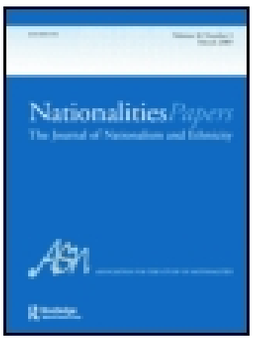

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# Self-attribution and identity of ethnic-German SpätAussiedler repatriates from the former USSR: an example of fast-track assimilation?

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# Self-attribution and identity of ethnic-German *SpätAussiedler* repatriates from the former USSR: an example of fast-track assimilation?

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Repatriates – so-called *SpätAussiedler* – from republics of the former Soviet Union are one of the most important groups of immigrants in the Federal Republic of Germany. Granted German citizenship based on ethnicity, German policy supposed fast and smooth assimilation. Despite the fact that *SpätAussiedler* had advantages for structural and social integration into German society compared to immigrants of non-German descent and indications of rather smooth integration, the initial hopes for fast assimilation prove to be exaggerated. Instead, as revealed by a survey and interviews on the ethnic self-identification, cultural habits, and linguistic behavior of *SpätAussiedler*, a hybrid "Russian–German" identity has emerged amongst many repatriates.

**Keywords:** repatriates; *SpätAussiedler*; assimilation; identity; self-attribution



## "Russlanddeutsche," "*Aussiedler*," "*SpätAussiedler*:" A specific migrant community for studying integration and assimilation

People from the former Soviet Union of ethnic-German descent are one of the largest immigrant groups in the Federal Republic of Germany. Since 1950, approximately 4.5 million of these repatriates, comprising non-Germanic family members, have settled in the Federal Republic of Germany, of which about 2.5 million settled in the 1990s. Russian has become one of the most widely spoken foreign languages and this specific form of co-ethnic migration (Münz and Ohlinger 2003) has changed German demographics.

Over the past decade, *SpätAussiedler*[1] immigration has decreased significantly (Figure 1) because the pool of ethnic-German migrants in the relevant countries of origin is largely exhausted and the formal requirements have been tightened (especially concerning language skills and the proof of genuine German culture).[2]

Unlike most other groups of immigrants to Germany, *SpätAussiedler* were privileged concerning their immigration to Germany, as the German nationality law until 2010 was mainly based on the *jus sanguinis* principle. Being descendants[3] of German people having settled in the Russian Empire and the Ukrainian (as well as Hungarian, Romanian and Serbian) territories of Austria–Hungary in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, they were (and are) entitled to German citizenship on the basis of their ethnic

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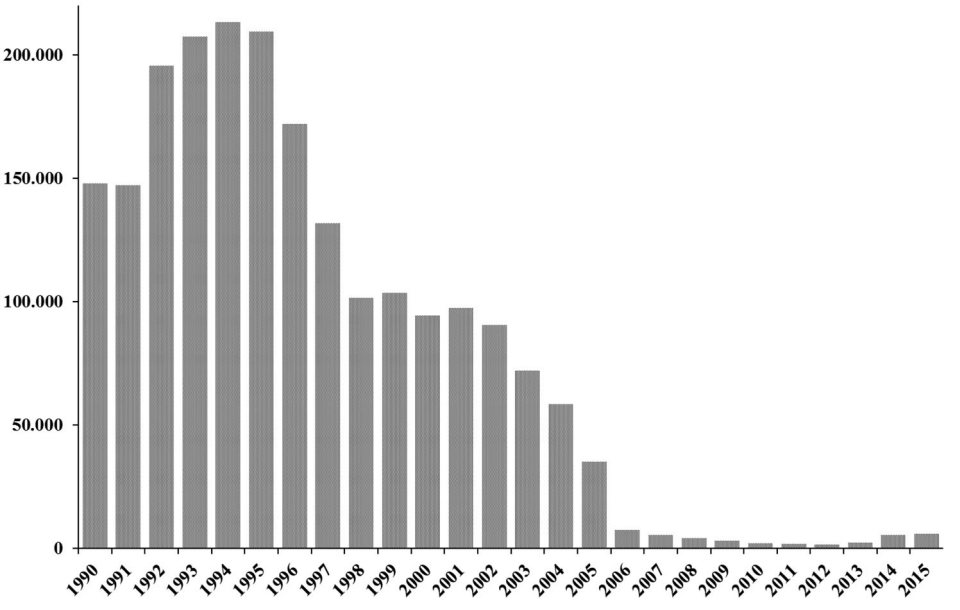


Figure 1. (Spät-) *Aussiedler* from former USSR to Germany, 1990–2015.
Data: Statistisches Bundesamt 2016.

and cultural belonging.[4] People of ethnic-German ancestry are considered to be German and have an inalienable right to German citizenship according to article 116 of the German Federal Constitution (*Grundgesetz*) and the "Act on Affairs of Displaced Persons and Refugees, Expatriates and Re-Patriates." Furthermore, non-German spouses or descendants of *SpätAussiedler* are generally awarded German citizenship or at least the right of permanent residence (shifts in legal and political practice and discourse in this context, are discussed by Zeveleva 2014 and Takle 2011).

Integration and assimilation are central aspects of contemporary German policy concerning citizenship and migration. For *SpätAussiedler*, ethnicity and assimilation represent the background of all legislation concerning their status. In scholarly debates, the meaning of assimilation and integration can be sometimes similar or even the same. Generally, "the term integration is preferred in German-language scholarship because 'assimilation' has a strong negative connotation in German because of its association with forcible Germanization" (Ehrkamp 2006, 1675). I distinguish between structural integration, social integration, and assimilation. *Integration* in this paper refers to gradual social integration into the "mainstream" society. Eventually, integration leads to *assimilation*. *Assimilation* is understood as the "full integration" into the receiving society, the adoption of the language, the culture and behavioral patterns, the expression of undivided loyalty toward the "new-homeland," and the abandonment of those of the country of origin (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 1997; Portes 2001; Rebhun 2014). This straightforward concept to assimilation (also referred to as incorporation and integration by some scholars) has been discussed widely (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Waldinger 2008). New ideas, such as segmented assimilation, transnationalism, and hybrid identity emerged as alternative approaches, taking into consideration that there are variable trajectories of social integration and that assimilation is not an inescapable final outcome (Portes and Zhou 1993; Pries 1998; Dufoix 2003; Waters and Jimenez 2005). Nonetheless, the "classic" idea of

assimilation occurs to be the appropriate perspective for studying *SpätAussiedler* because their immigration to Germany is linked to an ethnicist paradigm imposed by the Federal Republic of Germany.

Putting emphasis on assimilation in Germany may appear surprising at first glimpse, as Germany's official immigration policy from the 1950s *Gastarbeiteranwerbung* (literally: guest worker-recruitment) until the late 1990s is often described as multiculturalist. Due to the fact that immigrants – with few exceptions – were meant to settle only temporarily and eventually return "home," multiculturalism was favored in order to maintain (cultural) separation from German society and ease return migration (Hess and Green 2016). It is only from the late 1990s that Germany successively acknowledged being an "immigration-country" and experienced a (parallel) re-orientation toward assimilationist immigration politics. As a consequence, contemporary Germany does not fit easily into scholarly schemata of ethnocentrism, transformation, or multiculturalism (Schönwälder and Triadafilopolus 2016).

Although German immigration policy seems quite volatile, the situation concerning *SpätAussiedler* was always distinct and legally defined. People are of German kinship if they are descendants of German citizens or people of German kinship, and who have been raised in a German way, been taught German language and German culture, and who openly identified themselves as German ethnics in their country of birth (§6 BVFG). This concise, yet comprehensive, legal definition of "Germanness" does not give any other option than assimilation to the *SpätAussiedler*. Thus, multiculturalism did not make sense from a formal point of view concerning the repatriation of this specific group of immigrants. Furthermore, especially fast assimilation of *SpätAussiedler* was presumed by the state, as their status is based on German ethnicity.

This paper contributes to scholarly knowledge on immigration, integration, and cultural assimilation by exploring how first-generation *SpätAussiedler* in Germany perceive their place in society and how their ethno-national identity is shaped. It is framed within the contemporary political discourse on immigration in Germany, where a general shift from multiculturalism to assimilation occurs is under way, but far from completed (Schönwälder and Triadafilopoulos 2016).

The central research questions in this context are: To what extent do first-generation *SpätAussiedler* feel integrated and "genuinely German? Is the cultural proximity of *SpätAussiedler* in combination with structural integration advantages a significant catalyst to cultural integration? The latter idea corresponds with the unspoken but implicit expectation by German officials of a fast-track assimilation concerning *SpätAussiedler*. As this study is on first-generation migrants, assessing the "degree of assimilation" would be a premature undertaking (and this is not the intention of this research). Nonetheless, facilitating and hindering factors concerning the first generation's trajectory to integration can be identified.

In order to better understand integration, social formations built around ethnic markers are of importance (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1995; Faist 2000). Therefore, my focus is on the voices of the individuals involved. Consequently, this study is based on a survey and qualitative interviews. Considering the divergence of the "official" discourse and legal framework on the one hand, and the day-to-day challenges and experiences of the individual migrants, on the other hand, the *self-referred* state of integration and (ethnic) self-identification of *SpätAussiedler* has been selected as the key element for three reasons. First, despite a latent assimilationist-ethnicist attitude toward migrants in Germany, there is no clear political concept for integration and assimilation (in fact, there is not even a concise and consistent immigration act, but a repertory of, partially conflicting, case-by-case legislation).

Second, the focus on the individual perspective anticipates scholarly critique that older assimilation theories have been based on quantitative data analysis (such as census data or information delivered by public administration) and would not note the immigrants' experiences and understanding (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Ehrkamp 2006; Phillips, Davis, and Ratcliffe 2007; Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen 2009). Hence, the explicit qualitative perspective of the interviews for this study has been included, because I also do not see a convincing normative scheme for "measuring" assimilation and the degree of integration via (seemingly) precise quantitative-numeric indicators.

Third, integration is by no means only a question of the individual capacity to adapt and integrate in a new cultural, social, and societal environment. Various externalities, such as exclusion and rejection, discrimination, and xenophobia, are factors of high importance. At this point, the subjective voice is particularly important, as hurtful individual experiences and oblique forms of discrimination are not understood and discovered from an outsider's perspective or measured by quantitative indicators. Integration is not about where immigrants and minorities live, but how they understand their membership in society (Nagel and Staeheli 2008; Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen 2009). This is also true for *SpätAussiedler*. Even though they hold a German passport, they are immigrants to Germany.

As a conservative approach to assimilation and integration represents the foundation of German politics concerning immigration, I chose also the rather "classical," yet coherent and easy-to-apply scheme by Esser (2001) for assessing integration. This approach is also widely used in the context of policy advice or social planning in Germany. Esser (2001) names four main forms of social integration: identification, interaction, acculturation (socialization), and placement. For this study, identification and socialization are of special relevance. Within these two key variables, I give special attention to the identification with a national group, cultural proximity (habits), language proficiency, and linguistic behavior (most commonly spoken language(s) in everyday life).

Language is a key indicator. According to the "three-generation model of language assimilation" (Alba et al. 2002; Bean and Stevens 2003; Waters and Jimenez 2005), the immigrant generation predominantly continues to use their native tongue, whilst the second generation is bilingual, and the third generation does not (or hardly) speak the language of their grandparents any more. In this context, the *SpätAussiedler* were in an interesting, favorable starting position, as already the first generation was largely bilingual before immigration. However, fluent bilingualism cannot be assumed for all *SpätAussiedler*, and many close relatives of non-Germanic origin do not/did not speak German when arriving in Germany.

Many scholars deem adult immigrants to have solid identities forged in their countries of origin, which leads to a limited tendency to acquire identification with the receiving society. They are in the society, but not yet of it (Glazer 1953; Portes, Vickstrom, and Aparicio 2011). Their children (and those who emigrated at a very young age), by contrast, are raised in the new environment and should have better preconditions for integration. Recent research suggests that even the second generation is not always integrating properly, and assimilation can be expected from the third generation on (Portes, Vickstrom, and Aparicio 2011).

Since ethnic-German immigrants had relatively similar conditions for integration and some similar biographical markers – such as the country of origin, reasons for leaving home, and knowledge of German (Noyes 2004, 29) – it might be expected that differences in the course of integration (toward assimilation as virtually "highest" degree of integration) and identity would be strongly dependent on the age when leaving the native country and to a much lesser extent to the socioeconomic or biographical characteristics (Hill and Schnell 1990). It seems rather probable that older migrants, who have been fully socialized in the

Soviet Union, might have more difficulties with successful integration in Germany. The younger, however, should be "easier" and better integrated. Therefore, the age when leaving the native country and duration of stay in Germany was another central aspect of this study.

## Repatriation and assimilation: the ethnicist approach

Ethnic return migration is not a singularity or specifically German concern, but a global phenomenon. Typical rationales of nation-states on ethnic-repatriation are analyzed and explained in a comparative perspective by Tsuda (2010). Israel, Russia, South Korea, and Japan are other prominent examples for this type of migration (Tsuda 2010). In total, there are about 40 countries which have implemented repatriation legislation or programs, and most of the time, these policies are focused on the diaspora-ethnic group(s) of the titular nation (Zeveleva 2014).

Having a closer look on *SpätAussiedler*, the notion of return migration might seem odd, as we are witnessing the "return" of diasporic people whose ancestors have been living outside their ethnic homeland for generations. Germany as a nation state even did not exist when the forefathers of the *SpätAussiedler* settled in Central and Eastern Europe more than a century ago (Krieger 2015):

> Although such diasporic return migration may appear to be more ethnically driven than other types of international migration, most diasporic descendants are not returning to their ethnic homelands to reconnect with their ancestral roots or explore their ethnic heritage. Instead, they are generally migrating from less developed countries to more economically prosperous ancestral homelands (often in the developed world) in search of jobs, higher incomes and a better standard of living. (Tsuda 2010, 617)

This is certainly not very surprising. Despite distinct cultural ties and ethnic belonging, *SpätAussiedler*-migration is almost no different from other forms of immigration on an individual level. *SpätAussiedler* encounter similar challenges concerning integration, as do other migrants. Discrimination, difficulties with recognition of professional qualifications and education, as well as the adaption in everyday life, are typical problems (Ehrkamp 2005; Zeveleva 2014). Finally, they "are perceived by the local population as foreign or as a migrant group" (Zeveleva 2014, 809), but not as fellow countrymen. Certainly, this attitude is reverse to the official narrative. The Federal Commissioner for National Minorities, State Secretary Christoph Bergner made clear that from his point of view, *SpätAussiedler* should be seen as a community of the same fate with Germany and not as people of (solely) the same language (Bergner, 21 December 2006).

Despite the fact that they were "officially" considered to be "true" Germans and deemed to have exceptional potential for smooth and fast integration, *SpätAussiedler* and their families were subject to specific, mandatory (and free of charge) integration support. Other immigrants did not benefit from institutionalized support for integration until 2007, when a "National Plan on Integration" was waived. As already mentioned above, according to the government's version, foreigners in Germany were not meant to stay forever[5] (with some exceptions, such as confirmed asylum seekers), even though reality proved to be completely different. Given this point of view, integration support for migrants seemed unnecessary and inefficient. *Aussiedler* and *SpätAussiedler,* however, were meant to come, stay, and assimilate. Currently, an increasingly rigid roadmap toward integration and assimilation is discussed in German politics. Multiculturalist paradigms are regarded rather skeptically, often with reference to the danger of emerging *Parallelgesellschaften* (parallel societies within the country).

In 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel supposed that multiculturalism has *totally failed* ("Der Ansatz für Multikulti ist gescheitert, absolut gescheitert!" Angela Merkel, 16 October 2010, Deutschlandtag Junge Union, Potsdam) and in the light of the reception of more than 1 million asylum seekers and refugees in 2015 and early 2016 (www.bamf.de), in March 2016, German Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière proposed a law on integration, which envisages severe sanctions for so-called *Integrationsverweigerer* (literally "deniers of integration") amongst the newly arrived refugees.[6] However, "the very fact that a nation feels the need to declare its *Leitkultur* in party manifestos or by legislation would seem a fairly strong indicator that it no longer has one!" (Kasinitz 2012, 585).

Finally, the modification of German nationality law at the turn of the millennium (1999/2000 and in 2005) by adding a stronger *jus solis* component to the formerly *jus sanguinis*-based act did not include a true shift toward a pluralistic ideology. The change is more from a predominantly ethnicist paradigm toward a civic ideology with strong assimilationist tendencies. Furthermore, the former dominating paradigm of *jus sanguinis* has not vanished at all, and Germany still follows an predominantly historical and ethnicist understanding concerning nationhood and citizenship in political terms and public discourses (Brubaker 1992; Yağmur and van de Vijver 2012).

## Research design and methodology

The empirical findings of this paper[7] are based on a survey of 188[8] randomly chosen *SpätAussiedler* from former USSR countries living in the Rhineland-Palatinate Federal State, and nine qualitative in-depth interviews in Germersheim, Hochspeyer, Enkenbach, and Kaiserslautern (cities and communities within this federal state), which were carried out one year after the survey. The respondents were, with one exception, all persons with at least 10 years of residence in the Federal Republic of Germany at the time of the research and recruited in *SpätAussiedler* networks via opportunistic snowball sampling.[9] After quality and plausibility checks, 172 respondents of the survey remained for further analysis.

The survey put emphasis on an overview concerning self-attribution, identity, and integration, especially with regard to different age groups. The following in-depth interviews delivered more detailed insight into *subjective* views, in order to incorporate the individual perspective and obtain a comprehensive picture by the combination of both approaches.

To get a notion on the "integrative-effect" of structural (legal) incorporation (by providing German citizenship) and to better understand some specifics of the *SpätAussiedler*'s degree of integration, findings from a 2010 survey on self-referred integration amongst 142 Jewish immigrants[10] from Russia and former Soviet countries living in the Kaiserslautern area are juxtaposed with the information given by the *SpätAussiedler*. Furthermore, this sample also serves as the control group for selected topics on integration.

Jewish migrants are an appropriate peer group, as they are not of German ethnicity but faced similar conditions concerning immigration to Germany:

> In 1991, the Federal Government and governments of individual federal states adopted official immigration rules for Jews from the USSR admitting them to Germany as so-called quota refugees. Over the last two decades a total of 220,000 people came to Germany within the framework of "Jewish immigration." About 50% of them are Jewish according to religious criteria, the rest being persons of Jewish descent and non-Jewish spouses. (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, 22 September 2009)

Not being of German origin, they were not granted German citizenship but received permanent residence permits. Thus, de facto, they are *almost* as "privileged" immigrants as the

*SpätAussiedler*, at least until 2005 when the requirements were changed (since then, Jewish immigrants must speak German, should prove the option of incorporation to a German Jewish congregation and must not depend on social welfare). The survey concerned people having immigrated before this date and having spent more than five years in Germany.

Both surveys were conducted by persons of Russian origin, using bilingual questionnaires (German and Russian), whereas the interviews were carried out by a native German interviewer in the German language.[11]

Four age groups were predefined for the *SpätAussiedler* survey. The youngest cohort concerns those having come to Germany as children with their parents (0–13 years at the time of emigration). The second group comprises persons who were adolescents aged 14–18 years, when leaving their native country. Furthermore, a cohort of 19–45 year olds at the time of departure was chosen. The limit of 45 years of age is set for this group, as it is assumed that those individuals who (coming to Germany in the period from 1989 to 2000) were born no earlier than 1945, but immediately after World War II. The fourth group consists of emigrants who were 46 or older and represent the oldest generation.

Empirical and explorative research on subjective orientations and experiences of migrants remains an important base for theoretical discussion and the advance of migration and integration studies. Even though the concentration on self-referred, subjective orientations in this study may be critically discussed (Portes 1997), it should be recognized that subjective factors are of crucial importance to belonging and integration and deserve attention, to better understand the complex interaction of various factors concerning integration and assimilation (Yuval-Davies 2006; Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen 2009).

## Being *Russlanddeutsch* or German or Russian?

A bold marker of assimilation is the primary identification with a national group. In the interviews as well as the survey, almost half of the respondents considered themselves *Russlanddeutsche* (Russian–Germans).

Surprisingly, it was the younger respondents, who were much more likely to describe themselves as Russian–German or even Russian (Table 1). Hence, this finding contradicts the hypothesis of an especially fast integration of the young generation. The self-attribution of being Russian–German remains also important within the other age cohorts, except for the oldest generation. Thus, it is the elders who consider themselves as German. The

Table 1. Self-identification of the respondents – survey data.

| | *Ethnic self-affirmation*[a] | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age when migrating to Germany* | *I am German* | *I am Russian (Kazakh, Kyrgyz …)* | *I am Russlanddeutsche(r) (Russian–German)* | *I am neither Russian nor German or other* |
| *46 years and older* | 10 (50%) | 1 (5%) | 6 (30%) | 3 (15%) |
| *19–45 years* | 21 (27%) | 10 (13%) | 36 (48%) | 9 (12%) |
| *14–18 years* | 3 (12%) | 6 (24%) | 15 (60%) | 1 (4%) |
| *0–13 years* | 16 (33%) | 10 (20%) | 20 (41%) | 3 (6%) |

[a]Total number and percent of age group.

interviews did confirm this, with the specific difference that it was the (very) youngest (as expected before) *and* the oldest family members, who claimed German identity.

A closer look at the younger *SpätAussiedler* shows that even those who were at preschool age and younger at the time of immigration do not necessarily refer to German identity. Similar conclusions are drawn by Göler and Lautenbacher (2010), pointing out that young *SpätAussiedler* in the city of Bamberg claimed to be either German, Russian, or of mixed identity, but never (*Spät-*)*Aussiedler* (Göler and Lautenbacher 2010, 45).

It is reasonable to assume that a high number of those who actually came to Germany as small children may consider themselves as being Russian or *Russlanddeutsch* instead of German, because ethnic identity is strongly shaped in everyday family life. If Russian language is the first language and the language spoken at home, a predominantly German identity is very unlikely to emerge: I speak Russian, therefore I am Russian. Furthermore, the experience of ethnic-based marginalization in German society may foster differentiation amongst the young *SpätAussiedler* and very probably also affect the second generation, born in Germany.

However, almost all interviewees of the qualitative part of study, who had all come to Germany in the early 1990s, referred to themselves as "Russian–German" but put clear emphasis on being more German than Russian:

> Russia is the past. If you listen to a Russian song, you will sometimes feel nostalgic. A German would feel the same when he recalls memories from the past. So you would be pleased, for example as a parent, if your child shows the same interests as you did previously. Russian folk dances, for example. (Interview 8, female, Germersheim)

In this statement, the (more or less unconscious?) differentiation between "her group" and "the Germans" reflects also the position in-between two cultural spheres. Nonetheless, this person considered herself and her family German, speaking only German at home.

Bi-cultural self-attribution is often reflected with regard to non-ethnic German (close) family members. It is very frequent that families are at least bi-national (Schmitz 2013, 151). Hence, a demonstrative self-attribution as being German instead of Russian–German might cause conflicts, as it could be interpreted as disloyalty or even breakup with non-German family members and the former cultural milieu (Rosenthal, Stephan, and Radenbach 2011, 13). This is an important point, explaining why the majority of *SpätAussiedler* adopt a position of *Russlanddeutsch* (Russian–German) in between two major cultural spaces, instead of taking a clear stand for the one or other ethnic sphere. Similar behavior and peer-group pressure are described by Patricia Ehrkamp (2005) amongst Turks living in Germany.

The general bi-cultural attitude is not a compelling consequence of emigration, but was already observed in the native countries.

The bi-cultural orientation of younger Germans in Russia was reported already before immigration to Germany. About 45% of a sample amongst young ethnic Germans living in Russia with emigration plans claimed being Russian *and* German (German Research Centre at the University of Novosibirsk in 1997; quoted by Heinen 2000, 41). More than one-third of them wanted to retain this cultural characteristic also after emigration from Russia. These findings fit to the idea of selective acculturation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), but with the difference that the concerned individuals were exposed to a split cultural environment even before emigrating.

Closely linked to the ethnic self-attribution is the perceived emotional binding to the place of origin and toward Germany. Here, it should be taken into consideration that moving to Germany was not in every case due to cultural alienation, but often linked to

very practical push-factors, such as a low standard of living or the loss of perspective in the native country. Given this context, the true *Heimat* (homeland) remains the place of origin for some people. After all, and regardless of ethnic classification or motives for emigration, the places where people are born and raised are typically places of strong emotional attachment. It needs to be mentioned that a semantic detail proved to be delicate, as the term *Heimat* had been used synonymously with "country of origin" in the questionnaire. Actually, German *Heimat* as well as the corresponding Russian term *rodina* (with a broader meaning of "Motherland") are extremely affective terms. Whilst country of origin is a more or less technical category, *rodina* reflects a deep emotional relationship, which goes beyond "homeland" and the already quite comprehensive idea of German *Heimat* (Blickle 2004, 21).

The strong attachment to Germany as *Heimat* and the commitment to German ethnicity of the elderly, relates to discrimination of Germans in post-war USSR and to experiences and narratives of much more grave harassment and oppression concerning ethnic Germans in the USSR during the 1940s: namely vilification, exclusion from society, deportation, violence.

One of the older interviewees, living in Germany since 1991, states:

> [In Germany I feel] recognized and integrated! At home and at ease, this is […] my home country, all my relatives are here and [my] children were born here. (Interview 4, male, Germersheim)

In this interview, the negative experiences linked to Soviet Union were explicit. It was described as especially hurtful to never have been fully accepted in the Russian-dominated Soviet society as an ethnic German. Furthermore, the ban of religion in the USSR was mentioned as another alienating element. Religion used to be very important for most ethnic-German communities. Germany instead was described ostentatiously positive. Emphasis was given to the fact, that (luckily), his professional qualification and his diplomas had been widely approved (which made integration so much easier), even though he did not hold an equal position as the one he used to fill in before leaving Kazakhstan. In order to reinforce this positive perception, the interviewee mentioned his cousin: A medical doctor, with fully recognized professional qualification after a short internship.

When asking *SpätAussiedler* about their emotional attachment to either Germany or the country of origin, the survey shows that one-third of all respondents felt very closely connected to both entities. More than half, however, chose only one country. Whilst one-fifth claims strong ties toward the country of origin, it is about one-third who consider Germany as an "emotional" homeland. However, most respondents referred to two cultural spaces simultaneously, which is coherent with the ethnic self-attribution (Tab. 1).

Of the same tenor were most interviews, although a preference for Germany becomes apparent. It occurs that the time of residence in Germany and individual preferences are quite important in this context. Practically all interviewees emphasized that they had always maintained and fostered "their" German culture in the Soviet Union, despite all troubles. One respondent pointed out that those people, who emigrated "later," tend to have much more difficulties to integrate, as they were not "true" *SpätAussiedler* anymore. This later generation is blamed for not speaking proper German and lacking the will to integrate:

> Thirty years ago they [*Aussiedler* coming to Germany] were Germans, today, they are more like Russians. (Interview 5, female, Germersheim)

This volunteer described her own integration as: "Well, it is so-so" and she mentioned her Russian accent as a major obstacle for being accepted as a genuine German. On the other

hand, a major point during the interview concerned the very "successful" integration of herself and her entire family. This division of *SpätAussiedler* into different groups within the category has also been repeatedly pictured by scholarly research and was even anticipated by German politics (Savoskul 2005; Schmidt-Bernhardt 2008; Takle 2011). In the mid-1990s, when the numbers of *SpätAussiedler* to Germany rocketed (Figure 1), critical questions on the "true" ethnic belonging of these immigrants were raised, and as a consequence, the needs to be officially recognized as *SpätAussiedler* have been gradually increased by German authorities:

> [A]ltering attitudes of politicians might […] be explained by reactions to compositional changes in the *SpätAussiedler* population. At the beginning of the 1990s, most of these people that practiced the German way of life in their place of origin. With linguistic and cultural sensitivity, they had easily integrated. But by the end of the decade and at the beginning of the new millennium, many were coming from territories of the former Soviet Union. While they could prove the German ancestry, their ignorance of the culture and poor linguistic skills made integration difficult. (Hess 2008; Takle 2011, 176)

This shift from "Germans to immigrants," as Takle (2011) points out, is also expressed by the neologism Russlanddeutsche (Russian–German) in German popular language and refers to the assumption that this new(er) group of *SpätAussiedler* were deemed citizens but could not (really) speak German and were culturally more Russian. This point of view is widely shared in German society (Haug and Sauer 2007). Maria Savoskul provides a typology of three types of *Aussiedler/SpätAussiedler*. Members of the first group deem themselves as "true Germans" and immigrated to the Federal Republic before (!) 1988, the second group are "Russian–Germans" sharing a split identity and finally, those who do not attempt to integrate but use their ethnic attribution as an opportunity for emigration (Savoskul 2005). The latter group is estimated to be the majority of *SpätAussiedler* according to her research and would explain lacking attempts to assimilate. Takle suggests that "many of those who immigrated were culturally more Russian and to a lesser extent perceived as German" (2011, 178). Also in my study, the early migrants were very likely to associate mal-integration with later arriving *SpätAussiedler* and their family members.

Repeatedly, interviewees put emphasis on language skills and a job as indispensable basics for integration, which translates into making German friends and being able to socialize with colleagues. Generally, work and education are highly valued by *SpätAussiedler*:

> That's just the way we have to live. We have a good job and we are satisfied with what we have achieved and how we are doing. Of course, there are also those who do not want to work nor learn German. These people exist everywhere, unfortunately. […] We must integrate! (Interview 2, male, Hochspeyer)

Those who do not make an effort were deemed of being inevitably threatened by exclusion and failure:

> They […] hardly speak German, because they never really learnt it. Thus, they are ridiculed or insulted. Furthermore, their future will by no means be a bright one. A future without a good job. They also miss support from German friends, for instance. At worst, they go off the rails, become criminal, cannot find work and become hardship cases, dependent on hand-outs and benefits. (Interview 9, female, Germersheim)

Amongst the Jewish migrants, more than one-third refer to themselves as Russian-Jews, whilst one-fifth claimed to be Russian and a quarter Jewish. Furthermore, the Jewish and Russian-Jewish identity is strongly shaped by the self-perception of being victims of fascism and discrimination in the former Soviet Union. Exactly one quarter suffered from tangible discrimination in their native country and named this factor as being

important for their decision to emigrate. Hence, also this group's identity is not linked to only one titular nation straightforward, but reflects much more complex issues of culture and individual experiences.

Quite similar to the *SpätAussiedler*, Jewish migrants put emphasis on the necessity of individual effort to integrate as well as on the importance of having a job. Most of them were concerned about "good" integration, which means to live a low-profile life and not mingle ostentatiously with other people from the former USSR or chose a more or less segregated "Russian" neighborhood. More than half of the respondents socialized with Germans, whilst one-third reported that they would prefer contact with Russians, mainly due to difficulties with German language.

Labor market-related experiences were mainly negative. Despite the fact that two-thirds of the respondents obtained full formal recognition of their educational and/or professional qualifications (a quarter received partial approval), almost none did equal the professional and social status they used to have in their former home country. Mainly highly qualified persons claimed to have experienced harsh cutbacks. This experience, including unemployment, has a strong negative impact on self-esteem and well-being in Germany. Interviewees stated that without a job they consider themselves as despised, less useful members of society. This finding might be an indication of what is referred to as segmented "downward" assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993).

The experience of exclusion both in the country of origin as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany was also articulated throughout the interviews with *SpätAussiedler*:

> We feel at home, can't imagine living elsewhere and we don't feel foreign at all. But sometimes my family and I have the impression that we are not really welcome and […] we are rejected somehow. (Interview 2, male, Hochspeyer)

At this point, the interviewee mentioned that he was easy to spot as *SpätAussiedler* due to his distinct Russian accent when speaking German. Nonetheless, the concerned person did consider his family and himself perfectly integrated, having many German friends.

Prejudices and latent discrimination were mentioned in most interviews, but always put into a tame perspective. However, it is more than unlikely that these cases of discrimination are perceived so incidental, as the respondents pretended. Six out of nine interviewees did mention that their Russian accent makes them stand out of the crowd and that sometimes humbling experiences relate to this:

> We went to the bookstore to pick up the textbooks for grammar school/Gymnasium [German higher secondary school]. When asking if the textbooks were already available, we were given the response that yes, the books for lower secondary school [Hauptschule[12]] have just arrived. I said that this is nice to know, but we would like to pick up books for grammar school (Gymnasium). Well, we'll just have to live with such prejudices at times. (Interview 2, male, Hochspeyer)

Once again, language proves to be a key element. The Slavic accent is considered as major obstacle to acceptance, whilst perfect fluency – if possible for both languages, German and Russian – represents an ideal (when children or grandchildren fulfilled this requirement, it was mentioned with great pride):

> There are still situations where one feels foreign. It is a pity that we still are subject to the prejudice of being unable to speak proper German! But we can! We don't want to go back to Russia. (Interview 7, female, Germersheim)

However, the same person gave an estimate that most of her family felt rather isolated in Germany, which – according to her interpretation – is due to little contact with non-*SpätAussiedler* as well as, residential segregation by choice.

While there is a tendency to trivialize insults that happened in Germany, the Soviet-time discrimination against the German minority was described in especially negative, if not traumatic, terms. This is noteworthy, as the interview guidelines did not comprise questions on this topic. Typical examples are the assignation to the so-called "fascist class" in elementary school experienced by an interviewee when he was a child (interview 2, male, Hochspeyer) or narratives on "the suffering of Grandpa or Grandma" in Soviet Union:

> We were never integrated into Russian society and often excluded from the community or, at worst, even insulted. Thereafter we just wanted to return to our home country: Germany. (Interview 6, female, Germersheim)

Quite remarkably, this statement was given by a person who was three years old at the time of emigration to Germany (with her parents). The native-land-discrimination narrative occurs to be very distinct and this also explains, why especially elder family members wanted to emigrate, despite their (sometimes very) advanced age.

A not fully explored aspect in this research is related to individual memories and imaginaries of the former homeland. Since those memories are bound to a spatial, societal, and political environment that no longer exists, the concept of "postmemory" (Hirsch 1997) becomes a relevant. Interviews from Bamberg (Germany) proved that young *SpätAussiedler* had a quite differentiated picture of Germany and their former homeland. Nonetheless, the country of origin used to be idealized with imaginaries shaped by childhood memories and above all, stories told by close relatives (Göler and Lautenbacher 2010). Most of the elder *SpätAussiedler* are well aware of this bias.

## Language and Slavonic tradition in everyday life

The necessity of being fluent in German language as a basis for social and vocational integration has been pointed out already. Language is of utmost importance, as it is not only a formal "qualification" but also a central marker of belonging (Valentine, Sporton, and Nielsen 2009).

Almost every respondent (97% of respondents in the survey) declared a sound knowledge or even an excellent command of German language (Table 2). This result is certainly not really surprising as most interviewees have been staying in Germany quite a while, and were able and willing to take part in a scientific study. Furthermore, the proof of German language skills is a prerequisite for being recognized as *SpätAussiedler* by German authorities. Instead, it occurs more relevant to consider how important German language actually is in everyday life.

The majority of respondents use both languages in the family, with a tendency toward Russian. German is very seldom the only language spoken at home. This finding from the survey is only slightly different from the alleged practice within the families of the

Table 2. Languages spoken at home with the family – survey data.

| | *Language spoken at home* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Age when migrating to Germany* | *Russian* | *German* | *Both* |
| *46 years and older* | 4 | 3 | 11 |
| *19–45 years* | 13 | 6 | 56 |
| *14–18 years* | 9 | 0 | 16 |
| *0–13 years* | 8 | 6 | 35 |

interviews: The variable use of languages (named "linguistic hodgepodge" by one person) is characteristic, but with a slight preference for German.

Some people referred to the dimensions "inner" and "outer" concerning the use of language:

> We speak German in public, even if our language skills are not excellent. The first generation speaks Russian at home when the family comes together, but usually a mix. The second generation speaks German at home. (Interview 1, male, Enkenbach)

Over and again, the benefits of bilingualism were emphasized:

> Bilingualism is of great importance to us. So you can also easily communicate if you meet Russian-speaking people at your job, who do not understand German. (Interview 9, female, Germersheim)

Furthermore, a latent fear of unspecified problems due to "sloppy" use of language echoed through many interviews:

> [My] Ukrainian wife; she'd like to speak more Russian, my daughter speaks only German. I want to avoid a mix, we talk either in German or in Russian! But many speak some mix. (Interview 3, male, Germersheim)

This bilingual everyday practice can be problematic, when individuals are finally unable to speak any language consistently and correctly. This is highlighted in the Bamberg study amongst adolescent *SpätAussiedler*, where many respondents spoke almost only Russian in daily life and consumed Russian media (television) but were unable to read Cyrillic letters (Göler and Lautenbacher 2010, 46).

The importance of language proficiency as *key to integration* (Michalowski et al. 2006; quote by Göler and Lautenbacher 2010) is evident and has been mentioned before. At best, the command of Russian and German is an individual resource, giving the opportunity to be part of two cultures (Gogolin 2003, 69). Russian language, for example, is much more suited in vocabulary and variety to describe emotions, compared to German. Thus, *SpätAussiedler* tend to speak Russian, when emotional spheres and romantic issues occur (Kossolapow quoted by Frik 2005, 148). This also explains why so many respondents had a strong attachment to Russian language although their knowledge of German was good or even excellent.

The Jewish control group showed similar patterns, with certainly less Germanic elements but a closer attachment to Russian culture. More than two-thirds spoke Russian at home compared to one-fifth speaking both Russian and German. Rather surprisingly, some people spoke only German. Closer investigation proved that these persons were elder people whose first language was Yiddish, a Germanic language. Furthermore, a few respondents declared the purposeful use of Russian at home in order to preserve and care for Russian culture as well as passing it to their children.

With an increasing number of *SpätAussiedler* and other citizens from the former USSR, specific services and media gradually emerged in German cities. Today, specialized "Russian shops," grocery stores, medical services, newspapers, websites, or discotheques, for example, can be easily found. Even major retailers have recognized the consumer demand of these clients, since there is a limited offer of "Russian" and "Slavic" products in every well-assorted German supermarket. The frequent use of such goods and services might serve as an indicator concerning integration, emotional ties to the country of origin, and cultural practice in everyday life.

Quite popular are specialized "Russian" grocery stores. Furthermore, "Russian" clubs (discotheques), hairdressers, doctors, and travel agents with a focus on this target group were mentioned in the interviews. The idea that frequent shopping in ethnic structures

may relate to low integration, nostalgia, and homesickness was rejected by the respondents. However, making use of some "Russian" services (especially physicians or lawyers) was associated with a limited knowledge of German and a higher degree of trust within the *SpätAussiedler* community.

The owner of a "Russian shop" in Germersheim herself buys in "all kinds of supermarkets" and:

> from time to time in Russian shops for specialities. […] I opened a Russian shop myself two years ago. Approximately 70% of customers are Germans! (Interview 7, female, Germersheim)

Most significant is the use of Russian language mass media: More than one-third claimed to use them regularly for better and more detailed information about current issues in their native land.

Even those who were very particular about "Germanhood" always mentioned that elements of Russian culture are important to them. At least when it comes to private social events such as family parties or marriages, Russian customs are preferred. In comparison, the German variants are considered rather modest (less people, less music, less dance as mentioned in an interview), thus, less fun:

> We celebrate these festivities quite abundant and "big", because we have about 60 cousins here in Germany. (Interview 9, female, Germersheim)

"Russian tradition" was generally attached to "leisure" and "being happy," whilst "German habits" are linked to more serious occasions. One interviewee pointed out that religious holidays were celebrated the German way, but festive events such as weddings are held in rented, specific halls with Russian "ceremonies" (dance, music, drinking). Throughout the interviews, the important meaning of family and family ties has been mentioned as another central marker of "being Russlanddeutsch:"

> Family ties are important and maintained. We share laughter and crying, there is much singing and dancing. Many generations live together rather than sending the elder to a nursing home. (Interview 4, male, Germersheim)

To conclude, there is a specific culture of *SpätAussiedler* today, integrating positive and meaningful elements from multiple societies displaying a distinct Russian–German cultural identity. However, this multicultural practice is by no means a compelling indicator of disloyalty or a lack of will to integrate.

## Conclusion

About 20 years since the peak of German *SpätAussiedler* repatriation, empirical research suggests that *SpätAussiedler* integration in general is astonishingly successful and smooth (Woellert et al. 2009; Worbs et al. 2013), although also difficulties have been reported for sub-groups within the major *SpätAussiedler* community (Savoskul 2005; Göler and Lautenbacher 2010).

Indisputably, the right of citizenship in combination with on target integration support eased orientation as well as integration in Germany. However, the administrative labeling as "German" does not protect from foreignness and rejection in and from the new host society. Empirical research for this paper shows that a specific "fast-track assimilation" cannot be observed, despite favorable structural conditions.

With regard to self-attribution and identity, a "mixed" ethnic identity, which comprises elements of Russian, (post-) Soviet and German culture is characteristic.

Strategies of self-attribution and cultural habits of the *SpätAussiedler* are very similar to those of Jewish immigrants, which have come to Germany at the same time and were

granted permanent residence permits but not German nationality. This relative resemblance of practices and experience concerning both groups reveals that affirmative ethnicity is not a marker which distinctively accelerates integration.

Nonetheless, whilst "full" assimilation is still to await, *SpätAussiedler* have integrated much better than members of other major migrant groups, especially the Turks (e.g. Ehrkamp 2006). Furthermore the respondents of this study showed great individual effort and will to integrate: This attitude has been described also in other research concerning *SpätAussiedler* (Haug and Sauer 2007; Woellert et al. 2009; Schmitz 2013; Worbs et al. 2013).

With regard to the *official* appraisal by the German government, the current state of integration of *SpätAussiedler* is a big success. Nonetheless, it is too early for deciding if we can speak of a persistent, prototypical Russian–German culture, or if the current two-tier/hybrid self-attribution merely reflects the current – and temporary – position in the process of further integration and assimilation. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore *SpätAussiedler* narratives and their effects on split identity, self-attribution, and the emergence of a distinct *SpätAussiedler* culture. To what extent is Russian–German culture and identity characterized by (post-)Soviet imaginary landscapes, narratives, practices, and by German imprints?

Integration is a long-term social and cultural process, often intergenerational. It responds not only to regulatory requirements, but also has its own momentum in the addition of new groups and many other exchanges (Bade and Oltmer 2004). Against this background, the split identity and bi-cultural self-attribution of *SpätAussiedler* is neither surprising nor alarming. With regard to German immigration and citizenship policy and the current discussion on integration of refugees, a realistic prospect needs to be foremost a patient one and a coherent political frame for immigration and integration in Germany must (finally) develop.

## Notes

1. *Aussiedler* and *SpätAussiedler* are migrants who were born as German citizens east of the Oder-Neisse river (the new Polish-German border) in former German territories and stayed in place after 1945. Furthermore, this category applies to their descendants who moved to Germany as well as for ethnic Germans (descendants of German emigrants who had settled in Eastern Europe before the twentieth century). Until 1992, they were referred to as *Aussiedler* (re-settlers). Since 1 January 1993, the term "*SpätAussiedler*" (late re-settlers) is used in official language. In this paper, the official term *SpätAussiedler* is given preference to the other frequently used synonyms, notwithstanding that *SpätAussiedler* usually refer to themselves as *pereseentsy* (Re-Settlers) and *Russlanddeutsche* (Russian–Germans). The very common term *Russlanddeutsch* is quite simplistic, as the concerned people originate from all parts of the former Soviet Union. It also can have a negative connotation (Schmidt-Bernhardt 2008).
2. According to Russia's 2010 census, there were 394,138 Russian–Germans/*Rossiiiskie nemtsy* living in the Russian Federation, compared to 842,295 in 1989. (http://rg.ru/2011/12/16/stat.html; last accessed 11 May 2016.) The Kazakhstan statistical office reports about 300,000 ethnic German citizens in its 2003 census, 170,000 in the 2009 census, and 180,800 in 2012.
3. For a comprehensive yet concise history of ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, see Diener's paper on homeland as a social construct in Kazakhstan (Diener 2006). An elaborate history of *Russlanddeutsche* was recently published in German by Viktor Krieger (Krieger 2015).
4. Speaking about ethnicity in this text, I refer to *ethno-national* and *ethno-linguistical* group identity, based on language use, shared history and fate, self-attribution and attribution by others. Religious aspects as well as ethno-regional and ethno-racial aspects are spared, because of their minor relevance in the context of this specific research.

5. The official designation of immigrant workers in the 1960s and 1970s as *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) verbalizes this immigration policy in very a clear manner.
6. https://www.tagesschau.deinland/integration-fluechtlinge-de-maiziere-101.html.
7. The surveys and interviews were carried out within the framework of three state-exam theses at Universität Koblenz-Landau (Germany) in 2010–2012, initiated, supervised, and further elaborated by the author. The interviews are an element of a thesis submitted by Pascal Werner, whilst the survey has been conducted by Maria Müller. Their findings are contrasted with the results of a survey on the integration of Jewish (non-ethnic German) migrants from Russia by Ekaterina Maiseyeva.
8. This is the number of successful interviews.
9. German official figures do not include information on ethnicity and *SpätAussiedler* cannot be identified via administrative statistics. Since 2005, sample census data on migration identify naturalized persons, but do not provide useful spatial information or individual data as a basis for a proper representative sampling. As a consequence, the precise parent population for this research was not available and representative sampling impossible. Therefore, snowball sampling was chosen, despite all restrictions of this method. Nonetheless, given the number of more than 170 respondents in the first and around 140 respondents in the second survey, and the coherence of the findings with similar empirical studies (e.g. Savoskul 2005; Göler and Lautenbacher 2010; Schmitz 2013), the results of this study seem reliable.
10. These participants were recruited via the Jewish congregation of Kaiserslautern.
11. As there is a potential risk that some interviewees might give partly socially desirable answers to a native German interviewer, the interviews have been checked particularly carefully for any signs of biased information.
12. German Hauptschule represents a low level of education with nine years of schooling and has a negative reputation. Only Gymnasium or Fachoberschule qualify for entering a University.

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