New Geographies of Polish Women Identities

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

How do women claim and reclaim their multiple identities while simultaneously losing others? How these processes are mediated across scale and through changing relations to space? How a woman’s individual experiences is translated into collective interests and in turn, how do these implicate production of scale (from local to transnational)? In this paper identities are understood as constructed through multilayered intersections of diverse markings such as class, sexuality, ethnicity, abilities, age, and the urban/rural division, among others, and are shaped through material, cultural and spiritual forces. As some identities are being claimed, others are simultaneously being lost. These contestations and confrontations are especially strongly visible in countries undergoing political, socio-economic and cultural transformations, such as those of central and east Europe, where the post-communist identities are confronted by emerging traditional and nationalist subjectivities, and concurrently are challenged by rising global and transnational communities. Such processes create new opportunities for subjects to access diverse means and resources in order to utilize different strategies of engagement across scale and, through these practices, to mould new hybrid identities. This paper will examine new geographies of women’s identities and will use Poland as the case study. It will draw on the results of public survey data, field interviews with women’s NGOs, and textual analysis in order to show the diversity of sites conducive to new identities construction processes. It will show how the mixture of the forces represented by women’s agency and their collective power, the state (which on one hand supports Poland’s membership in the new Europe - EU, NATO- and on the other enters into the conservative agreement with the catholic church), along with those of pro- nationalist forces (church, traditional family values, anti-foreign sentiments) opens and constrains the spaces where new transnational women’s identities can emerge.