

I think the bigger picture is that the Roman Catholic Church has many problems dealing with sex and sexuality. The Church does not like women. That is the baseline. They see women as dangerous, as temptresses. All the strictures and prohibitions are really attempts to control women, to make sure that they continue to reproduce.

When you look at the history of the Church, the value of women has been reduced to that of a reproducer.

The Roman Catholic Church also does not like sex and sexuality. The only valid reason for sex is reproduction. This is a built-in ideology, preventing us to move to the next step of understanding that sex can be for pleasure, that it can enhance a couple's relationship.

The Catholic Church has to understand how current teachings propagate an ideology of male dominance. The idea that one's worth rests on reproduction encourages machismo among men, while reducing women to breeders. That is why the whole discussion around family planning has to be in the context of gender rights. ■

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Abortion in Pre-industrial Societies



Abortion was a normative practice in many societies prior to the development of sophisticated economic exchanges, including capitalism; the spread of colonialism; and the rise of the modern nation states. Various anthropological accounts indicate that abortion practices were largely defined by the dominant social relations in given societies.

In 1955, George Devereux compiled accounts on abortion from over 400 pre-industrial societies in order to “provide an objective proof for the valid and generally accepted—but, oddly enough, never systematically proven—axiom that cultural

diversity demonstrates the tremendous plasticity and variability of human behaviour.” His book, *A Study of Abortion in Primitive Societies* covers ethnic groups, mostly in the Andes, North America, Africa, Australia, and Polynesia. Women availed of abortion for various reasons, such as the following:

NOMADIC LIVING – Constantly moving from one place to another posed limitations to families. It was a custom among Cheyenne Indians not to have a second child until the firstborn was 10 years old. Pregnant women of Guaycuru (Brazil and Paraguay) resorted to abortion due to fears their husbands might leave them.

FAMILY PLANNING – Abortion was widely used then to control the number of children as in the cases of the Eskimos, Amazon Indians, Igorot (Philippines), Buru (Malaysia), Fiji (Fiji) and Malagasy (Madagascar), among many other societies.

UNWANTED FATHERS – Masai women (Kenya) availed of abortion when the fathers of their babies were alien, sick, or old. Pregnancy was also terminated in Tikopia (British Solomon Islands) when the father was unknown. Under the Japanese colonial law, Korea allowed abortion for pregnancies resulting from rape. Similarly, abortion was an option for Gunantuna women (Melanesia), whose children were fathered by close relatives.

Class structure also played a role in communities such as Sedang moi (Indochina), Tupinamba (Brazil), and Toradja (Celebes) when the father was a slave, and/or conversely, when a prince impregnated a woman slave. Abortion was also a recourse for poor Bali (Indonesia) women whose husbands were killed.

CHILD-BEARING AGE – Abortion was employed when pregnancies occurred among young girls who had not undergone puberty rites as in the case of the Maori (New Zealand), Masai, and Owambo (Namibia). In Formosa (now Taiwan), women were not allowed to conceive until they reached the age of 34 years and in some parts, 37.

Among the Chagga women (Tanzania), old age was also a ground for abortion. They were not encouraged to have babies after their daughters got married.

DIFFICULTY IN CHILD BIRTH - The Kai, Purari and Apinaye women (Papua New Guinea) dreaded pregnancy and the pains of childbirth. Purari women would climb the tall and smooth Pairu tree while Apinaye women created a compound, mainly consisting of tinguy shrub and urucu, and spread this on their bellies. Turkish women and native Americans living along the Zuni river (now a tributary of the Colorado river) likewise resorted to abortion once they foresaw that childbirth would be too difficult, especially in the case of triplets. There were also women such as those of the Chaco Indian communities who provoked a miscarriage during their first pregnancy to facilitate the delivery of their next child.

DEFORMED FETUS- There were instances when abortion was performed after the Efik mothers (Nigeria and Cameroon) learned the ill health of the babies in their wombs. Ethnic groups such as the Cocama (Peru) viewed a deformed fetus as a child of the spirits. Meanwhile, the Jivaro (Ecuador) and Dayak (Borneo) aborted their children when they were convinced that demons impregnated them.

COLONIAL RESISTANCE- Abortion was also used as a form of colonial resistance, especially in Australia, and in Spanish colonies in America. Apathy to the missionary activities in certain parts of what is now Australia and Samoa encouraged mothers to terminate their pregnancies. Abortion became rampant in Spanish colonies like Antilles and Guam, especially in cases where women were impregnated by the colonisers. There were also mothers who opted to have their babies aborted to save them from slavery. Devereux notes that *“these mass abortions went hand in hand with mass suicides, and represented a more or less definite attempt at race suicide.”*

Source: Devereux, George (1955). *A Study of Abortion in Primitive Societies*. New York: The Julian Press.