ABSTRACT

MEDICALISATION OF REPRODUCTION. EUGENIC MEDICINE AS PATRIARCHAL MODERNIZATION OF MOTHERHOOD, GENDER– AND GENERATION RELATIONSHIPS.

Maria Wolf, University of Innsbruck, Austria

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

In this paper I will explore medicalisation of reproduction as an educational and a political intervention in the culture and the society. Therefore I will analyse eugenics, which is an integral part of medicalisation, as an attempt of patriarchal renewing of the gender- and generation-relationships by manufacturing a ‘scientific motherhood’. Eugenic interventions in culture and nature of reproduction became, as I will show, the modernization of patriarchal regulation and control of Reproduction in the 20th century by scientific medicine.

The faith in the potency and authority of medicine, which arises concurrently with the faith in the improvement of the conditions of life due to scientific progress during the last century, was transferred to reproduction. That means, that “Medicalisation of Reproduction” is particularly linked with the attempts and experiments of scientific improving of mothers and children.

The ‘medicalisation’ of the mother-child relationship is paralleled by ‘eugenisation’, because the improvement of mothers and children is supposed to be achieved through selection, optimisation and destruction. This gateway from the ‘wild’ to the ‘habitualised’ body is supervised and controlled by doctors as well as by mothers themselves. This ‘eugenisation’ of the ‘beginning of life’ conditions a eugenic relationship to women’s selves - and to their children - and encourages the expansion of a eugenic mentality in the realm of social relations in which human beings are part of nature.

In my paper I will discuss how ‘medicalisation’ of the mother-child relationship strengthens the gateway from ‘private’ to ‘public patriarchy’ in which the ‘father state’ organises the quality of its offsprings through the production of ‘usable human beings’. In this way the process of individualisation, whose cost is the ‘eugenisation’ of the relationship to human beings as well as the ‘self-eugenisation’ of the individual, is consolidated.