

## **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

**Danielle Drozdewski**

### **Contextualising contemporary attitudes towards integration in Berlin and Wrocław within histories of difference.**

This paper focuses on attitudes towards refugees, and their settlement, in two cities, Wrocław, Poland and Berlin, Germany. It is positioned within the changing policies regarding refugee settlement and visible difference in Poland and Germany that concord with dominant narratives of each nation's cultural memory. Cultural memory is important. It fosters familiarity, security and comfort in the collectivity of civil society. It 'guarantee a cultural sense of belonging' (Brockmeier 2002:18). Ideas of the nation that reinforce such ethnic nationalism are (re)produced in, and linked to places, culturally familiar symbols, and practices. These complex reproductions of place/people/identity are augmented in situations of conflict, territorial incursions and with potential threat (real or imagined). Such 'threats' also gain currency from histories of conflict and occupation, and often fuel a compulsion look inwards and towards maintaining national cultural memories. The contention of this research is that historical legacies of the nation frame contemporary responses to the refugee crisis in both case study cities, though they do so differently. Framing the research is a politics of identity approach, which mandates that representations of national identity should be subject to critical scrutiny especially if a nation is truly committed to inclusive representation of its citizenry.

To investigate the research question, we conducted short interviews in Wrocław (n=170), Poland and Berlin (n=139), Germany, examining attitudes to refugees. Contextualising the empirical work, I undertook a discourse analysis of recent changes to refugee policies,

focusing on events that have agitated for Euro-sceptic and protectionist approaches. While the same sets of questions were posed to both national case studies, a direct comparison of responses was not the research intention. Rather, I have sought to better understand contemporary responses within the milieu of each country's divergent histories of difference and to explicate how negotiations of national identity play out in practice and 'in place' when civil society is compelled to consider difference. In Wrocław, the interviews revealed resonance between the historical narratives of resisting foreign occupation and pro-nationalist sentiment. In Berlin, attitudinal variance was spatially distributed across the city, however integration was a notable theme across five interview locations.

Dr. Danielle Drozdowski is a Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Stockholm University, Sweden. Her main research areas are cultural geography, cultural memory and geographies of ethno-cultural identity and national identities. She is interested in people's interactions with memorials in everyday locations and how a politics of memory influences memory selection in post-war and post-totalitarian states. She recently co-edited *Memory, Place and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict*, Routledge, 2016. Her new co-edited collection, *Doing Memory Research: New Methods and Approaches*, is due for release with Palgrave in late 2018.

