

International Conference: Challenging Patriarchy, Facing Backlash: Transnational Health Feminism and Antifeminist (Re)Actions, 1970s through 2000s

Conveners: Isabel Heinemann, University of Bayreuth, Germany / Heidi Hein-Kircher, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany

Location: University of Bayreuth, Germany

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When women across Europe and the United States started to question male dominated health care and patriarchal power – both in the family and in the realm of politics – their feminist activism soon developed into a transnational movement. The health books written ‘by women for women’, the practice of self-examination and the concept of women’s health centers stimulated demands for better and women-centered health care also in other parts of the world, namely the socialist countries and the Near and Far East. However, what started as a powerful critique of antifeminist and patriarchal conditions in healthcare in Western democracies soon fueled further antifeminist reasoning and blaming of activist women as either “communist agents” or “reckless man-hating” feminists in these same countries. Whereas we have first accounts of how antifeminist campaigns sought to undermine women’s health feminism and of how activists themselves worked to counter such attacks in Western democracies, we need more information on how women in Eastern Europe and the NFE dealt with patriarchal health care systems and health knowledge on the one hand side and antifeminist attacks on women’s (health) movements on the other. This is where our international conference sets in.

We ask:

- How did women in Western Europe and the US, but also Eastern Europe and the Near and Far East react to patriarchal structures and predominantly male-centered healthcare and health knowledge? What alternative knowledge techniques, body practices and organizational structures did they build? How important were international networks and which persons created them?
- How did medical authorities but also political bodies or the churches and religious movements react to women’s quest for health knowledge and adequate health care? Which topics (contraception, abortion, fertility treatments, trans-gender health) did provoke the most violent antifeminist reactions?
- How did the global success of right-wing populism and conservative religious movements stimulate antifeminists actions and reasoning in the field of women’s health throughout the different countries? Which counterstrategies did feminist activists invent and how important were transnational women’s networks?

We are interested in papers that deal with or discuss one or more of the following topics:

- Antifeminism in theory and practice
- Feminist health knowledge and how it changed
- Tools and methods of healthcare developed and propagated by women
- Self-help and feminist health clinics
- Health feminist movements and individual (women) actors
- Health feminism across the Iron Curtain and/or across national boundaries
- (Anti)feminism and religious movements

We invite presentations of original research from different disciplines such as history, political sciences, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, history of medicine and medical ethics. Researchers at all academic stages are encouraged to apply.

Network members of COST 23149 will be reimbursed due to annotated rules. Non-network members are encouraged to apply for membership via e-cost@eu in order to apply for reimbursement.

We kindly ask for abstracts (500 words max) and a short CV of your intended contribution by May 15, 2025 to neueste.geschichte@uni-bayreuth.de. Successful applicants will be notified by the end of May 2025.

Feldfunktion geändert