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Subversive Swallowing

The Self-Help Abortion as a Site of Stigma and Resistance
in the Anti-Choice State
The case of Northern Ireland

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Abstract

Where the state controls reproduction, the 'self-help abortion' controls right back. Between a past which saw pregnancy as punishment and a present which sees pregnant bodies as public property, the issue of abortion in Northern Ireland has been shrouded by censure, silence and stigma. Meanwhile, caught between the foetal fetishisation of anti-choice abstraction on one end and idle establishments both sides of the pond on the other, women have found themselves in a quasi-colonial state of reproductive exile. For those with means, amnesty can be found by crossing borders on the 'abortion trail,' those without- face trial. Under remnants from the era of Victorian prudism, women have been criminalised for the procurement of abortion pills. Along with the ideological maelstrom wrought in the wake of prosecutions, a new form of stigma was witnessed; that of the 'self-help abortion.'

This thesis seeks to advance an understanding of 'self-help abortion stigma' building on *Kumar et al's* 2009 conceptualisation of abortion stigma. It examines how self-help abortion stigma is reproduced and replicated in the anti-choice state across community, institutional and organisational levels. Equally it is considered how self-help abortion stigma is resisted in Northern Ireland. It proposes that the self-help abortion can be seen as a counter-hegemonic tool to reclaim reproductive control in the anti-choice state. It proposes a paradigm shift that would frame self-help abortion not as a reality to be accepted but a potential to be embraced.

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