

“Ganz normale Familiengeschichten.” Bilder von Migration und migrierende Bilder im Familiengedächtnis. By Sandra Kreisslová, Jana Nosková, and Michal Pavlásek.

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The authors’ study focuses on four social groups that have experienced migration in various ways and to different degrees across generations. The first group consists of Czech families who emigrated to Croatia in the nineteenth century, with some returning to their homeland after World War II. The second group includes displaced Germans who were forced to leave the Czech Republic after 1945, as well as those who remained. These groups faced the dilemma of whether to ‘stay’ or ‘emigrate’ at certain points in their histories. The Czechs in Croatia had the freedom to choose between returning or remaining in their new home. In contrast, the Germans in the Czech Republic were subjected to persecution and expulsion based on the principle of collective responsibility. Those who stayed often faced long-term discrimination. Despite their different circumstances, all four groups had to integrate into unfamiliar local societies. They also had to adapt to the changes resulting from the departure and loss of family members, friends, and neighbors, as well as the arrival of newcomers.

The research focused on the preserved elements of events in family memory rather than on how contemporaries remembered and experienced those events. The authors also explored how memories are transmitted within families and how interpretations of narratives about migration can vary from one generation to the next.

The volume is divided into five major thematic units. It begins with a comprehensive theoretical and methodological introduction, in which the authors define the key concepts they will be using. The second section provides a detailed account of the fieldwork, including its organization, execution, the challenges faced, and the solutions implemented. In the third part, the authors focus on cultural memory, starting from the premise that families, as the smallest units of social memory,

can reflect the processes and contents of memory transmitted at higher levels. The fourth section presents the communicative memory of selected families, examining the content of family memory and the methods through which it is passed down from one generation to the next. The fifth part serves not only as a summary of the issues discussed in the volume but also as a comparative analysis of the groups under study. In this section, the authors highlight the similarities and differences that have been identified among these groups. The comparative analysis focuses on the content of family memories and the question of intergenerational transmission. Specifically, it examines who talks about what, to whom, and what topics are avoided or not discussed at all.

In Croatia, there are two groups of Czechs: those who moved to Czechoslovakia after World War II and those who chose to remain in Croatia. Until the remigration period, these two groups shared common themes in their collective memory. The story of their ancestors' arrival in Slavonia helps to clarify why these families are present in Yugoslavia/Croatia, a fact that is not immediately obvious.

The voluntary emigration or return of some Czechs in Croatia, particularly families with partisan experience, led to divergence in the memories of two groups. These memories were tied to different post-war experiences: on the one side, of the Czechs who remained in Yugoslavia, and on the other, of the 'remigrants' who returned to post-war Czechoslovakia. For the generation that experienced remigration, this event became a significant part of their narratives. Their recollections of this experience were crucial in reflecting on their gradual integration into Czechoslovak society, which came with its own set of challenges.

The experience of non-ethnic otherness, characterized as the 'topos of the hostile immigrant,' emerged in the recollections shared by the descendants of those who had been resettled after 1989. The descendants of those who had been resettled found themselves struggling for recognition of their parents' historical contributions, as the anti-communist memory politics of the liberal-democratic regime overshadowed the significance of the resettlers' actions. This context meant that criticism of the post-communist era was prevalent in the history of all (re)migrants. For the Czechs who remained in Croatia, the event of return migration was not as significant. The narratives of second and third-generation interviewees focused more on economically motivated migration from present-day Croatia, where they voiced their criticism of the country's post-war economic and political situation. In the context of memory for Czechs in Croatia, the primary themes included not only World War II but also the Yugoslav Civil War.

The situation for different groups of the German population in the Czech Republic was distinct. The life stories of generations who experienced the events—both the Germans who were forcibly displaced and those who remained in their

homeland—highlight several key historical periods and processes. We can categorize these periods into four main phases: before 1938, after 1938, during World War II, and the era of forced emigration. Although the shared history of Germans in the Czech Republic was interrupted by deportation, both those who emigrated and those who stayed perceived themselves as an unwanted and excluded social group due to their ethnic identity. Both groups encountered challenges in integrating into mainstream society. For those who left their homeland as a result of forced emigration, integration into West German society was a significant concern. Meanwhile, members of the German minority who lived under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia underwent an assimilation process. Post-war migration is viewed by both groups as a fundamental disruption, with the theme of forced migration echoing throughout the accounts of all interviewees. It is also a crucial part of the narrative for Germans who did not emigrate, in contrast to the Czechs who remained in Croatia. Both groups of Germans unanimously perceived forced migration as an injustice and a loss. Although the Germans who stayed in their homeland were largely unaffected by physical relocation, the social and cultural landscape of their territory changed drastically. Like their displaced relatives and neighbors, the Germans who remained in Czechoslovakia experienced radical changes in their living environment due to the resettlement of different social groups. Particularly in the first decade after the war, they faced ethnic segregation and stigmatization. The new environment, along with the integration and assimilation processes, led to a gradual loss of certain cultural and linguistic characteristics in both groups. While the Germans who remained in the Czech Republic acknowledged the higher living standards achieved by the expellees, they did not question their decision to stay. They attributed their choice to family, social, and professional ties, as well as the fear of potential political repercussions for their family. Additionally, they expressed a reluctance to experience the homesickness endured by their displaced relatives. In contrast, the life stories of German expellees illustrated a sense of reconciliation with the irreversible loss of their homeland, along with pride in the new lives they had built in Germany. In all four groups, the narratives of the interviewees primarily reflect those of the victor and the hero.

In the context of the Czechs in Croatia, the narrative surrounding the victims of National Socialism and the victors of the World War II is clearly defined. In the Czech Republic, Germans—both those who were forcibly displaced and those who remained—have also attempted to negotiate their place in this historical narrative by reversing the roles of victim and perpetrator. These individuals, along with their families, friends, and relatives, present themselves as victims of the National Socialist regime. They construct the legitimacy of their victimhood by citing the undeniable cause-and-effect relationship present in historical events. They argue

that the humiliation faced by the German population in Czechoslovakia after 1918 and the discrimination between native and imperial Germans contributed to their eventual support for the National Socialist regime. They portray themselves as an oppressed and passive group, emphasizing that they had their own real heroes, the German anti-fascists. This narrative of exoneration is further supported by the argument that the crimes of National Socialism only became widely known after the war, suggesting that people were unaware of them beforehand. Research by the authors indicates that when recounting family stories, children and grandchildren are very protective of their ancestors.

What is common to all the studied groups, such as Czechs and Germans, across all generations, is the narrative of diligence and hard work. The authors attribute this narrative to a sense of alienation and minority status. This crafting of a positive self-image serves as a practical tool for self- and group-assertion in new and challenging social circumstances, aiding acceptance by the majority society. Consequently, the interviewees transition from being seen as victims of a larger narrative to being regarded as everyday heroes. The emphasis on diligence is a recurring theme in the narratives of all generations, alongside references to modesty and thrift. These values have allowed previous generations of the family to prosper. Therefore, family memory encompasses not only information about the ancestors' lives but also the values, norms, and outlooks on life that these stories represent. As the authors highlight, in some instances, the complex of inherited values may bear even more significance than the 'objective' content of family memory.

The life stories also involve a significant negotiation of both group and personal identities. Identity emerges from feelings of alienation and the experience of being part of a minority, as previously mentioned. It is an essential aspect of both the individual and the group that cannot be taken for granted. Through the narrative construction of identity, the authors were able to highlight the various meanings that speakers attribute to the concept of identity. In these narratives, all models of identity transmission can be identified. Notably, I found the presence of the so-called 'embracing model' particularly interesting, where the interest in family stories begins with the youngest generation, without the middle generation necessarily acting as an imaginary bridge. Another important aspect of the detailed comparative analysis is the investigation of the mechanisms and strategies involved in family memory and its formation. The authors also examined the tensions between family memory and the dominant narratives surrounding past interpretations by situating the specific case studies within a broader context.

The authors have thoroughly detailed the process by which family memories emerge from traditional stories about ancestors' experiences, knowledge, values, and moral concepts. Family members interpret and relate to their own experiences

in unique ways. As a result, the intergenerational transmission of memories within families goes beyond merely passing along information. The case studies in this volume illustrate that family histories, whether transmitted critically or uncritically, consciously or unconsciously, significantly shape individuals' identities. Family memory is created through everyday communication. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most important ways families represent the past is simply by discussing it. Family celebrations and gatherings provide the most suitable occasions for these conversations about the past.

The photographs serve as both a reflection of the current state of their lives and as imaginary bridges connecting the present—whether in the Czech Republic or Germany—with the past, rooted in the former Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia. It is evident that documenting family life through photographs significantly strengthens family ties and enhances the sense of belonging to both the family and its history. For future generations, these photographs become a way to preserve an idealized image of the family. Sharing and viewing family photographs together is therefore an important method that families use to pass down memories across generations. Along with photo albums and photographs, the families' communicative memory is also connected to other objects that reference their ancestors' past.

This is especially evident among families with migration experiences, such as German expellees, returnees, and Czechs who remained in Croatia. For these families, certain objects serve as 'small monuments' that commemorate significant events and family histories. Objects that might seem mundane can acquire deep significance due to their connections to personal experiences and events. Members of the older generation often have strong emotional attachments to specific objects, given that these items are tied to their past and personal stories. The act of collecting, preserving, and cherishing these objects not only helps them process their loss of homeland but also allows them to preserve a piece of it, ensuring that their old homeland is not forgotten.

The desire to maintain a connection to their homeland and the memories of their ancestors is particularly strong among German expellees. This sentiment is evident in the phenomenon known as 'homesick tourism,' which gradually emerged in the second half of the 1950s.

The visits of displaced Germans are of significant importance for those who remain in their homeland. These reunions allow family members and local communities to reconnect. On the one hand, such encounters grant them a special status, as they receive Western goods and gifts from their relatives. On the other hand, these connections set them apart from the Czech majority society, which can lead to mistrust from the state and their surrounding community. For both Czechs and Germans, it is common for the generation that experienced these events to invite

their children and grandchildren to join them. Additionally, it has become increasingly common for descendants to visit these places, reflecting intensification in the search for roots in the postmodern era. Finally, the authors emphasize the significance of new sources of information in preserving family history. While older generations may be unaware of these tools, younger generations find the internet to be a vital channel for learning about their ancestral homelands and staying connected. This means that information flows both ways: not only do grandparents and elders pass down stories, but grandchildren also share knowledge gained from their education and exploration, including reading, school lessons, or personal archival research. As a result, family history evolves into a dialogue that bridges different generations.

The book was originally published in Czech in Prague in 2019 and received the Czech Ethnographic Society's 'Best Book of the Year' award, and rightly so. The German edition was made possible through collaboration between the Czech Academic Institute of Ethnography and the Institut für Volkskunde der Deutschen in Eastern Europe, with support from the Deutsch-Tschechischen Zukunftsfond and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The translation pays tribute to the work of Corinna Anton. This volume will be of interest to historians, sociologists, ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, and the general public who are concerned with inter-ethnic relations and recent migration issues. The authors have compiled a substantial source base on the topic, processed with remarkable theoretical and methodological rigor while considering a wide range of aspects. There is a significant need for a similar study focusing on the memorial history of dispersed German families in Hungary.

