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DEMFAm THURSDAY TALKS

Rethinking Parenthood in Central and Eastern Europe. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives



Thursday, 4–5 PM (CET) online

Helena Tolić

Judgemental gaze in motherhood.
How do we evaluate maternal practice?

Dec
18
2025

The presentation is based on a qualitative anthropological study, conducted in Zagreb, and examines how maternal identity is shaped through ongoing judgments of one's own and others' maternal choices.

Such evaluations – ranging from approval to disapproval – are a constant feature of everyday motherhood and emerge through observing behaviors and interactions in both routine and crisis situations. Mothers act simultaneously as observers and the observed, assessing conformity to dominant Croatian ideals of 'good' motherhood. Although largely internalized or unspoken, these evaluative processes exert strong influence on mothers' daily decisions, emotional experiences, and family life. Viewed through affective economies, this dynamic represents a form of intense affective labor. The study is part of a doctoral project employing interviews, participant observation, intimate ethnography, and autoethnography to illuminate contemporary maternal experience and present emerging concepts.

Speakers' bio

Helena Tolić is an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. The topic of her doctoral research, titled "Cultural Meanings of the Good Mother in the Context of Returning to Work" focuses on the experience of motherhood in Croatia, particularly the understanding of the "good mother" concept and the experience of returning to work from maternity leave within a corporate work environment.

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