

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS AS A STARTING POINT
FOR COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

Uta Müller-Handl

This is a report on a qualitative investigation and documentation about the long-term integration of Sudeten German women in the Federal German land of Hesse. The study is based on recollections of individual lives which were established with the help of intensive interviews carried out in 1989–1990. The gravest breach in the life of these women is the period from the end of the war until the forced emigration from Czechoslovakia. This breach is not without effects on the recollections of the earlier past and of the time that followed, up until the present; it acts so as to almost forestall these recollections. Being Sudeten Germans, all these women were after the war classified as belonging to the perpetrators, regardless of whether there was any personal guilt, and at the same time they became the victims of repression and expulsion. This connection makes it very difficult for them to look objectively at the history they have in common with the Czechs. After more than 40 years, their feeling at home in Hesse is not unqualified. They have arranged their lives within a framework of ethnicity reconstructed in Hesse. They still have to come to terms with the fact that they do not have roots in the community in which they live, and they are still trying to arrange themselves in such a way as to make this loss bearable.