

THE ABORTION DEBATE IN THE WORLD ARENA

The Abortion Debate in the World Arena

Andrzej Kulczycki





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To Lucía
the wonderful woman in my life

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List of Abbreviations

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CELAM	Latin American Episcopal Conference (Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana)
CFFC	Catholics for a Free Choice
CONAPO	National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población) (Mexico)
D&C	dilatation and curettage
FIGO	International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics
FLCAK	Family Life Counselling Association of Kenya
FPAK	Family Planning Association of Kenya
GIRE	Reproductive Rights Information Group (Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida)
IMSS	Mexican Social Security Institute (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social)
IPAS	International Projects Assistance Services
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IUD	intrauterine device
IVF	in-vitro fertilization
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KCS	Kenya Catholic Secretariat
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
KMA	Kenya Medical Association
MCH	maternal and child health
MEXFAM	Mexican Foundation for Family Planning (Fundación Mexicana Para la Planificación Familiar)
MOH	Ministry of Health
MVA	manual vacuum aspiration
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NCKK	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NCPD	National Council for Population and Development (Kenya)
NFP	natural family planning
NGO	non-governmental organization
PAN	National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional) (Mexico)
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) (Mexico)

SLD	Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)
STD	sexually transmitted disease
TFR	total fertility rate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund (formerly known as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities)
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
ZChN	Christian National Union (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańskie Narodowe)

Preface

One morning in Nairobi a soft-spoken man told me how he came across a small bundle by some rocks near a river. He looked more closely and recoiled when he saw a dead infant. The women in the makeshift houses nearby said the young mother had come from a broken home; their only surprise was that she had given birth and had not aborted her pregnancy. 'One cannot fix a social problem with a medical solution,' continued the person, a compassionate religious figure. The encounter prompted him to help set up a counselling center for disadvantaged women with crisis pregnancies which also intervened on behalf of pregnant girls to let them return to school and complete their education.

That same day I met an earnest physician who told a different story about two schoolgirls who became pregnant at a summer camp. One of the girls had a father willing and able to pay for an abortion. The other girl did not. Expelled from school, she attempted to stay with her uncle, who disowned her. After she gave birth at a public hospital, she could only afford slum housing and did what she could to make ends meet. Fifteen years later and looking prematurely aged, the woman was brought to court for brewing and selling illicit alcohol. There she met her old classmate, now her judge. 'What was the one single event that caused the change in fortunes and parting of the ways?', the physician asked.

These stories suggest some of the human dimensions to the problems posed by unwanted pregnancies and abortions, the deep concern this evinces among many people, and how individual decisions about abortions are made often as if on a separate plane from that where public debate about abortion takes place. In fact, most of the 45–50 million annual abortions worldwide are thought to be operated on women in more stable relationships than in the stories above; women who already have children and who for various reasons feel they cannot bear more. They are rarely willing to discuss their experiences, reflecting a moral, emotional and social complexity seldom apparent in public debates about abortion. And yet the way this issue is resolved in the public arena will in large part determine how abortion is thought of and the way in which it is likely to occur.

Abortion is perhaps the oldest method of controlling fertility, and it remains a health problem in many societies; over 150 women die each day due to their pregnancies being terminated under unsafe conditions. Abortion touches deep questions about values and brings up primordial sentiments. It is tied to the broad sphere of sexuality and reproductive life that many people find awkward to discuss. It cuts across gender, social, religious and political cleavages.

Arguments about abortion, and the question of what to do about it, are no longer confined to the Western liberal democracies. Understanding the dynamics of the abortion debate has become a vital area for comparative international research. The US government, feminist forces and the Holy See waged a highly publicized battle over abortion before and during the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo. The European Union, Latin American states and Islamic governments also became involved in this bitter dispute that dominated the conference proceedings and received global media coverage, graphically illustrating the arrival of the abortion issue on the international agenda.

This book attempts to compare, contrast and link the abortion debate globally by using multiple sources of evidence, including 162 elite interviews. The study shows how and why controversy over abortion has spilled over to the developing world and to the post-communist societies of East Central Europe. This assessment is enhanced by being empirically grounded in the experiences of three nations – Kenya, Mexico and Poland. These countries, often considered as regional bellwethers, are strategically significant in the worldwide struggle between groups over abortion. In each of these countries, domestic processes and international influences are focusing greater attention on abortion. These forces include organized Catholicism and women's movements. Abortion is being discussed more openly than before, and its practice is most unlikely to decline unless contraceptive use becomes more widespread and effective.

The complexity of the abortion debate involves historical and cultural meanings specific to each country. It also reflects different stages of demographic transition and reliance on abortion for fertility regulation, as well as struggles over gender roles, laws, relations between church and state, the influence of other social actors, and the way the policymaking system works. Consideration of such variance facilitates comprehension of cross-national similarities and

differences in the social construction of abortion, its management and the conflict surrounding it. The ensuing debate is often poorly informed at the same time as it is moving to the public arena, be it slowly as in Kenya and Mexico, or more rapidly as in Poland. It is reaching agenda status as societies become more pluralistic and open to external interests, and states are finding it more difficult to contain the controversy and to reach an effective policy resolution.

The Abortion Debate in the World Arena consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the key dimensions to 'the policy conundrum' posed by abortion, the scope and purpose of the study, the issues and themes with which it is concerned, as well as the reasons for looking at Kenya, Mexico and Poland in more depth. The methodology is discussed further in an appendix. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 examine abortion practice, policy and debate in Kenya, Mexico and Poland, respectively, and address a range of shared underlying concerns with a focus on what is salient in each country and its wider region. 'The tyranny of silence' described in Chapter 2 is characteristic of much of Africa, where abortion is emerging as a significant social and health problem, and social actors are unable for the most part to press governments reluctant to take action. In Mexico the question of abortion has appeared intermittently on the decision-making agenda. As elsewhere in Central and Latin America, the reality of abortion has been masked over, perpetuating existing problems. Chapter 3 explains how concerned parties are 'negotiating a hidden reality' in order to seek alternative ways out of this situation. 'Peering into Pandora's Box', Chapter 4 shows how and why conflict over abortion at times upstaged the whole process of systemic transformation as political theatre in Poland and East Central Europe. The issue of abortion, all too often divorced from a wider consideration of adequate birth control options, continues to be used as a political football by both church and state in Poland, with significant implications for women and society. Finally, Chapter 5 reviews the main findings and examines a number of major themes which weave through the study. It provides a more focused comparison between the three countries and their regions, set within a broader international context. The chapter aims at enabling the reader to understand better 'the global nature of the abortion debate', its realities and prospects, especially as it relates to public policy.

This book is intended to fill a gap in the otherwise extensive literature on abortion. It examines the emergence and construction

of the abortion debate beyond the Western liberal democracies and how the Catholic Church, the most visible transnational actor in this dispute, engages this issue worldwide. Existing studies are almost entirely focused on North America and Europe, and unsuspecting readers could easily project the forces at work in those societies onto social realities in other parts of the world. Furthermore, this work gives a detailed assessment of the situation in three countries from different regions of the world and brings out the external linkages that are expanding and intensifying conflict over abortion. In addition to studying the influence of organized religion, the discourses and roles of competing actors in this dispute are analysed, along with the conditions under which abortion policies become more open to change. It is my hope that this book may appeal to scholars, those with a stake in these issues and the interested public alike, and that it may stimulate further work in this area.

The idea of this study germinated for a long time and, like many first books, had an earlier incarnation as a doctoral dissertation. I am grateful to my co-supervisors, Jason Finkle and Alison McIntosh, at the University of Michigan for their guidance and support, and to my other committee members, Yuzuru Takeshita and Kim Lane Scheppele, for their helpful comments and advice.

I have benefited immensely from having had three more years to reflect on this topic. I owe a special debt to many people I met during the course of this research with whom I had the opportunity to share information and thoughts. There are many aspects to abortion and a number of perspectives bearing on it, as recognized by the religious figure, the physician, and the women mentioned at the outset of the preface. The comparative inquiry here links up the ideas and methods of several fields to develop an informed and engaging analysis of a subject that meshes health, demography, sex, religion and politics.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Henryk Skolimowski for challenging me to think deeper. Also, I extend my thanks to John Slyce and Jesús Ramirez for commenting on earlier drafts of my work on Poland and Mexico, and to Prem Saxena for his useful suggestions at the end. I am grateful to Octavio Mojarro for our many conversations, and to Leopoldo Núñez and Carlos Aramburu who also helped my work proceed more smoothly in Mexico. Thanks also to Jerzy Holzer and Janina Józwiak for the assistance they have shown since I first started to conduct research in Poland.

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