for resettlement.”<sup>10</sup> Even when evidence about her naturalization as German by the EWZ surfaced, the case officer’s impulse was still to give her the benefit of the doubt:

Applicant was 13 years [old] at [the] time her mother had signed the EWZ. She claims that she never had any advantages of her citizenship. She claims that this fact was disclosed by her mother only after the war. On all documents registered as Russian. It is felt that the applicant cannot be held responsible for her mother’s acts during the war.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite this sympathetic stance towards the plight of a young girl caught up in the upheavals of war and resettlement, she was eventually ruled “not within the mandate” in July 1950 and her certificate of eligibility was withdrawn – a fact that she claimed in her petition for review was not communicated to her until April 1951.<sup>12</sup> At the time, she was getting ready for emigration to the United States, where her sister lived.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know the outcome of her appeal. She did, however, emigrate to the United States in

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<sup>7</sup> 3.2.1.1 / 78940324 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>8</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Johan Bischoff, August 12, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78940318 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>9</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Veronika Treu, December 15, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79854927 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>10</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Veronika Treu, December 15, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79854927 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>11</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Veronika Treu, December 15, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79854927 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>12</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Veronika Treu, December 15, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79854927 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>13</sup> Petition for Review, April 19, 1951, 3.2.1.1 / 79854931 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

December 1951, although whether she did so with IRO assistance or in some other way remains unknown.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, Peter Thiessen, born in 1925 in the Mennonite colony of Choritz, did not manage to produce a similar consistent narrative that would satisfy the interviewers even temporarily, and failed to elicit sympathy among the case officers. The remarks on his Interview Record Face Sheet are quite blunt in this regard:

He stated that he is an orthodox, then changed this many times. His all [sic] statements are merely lies. He stated that he was 1) orthodox, 2) Mennonite, 3) evangelisch-protestant [sic]. His brother Hans has been declared ineligible. Peter was cross-questioned and didn't want to give clear answers. He looks older than 23 years, he looks like 28-29 years of age. He is obviously lying. At the end of the screening he entirely changed his attitude and stated that he is fed up with screening. He is not [the] concern of [the] IRO. His registration after 1945 in Germany shows that he was evang. not mennonitisch [i.e., Mennonite]. Checked by a Ukrainian interviewer [and] proved to speak very poor Russian and some Ukrainian.<sup>15</sup>

These cases of failed national “conversion” reveal the limits of the much-cited ethnic and national hybridity and fluidity in multi-ethnic Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The ambiguity and malleability of identities and persistent relevance of “national indifference” among the populations of the region have been stressed in much recent literature (see, e.g., Zahra 2010a). Yet the switching of identification was not so simple for those examined here – partly as a result of who they were, partly as a result of the actions they took during the war. For example, despite her initial success before the IRO eligibility officer, Anna Klun was not, in fact, particularly ambiguous in terms of her ethnic and cultural characteristics: she barely spoke Slovenian (the eligibility officer probably spoke none at all); she had joined the Nazi resettlement campaign; and she could eventually not make a compelling case for her not being German.<sup>16</sup> The same was true for many of her fellow Gottscheers, who were quite evidently not “amphibians” easily able to switch nationality, like those described by Chad Bryant (2002) in a Czech-German context, but rather occupied a distinct place in both prewar and wartime Slovenian society. For the young petitioners from Ukraine, things looked slightly different: their claimed linguistic proficiency in Slavic languages does appear credible. Thus, culturally they might have had a claim to a nationality other than German. What spoke

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<sup>14</sup> 0.1 / 47111254 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>15</sup> Interview Record Face Sheet, Peter Thiessen, November 23, 1948, 3.2.1.1 / 79841385 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>16</sup> Anna's actual lack of Slovenian language skills was mentioned, both by her niece, and her nephew – my mother and uncle – who recalled her only possessing a basic knowledge of Slovenian from her job as an innkeeper in Lienfeld (Margarete Panagiotidis, personal communication; Otmar Krajec, email communication, November 12, 2017).

against them was their (or their parents') identification as ethnically German before the EWZ officers, which left a damning paper trail to which the IRO investigators had access via the BDC. Such acts of identification and allegiance, rather than real or presumed cultural traits and ethnic origins, were to eventually prove decisive for the failure of their applications for IRO assistance.

#### 4.2 "Mixed" Cases

Yet not all applications of ethnic Germans were ultimately unsuccessful. As the following case studies show, marriage to a non-German partner opened a window of opportunity via which *volksdeutsche* DP applicants could achieve recognition. Considering preceding screenings of the same people, this is not entirely surprising: in every context of national classification, "mixed" marriages represented contentious borderline cases, as they put assumptions about the possibility to draw clear-cut boundaries between national groups to the test. For instance, in its resettlement actions, the EWZ was generally distrustful of mixed families. While they could participate in the resettlement, they were generally not to be settled in the colonized territories in the east, but within the borders of prewar Germany, the so-called *Altreich* (Leniger 2006, 202-3).<sup>17</sup> For this reason, Anna Klun's sister Frieda and her Slovenian husband Josef Krajec, for instance, were not allowed to stay in Brežice, but were sent to Central Germany for resettlement in the spring of 1943.<sup>18</sup> This corresponded with the overall tendency of the EWZ eligibility officers to treat the nationality of the husband as decisive for the classification of mixed families. In general, cases in which the husband was German and the wife was of another nationality were treated more favorably, as it was assumed that a German husband would ensure the dominance of German culture in the family. Should the situation be reversed, an in-depth examination would be required (Leniger 2006, 202).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> There were exceptions to this rule if the examiners considered assimilation to "Germandom" (*Deutschtum*) to be sufficient.

<sup>18</sup> Frieda and Josef Krajec were my grandparents. Their resettler IDs, dated October 17, 1941, were marked "valid only in the *Altreich*." I thank my aunt Anne Eisert and my cousin Ellen Ince for providing me with copies from their private archive. See also Josef Krajec's registration with the miners' insurance (*Knappschaft*), dated May 27, 1943. List of political, social security and labor employment office records, 2.1.1.1 / 70419135 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Frommer (2000) reports similar findings for the treatment of mixed families during the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia after the war. According to Presidential Decree No. 33 – which was aimed at stripping ethnic Germans and Magyars of their Czechoslovak citizenship – German women married to Czech men should be judged "benevolently" when reapplying for Czechoslovak citizenship, whereas no such dispensation was made for German men married to Czech women. Czech women married to German men, in turn, were in theory able to retain their Czech citizenship and remain in the country. In practice, they were often expelled, too, as the male nationality was supposedly dominant.

However, as the following case of the Bartle family from the Kutschurgan colony of Selz shows, the wife's nationality could also be decisive for the evaluation of a family's belonging by both Nazi authorities and the IRO. Of a total of six Bartle siblings, three applied for IRO assistance between 1948 and 1949. Two of them, Matilde and Pius, caused the IRO officers some headaches, but were ultimately rejected. Yet one of them, Martin Bartle, actually managed to be recognized as "within the mandate," convincing the eligibility officers that he was not, in fact, of ethnic German origin. As will be seen, his Ukrainian wife, Tatjana, played a significant role in Martin getting a different evaluation by the IRO officers than his siblings, despite their generally similar characteristics.

Matilde and Pius Bartle, born in 1910 and 1912 respectively, submitted their CM/1 applications for themselves and their mother Margarete in March 1949. They professed to being Soviet citizens of Russian nationality and Roman Catholic faith. Matilde claimed fluent knowledge of Russian and German, Pius fluent Russian and only a little German. They reported that they had been in Odessa until 1944, then in Chemnitz from March 1944 until April 1945, then, from May 1945 onwards, in Fürth. The interviewers were confused. About Matilde, one wrote: "She is not Ukrainian, but probably Russian – though she is suspected as Volksdeutsch. Doubtful case."<sup>20</sup> Another added:

Though the applicant speaks better Russian than German, her eligibility is doubtful for it is possible that she is of German ethnic origin: her and her mother's maiden names are German, her German Kennkarte [internal passport] is issued in 1949 and her citizenship is "fr. Russland" [formerly Russia].<sup>21</sup>

The assessment of Pius's file echoed these sentiments:

The man tells, his grandfather was a Frenchman, but his parents and he estimated himself [sic] as Ukrainians. He says he was taken by force to work in Germany. He is no Ukrainian – but probably a Russian – though he is suspected to be Volksdeutsch. [...] The case is doubtful.<sup>22</sup>

In the end, the doubts proved overwhelming and both Matilde and Pius were ultimately found ineligible and their cases were assigned for "local settlement."<sup>23</sup>

While the case of their brother, Martin Bartle, raised similar doubts, his application produced a different outcome. Martin submitted his CM/1 application

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<sup>20</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Matilda Bartle, March 28, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910520 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>21</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Matilda Bartle, March 28, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910520 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>22</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Pius Bartle, March 28, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910521 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>23</sup> Transfer of Case under I.R.O. Mandate for Local Settlement – U.S. Zone, Germany, 3.2.1.1 / 78910522 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.



in August 1949. Unlike his siblings, he was married with children. His wife, Tatjana (née Hajworonska, widowed Osadtschii), originally came from Dnepropetrovsk. The application extended to the whole family, but only contained information regarding Martin as the head of the family. He declared himself a Soviet citizen of the Roman Catholic faith and of “German or Russian” ethnicity.<sup>24</sup> In terms of language skills, he claimed fluent Russian and German (although he possessed only moderate written German) as well as fluent English (spoken only). The family had left Odessa in 1944 and lived in Oberfrohna near Chemnitz from May 1944 until April 1945, apparently in a camp for foreigners (*Ausländerlager*). Like Martin’s siblings, from May 1945 they were in Fürth, but at a different address. In his case, too, the interviewers were hard-pressed to make sense of the information they received. One wrote: “He is not a Ukrainian but a German or Russian – very doubtful.”<sup>25</sup> A second official showed a little more confidence, but still could not make up his mind:

The identity of the applicant and his family is proved with his documents. He says he is an [sic] Ukrainian and Russian citizen [...]. He has no documents from the war-time except a certificate from the camp for foreigners at Oberfrohna (Germany). Regarding to this fact and to the doubts of the interviewer I suppose that his case is doubtful.<sup>26</sup>

Referring to a certificate he possessed from a Russian firm and the previously mentioned certificate from the Oberfrohna *Ausländerlager*, a third officer examining the case concluded: “Except for his name I don’t have the impression that he is Volksdeutsch. Further the aforementioned documents indicates [sic] his Russian origins.”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, after initially being deemed “not within the mandate,” Martin Bartle and his family were eventually judged to be “within the mandate of the IRO.”<sup>28</sup>

The discrepancy in the treatment of the Bartle siblings, despite their rather similar characteristics and trajectories, clearly indicates the importance of non-German partners for the ethnic screening decisions made by various authorities. The main difference between Martin and his siblings was Martin’s non-German spouse. The Nazi resettlement agencies treated Martin and Tatjana Bartle as foreigners rather than Germans, and put them in an *Ausländerlager*, arguably because of Tatjana’s non-German origin – in her EWZ examination file of

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<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear from the file whether Bartle made this ambiguous statement himself, or whether it already represented a judgment by the case officer.

<sup>25</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Martin Bartle, August 17, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910508 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>26</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Martin Bartle, August 17, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910508 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>27</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Martin Bartle, August 17, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910508 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>28</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Martin Bartle, August 17, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78910508 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

November 1944, she was listed as being of the Orthodox faith and unable to speak German.<sup>29</sup> This classification was important for the IRO decision to also treat them as non-Germans. Based on Tatjana's non-German ethnicity, both the EWZ and the IRO thus concluded that the whole family was to be treated as non-German – in contrast to Martin's siblings (who incidentally are not mentioned at all in his IRO application).

That said, in IRO decisions regarding mixed families with one German partner, there seems to have been no consistent rule according to which couples or families would be classified as eligible or ineligible. In a situation similar to that of Martin and Tatjana Bartle, Johann Stark from Landau (Ukraine) and his wife Tatjana (née Starodubzewa) from nearby Voznesensk were deemed ineligible in March 1950. Johann's claim to being a Greek Orthodox Russian did not appear credible to the interviewers, given that the "petitioner's name, signature, name of father and mother, district of origin (German town in the Ukraine) clearly point to V.D. [*volksdeutsch*]."<sup>30</sup> The "privileged position" of the Stark family in Austria during the war with "social security benefits and high wages" was also held against them.<sup>31</sup> Tatjana's apparent non-German origin made no difference in this case.

In the reverse situation – that of a non-German husband and a German wife – the Ukrainian Stephan Jurtschik and his wife Eugenie (née Deibele) were deemed eligible in 1948, despite documentation identifying Eugenie as "former Volksdeutsche."<sup>32</sup> According to their registration card (*Meldekarte*) from Rottach-Egern in Bavaria, where they lived in 1945-1946, they were forced to leave Ukraine precisely because Eugenie was *volksdeutsch*. "The husband, who had Ukrainian citizenship, left with his wife and therefore had to be treated as *volksdeutsch* until the end of the war. At the time he assumed his wife's surname. His name was re-instated in August 1946."<sup>33</sup> Even so, this treatment as *Volksdeutsche* during the war did not result in the same treatment after the war, nor were possible advantages the Jurtschiks had gained from being considered German by the Nazis held against them. Stephan's non-German nationality assured the Jurtschiks of their DP status.

However, also in such situations with a non-German as head of the family, there were no guarantees of recognition. In 1949, Peter Melnikow – a self-identified Orthodox Ukrainian from Karlsruhe (Ukraine) – and his wife Elsa were deemed ineligible because of Elsa's Russian passport, identifying her as

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<sup>29</sup> 3.2.1.1 / 78910516 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>30</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Johann Stark, March 28, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79805969 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>31</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Johann Stark, March 28, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79805969 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>32</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Stephan Jurtschik, March 5, 1948, 3.2.1.1 / 79242985 and 2.2.2.1 / 72812576, both in ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>33</sup> 2.2.2.1 / 72812576 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

ethnically German, and because the IRO investigators found out about her naturalization by the EWZ.<sup>34</sup> Here, wartime treatment as German by the Nazis did prejudice treatment by the IRO after the war. In a Bessarabian case, this reasoning was made explicit: Feodot Kornienko, a Romanian citizen identifying as ethnically Romanian, and his German wife Luisa had come to Germany as *Heim ins Reich* resettlers in 1940. As the IRO interviewers acknowledged, Feodot was never naturalized. Yet from 1944, he had served in the Wehrmacht. He was therefore deemed “not within the mandate” in July 1949 – a decision against which he appealed.<sup>35</sup> The review board, too, acknowledged that Feodot had not been naturalized, and generally gave credence to his account of his wartime trajectory as a resettler, worker, and soldier. Even so, the reviewers concluded: “Though his ethnic origin may not be German, as he claims, he has accepted *Volksdeutsche* status, with all the privileges and obligations which ensued.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the very similar Jurtschik case, the review board therefore upheld the decision to exclude him and his family from IRO care. The “privileges” associated with *volksdeutsch* status under the Nazis could be invoked as an argument to exclude applicants from DP status, although this did not occur in a uniform manner.

Thus, while decisions on mixed families who had lived through war and resettlement together could go either way – irrespective of the nationality of either partner – two other Bessarabian cases show how marrying a non-German after the war could allow ethnic German women to acquire DP status. Adele Kranz (née Heim), born in Tarutino, Bessarabia in 1916, married the Polish citizen Josef Swiderski in July 1949. Adele’s former husband, Otto Kranz, with whom she had two daughters, died in Russia in November 1945, presumably as a prisoner of war. With her children she first travelled from West Prussia to Mecklenburg and eventually, in 1947, to Öhringen in the American occupation zone, where she married Josef Swiderski. Josef had followed his own postwar odyssey through various places in Lower Saxony and Belgium before coming to Öhringen in late 1948.<sup>37</sup> Their CM/1 file does not reveal whether they already knew each other from West Prussia, where they had lived in the same town from 1942 until 1945. What is certain is that they had a son in August 1949.<sup>38</sup> Josef’s DP status extended to this child, as well as to Adele and her two

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<sup>34</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Peter Melnikow, July 13, 1948, 3.2.1.1 / 79470773 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>35</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Feodot Kornienko, June 29, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79317598 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>36</sup> International Refugee Organization, Decision of the Review Board, Feodot Kornienko, August 7, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79317599 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>37</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Josef Swiderski, August 3, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79804688 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>38</sup> Change of PCIRO Status, Josef Swiderski, September 28, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 79804689 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

daughters.<sup>39</sup> They eventually emigrated to Ontario, Canada. Similarly, Emilie Pikelis (née Günther), also born in Tarutino in 1928, became eligible for DP status through her marriage in September 1950 to Stasys Pikelis, a Lithuanian who had ended up in Northern Germany after being forced to dig trenches for the Germans in East Prussia from late 1944.<sup>40</sup> In both cases, no questions were asked regarding the women's wartime behavior and whether they had benefited from their ethnic German status. Marrying a non-German could thus present a viable strategy via which German women could achieve DP status – although, of course, this does not imply that such unions were necessarily merely marriages of convenience.

### 4.3 Collective "Conversion"

As the cases analyzed for this study show, the individual strategies of ethnic Germans to achieve IRO recognition met with modest success. Among the Gottschee sample, only one family managed to obtain and retain DP status, while others, like Anna Klun, were declared ineligible after initial recognition.<sup>41</sup> Of the Beresaners, two applications were successful, one of which was after an initial rejection.<sup>42</sup> From the Kutschurgan sample, only Martin Bartle was found and remained eligible, while Veronika Traj/Treu had her status withdrawn. Of the Bessarabians, two mixed families were found eligible, the women of which acquired the DP status of their respective Polish and Lithuanian husbands.

The only instances where ethnic conversion systematically worked were the cases of Mennonite resettlers. However, this had rather more to do with the systematic lobbying of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) than the credibility of individual stories. The MCC had been founded after World War I as a relief organization for Mennonite refugees fleeing the Russian Revolution. At the time, it succeeded in resettling many of them in Canada and Paraguay (Unruh 1952). After World War II, they were on the scene in occupied Germany, dispensing humanitarian aid to the broader population of DPs, but to Mennonites in particular. It was through the MCC's lobbying that the IRO decided that "it is not the wish of the Organization to view the Mennonites as ethnic

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<sup>39</sup> 3.2.1.1 / 79804690 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>40</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Emilie Pikelis née Günther, September 29, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79593984 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>41</sup> For a successful case, see the DP registration cards of Janez, Paulina, and Hilda Cerne, June 17, 1949, 3.1.1.1 / 69036090-3 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen. Unfortunately, their CM/1 file has not survived, making it impossible to follow the case officers' reasoning

<sup>42</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Klara Sasonow (née Meier), April 9, 1951, 3.2.1.1 / 79694583 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen; IRO, Decision of the Review Board, October 29, 1951, 3.2.1.5 / 81307960 / ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen. The reasons for the change of decision are not clear from the file.

Germans” (Goossen 2017, 179). Instead, they persuaded the IRO to accept the existence of a separate Mennonite nationality, similar to the way in which they had done so in the case of Jewish DPs (Goossen 2017, 179). In practice, this meant that IRO officers accepted the claims of Mennonite petitioners, not as ethnically German, but as ethnically Dutch – a claim based on the Frisian origins of Menno Simons, the founder of Mennonitism, and his original followers.<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to this argumentative figure, the MCC was able to secure international support for the overseas resettlement of the majority of the people in its care before the systematic scrutiny of EWZ records in the BDC showed the involvement of many Mennonites with Nazi Germany, including the acceptance of German citizenship, which rendered any claim to Dutch ethnicity void (Goossen 2017, 180). As in cases of non-Mennonite resettlers from the Soviet Union or elsewhere, proof of naturalization in Germany could lead to the revoking of already granted DP status. This happened, for instance, to Helene Dyck, who was found to be “within the mandate of the IRO” in October 1949, before the appearance of her EWZ naturalization records made the IRO withdraw her status in January 1950.<sup>44</sup> In a similar case, Viktor Isaak and his family were initially found to be “within the mandate of the IRO” in October 1949.<sup>45</sup> Then their status was revoked, as it transpired that Viktor had been naturalized by the EWZ in July 1944, and had previously served with the SS-directed ethnic German *Selbstschutz* (“self-protection” units).<sup>46</sup> However, in his defense, Viktor claimed that they had been forced to appear before the naturalization commission, without him ever having applied for citizenship.<sup>47</sup> This explanation seems to have been good enough for the IRO, as they were once again ruled eligible in October 1950.<sup>48</sup>

It is uncertain whether the reinstatement of Viktor Isaak’s DP status (as well as that of other petitioners) was the result of MCC interventions or not. According to Benjamin Goossen’s (2017) account, the MCC was quite effective in fending off attacks on Mennonite eligibility for DP status. In their defense of

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<sup>43</sup> The idea that the Mennonites were, in fact, Dutch rather than German was actually much older. How the Mennonites were historically construed as German is analyzed by Goossen (2017).

<sup>44</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Helene Dyck, n.d., 3.2.1.1 / 79054577 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen; IRO Eligibility Officer, Wentorf, to James B. Hurley, US DP Commission, Brit. Zone, January 18, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79054584 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>45</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Viktor Isaak, n.d., 3.2.1.1 / 79204192 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>46</sup> 3.2.1.1 / 79204197 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen. On the *Selbstschutz* and its role in the Holocaust, see Steinhart (2015).

<sup>47</sup> Erklärung Viktor Isaak, September 21, 1950, 3.2.1.1 / 79204195 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>48</sup> Application for IRO Assistance, Viktor Isaak, n.d., 3.2.1.1 / 79204192 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

Mennonites from Ukraine, the MCC asserted to the IRO that those who were naturalized or had performed armed service had acted under extreme coercion (Goossen 2017, 180). Yet, as the Chortitza cases examined in this study show, this did not stop the IRO from probing and revoking previously granted statuses even after Mennonite eligibility – which Goossen (2017, 180) claims had been collectively suspended in July 1949 – had supposedly been reinstated in October 1949. Altogether, about half of the applicants from the Chortitza sample were granted DP status – a significantly larger proportion than among the other *Umsiedler* groups. The effective lobbying of the MCC’s ethno-confessional network went a long way in enabling the mass “conversion” of Mennonites from German to Dutch or, indeed, specifically Mennonite ethnicity.

#### 4.4 Overseas Resettlement and (Ethno-)Confessional Networks

The MCC’s ethno-confessional network was also crucial to the eventual resettlement process. The MCC proved most effective in transferring Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union (as well as from Polish West Prussia) to overseas destinations. After the Paraguayan government had decided to accept Mennonite immigrants in 1946 – adding to the already existing colonies in the country’s Chaco region – the first MCC emigrant ship sailed in February 1947 (Goossen 2017, 178-9). Thanks to these institutionalized colonization projects, Mennonite DPs did not have to rely exclusively on personal networks – even though Mennonite emigration movements from pre-revolution Russia and the Soviet Union had produced them. Instead, they were able to establish new lives in MCC-sponsored agricultural settlements.<sup>49</sup> In total, up until the mid-1950s, the MCC successfully resettled more than 15,000 Mennonites overseas, of whom approximately 8,000 went to Canada; 5,000 to Paraguay; 1,200 to Uruguay; and 1,100 to the United States (Goossen 2017, 181 and endnote 32, 251). This number included nearly all of the roughly 12,000 Mennonites from Ukraine who had not been “repatriated” to the Soviet Union (Goossen 2017, 181).<sup>50</sup>

As the United States and Canada relaxed their restrictions on ethnic German immigration from 1950 onwards, emigration also became feasible for all those *Volksdeutsche* of other denominations and origins who had not managed to acquire DP status (Freund 2004; Maeder 2011). For the success of their emigration projects, they depended on a mix of personal networks and sponsorship from generic confessional relief organizations. Many Gottscheers benefitted

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<sup>49</sup> For an autobiographical account of resettlement in an MCC colony in Uruguay see, for instance, Warkentin (2004).

<sup>50</sup> In 1945, there had been 35,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union in Germany, of whom 23,000 were deported back to the Soviet Union (see Goossen 2017, 174, 177).

from their connections to relatives who had emigrated to the United States during the interwar period or already before World War I. Anna Klun, for instance, moved to the United States in May 1950 via the sponsorship of her brother Louis Klun, who had done so in 1928.<sup>51</sup> After the US Refugee Relief Act of August 1953, institutional sponsorship became more common (Freund 2004, 220). In the Gottscheer case, it usually came from the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC), of which the New York-based Gottscheer Relief Association was a constituent organization. In this case, ethnic and confessional organizations overlapped. Dense personal networks combined with institutional connections produced a fairly efficient resettlement machinery. For example, of the 211 inhabitants of Anna Klun's village Lienfeld/Livold, who were displaced by the Nazis in 1941-1942, at least half found new homes in North America after the war – mostly within a few blocks from each other in the Glendale and Ridgewood neighborhoods in Queens, New York.<sup>52</sup> Those who did not emigrate settled mainly in Austria (Wörsdörfer 2018).

The confessionally heterogeneous Germans from the Soviet Union benefited from sponsorship of different denominational as well as ecumenical organizations. Those included the NCWC, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the ecumenical Church World Service (CWS), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). The Central Office of the Relief Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (*Zentralbüro des Hilfswerks der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*) was also helpful with emigration from Germany. Those wishing to resettle in Canada were assisted by the cross-confessional Canadian Christian Council for Resettlement of Refugees (Heier 1955, 125-6). As an example, among the case studies addressed in this article, the Protestant couple Friedrich and Matilde Aldinger from the Johannestal colony in the Beresan region emigrated to the United States in March 1952, sponsored by the LWF.<sup>53</sup> Their destination was Roscoe, South

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<sup>51</sup> Passenger manifesto of S.S. Westphalia, sailing from Hamburg, July 25, 1928, arriving at Halifax, August 5, 1928. Ancestry.com. Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935.

<sup>52</sup> I have calculated these numbers based on the EWZ records of the Gottscheer resettlement (available online at <<http://gottschee.net/Dateien/Dokumente/Web%20Deutsch/Umsiedlungsverzeichnis/start.php>> [Accessed January 9, 2019]) and the emigration records of Lienfelders contained in the ITS archives, as well as at <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>. For their detailed analysis see Panagiotidis (2020). There are no exact numbers available on the total number of overseas migrants from among the 12,000 Gottscheer *Umsiedler*. The partial numbers given by the Gottscheer Relief Association on its website suggest that Lienfeld might be fairly representative. It mentions about 2,000 Gottscheer immigrants to the United States between 1948 and 1950, another 2,000 in 1952, and smaller numbers of immigrants over the following years. See History of the Gottscheer Relief Association, <[http://www.gottscheenewyork.org/relief\\_history.html](http://www.gottscheenewyork.org/relief_history.html)> (Accessed August 20, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Manifest of In-Bound Passengers (Aliens), USNS Gen. S.D. Sturgis, sailing from Bremerhaven, March 4, 1952, arriving at New York, March 15, 1952. Ancestry.com. New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957.

Dakota, where several of their nephews and nieces lived.<sup>54</sup> Martin Bartle (a Catholic), his wife Tatjana, and their two children reached the United States in April 1952 via the sponsorship of the CWS – which, in other instances, also sponsored the emigration of Protestants.<sup>55</sup> They subsequently settled in Milwaukee, where they had another daughter in 1953 and lived until their deaths in 1995 and 1999 respectively.<sup>56</sup> Martin's sister Matilde and her Ukrainian husband Feodor Holub, whom she had married in Germany in September 1951, were also sponsored by the CWS, while his brother Pius and their mother Margarethe were sponsored by the NCWC. They all came to the United States on the same boat in June 1952.<sup>57</sup> Previously, in June 1951, the WCC had intervened on their behalf, claiming that they were DPs, thereby trying to help their emigration case with the IRO.<sup>58</sup> They also went on to live in Milwaukee.<sup>59</sup> Pius got married in 1959 and moved to Illinois in the 1960s, where he died in 1984.<sup>60</sup> Matilde and her husband moved on to live in the state of New York, joining another sister, Eugenie Frank, who had already arrived in the United States in November 1951.<sup>61</sup> Matilde passed away in Hammondsport, New York, in April 2000.<sup>62</sup>

While there are no official statistics, the overall emigration of non-Mennonite Russian Germans seems to have been substantial, but not as large as that of the Mennonites. A 1955 article in the Russian-German *Heimatbuch*

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<sup>54</sup> Application for Assistance PCIRO, Friedrich Aldinger, March 29, 1949, 3.2.1.1 / 78871101 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>55</sup> Manifest of In-Bound Passengers (Aliens), USNS General M.B. Stewart, sailing from Bremerhaven, April 4, 1952, arriving at New York, April 20, 1952. A Protestant example is the Besarabian Johann(es) Zimmermann, listed with CWS sponsorship on Manifest of In-Bound Passengers (Aliens), USNS General Harry Taylor, sailing from Bremerhaven, March 18, 1952, arriving at New York, March 29, 1952. Both documents were retrieved via Ancestry.com. New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957. Johann(es) and his family went to join a relative in Eureka, South Dakota.

<sup>56</sup> See Martin Bartle's Petition for Naturalization in the United States (undated; Ancestry.com). Wisconsin, Federal Naturalization Records, 1848-1992. Their dates of death are also listed in the Ancestry database.

<sup>57</sup> Manifest of In-Bound Passengers (Aliens), USNS General C.C. Ballou, sailing from Bremerhaven, June 1, 1952, arriving at New York, June 10, 1952. (Ancestry.com). New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957.

<sup>58</sup> World Council of Churches, Refugee Division, to Control Center, Munich, June 20, 1951, 3.2.1.1 / 78910523 / ITS Digital Archives, Bad Arolsen.

<sup>59</sup> See Matilde Holub's Petition for Naturalization in the United States (undated; Ancestry.com). Wisconsin, Federal Naturalization Records, 1848-1992.

<sup>60</sup> See Pius Bartle's Petition for Naturalization in the United States (undated, after April 1959; Ancestry.com). Illinois, Federal Naturalization Records, 1856-1991. His date of death is also listed in the Ancestry database.

<sup>61</sup> On Eugenie and Konstantin Frank's immigration, see Manifest of In-Bound Passengers (Aliens), USNS General R.M. Blatchford, sailing from Bremerhaven, November 7, 1951, arriving at New York, November 17, 1951. (Ancestry.com). New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957.

<sup>62</sup> Ancestry.com. Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014.



(historical almanac) published by the Stuttgart-based homeland association (*Landsmannschaft*) of Germans from Russia reported that more than 4,000 families of Lutheran Russian Germans had emigrated with the help of national and international church organizations, which amounted to an estimated 12,000-14,000 persons. There were no comparable statistical records for Catholics and for those who emigrated privately through family networks. The anonymous author of the article estimated a total of 3,000-4,000 individuals fell within these categories.<sup>63</sup> These estimates yield a number of between 15,000 to 18,000 non-Mennonite Russian-German postwar overseas emigrants, out of a total of approximately 58,000 who had escaped repatriation to the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup> Among those who stayed were two of the six Bartle siblings – Katherina, who lived near Heilbronn until her death in 1990; and Ferdinand, who passed away in East German Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1957.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the majority of Bessarabian resettlers did not emigrate, but established themselves in West and East Germany.<sup>66</sup> Arguably, the integrative role of active self-help initiatives from within the community, such as Karl Rüb's Stuttgart-based Relief Council for Protestant Resettlers (*Hilfswerk für evangelische Umsiedler*) and Immanuel Baumann's Relief Committee of Lutheran Germans from Bessarabia (*Hilfskomitee der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Deutschen aus Bessarabien*), aided this outcome (Schmidt 2003, ff. 278 and 2012, ff. 345).

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<sup>63</sup> "Volk auf dem Weg: Über den Wandertrieb unserer Volksgruppe." *Heimatbuch der Ostumsiedler* (1955): 59–61.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin Goossen (2017, 177) writes that 280,000 out of a total of 350,000 *Umsiedler* from the Soviet Union were repatriated, putting the number of those initially remaining in Germany at 70,000, including 12,000 Mennonites. This number is roughly consistent with Viktor Krieger's (2017) estimate of 51,200 Russian Germans living in West Germany, and 11,000 in East Germany in 1950, considering that the majority of Russian-German Mennonites had emigrated by then. Other authors give different numbers: In a publication for the Cultural Foundation of German Expellees, historian Gerhard Reichling (1986, 31) puts their total number in both German states at 90,000 in 1950. According to Detlef Brandes (2012), only 140,000 of 300,000 wartime resettlers were repatriated, which would put the number of Russian Germans in postwar Germany at 160,000, although this number certainly appears too high.

<sup>65</sup> Both are listed as part of the "Frank Family Tree" on Ancestry.com, <<https://www.ancestry.de/family-tree/tree/1399927/family?fpid=-1948686461&usePUBJs=true>>.

<sup>66</sup> I could not find precise numbers on Bessarabian emigration. Of the 46 cases from the ITS database, only 4 definitely emigrated. Ute Schmidt (2012, 348) merely writes that "many families" emigrated to the United States and Canada. Referring to an unspecified statistical survey by the *Heimatortskartei* Bessarabia (an office keeping a registry of former Bessarabian Germans), the German-language Wikipedia entry on Bessarabian Germans mentions 79,000 living Bessarabians in 1964 (of a total of 93,000 wartime resettlers), of whom 65,000 lived in West and 12,000 in East Germany, suggesting that only a small number had emigrated to other countries. See entry "Bessarabiendeutsche," <<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessarabiendeutsche>> (Accessed August 18, 2018). Plans for a Mennonite-style collective resettlement in Paraguay failed (see Schmidt 1999, 296; and the contemporary article "Nach Paraguay," *Die Zeit*, July 24, 1952, <<https://www.zeit.de/1952/30/nach-paraguay>>).

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## 5. Conclusion

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In this article, I have looked at the postwar migrations of ethnic Germans from Slovenia (Gottschee), Romania (Bessarabia), and the Soviet Union (Ukraine) who had found themselves in Germany and Austria due to Nazi resettlement campaigns. While their story is usually told within the context of German “flight and expulsion” (*Flucht und Vertreibung*), it is also (and equally) part of the history of postwar refugee and DP management, which has attracted much historiographical attention in recent years. A direct point of overlap between these two stories was created when people who had been classified and resettled as *Volksdeutsche* during the war sought international assistance, despite the clear administrative division between German and non-German refugees.

This article has looked at the individual and collective strategies of ethnic Germans trying to access IRO care, usually with the aim of emigrating overseas. Individual strategies consisted of claiming a nationality other than German before the IRO officers and trying to provide a convincing narrative to back up this claim. However, as the cases presented above have shown, these efforts usually failed. Contrary to the idea that national identifications are infinitely malleable and “fuzzy” by definition, the people in question were, in the end, quite clearly identified as German – not so much based on criteria such as culture and origin, but due to acts of self-identification during the war, which had assured them favorable treatment by the Nazi authorities. Ethnic German petitioners living in mixed marriages represent a partial exception and were in some instances able to gain recognition as DPs for themselves and their families. Marrying a recognized DP was also a viable strategy for ethnic German women. Yet overall, the majority of ethnic German petitioners remained outside the IRO system. The main exception were the Russian and West Prussian Mennonites, whose well-connected international relief and lobbying organization, the MCC, enabled a collective “conversion” from German to Dutch ethnicity, based on the historically Dutch origins of their religion. Here then, national identification did prove to be malleable and a function of political negotiation.

Although the majority of the *Umsiedler* examined here were not recognized as DPs, many of them ultimately succeeded in emigrating overseas when the United States and Canada loosened their immigration restrictions for ethnic Germans from 1950 onwards. Seen in a broader temporal context, their overseas resettlement was part of a general migration trend among such communities towards the western hemisphere. To what extent they were able to continue this trend after the war depended largely on the strength of their family and community networks. As demonstrated previously, the majority of Gottscheers already lived in North America before the war; postwar resettlement brought a large part of the remaining European community across the Atlantic. This was helped by the dense pre-existing networks and active North American commu-

nity, while their lack of perspective in postwar Austria – a country that denied all responsibility for them – constituted an important “push factor.” In this respect, they differed from the Bessarabians, who, like the Gottscheers, had been displaced by the Nazis in an official resettlement campaign, but unlike the Gottscheers ended up within the borders of postwar Germany. While conditions there were problematic, too, they were at least within the purview of the emerging German refugee administration. Moreover, they soon developed active self-help initiatives that aided their integration in Germany, while a North American community organization to help their emigration was absent. Therefore, despite existing family networks extending to North America, emigration among this community remained limited.

Germans from Russia and the Soviet Union had also been on the move towards the Americas since the last quarter of the 19th century. This trend had been severely curtailed by Soviet emigration restrictions. Of those remaining in the Soviet Union, only about one quarter were resettled by the Nazis during the years 1943-1944, while the others were deported eastward by the Soviet authorities at the beginning of the German-Soviet War – as were about 80% of the *Umsiedler* after the end of the war. As a consequence, the vast majority of the group was still in the Soviet Union after World War II. For those in the West, ethnic and confessional networks were decisive in enabling overseas resettlement: while Mennonite resettlement was near total, thanks to the very active and well-connected North American community organization, members of other confessions had to struggle harder, as they were lacking a comparable lobbying body and network.

Ultimately, about two thirds of the *Umsiedler* who were not repatriated to the Soviet Union stayed in West Germany. Their presence would turn out to be of crucial importance when the Soviet Union started allowing the emigration of ethnic Germans for purposes of family reunification from the 1970s onwards (Panagiotidis 2019). From this point in time, the Federal Republic of Germany, rather than the Americas, became the preferred destination of ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union – a fact that was aided by the country’s generous provision of citizenship to such people. Since 1987, the majority of the remaining Russian Germans, whether of Ukrainian or Volga German origin, have moved to Germany as “late resettlers” (*Spätaussiedler*). Recently, some of them, mostly Mennonites, have rediscovered their overseas connections and have moved again to places in North and South America.<sup>67</sup> The migration of Russian Germans thus continues, albeit no longer as a consequence of war and coercion.

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<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, the examples in Kühn (2012). I also have anecdotal evidence of *Spätaussiedler* of Mennonite origin and their children moving to destinations in Canada and Bolivia.

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