

**FRAUEN IN AUSEINANDERSSETZUNG MIT GENUSS  
FORTPFLANZUNGSTECHNOLOGIEN  
(WOMEN RESPONDING TO  
GENETIC AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES):  
A SEMINAR HELD 17–19 JUNE 1988, BERLIN**

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Forty women met in Berlin (West) 17–19 June 1988 to discuss creating a nation-wide network of the various women's groups for further cooperation in resistance to reproductive and genetic engineering, including their uses in medical science, for population policies (quantity and quality control), in agriculture, and for-profit enterprises. Most of the participants have been active since 1984 in raising of public awareness of the feminist critique of the new technologies. (The critical response of activists in the Federal Republic of Germany has been stronger than in many other countries. In 1984, a national women's meeting, Women Against Gene and Reproductive Technologies in Bonn, drew over 2,000 women.)

Groups represented at the Berlin meeting included: Feminist Women's Health Centre, Frankfurt; the Gene Archive, Essen; Gene Ethic Network, Berlin; Women Against Population Policy, Bochum; the Feminist Action Group, Munster; Women Against Gene and Reproductive Technology, Hamburg; and FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) regional group, Berlin. FINRRAGE women from Britain, Spain and Switzerland also participated to discuss European and international networking, especially important now that the European Parliament is formulating guidelines on the regulation and deployment of genetic engineering in the food and agriculture industries. Deborah Lynn Steinberg presented to conference participants the working of FINRRAGE on the international level, and the aims of the forthcoming conference in Bangladesh in 1989, where Third World women's concerns over reproductive and genetic engineering will be

highlighted. (The two most prominent concerns are depopulation policies where women are forced into accepting modern contraceptive methods (IUDs, Depo Provera, tubal ligation, etc.), and seed engineering agricultural methods.)

Two recent activities in the FRG, the attempt to open a surrogacy agency in Frankfurt and the federal police raids on feminists in December 1987, showed that the question of networking among women, and their connections to the international FINRRAGE network itself was of great help in making powerful, effective feminist responses.

The importance of strengthening the German women's network on the issues of reproductive control and population policy became apparent after Noel Keane tried to establish a surrogacy agency in Frankfurt in 1987. Keane, the head of a network of commercial surrogacy agencies in the USA, wanted to set up an administrative office in Frankfurt to allow West German men to hire North American women as "surrogate" mothers. Women's groups nationally and internationally mobilized against his effort, and Keane was eventually forced to leave the country. This incident encouraged some of the women involved to plan a more organised system of networking for future campaigns, and the Berlin conference addressed this subject.

The Berlin meeting also discussed further support for Ulla Penselin and Ingrid Strobl, who were arrested during police raids (18 December 1987) on women in many locations who were protesting against gene and reproductive technologies, and against racist immigration policies of the government. The international

reaction to the criminalisation of women forced state authorities to answer the many letters of protest – a phenomenon never noticed before in similar cases. Some women at the conference emphasized their appreciation of FINRRAGE's efforts.

The general conclusion reached by the meeting was that FINRRAGE in the FRG should be seen as an informal network for information exchange.

#### *Workshops*

Two main workshops covered: (a) medical ideas behind genetic and reproductive technology: the relationship between medicine, experimental research, and therapy (e.g., in the use of ultrasound in pregnancy). Beate Zimmermann of the Gen Archiv, Essen led this workshop, which also continued the important discussion of what a feminist understanding of health and disease could be. This debate is in its beginning and will be continued at the second women's conference against reproductive and genetic technologies in Frankfurt in 1988; (b) current legal situations in Britain, the FRG, and Spain (already existing laws and pending legislation on surrogacy, IVF, egg and embryo storage, regulation of artificial insemination, human embryo research, etc.).

Verena Stolcke, FINRRAGE in Spain, reported on the proposed Spanish law on "Aided Reproduction" (IVF, AID, and related technologies) which to a great extent follows the recommendations and thinking of the Warnock Report (Britain's Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology, 1984). For instance, research on human embryos will be allowed up until fourteen days after fertilisation. Following the usage of the Voluntary Licencing Authority in Britain, the distinction is made between pre-embryo (the human embryo from fertilisation up to 14 days) and embryo.

Preimplantation diagnosis and germline manipulation ("therapy") are also to be allowed. IVF will be accessible to unmarried women, but only if they pay for the treatment, and are judged to be morally fit and financially able to raise a child. Married women will not be put under such scrutiny, and will not pay for the services. As lawyers have pointed out, this kind of discrimination against unmarried women is unconstitutional.

Spain is expected to be the first country with a

federal law regulating the new reproductive technologies. There has been virtually no public debate on the issues. As a new member of the European Community, Spain is eager to establish itself as a progressive state, supporting new science and technology. Restrictions are fewer than in other countries, and Spanish women protesting the legislation fear that medical doctors and researchers from other European countries will set up practice in Spain for precisely this reason.

The conclusion drawn from this session was that all of the laws are being aimed at protection of the embryo and empowerment of research science, both at the expense of women's health, and women's reproductive and sexual rights. (None of the proposed laws in any country recognizes the great health and social risks to women of these technologies.) Pending legislation in Britain and in the FRG offer "embryo protection," if not directly, indirectly.

In the FRG, it is expected that an embryo protection law will declare embryo research and violation of embryos a criminal offence. Preimplantation diagnosis and germline manipulation will be forbidden – until they are regarded as relatively safe. No distinction between embryo and pre-embryo is made here, but exceptions which allow embryo research under specific circumstances are expected to be made. All of the proposals regard the embryo as a person independent of the woman (scientifically and juridically).

In Britain, pending legislation will offer two alternatives on embryo research to Parliamentarians, one following the recommendation of the Warnock Report to allow research on embryos up to 14 days after fertilisation in the laboratory, thus creating *de facto* embryo protection after 14 days. The other option will ban embryo research altogether, creating *de facto* embryo protection from fertilisation onwards. Both options will set the stage for anti-abortion backlash and for creating a social and moral atmosphere where women's behaviour may be judged in relation to what is medically "best" for potential and existing embryos and fetuses. Sarah Franklin of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham discussed the connections between this and other aspects of the British legislation on reproductive technology, and with Clause 28, the anti-gay legislation which

was passed into law in 1988 forbidding the “promotion” of gay and lesbian sexuality, and with the failed Alton anti-abortion bill, which would have lowered the upper limit for legal abortion. She placed all of these laws in the context of Thatcherism and the right-wing moral crusade to re-assert the primacy of the heterosexual nuclear family.

Conference participants planned a campaign against the intended law in the FRG which includes a critique of the myth of embryo protection outside the woman’s body. And the following telegram to the Spanish upper house, which was voting on the legislation on reproductive technologies was sent:

We protest the expected passage of a law on reproductive technologies by the Spanish Parliament. We and many other women all over the world reject these technologies as a violation of women’s integrity and physical and emotional well-being.

Instead of the planned legitimation and institutionalization of reproductive technologies, we support the demand of

Spanish women for a moratorium on the development and application of gene and reproductive technologies.

One important issue which spontaneously arose was the question of with whom to cooperate in political resistance work. The common experience of those present is that male dominated groups took over some aspects of the work of women, gained some influence in the public, while making the women’s work invisible or even discriminating against our points. To avoid further exploitation of women’s work, participants decided to increase cooperation using the national FINRRAGE contact for liaising. Further, to make even wider links with women in other movements and sectors of society, we also recognized the importance of putting more emphasis on the analysis of genetic engineering, and how it affects the lives of women, for instance in food production.

This meeting in Berlin is to be followed by the Second Women’s Congress Against Reproductive and Genetic Engineering in Frankfurt, 28–30 October 1988.