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Anti-abortion Activism in Poland and the Republic of Ireland *c.*1970s–1990s*

This comparative article explores anti-abortion activism in Poland and Ireland from the period of the 1970s to the early 1990s. Drawing on a range of archival and printed sources, it sheds light on the Polish and Irish anti-abortion movements as a part of transnational anti-abortion efforts and underscores the importance of studying such phenomena transnationally, in a comparative perspective. We argue that despite political, social, and legislative differences that characterised both countries during this period, several pertinent parallels existed between Polish and Irish anti-abortion activism. As we show, both movements relied on transnational anti-abortion networks and discourses, employed medical knowledge to legitimise their efforts, and represented women undergoing abortion as victims.

Introduction

The turn of the 2020s brought about significant changes in abortion legislation in two largely Catholic, European countries: Ireland and Poland. In the former, abortion was legalised in 2018, in the latter the Constitutional Tribunal declared abortion unconstitutional in cases of foetal defects and abnormalities in 2020. The Polish ruling exacerbated even further the situation of women who should have had very limited access to abortion since 1993 when it was criminalised after several decades of very liberal legislation that

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originated in the times of communism.¹ One of the potent forces playing an important role in criminalising abortion in Poland was the anti-abortion movement, active in the country during the last decades of state-socialism and the democratic transition. In Ireland, in a different political, social and legal context, the anti-abortion movement also developed in the second half of the twentieth century, and its activities centred around the introduction of the eighth amendment to the constitution in 1983, and following that, attempting to protect this Irish amendment that maintained the illegality of abortion.²

This comparative article explores anti-abortion activism in Poland and Ireland from the period of the 1970s to the early 1990s. It is principally concerned with activists, that is, individuals who are highly involved in and committed to the abortion debate, and who have conducted the “sustained political work of the debate in order to bring law and public opinion on abortion into line with their own values.”³ We draw mainly on printed sources relating to anti-abortion activism in Poland and Ireland, including newspapers, anti-abortion publications, leaflets and publications from the Catholic hierarchy. For the Polish case, we also analyse relevant archival materials pertaining to anti-abortion activism during late state socialism created by anti-abortion milieus, the Catholic Church, and the communist secret service. The material used for this research was identified by archival and library searches, including digital newspapers databases. The reliance on printed sources and archival material was also caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted access to actors involved in pro-life activism in the period of analysis, with whom the authors plan to do oral history interviews in future, preferably in person. While the analysis of printed and archival material has allowed us to flesh out the activities and the rhetoric of the anti-abortion movement, oral histories would add the personal perspectives of anti-abortion activists.⁴

Our analysis pertains to countries that were characterised by salient political, social, and legislative differences. During the time we analyse, Ireland was a democratic country where abortion was illegal, whereas in Poland terminations of pregnancy were de-criminalised in the 1950s and abortion

1. On the verdict of the Constitutional Tribunal and its impact see: A. Krajewska, “The judgement of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal on abortion: dark day for Poland, for Europe, and for democracy”, U.K. Const. L. Blog, 12 November 2020, accessed 5 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2021.56>; A. Krajewska, “Connecting Reproductive Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law: Lessons from Poland in Times of COVID-19,” *German Law Journal* 2, no. 6 (2021): 1072–97; more on the effects of the 1993 law see: A. Krajewska, “Revisiting Polish Abortion Law: Doctors and Institutions in a Restrictive Regime,” *Social and Legal Studies*, 2021, on-line version ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639211040171>

2. On the legal impact of the eighth amendment, see, for example: F. de Londras, ‘Constitutionalizing Fetal Rights: A Salutory Tale from Ireland’, *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, 22 no. 2, (2015): 243–89; J. Schweppe (ed.), *The Unborn Child, Article 40.3.3 and Abortion in Ireland: Twenty Five Years of Protection?* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008).

3. K. Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 9.

4. All translations of the Polish language materials were done by the first author, who is a native Polish speaker.

remained legal until 1993. Since the Second World War until 1989 Poland was a communist country, whose citizens possessed limited rights and whose civic liberties were constrained. The history of the Polish anti-abortion movement constitutes hence the history of the activism during state-socialism and then under the democratic regime. We argue that despite these political, social, and legislative differences that characterised both countries during the period under study, several pertinent parallels existed between Polish and Irish anti-abortion activism. As we show, both movements relied on transnational anti-abortion networks and discourses, employed medical knowledge to legitimise their efforts, and represented women undergoing abortion as victims. Our paper sheds light on the Polish and Irish anti-abortion movements as a part of transnational anti-abortion efforts and underscores the importance of studying such phenomena transnationally, in a comparative perspective.⁵ Cognisant of the scholarly discussion on the use of the terms “pro-life”, “pro-choice,” and “anti-choice,” we have decided to refer to the activism we analyse as “anti-abortion,” thus employing the most neutral term.⁶

In recent years, a number of valuable studies have enriched our understanding of the American anti-abortion movement.⁷ In the Irish context, with notable exceptions, less scholarly attention has been paid to this topic.⁸ Research on the history of abortion in Ireland has tended to focus on the

5. Slattery's valuable 2010 thesis traces the transnational networks of anti-abortion activism from the 1960s to the 1990s, providing crucial insights into the involvement of American campaigners in anti-abortion campaigns in Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa. K. Slattery, *Building a "World Coalition for Life": Abortion, Population Control and Transnational Pro-life Networks, 1960–1990*, (PhD thesis, 2010, University of New South Wales), accessed 15 November 2021, <http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:9072/SOURCE02?view=true>

6. J. Schoen, *Abortion After Roe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); D. K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

7. For example, Williams; Luker; F. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1989); C. Maxwell, *Pro-life Activists in America: Meaning, motivation and direct action* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Schoen; K. Haugeberg, *Women against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017); M. Ziegler, *After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) and *Beyond Abortion: Roe v Wade and the Battle for Privacy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

8. See for example: T. Hesketh, *The Second Partitioning of Ireland: The Abortion Referendum of 1983* (Dublin: Brandsma Books, 1990); C. Delay, “Wrong for Womankind and The Nation: Anti-Abortion Discourses in Ireland, 1967–1992,” *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 3 (2019): 312–25; R. Fletcher, ““Pro-life” absolutes: feminist challenges, the Fundamentalist Narrative of Irish Abortion Law”, *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 36, no. 1, (1998): 1–62 and R. Fletcher, ‘Post-colonial Fragments: Representations of Abortion in Irish Law and Politics’, *Journal of Law and Society*, 28, no. 4, (December 2001), 568–89, U. Barry, ‘Abortion in the Republic of Ireland’, *Feminist Review*, 29, (Summer 1998): 57–63.

legislation and debates surrounding abortion in Ireland.⁹ Other studies have examined the influence of Catholicism on moral issues in Irish society such as abortion.¹⁰ Historians have highlighted the experiences of women seeking illegal abortions in Ireland.¹¹ Over the last few years, partly as a result of the campaign and ensuing referendum to repeal the eighth amendment in Ireland, there has been a renewed interest in the history of abortion-related activism.¹²

Anti-abortion activism in Poland during late state socialism and the early phase of the democratic regime is also heavily under-researched. Substantial scholarly literature on anti-abortion measures and legislation was produced in the early 1990s when abortion was criminalised in Poland.¹³ A small number of publications which specifically examine, or at least briefly mention, anti-abortion activism were published in the 1980s and were arguably

9. See: L. Earner-Byrne and D. Urquhart, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1968–2018* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019); C. Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); L. Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2005).

10. T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997); Hug.

11. C. Delay, "From the Backstreet to Britain: Women and Abortion Travel in Modern Ireland," in: C. Beyer, J. MacLennan, D. Smith Silva, and M. Tesser (eds.), *Travellin' Mama: Mothers, Mothering, and Travel* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2019), 217–34. For studies of abortion in Ireland prior to 1967, see C. Delay, "Pills, Potions, and Purgatives: Women and Abortion Methods in Ireland, 1900–1950," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 3 (2019): 479–99 and C. Delay, "Kitchens and Kettles: Domestic Spaces, Ordinary Things, and Female Networks in Irish Abortion History, 1922–1949," *Journal of Women's History* 30, no. 4 (2018): 11–34; C. Rattigan, "'Crimes of the Passion of the Worst Character': Abortion Cases and Gender in Ireland, 1925–50," in *Gender and Power in Irish History*, ed. M. Gialanella Valiulis (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 115–40; S. McAvoy, "Before Cadden: Abortion in Mid-Century Ireland," in *The Lost Decade, Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. D. Keogh, F. O'Shea and C. Quinlan (Dublin, 2004). On Northern Ireland, see: L. McCormick, "'No Sense of Wrongdoing': Abortion in Belfast 1917–1967," *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (2015): 125–48.

12. On anti-abortion strategies during and leading up to 2018, see: K. Browne and C. J. Nash, 'In Ireland We 'Love Both': Heteroactivism in Ireland's Anti-Repeal Ephemera', *Feminist Review*, 124, 51–67; K. Side, 'Visual realignment? The shifting visual terrains of anti-abortion strategies in the Republic of Ireland', in *Representing Abortion*, ed. R. A. Johnston Hurt (New York: Routledge, 2020), 104–118. See also, K. Browne and S. Calkin (eds.), *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics in Ireland* (London: Zed books, 2020); F. de Londras and M. Enright, *Repealing the 8th: Reforming Irish Abortion Law*, (London: Policy Press, 2018); S. Calkin, F. de Londras, G. Heathcote (eds.), 'Abortion in Ireland', special issue of *Feminist Review*, (March 2020) and C. Delay and C. Bracken, 'Women's Health and Reproductive Justice in Ireland', special issue of *Éire-Ireland*, (Fall/Winter 2021).

13. H. Jankowska, "Abortion, Church and Politics in Poland," *Feminist Review* 39, no. 1 (1991): 174–81; H. Jankowska, "The Reproductive Rights Campaign in Poland," *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 3 (1993): 291–6; H. David and A. Titkov, "Abortion and Women's Rights in Poland, 1994," *Studies in Family Planning* 25, no. 4, (1994): 239–42; P. J. Flood, "Abortion and the Right to Life in Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Russia," *East European Quarterly* 36, no. 2. (2002): 191–226; M. Fuszara, "Legal Regulation of Abortion in Poland," *Signs* 17, no. 1 (1991): 117–28; J. Heinen, "Les Femmes entre l'Église et l'État ou la remise en cause du droit à l'avortement en Pologne," *L'Homme et la société* 99, no. 1 (1991): 25–35; J. Heinen and A. Matuchniak-Krasuska, *Aborcja w Polsce. Kwadratura koła* (Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Religioznawcze, 1995); A. Kulczycki, "Abortion Policy in Postcommunist Europe: The Conflict in Poland," *Population and Development Review* 21, no. 3 (1995) 471–505; D. Standish, "From Abortion on Demand to Its Criminalization: The Case of Poland in the 1990s," in: *Abortion Law and Politics Today*, ed. E. Lee (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 116–29; M. Chafubiński, *Polityka i aborcja* (Warszawa: Agencja Scholar, 1994).

influenced by that moment's mores and political situation.¹⁴ Our paper aims to offset these limitations and to contribute to the recently growing literature on the Catholic Church and reproduction and sexuality in state-socialist Poland that, however, has not considered anti-abortion activism.¹⁵ Last, but not least, our paper contributes to the comparative literature on reproductive politics in Poland and Ireland that has so far examined only contemporary developments and not events and phenomena in the past.¹⁶

This article has three key sections. In the first contextual section, we explore how anti-abortion activism developed in Ireland and Poland, and how specifically Catholic discourses filtered down to grassroots organisations in both countries. In the second and third sections, we analyse in depth how two tropes emerging in Catholic milieus circulated across borders. In the second section, we look at the role of medical knowledge and medical professionals in anti-abortion activism and rhetoric, emphasising the transnational and particularly American influences in this context. In the third section, we explore representations of women as victims in anti-abortion activism in both Ireland and Poland.

Church Hierarchies and the Abortion Issue

The Polish anti-abortion movement emerged at the turn of the 1960s in response to the de-criminalisation of abortion in 1956, and it entered an organisational stage in the late 1970s. A plethora of different forms of organised anti-abortion activism developed. Most Polish anti-abortionists during late state socialism organised themselves in informal, parish-centred groups led by Catholic priests.¹⁷ Yet there were also groups that were primarily characterised by fierce anti-communism. For example, in 1977 a group of

14. J. Drażkiewicz, *Świadectwo i pomoc: O ruchach antyaborcyjnych w Warszawie* (manuscript) (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, 1988); M. Okólski, *Reprodukcja ludności a modernizacja społeczeństwa: Polski syndrom* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988); E. Zielińska, *Oceny prawnokarne przerywania ciąży: Studium porównawcze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1986).

15. See, for example: N. Jarska, "Modern Marriage and the Culture of Sexuality: Experts between the State and the Church in Poland, 1956–1970," *European Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2019): 467–90; A. Kościańska, "Humanae Vitae, Birth Control and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland," in *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975*, ed. A. Harris (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 187–208.; S. Kuźma-Markowska, "Marx or Malthus? Population Debates and the Reproductive Politics of State-socialist Poland in the 1950s and 1960s," *The History of the Family* 25, no. 4 (2020): 576–98; S. Kuźma-Markowska and A. Ignaciuk, "Family Planning Advice in State-Socialist Poland: Local and Transnational Exchanges," *Medical History* 64, no. 4 (2020): 240–66.

16. S. Calkin and Monika E. Kaminska, "Persistence and Change in Morality Policy: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Politics of Abortion in Ireland and Poland," *Feminist Review* 124, no. 1 (2020): 86–102; P. Cullen and E. Korolczuk, "Challenging Abortion Stigma: Framing Abortion in Ireland and Poland," *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 27, no. 3 (2019): 6–19.

17. For instance, the Care of Life (*Troska o Życie*) formed in Lublin; or the ones from Warsaw: for instance, the Movement for the Protection of the Conceived Children Gaudium Vitae (*Ruch Obrony Dzieci Poczętych Gaudium Vitae*) or the Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko Movement for the Defence of Life (*Ruch Obrony Życia im. księdza Jerzego Popiełuszki*); Drażkiewicz, 16; Okólski, 203.

nationalist anti-communists from Warsaw and its vicinity formed the Polish Committee of Life Promotion and Family (*Polski Komitet Obrony Życia i Rodziny*). In the 1980s, the movement of “spiritual adoptions” of “unborn children” was also commenced; in its form of activism it resembled a similar 1980s undertaking, that of the “crusade of prayer in defence of conceived children.”¹⁸ Since the 1970s, the anti-abortion message was also spread by some formal Catholic organisations such as the Catholic Intelligentsia Club, an influential group of progressive Catholics formed at the onset of state-socialism.

The collapse of communism endowed the Polish anti-abortion movement with a wide range of new possibilities and forms of activism that could not be developed under the non-democratic regime. After the democratic transition, the anti-abortion movement lobbied vehemently in order to criminalise abortion, established formal associations, published and distributed periodicals, and spread the anti-abortion message through various media, including public television. It was also in the early 1990s, during the transition from state socialism to democracy, that the Polish anti-abortion movement coalesced, forming the Polish Federation of Movements for the Protection of Life that united old milieus and new groups and associations. The Federation played a pivotal role in the introduction of the 1993 law that criminalised abortion in Poland despite massive protests of feminist and liberal milieus.¹⁹

The Irish anti-abortion movement grew out of the anti-contraception movement of the 1970s. Arguments against the legalisation of contraception were inextricably linked to the abortion issue. For example, the conservative Catholic group, the Irish Family League, founded in 1973, argued that contraceptives such as the pill were abortifacients, expressed concerns over the side-effects of artificial contraception, and stated that the legalisation of contraception would lead to the introduction of legal abortion.²⁰ A number of national and international legal events also sparked concerns among Irish campaigners. For example, in 1973, the Irish Supreme Court found that Section 17 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935) which prohibited the import of contraceptives for personal use was unconstitutional as it violated Mary McGee’s right to marital privacy.²¹ Conservative campaigners feared that this judgement could lead to the path of legal abortion, in the same way as the American *Griswold v. Connecticut* case had paved the way for *Roe v. Wade*.²² As Fletcher has posited, the McGee case judgement “was

18. A. Zięba, “Krucjata modlitwy w obronie poczętych dzieci” *Źródło* no 1, 1992, 10.

19. A. Kulczycki, *The Abortion Debate in the World Arena* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999); Heinen; Flood, 191–226; Jankowska, “Abortion, Church and Politics”; Jankowska, “The Reproductive Rights.”

20. L. Kelly, “The Contraceptive Pill in Ireland c.1964–79: Activism, Women and Patient–Doctor Relationships,” *Medical History* 64, no. 2 (2020): 214–17.

21. *McGee v. The Attorney General* [1973] IR 284.

22. ²² *Griswold v Connecticut* (1965) 381 US 479 and *Roe v. Wade*, (1973) 410 U.S. 113. Fletcher, “‘Pro-life’ absolutes”, 28. On the McGee case, see E. Cloatre and M. Enright. “Commentary on *McGee v Attorney General*.” *Northern/Irish Feminist Judgements: Judges’ Troubles and the Gendered Politics of Identity*, eds. Máiréad Enright, Julie McCandless and Aoife O’Donoghue, (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2017), 95–116.

regarded as a significant rebuttal of Roman Catholic doctrine” and was seen as “laying the ground for further liberalization of the legal regulation of reproduction.”²³

The introduction of the 1979 Family Planning Act which allowed contraception to be made available for *bona fide* family planning purposes only cemented conservative campaigners’ concerns that the legalisation of abortion would soon follow. Fourteen anti-abortion groups mobilised in 1981 under the banner of the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC). The aim of PLAC was to have an amendment included in the Irish Constitution which would guarantee the right to life of the unborn child from the moment of conception.²⁴ One of the most vocal PLAC member groups was the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC). SPUC was largely comprised of unpaid volunteers, mainly women.²⁵ SPUC had originally been founded in England in January 1967, in response to debates over the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill, and in the wake of silence from the Catholic Church in England on the issue.²⁶ In July 1980, three members of the British SPUC, Phyllis Bowman (national director and founder), John Smeaton (general secretary) and Clare Page, (press officer), gave a lecture in Dublin on “The Humanity of the Foetus.”²⁷ In August that year, Bowman and regional chairperson of SPUC, Menia Aitken went on a slide lecture-tour around Ireland.²⁸ An Irish branch of SPUC appears to have become active later in 1980, illustrating the transnational nature of anti-abortion activism and influence of international campaigners.²⁹

Lisa Smyth and Cara Delay have shown that the PLAC campaign was linked to moral panic about the future of the Irish nation, which was considered to be under threat of global liberalism, pro-Europeanism and British supremacy.³⁰ The ensuing referendum occurred in 1983, with over 66% votes in favour of the introduction of the eighth amendment to the constitution. The wording of the amendment meant that in the eyes of the Irish state, the life of the unborn child was equal to the life of the mother and thus abortion was effectively outlawed. To some commentators, the result was a victory for conservative Catholics against the liberalisation of Irish society.³¹ From the late 1980s into the 1990s, Irish groups were concerned with protecting the eighth amendment; campaigners were particularly active in the lead-up to the four referendums on abortion (1983, 1992, 2002, 2018). The

23. Fletcher, 28.

24. Hug, 146.

25. “Hang in There, Baby,” *Irish Times*, 29 April 1983, 10.

26. O. Dee, *The Anti-Abortion Campaign in England, 1966–1989* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 35.

27. *Evening Press*, 12 July 1980, 3.

28. “Abortion Issue,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 August 1980, 9.

29. “Child Protection March,” *Irish Times*, 23 December 1980, 7.

30. Smyth, 49; Delay, “Wrong for Womankind,” 322–3.

31. L. Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004), 240.

2018 referendum resulted in the repeal of the eighth amendment; this passed with 66.4% in favour and 33.6% against.³²

Even though Catholicism influenced anti-abortion activism in both Ireland and Poland, there were important differences in the relationship between church hierarchies and anti-abortion activists. In Ireland, anti-abortion campaigners were not always keen on being associated with Catholicism. For example, interviewed by the *Irish Times* in 1982, activist Patsy Buckley stated that in an article on a torchlight anti-abortion protest, the newspaper had singled out “an eccentric woman with rosary beads and a cross,” which in her view did not sketch an accurate picture of the broad membership of SPUC, which consisted of “ordinary people, insurance officials, housewives, dentists, printers, university students, teenagers, grannies and grandads.” Moreover, another SPUC campaigner, Brenda Barry added: “We are very careful not to present a bead-rattling, hymn-singing, candle-carrying image.”³³ In Poland, conversely, associations between anti-abortion and Catholicism were more direct, with many anti-abortion groups being led by priests.

Nevertheless, in Ireland, Catholic bishops played an important role in anti-abortion activism, through the production of pastorals on sexual morality. The Catholic hierarchy issued an anti-abortion pastoral *Human life is sacred* in 1975. It argued strongly against abortion and criticised the increasing public demand as what they described as a “contraceptive mentality.”³⁴ The pastoral additionally reiterated the church’s teachings on natural birth control methods as the only acceptable forms of family planning and suggested that contraceptive pills and intra-uterine devices were “in fact primarily abortifacients.”³⁵ Abortion was described as “killing the innocent” and the pastoral went into significant detail about how abortions were performed, using highly emotive language.³⁶ The rights of the unborn were stressed with focus placed on scientific knowledge of foetal development in order to enforce notions of foetal personhood. For example:

Many abortions take place at twelve weeks. By then the baby has well developed features and its heart-beat can be easily identified. Two hearts are then beating together in the mother’s body; but the small heart depends entirely on the large one, not only for the blood supply which brings it nourishment, but even more for the love which will allow it to develop its full human potential.³⁷

The pastoral also drew attention to the consequences of abortion, including the “emotional disturbance” experienced by women after abortions, the ethics

32. “Irish abortion referendum: yes wins with 66.4% - as it happens’, *Guardian*, 29 May 2018, accessed 21 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/may/26/irish-abortion-referendum-result-count-begins-live>

33. “No middle ground on abortion says SPUC,” *Irish Times*, 5 April 1982, 8.

34. *Human Life is Sacred: Pastoral Letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland to the Clergy, Religious and Faithful*, (Dublin: Cahill Printers, 1975) 56.

35. *Human Life is Sacred*, 56–57.

36. *Human Life is Sacred*, 10.

37. *Human Life is Sacred*, 9.

of abortions where disability was suspected, and the potential for “harmful physical effects for the mother herself and some risks for her future pregnancies.”³⁸

Leading up to the 1983 referendum on the eighth amendment, the Catholic Press and Information Office (on behalf of the Irish bishops) issued a booklet entitled *The Catholic Church and Abortion*. The booklet made many of the same arguments as the 1975 pastoral. Importantly, it emphasised ideas of foetal personhood, including a quote from professor of midwifery in Glasgow, and founding member of SPUC in Britain, Ian Donald, which stated “This is more than a potential human being, it is already a human being with potential, complete with every genetic detail, unique, individual, unrepeatabe.”³⁹ The development of the foetus was also discussed while organisations that supported women seeking an alternative to abortion were referred to, suggesting that there were other options available to women facing crisis pregnancies.⁴⁰ The pregnant woman was described as someone needing help and support.⁴¹

Other members of the clergy spoke from the pulpit about the referendum. Archbishop Ryan of Dublin and Bishop McNamara of Kerry “departed from the agreed official statement and, in individual pastoral letters, urged support for the amendment.”⁴² McNamara’s pastoral on the issue dealt with a range of issues including the right to life of the unborn child and the issue of “hard cases”. It ultimately argued that a vote in favour of the amendment “will be a vote that some unborn children in the future be not put to death, but allowed to be born and live.”⁴³ As we will see in the second and third sections of this article, both the use of scientific information and the representation of women as victims inflicted the rhetoric of grassroots movements.

In Poland, the Catholic Church long constituted the main driving force against abortion, with the Church’s opposition becoming even more vocal after the decriminalisation of abortion in 1956 and 1959. In reaction to these legal changes, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński began to mobilise Catholic bishops and priests against abortion legislation and the accompanying contraceptive campaign initiated by the Party-state. In the 1960s and 1970s, anti-abortion rhetoric infused local level initiatives of Catholic pre-marital and marital counselling offered in Catholic parishes in several regions in Poland, which mainstreamed the idea of “responsible parenthood” and stressed that so-called “artificial contraception” predisposed the couple to terminate any

38. *Human Life is Sacred*, 14–16.

39. *The Catholic Church and Abortion* (Dublin: Irish Messenger Publications, 1983), 6. For more on Donald see: R. Davidson and G. Davis, *The Sexual State: Sexuality and Scottish Governance, 1950–80*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 108–9.

40. *The Catholic Church and Abortion*, 12–13.

41. *The Catholic Church and Abortion*, 17–18,

42. Fuller, 241.

43. Bishop Kevin Macnamara, *The Pro-Life Amendment to the Constitution* (Wicklow: Irish Messenger Publications, 1983).

unexpected pregnancy.⁴⁴ The Polish Catholic Church's teachings on abortion and its link to contraception were strengthened by the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which reinforced the Church's views relating to the purpose of marriage and condemned all methods of artificial birth control.⁴⁵

The formation of first anti-abortion groups in Poland in the late 1970s coincided with the election of a Polish bishop Karol Wojtyła for a pope. Wojtyła was a leading figure of anti-abortion and anti-contraception efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. His Catholic marriage manual *Love and Responsibility* reflected the aforementioned narratives from Catholic pre-marital and marital counselling.⁴⁶ Scholars as Andrzej Kulczycki and Agnieszka Kościańska stress that Wojtyła and his friend Wanda Póltawska greatly influenced *Humanae Vitae*, which stipulated that "induced abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, was illicit."⁴⁷ Kulczycki argues that as a pope, Wojtyła sought to "enshrine" the encyclical "teachings as unambiguous Church doctrine" and made "unequivocal statements on abortion" in numerous documents and during papal visits, including in Poland, but also in Ireland.⁴⁸ Indeed, in 1979, Wojtyła visited Ireland for three days; over 2.5 million people attended his events. In several of his speeches, the pope alluded to the abortion issue. For example, in a speech at Knock, calling upon Jesus' mother Mary, he stated "Teach us that evil means we can never lead to a good end; that all human life is sacred; that murder is murder no matter what the motive or end."⁴⁹

During the last decade of state-socialism and in the early 1990s, the Polish anti-abortion movement relied on Wyszynski's and Wojtyła's anti-abortion statements. The recently elected pope was quoted in anti-abortion leaflets and brochures issued and distributed "in defence of human life."⁵⁰ Anti-abortion activists widely publicised the statement from the first papal visit to Poland in 1979 when Wojtyła avowed: "Again, I express the wish and I always pray for this, that the Polish family may beget life and may be faithful to the sacred right to life."⁵¹ Anti-abortion quotes from Wojtyła were also cited in anti-abortion magazines, such as *Źródło* (*The Source*).⁵² Also during turn-of-the-1990s efforts to criminalise abortion, Polish Catholic authorities often referred to Wojtyła's statements.

44. Zielińska, 108–111; A. Ignaciuk, "Marital Intercourse is Togetherness and Parenthood": The Biopolitics of Catholic Preparation for Marriage in Poland during the 1970s" (manuscript in preparation)

45. Kościańska; see A. Harris (ed.), *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–75*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

46. K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL, 1960); first English edition: K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (London: Collins, 1981).

47. Kościańska; Kulczycki, *The Abortion Debate*; quote: Kulczycki, 24.

48. Kulczycki, *The Abortion Debate*, 24.

49. *The Pope in Ireland: addresses and homilies*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2004), 59.

50. W obronie życia człowieka, 51, Catholic Intelligentsia Club Archive, Central Archives of Modern Records, Warsaw (henceforth CIC – CAMR).

51. W obronie życia człowieka, 51, CIC – CAMR; "V nie zabijaj", *Źródło*, no 18, 1996, 8.

52. *Źródło*, no 5, 1992, 10.

Catholic priests involved in anti-abortion efforts in Warsaw and other cities did not only spread the anti-abortion teachings of the pope, but also mobilised Polish Catholic Church authorities and other professional groups. The activism of Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko in Warsaw parishes was particularly significant. Popiełuszko, an avowed anti-communist, visited Cardinal Wyszyński with a telling gift: a pair of little shoes that symbolised “unborn children.”⁵³ Popiełuszko also mobilised a professional group indispensable in anti-abortion undertakings: doctors and nurses. A few medical practitioners had already openly expressed their opposition to the 1950s abortion legislation.⁵⁴ Popiełuszko, however, undertook systematic efforts to mobilise Catholic medical students, doctors, and nurses and also invited medical students to seminars on the medical, ethical and theological consequences of abortion.⁵⁵ The “pro-life” stances and undertakings of Popiełuszko were highlighted particularly after he was murdered in 1984 by the communist secret service and when he became a martyr of not only anti-communist opposition but as well the “pro-life” movement that involved also other anti-abortion and anti-communist priests as Stanisław Małkowski.

Medicine and Health-Related Arguments in Anti-Abortion Rhetoric

In this section, we show that scientific arguments were used to legitimise the movement’s undertakings and to alter the perception of the pregnancy and the foetus. We argue that both Irish and Polish activists relied on foreign, particularly American, visual materials to disseminate anti-abortion messages and that American activists greatly influenced the trajectories of activism in both countries.

In Poland, anti-abortion activists relied on visual representations of foetuses in order to convince the public at large that the product of pregnancy was not “clotted blood” but a “human being” with well-developed organs. The belief that early pregnancy is merely a “jelly” was to be combatted by the statements of medical authorities and by films and photographs circulated by the anti-abortion movement at displays and small exhibitions in churches in Poland in the 1980s and in the press and during public marches in the early 1990s. Similarly, in Ireland, anti-abortion groups refuted claims that at 10 to 12 weeks the human foetus is “simply a blob of jelly, no different from

53. E. Steczkowska, Ks. Jerzy obrońca życia, W rodzinie, accessed 18 February 2021, <http://wrodzynie.pl/ks-jerzy-obronca-zycia>

54. Zielińska, 108–111; on the role of the medical profession in shaping the abortion law in Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth century, see: A. Krajewska, “Rapture and Continuity: Abortion, the Medical Profession, and the Transnational State – A Polish Case Study,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 29 (2021): 323–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2021.56>

55. M. Kindziuk, *Popiełuszko: Biografia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2018); A. Olędzki, *Ksiądz Jerzy Popiełuszko. Spotkania po latach. Wywiady* (Kraków: eSPe, 2010), 125–6; A. Olędzki, *Moja Polska rozmodlona: ksiądz Jerzy Popiełuszko* (Warszawa: Kościół św. Stanisława Kostki, 1985), 113–114.

a pig or a rabbit”, through the use of public lectures, talks to schools, and the showing of illustrated slides and films.⁵⁶

In 1981, for example, a Polish Catholic periodical *Z pomocą rodzinie* (*With Help to the Family*) published an interview with the female gynaecologist Jolanta Massalska, who had been fired in the late 1950s from a Warsaw hospital because she had openly opposed the abortion law, and who in subsequent decades had become involved in Catholic natural family planning efforts.⁵⁷ Massalska firmly stated that women terminating pregnancies until the third month “do not treat the removal of the foetus as killing a human being” in spite of “the progress of the medicine showing that abortion is not a removal of some shapeless jelly.”⁵⁸ Massalska’s views were repeated by many authors at the turn of the 1990s, who stressed that “the life starts with conception” and that “empirical sciences prove that the conceived child is a human being.”⁵⁹

In many instances, the dissemination of anti-abortion local and foreign materials in Poland and Ireland was underpinned by claims to medical science in spite of the actual distortion and manipulation of the circulated materials and particularly of the visual representations of foetus. Since 1975, Polish anti-abortion groups and other religious associations such as the Catholic Intelligentsia Club, used the set of images and the narrative from *The Handbook of Abortion*, which was self-published in the early 1970s by the American doctor and nurse Jack and Barbara Willke.⁶⁰ In line with the strategies of the American anti-abortion movement, the Polish 1975 translation of the excerpts of *The Handbook*, entitled *Life or Death* (*Życie czy śmierć*), featured the “materials regarding termination of pregnancy” and juxtaposed images of “aborted” and “life” foetuses.⁶¹ The images of *The Handbook* were also reproduced as full-sized photographs, assumingly with the purpose of displaying them during anti-abortion trainings, preparation for marriage

56. “No middle ground on abortion says SPUC,” 8.

57. Kuźma-Markowska and Ignaciuk, 257.

58. J. Massalska, “Lekarze w obronie życia nienarodzonego,” *Z Pomocą Rodzinie* no. 3 (1981): 143.

59. Rev. W. Gasidło, “Wokół projektu ustawy o prawnej ochronie dziecka poczętego,” *Rodzina Katolicka* 81–85, no. 2–6 (1989): 8. The Department of the Chaplaincy of Families, Cracow Metropolitan Curia Archive, Cracow (henceforth DCF – CMCA), files in the CMCA are not catalogued; many thanks to Agata Ignaciuk for sharing CMCA files with me; P. Wosicki, “O człowieczeństwie dziecka poczętego,” *Głos dla Życia* 9, no 3 (1993): 1; Przyczyny i cele petycji, 8, The Polish Committee of Life Promotion, Family, and the Nation, The Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw (henceforth: PCLPFN-INR); many thanks to Jan Olszsek and Natalia Jarska for their help in accessing the Committee’s records.

60. Prezentacja materiałów dotyczących przerywania ciąży, fotografie, 402, CIC – CAMR.

61. On the representations of foetus and distortion of foetal images, see: R. P. Petchesky, “Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction,” *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 263–93; R. P. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1990); S. Dubow, *Ourselves Unborn: A History of Fetus in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); L.M. Morgan and M.W. Michaels (eds.) *Fetal Subjects, Feminist Positions* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

courses, and at anti-abortion exhibitions in churches. As argued by the Cra-cow anti-abortion activist Antoni Zięba, in the 1980s communist authorities censored visual anti-abortion materials and opponents of abortion could display them only in churches, because the press was controlled by the Party-State.⁶² This situation changed after 1989, when anti-abortion movement magazines as *Źródło* (*The Source*) or *Głos dla Życia* (*The Voice for Life*) spread images of foetuses, emphasising their human-like status, in nearly every issue.

In several Polish cities, local parishes not only organised anti-abortion exhibitions, but also showed local and foreign films presenting at times distorting and fictitious rationales as the infamous movie *The Silent Scream*.⁶³ This film, produced in 1984 by former abortionist Bernard Nathanson was presented to the Polish public since the mid-1980s through several channels, including public television.⁶⁴ Anti-abortion images also circulated through the 1985 translation of the landmark book *The Everyday Miracle: A Child is Born*, first published in 1967 and authored by Lennart Nilsson, Axel Ingelman-Sundberg and Claes Wirksén.⁶⁵ All of these media aimed to “humanise” the foetus and separate it from the pregnant female body, treating the foetus as a “person” or a “patient,” in line with the strategies of the anti-abortion movement in the United States and Western Europe.⁶⁶ Many of these visual representations of the foetus were inaccurate and/or misleading and were weaponised in foetal rights discourse that the movement relied on.

In Ireland, SPUC members also were clearly inspired by the activism of both British and American activists and provided anti-abortion lectures to secondary school pupils and the general public, utilising film and colour slides which showed the main methods of abortion and the remains of aborted foetuses. In 1981, Clare Page, a British Youth Organiser for SPUC returned to Ireland and illustrated a lecture at a secondary school with slides. The purpose of these illustrations was to show “young people the gruesome reality of abortions” and “to really bring home to them the fact that abortion was not a solution to a problem but was in fact the murder of a human being whose heart was already beating before the mother even knew she was pregnant.”⁶⁷ Similarly, a 1983 article in the *Irish Times* described a SPUC meeting at the assembly hall of a local school in Dublin with an attendance of 150 people, one-third of the audience being teenagers. Patsy Buckley

62. “Chciałem coś zrobić dla ratowania życia” – wywiad z Antonim Ziębą z Krucjaty Modlitwy w Obronie Życia,” *Głos dla Życia* 20, no 2 (1996): 6.

63. “Wywiad z dr Pawłem Wosickim Przewodniczącym Komitetu Założycielskiego Polskiej Federacji Ruchów Obrony Życia,” *Źródło* no 22 (1993): 6.

64. M. Czardybon, „Niemy krzyk nienarodzonego,” *Słowo Powszechne*, 19 January 1986; M. Stypułkowska, “Niemy krzyk dziecka,” *Niedziela*, 11 August 1985, 6; M. Braun-Gałkowska, “Nie każda metoda jest dobra,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23–24 March 1991.

65. *Życie przed narodzeniem: fotodokumentacja rozwoju życia ludzkiego w łonie matki*, fot. L. Nilsson; teksty A. Ingelman-Sundberg, C. Wirsen, tłum. J. Sychowska-Kavedzija (Warszawa: Instytut Rodziny, 1985).

66. Petchesky, “Fetal Images”; Dubow; Schoen; *Fetal Subjects, Feminist Positions*.

67. “Cashel to Form Branch of ISPUC,” *The Nationalist*, 7 November 1981, 8.

presented a 40 minute film, *An Everyday Miracle* narrated by David Attenborough which showed the development of the foetus. This was then followed by 12 slides showing various aspects of the foetus's development, followed by a gap, and then five slides showing methods of abortion under the heading "Death Before Birth." Audience members who did not wish to see the abortion slides were advised to close their eyes during the gap or leave. According to a report of the proceedings:

nobody left in the interval before the second group of slides. The first of these showed the remains of a suction abortion. Behind me, a girl was inhaling and exhaling audibly, as if trying not to be sick. [...] The other slides — one more sickening than the last — were shown, with commentary ("That's a morning's work in a Canadian abortion chamber").⁶⁸

Campaigners evidently aimed to produce an emotional effect. SPUC campaigner Brenda Barry, interviewed in 1982, stated "I would feel upset if people did not show some emotion. They are difficult to look at. Violent death is upsetting."⁶⁹ One of the images commonly used in SPUC materials was a picture of a black refuse sack with the remains of human foetuses, captioned "a morning's work in an abortion clinic."⁷⁰ This image may have come from American anti-abortion visual materials, as a flyer from the "National Truth in the Media" campaign, also utilises this image with the same caption and states that it was courtesy of "Dr. Wilke, (sic) Pres. NRL America."⁷¹ In Ireland, SPUC also provided materials outlining the anatomical development of the foetus at different stages of pregnancy, believing that "few people, even women, have an accurate idea of how early the foetus develops identifiable features."⁷²

This emphasis on foetal personhood was backed up by scientific information on the development of the foetus. The group also circulated leaflets in hospitals, one of which "outlined the thoughts of a foetus from three days after conception until a few weeks later when its mother aborted it."⁷³ Similarly, an information sheet produced by PLAC outlined the key stages of foetal development from conception to the fortieth week of gestation.⁷⁴ Leaflets produced by anti-abortion campaigners were often illustrated with drawings of the unborn foetus. For instance, one leaflet produced by SPUC encouraging a "yes" vote in the 1983 amendment depicted "unborn babies at 11 weeks and 15 weeks" with the accompanying slogan "Warning! Abortion kills babies."⁷⁵

Not only did American pictures and films circulate in Poland and Ireland, American anti-abortion activists also travelled and gave lectures in both

68. "SPUC's Picture Show in Palmerstown," *Irish Times*, 29 April 1983, 10.

69. "No Middle Ground on Abortion, says SPUC," *Irish Times*, 5 April 1982, 8.

70. "Anti-abortion Group to Use Films and Slides," *Irish Times*, 2 April 1982.

71. Undated 'Vote Yes' flyer for National Truth in the Media' campaign.

72. "No Middle Ground on Abortion, Says SPUC," 8.

73. "Why We Should Oppose the Referendum," *Irish Times*, 2 April 1982, 12.

74. *Pro-life Amendment Campaign: Information Sheet no.3, Medical Spects*, (1983).

75. 1983 Pro-Life Amendment Leaflet.

countries. When discussing the role of medicine and health in anti-abortion rhetoric in Ireland, it is important to emphasise the influence of American anti-abortion activists on the character of Irish activism and the active engagement of American anti-abortion campaigners in Irish campaigns, particularly in the development of constitutional activism.⁷⁶ As Slattery has shown, ‘The failure of human life legislation in the United States coupled with the fact that Ireland was the “last bastion” of Catholic resistance to abortion in the developed world inspired many American pro-life leaders to take a keen interest in the Irish pro-life amendment campaign.’⁷⁷ One of the most prominent American anti-abortion campaigners to engage with the Irish movement was Father Paul Marx. Marx, a Catholic priest, was one of the leaders of the anti-abortion movement in the United States. He established a number of anti-abortion organisations there such as the Human Life Center (1971) and Human Life International (1981). Marx came to Ireland in January 1973 as part of a tour of talks in Ireland and Britain organised by the British SPUC. In his Dublin lecture at Power’s Royal Hotel, attended by about 150 people, Marx discussed abortion in the United States and advocated the education of young people in schools on the issue. He showed the audience a series of slides and film strips of normally developed foetuses and aborted foetuses as well as playing an audio recording of what was described as an ultrasound record of a three month old foetus’ heartbeat.⁷⁸ As part of his visit, Marx spoke to a group of hundreds of teenage schoolgirls at St. Marie’s of the Isles School in Cork on abortion, using slides of aborted foetuses to illustrate his talk and showing them a 14 week old foetus in a jar.⁷⁹ The showing of the foetus gained significant publicity and in response, the Archdeacon James Bastible of Cork stated that the foetus had been shown to the group without his foreknowledge and approval.⁸⁰

Marx returned to Ireland in November 1973 to give twenty lectures at a number of locations, over two weeks organised by the Irish Family League.⁸¹ At a Dublin meeting attended by 300 people, Marx showed an anti-abortion film *Abortion: A woman’s decision* as well as numerous slides depicting aborted foetuses.⁸² Marx would go on to make a number of visits to Ireland over the next three decades. On a return visit to Ireland in 1976, the showing of a film in Galway called *The Beginnings of Life* as part of his lecture, caused a number of persons in the audience to become ill, and the retired bishop, Dr. Browne left the convent hall before the end of the lecture.⁸³ Marx’s visits to Ireland had a profound effect in mobilising a number of

76. See: Slattery, 109–21.

77. Slattery, 111–12.

78. “U.S. Priest says Ireland Needs Campaign against Abortion,” *Irish Times*, 16 January 1973, 1, 5.

79. “Archdeacon Says He Did Not Know of Foetus,” *Irish Times*, 20 January 20, 1973, 6.

80. “Archdeacon Says He Did Not Know of Foetus,” 13.

81. “Father Marx Hits Irish Hypocrisy,” *Evening Herald*, 15 November 1973, 6.

82. “An Evening with Father Marx,” *Irish Independent*, 19 November 1973, 8.

83. “Former Galway Bishop Walks out of Showing of Film on Abortion,” *Irish Times*, 5 October 1976, 1.

groups which campaigned against contraception and abortion and received wide publicity, bringing the issue of abortion into the public consciousness. Slattery has also shown how Marx was in regular contact with prominent Irish anti-abortion campaigner John O'Reilly, providing advice on matters such as the wording of the eighth amendment.⁸⁴ By 1982, Irish activists were requesting financial and technical support from US anti-abortion organisations.⁸⁵ Indeed, in 1982, Marx initiated a "Save the Irish Babies!" fundraising campaign in the US which targeted Americans of Irish Catholic descent.⁸⁶ Moreover, in March 1982, Paul Marx organised a week-long training seminar for Irish anti-abortion activists, giving them the opportunity to learn from prominent American and British campaigners, with workshops emphasising the importance of grassroots activism, lobbying politicians and fundraising.⁸⁷

As argued by Slattery, Human Life International (HLI) and Paul Marx played also a crucial role in anti-abortion developments in Poland in the late 1980s. Slattery emphasises that "tensions and uncertainties generated by the end of the Cold War provided a fertile recruiting ground" for HLI in Poland and other Eastern European countries, and that the organisation "joined Pope John Paul II's efforts to replace Marxism with religions revival"⁸⁸ in the region. Accordingly, Marx visited Poland in 1987 and then in 1988, bringing "financial, material, and spiritual aid", and the HLI was invited to the country. The establishment of the local branch facilitated the transfer of the expertise and money from the United States to Poland, as well as passing on of anti-abortion propaganda materials such as films, pamphlets and brochures, as well as foetal models. All in all, as Slattery claims, the HLI's support contributed considerably to the success of the Polish anti-abortion campaign.⁸⁹

In the 1980s and at the turn of the 1990s, Polish anti-abortion activists also strengthened their allegedly scientific arguments by referring to the expertise of foreign doctors, for example from the United States and France. Polish anti-abortion materials regularly quoted the maker of *the Silent Scream* Nathanson, who used his medical expertise to legitimise his anti-abortion arguments: "as a scientist I know; not suppose, but know; that the life of a human being starts with the conception."⁹⁰ Another foreign anti-abortion medical expert strongly featured in anti-abortion materials was the French doctor and prominent geneticist Jerome Lejeune, a close acquaintance of Pope John Paul II who opposed legalisation of abortion in France and promoted anti-abortion beliefs in scientific community.⁹¹

Doctors involved in and supporting the Polish anti-abortion movement not only stressed that life from an allegedly scientific point of view began at

84. Slattery, 111–12.

85. Slattery, 114.

86. Slattery, 117–18.

87. Slattery, 115–16.

88. Slattery, 235.

89. Slattery, 246–50.

90. B. Nathanson, „Życie ludzkie zaczyna się od poczęcia”, *Młoda Polska* no 29 (1990): 10.

91. Naukowcy, lekarze o początku życia ludzkiego, 51, CIC – CAMR.

conception, but also provided arguments on the dangers of terminations to women's health. References to the medical dangers of abortion, as Agata Ignaciuk and Amy Randall argue, were commonplace in public and medical discussions in both state-socialist Poland and the USSR in spite of the liberal abortion law in both countries.⁹² The women's health rationale of the Polish anti-abortion movement resembled the arguments presented in the medical press and in the venues of the state-supported family planning association Society for Conscious Motherhood/Society for Family Planning. In both, the possible direct and long-term consequences of abortion were stressed, including infertility. The opponents of abortion, however, distorted and exaggerated such women's health arguments, claiming for instance that terminations resulted in "five times bigger perinatal mortality" in subsequent pregnancies or in "four times more frequent birth defects" in future children, the stipulations of which were not proven in medical literature.⁹³

The anti-abortion campaign in Ireland also benefited from the backing of a number of prominent gynaecologists, obstetricians and medical practitioners who also gave public talks on the issue. For instance, a meeting held by the Responsible Society in March 1980 on the theme of "The Permissive Society and its Lessons for Ireland" was addressed by Valerie Riches, chairperson of The Responsible Society in Britain and followed by papers by gynaecologist Professor John Bonnar and Dr. Austin Darragh. Founding patrons of PLAC in 1981 included ten prominent obstetricians and gynaecologists from the major Irish hospitals and universities.⁹⁴ The patrons from the medical establishment were also listed on PLAC campaign literature.⁹⁵ A major concern of the anti-amendment campaign was that the eighth amendment would put women's lives at risks.⁹⁶ PLAC drew on the expertise of their gynaecologists and obstetricians to refute this claim, arguing that necessary treatment was never denied because of pregnancy and that "there are no medical circumstances in which the life of a mother can be saved only by directly killing her unborn child."⁹⁷ As Hug has argued, "the vision of babies being killed in the womb was stronger in the minds of the Irish than the potential danger in

92. A. Ignaciuk, "Ten szkodliwy zabieg: Dyskursy na temat aborcji w publikacjach Towarzystwa Świadomego Macierzyństwa/Towarzystwa Planowania Rodziny," *Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej* 20, no. 1 (2014): 75–97; A. Ignaciuk, "In Sickness and in Health: Expert Discussions on Abortion Indications, Risks, and Patient-Doctor Relationships in Postwar Poland," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 95, no. 1 (2021): 83–112; A. E. Randall, "'Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!' Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 13–38.

93. "Skutki sztucznych poronień dla zdrowia kobiety", *Źródło* no. 33 (1994): 7–8; more on this strategy: Kuźma-Markowska and Ignaciuk, 263–4.

94. These were Professor Eamonn de Valera (Mater Hospital), Professor Kieran O'Driscoll (National Maternity Hospital), Professor Kevin Feeney (The Coombe), Professor Eamon O'Dwyer, Professor John Bonnar, Professor David Jenkins (UCC), Dr Arthur Barry (Holles Street), Dr T Hanratty (St James Hospital), Dr Dermot Macdonald (master of the National Maternity Hospital) and Dr. Niall Duignan (master of the Coombe).

95. "Show That YOU are opposed to Abortion," PLAC Leaflet, 1983.

96. Hug, 154.

97. *Pro-life Amendment Campaign: Information Sheet no.3, Medical Aspects*, (1983).

which the amendment put women” and she has suggested that perhaps voters “trusted their doctors more than their legislators.”⁹⁸

Representations of Women

In this section, which examines the representations of women in anti-abortion activism, we argue that both in Ireland and Poland women undergoing abortion were presented as victims of the terminations. We situate our analysis in the transnational context and also show the similarities and differences in the framing of women as victims. We show that the differences stemmed mainly from the political and social contexts in which the anti-abortion activists operated.

As Leslie Cannold has shown, women-centred approaches became an additional strategy of the international pro-life movement since the mid-1980s.⁹⁹ Women-centred activists “argue that abortion is wrong because it hurts women and, unlike foetal-centred activists, do not explicitly oppose the legality or availability of abortion. Instead, they depict themselves as having an agenda-less desire, grounded in their concern to protect vulnerable women’s rights from being trampled by abortion service-providers.”¹⁰⁰ As Joanna Schoen has shown, from the early 1970s in the United States, anti-abortion protestors began to found crisis pregnancy centres to educate women about the dangers of abortion and dissuade them from having abortions.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in England, anti-abortion organisations such as LIFE began to create counselling services and short-stay accommodation options from the 1970s in order to assist women who felt pressured to have an abortion.¹⁰² Foetocentric grief came to dominate pro-life discourse and repositioned abortion “as an act that destroys autonomous life and leaves women perpetually mourning their unborn children.”¹⁰³ From the mid-1980s, the idea of post-abortion syndrome (PAS) began to be weaponised by American pro-life activists, soon gaining traction internationally.¹⁰⁴ Anti-abortion campaigners appropriated vocabulary from the feminist health movement in their framing of PAS which encompassed the idea that abortion was not only a threat to motherhood but to women’s mental health.¹⁰⁵

In Poland, since the turn of the 1990s, in anti-abortion periodicals one may also find references to PAS such as through quotations from American

98. Hug, 154.

99. L. Cannold, “Understanding and Responding to Anti-choice Women-centred Strategies,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 19, no. 10 (2002): 172.

100. Cannold, 172.

101. Schoen, 180–86.

102. Dee, 129–31.

103. E. Millar, “Mourned Choices and Grievable Lives: The Anti-Abortion Movement’s Influence in Defining the Abortion Experience in Australia Since the 1960s,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 515.

104. Millar, 505–6.

105. R. L. Moran, “A Women’s Health issue?: Framing Post-abortion Syndrome in the 1980s,” *Gender & History*, (July 2021): online access, 1–15, on 2, accessed 15 January 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-0424.12554>

publications such as the Willkes' *Handbook on Abortion*.¹⁰⁶ The insistence that termination of pregnancy unavoidably led to deep grief and regret as well as to mental problems figured firmly in Polish anti-abortion discourse as it had done before in American and British anti-abortion arguments.¹⁰⁷ From the late 1980s, campaigners in Poland and Ireland began to utilise American-influenced approaches such as counselling and support groups to try and dissuade women from having abortions and highlighted the impact of PAS. Indeed, in the Irish context, the reconfiguration of a woman who had sought an abortion from a "murderer" to "victim" may be seen in a 1991 quote of Mary Lucey, the president SPUC, who described a woman's experience of abortion in the following way:

She delivered herself into the hands of people whose only purpose was to kill her baby and to make money from the killing. They showed no compassion for her or for her baby and, when their gruesome work was done, the baby was dead and the poor mother was left to bear a great burden of guilt and regret for her unborn child.¹⁰⁸

In Ireland, two key groups focusing on a women-centred approach were CURA, founded by the Irish Catholic bishops in March 1977, and Women Hurt By Abortion, founded by priest Father Brian McKeivitt in 1987.

It is important to stress the hostile wider context relating to unplanned pregnancy in twentieth-century Ireland and limited options facing women who faced a pregnancy outside of marriage.¹⁰⁹ Significant numbers of women seeking abortions travelled from Ireland and Northern Ireland to the UK from 1967 onwards.¹¹⁰ From the 1970s, the Catholic hierarchy became concerned with this trend and was motivated to found the crisis pregnancy service CURA in 1977. CURA initially had the aim of dissuading women experiencing crisis pregnancies from going ahead with an abortion, but it soon expanded to a broader programme. Women who underwent abortions were described in one article on the subject as "girls who go through desperate agonies of conscience and physical disorders after the abortion." Moreover, the article drew attention to issues such as regret, pressure from boyfriends into having an abortion, and the shame brought on by individuals' families around unwanted pregnancy.¹¹¹ Indeed, Bishop Macnamara in his

106. "Druga ofiara aborcji," *Głos dla Życia*, May 1991, 4; on the syndrome rhetoric in Poland after the democratic transition: J. Włodarczyk, "Manufacturing Hysteria: The Import of the U.S. Abortion Rhetoric to Poland," *Genders* 52, 2010, accessed 14 April 2021, https://cdn.atrია.nl/eazines/IAV_606661/IAV_606661_2010_52/g52_wlodarczyk.html

107. E. Lee, *Abortion, Motherhood, and Mental Health: Medicalizing Reproduction in the United States and Great Britain* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2003).

108. "May Have Saved Other Lives," *Irish Examiner*, 10 July 1991, 10.

109. L. Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Dublin, 1922–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 179–180.

110. On the Irish abortion trail, see: A. Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The Abortion Trail and the Making of a London-Irish Underground, 1980–2000*, (London: IASC Publishing, 2009); D. Duffy, 'From Feminist Anarchy to Decolonisation: Understanding Abortion Health Activism Before and After the Repeal of the 8th Amendment', *Feminist Review*, 124 (2020), 69–85; R. Fletcher, 'Negotiating strangeness on the abortion trail', in *Revaluing Care in Theory, Law and Policy: Cycles and Connections*, eds. R. Harding, R. Fletcher and C. Beasley (New York: Routledge, 2016), 14–30.

111. "Help to Stop Girls from Abortions," *Sunday Independent*, 13 March 1977, 8.

1983 pastoral on the referendum on the eighth amendment argued for a need for “a new resolve in our society never to be found lacking in Christian compassion for any woman who is tempted to do away with her unborn child.”¹¹²

CURA was a nationwide service for women which primarily offered a telephone service and counselling at centres around the country to women experiencing unwanted pregnancies, with the aim of discouraging women from having abortions.¹¹³ According to one article on the service, “should the person be contemplating an abortion, the pro-life alternatives will be put to her delicately and sensitively in the hope that it may encourage her to think again. At the very least it will help her evaluate her reason for wanting an abortion”. Moreover, the organisation claimed to offer “a real alternative to abortion” through its connections with existing agencies, sheltered accommodation, short term nursery care, adoption and assistance for women who decided to continue with their pregnancies.¹¹⁴ By 1981, CURA had organised a network of placement families whereby a pregnant unmarried woman could go to live with a family before she gave birth.¹¹⁵ Women were also sent to “hostel accommodation” at one of three mother and baby homes.¹¹⁶ Recent important work, in particular, by the Clann project, has highlighted the range of abuses experienced by women who were sent to these “homes” throughout the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ The women who sought support from CURA were often described as “girls,” situating them as ignorant and innocent. Anti-abortion campaigners in the 1970s and 1980s emphasised the idea that “foreigners were exploiting Irish abortion-seekers by referring to these women as ‘girls’ no matter their age.”¹¹⁸

In its first nine months the service received 1,323 calls, with 15 per cent of these coming from women thinking of having an abortion and 80 per cent from pregnant women in distress who were seeking information and

112. Macnamara, 20.

113. “The Abortion Trail to England,” *Woman’s Way*, 24 June 1977, 13–14.

114. “Service Will Aid Unmarried girls,” *Irish Examiner*, 16 March 1977, 7.

115. “Help for the Single Pregnant Girl,” *Western Journal*, 10 July 1981, 11.

116. “Panic-stricken, Pregnant, and Single,” *Irish Examiner*, 1 September 1982, 8.

117. See: Clann Project website (accessed 10 November 2021, <http://clannproject.org/>). Oral history has also been used to uncover the lived experiences of women in Northern Irish Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalen Laundries. L. McCormick, S. O’Connell, O. Dee and J. Privilege, *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990, Report for the Inter Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse*, (January 2021). There is a rich body of historical work on the experiences of unmarried mothers in Ireland. See, for example, M. Luddy, ‘Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973’, *Women’s History Review*, no. 1, (2011), 106–26; J. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); L. Earner-Byrne, ‘The Boat to England: An Analysis of the Official Reactions to the Emigration of Single Expectant Irishwomen to Britain, 1922–1972’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, 30, (2003), 52–70; L. Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Ireland, 1920s–1960s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

118. Delay, “Wrong for Womankind,” 323.

assistance.¹¹⁹ In 1980, the organisation received 4,819 calls from women and by 1982, this had risen to 7,277 clients.¹²⁰ Speaking in 1981, Bishop Dermot O'Mahony, then national coordinator of the CURA service felt that if the service had not been established "far more women would be going to England for abortions."¹²¹ CURA's strategy marked a shift from a focus on the foetus to that of the mother, with advertisements for the organisation frequently using statements such as "CURA cares for you and your unborn child."¹²² By 1985, in their Lenten pastoral *Love is for Life*, the Irish bishops stated that through CURA "Many girls have thus been caringly helped through their difficult experience, and have been saved from the still more harrowing experience of abortion and post abortion guilt."¹²³

Women Hurt By Abortion began in Cork in 1987, founded by Dominican priest, Father Brian McKeivitt, but soon grew into a network of groups around the country. In each part of the country, a woman's number was advertised as the initial contact point. If the caller wished to join the local group, she was then invited to attend fortnightly meetings where women could talk about their experiences of abortion and how they had been affected, or she could meet another woman one-on-one.¹²⁴ The key aim of the group was for women to share their emotions, memories and ways of coping in order to help them "move towards healing," and "to bring awareness to the general public, especially psychiatrists, doctors, nurses, clergymen, and others in the caring professions the extensive psychological, social and spiritual hurt caused by abortion." The group also aimed "to ensure that girls and women who are considering having an abortion know the suffering they may have to go through for the rest of their lives."¹²⁵ Indeed, a Kerry branch of the group claimed in May 1988 that their work had stopped women from having abortions because the women "were able to speak to people who had been in the same predicament as themselves."¹²⁶

An important aspect of the group's work was the publishing of stories of women who had undergone abortions. Eileen's story, published in *Woman's Way* in 1989, is a typical account. Eileen became pregnant at 26 and felt that she had no option but to have an abortion. The abortion itself was described as "impersonal and efficient" and the London clinic staff were described as being "indifferent. I was just another one to them." Eileen went on to describe in detail the emotions she felt following the abortion, highlighting her feelings of loss, depression, loneliness, her lack of self-respect, explaining "What I did has coloured my whole life." She had begun to find solace through her local Women Hurt By Abortion group, however, and felt

119. "Pregnancies," *Irish Press*, 16 March 1978, 4.

120. "CURA Helped 4,800 Women in 1980," *Anglo-Celt*, 20 March 1981, 2; "Pleas to CURA up by 41%," *Strabane Chronicle*, 26 March 1983, 15.

121. "CURA Helped 4,800 Women," 2.

122. Advertisement, *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 October 1984, 15.

123. *Love is for Life*, (1985).

124. "Women Hurt by Abortion," *Woman's Way*, 3 March 1989, 6.

125. "Women Hurt by Abortion," *Leitrim Observer*, 21 January 1989, 13.

126. "New group Says It Prevents Abortions," *Kerryman*, 6 May 1988, 1.

"It's helpful to have a shoulder to cry on and to talk to people with compassion who understand."¹²⁷

The organisation tended to characterise women who had abortions as victims. A letter from "Yvonne" in the *Irish Independent* in 1989 stated "Many women who have had an abortion are still suffering in complete isolation, with no one to turn to. [...] Women hurt by abortion are among the unmentionables in society today."¹²⁸ As with similar organisations internationally, an emphasis was placed on the idea that women who had abortions had been exploited by ruthless clinics which were only concerned with profits.¹²⁹ In a 1988 interview, McKeivitt explained that women "are being conned and exploited for their babies are taken from them and they are just being cast aside by people who don't want to know about them afterwards."¹³⁰ From 1988, "post-abortion syndrome" was used by McKeivitt in interviews to describe the feelings experienced by women after an abortion. The long-term impacts of PAS were discussed at the first national convention of the group in 1988. PAS was described as a "time-bomb" because it could take five to fifteen years "before it explodes into the woman's consciousness."¹³¹ Journalist Isabel Healy, writing about the group, argued that while she was sure they were well-meaning, she felt that they were "trying to instil into suggestible women that if they decide on such an option they will be punished, in an effort to create fear of abortion, and thus curb it."¹³² The group's strategy tried to move discourses around women being "murderers" to women as victims. For example, highlighting the group's work in 1992, the *Irish Examiner* stated "You will find the most vocal of those who condemn women as 'murderers' have never had to make the decision as to whether or not abortion is the way out."¹³³

The anti-abortion movement in Poland similarly viewed women who had abortions as victims. Already in the 1980s, women undergoing abortions were paternalistically depicted as unaware victims of terminations, allegedly lacking medical knowledge regarding the real nature of the "surgery" (*zabieg*). In an article in the Catholic periodical *Słowo Powszechnie* (*Common Word*) discussing the film *The Silent Scream*, the author urged readers: "But let us remember that women are also the victims of abortion, who are not informed about the true nature of the unborn child. [Women] do not know true facts and do not know what in fact the procedure entails."¹³⁴ The article stressed that all women considering abortion should watch a movie like *The Silent Scream* before they decided to terminate a pregnancy, whereas the letters of "women hurt by abortion" included in anti-abortion publications

127. "Women Hurt by Abortion," *Woman's Way*, 3 March 1989, 7.

128. "Abortion," *Irish Independent*, 3 January 1989, 8.

129. "Women Hurt by Abortion," *Irish Press*, 2 August 1989, 12.

130. "Group Therapy Heals 'the Walking Wounded,'" *Irish Examiner*, 21 March 1988, 4.

131. "'Blind Eye' to Abortion," *Irish Independent*, 8 November 1988, 12.

132. "Let Those Who Are Without Sin," *Cork Examiner*, 13 September 1988, 8.

133. "Shunned as Single Parent," *Irish Examiner*, 20 January 1992, 8.

134. "Niemy krzyk. Anatomia zbrodni," *Słowo Powszechnie*, 1 May 1988.

showcased the effectiveness of anti-abortion visual materials, presenting the testimonies of women regretting terminations after watching *The Silent Scream* and parallel films.¹³⁵

Next to being the victims of the supposedly distorted, unscientific assumptions regarding abortion, women terminating pregnancies were also envisaged as victims of their husbands and/or potential fathers of their babies. In the early 1990s, during the heated debate and attempts to modify the abortion law, new anti-abortion periodicals as *Głos dla Życia* (*Voice for Life*) were filled with references to irresponsible men coercing women to terminate unplanned pregnancies. As in reproductive and population debates in state-socialist Poland, men were at large presented by abortion opponents as emotionally immature, egoistic, unrestrained, helpless and — tellingly — not taking responsibility for their sexual activities.¹³⁶ In one anti-abortion article, its author even stated that if “a woman has a support and protection of the father of the child, she will not choose abortion.”¹³⁷

This assumption of the utmost role of a potential father in the decision to “keep the pregnancy” was reinforced by such influential abortion opponents as Wanda Póltawska, a close friend of Pope John Paul II, who was regularly featured in anti-abortion publications at the turn of the 1990s. Writing that “no woman would kill a child [have an abortion — the authors], if the baby’s father took full responsibility for its fate,”¹³⁸ Póltawska stressed that a potential father had both duties as well as rights to “his child” [the foetus — the authors].¹³⁹ A very similar narrative may be found in testimonies of women who had abortions and whose stories were included in anti-abortion publications. Regretting the procedure, women put the blame on their husbands, insisting that “there would be no women undergoing abortions, if there were no irresponsible men.”¹⁴⁰ The image of women undergoing abortion as victims was strongly present in early 1990s Polish anti-abortion discourse and remained one of the features of the Polish anti-abortion rhetoric until the twenty-first century.¹⁴¹

135. “Cofnąć czas ... Świadczenia kobiet zranionych aborcją,” *Głos dla Życia* 21/22, nos. 3 and 4 (1996): 8.

136. K. Meissner, “Adamie, gdzie jesteś?” *Głos dla Życia*, Oct 1991, 3; on images of men in reproductive and population debates during state-socialism – N. Jarska, “Między równością a różnicą płci. Poradniki życia małżeńskiego w PRL,” in *W kregu kultury PRL. Poradnictwo*, eds. K. Bittner and D. Skotarczak (Poznań: IPN, 2018), 291–305; A. Ignaciuk, “No Man’s Land? Gendering Contraception in Family Planning Advice Literature in State-Socialist Poland (1950s–1980s),” *Social History of Medicine* 23, no. 4 (2020): 1327–1346; Kuźma-Markowska; more on Polish men and their identities during state-socialism: N. Jarska, “Men as Husbands and Fathers in Postwar Poland (1956–1975): Toward New Masculine Identities?” *Men and Masculinities* 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20910492> on-line version ahead of print.

137. “Druga ofiara aborcji,” *Głos dla Życia*, May 1991, 4.

138. W. Póltawska, “W obronie matki,” *Rodzina Katolicka* 81–85, no. 2–6 (1989): 57, DCF – CMCA.

139. W. Póltawska, “Wątpliwy obrońca,” *Źródło* no 47 (1992): 6–7.

140. “Cofnąć czas... Świadczenia kobiet zranionych aborcją,” *Głos dla Życia* nos. 3 and 4 (1996): 9.

141. I. Karolewska and K. Zielińska, “‘Defending the Unborn,’ ‘Protecting Women’ and ‘Preserving Culture and Nation’: Anti-abortion Discourse in the Polish Right-wing Press,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 24, no. 5 (2022): 673–697.

However, close scrutiny of the anti-abortion narratives complicates an easy conclusion that Polish anti-abortion activists blamed solely men for pressuring women to have abortions. The irresponsibility of men, stressed in the narrative, was reinforced according to the abortion opponents by the 1950s abortion legislation that the Polish anti-abortion movement combatted. For example, in an interview for a conservative magazine in 1990, the gynaecologist Włodzimierz Fijałkowski stressed that the abortion law “deprived fathers of the right to decide about the pregnancy.” Not being able to take the decision — Fijałkowski insisted — the potential father did not feel responsible.¹⁴² A similar argument was presented by Póltawska who strongly stated that “the law that allows for an unpunished killing of children [abortion — the authors] is at the same time the cause of the infantilization of men.”¹⁴³ In reproductive and population narratives in state-socialist Poland, men’s irresponsibility in reproduction was considered to be caused by their egoism, alcohol overconsumption, and corresponding brutality.¹⁴⁴ For Polish anti-abortion proponents, liberal abortion legislation was the potent cause of men’s irresponsibility.

In line with this narrative, the Polish anti-abortion movement in the 1980s undertook several initiatives to help women financially, because economic problems and lack of support were seen as the most acute causes of terminations. Women considering abortion were counselled via phone, whose number was circulated in churches and among religious organisations, and provided with material aid such as babies’ clothes.¹⁴⁵ A lay female anti-abortion activist Małgorzata Bal, involved in such efforts in a Warsaw parish in the 1980s, stressed that “some mothers cannot cope alone. It is extremely important that we are able to help so effectively that the mother can always accept the child already living within her [the foetus — the authors].”¹⁴⁶ Bal’s testimony is also telling in regard to the place and role of lay women in the Polish anti-abortion movement. In groups and milieus that were led by Catholic priests, lay women had an auxiliary function that could not develop into the leadership role as it happened in the United States in the 1970s or 1980s.¹⁴⁷ Some other strands of Polish anti-abortion movement presented very conservative narratives regarding the role and place of women in the society, recommending limitations in women’s employment and return to traditional marriages destroyed by communism.¹⁴⁸ Such anti-woman discourses strengthened in the 1990s, after the collapse of state socialism and criminalisation of abortion in early democratic Poland.

142. “Przeciwnik aborcji nie musi być katolikiem,” an interview with Włodzimierz Fijałkowski by Artur Matys, *Młoda Polska* no. 14 (1990): 10–11.

143. Póltawska, “W obronie matki,” 58.

144. Ignaciuk, “No Man’s Land”; Jarska, „Między równością.”

145. Drażkiewicz.

146. M. Bal, „Utworzyć dyżur ratowników życia,” *Głos dla Życia* no 1 (1991): 15.

147. Haugeberg.

148. Przyczyny i cele petycji, 11, PCLPFN-INR.

Conclusion

This article has explored anti-abortion activism in Ireland and Poland, predominantly focusing on the 1970s and 1980s. In writing this article, it became clear to us that this work is just a starting point. Future studies could help to illuminate Polish anti-abortion activism during state-socialism as a part of anti-communist efforts while in the Irish context, anti-abortion activism in the 1990s requires more scholarly attention. Future research could also explore the role of women within the anti-abortion movements in both countries.¹⁴⁹ Our work here has clearly shown the value of situating anti-abortion activism within a wider transnational movement. While it was beyond the scope of this article, future research might help to elucidate the influence of the American anti-abortion movement on the nature of anti-abortion ideas and activism in both countries, and more widely, the transnational nature of anti-abortion activism.

While the two countries clearly have very different political, legislative, social, and cultural contexts, there are lots of similarities in terms of the trajectories of anti-abortion activism in both states. In both countries, anti-abortion activism emerged as a reaction to new legislation: in Ireland, in response to the legalisation of contraception in the late 1970s and, in Poland, in the 1960s in response to the decriminalisation of abortion in 1956. Both movements relied on transnational anti-abortion networks and discourses, employed medical knowledge to legitimise their efforts, and represented women undergoing abortion as victims. In both countries, the Catholic religion and anti-abortion activism became intertwined and the Vatican, particularly during the papacy of John Paul II, had a considerable impact on Catholic institutions in relation to anti-abortion discourse and activism. In Poland, Catholic priests had a crucial role in leading the anti-abortion movement. In addition, anti-abortion rhetoric was adopted by Catholic pre-marital and marital counselling offered in several regions in Poland and the anti-abortion statements of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Karol Wojtyła were widely disseminated by Polish anti-abortion activists. In Ireland, lay activists such as members of SPUC tried to distance themselves from being branded as “Catholic,” however, Catholic bishops played a key role in the proliferation of anti-abortion sentiments leading up to the 1983 referendum and the establishment of the anti-abortion pregnancy counselling service CURA.

Moreover, it is clear that the American movement had a significant impact on the nature of anti-abortion campaigns in both countries. In Ireland, the visits of prominent American (and British) anti-abortion activists helped to mobilise groups campaigning on the issue, while American visual material such as photographs of aborted fetuses was used in Irish propaganda. In Poland, during the period of state-socialism, there was a transfer of knowledge and visual materials from the United States, with the US having a more

149. M. Avanza, “Using a Feminist Paradigm (Intersectionality) to Study Conservative Women: The Case of Pro-Life Activists in Italy,” *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 2 (2020): 552–80.

direct influence after the democratic transition. The Americans who actively disseminated their visual anti-abortion materials aided the Polish activists who in the 1970s and 1980s were not technologically capable of producing such materials by themselves, because of the lack of access to equipment and know-how. The impact of the Americans on the Polish anti-abortion movement during state-socialism shows American cultural hegemony that transcended the Iron Curtain.

Nevertheless, there are also differences between the anti-abortion activism in both countries, for example, regarding the representation of women as victims. In Ireland, women seeking abortion were depicted as “girls” who were exploited by clinics concerned with financial profits in countries which posed a negative, modernising influence (such as Britain), while in Poland, women seeking abortions were portrayed as the victims of their irresponsible husbands/potential fathers and ultimately of the liberal “communist” abortion legislation that allowed for terminations of pregnancy. In short, we have shown here the value of a comparative approach in illuminating the transnational aspects of anti-abortion activism.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable.