

Memories, normative ideals and empathic solidarities in Europe in the aftermath of refugee arrivals in 2015–16

Humboldt University of Berlin, 19–20 October 2018

Jasna Čapo

‘Ordinary people are much smarter and more humane’: Local population’s reactions to the refugee transit through Croatia in 2015

The presentation analyses some aspects of the refugee transit through Croatia in the autumn of 2015. It points out the discrepancies between top-down (governmental) management of the transit and grassroots’ responses to the refugee plight. Ethnographic research carried out in the temporary refugee reception camp in Opatovac (easternmost Croatia) and in the adjacent villages at the peak of the ‘migration crisis’ (October 2015) reveals diversified responses by the local population: they reacted by a mixture of empathy, sympathy and humour while at the same time eagerly engaging in assisting refugees. These findings question the prevalent opinion (also found by surveys) about xenophobic attitudes of Croatian citizens to refugees and foreigners and can be partly explained by their own experience of flight and search for a safe place during the war for Croatian independence in the 1990s.

Jasna Čapo is a senior research fellow (research advisor) at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb and titular professor at the University of Zagreb. She has a multi-disciplinary background in ethnology, cultural anthropology, and demography. She was post-doctoral fellow in Strasbourg and Vienna; Humboldt Fellow in Munich, Berlin and Tübingen. Currently, she leads the research project *City-making: space, culture and identity* (funded by Croatian Science Foundation). Her research interests include transnational (refugee and labour) migration, return migration, migrants in urban contexts, national identity-building. She is the author of five books, co-editor of seven volumes and has published in journals and edited volumes internationally.