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Summary

At the end of the second world war, German families who were socialized in and established the National Socialist society in the Eastern parts of the German Reich were moved by the Red Army to the Soviet Occupation Zone. There they were confronted by the antifascist cultural memory that was fostered in the newly formed German Democratic Republic (GDR). After the reunification of Germany in 1989, the social conditions of cultural and individual memory fundamentally changed once again.

Based on theories of interpretative social research and memory studies Katinka Meyer examines the way that these East German families remember this so-called 'expulsion of Germans'. Her dissertation reveals the complex ways in which these families negotiate with their past, including which parts of their interpretations last over decades, the way that their memories are linked to discourses as well as changes in social orders. Katinka Meyer also shows how individual interpretations of family members interact with each other and how these reproduce or reject certain perspectives. By focusing on East German families, including different generational perspectives, the study closes a gap in research on family memories.

The research is empirically based on biographical-narrative interviews (Schütze 1976, 1977, 1983; Rosenthal 1995) with three generations of family members. The interviews are analyzed with biographical case reconstructions (Rosenthal 1995, 2011), integrating archive research and analysis of geneograms (Hildenbrand 2005). The empirical data is accurately embedded in context information about the social and historical conditions of the time – beginning with National Socialism and the Second World War, certain phases of forced migration, the integration of the resettlers in the GDR and finally their changed context after the German reunification.

With reference to the theoretical concepts of *individual* and *collective memory* (Halbwachs 1967, 1985), Katinka Meyer shows that family memory is not only related to past events but to ongoing and changing interpretations of family history. She claims that on an individual, trans-generational and familial level, dealing with the past can include a hidden Heritage of Trauma, trans-generational memory-work to deal with losses and hide Nazi crimes or just letting the life-story sink into oblivion.