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## Determining the "Homeland": Expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Breslau/Wroclaw in the Wake of World War II

Nathan Stepp

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### Introduction

The Holocaust and World War II were, without a doubt, two of the most horrific events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tragedies continued after the guns were silenced, however, and these have tended to be overlooked. At the conclusion of World War II, Europe's national borders were hastily redrawn. Truman, Churchill, and Stalin determined at the Potsdam Conference in May 1945 that the borders of Poland and Germany should shift "back" to the Oder-Neisse line.<sup>1</sup> Germany, under Hitler's Third Reich, was certainly guilty of unjustly seizing much of Poland's land during the war. While the seizure of German land may have been emotionally satisfying for the Allied Forces after a destructive war started by the Germans, this redrawing of borders proved devastating for those who fell within the land that changed hands.

One city in particular experienced this harmful shake-up at the hands of foreign powers to the fullest degree. Breslau, a city that had been part of Prussia, and subsequently part of the German Empire since unification in 1871, was a city that comprised mostly Germans – five times more Germans, in fact, than

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<sup>1</sup> Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 231.

ethnic Poles in 1945.<sup>2</sup> Under the Potsdam Conference decision, Breslau would be "returned" to Poland, a policy justified by use of historical evidence tracing of the city back to Polish roots, hundreds of years in the past. It is important to note, however, that careful historical analysis was not actually carried out; rather, the city of Breslau was given to Poland "as the result of a last-minute change of heart" by the Allies.<sup>3</sup> With Truman initially completely opposed to this decision, and Churchill skeptical, Stalin was eventually able to convince Truman after Churchill was unseated by Clement Attlee as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> After Potsdam, the national Germans were effectively forced out, and Poles were encouraged to "repatriate" Breslau, which would now be called Wrocław.

This shift raises an important question. What is the meaning of "homeland"? How far back in history is it acceptable to search to determine which nationality truly "belongs" in a given area? In the case of Breslau, the city had been essentially German for hundreds of years. When the new Polish settlers arrived in Breslau, they found a strange, foreign, empty city awaiting them. Was this city really theirs? The Germans forced out of Breslau were leaving what they saw as their rightful home. Many died in the westward movement to central Germany, and many of those who did not were forced into terrible conditions.<sup>5</sup> This historical problem forces us to ask ourselves, who

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<sup>2</sup> Norman Davies and Roger Moorehouse, *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 416.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

belongs where? How can conflicts of disputed territories be solved? Post-war Wroclaw, and the formerly German, now Polish, borderlands provide an appropriate context to discuss this issue. Many scholars have studied the specific historical problem of forced post-World War II emigration in Eastern Europe, but this essay intends to approach the issue with a fresh perspective, focusing mainly on how the "homeland" was determined, justified, and experienced in Breslau/Wroclaw.

Existing scholarship that examines the question of forced exile and "repatriation" often considers it from the perspective of ethnic cleansing, detailing how Polish leaders used ethnic cleansing to create "an ethnographic monolith, with more than 95 percent of its population consisting of Polish gentiles" five years after the end of World War II.<sup>6</sup> Scholarship with an even wider scope examines the expulsions of ethnic Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia, and though the main focus of this scholarship is on ethnic cleansing and not on the nature of the homeland, it can be valuable for understanding how the outside determination of who belongs where can cause strife—not only physical strife—but also emotional and psychological.<sup>7</sup> Comprehensive political histories also exist on the city of Breslau/Wroclaw.<sup>8</sup> While telling and effective in laying out the scenario, such literature

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<sup>6</sup> T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep?: The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 1-195.

<sup>7</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 108-138.

<sup>8</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 433.



does not focus mainly on the nature of "home" but rather on the large historical patchwork of this particular region. Psychoanalytical literature also exists on the nature of forced emigration and its focus on the psychological pains of exile is particularly useful in helping to understand the experience that so many must have had in being forced out of Breslau. This literature provides evidence about how exile is "one of the most serious problems of our time."<sup>9</sup>

The post-World War II forced emigration out of Breslau remains a relevant, controversial topic. A recent German newspaper article from 2008 about a divisive museum exhibition commemorating the German victims of these expulsions shows that the pains and bad blood involved in this forced emigration and resettlement still run deep in the veins of many Germans and Poles today.<sup>10</sup> While this article discusses the progress made by these two countries in their attempt to start coming to terms with the acceptance of such a museum, it highlights the fact that this very expulsion of Germans after World War II has "remained a thorny issue" for German-Polish relations.<sup>11</sup>

The way the Allies dealt with Breslau after World War II yielded disastrous, inhumane results not only for the national Germans, but also often for the

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<sup>9</sup> León Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> "Germany and Poland to End Row over Exhibition on Post-WWII Refugees" *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 5 February 2008, <<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/183201,germany-and-poland-to-end-row-over-exhibition-on-post-wwii.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

"resettled Poles." What part did the importance of homeland play in this debacle? It is necessary to begin with a real historical look into just how Polish or German Breslau really was in the years leading up to the forced emigration conflict.

### **History of Breslau – The Credibility of a Historical Polish Claim**

It was Stalin's overwhelming wish to ensure a complete "repatriation" of Breslau to Poland that gave the ultimate nudge to the Allies endorsing this plan. Truman eventually conceded his original position of supporting an Eastern Neisse border on 29 July 1945 to agreeing to a Western Neisse border on 30 July 1945.<sup>12</sup> The outcome of a post-war Poland "moved bodily westward" was manufactured by the Allies as a rhetorical giving back of the land to its supposedly rightful owners, the Poles.<sup>13</sup>

One question rises to the forefront in dealing with this supposed historical justification by the Allies at Potsdam: How Polish was Wroclaw? More specifically, how Polish could Wroclaw have been said to be at the time of the Potsdam decision to transfer it "back" to Polish control? Key geographical features of the region shed light on how Wroclaw has come to be such a historically disputed territory. The city lies at a strategic intersection of two ancient trading routes, and the area is rich in the natural resources of iron, coal, silver, gold, lead, tin, and copper.<sup>14</sup> It is

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<sup>12</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 416.

<sup>13</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers: Fort Worth, 1997), 500.

<sup>14</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 39.

understandable, then, why many groups would strongly desire to control this land.

Cultural and political understanding of Wrocław before 1000 is somewhat nebulous.<sup>15</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, however, note that "the large-scale presence of Celts in ancient Silesia is beyond question."<sup>16</sup> Perhaps in a different context then, the Republic of Ireland might make a similar sort of historical claim to the region as Poland did in the wake of World War II. The greater picture becomes even more complicated, however, when we consider that "Germanic incursions began as early as the fourth century BC" in the general region of Wrocław.<sup>17</sup> Wrocław, like most cities, has far too complicated a history to be oversimplified in such fashion. An insightful summary can be found in the book *Microcosm* that illustrates the complex and constantly evolving historical and cultural nature of the city:

By the middle of the first millennium AD, the list of culture groups, tribes and assorted peoples who are known to have lived in or near the Island City was approaching a score. It included the Corded Warers, the Jordanovians, the Uñeticians, the Lusatians, the Bylanians, various unspecified Celts, the Venedians, the Przeworksers, the Scythians, the Sarmatians, the Marcomanni, the Silingae and Asdingi (the Vandals), the Goths, the Huns, the Gepids, the Heruli and various unspecified Slavs. If the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 48.



sources were more plentiful, the list would certainly have been longer. At each stage, the newcomers mixed and mingled, and ultimately obliterated their predecessors.<sup>18</sup>

One conclusion can be made from this assessment: no *one* particular group can really lay exclusive historical claim to this piece of land. Still, this fact did not deter the post-war Polish government from referring to "the so-called eastern territories—East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia...as 'recovered territories'."<sup>19</sup> It must then be examined where this notion of "recovery" originated historically. Communist Poland operated not unlike the Soviet Union in regard to the control of memory, specifically historical memory. One 1993 New York Times article explains that "until the fall of Communism, many say, residents lived in an ancient city that was allowed no history."<sup>20</sup> Instead, according to then-Director of Wrocław Historical Museum Maciej Lagiewski, residents of Wrocław "were allowed only the stupid Communist history, which leaped from the Piasts to 1945."<sup>21</sup> The Piasts are described as a "Slavic dynasty that ruled over a large region from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and created a great Polish empire."<sup>22</sup> More than a half millennium of erasure from the Island City's history has serious implications.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>19</sup> Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (Oxford University: New York, 2002), 231.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Kamm, "Yes, Class, Once Upon a Time This Was Germany," *New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1993, A4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



This extreme erasure highlights a key element of the nature of "homeland." The Times article suggests that "homeland" can be, and has often been, used for political purposes. Equally important to understand, however, is that this is a two-way street. That is, just as the concept of "homeland" is used for political gain and justification, political control (especially of national memory) is used as a means of creating a validation for having that "homeland" at all.

Polish historians of the past, like 15<sup>th</sup> century Cracovian historian Jan Dlugosz, have often emphasized Silesia as "part of Poland's lost inheritance."<sup>23</sup> Wroclaw was called Wrotizla during its Piast years. Dlugosz, well-known in Poland, is a voice of authority who has helped to construct the narrative of Wroclaw as essentially Polish. Though the Polish Piast Dynasty did see a reign of sorts until the 1330s, this reign was often weak and fractured, constantly under duress from both civil and foreign wars, the latter often being with the Holy Roman Empire. The Germanic culture would begin to pervade Wroclaw, however, eventually leading to a solid German identity in the city that would officially become part of a modern German nation state after the culmination of the Franco-Prussian War and German Unification in 1871.<sup>24</sup>

It is most important to understand that during the period between 1327, when "Wrotzila, for all practical purposes, had cut its political links with Poland," and

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<sup>23</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Felix Gilbert and David Clay Large, *The End of the European Era: 1890 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 70-72.

1945, with the eventual Allied defeat of the Third Reich in World War II, there existed no overarching ownership of the land by any *significant* Polish power.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, the period of 1335 to 1526 saw a renewed Kingdom of Bohemia and a city name of Vretslav, and from 1526 to 1741 the city became Presslaw under the rule of the Hapsburg Monarchy, an undeniably Germanic Austrian monarchy.<sup>26</sup> The city, however, inched closer to its final German state with its inclusion in the Kingdom of Prussia from 1741 to 1871, for the first time being referred to by its now familiar name Bresslau (with two s's rather than one).<sup>27</sup> The unification of Germany, really a unification of Germanic Prussia and Germanic Bavaria and other, smaller German-speaking territories, gave Breslau (now without the second s) finality in its German-ness.

What did this all really mean for the overarching national identity of Wroclaw at the time of the outbreak of World War II? Indeed, Hitler stole a large chunk of Poland, with Stalin stealing the other large chunk, under the secret terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>28</sup> Breslau, however, was not a part of this theft, but rather had been a part of the German Empire since Unification. This city had been essentially Germanic since its rule by the Kingdom of Prussia and the Hapsburg Monarchy, dating all the

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<sup>25</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 105-406. In-depth historical account of non-Polish rule from 1335 to 1945.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-199.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-266.

<sup>28</sup> "The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," *Modern History Sourcebook* (Moscow: 23 Aug. 1939), <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1939pact.html>> (3 Feb. 2009).

way back to 1526, 419 years, in fact, of Germanic rule by the time the Allies decided to "repatriate" the city at Potsdam. Recent political ownership of land, especially when that ownership goes back 400 years, should have played an important role in determining the nationality of the Wroclaw region; it, however, would play no significant role. The sentiment expressed by ethnic Germans that they were unjustly forced out of what been, at least during their lifetime, their true homeland, then, is understandable.

### **The Reality of the Expulsion Process**

A 1946 New York Times article informed the West that if there was any doubt that the disputed land containing Breslau/Wroclaw would remain in Polish hands, those doubts should be put to rest.<sup>29</sup> The number of new Polish "repatriants" that had made their way to this region in such a short time was truly striking. By October 1946, "more than 4,000,000 Poles ha[d] already been brought [to Silesia] from areas taken over by the Soviet Union in the east and from the ruined cities of central Poland."<sup>30</sup> What actually took place between the taking of Breslau by the Red Army and this scenario in October 1946?

It must be stressed that the Polish government's desire to expel ethnic Germans from Poland did not emerge after the end of World War II, or even toward the end of World War II for that matter. In fact, the Polish government-in-exile in London discussed the

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<sup>29</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Poles Found Set to Retain Silesia; Pace of Industrial Recovery Impressive--4,000,000 Are Shifted to German Area," *New York Times*, 16 Oct. 1946, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



issue often throughout the war. They emphasized in these discussions the necessity of lobbying Allied governments "to ensure the acceptance of population transfer in principle."<sup>31</sup> Mass deportation was not a foreign concept to the Soviet Union, and this would play heavily into turning the Polish desire to expel Germans from what became Poland after World War II into a reality.<sup>32</sup> The United States, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was also no stranger to mass expulsion of people from their homes, as was evidenced by its treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II.<sup>33</sup> The Allies then, through their respective wartime behaviors, showed that they were not averse to forced expulsion of minority peoples, and the Soviet Union in particular played a heavy hand in this treatment of the powerless.

The Red Army's final westward push toward Berlin at the end of the war could only be described as "pitiless and intense."<sup>34</sup> The seizure of Breslau by the Red Army began with a three-month siege of the city that completely isolated Breslau from any possible reinforcements from other German territories by 15

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<sup>31</sup> Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 108.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 85-107. This section, "Soviet Deportation of the Chechens-Ingush and Crimean Tatars," describes in detail how Stalin had these two significant minorities quickly and inhumanely deported between 1943 and 1944.

<sup>33</sup> see Ed. Lawson Fusao Inada, *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (San Francisco: Heyday Books, 2000). This collection of source materials describes the mass forced movement and internment of Japanese Americans by the United States government during World War II.

<sup>34</sup> Curp, *A Clean Sweep*, 41.



February.<sup>35</sup> One account estimates that as many as 90,000 Breslauers died during an evacuation in temperatures as low -20°C.<sup>36</sup> The disastrous evacuation and terrible conditions during the eighty-day siege certainly added to a feeling of dread and a lost homeland.<sup>37</sup> On 6 May, the German military finally surrendered in Breslau, and the last shot was fired.<sup>38</sup> By that time, what was left of the original Breslau population was "a residue of refugees, prisoners and invalids."<sup>39</sup> Among the civilian deaths experienced at Breslau, roughly 3,000 of these were suicides.<sup>40</sup>

"Peace in Europe" was declared on 8 May 1945, but for the citizens of Breslau, this did nothing to usher in any real end in conflict.<sup>41</sup> The occupying Red Army refused to let any feeling of peace come over the land. The uninhibited crimes of robbery, rape, arson, and methodical looting were regular and rampant.<sup>42</sup> The anti-German sentiment that led to such atrocities could only be labeled as ethnic cleansing, a theme that would continue in the region.<sup>43</sup>

The Polish/Soviet ownership until the official transfer was surrounded by the question of authenticity. The Polish administrators' claim to Breslau/Wroclaw was, in reality, a "classic fait

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<sup>35</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 408

<sup>43</sup> Naimark, *Fires*, 108-138.

accompli.”<sup>44</sup> The real aim of the new Polish administrators was to “ensure that Breslau was safely in Polish hands before the victorious Allies could even discuss it.”<sup>45</sup> When the Potsdam Conference finally did convene in July and released its agreement on 2 August, the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity was officially sanctioned.<sup>46</sup> The days of uncertainty about the recognized ownership of Breslau/Wroclaw came to an end. A more detailed plan for the actual expulsion of Germans from “repatriated Poland” came in a message from the Allied Control Council in Berlin on 6 December 1945, which stated the goal of removing the entire German population from recently border-shifted Poland into the Soviet and British zones of occupied Germany.<sup>47</sup> Forced expulsions were quick and effective, at least from the viewpoint of the Polish and Soviet governments. At the end of December 1945, the 33,297 Poles registered in Wroclaw were outnumbered five times by Germans living there.<sup>48</sup> By March 1947, of the total population of Breslau/Wroclaw, 196,814 were Poles and only 17,496 were Germans.<sup>49</sup> During

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<sup>44</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 410.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> “Extracts from Potsdam Agreement,” *Poland, Germany and European Peace; Official Documents, 1944-1948* (London: Polish Embassy, 1948).

<sup>47</sup> “Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Germans from Poland,” *Poland, Germany and European Peace; Official Documents, 1944-1948* (London: Polish Embassy, 1948). The German population of Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary, consisting of roughly 3.15 million people, were to be removed to the American, France and Soviet zones of occupied Germany.

<sup>48</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 419.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

these times of high expulsion rates out of Wroclaw, the conditions for the remaining Germans were quite dreadful:

Starving, sick and stupefied, they bore the full brunt of the pent-up collective anger and contempt that Soviets and Poles alike had harbored through the long years of total war (surprisingly, they included a sizeable contingent of German Jews).<sup>50</sup>

So whether a German Breslauer was early to leave or late to leave his or her homeland, the experience would prove difficult and discouraging. The Poles' constant assertion that Wroclaw was in fact, and should be, a truly Polish homeland, likely added to the emotional and psychological strife both of those who had left and of those remaining behind. A 10 February Polish Delegation document, entitled "The Western Territories of Poland," was circulated to the Allied nations. This document constantly used the verb "repatriate" to describe both the process of moving Poles in and moving Germans out into "proper" Germany.<sup>51</sup> What implications (psychological, emotional, or physical) did both this ostensible "repatriation" of Germans into the Ally-occupied zones of Germany and this supposed "repatriation" of Poles into the formerly Germanic Breslau have on all those

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "The Western Territories of Poland," *Poland, Germany and European Peace; Official Documents, 1944-1948* (London: Polish Embassy, 1948).



involved? What role did the notion of homeland itself play in all this?

### **The Relationship of Forced Emigration to the Notion of "Homeland"**

To move an entire life, an entire existence, an entire framework and context of living to a foreign location is undoubtedly a considerable task. Exile, the act of being truly forced from the "homeland," has unique and powerful implications. For many exiles, the sacred rite of farewell is denied.<sup>52</sup> This was certainly the case for the vast number of Breslauers forced to frantically flee Breslau as news came of the Red Army approaching in 1945. For an estimated 90,000 Breslauers who died in the evacuation of the city toward the end of World War II, there was no traditional farewell.<sup>53</sup> There was only panic and rushed exit. Breslauer Elisabeth Erbrich's account effectively paints the picture of the reality for the evacuees: "The news was so sudden that there were terrible scenes. Many women...had crying fits. People ran around in the streets confused and disturbed."<sup>54</sup> With survival as the highest priority in the chaos, anxious evacuees could not even spend their final days at their homes. "At the railway station," Erbrich recounts, "refugees camped day and night with their meager belongings, waiting for a chance to travel to the interior of the Reich." It was a heartbreaking sight, she added, that she would never forget.<sup>55</sup> This

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<sup>52</sup> Grinberg and Grinberg, *Migration and Exile*, 156-165.

<sup>53</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



powerful weight pushes down on the displaced, and it brings to light just how important the "homeland" can be to people, especially if they are forced to abandon it. The constant internal persecutions experienced by the exiled that comes from their separation from their homeland (which represents a familiarity and a sense of belonging) show just how crucial the homeland can be to an existence where one can feel at peace.

The detachment from the homeland can lead to severe psychological disorders. It is telling that since World War II, the term "Entwurzelnungs-Depression" has become a permanent fixture in German psychiatry.<sup>56</sup> This type of depression is described as "depression resulting from uprooting" and is directly related to "deportations, expulsions, [and] loss of homeland."<sup>57</sup> Those uprooted from their Breslau homeland into unfamiliar parts of Germany certainly contributed to the rise of this type of depression in post-war Germany. The expelled Germans were understandably distraught by losing their roots, and when coupled with the mass deaths they experienced as well as the anguish and humiliation of losing the war, depression was an unfortunate but understandable result.

The expelled Germans were not the only group in this story that can illuminate the nature of the homeland. The experience of the "repatriated" Poles also offers an important look into the issue. After only one year controlling Silesia, the region which included

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<sup>56</sup> D. Muller-Hegemann, "Human Uprooting," in Charles Zwingmann and Maria Pfister-Ammende, *Uprooting and After...* (New York: Springer-Verlag New York, 1973), 103.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Breslau/Wroclaw, the Poles created an "industrial machine" that "absorb[ed] 600,000 workers...."<sup>58</sup> Bold plans for the future of industry in Silesia were being made at the time as well, as the Communist Minister for Industry promised that thirty percent of Poland's agricultural machinery was being relocated to Poland's "Recovered Territories."<sup>59</sup>

While the Poles may have been spirited in their efforts at rebuilding industry, this did not equate to an immediate feeling of comfort and belonging. Immigrants who have just arrived at their new destination often experience feelings of insecurity that partially come from anxiety and uncertainty of the unknown.<sup>60</sup> Breslau had an intensely Germanic look and feel by the time these Poles arrived. Psychologists Grinberg and Grinberg assert that "an individual's capacity to remain himself during periods of change is fundamental to his sense of identity, which he experiences emotionally," and especially "events such as migration, which cause drastic change in a person's life, can pose threats to the sense of identity."<sup>61</sup> What sets the phenomenon of the migration of these Poles to Wroclaw apart from other types of migration is that the migrants instantly became the majority, the controlling party of a region only just recently controlled by a completely different ethnicity. This caused elements of identity coping usually found at the individual level to be expressed on a much larger scale by the newly Polish city as a whole.

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<sup>58</sup> Gruson, "Poles Found Set to Retain Silesia."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Grinberg and Grinberg, *Migration and Exile*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 129.

Apart from the collective spirit of trying to transform the ethnic identity of Wroclaw upon arrival, certain efforts were made to, in a sense, bring the old home along. Grinberg and Grinberg have observed at the individual level that immigrants feel a need to bring familiar objects that carry a significance of affection so that they feel a sense of accompaniment and use them for a continuity with the past.<sup>62</sup> It is common for immigrants to adorn their homes abundantly with conventional objects from their original cultures.<sup>63</sup> Because they had the power to do so, however, this "decorate your home with your culture" mentality was institutionally applied to the entire city of Breslau/Wroclaw. One of the first attempts to transform the city from a German to a Polish one came in the Polanization of all aspects of city life, in a very expedient fashion at that.<sup>64</sup>

There was clearly a concerted, powerful effort on the part of Poles (with heavy encouragement from the Soviets) to saturate Breslau with Polish culture in a quick manner. Soviet propaganda tried, often very successfully, to make Wroclaw appear to be an attractive, liberated haven for Poles left in dire straits after World War II.<sup>65</sup> In the midst of a ravaged yet still very German shell of a city, Polish culture took less time than one might have expected to thrive, already the dominant cultural force by 1947, when some of the last major groups of German expellees left Wroclaw.<sup>66</sup> Ironically, the ardor for Polish culture was partially

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<sup>62</sup> Grinberg and Grinberg, *Migration and Exile*, 133.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Davies and Moorehouse, *Microcosm*, 430

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 424.



spurred on by the extremely un-Polish quality of the setting.<sup>67</sup> The "sheer determination of the early years" would greatly pave the way for a "much greater cultural harvest later on."<sup>68</sup> These changes intensely brought about by a collective Polish (and Soviet) desire to Polanize the German city are what make modern-day Wroclaw a very Polish city, despite its mixed heritage.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

Wroclaw is a Polish city. At least, it is today. But why is it a Polish city, and should it really be? The arguments were made by Poland, by the Soviet Union, and by the Allies in general for Wroclaw shifting from German to Polish hands after World War II. The new borders and a national "shift" in Breslau/Wroclaw was not so much a "theft," they argued, as it was a "reclaiming" of the city for Poland, a "repatriation" of Poles into their proper homeland. History was used, or perhaps more accurately, abused, to justify carving a chunk out of Germany that was not Polish before the war, was not Polish at any recent time, and had not been Polish since the 1300s. A careful historical analysis reveals far more Germanic influence from that time onward, with a consistent growth in German culture and the eventual inclusion of Breslau in the unified German Reich in 1871.

Despite the more recent history of Breslau during the past 600 years, Poland "repatriated" Wroclaw

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Bernstein, "Honor the Uprooted Germans? Poles Are Uneasy," *New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2003, A3.



under the terms of the Potsdam Conference, and atrocity after atrocity was committed against ethnic Germans, many of whom died in the process. In a short period of time, most ethnic Germans were completely "cleansed" from Wroclaw, and efforts were made to Polanize the city. Problems with psychological and emotional distress accompanied the Germans who made it back to the Germany restricted within new borders, and psychological disorders increased. For the Poles who "repatriated" Wroclaw, the experience was also undoubtedly strange. Both the experiences of the removed Germans and the "repatriated" Poles illustrate the importance of the "homeland" in human existence. It was precisely this emotional attachment to a fictionalized homeland, an attachment highly promoted by the Soviet Union and Polish leadership, that led the Polish people to strongly desire this piece of land.

The concept of homeland is of utmost importance, culturally, psychologically, emotionally. It is more than just a physical place. It is a mindset, a comforting idea, and a way of life. It is used opportunistically and invoked for political gain. The story of Wroclaw exemplifies this.

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