

## Birth control cultures in Poland (1945-1989)

Contraception and abortion continue to be the subjects of social and political controversy in Poland. A close examination of how these issues were dealt with in the recent past can shed new light on the history of Polish state-socialism, the democratic transition and current debates on contraception, abortion and in-vitro fertilization.

My project focuses on birth control cultures in postwar Poland (1945-1989), defined as an intersection of population policies, expert and lay knowledge about contraception and abortion and people's family planning experiences.

I am interested in ways in which communist authorities and state institutions on one hand and the Catholic Church on the other, were trying to convince people—directly or through specific organizations funded for that purpose—to have certain number of children. I examine how the population policies these institutions promoted were shaped, communicated and how they changed over time, looking for discrepancies and also meeting points between the state and the Catholic Church in defining and executing their population policies.

Second, I examine the knowledge and experiences of Polish women and men related to birth control. Through the study of the literature, general and professional press, propagandistic materials about birth control and interviews with men and women about their experiences, I seek to evaluate how population policies shaped Poles' sexual relations, perceptions of sexuality and the body, information about birth control people received and, most importantly, how they made their decisions regarding family planning.

While the history of contraception, abortion and, generally speaking, of reproduction during the state socialist period has received increasing academic attention over the recent years, most studies focus on short periods and isolated institutions or cases. The advantage of my study is that it focuses on the whole socialist period, so I will be able to research on if and how birth control cultures changed over time. Another advantage of this study is that it examines intersections and divergences of state and Catholic Church's population policies and publications, by far mostly approached separately. Also, by employing oral history as a method of historiographic enquiry, I will be able to produce insights to a largely unexplored terrain of people sexual and reproductive experiences during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.