

getting stuck or failing to get unstuck is a mother's choice and a woman's personal failure.

Reference

Giroux, H. A. 1997. "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness." *Harvard Educational Review* 67 (2): 285-320.

Abortion and Nation *The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland*

Lisa Smyth
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005

Reviewed by Máire Leane

Abortion and Nation analyzes the ways in which abortion politics have been framed and reframed in Ireland over the past two decades. The discussions of abortion contained in three key daily newspapers, in parliamentary debates, and in the two governmental working-groups established on the topic provide the data sources on which Smyth's analysis is based. She argues convincingly that a hegemonic construction of Irish nationhood as essentially familial, Catholic, traditional, and heterosexual has shaped the nature of abortion debate in Ireland and has mitigated against the introduction of a right to reproductive choice.

In chapters four and five, Smyth demonstrates how during the successful 1983 campaign to introduce a constitutional ban on abortion, abortion was framed as a moral/religious issue with the anti-abortion stance constructed as representative of the traditional Catholic, familial ethos of the Irish nation. Within this frame, concerns for women's rights were marginalized while the rights of the foetus were strongly asserted.

As Smyth's analysis in chapters six and seven reveals, however, the 1992 "X case," and the outpouring of rage and compassion it generated, forced a reappraisal of this anti-abortion stance. "X," a fourteen-year-old girl pregnant as a result of rape, was prohibited by the Irish courts from travelling to England to procure an abortion. A subsequent Supreme Court decision permitted "X" to leave the country on the grounds that she was suicidal and that there was a substantial risk to her life. Smyth argues that following the "X case" press coverage of the abortion issue constructed the State as repressive. Furthermore,

anti-abortion moral absolutism was replaced by considerations of the complex realities of abortion, and increasing press space was given to a reproductive rights discourse. Smyth's analysis of the parliamentary debate surrounding the "X case" and subsequent official responses to it reveals, however, an official reframing of abortion as a medical issue distinct from a moral/religious issue, and a political failure to engage with more complex understandings of abortion. Within this context, the reproductive rights discourse, which gained ground following the "X case," became marginalized as pro-abortion groups adopted the pragmatic strategy of arguing on the basis of women's needs for medical services as distinct from their right to make choices.

The outcome of this reframing of abortion was evidenced in the publication of the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill in 2002. This proposed legislation allowed for abortion in the case of risk to a woman's life, rather than risk of self-destruction. A constitutional referendum reflecting this proposed legislation was rejected by a majority of less than one per cent in March 2002. Thus, after two decades of debate, a woman's right to abortion in Ireland exists only in the context of a serious medical threat to her life.

Smyth concludes that the various framings of abortion politics in Ireland since 1983 reflect an ongoing connection between abortion access and a politics of nationhood. Her reading of official responses to abortion—as a struggle to maintain a distinctive national identity while simultaneously meeting the standard of rights and compassion expected of a modern democratic nation-state—is original and exciting. Chapter One, which deals with the history of Irish abortion politics, and chapter two, which reviews feminist positions on abortion, are especially accessible to a general audience and could be read on a stand-alone basis. Overall, this work makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of material on abortion in Ireland and will engage readers interested in abortion, politics, sociology, or cultural studies.

A Lot to Learn ***Girls, Women and Education in the 20th Century***

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj
Toronto: Women's Press, 2005

Reviewed by Dorothy Lander

The appeal of this book, which author Helen Jefferson Lenskyj reveals on the first page of her Introduction, is its blend of biography and autobiography written as social history, and the opportunities it offers for comparing Lenskyj's mother's life and education with her own, and for comparing Australian and Canadian contexts of schooling and educational activism, especially anti-