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TODAY WROCLAW IS A CITY THAT AT FIRST GLANCE REVEALS LITTLE OF the dramatic rupture of 1945. It appears no different than any other major city in Poland. It is the seat of a voivodeship administration, a university town with important cultural institutions, a transportation hub, an industrial city, and also, increasingly, a magnet for tourists. The central squares and streets in the Old Town look as if they had survived the war without significant damage. Visitors familiar with photographs of the ruins of 1945 stare in amazement at the Baroque façades of the patrician houses and of the university. They hardly believe their own eyes as they stroll along the seemingly old walls on Cathedral Island beneath the towers of the apparently untouched Gothic cathedral. If one recalls the tragedy of 1945, when much of Wrocław was reduced to rubble and an entire country shifted westward, displacing millions of people, this normal and prosperous city strikes the viewer as somewhat disturbing, nothing short of surreal.

Even in an incomparably less complex entity such as a village, we would expect the expulsion of its entire population to lead inevitably to its ruin, for how could any place survive the loss of local knowledge accumulated over generations, of traditions expunged from one day to the next. And in fact the postwar era in many places in Poland's western and northern regions, which had once been the eastern regions of Germany, was marked by such decline. In his fascinating study *Niechciane miasta* (Unwanted Towns), Zdzisław Mach examined the consequences of the population exchange for the town of Lubomierz (formerly Liebenthal) in Lower Silesia.¹ Here, the expulsion of the German population led to the desolation and deterioration of a small town that had been completely intact at the end of the war. This was in part due to the consequences of Soviet-style state socialism, which crushed any form of local autonomy and strangled economic diversity in the town. However,

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a comparison of Lubomierz with towns in central Poland—that is, in those regions that had not been part of Germany prior to the Second World War—highlights the role played by the forced migration in the town’s deterioration. The expulsion of the German inhabitants and their replacement with Polish settlers, who had no ties of any kind to Lubomierz and knew nothing of local traditions, was in fact a fundamental cause of the decline. Only Lubomierz’s third-generation Poles, the today forty-something grandchildren of the settlers, have felt sufficiently at home in the town to become interested in revitalizing it. Taking advantage of opportunities arising from the political and economic transformation of Poland following the fall of communism in 1989, they have begun to turn the town back into an attractive place to live. Although Lubomierz might be an extreme case, it is nonetheless symptomatic of conditions in Poland’s new western territories.

For decades the economic decline of the regions Germany had to cede was one of the central arguments employed by Germans who refused to acknowledge the permanence of the 1945 territorial losses and who called for a revision of the decisions made at the Potsdam Conference. This line of argumentation combined an accurate economic analysis with erroneous political conclusions. Not only had a revision of the postwar German-Polish border soon become politically illusory; following the population exchange completed in 1948, the “right to a homeland” in a territorial and legal sense, as claimed by the German expellee organizations, increasingly worked in favor of the Poles who had been settled in previously German territories, and favored less and less the Germans who had been expelled from them. The Polish side understandably rejected the demanded territorial revisions, although usually on the basis of arguments that grossly distorted the historical facts. Up to the fundamental political changes of 1989, the Polish government and Polish society invoked historical rights to “age-old Polish land” and referred to the Germans who had once lived there as former “occupiers,” as if the seven-hundred-year tradition of German-speaking settlements east of the Oder-Neisse line were merely a chimera. They also denied, at least in public, any negative impact of the border and population shifts on the western territories.

Not until after the definitive recognition of postwar borders in the German-Polish Border Treaty of 1990 did a truly unbiased, scholarly examination of the background and repercussions of Poland’s westward shift and the ensuing population movements become possible. Scholars no longer had to serve

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political interests and supply ammunition for turf battles over the justice or injustice of the Oder-Neisse line and the expulsion of the Germans. Joint German-Polish research projects and publications, even on these sensitive topics, became possible and are today in fact a matter of course. Where it was no longer a matter of politics but of history alone, common ground could be found relatively quickly. Among historians of the two countries, nationally-based standpoints have disappeared. In this regard, German-Polish research projects on the history of forced migrations are playing a pioneering role in contemporary European scholarship.²

Nevertheless, the history of forced migrations in twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe remains a difficult subject and one that can easily fall prey to political instrumentalization.³ It is not surprising that even sixty years after the fact the issue still gives rise to emotional responses. Unbiased, scholarly examinations and the cross-border public debate about the mutually inflicted suffering began in earnest only *after* the Cold War, though there were a few notable early attempts to analyze these processes from an impartial perspective.⁴ The “ethnic cleansing” in the Yugoslavian civil war in the 1990s functioned as a catalyst for international public interest in the history of forced population shifts in Europe and elsewhere. The Yugoslavian case suddenly shed light on how little unbiased research had been done on these violent processes, despite the fact that they have shaped large parts of Europe and continue to shape other parts of the world. Although significant progress in research on the history of forced migrations has been made since the mid-1990s, we are just starting to move forward into this long neglected—and deliberately avoided—field.

One cannot expect that examinations of forced migrations will lead to particularly pleasant findings, as they deal with violent and utterly destructive events. In documenting these processes, scholars confront a dilemma that Karl Schlögel described several years ago: After the expulsions have been instrumentalized politically for decades, it is not easy to find a language that facilitates discussion, avoids becoming politically charged, and at the same time calls things by their real names.⁵ In order to achieve this, it is critical to conceive of these forced migrations within their larger historical contexts. In the case of the expulsion of Germans from Poland, this context is first and foremost the Second World War and the German occupation of Poland, the Nazis’ monstrous resettlement, “re-ethnicizing” (*Umvolkung*) and

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extermination policies, and the mass murder of Jews, Roma and Sinti, and Slavs. No simple causal relation exists between these processes, and we have to bear in mind that the history of forced migrations in twentieth-century Europe began already in the nineteenth century.⁶ Nevertheless it is clear that the dissolution of Prussia, the eradication of eastern Germany, and the expulsion of millions of Germans from the East would not have been possible without the war of conquest and extermination waged by Nazi Germany in Central and Eastern Europe.

The present study is concerned with both the short- and the long-term consequences of forced migrations for those regions where the established inhabitants were expelled and replaced by new settlers from elsewhere. My approach is to use a case study. The book studies the consequences of forced migration through the lens of a single location: that of Wrocław, the largest city in the German territories ceded to Poland after the war and the largest city ever to experience a total population exchange of this kind. Prior to the original publication of this book in German in 2003, to the best of my knowledge there had been no comprehensive local study of forced migration and its long-term effects on Wrocław or any other place.⁷

I chose to look at the city of Wrocław for a number of reasons. As a large city, it is particularly well suited for an investigation of the complex consequences of such a population exchange. A large city generates a sufficient amount of the sources necessary for historical research. Compared to other large Polish cities with a similar history, such as Szczecin and Gdańsk, Wrocław offered decisive advantages. In 1945, Szczecin became a border city, having lost a significant portion of its hinterland as well as its economically crucial connection to Berlin. In an examination of postwar Szczecin, it would have been difficult to determine which aspects in the development of this city were tied to the population exchange and which to its economically unfavorable peripheral location at a hermetically sealed border. In Wrocław, by contrast, established regional relations were preserved because almost all of Silesia became Polish in 1945. Although Wrocław did lose Berlin as an economic reference point, this could be compensated for—better than in the case of Szczecin—by strengthening economic ties to Krakow and Poznań.

Wrocław was also better suited than Gdańsk because I wanted to investigate the radical rupture of 1945, the sense of foreignness that the Polish

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newcomers experienced, and the cultural strategies through which they attempted to overcome this foreignness. Although Gdańsk experienced a complete population exchange as well, the break was less pronounced there. Despite its largely German-speaking population prior to 1945, the port city on the Vistula had had traditionally strong economic, political, and cultural connections to Poland. Even before the war, it thus occupied an important place in the Polish collective memory. Gdańsk's incorporation into Poland, a political demand that had been raised repeatedly between the world wars, did not come as a surprise to Poles in 1945. The situation regarding Wrocław was quite different. Although the city had once belonged to Poland (in the Middle Ages), it had gradually grafted onto the Holy Roman Empire beginning in the thirteenth century. Wrocław had thus become a German city over the course of the centuries. While its ties to neighboring Poland had always been an important factor in the history of this trading city, modern Wrocław's ties to Poland were such that, prior to 1945, no one in Poland would have doubted its German character or its affiliation with Germany. Polish society was as unprepared to take over Wrocław as it was to give up Lwów.

The present study is based on three simple questions: How could Wrocław, which was devastated in the Second World War and lost its entire established population, become a thriving city again? How did the Polish settlers and their descendants not only overcome their feeling of foreignness and establish roots in the formerly German city, but also develop a sense of civic pride unsurpassed anywhere else in Poland? And how was it possible to make of Wrocław not merely a city in Poland but also a truly Polish city, if only in the course of an extended process that is still ongoing today?

The search for answers to these questions led to five different fields of research, to which this book hopes to contribute. First, it sheds light on an epoch of Wrocław's history that has long been neglected.⁸ Although the present study examines the entire period from 1945 to the present, it does not claim to be a comprehensive investigation of Wrocław's history. The analysis is always centered on the consequences of the forced population exchange. This requires a temporal focus on the years immediately after the war, but also takes into consideration the fundamental changes caused by the great political upheaval of 1989. Many important aspects of the local history not directly related to the border and population shift in 1945 could not be treated here. In the course of my investigation of Wrocław, however, I have become

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convinced that the “demographic revolution” of 1945, through which a German city was made Polish overnight, has remained the central element in Wrocław’s city history ever since. Whether explicitly addressed or tacitly avoided, the rupture of 1945, the new inhabitants’ lack of roots in the city, and the psychological problem of moving into the homes and taking over the workplaces of those expelled from the city all had a sustained impact on Wrocław’s postwar development.⁹

Second, the book is intended as a contribution to the history of German-Polish relations in the tradition established long ago by Klaus Zernack, whose *Beziehungsgeschichte* methodologically anticipated much of what is known today as *histoire croisée*.¹⁰ Polish settlers did not encounter the German legacies in Wrocław with indifference, but rather within the context of conflict-laden German-Polish relations, which experienced its darkest phase during the Second World War. Many Poles in Wrocław moved into the apartments of their tormentors or suddenly had an opportunity to leaf through the private libraries and papers of political opponents from Germany. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the relationship was also marked by a great intimacy. The first Polish mayor of Wrocław after the war had earned a doctoral degree at a German university, and many of the professors who built up the Polish university in Wrocław had studied and taught in Germany. One example is the famous Polish physician and microbiologist Ludwik Hirszfeld (1884–54), who established the ABO blood type nomenclature. After graduating from secondary school in the multiethnic Polish-German-Jewish city of Łódź in 1902, Hirszfeld studied medicine in Würzburg and Berlin, earning a doctoral degree at the University of Berlin in 1907. He subsequently worked in Heidelberg and Zurich, where he completed his postdoctoral dissertation in 1914. In 1921, he continued his scientific career in Warsaw. After the German invasion of Poland, Hirszfeld, who had published much of his scholarly work in German, lost his professorship at the University of Warsaw and, because he was Jewish, was deported to the Warsaw Ghetto. However, he was able to flee the ghetto and survived in occupied Poland. After the war Hirszfeld was appointed dean of the medical school at the University of Wrocław. On November 15, 1945, he gave the keynote lecture in the Aula Leopoldina inaugurating the first Polish academic year in Wrocław.¹¹ As this biography illustrates, the destruction of Polish-German relations—and in the

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case of Hirszfeld also German-Jewish relations—occurred against the backdrop of a particularly dense web of mutual interaction.

The lives of very few Polish settlers in Wrocław were as tightly intertwined with the Germans as was that of Ludwik Hirszfeld's, but the German past of the city nonetheless had meaning for most of them. The fact that Wrocław did not suffer the same fate as Lubomierz was due not least to the symbolic significance of the largest city in the former German territories of postwar Poland. This was the proving ground where Polish society could demonstrate its ability to reconstruct and revive a city whose destruction had been caused by the Germans. For this reason, Wrocław could not help but communicate with Breslau. The size of the city prior to 1945, the number of its inhabitants, its architecture, and its technical and cultural institutions—all of these became benchmarks for Wrocław after 1945. If the city had been merely a social space, then Breslau would have been extinguished with the expulsion of its inhabitants and a completely new and different city would have arisen after the war. Breslau and Wrocław would have confronted each other like the unrelated texts of a palimpsest. This, however, was not the case. In the background of the postwar city, the prewar city was always present. At first the relation between the two was marked by Wrocław's desire to negate and occasionally to outstrip Breslau. However, with increasing distance from the Second World War and diminishing political tensions between Germany and Poland, an initially interested and ultimately respectful encounter developed between the Polish city and the German one, as I will illustrate in the present study.

The third field of research forming the basis of this book is the history of forced migrations in twentieth-century Europe. As a result of growing research and publications since the late 1990s, our knowledge has expanded significantly. Works such as Norman M. Naimark's comparative study *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* have helped to overcome national perspectives on the history of forced migrations and to sharpen our understanding of the recurring mechanisms of ethnic cleansing.¹² Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* and Kate Brown's *History of No Place* remind us of the extent to which the world of Central and Eastern Europe has been shaped and misshaped through the forced removal or destruction of entire populations and the eradication of their traces.¹³ Systematic research on the long-term consequences of forced migrations has just gotten started.¹⁴ Wrocław is a particularly fascinating case in investigating the century of expulsions because

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it was the site of several forced resettlements: the expulsion of Germans, the settlement of Poles expelled from the territories Poland lost to the Soviet Union, the settlement of Ukrainians deported from southeastern Poland in 1947, and the arrival of tens of thousands of Polish Jews, most of whom had survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and subsequently fled the rampant anti-Semitism in postwar Poland to the country's western territories. The present study, however, is concerned not with these forced resettlements per se but rather with their repercussions for a city such as Wrocław. One of the central issues here is how the population relocated to Wrocław dealt with the psychologically difficult situation of taking over a place that had previously "belonged" to others. For many this meant a material improvement. Nevertheless, precisely those people who had been expelled from eastern Poland did not regard this as real compensation for the loss of their homeland. No matter how modern and luxurious the new residences in the western territories might have been, many settlers missed their former homes in East Galicia or Volhynia, to which they were tied through personal memories and a sense of tradition going back generations. This sense of uprootedness among the new inhabitants in territories from which the former population was expelled is a dimension of the history of forced migrations that has not yet been adequately investigated. Forced resettlements and ethnic cleansings are political actions that can be carried out in a single historical moment. The negative material and psychological repercussions they have on the societies and regions involved, in contrast, can be overcome, if at all, only in the course of a decades-long cultural process.¹⁵

The fourth field is research on the rebuilding of European cities destroyed in the Second World War. Even without the expulsion of the German population, the scope of war damages in Wrocław would have resulted in a profound caesura in the city's history. As in other European cities devastated by the war, the loss of cultural assets in Wrocław was enormous and, in general, irreplaceable. Postwar European societies were confronted with a mammoth rebuilding task, which unleashed both creative and destructive potentials.¹⁶ In many places, future-oriented visions of a modern society guided new construction to such an extent that anything regarded as old-fashioned was ruthlessly eliminated. The emphatic dawn of an ostensibly better future heralded by architects and urban planners ultimately caused as much damage to the historic building stock of many European cities as had the air raids. Elsewhere,

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emphasis focused instead on returning to historic traditions in order to create at least the illusion of stability and familiarity in a world marked by destruction and the loss of tradition. The historical reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town has become symbolic of the refusal to accept the loss of historic buildings in the war. However, even the reconstruction of Warsaw involved both demolition and historic reconstruction, as was typical for most European cities rebuilt after the war. In examining the reconstruction of war-ravaged cities, Wrocław offers a particularly fascinating case: Here the residents attempted to historically reconstruct "their" devastated city, which they had never known in its intact state. They first had to actively search out the architectural traditions they wished to revive in the reconstruction process.¹⁷

Related to this is the fifth and final field of research that is of central importance to the present study: cultural memory¹⁸ and the politics of the past.¹⁹ In postwar Wrocław, the gradual transformation of a heterogeneous migration society into a unified citizenry had much in common with a nation-building process. One of the main tasks was the "invention of tradition."²⁰ The formation of a common cultural memory capable of creating community and a sense of belonging, which in turn could make of a foreign place a home, was crucial for the successful revitalization and Polonization of Wrocław after war, border shift, and forced migration. This cultural memory, of course, did not simply develop on its own. In large part, it was a product of the politics of the past, whose agents were the city's political and cultural elite. The people who came to live in Wrocław after the war had to be convinced and to convince themselves that Wrocław would become a Polish city, no different from Kraków, Poznań, or Łódź. This required inventing, popularizing, and internalizing a tradition that justified the Polish presence, one that moved the beginning of the city's Polish history back from 1945 to the Middle Ages, thereby tying Wrocław's new inhabitants to each other and to the city itself.

Wrocław's postwar history is particularly fruitful ground for examining cultural memory, because the wealth of documentary material, the manageable time frame, and the concreteness of location make it possible to trace quite precisely the construction of a new tradition and its impact on the city and its society. We will observe local historians, philologists, archeologists, and art historians who designed, on the drawing board as it were, a purely Polish city history, thus becoming the engineers of a cultural memory. We will witness a process that expunged traces of the German past from public spaces

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because they obstructed the popularization of the new, Polish version of local history. We will see how the Wrocław Old Town was not only reconstructed but also simultaneously reshaped into a Polish landscape of memory. However, we will also learn that the invention of tradition had limitations, that the repression and condemnation of Wrocław's German past—which was at first necessary in order to set in motion a process of cultural appropriation—ultimately became an obstacle to this very process of appropriation. In order to complete this process, Polish Wrocławians have since 1989 sought ways to integrate the German past into the collective memory of the city. This development has been accompanied also by a democratization of the politics of the past, which within a pluralist society is determined not only “from above,” but is also subject to powerful impulses from “below.” In this way collective memory is continually reshaped and revised.

A variety of different sources were examined in order to answer the aforementioned questions. Archival materials provided information above all about official measures and governmental policies, but also about processes such as the deliberate Polonization, which were not discussed publicly. In search of directives issued by the Polish government, I reviewed the central collections at the Archive of New Records (AAN) in Warsaw, especially the files of the Council of Ministers (URM) and those of relevant ministries. The files of the Society for the Development of the Western Territories (TRZZ), which do not appear to have been evaluated prior to this study, also contained important information about cultural policies concerning the western territories after 1956 and about specific difficulties facing the region. The State Archives in Wrocław (AP Wr) proved a rich source of information; many of the archive's files relating to cultural issues and the Polonization of the city had hardly been evaluated prior to the present study. The files of the municipal administration and the voivodeship office in Wrocław provided information not only about the general mood, but also some specifics of the Polonization policies. Interesting files about later years were occasionally found in the collections of the County National Council of Wrocław (PRN), as well as in those of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)—noteworthy in the latter particularly were documents regarding the planning and implementation of the major anniversary celebrations of the end of the war. Finally, the files of the Wrocław Directorate for Reconstruction (WDO) and the Miastoprojekt Design Center were illuminating

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in regard to construction policies, although these contain primarily technical and logistical material and reveal little about the political objectives of the reconstruction. With respect to archival materials in general, I share historian Andreas Hofmann's suspicion that potentially explosive materials were removed from the most interesting collections before they were turned over to the archives.²¹ Therefore, however important archival research is for the present study, we must bear in mind that the extant files cannot provide comprehensive information even about administrative and political procedures.

Published recollections and memoirs by settlers have thus proved extremely valuable, despite the caution required in using them due to state censorship of sources of this kind. Collecting *pamiętniki*—recollections by contemporary witnesses—had enormous significance in the People's Republic of Poland and was repeatedly encouraged through elaborate competitions. The versions that were ultimately published, however, often differed significantly from what the authors had actually written.²² Information about problems with the Soviet military forces stationed in Poland or the labile national identity of the population that settled in the western territories was especially apt to be suppressed or falsified. Nevertheless, the *pamiętniki* are an important source that can be read in a dual manner: On the one hand, they contain a plethora of information that is otherwise virtually impossible to obtain, and provide a lively impression of the atmosphere of the period. On the other hand, precisely because of state censorship they also constitute a central source in understanding the official conception of how the "pioneer era" in the western territories was depicted within the People's Republic.²³ The diaries of Joanna Konopińska, who moved to Wrocław in 1945 as a university student and became an incisive and reflective observer of the situation in the city and the mood of its inhabitants, offer recollections of a completely different kind. Their publication in 1987 and 1991 was no longer subject to state censorship, so they can be regarded as a highly authentic primary source.²⁴

Great attention was also paid to those texts that served to create and popularize a Polish cultural memory in Wrocław. This category includes city guidebooks, popular historiographies, local or regional history periodicals and similar materials. These publications contained propaganda far into the 1980s, which has meant that authors of more recent works have not always considered them serious sources. However, apart from the fact that even

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propagandistic writings include unadulterated facts and information, these texts are an indispensable source in identifying strategies of cultural appropriation and in examining the changes such strategies were subject to over the course of time. The most recent books on local history, Wrocław encyclopedias and other reference works, popular histories, new city guidebooks, and recent editions of the aforementioned local and regional historical journals, which were all published after the abolition of state censorship, have also been evaluated here in this dual sense; that is, both as reference works and as documents reflective of the changing ways of seeing local history. The daily press was utilized sporadically as a source in this study. However, because local Wrocław historians have examined newspapers intensively in recent years, it was possible to a great extent to draw from their findings.

Finally, Wrocław's physical appearance was treated as an important source of local history; that is, as a revealing document that the author, inspired by Italo Calvino, Spiro Kostof, and Karl Schölgel, attempted to read.²⁵ There is today hardly anything random in Wrocław's appearance. Indeed as a result of rebuilding after the devastation of the war, its cityscape—first and foremost the face of the historically reconstructed and thereby reshaped Old Town—has become a kind of public text. The reconstruction of the city center was, in broad stretches, historiography by means of architecture. Through the interplay of reconstructed and reconfigured historic buildings, monuments, and commemorative plaques, as well as the names of streets and squares, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* laden with meaning has emerged, which—to borrow Jan Assmann's term—might be called a “mnemotope.”²⁶ The Polish inhabitants of Wrocław were able to decode this meaning because it had arisen within their own cultural sphere and was elucidated in published city guidebooks and repeatedly internalized through the rituals of commemorative celebrations. For external observers, however, who are not part of this society, the meaning of all this is anything but obvious.

Meanings fade over time and are eclipsed by new meanings. As a result, even the present-day residents of Wrocław are often no longer able to interpret the symbols inscribed in the postwar cityscape. In addition, a process was set in motion beginning in 1989 that has rapidly and profoundly altered the notions that Wrocław's residents have about their city. Elements of the cityscape that were once central have lost “significance” both in terms of their importance and their ability to signify meaning. In contrast, other elements,

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which previously played no role, have suddenly moved into the center of attention and become charged with meanings relating to the new era. For this reason, elucidations in the sense of Clifford Geertz's "thick description"²⁷ are necessary in order to make the cityscape readable as a "cultural system" for observers from different cultural contexts.