

Culture in court : notes and reflections on abortion in Guam

Donald H. Rubinstein

Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Rubinstein Donald H. Culture in court : notes and reflections on abortion in Guam. In: Journal de la Société des océanistes, 94, 1992-1. pp. 35-44;

doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/jso.1992.2605>

https://www.persee.fr/doc/jso_0300-953x_1992_num_94_1_2605

Fichier pdf généré le 04/05/2018

Culture in court :

notes and reflections on abortion in Guam

by

Donald H. RUBINSTEIN *, PhD, MPH

Guam's recent anti-abortion law (PL 20-134) enacted in March 1990 is perhaps the most restrictive example of such legislation in any US flag area. Although the social, legal, and political aspects of the abortion debate in Guam provided a microcosm of the wider "Pro-Choice" vs "Pro-Life" confrontation in the US, in cultural terms the Guam debate was unique. The defense of Guam's anti-abortion law was presented in large measure as a protection of Guam's "special identity and heritage". In the defendant's memorandum in support of a partial motion for summary judgement, there were at least eight allusions to culture. The implicit argument was that the Guam Legislature, in passing the anti-abortion law, acted "to protect the indigenous... customs of... Guam" in regard to abortion. Social and religious leaders of Guam have presented the cultural argument in very explicit terms, by insisting that the Chamorro language lacks a term for "abortion", and that abortion was non-existent in indigenous Chamorro culture.

In other respects, the controversy surrounding Guam's anti-abortion law followed the form of such debates in the US mainland. Public rallies were held to endorse both sides, professional advocates from outside the community appeared soon afterwards to promote one cause or the other, and public leaders were called upon by the media to answer questions and define their position. Despite the insistence of island leaders that the issue was strictly a local matter, without legal or political implications outside of Guam, the debate quickly received national media atten-

tion throughout the US. Not only was it seen as a potential legal test at the US Supreme Court level of the current abortion rights guaranteed under *Roe vs Wade*, but the Guam law also had significant and unforeseen political repercussions for the territory, by seriously undermining, at least temporarily, US Congressional support of Guam's movement for self-determination (North, 1990).

The introduction of "culture" as a term in Guam's abortion debate is part of an increasingly prevalent process in the Pacific : the objectification and idealization of culture, and its rhetorical use in local and national level political discourse (Keesing, 1989). In this process, culture — including history and language — is mythologized and reformulated, in order to serve as rationalizations of contemporary social movements. Culture, custom, and tradition become powerful symbols in political discourse, and are molded and manipulated by local elites. Traditional culture is "reinvented" *ex cathedra* to legitimize new social ideologies or political structures, and to resolve contradictions between ancestral practices and current Christianity (Keesing, 1982).

While this process is a normal one of cultural inventiveness, it is nevertheless useful to reflect critically upon the resultant beliefs and statements. This paper offers a review of historical and ethnographic references to abortion in Guam and Micronesia. The material reviewed here is offered not as a way of "setting the record straight", but rather as a basis for a more informed and critical approach to cultural and historical understanding.

* Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam.

ABORTION IN CHAMORRO CULTURE.

The earliest historical reference that was found to abortion in Guam is in an 18th century centennial history of the Philippines Province and the Society of Jesus, published in 1749 and written by Pedro Murillo Velarde, a Jesuit priest and historian stationed in the Philippines (excerpt cited in McGrath, 1973 : 220). Velarde was evidently quoting an earlier writer's statement, but that source has not been located. Most likely he was citing either a comment from Jesuit letters written in the early 1700s from Guam, or from official reports around the time of the governorship of Lieutenant General Juan Antonio Pimentel (1709-1720).

The Jesuit historian Joannis Joseph Delgado was probably using Velarde's or the earlier source in a document he wrote in 1751. Delgado refers to abortion in a discussion of the catastrophic depopulation of the Chamorro people.

There is in said [Mariana] islands a governor appointed by the King, [which is] a useful and easy occupation since he has little governing to do, inasmuch as today, all the residents, including the Spaniards and the people from Manila who are living there, barely reach 3 000. According to some people, the cause of this diminution was a great epidemic from which many died. But others give other reasons, such as that they cannot abide the yoke of the Spaniards because of their great pride and haughtiness, and that they would like to live as they did in the past, in freedom and [following their] barbarous customs. Because of this, many hang themselves and others kill themselves [each other?]; and there are those who flee to other distant islands. The women, likewise, purposely sterilize themselves; or if they conceive, they find ways to abort, and some kill their children after birth in order to save them from the subjugation of the Spaniards (1751, Folio 83, trans. by M. Driver).

A possible allusion to Chamorros' self-inflicted deaths and abortions appears in a letter dated September 20, 1722, sent to the viceroy of New Spain (Mexico), reporting on the "Indians of the Marianas". This letter was written shortly after the repressive governorship of Pimentel, and was protesting the abusive administration. "...[T]here is no brake with which to restrain his [governor of the Mariana Islands] abuses and injustices toward the recently converted unfortunates and so everything is being notably reversed and the vexed Indians (seeing themselves in such an oppressive slavery) do things unwor-

thy of their professed faith" (Alcorobarratia, 1722, trans. M. Driver).

Velarde's 1749 observation was repeated in the multi-volume study by the Spanish historian Juan de la Concepción, another Jesuit priest based in the Philippines. Writing in 1788, de la Concepción was also considering the problem of the depopulation of the Chamorro people, which he attributed to several factors, including suicide, abortion and infanticide.

This very large diminution of population comes from the subjugation imposed upon them by the force of arms. As lovers of liberty they could not tolerate a foreign yoke. This became so painful for them that, not being able to free themselves of it, they preferred to lose their lives by hanging and by other desperate means. The women purposely sterilized themselves, and they threw their newborn children into the sea, convinced that an early death would free them of travails and a painful life [in death] they would be fortunate and happy. Subjugation was so despicable that, for them, it was the ultimate and most deplorable calamity (Volume 7 : 48-9, by M. Driver).

This phrase "purposely sterilized themselves" in de la Concepción is ambiguous, but is usually interpreted to refer to intentional abortion (Thompson, 1947 : 204-5; cf McGrath, 1973 : 220). This statement evidently is the basis for several other historical references to abortion in Chamorro culture. The statement was accepted and repeated by Abbé Rochon in 1783 (1891 : 83), Chamisso in 1817 (Kotzebue, 1967, Vol. 3 : 78-9), Freycinet in 1820 (1839 : 330), Ibáñez y García in 1886 (1990 : 83), and Beardsley in 1964 (1964 : 135). None of these writers disputed the earlier observation. Freycinet, who visited Guam in 1819, added his own contemporaneous observation that some Chamorro women aborted (1839 : 280, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 276).

Early twentieth century ethnographic accounts reflect a knowledge of abortion methods among Chamorros. Shizuo Matsuoka, a Japanese ethnographer in Saipan in the 1920s, wrote that "...abortion is widespread. The Chamorros drink *Ephedra vulgaris*, pinebark, and the root of abas (a tree) which they soak in water. They do this within three months after conception" (1927 : 367, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 276). Laura Thompson, an American anthropologist who conducted extensive studies of Chamorro culture and history in the 1930s, summarized four contemporary techniques of abortion in Guam

Several means of bringing on abortion are known. (1) Boil a small piece of ironwood (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) trunk, from which the bark has been removed, with *aguardiente*. Drink one cup from this brew three times. This is the most effective dose. (2) Boil the roots and leaves of the *chaguan lemae* (*Cyperus Kyllingia*) grass and drink a dose of this three or four times. (3) Mix ground *plementa* pepper with *aguardiente*, and drink one small glassful. (4) Grind *kapok* (*Ceiba pentandra*) root, boil, and drink (Thompson, 1947 : 201).

Occasionally abortions are induced artificially by one of the methods described on page 201. After an abortion the fœtus is usually buried near the house (Thompson, 1947 : 240).

ABORTION IN FILIPINO AND 17TH CENTURY HISPANIC CULTURE.

The knowledge and cultural acceptance of abortion methods in Filipino culture has relevance to evaluating the issue of abortion in contemporary Chamorro culture, owing to the long and close relationship of these two cultures in Guam. Chamorro language and culture during the past three centuries has assimilated innumerable items of Filipino origins. One might argue that the imprint of Filipino culture has been at least as pervasive if not more so than that of Hispanic culture on Chamorro culture. Population numbers are one rough measure of cultural influence. Mixed Chamorro-Filipino marriages by the mid-1700's were more common than Chamorro-Spanish marriages, and by the early 1800s, Filipinos outnumbered Spanish in Guam by nearly two to one (Thompson, 1947 : 35-36).

There is a large cultural repertoire of folk abortifacients in the Philippines. Over three dozen techniques have been described (Damo, 1970, Demetria, 1969). These have been summarized (Yu and Liu, 1980 : 137-141) under seven categories, including (1) external applications with herbal concoctions ; (2) external pressure, including combinations of forceful massage and squeezing of the abdomen, applying a poultice to the woman's abdomen, and applying weight to a bamboo pole placed across the woman's abdomen ; (3) internal intrusions, including the insertion of wires or fingers into the vaginal canal, or the application of a hot enema ; (4) use of chemicals ingested orally, including a variety of locally produced pharmacological agents, quinine, ergot tablets, paregoric, and alcoholic drinks ; (5) use of inanimate objects, such as infusions made from magnetic stones that are soaked in water or ground and mixed with water ; (6)

herbal preparations for internal consumption, which is the most commonly used method.

It is noteworthy that abortion techniques are culturally elaborated in the Philippines, despite their illegality, the disapproval of the Roman Catholic Church, and the "restrictive sexual mores" (*op cit*, 141). Also, it appears that the practice is equally common in rural and urban areas, and among the low, middle, and upper class Filipinos (*op, cit*, 139-40).

Chamorro society underwent a period of profound and rapid restructuring following the Spanish invasion and conquest in the latter third of the seventeenth century. It is relevant therefore to consider historical attitudes and practices regarding abortion in Hispanic society of the period, which may have influenced Chamorro attitudes that emerged from the early cultural contact with the Spanish, and the enormous disruption that ensued.

Payne's recent historical overview of Spanish Catholicism (1984) makes the point that seventeenth century Spanish sexual mores were "rather relaxed" and that the cities were characterized by crime, prostitution, vice, and a "cynical attitude toward common morality" (*op. cit.*, p. 59). The institution of marriage was often mocked, and even clerical guidelines on abortion were "remarkably tolerant" (Kamen, 1980 : 296, cited *op. cit.*, p. 59). Abortion and infanticide were both practiced as the common post-conception means of family size limitation for centuries in Europe (Gies, 1987: 13 ; Flinn, 1981 : 46), and neither contraception nor abortion were terribly controversial subjects (Gies, 1987 : 304). It does not seem likely, therefore, that Chamorro society would have encountered and assimilated strong anti-abortion cultural values from seventeenth century Spanish administrators, relocated prisoners, or even clerics.

ABORTION IN OTHER MICRONESIAN CULTURES.

The numerous references indicating cultural knowledge and practice of abortion in Micronesian societies outside of Guam bear on the issue of abortion in Chamorro society in two ways. First, Micronesia is a "culture area" which, though composed of a number of distinct societies, shows some common cultural patterns including matrilineal transmission of land rights and clan (descent group) membership, ranked social classes based on inheritance and presumed priority of settlement in particular estates or villages, similar material

culture adaptation to tropical horticulture and fishing, and a related family of languages. On the basis of the widespread presence and cultural rationale of a practice such as abortion throughout the Micronesian area, one may infer that the practice also had a place in Chamorro culture prior to the Spanish invasion.

Secondly, the frequent contacts between Chamorro people and the peoples of the Caroline Islands provided ample opportunities for Chamorro exposure to and familiarity with abortion practices among related cultural groups. Carolinians from the Woleai-Satawal-Puluwat area were making frequent trading voyages to Guam in ancient times, and by the early to mid-1800s there were permanent settlements of Carolinians in Saipan and Guam. Likewise, significant numbers of Chamorros migrated to the Caroline Islands in the first two decades of the twentieth century. By 1926 there were two hundred Chamorros living in Palau, Yap, and Truk (Hornbostel, 1926 : 196).

Today there are an estimated 3 000 Palauans living in Guam, and an estimated 5 000 Micronesians from the Caroline Islands. Many marriages between Chamorros and other Micronesians have taken place, as well as daily informal contacts. The traditional knowledge of abortion among these Palauan and Carolinian residents in Guam is another source of cultural knowledge about and familiarity with abortion in contemporary Guam society.

In Palau, abortion techniques have been described in detail by several anthropologists who collected information from Palauan women.

Abortion occurs during the second or third month of pregnancy, generally by recourse to poisonous plants (Krämer, 1926 : 269, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 306).

Traditional "medicines" were once used to abort an unwanted child... Modern attempts to abort include using traditional medicines, drinking a quart of soy sauce or alcohol in the belief that the resultant nausea will abort the fetus, and deliberate jumps or falls (Smith, 1983 : 178).

The usual method is to take some potion orally. This potion may be derived from the bark of the *ngas* tree. After drinking it the individual is encouraged to exercise strenuously and later is massaged. The final phase of this method is to sit in cold sea water for a while. Dilation and physical injury is also practiced after the fashion of Yap. A poison from the *dub* tree, which is used in killing fish, is inserted into a bamboo tube that has been sharpened to a rough point. The point is then forced into the cervical os breaking the skin and permitting the

poison to reach the blood stream (Mc Grath, 1973 : 219).

Abortions were sought through exaggerated physical activity and by the use of abortifacients (*olecheicheb*) compounds of plant leaves which were taken as infusions. These compounds are still in use today. A woman who suspected a pregnancy might also attempt to abort by repeatedly jarring her abdomen by flopping face forward into shallow water or jumping from some elevation on land and landing on her feet. Both physical approaches are said to have been kept up until internal bleeding was induced (Force, 1972 : 55n).

Among the Southwest Islands of Palau — which are culturally related closely to Ulithi and the Outer Islands of Yap — abortion is also practiced. "In Sonsorol, Merir, and Pulo Anna women procure abortions by means of a decoction of pandanus roots" (Fritz, 1907 : 666, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 283).

Abortion practices in Yap were noted by German ethnographers in the early twentieth century. "Though the women are fond of children, they have no great desire to give birth to them. As a result, they practice abortion very generally. The massage of the belly is quickly successful" (Reichstag, 1903 : 5524, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 353). "Abortion and contraception are widely practiced by young women lest they should lose their beauty... Abortion is looked on as shameful and is a reason for divorce but is not a legally punishable action" (Senfft, 1907 : 153, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 354). "Infanticide does not exist but women, in the first years of marriage, are known to abort, their aim being to preserve themselves" (Salesius, 1907 : 69, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 354). "Quite frequently sterility is desired and artificially induced through abortifacient media" (Müller, 1918 : 224, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 353-4).

Abortion practices and depopulation in Yap were also studied in detail by a research team from the Harvard Peabody Museum shortly after World War II (Hunt, *et al.* 1949, Hunt, *et al.* 1954, Schneider, 1955). They documented three classes of abortion practices : magical manipulations, the consumption of boiled concentrated sea water to induce vomiting and severe cramps ; and the insertion of a plug made of hibiscus leaves into the cervical os, accompanied by self-inflicted wounding of the cervix. It is interesting to note (Underwood, 1973 : 116) that these techniques are very similar to those described to a German physician by Chamorro women residing in Yap prior to World War I, and corroborated by Yapese informants (Kohl-

Larsen, 1957 : 117-118). This reference to Chamorros' familiarity with abortion practices of a related Micronesian society provides evidence of cultural borrowing of knowledge regarding abortion.

In Chuuk, techniques of abortion are also well known (Gladwin, 1952 : 158). A German ethnographer wrote in the early 20th century :

The Trukese do not know how to prevent conception. Abortion, on the other hand, does occur occasionally among those for whom it is too burdensome to raise a child, especially in the case of extramarital pregnancies... Medicines made of certain herbs, massage, and jumping from high objects serve as the means (Bollig, 1927 : 101).

An ethnographic study of Chuuk conducted shortly after World War II corroborated the earlier reports.

In the olden days, girls were sometimes aborted by their mothers to keep them from getting old too fast. This was accomplished by downward massage. They rub the abdomen vigorously downward. This may be done by the husband himself. They sometimes also jump vigorously up and down, on the belly. If this does not work, nothing else is possible. This is no longer done, because nowadays [1947] the women of Romonum desire children. Women did abort in olden days so that they could continue to engage in sexual relations. Women pound and massage the abdomen, being perhaps assisted therein by their husbands "if they want to". They also jump up and down (Gladwin, n. d., n. p., quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 342-3).

The techniques of abortion are widely known and consist in violent jumping or massage of the abdomen. However, while this used to occur in the past it is said not to be practiced any more. This statement must be considered suspect : not only do the doctors in the administration hospital report cases of women with entirely normal pregnancies who suddenly lose their babies, but it is also hard to understand how the women so anonymously reported not to want children can realize this wish and still maintain a high level of sexual activity, for contraceptives are or were at the time of this study [1947-51] unknown (Gladwin and Sarason, 1953 : 133).

Ethnographic reports regarding abortion in Pohnpei are equivocal. A nineteenth century visitor reported that "a decoction of the leaves and seeds [of the *yol*, a species of giant convolvulus] possesses properties akin to those of ergot rye [and is] much used by the native women for procuring abortion" (Christian, 1899 : 352, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 312). Another visitor several years later wrote that "abortion by massage is allegedly a fairly recent introduction from the Gilberts"

(Hahl, 1901 : 11, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 312). German ethnographers on Pohnpei in 1908 reported that "the people of Ponape deny that they have techniques of abortion or that they practice it. They do, however, profess to know a sterilizing drug" (Hambruch and Eilers, 1936 : 83, quoted Devereux, 1976 : 312). These same ethnographers also wrote "Abortion is fairly common in the first year of marriage. They first drink kava to drug themselves and then they massage the uterus. This may explain the rule that kava is not approved for women. However, women do take it secretly. They are not punished for this, although it is deemed improper for them to do so. Abortion is considered very wrong indeed and the lovers usually marry when the girl gets pregnant" (*op. cit.*). American ethnographers in Pohnpei have confirmed the cultural knowledge of abortion. Riesenberg noted two medical recipes for abortifacients, as well as an indigenous Pohnpeian term for abortifacient, meaning literally "destroys pregnancy" (1948 : 421, 427-8, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 312). Fischer also indicated that abortion is a traditional practice (1970 : 81); methods include massage and eating green mangoes (*op. cit.*, 125).

East of Pohnpei, in Kosrae, abortion has also been documented.

Abortion has always been known, and was employed by young girls as well as married women. In the case of the first, in former times the deciding reason for it is supposed to have been that fact that illegitimate children detracted from the girl's worth and respect. They readily admit that the bad habit was still very much in vogue nowadays [1908-10]. Older women perform the abortion. Massage alone was administered as the means for effecting it (Sarfert, 1920, Chapter 7 : 10).

A more recent study has revealed additional methods of abortion in Kosrae, including the use of herbs, the insertion of objects into the cervix, and violent activity (Ritter, 1978 : 378).

In the Marshall Islands, abortion is also practiced. "If possible [Marshallese] try to avoid that unmarried girls or newly wed women bear a child. In order to avoid fertilization, the male semen is artificially removed after sexual intercourse. Abortion (*jibun*) is rare with married women, but frequent with girls. They apply massage (*aamor*) with the hand or now also with bottles, assisted by hot baths" (Kramer, 1938 : 179). Another study of Marshallese culture (Rynkiewicz, 1972 : 12) cited an earlier German source (Erdland,

1914 : 124) that also documented abortion practices by massage and plant medicines, as well as birth control through the removal of semen after intercourse.

In the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati), the easternmost island group in the Micronesian culture area, abortion practice were noted by the visiting physician-missionary Luther Gulick in 1860. "So prolific are they [the Gilbertese] as yet on the greater number of islands that their population is deliberately limited by practicing abortion to prevent too great a number of mouths..." (1861-2 : 69). Meinicke (1876 : 342) also mentioned that Gilbertese women practice abortion at certain periods (quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 233). Other ethnographers have confirmed these observations. "There is no infanticide, but abortion is practiced by women who have more than two children. The operation is performed by old women who crudely maltreat the abdomen" (Finsch, 1893 : 31, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 233). "The Gilbertese Islanders... pound the abdomen of pregnant women with stones, or force the foetus downward by winding a cord tightly about her body" (Thomson, 1908 : 224, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 234). "In the Gilbert Islands abortion was very common, due to the infertility of the soil and the anxieties over food resulting therefrom" (Ploss, *et al*, 1927, 2 : 516, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 234).

Abortion has also been noted in Nauru, at the geographic periphery of the Micronesian culture area. Nauru is more similar to "nuclear Micronesia" (the Caroline and Marshall Islands) than to the Gilberts (Alkire, 1977 : 80).

Although children are always desired and although a pregnancy is considered always to bring good health, in some cases a termination of pregnancy might be desirable, or a pregnancy might even be prevented. Therefore, there are *contraceptive practices* [orig. emphasis] as there are in many Pacific islands. In Nauru, massage and potion are the two techniques used to interrupt or prevent a pregnancy. A special massage of the genitals of the woman, as well as her abdomen, will bring about a miscarriage, and a similar massage is able to prevent a pregnancy. Although these very precise and competent massages have to be done by specialists, they are neither unusual nor secret (Petit-Skinner, 1981 : 55).

Both abortion and infanticide have been noted as causes of the small population of Nukuoro (Kubary, 1900 : 14, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 302). Nukuoro is a Polynesian outlier in the Micronesian geographic area, that has a tradition of contact with Pohnpei

and the central Caroline Islands. "If, because of poverty, they [Nukuoro Islanders] decide to dispose of a child, they try to abort it first by pressing and maltreating the abdomen" (Kubary, 1900 : 36, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 302). "Queen Kauna [of Nukuoro] lost her son after birth. To cause her subjects to share her mourning, she ordered all small boys to be killed. Then, still not satisfied, she ordered all pregnant women to abort" (Eilers, 1934 : 217-89, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 302-3).

Evidently there is only one published study of a Micronesian society — Ulithi Atoll in the outer islands of Yap — that denies any cultural knowledge for abortion. "Abortion, like the prevention of conception, is not practiced, nor are methods for causing abortion known... It is claimed by Ulithians that abortion and infanticide were not even practiced in the days when Christianity was weak and the population greater" (Lessa, 1950 : 192). In contradiction to this statement, however, is information from a Ulithian man trained in anthropology (Josede Figirliyong, personal communication, May 1990), that Ulithian young women abort their pregnancies by violent activity or over-exertion, such as by jumping or carrying heavy objects or running. Shortly after the Outer Islands High School in Ulithi was established, providing the first opportunity for Ulithian girls to pursue an education locally, there were several known cases of young female students aborting their pregnancies. Several aborted fetuses were found near the school during its first years of operation. Apparently the motive for abortion was that the young women wanted to continue their education, rather than marry and assume the responsibilities of motherhood. Whether or not abortion was part of the traditional medical knowledge and practice on Ulithi, the opportunity for girls to pursue an education provided an incentive to terminate pregnancy by whatever means available.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE.

Indigenous linguistic terms for abortion provide further evidence that the practice was culturally recognized in Micronesian societies. If the practice was unknown or was a foreign cultural technique, then it is likely that the indigenous language would either lack a word for intentional abortion, or would have borrowed a foreign word. For example, suicide by hanging evidently was not a traditional method of self-inflicted death in the Marshall

Islands, although other methods of suicide were practiced. There was no indigenous term for suicide by hanging until about 1930, when a Kosraean sailor hanged himself aboard ship near Jaluit in the Marshall Islands. Since then, suicide by hanging has been called "*kilaba*", a word derived from the name of the man who hanged himself (Alfred Capelle, personal communication, September 1985).

In Chamorro, the two terms "*maffak*" and "*pokká*" are both given as translations of "abort" (Spanish *abortar*) in the dictionary by Fr. Ibañez del Carmen (1865 : 3). Both terms generally connote "shatter, crack open, break into fragments, burst". The Guam Capuchin priest, Rev. P. Román María de Vera, compiled a Chamorro dictionary in 1932 which also gave both the Chamorro terms the meaning "abortion", among other general meanings (165, 226). The more recent dictionary by Topping, Ogo and Dungca (1975) glosses only "*pokká*" as "abortion" (*op. cit.*, 170) although the word "*maffak*" is also included (*op. cit.*, 128). Of the two terms, "*pokká*" is a transitive verb which corresponds to the English verb "abort", while "*maffak*" connotes "to miscarry" and is formed from the passive marker "*ma*" prefixed to the stative verb stem "*ffak*", meaning "broken". Contemporary Chamorro suruhana understand "*pokká*" to mean intentional abortion (Anthony Ramirez, personal communication, May 1990).

In Palauan, the term "*melécheb*", a transitive verb, has the general meaning "to remove (something) from wherever it is attached or stuck" and also has the specific meaning "to perform abortion on" (McManus, 1977 : 151-2). There is also a derived term (instrument noun) "*olécheb*" meaning "medicine to bring on an abortion".

In both Chamorro and Palauan languages, there are terms apparently in use that connote intentional abortion. In other Micronesian languages, such as Ulithian-Woleaian and Marshallese, terms that primarily refer to miscarriage ("*mmoi*" in Ulithian) or stillbirth ("*jibun*" in Marshallese) are also applied to abortion (Josede Figirliyong, personal communication, May 1990 ; Abo *et al* 1976 : 102 ; Kramer 1938 : 179).

DISCUSSION : THE CULTURAL RATIONALE FOR ABORTION IN MICRONESIA.

The very widespread occurrence of abortion in societies throughout the world and at different times of human history has led some

scholars to conclude that the practice is universal. Devereux, summarizing an exhaustive review of abortion in 400 societies, wrote that "*there is every indication that abortion is an absolutely universal phenomenon, and that it is impossible even to construct an imaginary social system in which no woman would ever feel at least impelled to abort*" (1976 : 161 [orig. emph.]). Historical, ethnographic, and linguistic evidence from Micronesian societies lends support to this conclusion.

An examination of abortion practices within Micronesian societies also demonstrates the dynamic and adaptive quality of culture. In different societies and at different times, abortion practices have served different cultural purposes. Techniques have apparently been borrowed from one society into another, and have likely been invented when necessary. Attitudes towards abortion have changed and continue to change, in response to changing material conditions and outside value systems.

One of the historical foundations for abortion in Micronesian societies involves an institutionalized form of concubinage that functioned in traditional Palauan, Yapese, and Chamorro societies. Young unmarried women took up residence as servants or concubines in the bachelor men's clubhouses of other villages or districts. Their status — and that of their family and village — benefited considerably if they could secure a liaison or marriage with a wealthy man, who would give valuables as bridewealth to the girl's family and clan. In Guam, this cultural practice was stamped out by the first Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century (Hezel, 1989 : 22), while in Palau the system continued to function until the late nineteenth century (Vidich, 1949 : 37-8, 54-7) and in Yap a similar practice continued until the early twentieth century (Lingenfelter, 1975 : 82). Several writers have commented on the relation of abortion to institutionalized concubinage and the prestige of unmarried woman. "Formerly [Palauan] girls used to abort extensively by means of drugs, when the custom of keeping girls in the men's house promised the long maintenance of youthful charm" (Born, 1907 : 287, quoted in Devereux 1976 : 306). "The [Yapese] girls in the "*bāwai*" [bachelor house] are careful not to get pregnant because, in that case, they must leave the house and must marry. Consequently, such girls practice abortion most intensively" (Reichstag, 1907 : 5524, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 354).

A related cultural issue is the status of women generally in Micronesia, predomi-

nantly a matrilineal culture area, in which a person's land rights, group membership, social identity, and post-marital residence generally follow the female line. One might expect that female status and women's rights over their reproduction would find more cultural support in Micronesian societies than in more male-oriented societies, such as Melanesia. Furthermore, as female status opportunities change in Micronesia, abortion practices may also change. The example from Ulithi shows how new educational opportunities for young women may become a reason for delaying marriage and childbirth, and consequently can affect attitudes and practices regarding abortion.

Traditional abortion practices in Micronesia must also be considered in the context of cultural adaptations to islands with limited land area and resources. Many of the Micronesian islands, especially the "high" islands, supported indigenous populations that were larger at the time of European contact than they are today. These societies had developed a variety of ways to maintain an equilibrium between people and limited land resources. People and land were continually "balanced" through the redistributive effects of warfare, exchange systems, and customary child adoption. Population growth was kept in check through the practice of delayed marriage, long postpartum sex avoidance for women, sexual abstinence for men involved in a variety of specialized activities, and abortion. In some Micronesian societies that suffered devastating demographic reversals (Yap, for example), a conscious decision was evidently made to abandon many of the former practices of sexual abstinence, that acted to limit population growth (Hunt, *et al.*, 1949 : 185-6).

The exceptional historical circumstances surrounding the Spanish conquest of Guam provided a special context for abortion practices. The first historical references to abortion in Micronesia suggest that Chamorro women aborted their pregnancies as a desperate form of resistance to the invasion and conquest by the Spanish. During the first forty years after missionization occurred on Guam in 1668, the Chamorro people were decimated by disease and warfare. The few thousand islanders who survived suffered enormous cultural disruption caused by the forced relocation and plantation labor imposed by the Spanish conquerors. Reports of mass suicides, and the prevention of childbirth by women sterilizing themselves, went hand-in-hand with reports of abortion during this period. It is noteworthy

that other Spanish-dominated people in the New World suffered reportedly similar epidemics of abortion connected with mass suicide. Arawak women in the Antilles aborted — allegedly due to Spanish oppression — by means of well-known plant poisons "and then followed the example of their men and hung themselves" (Wisse, 1933 : 211 quoted in Devereux 1976 : 183, 239-40). Similarly, Chontal Indians "agreed to avoid all contact with their women, to use all means to prevent births and to abort any possible pregnancy" (Peschel, 1877 : 431-2, quoted in Devereux, 1976 : 210).

CONCLUSION.

This paper has sought to show that the inclusion of "culture" as a term in the contemporary legal debate over abortion rights in Guam — in particular, the argument that "abortion was non-existent in Chamorro culture" — involves a misreading of the historical and ethnographic record, in two senses. First is a factual inaccuracy. On the basis of this review it is fair to say that abortion methods were known and practiced by Chamorros at the time of the Spanish invasion and during the early period of Spanish occupation on Guam. Furthermore, the ethnographic record indicates that techniques of abortion are known and practiced in all the major Micronesian island groups, including Palau, Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru. It is also evident that post-contact Chamorro society received cultural influences from Micronesian and Filipino peoples who had extensive knowledge of abortion methods and who practiced abortion.

Second is a conceptual difficulty. Putting the question in the form, "is abortion part of Chamorro culture?" implies that "culture" is a sort of unwritten inventory of behavioral traits and ideas — uniform throughout a society, grounded in some "traditional" or distant past, and preserved in unchanging form from generation to generation. It implies also a simple dichotomy between the presence or absence of abortion. Contrasting with this rhetorical version of culture is a view of culture as dynamic, adaptive, inventive, and heterogeneous.

It is likely that new forms of abortion have been invented when necessary. The spate of abortions that reportedly occurred on the heels of the Spanish conquest of Guam may

well have been one such cultural improvisation. Chamorros and other Micronesians at the time of European contact surely possessed adequate anatomical and botanical knowledge to develop abortion techniques, though crude and dangerous, if necessity arose. Even in Micronesian societies in which abortion was extensively practiced, the acceptance or approval of abortion was conditional, and was related to the age and status of the woman, and the nature of her sexual liaison. No Micronesian society embraced an ideology of either unconditional acceptance or absolute rejection of abortion, or held a position of total ignorance of abortion techniques. To suggest that such was the case is a rhetorical exercise in cultural myth-making.

REFERENCES CITED

- ABO T., BENDER B. W., CAPELLE A., and DEBRUM T., 1976. — *Marshallese-English Dictionary*. PALI Language Texts : Micronesia. University Press of Hawaii. Honolulu.
- ALCOROBARRATIA A. de., 1968. Letter to the viceroy of Nueva España, September 20, 1722. Reprinted in Documents Relating to Micronesia. Translations from originals which are in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico. Translated by M. Driver. MARC Working Papers 13, Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam. Guam.
- ALKIRE W. H., 1977. — *An introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia*. 2nd Ed. Cummings. Menlo Park, California.
- BEARDSLEY C., 1964. — *Guam Past and Present*. Charles E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo.
- BOLLIG L., 1927. — *Die Bewohner der Truk-Inseln. Religion, Leben, und Kurze Grammatik eines Mikronesiervolkes*. HRAF translation. Aschendorff. Munster.
- BORN R. L., 1907. — Die Palau-Inseln. *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 17 : p. 286-289.
- CHRISTIAN, F. W., 1899. — *The Caroline Islands*. Methuen. London.
- CONCEPCIÓN J. de la, 1788. — *Historia General de Philipinas*. Por el Hermano Balthasar Mariano, Donado Francilcano. Manila.
- DAMO N. T., 1970. — *The Midwives : A Functional Analysis of Social Change*. MA Thesis. University of San Carlos. Cebu, Philippines.
- DELGADO J. J., 1751. — *História Geral Sacroprofana, Política, y Religiosa de las Yslas de el Poniente Llamadas Philipinas*. Escribirla un Religioso de la Compañía de Jesús. (Microfilm of partial print-out from Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. In Spanish Documents Collection, Micronesian Area Research Center, Guam).
- DEMETRIA A. M., 1969. — *Folk Methods of Birth Control*. MA Thesis. University of San Carlos. Cebu, Philippines.
- DEVEREUX G., 1976. — *A Study of Abortion in Primitive Societies*. Rev. Ed. International Universities Press. New York.
- EILERS A., 1934. — *Inseln um Ponape (Kapingamarangi, Nukuor, Ngatik, Mokil; Pingelap)*. *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910*. G. Thilenius, ed. II, B, VIII, p. 1-464. Friederichsen DeGruyter and Co. Hamburg.
- ERDLAND A., 1914. — *Die Marshall-Insulaner. Leben und Sitte, Sinn und Religion eines Südseevolkes*. Ethnologisches-Anthropos Bibliothek : Internationale Sammlung Ethnologischer Monographien, 2 (1). Münster in Westf.
- FORCE R. W. and FORCE M., 1972. — *Just One House : A Description and Analysis of Kinship in the Palau Islands*. B. P. Bishop Mus. Bull., 235.
- FINSCH O., 1893. — *Ethnologische Erfahrungen und Belegstücke aus der Südsee*. K. k. Naturhist. Hofmus. in Wien. Annales 8.
- FISCHER J. L., 1970. — *The Eastern Carolines*. (Reprint of 1957 ed.) HRAF Press. New Haven.
- FLINN M. W., 1981. — *The European Demographic System, 1500-1820*. Johns Hopkins University. Baltimore.
- FREYCINET L. C. D. de., 1839. — *Voyage autour du monde exécuté sur les corvettes de S. M. l'Uranie et la Physicienne pendant les années 1817-1820, Histoire du Voyage*. Livre III. Iles Mariannes. Pillet Aîné. Paris.
- FRITZ G., 1907. — Eine Reise nach Palau, Sonso und Tobi. *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 18 : p. 659-668.
- GIES F. and GIES J., 1987. — *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages*. Harper and Row. New York.
- GLADWIN T., n. d. — *Truk Field Notes*. MS, Yale University HRAF.
- GLADWIN T., 1952. — *Personality and Development on Truk*. PhD Diss., Dept. Anthropology, Yale University.
- GLADWIN T. and SARASON S. B., 1953. — *Truk : Man in Paradise*. Viking Fund Pub. Anthropology, 23. Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. New York.
- GULICK L. H., 1861-62. — *Lectures on Micronesia*. Typescript version edited by D. R. Siguenza and W. L. Wuerch. Originally in *The Polynesian*, Honolulu. Reprinted in *52nd Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for 1943*, p. 6-55.
- HAHL A., 1901. — Mittheilungen über Sitten und rechtliche Verhältnisse auf Ponape. *Ethnologisches Notizblatt*, 2 : p. 1-13.
- HAMBRUCH P. and EILERS A., 1936. — *Ponape, Part II. Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910*. G. Thilenius, ed. II, B, VII, XI, p. 1-386. Friederichsen De Gruyter and Co. Hamburg.
- HEZEL F. X., 1989. — *From Conquest to Colonization : Spain in the Mariana Islands 1690 to 1740*. Saipan, Mariana Islands. Division of Historic Preservation.
- HORNBOSTEL H. G., 1926. — *A Census of the Chamorro People*. *Guam Recorder*, 3.
- HUNT E. E. Jr., KIDDER N. R. and SCHNEIDER D. M., 1954. — *The Depopulation of Yap*. *Hum. Biol.*, 26(1) : p. 21-51.
- HUNT E. E. Jr., KIDDER N. R., SCHNEIDER D. M. and STEVENS W. D., 1949. — *The Micronesians of Yap and Their Depopulation. Report of the Peabody Museum Expedition to Yap Island, Micronesia, 1947-1948*. Coor-

- minated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology. Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Cambridge MA.
- IBÁÑEZ DEL CARMAN A., 1865. *Diccionario Español-Chamorro*. Imp. de Ramirez y Giraudier. Manila.
- IBÁÑEZ Y GARCÍA L. de, 1990. — The History of the Marianas with Navigational Data, and of the Caroline and Palau Islands. (Translated and annotated by Marjorie G. Driver, from Historia de las Islas Marianas... Paulino V. Sabatel. Granada. 1886). Micronesian Area Research Center. Guam.
- KÁMEN H., 1980. *Spain in the Later Seventeenth Century, 1665-1700*. London.
- KEESING R. M., 1982. — Kastom in Melanesia : An Overview. In R. M. Keesing and R. Tonkinson, eds. Reinventing Traditional Culture : The Politics of Kastom in Island Melanesia. *Mankind*, 13 : p. 297-301.
- KEESING R. M., 1989. — Creating the Past : Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1 (1 & 2) : p. 19-42.
- KOHL-LARSEN E., 1957. — *Unter roten Hibiskus-Blüten : ein Südseebuch*. Erich Röth-Verlag. Kassel.
- KOTZEBUE O. von., 1967. *A Voyage of Discovery into the South Sea... 1815-1818*. Biblioteca Australiana N° 17. N. Israel. Amsterdam. Da Capo Press. New York. (Facsimile reprint of 1821 original, 3 vols, translation from Russian by H. E. Lloyd. Longman, Hurst, et al. London).
- KRÄMER A., 1926. *Palau. Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910*. G. Thilenius, ed. II, B, III, iii, p. 1-362. Friederichsen, De Gruyter and Co. Hamburg.
- KRÄMER A., 1938. *Ralik-Ratak*. L. Friederichsen. Hamburg. (Translation by the Pacific Islands Program, University of Hawaii).
- KUBARY J. S., 1900. Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Nukuoro- oder Monteverde-Inseln (Karolinen-Archipel). Reprinted from *Mitteilungen der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Hamburg*, 16 : p. 71-138. 1900. Friederichsen. Hamburg.
- MCGRATH T. B., 1973. Abortion : Some Observations About Guam. *J. Soc. Oc.*, 29 (39) : p. 218-221.
- MCMANUS E. G., 1977. — *Palauan-English Dictionary*. Edited and expanded by Lewis S. Josephs with the assistance of Masa-aki Emesiochel. PALI Language Texts : Micronesia. University Press of Hawaii. Honolulu.
- MEINICKE C. E., 1876. *Die Inseln des Stillen Oceans*, Vol. II : *Polynesien und Mikronesien*. Froberg. Leipzig.
- MÜLLER W., 1918. — *Yap. Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910*. G. Thilenius, ed. II, B, II, p. 1-811 (p. 1-380), 2 vols. L. Friederichsen and Co. Hamburg.
- NORTH D., 1990. The Right of the Unborn. *Pac. Is. Monthly*, 60 (5) : p. 23-4.
- PAYNE S. G., 1980. — *Spanish Catholicism : An Historical Overview*. University of Wisconsin Press. Madison.
- PESCHEL O. F., 1877. *Geschichte des Zeitalters der Entdeckungen*. King. Leipzig.
- PETTIT-SKINNER S., 1981. — *The Nauruans*. MacDuff Press. San Francisco.
- PLOSS H., BARTELS M., and BARTELS P., 1927. — *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde*. New ed., rev. by Ferdinand Baron von Reitzensten. 3 vols. Berlin.
- REICHSTAG, 1903. Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der deutschen Schutzgebiete in Afrika und in der Südsee, 1901-1902. Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstages. X. Legislaturperiode, 2. Seccion, 1900-03. VIII. Anlageband, N°. 814, p. 5301-5311. Appendix F II : Missionsberichte, p. 5482-84 : H : Medizinalberichte VII : West Karolinen (Dr. Born), p. 5519-34. Berlin.
- RIESENBERG S. H., 1948. — Magic and Medicine in Ponape. *Southwestern J. Anthropol.*, 4 : p. 406-429.
- RITTER P. L., 1978. — Repopulation of Kosrae : Population and Social Organization on a Micronesian High Island. PhD Diss., Dept. Anthropology, Stanford University.
- ROCHON Abbé A. M. de (ed.), 1783. *Crozet's Voyage to Tasmania, New Zealand, the Ladrone Islands, and the Philippines in the Years 1771-1772*. Truslove and Shirley. London. 1891. (Trans. H. Ling Roth from Nouveau Voyage à la mer du Sud Commencé sous les Ordres de M. Marion. Paris.)
- RYNKIEWICH M. A., 1972. Demography and social structure on Arno Atoll. Prepared for Conference on Atoll Population Structure. East-West Center. Honolulu.
- SALESIUS P. Fr., 1907. *Die Karolinen-Insel Yap*. Süsserott. Berlin.
- SARFERT E., 1920. — Kosrae. L. Friederichsen and Co. Hamburg. (Unpublished translation by Pacific Islands Program, University of Hawaii).
- SCHNEIDER D. M., 1955. Abortion and Depopulation on a Pacific Island. In Paul B. D. ed. *Health, Culture and Community*. p. 211-235. Russell Sage Foundation. NY.
- SENEF A. Die Rechtssitten der Jap-Eingeborenen. *Globus*, 91 : p. 139-143, 149-153, 171-175.
- SMITH D. R., 1983. — *Palauan Social Structure*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ.
- THOMPSON L., 1987. *Guam and Its People*. Princeton University Press. Princeton.
- THOMSON B., 1908. — *The Fijians*. Dawsons. London.
- TOPPING D. M., OGO P. M., and DUNGCA B. C., 1975. *Chamorro-English Dictionary*. PALI Language Texts : Micronesia. The University Press of Hawaii. Honolulu.
- UNDERWOOD J. H., 1973. The Demography of a Myth : Abortion in Yap. *Hum. Biol. Oceania* 11(2), p. 115-127.
- VELARDE P. M., 1749. Historia de la Provincia de Philipinas de la Compañía de Jesús. Segunda parte que comprended los progressos de esta provincia desde el año 1616 hasta el de 1716. Manila.
- VERA P. R. M. de, 1932. *Diccionario Chamorro-Castellano*. Cacho Hermanos. Manila.
- VIDICH A. J., 1949. — Political Factionalism in Palau, Its Rise and Development. Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology 1947-1949, Report N° 23. Pacific Science Board, National Research Council. Washington DC.
- WISSE J., 1933. — *Selbstmord und Todesfurcht bei den Naturvölkern*. Zutphen.
- YU E. and LIU W. T., 1980. *Fertility and Kinship in the Philippines*. University of Notre Dame Press. Notre Dame, Philippines.