

Conference: Gender and Feminism under Post-Communism
Indiana University, Bloomington
Spring 2005

The situation of women in Central and East Europe has changed radically since the fall of communism. In every domain from domestic relations and sexuality to reproductive rights, employment equity, and cultural representations, the life of women looks very different now than even fifteen years ago. Furthermore, after a period of relative homogeneity across the Soviet satellites under communism, the various post-communist countries of the region have diverged from each. New configurations, representations, and forces have required the development of innovative theoretical approaches to women's issues that diverge from the dominant theoretical perspectives of western European and North American feminist scholarship.

This conference constitutes a gathering-point of scholarship on women's issues in the region in the post-communist period. The focus will be on Central and Eastern Europe (including Russia), though we will also be including perspectives from China and Central Asia to add further breadth. The aim will be to explore the theoretical and empirical research being done in a range of different countries and national settings, to take stock of the position of women in the various post-communist societies, and to highlight and juxtapose the best research currently being conducted.

The conference will take the form of a series of roundtables, following the proven model developed by the Russian and East European Institute's Roundtables on Post-Communism. Three presenters will prepare position statements (3000 words) in response to a question sent out by each panel coordinator. These materials will be made available electronically two weeks before the event, thus freeing the great majority of the time at the conference for discussion. Each panel will have a coordinator who will be responsible both for pre-conference organization and for chairing the panel itself. A commentator designated for each panel will open the discussion by responding to the three papers.

There will be four panels in all. The first three will take the format outlined above; the fourth will be an open discussion whose purpose is to integrate the work presented in the preceding four sessions and also to point the way toward further scholarship. The panels will be as follows:

1. Social and economic issues
3. Representations
4. History and myth
5. Private and public spheres

The conference will have three principal goals. First, it will bring together empirical and theoretical research being done in women's studies in a range of post-communist settings, and will thus serve a crucial networking function for scholars. Second, it will highlight the contributions that this empirical and theoretical work can offer to feminist and other scholarship in North America and Western Europe. Third, it will provide an opportunity to set directions and goals for future research. In order to pursue these goals beyond the conference itself, the contributions of all participants will be made available through a dedicated website administered by the Russian and East European Institute.

The conference is supported by financial contributions from the Russian and East European Institute, the Polish Studies Center, the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center, the Center for the Study of Global Change, the East Asian Studies Center, the West European Studies Center, and the Office of International Programs.