

SUMMARIES

BORDERLAND, NO-MAN'S-LAND: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO THE GERMANS IN BOHEMIA

Katharina Eisch

In the middle of the 1990s, an ethnographic research project dealt with ethnic Germans – now Czech nationals – living even today in the border regions of Bohemia: a group far remote from the big Sudeten German-Czech debates and arguments, a group which has been marginalized since the end of the war. The research focused on the identity and collective memory of this “disappearing minority”, so far as they could be ascertained in concrete, visible phenomena of the field as well as in strata more removed from the surface, such as memories, tales and traditions. An open methodology combining processual and dialogic aspects made it possible to resolve the problem of an at first rather irritating rejection of a “German identity” and of the Sudeten German discussion as a whole by the interviewees. What was found was a different, rather unexpected notion of diverging identities, an awareness of the potential for compromise as well as for conflict inherent in ethnically mixed communities, an awareness stemming from own experience, an inherited bi-national competence as well as from the fact that ethnic and national identity constructs had lost all their attraction in the course of the German-Czech catastrophe. In modern Europe this knowledge is more up-to-date and necessary than ever.