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The Deutsche Volksliste in the Łódź region during the Second World War

The Łódź region, like other areas that were incorporated directly into the Third Reich during the Second World War, experienced suffering and pain brought about by ethnic segregation. Following a short period of uncertainty, Łódź was made part of the Wartheland (also called Warthegau), whose gauleiter was Arthur Greiser (Łuczak 1997; Epstein 2011). In April 1940 the city was renamed Litzmannstadt, in honour of General Karl Litzmann, victor at the Battle of Łódź (Brzeziny) during the First World War, who had become a Nazi politician in the 1930s, serving as an NSDAP deputy and honorary speaker of the Reichstag. The Jewish population was forced into ghettos, where many died of hunger and exhaustion from forced labour, and those remaining were gradually murdered in extermination camps, such as that at Kulmhof (Chełmno nad Nerem) (Alberti 2006; Löw 2012). The Polish elites were murdered in the first months of the war or expelled to the General Government, while male and female workers had to work to excessive requirements in factories, and were often assigned to forced labour outside Łódź (Cygański 1962; Bojanowski 1992).

Łódź had a special role to play in the Nazis' plans for Poland – it was in that city that the Central Immigration Office (*Einwandererzentrale, EWZ*) was established in 1940, coordinating the resettlement of Germans from occupied Eastern Europe to the Reich. The topic of the *Volksdeutsche* (in colloquial Polish, *folksdojczy*) – people who were entered into the German Volksliste during the Second World War – stirs up significant controversy in Poland even today. The term *Volksdeutsch* was applied to ethnic Germans during that war, having begun to be used extensively in Germany following the First World War (Olejnik 2006: 19–21). They were also sometimes known simply as Germans (Krzoska 2010: 69), but in the Łódź region they were rather called “*Niemiekojęzyczni*” (“German-speaking”), an appellation used by the German minority itself, for example in names of associations. After 1945 the term *Volksdeutsche* came to be replaced by the words *Flüchtlinge* and *Vertriebene* (“expellees”), and it no longer carries any connotations within German society (Kochanowski and Zwicker 2015: 629).

The word *volksdeutsch* has different semantic ranges in the documents of the German administration and in the post-war literature. The administrative apparatus and propaganda used *volksdeutsch* to refer to all groups of Germans living in occupied territories in Eastern Europe (usually excluding the Czech and Moravian lands), including for example those resettled from the Baltic countries and today's Ukraine and Romania (Schmitz-Berning 2007: 650–652). Polish historians restrict their use of the term to Germans who were Polish citizens and lived in Poland before 1939.

The most important works concerning the Volksliste in occupied Poland include monographs by Sylwia Bykowska (2012) and Krzysztof Strykowski (2004), and an article by Ryszard Kaczmarek (2004). Of works published in the communist period, the most significant are those of Zofia Boda-Krężel (1978) and a book by Zygmunt Izdebski (1946). The experiences of Volksdeutsche during the Second World War in the Łódź region have received relatively little attention from Polish and international researchers. Moreover, most studies focus only on the city of Łódź itself, overlooking materials that concern the larger Łódź administrative region.¹ The most important texts on the Volksliste in the occupied Łódź region include an article published in *Rocznik Łódzki* by Paweł Dzieciński (1988). Dzieciński concentrated on the documents of the German administration then available in the National Archives in Łódź and Poznań, and presented the Volksliste from an administrative perspective. The topic is discussed to some degree in a work by Tadeusz Bojanowski (1992) that describes aspects of the occupation in Łódź, including daily life. Recent works mentioning the Volksliste include some parts of a book by Winson Chu about the Łódź Germans (Chu 2012) – although the book's title indicates that it concerns the interwar period, it contains a short study of the Volksliste in the Łódź region. Another researcher who has recently taken up the subject of the Volksliste in Łódź, and partly also in the region, is Gerhard Wolf; however, his latest works mainly concern institutional disputes in 1940–1941 over the form and scope of the Volksliste in the Wartheland and in the Łódź government area (*Regierungsbezirk*). The most recent work by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg on the history of Łódź discusses the wartime period and the Volksliste (Bömelburg 2022). The Volksliste gives rise to many questions, which are only partially addressed in Polish historiography. To what extent did the categorisation process enable an effective assessment of the Łódź Germans? How flexible were the categories, and how were they applied by the officials responsible for assigning

¹ There is no uniform definition of the “Łódź region” that would be accepted by a majority of researchers. For the purposes of this article I have restricted it to the city of Łódź and the counties of Łódź and Łask, within the boundaries drawn by the occupying authorities. “County” denotes the administrative unit known as *Kreis* in German and *powiat* in Polish.

Germans to them? What motivated the Germans who declined entry on the list and those who accepted it, or even tried to obtain a preferential racial category?

To be able to answer these questions, we must begin by introducing the Volksliste – the most important mechanism of Germanisation in the Polish lands in the times of the Second World War – which will be analysed in this article using the example of its implementation in the Łódź region.

Plans for a Volksliste and its scope

The German Volksliste was at its core an attempt to solve the problem of how to identify Germans in the newly conquered territories of the German Reich. At the heart of this ambiguity in identity was the fact that the wished for Germans outside the pre-1914 German boundaries were not marked by the possession of German citizenship. The practice that had developed in 1938–1939 (Olejnik 2006: 22–23) tended to suggest that citizenship would be extended to all Germans, without their being placed in a hierarchy of groups based on pre-war loyalty and degree of Germanisation (Neander 2008). However, the plans of the Wartheland ethnocrats provided for the introduction of a hierarchy of ethnic Germans for the purpose of re-Germanisation, and the criteria of hierarchisation exposed differences between the officials working on them in the Wartheland's central office (*Gauamt*) and in the government area (*Regierungsbezirk*) of Łódź. A plan by Egon Leuschner, an official responsible for matters of nationality in the office of the head of Łódź government area (*Regierungspräsident Lodsch*, later *Litzmannstadt*), which has been preserved in the collections relating to the Łódź Region Volksliste in the State Archive in Łódź, provided for the division of the Volksdeutsche in the Wartheland into groups denoted by the letters A to E. The most loyal, and therefore privileged, were assigned to group A, while group E was the least trusted, intended for those Łódź Germans who had been “actively and nationalistically Polishised”. Also distrusted by the Nazis were those who were to be placed in group D: Germans who had been “passively and ethno-nationalistically (*völkisch*)² Polishised” (APŁ, NLN,³ 53: 3–4).

² The German word *völkisch* does not have an exact equivalent in English. As an adjective it may be translated as “folk”, “national”, “ethno-nationalist”, etc., but these do not fully reflect its meaning. The term is closely tied to the Third Reich, although it dates from the 15th century and was used by writers and thinkers from the 19th. From the end of the 19th century it referred to a people in a racial sense. See “*völkisch*” in: Schmitz-Berning (2007: 645–646).

³ Here and in further citations, “APŁ” or “APP” denotes the National Archive in Łódź or Poznań, and “NLN” denotes the archive files relating to the German Volksliste in the territory of Łódź province.

A different solution was proposed in a plan by Karl Albert Coulon, who became the official responsible for matters of nationality in the Wartheland. This provided for the existence only of the groups A and B (Wolf 2018: 138–139). Ultimately it was Leuschner's vision that was adopted for the Wartheland, and his plan for the Volksliste was implemented in the Łódź government area in early 1940.⁴ The ideas behind this construction of the list had a significant impact on the Volksliste created by the Reich interior ministry and approved in March 1941. The largest change was the abolition of group E and the introduction of a numbering system for the groups: the highest group (A) became group 1, while group 4 replaced groups D and E. The ultimate aim was for all Volksdeutsche to be made equal to the Germans from the Reich (Bojanowski 1992: 202–203). The purpose of the hierarchy was to identify the Germans who could most quickly be re-Germanised and made part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* – a community united around national socialism, the so-called community of the German blood (race) and people (all social classes)⁵ (Schmitz-Berning 2007: 654–659). The categorisation of local Germans was supposed to distinguish the groups that could potentially be Germanised and the groups that did not require re-Germanisation. Through such separation from the general population of occupied Poland, the Nazis wanted to break those groups' connections with Polish culture, society, etc. and to ensure their allegiance to the Third Reich.

Privileges and duties of the Volksdeutsche

Each group in the Volksliste (according to the decree of March 1941, but also earlier) was to contain a different category of Germans. Group 1 would include those Volksdeutsche who “before 1 September had actively struggled for Germanness”. This struggle was taken to mean activity in German social, cultural or sporting organisations, but primarily in political organisations. Membership of religious organisations (Catholic or Protestant) was also considered a reason for assignment to group 1. Those admitted to this group were *de facto* most often activists of pre-war right-wing parties of the German minority

⁴ Entry on the Volksliste began in Poznań in December 1939, and initially included only those assigned to groups A and B. It was gradually extended to other parts of Wielkopolska, reaching the Łódź–Kalisz government area in the first half of 1940.

⁵ This term was also used by the Nazis in jurisprudence as a counterpoint to the rights of a citizen.

in Poland (IPN GK 62/15: 2). Group 2 was to include those Volksdeutsche who prior to 1939 “were not active in support of Germanness, but who can be proved to have remained German”. Group 3 would consist of people of German descent who had “connections with Poland” but were considered by Volksliste officials certainly capable of “becoming full members of the German national community”, as well as Polish partners of Germans (although it was stipulated that the German spouse must be “dominant”) and members of ethnic groups that the Nazis considered to have German ties (Kashubians, Masurians, “Wasserpolen”, Silesians). The lowest category, group 4, was intended for persons of German descent who had “politically gone over to the Polish side”, that is, had been significantly Polonised (APŁ, NLN, 52: 16–25).

The Volksdeutsche of groups 1 and 2 automatically received German citizenship. In 1942 the granting of citizenship was extended to some of those in group 3; this was usually linked to their entrance into the Wehrmacht. Apart from the duty of military service (Kaczmarek 2010; Olejnik 2006: 40–41) and the requirement to submit to national socialism, the Volksliste provided many privileges to those whose names were entered into it. Some of these privileges were dependent on the group to which one was assigned, while others were given to all those on the list. All Volksdeutsche received the same ration coupons for food and clothes; they were also permitted to shop in the early morning hours (when goods were available in the stores).⁶ There were many products that could not be sold to Poles or Jews, and Germans received significantly higher food rations (Bojanowski 1992: 209–210). Even after the introduction of a far-reaching system for the rationing of goods, Volksdeutsche were privileged over non-Germans (ibidem: 211–212). Germans had uniform rights to primary and secondary education,⁷ although in reality access to such education and its quality were dependent on where one lived – in many villages in the Wartheland, particularly in the Łódź region, there existed only general schools offering the first few years of education, with teaching done by instructors who had not completed teacher training college. In the towns the availability of education and teachers’ level of training were much higher, but access was conditional on knowledge of German and on the Volksliste group to which the child and its parents belonged (Hansen 1995: 53). All Volksdeutsche had identical

⁶ These principles were not always upheld: internal correspondence of the area office indicates that in occupied Łódź until July 1941 Volksdeutsche in groups 3 and 4 were not always issued with German ration coupons for clothes (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1132: 38).

⁷ University education was available to Volksdeutsche in groups 3 and 4 only with the consent of the administrative authorities of their home county.

privileges with regard to the payment of old-age and disability pensions, and also had more or less uniform access to a high standard of health care, which Poles and Jews did not have. Ethnic Germans were allowed to keep their homes (Bojanowski 1992: 212–214) and places of employment.

Certain privileges were restricted to the Volksdeutsche in groups 1 and 2 (A, B and C before 1941). Some professions were available only to Germans from the two highest groups. Those from groups 3 and 4 could not be appointed to higher or managerial posts. Only those in group 1 could belong to the party; Volksdeutsche from the other groups were not allowed to apply for membership.⁸ Possession of land, firms and workplaces, and the possibility of taking over Jewish and Polish property were restricted to the two highest Volksliste groups, and some Volksdeutsche from groups 3 and 4 had property confiscated (Rudawski 2018: 124–127). Poles and Jews were not permitted to own land, houses, flats, shops, workshops or factories (Łuczak 1979: 88–99); from the very first days of the occupation, German institutions took over ownership of such property or evicted the owners and handed the property over to Germans, including Volksdeutsche. According to Himmler's plans, the Volksdeutsche in group 4 were to be resettled in the "old Reich" (Olejnik 2006: 39).

Statistics

The entry of Volksdeutsche on the Volksliste in the Łódź government area took place in several distinct stages. The first lasted from March to September 1940, and covered most of the German population in Łódź, who mostly (in contrast to applicants in the subsequent stages) had a strong national identity and identified themselves as Germans. In many cases it can also be said that applications were submitted under social pressure or economic necessity. The second stage began in March 1941 with the decree of the Reich interior minister concerning the Volksliste. It is not clear exactly when this stage ended; in September 1944 the number of people obliged to submit a Volksliste questionnaire was significantly reduced – this concerns people who had previously applied but had not been granted Volksdeutsch status, as well as Wehrmacht personnel. In fact, the Gestapo was still taking action against people who were delaying entry on the Volksliste even in December 1944 (Dzieciński 1988: 284;

⁸ For some time, the Wartheland authorities and the party's chancellery considered the possibility of allowing Volksdeutsche in group 2 to join the NSDAP, but these plans were never implemented (APP, NSDAP Wartheland, 643).

APŁ, Gestapo, 12: 15–17). In both stages, people perceived as being of German descent were forced to apply by the police or pressured by the Gestapo. In Łódź from 1943 onwards, pressure was put on the Polish partners of people of German descent to sign the Volksliste (Olejnik 2006: 35–36).

The majority of the German population of the Łódź region lived in Łódź itself. According to census data from 1931, there were 53,600 people living in Łódź who declared German as their mother tongue,⁹ in addition to 28,500 in Łódź county and 10,500 in Łask county. These figures represent respectively 8.86%, 7.93% and 6.1% of the populations of those administrative units (Rzepkowski 2016: 282–284). There were also relatively high numbers of people declaring German as their mother tongue in the counties of Brzeziny (10,000) and Piotrków (8,800) (Marszał 2020: 187–188). The percentage of Germans in the region did not change significantly between then and the outbreak of the war, but changes were already visible by December 1939.

Table 1

Numbers of people declaring German nationality in the police census of 1939

	Number of persons
Łódź	86,351
Łódź county	27,469
Łask county	21,885
Total	135,675

Source: APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 682.

Table 2

Number of Volksdeutsche in the Łódź region in 1940, by Volksliste category

	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Łódź	8,518	53,775	16,527	5,476	111	84,407
Łódź county	7,144	15,963	4,227	1,042	261	28,637
Łask county	1,689	15,152	3,561	519	28	20,949
Total	17,351	84,890	24,315	7,037	400	133,393

Source: APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1120: 48.

⁹ The 1931 census asked about the language used at home, but not about nationality. Because the question in the previous 1921 census had concerned nationality, it is not possible to compare those data.

Table 3
Number of Volksdeutsche in the Łódź region in October 1944, by Volksliste category

	1	2	3	4	Total
Łódź	9,812	78,867	15,873	3,072	107,624
Łódź county	8,591	20,014	2,148	665	31,418
Łask county	10,466	10,257	3,058	285	24,066
Total	28,869	109,138	21,079	4,022	163,108

Source: IZ, Doc. 1-315.

The growth in the population of Volksdeutsche from 1939 onwards, as shown by the above statistics, was largely caused by the entry on the Volksliste of more and more groups of German people and those of German descent, rather than by external or internal migration in the Łódź region. From the three tables, which cover the period from the first attempts to compile a Volksliste in Poznań (December 1939), through statistics from the first version of the Volksliste, up to those from October 1944 (immediately before the possibility of registration as Volksdeutsche ended), it is clear that 20% of Volksdeutsche in the city of Łódź, 12% in Łódź county and 9% in Łask county, according to the October 1944 figures, had not identified themselves as German in 1939. Most (though not all) of these had probably declared Polish nationality.

Another interesting question is that of the reassignment of groups D and E to group 4. According to the guidelines issued by the central authorities, Volksdeutsche from these two groups should not for the most part have been classified and added to group 3. In fact, almost 45% of Volksdeutsche from groups D and E were promoted to group 3 (equivalent to C). Also notable is the large percentage of Volksdeutsche in Łask county who belonged to group 1, compared with the other parts of the region. Volksdeutsche made up the majority of the population of Germans in the Łódź region.

The data given in Table 4 indicate that local Volksdeutsche were more numerous than other groups of Germans who had arrived following the September campaign. It should also be remembered that in all counties of the Łódź region, the Volksdeutsche were in a minority relative to the non-German population.

The surviving documents of the Volksliste office in Łódź do not contain any demographic data relating to the Volksliste, and it is not clear whether any statistics were ever compiled from the official address registers, personal files of Volksdeutsche or other records of the Wartheland administration. The surviving demographic data refer to Germans as a whole, with no breakdown by

Volksliste group or German nationality status (Volksdeutsche, German from the Reich, or resettlee).

Table 4

Volksdeutsche as percentages of the German and total populations of counties in the Łódź region in October 1943

	Number of Volksdeutsche	Number of all Germans	Volksdeutsche as percentage of Germans	Germans as percentage of total population	Volksdeutsche as percentage of total population
Łódź	107,419	138,984	77.3%	24.4%	18.8%
Łódź county	31,371	34,199	91.1%	24.6%	22.5%
Łask county	23,912	37,170	64.3%	17.6%	11.3%

Source: Wróbel (1987: 258–259) and the author's own calculations.

The statistical differences between the Łódź government area and Upper Silesia or Pomerania were very large. In the Łódź area, most Volksdeutsche belonged to group 2, with relatively few in group 3 and especially group 4. In the Danzig–West Prussia and Upper Silesia provinces, almost three-quarters of local Volksdeutsche in 1942 belonged to group 3 (Kaczmarek 2007: 32). The reason for this was the different policies applied by the gauleiters with regard to entry on the list. Each gauleiter in occupied Poland had a great amount of freedom in determining the categorisation criteria and the criteria for identifying whether a person was to be counted as being of German descent and thus qualifying for entry on the list. Because of Greiser's rigorous policy, most of the population of the Wartheland was not placed on the list. The gauleiters took account of the specific features of their regions – in Danzig–West Prussia and Upper Silesia most of the population had lived there since birth, often remembered the times of the German Empire, had attended German schools, etc. This was not the case in the Łódź region. Moreover, in the case of Upper Silesia a significant factor was the province's economic importance – the coalmines, steelworks, and strategic heavy industrial plants all needed a labour force, and there could be no question of depriving them of workers by classifying the latter as Poles and expelling them from the region. The industry around Łódź was not generally of great significance for the Reich economy; during the occupation Łódź exported workers to the Old Reich and other occupied regions, and the textile factories – the most important in the region – were operating on significantly reduced time (Bojanowski 1973, 1976).

Structures and procedures

The organisation of the process of entry on the list was the task of the Volksliste offices that were established in 1939 and 1940. The highest authority was the Volksliste office at gauleiter level (*Zentralstelle*); below this were the offices at government area level (*Bezirksstelle*) and at lower levels of local administration (*Zweigstelle*). According to the Volksliste decree these offices were to be established at county offices (Cygański 1972), but in fact they were present in all large towns in the respective counties: Aleksandrów Łódzki, Konstantynów Łódzki, Brzeziny and Zgierz, and Pabianice in Łask county. The decree's entry into force in March 1941 did not lead to fundamental changes in the structure of the offices. Formally there also existed a Supreme Court for Questions of Ethnic Origin (*Oberste Prüfungshof für Volkszugehörigkeitsfragen*), which was to consider cases of disputed classification that were questioned by the Wartheland administration (Frackowiak 2013). These mainly concerned Polish aristocrats and persons of particular political and economic importance – owners of large firms and industrial plants (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1108: 140). In view of the working-class character of the region before 1939 and the rapidly completed process of taking over Polish and Jewish property, it may be presumed that relatively few cases from Łódź and the Łódź region came before that court. Real power over the Volksliste rested in the hands of the gauleiter and the government area chiefs.

Every office at county level (or at the level of a city with county status) had a control department, a department for name changes, a statistical department, and two departments issuing Volksliste ID cards (one for groups 1 and 2, and another for groups 3 and 4). The control department was the most important – its staff issued and received Volksliste questionnaire forms and checked the accuracy of the data provided (APŁ, Łódź County Chief, 127: 40–41). This was probably also the largest department at every office; in March 1940 during the process of making entries on the Volksliste the control department for the city of Łódź consisted of 80 persons, in addition to three detectives (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1109: 296). The committees decided whatever toward Volksdeutsche status. They were composed of representatives of the administration and of the NSDAP, as well as trusted local Germans.

There were no major differences in the procedure for Volksliste registration between the Wartheland and other regions of occupied Poland. If Germans wished (or were compelled) to apply for entry on the list, they would need to go to the appropriate office to collect an application and supplementary form, to be assessed by a committee or – more commonly – by single persons. Surviving Volksliste questionnaires reveal which sections applicants would skip without

providing additional information, and which were genuinely important to the assessors. Most Volksdeutsche (in the studied sample of questionnaires held in the State Archive in Łódź) did not provide any information on activity in German organisations or parties before the war. The reason for this may have been not only the lack of such activity, but also caution – the Volksdeutsche did not know the evaluation criteria for organisations but were aware that providing information on activity in Polish or socialist organisations would be poorly received or would cause them problems. The question on Jewish ancestry was usually omitted; only in some cases did applicants write that they had no Jewish ancestors to their knowledge. It was rare to find applicants who, like Walter Kindermann, a pre-war Łódź lawyer, admitted to Jewish roots or relationships with people of Jewish origin (Bömelburg 2021). Questions on language and religion, as well as the language of the applicant's partner and children, were answered on every application, from which we may deduce that the Volksliste officials made sure that this information was supplied.

It is also worthwhile to remember the importance of accompanying documents – many applications are supplemented with various certificates, diplomas and other documents serving to confirm the applicant's German origin or contribution to the German struggle before 1939. Sometimes we also find opinions collected by the Nazis from neighbours, or documents indicating the submission of an appeal or refusal to accept entry on the Volksliste.

Entry on the Volksliste was formally voluntary, but in fact those who refused to be entered or to collect their Volksliste book were subject to pressure and persecution. There were probably few people who had German origins or felt themselves to be German but did not obtain entry on the list. The best-known Germans in Łódź who refused to join the list included Emil Zerbe, leader of the pre-war German socialists (*Deutsche Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Polens*). At least 80 persons refusing to declare that they were Germans had their cases passed to the Gestapo (Bojanowski 1992: 203). Only one file has survived with several lists of persons refusing to join the Volksliste; it is located in the State Archive in Łódź (APŁ, NLN, 59). The documents that survived the occupation include a small number of Germans' declarations to the Gestapo refusing entry on the Volksliste. The merchant Edward Ramisch of Pabianice declared officially on 21 August 1942 that he would not sign the list, stating: "I feel myself to be a Pole and wish to remain a Pole."¹⁰ He made this declaration despite being told by officials that he was of 75% German descent while his wife was of 100% German descent, and being informed of the possible repres-

¹⁰ "Ich selbst fühle mich als Pole und will Pole bleiben."

sions. Other persons argued similarly: “I refuse admission because I think and feel Polish”; “I myself grew up as a Pole and feel myself to be a Pole”¹¹ (APŁ, NLN, 58: 6–8). All of these people were of 75% German ancestry (according to Reich criteria). One Gestapo file has survived concerning Poles of German origin who refused the Volksliste, but declarations of the reasons for refusal are absent (APŁ, Gestapo, 12).

Criteria for the listing and categorisation of Volksdeutsche

The criteria for entry on the Volksliste and for assignment to categories did not undergo significant alteration despite the legal changes of March 1941. The most important categories include the language used by the applicant and their family, religious denomination, engagement in sociopolitical life before the outbreak of war (understood as participation in German organisations, but also absence of activity in Polish organisations and parties), and degree of integration with Polish society. In Łódź, the question of the language declaration was not an obvious one – many people there were trilingual, and knew Polish and Russian as well as they knew German. Membership in German organisations was understood by the Volksliste officials to mean membership in German minority organisations that were not left-wing, anti-Fascist or pro-Polish. Some applications were rejected in spite of the fact that the candidates for volksdeutsch status could prove their affiliation to such organisations (Bömelburg and Klatt 2015: 280). “Degree of integration” was understood to encompass many minor but revealing factors, such as self-identification and public declaration thereof, Polonisation of one’s forename and surname, national identification in documents (such as military service books and official address registers), names given to children, and choice of school for children. The criterion of non-participation in Polish sociopolitical life was very broadly interpreted, which led to conflicts – many Germans had been obliged to belong to Polish organisations. An example might be teachers: a significant proportion of pre-war teachers belonged to the Polish Teachers’ Union (ZNP) or other organisations of Polish teachers. Membership of the ZNP was seen by the Volksliste officials as grounds for classification in a lower Volksliste group, although according to the author of a 1941 report it did not imply Polishness and could not be a reason to place someone in a lower category (APŁ, NLN, 52: 90–96).

¹¹ “Die Aufnahme lehne ich ab, da ich polnisch denke und fühle”; “Ich selbst bin als Pole aufgewachsen und fühle mich als Pole.”

The mother tongue of the applicant and of their family, religion, and political loyalty were noted not only in the process of classifying Volksdeutsche, but also in the reports concerning them drawn up by the local authorities and party branches. Everyone entered on the Volksliste was the subject of a short description referring to their degree of Germanness and political loyalty, partly based on the criteria of language, religion, and self-identification. There were often also descriptions of character, indications of their political activity, and single-sentence assessments of their Germanness. The reports noted the Volksliste group to which the person belonged. Some of these reports from Łódź survived the war, and are now available in the State Archive in Łódź and in the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (APŁ, NLN, 92–98; AIPN, GK 778/123). Most of them were based on an interview conducted at the person's place of residence; the reports cover not only Germans, but also – for example – persons declaring Russian nationality.

A separate consideration is the question of the racial checks to which Volksdeutsche were to be subject during the process of entry on the Volksliste. Some of the Volksliste questionnaires contain stamps with an assessment in the form of a racial classification category (the so-called RuSHA group, this being the abbreviation of *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*, the SS Central Office for Race and Settlement). Most Volksdeutsche did not undergo such checks. They were applied mainly to people who had Polish ancestry, knew German inadequately or hardly at all, or were the Polish partners in mixed marriages with Germans (Heinemann 2014). There are differing claims in the literature concerning the number of racial checks carried out in the Łódź government area and the Wartheland, and the surviving documents from the area Volksliste office do not provide such data. Racial checks aroused many controversies among the Volksliste offices at the area and provincial levels, and involved Greiser himself (Wolf 2018: 153–157). Greiser resisted the expulsion of Volksdeutsche considered racially undesirable (Epstein 2011: 208).

According to the official criteria relating to language and religion, a candidate Volksdeutscher would be fluent in German and not use the Polish language. An ideal German would also not have maintained close social relations with Poles before the war. All of these criteria failed to stand up to reality, in spite of the fact that the Volksliste office staff in the Łódź government area were more favourable to applicants in their interpretation of the regulations.

The county-level offices in the Łódź government area, particularly in the city and county of Łódź, complained about the frequent use of Polish by many Volksdeutsche, including in public places. Furthermore, some of them spoke German poorly or not at all, a problem that was to be addressed by means of

language courses run by the counties. However, these courses accommodated no more than a few hundred people per county, and left out a large group of Volksdeutsche with weak knowledge of German (for Łódź county: IZ, Doc. 1-367: 67a; for Łódź: IZ, Doc. 1-362: 20–21). As some of the officials noted, the language problem affected not only Volksdeutsche from the “suspect” groups 3 and 4, but also Germans from group 2 and even group 1. According to Łódź county reports, Volksdeutsche would use Polish not only to communicate with Poles, but also amongst themselves (IZ, Doc. 1-356: 7). Reports from various institutions confirm the frequent use of Polish in public places – for example, the management of Łódź city zoo (from which Poles were barred) complained in March 1943 that many of its visitors were speaking Polish publicly (AIPN, GK 68/19: 68). It is clear that the language criterion could not operate in the reality of occupied Łódź – Volksdeutsche were not always fluent in German, and often preferred or were accustomed to speaking Polish. Some Nazis, like the deputy chief of Łódź government area, Walter Moser, noted that: “such a prohibition would mean that the principle of absolute separation from Polishness, constantly emphasised by the *Reichsstatthalter* [Greiser], would be completely illusory.” This statement is only partially true – there was a certain group of Germans in the Łódź area who spoke broken German or did not know the language at all (Epstein 2011: 198).

The criterion of religion, whereby an ideal Volksdeutscher would have been raised in a Protestant culture, was problematic for several reasons. First, in the city of Łódź and in Pabianice lived groups of German Catholics (Budziarek 2001). Although they were not numerically dominant among the German minority, they were significant enough that the German occupying authorities took note of their existence (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1106: 6). Secondly, not all Protestants were Germans – in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War a conflict had begun within the Łódź community of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, which led to a split into a German majority and a Polish minority. Protestant Poles, with the support of the city’s authorities and elites, including many factory owners, had been strengthening their position within the Evangelical Church in Łódź and its region – as evidenced by the formation of an Organisation of Evangelical Poles in Łódź in September 1927 and by the work of pastor Karol Kotula as leader of that community (Kotula 1998: 137–161). Thirdly, the Wartheland authorities treated both the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church in a clearly hostile manner. The repression against the already strongly Germanised (and at least outwardly loyal) Evangelical Church culminated in the decree on church reorganisation in the Wartheland, which divided it into two

churches, based respectively in Poznań and Łódź. Both were available only to Germans; the Polish Evangelical organisation was outlawed and subjected to severe repressions. The Catholic Church could carry on service only for Germans (Epstein 2011: 222–223; Huener 2018). All of these measures caused severe dissatisfaction among the Volksdeutsche, who did not agree with the war against religion (Bojanowski 1992: 224–225; Epstein 2011: 225–227).

All of these three factors suggest that religious denomination was treated primarily as a tool for determining how much the individual belonged to the German community – German Protestants had a much greater chance of preserving their Germanness than German Catholics, who had had to attend Polish masses, and were also more frequently married to Poles. Greiser and the Wartheland leadership were hostile to religion, and this characterised their policies even in comparison with other parts of the Reich.

The criteria of language and religion so eagerly applied by the Nazis in occupied Łódź did not in the slightest degree reflect the truth about the Volksdeutsche. The use of these criteria, even if self-identification were also taken into account, would necessarily lead to the failure of the project as a whole. The Wartheland administration knew of these problems and attempted to adapt the criteria to the actual state of affairs in the eastern part of the province.

Several documents from the surviving records of the Łódź area Volksliste office and the Wartheland central office suggest that the procedure for categorising Volksdeutsche in the Łódź government area was less strict than in the case of their compatriots in the Poznań and Inowrocław areas. Also, different criteria were applied than in the case of Germans from Wielkopolska. The author of a memorandum concerning the Deutsche Volksliste in Poznań, Herbert Strickner, citing the existence of only Russian schools before 1914,¹² the mastery of three languages (German, Russian, and Polish) by many Germans in the Łódź region, and the poverty of the population, argued for the need to use criteria other than language – for example, religious denomination. He went on to state explicitly that the Łódź Germans had to be assessed more leniently (Pospieszalski 1949: 99–100). The procedure itself was also simplified, with many decisions taken at the discretion of a single official. According to an estimate made by the city Volksliste office in Łódź in May 1944, out of the 107,523 people in Łódź entered on the list, approximately 80,000 had been accepted (and categorised) as a result of a single official's decision (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1113: 314). Gerhard Wolf estimates that close to 20% of Volksdeutsche in

¹² This is not accurate; Polish- and German-language schools existed in Łódź from the beginning of the twentieth century.

the Wartheland were entered on the Volksliste in contravention of official regulations and guidelines (Wolf 2018: 152).

Mixed marriages

Another question to be considered is that of marriages between Poles and Germans (*Mischehe*, or mixed marriage, is a term used in Nazi propaganda) (Röger 2020). The Nazis viewed Łódź as a place where there was a high degree of mixing between nations, understood to include ethnically mixed marriages. The introduction of the Volksliste often led to bitter divisions within families. The historian Lucjan Kieszczyński, who was a manual worker during the occupation, described the family of a female friend as follows: “Her father, a Pole, a fanatical patriot, when her mother accepted the Volksliste and when their son was later taken into the German military, could not take it and committed suicide by hanging. This was provoked by his being slapped in the face by a German, which he took as an affront to the honour of a Pole. He did not want to live with a German wife and a German soldier as a son” (Kieszczyński 1996: 185).

The Nazis attempted to assign families to a single ethnicity; differences between husband and wife could lead to a conflict of identity among their children. At least in the case of pre-existing marriages, it was seen as better to assign the Polish spouse to group 3 or 4 than to leave him or her outside the Volksliste. There was also a practical reason to make the same assessment for both spouses: it was feared that local Germans would feel dissatisfaction and would protest if their Polish spouses were left as “serfs” outside the legal system of the Third Reich.

According to the guidelines, all Volksliste offices were to enter the Polish partners in such families on the list. If Polish spouses in binational marriages had been treated worse than their German partners, significant problems might be expected to ensue. “There are differences of opinions within marriages, children grow up subject to a certain dissonance, and finally do not know to which nation they belong. In this way an intermediate layer is artificially created”¹³ (Kundrus 2012: 119). It might also irritate local Volksdeutsche and weaken their loyalty to the German state. Hence it was better “to admit several

¹³ “...die Kinder wachsen in einer ausgesprochenen Dissonanz auf und wissen letzten Ende nicht, welchem Volkstum sie angehören. Man schafft auf diese Art und Weise nur künstlich eine Zwischenschicht” (Pospieszalski 1949: 93).

thousand Poles with their German partners to the German nation, than to have them stand outside”,¹⁴ as the chief of the Łódź government area indicated in 1942 (*ibidem*). This led to uniform treatment of Polish partners and the settlement of disputed questions, for example the issuing of German food rations to Germans’ Polish spouses (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1129: 13). After submitting an application, Polish spouses in mixed marriages were usually assigned to Volksliste group 3 or 4. It was very rare for such spouses to be admitted to group 2, or not to be admitted to the Volksliste at all. If the German spouse was in group 3 or 4, their Polish partner would generally be assigned to group 4 (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1124: 9–12). The non-German national identity of the Polish partner was always noted in the applications of both spouses. A mixed marriage was a serious “burden” on the German partner, and could – along with language used at home and children’s first language – affect the Volksliste group to which that person was assigned. For officials and NSDAP members, the possibility of marriage to a person of non-German nationality was excluded (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1124: 28). Poles in mixed marriages, like Volksdeutsche in groups 3 and 4, were quite often subjected to racial checks (Heinemann 2014: 233–235), particularly in cases where the relationship was legalised in the course of the war. Official approval of a Polish–German relationship and permission to marry depended on a decision of Greiser’s chancellery and had to be well reasoned. Permission was difficult to obtain; it was not possible if the Polish partner had a negative assessment from the racial checks. Relatively few people attempted to legalise a relationship with a Pole; several files with requests and decisions have survived in the State Archive in Poznań (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 768–769),¹⁵ and Volksliste files contain a number of requests addressed to the mayor of Łódź (Bömelburg and Klatt 2015: 241, 259–260; APŁ, City of Łódź Files, 28665, 28513) and appeals (Bömelburg and Klatt 2015: 246–249; APŁ, NLN, 87–88). Following approval of the marriage and entry on the Volksliste, the Polish partners remained under the observation of the occupying authorities. Their status was uncertain – some offices objected to them being treated like other Volksdeutsche, and this led to requests for guidance being made to the Wartheland Central Office. A particularly controversial question was the continued Volksliste status of Polish widows of men who had died serving in the Wehrmacht (Kundrus 2012: 120).

¹⁴ “Es ist besser einige tausend Polen mit ihren deutschen Ehegatten in das deutsche Volk zu übernehmen, als diese außerhalb stehen zu lassen” (*ibidem*).

¹⁵ Several files contain applications by Germans concerning relationships with non-Poles: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians, people from the Baltic countries, etc.

An example of categorisation problems: Oskar Ambroży Klikar

The clear dividing line between the privileged (within the already privileged minority of inhabitants of the Łódź region) groups 1 and 2 of *Volksdeutsche* and the “Polonised” groups 3 and 4 compelled some Germans to submit appeals against their assignment to a group that they considered too low. Much depended on that decision; for example, whether they would be able to continue to practise their profession or retain their property.

The files held at the State Archive in Łódź contain numerous appeals lodged with the *Volksliste* office at government area level.¹⁶ Most of them are requests for reassignment from group 3 to group 2; a few indicate the desire to move from group 4 to group 1. This is partly a result of instructions issued to *Volksliste* officials in 1941 prohibiting the acceptance of appeals from group 2 *Volksdeutsche* requesting a higher categorisation (APŁ, Łódź Regierungsbezirk Chief, 387: 134). An interesting case whose records survive in the *Volksliste* files is that of Oskar Ambroży Klikar (also spelled *Klikauer*). It is an atypical example that all the same demonstrates the dilemmas of categorisation and the problems associated with the categories that the Nazis had adopted.

Klikar was born in Łódź on 7 November 1869. From the age of 22 he worked for various industrial firms in Łódź. From 1932 he was a director of the *Widzevska Manufaktura* factory (APŁ, NLN, 245174, p. 22). In 1929 he took a seat on the city council, representing *Deutscher Volksverband*, one of the most important German organisations in the Łódź region at that time (Cygański 1962: 28). Klikar submitted his *Volksliste* application in April 1940. The following comment was added to his questionnaire form: “Klikar presented himself as a Pole before the war. His wife is Polish. Klikar denies his Germanness, speaks disrespectfully about Germans, the Führer and Germany. In order to become a complete Pole, he was rechristened, associated with Poles and Polish priests, belonged to the Polish Military Organisation [POW].”¹⁷

Klikar appealed against the decision of an official who in 1940 had assigned him to group C, and subsequently to group 4. The appeal was considered twice:

¹⁶ An unknown number of appeals were finally considered by the Supreme Court of Examination of the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums* (Reich Commissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood).

¹⁷ “Klikar gab sich vor dem Krieg als Pole aus. Seine Frau ist Polin. Klikar ist ein Verleugner seines Deutschtums, äußert sich abfällig gegen Deutsche gegen den Deutschen, dem Führer und Deutschland. Um ein ganzer Pole zu sein ließ er sich umtaufen, verkehrte mit Polen und polnischen Pfarrern, gehörte zur Polnischen Militärorganisation.”

first in 1942 (or earlier), and again in 1943 (APŁ, NLN, 89). His actions as director of Widzewska Manufaktura were assessed negatively by the Nazis – he was said to have forbidden employees to speak German, and to have been an enemy of Germans. The aforementioned accusation that he had insulted Germany and Hitler was described in more precise terms in subsequent opinions issued by the occupying authorities – he was reported to have said in the presence of his driver: “Hitler’s whole damned pack need to be eradicated right back to the cradle”¹⁸ (APŁ, NLN, 245174, p. 11). A second opinion confirms that Klikar belonged to the POW during the First World War and disarmed a general of the German army in Łódź (APŁ, NLN, 245174, p. 12). According to a third opinion annexed to the application, he was said to have funded a Jewish organisation. That opinion also contains the following assessment: “It can be added that Klikar was a typical Łódź businessman: he was a Pole to the Poles, a German to the Germans – if that would bring some advantage. Klikar recently claimed to be of French descent, with the original name Klikard!”¹⁹ (APŁ, NLN, 245174, p. 13). The “charge” that he acted as papal chamberlain to Pope Pius XII in Poland is not supported by Klikar’s personal files, but one opinion concerning him indicates that he was a member of the Papal Academy (without indicating a specific department). The German mayor of Rzgów stated in his first opinion: “Klikar was not known as a German, and if he wishes to claim otherwise today, that is sheer hypocrisy”²⁰ (APŁ, NLN, 245174, p. 11).

Claims repeated in works of literature (Izerski 1964: 211; Lesman 2017: 250–252, 344) that Klikar was a Nazi party chief have no support in the sources – no Volksdeutscher of group 4 was permitted even to belong to the NSDAP, let alone take on a leadership role at regional level.

Klikar’s appeal over his Volksliste categorisation ultimately failed in August 1943, when the Volksliste office at Łódź government area level rejected it with the following reasoning: “Klikar had a hostile attitude to Germanness in the past, and in many cases acted against Germans” (APŁ, NLN, 89).

¹⁸ “Folgende Wörter wurden deutlich von dem Kraftwagenführer des Kilkars Oskar und seinem Bruder und anderen Dorfbewohner vernommen, das ganze verfluchte Hitlerpack müßte man bis zur Wiege ausschalten.”

¹⁹ “Bei Klikar kommt noch hinzu, dass er ein typischer Lodscher Geschäftsmann war: er war den Polen ein Pole, den Deutschen ein Deutscher – wenn er sich davon einen Vorteil versprach. Klikar gab sich in der letzten Zeit als französischer Abkömmling, der ursprünglich Klikard geheissen habe!”

²⁰ “Laut weiteren Aussagen des Bürgermeisters der Stadt Rzgów, war Klikar als Deutscher nicht bekannt und wenn er heute das Gegenteil behaupten will, so ist es eine blosse Heuchelei.”

The files with appeals contain mostly only the decisions of the government area's Volksliste office, together with a few documents submitted by applicants to support their appeals. The reasons given for the committee's decision provide a certain insight into the arguments used in assigning someone to a privileged group or to one of the lower, "Polonised" groups (3 and 4).

Oskar Klikar lodged his appeal out of necessity, as Volksdeutsche in groups C, D and E, and later group 4 were subject to a number of restrictions that affected their economic position. It may be surprising that he sought promotion to group 1, as most of the surviving appeals are requests for reassignment to group 2 (from group 3). His fate during the occupation and after the liberation of the Łódź region is unknown. It is natural that in his case the decisive arguments mainly related to his position as director of Widzewska Manufaktura. Klikar, who can be counted among the elites of pre-war Łódź, found himself – if only from the need to maintain close contacts with the Polish state and Polish society, or due to his position as a city councillor – partly compelled and partly encouraged (for example, through the support of Polish governing circles for Polish industry) to maintain close contacts with Poles and to engage in anti-German initiatives. Other arguments that appear in the appeals of much less wealthy applicants, such as those concerning Catholic faith or knowledge of the German language, did not play a major role in Klikar's case, even though they appeared several times in the opinions of various officials. Klikar's case is representative only for a small number of well-situated Łódź Volksdeutsche: he had been a director of one of the city's largest factories, and also no doubt had very good contacts with the Polish elites.

Reasons for seeking entry on the Volksliste

Those seeking entry on the Volksliste were motivated by a wide variety of factors. A major consideration was that the German population and people of German descent (or their partners), if they delayed applying for the list, were subjected to coercion. A declaration of German nationality could help one to avoid a punishment or to have it significantly reduced. Some people accepted entry on the list to save family members from being sent to a concentration camp. In the case of many practising a profession, lack of entry on the Volksliste or assignment to too low a group would cause them to be prohibited from practising. The same applied to many civil servants, including teachers – assignment to a low group might result in dismissal (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1129: 39–47). Owners of businesses and landowners

had to consider the possibility of confiscation. If parents failed to sign the Volksliste, their children could not attend school; entry on the list or assignment to a “privileged” group could provide access to education.²¹ There was also significant pressure from below; many were forced or persuaded to apply by their partners, parents, other family members, or employers. In the case of many Polish–German couples, after the German partner had submitted a questionnaire, pressure was applied to register the Polish spouse and their children. There were also a certain number of opportunists who sought entry on the Volksliste because they expected the occupying regime to last, or else they believed in the Nazi ideology or identified as Germans. We should also remember a relatively small number of Volksdeutsche who signed the list on the instructions of the resistance movement or who joined an anti-Nazi underground movement after being entered on the list.

It is not always possible to determine to what extent individual Volksdeutsche felt themselves to be German, and to what extent Polish. Zygmunt Izdebski and later Volksliste researchers state that there exist a range of intermediate attitudes and a great variety of reasons for declaring German identity (Olejnik 2006: 29).

Perceptions of the administration and the Łódź Volksdeutsche about the Volksliste

Surviving sources from the time of the occupation contain relatively few opinions of residents of occupied Łódź and the Wartheland concerning the system used to categorise ethnic Germans. One description of the campaign of March 1940 that survives in the files of the German administration is a sentence from a report by the head of the Łódź–Kalisz government area: “Entries on the German National List have brought the Volksdeutsche significant peace of mind and a good mood” (APP, Wartheland Gauleiter, 1380: 13). A later Security Service (SD) report comes from the period after the implementation of the Volksliste in accordance with the decree of the Reich interior minister, namely after March 1941. Extension of the Volksliste registration campaign to the group of Polonised

²¹ The “privileged groups” included Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Czechs, and people from the Baltic countries, living in occupied Poland and recorded on the appropriate national lists or in the official address register. There also existed primary education for Poles from around 1943; it was available to a very small group of Polish children and had a minimal teaching programme, not comparable to that of German schools.

Volksdeutsche or to Poles with German roots was, according to this report, criticised by the previously registered Volksdeutsche who had a more firmly grounded national consciousness (AIPN, Gestapo, Ld 1/280: 243). People submitting applications began to withdraw them following Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, as Strickner himself mentioned in his report (Pospieszalski 1949: 58–59). Also in April 1942 the SD confirmed that the Soviet–German war was having a negative impact on the Volksliste – the arrival of injured from the Eastern front weakened faith in and expectation of a German victory among Poles and Germans in the Wartheland (AIPN, Ld 1/280: 377).

Conclusion

The hopes placed by the Reich in the Volksliste in the Łódź region were not fulfilled. The liberation of Łódź in January 1945 and the fall of the Third Reich ended the essentially prototypical idea of the re-Germanisation of Germans, people of German descent, and Poles with ties to Germans. The criteria of religion, language, and self-identification were a clearly insufficient basis for a categorisation of most of the German population that would enable it to be separated from the non-German majority and re-Germanised: the Jewish and Polish elements had been dominant in Łódź before 1939, and the Nazis themselves considered almost all of the city's Germans (including those with a much stronger national identity) to be unreliable and insufficiently German. One may agree with Kundrus that the Volksliste system was flexible – the uniform treatment of Polish–German married couples indicates a certain dose of realism within the German administration. Another indication of a realistic approach may be the fact that the criteria were adapted to suit the reality, and that the Łódź Germans were assessed more leniently than their compatriots in Poznań. More detailed research is needed on the individual applications for entry on the Volksliste; in view of the fact that tens of thousands of Volksliste forms and accompanying documents have survived, this article provides only a partial account of the attitudes of people of the time. The case of Oskar Ambroży Klikar, director of the Widzewska Manufaktura factory prior to 1939, who attempted to change his classification from group 4 to group 1, is unusual for the Łódź Volksdeutsche. It is also unusual among industrialists in occupied Łódź, who strove by various other means to retain their property and position. Further research relating to this subgroup is also necessary.

One of the effects of the introduction of the Volksliste was the complete destruction of Polish–German relations in the Łódź region. These relations be-

gan to be revived only after 1989, although in entirely different circumstances than in 1939. Even today those relations remain overshadowed by the consequences of the Volksliste.

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the German National List (Deutsche Volksliste) compiled in the Łódź region during the Second World War. The Volksliste was part of the Nazis' plans to re-Germanise the Łódź Germans and to separate them from the influence of Polish culture and society. The main questions addressed are the categorisation of Volksdeutsche by the Volksliste offices, and the motivations of Germans who rejected the list or applied for admission to a higher category. It is hypothesised that the criteria used for categorisation were insufficient, and that the most frequently applied criteria – language and religion – did not enable an adequate categorisation of the Łódź Germans. People accepted the list for many different reasons (in some cases they were compelled to do so), the most important reasons being economic ones – a desire to preserve one's wealth, profession or social position. The article is based on various archival sources, including documents of the German administration from archives in Łódź, Poznań, and Warsaw, as well as documents submitted by applicants, as in the case of Oskar Ambroży Klikar, who appealed against his assignment to a low Volksliste category.

