

POLITICS & POLICY

Abortion's Underside

By JILLIAN KAY MELCHIOR | May 8, 2013 8:00 AM



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Kermit Gosnell is not the only seedy backroom abortionist operating in the age of *Roe v. Wade*.

Sycloria Williams was recovering from a botched abortion at her Pompano, Fla., home on July 21, 2006, when two homicide detectives knocked on her door. They asked if she knew why they were there. “Yes,” Williams said immediately. “Because the baby was born alive.”¹

It took investigators one week and three separate searches to find the corpse of Williams’s infant, which was hidden away in the abortion clinic in Hialeah, Fla.² It was a tiny black girl, only 25.5 centimeters from head to toe, born prematurely on July 20. Her body was badly decomposed, discolored and infested with maggots, but the autopsy report and an expert physician’s review both suggested she had drawn breath on her own before she died.³

The body had been hidden, according to a tip received by the police, on the roof⁴ or perhaps in the dropped ceiling of the abortion clinic,⁵ then later in a biohazard bag within a medical-waste box in the malodorous recovery room.⁶ Florida’s Department of Health later alleged that Williams’s doctor had “falsified [her] medical records in an apparent effort to conceal his errors and the true events of July 20, 2006.”⁷

Those “true events” — the alleged murder of an infant who was not supposed to be born alive — turned out to be harder to sort out than anyone expected, and the conclusion also proved hazy. In the end, no one was successfully held responsible for the infant’s death in either criminal or civil court, despite efforts at prosecution.

The sensational case of Philadelphia doctor Kermit Gosnell, which finally gained coverage from the reluctant media, has revealed the ugly operations of an abortion clinic where live-born babies were allegedly murdered, their spines snipped with scissors, and where women received abortions in horrifyingly unsanitary conditions. Many sustained internal injuries; one woman even died, drugged up on cheap Demerol.

The Gosnell case prompts the question of how common similar practices are. A NATIONAL REVIEW investigation revealed the troubling history of three Florida abortion clinics, located in Miami, Hialeah, and Miramar, that have had several run-ins with the law. After a 2004 tip proved accurate, two owners and two staff members were successfully prosecuted for unlicensed medical practice; and, although there was no conviction, it appears that Sycloria Williams’s baby was born alive and murdered at the Hialeah clinic in 2006. Furthermore, some of the clinics’ doctors have records best described as routine medical violence against women. Yet despite their fraught past, the three clinics remain fully operational today. And they are a critical but often-neglected part of the picture of abortion in America.

Dr. Frantz Bazile arrived in Florida with a shady medical record. According to a complaint by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, in September 1987, Bazile had performed a late-second-trimester abortion on a 17-year-old, which he thoroughly mangled. He lacerated her vagina and cervix, also digging out spongy material from her body that he failed to recognize was mature

placental tissue. The girl consequently began bleeding profusely, so Bazile began suturing her vaginal vein. Finally, an ambulance had to be called, and the girl was taken to the hospital for an emergency C-section. The baby was born alive, but it died later the same day.⁸The Illinois Department of Professional Regulation accepted a proposed settlement from Bazile, placing him on three years' probation.⁹

It was apparently soon afterward that Bazile moved to Florida, where he immediately ran into more trouble. The *Miami New Times* reported that in 1990, a patient named Gwendolyn Bolton claimed he had misdiagnosed her appendicitis, although no negligence was found, and the case was dismissed. Also in the early '90s, Bazile was taken to court for allegedly performing an abortion on a 17-year-old without parental consent. This case was also dismissed, and it's unclear whether a settlement was paid.¹⁰

Around this time, Bazile came into contact with a woman named Belkis Gonzalez, with whom he eventually shared a residential address.¹¹ How long the two had known each other is unclear — Bazile never responded to my interview request, which was left with a receptionist at his office in Hialeah — but according to a complaint filed in the 11th Judicial Circuit Court in Florida in 2009, Bazile and Gonzalez had had a sexual relationship in addition to a professional one, conceiving one or two children together.¹² Details about Gonzalez are scarce; official records say she has little more than a high-school education and considers Spanish her language of choice. She later told authorities that she had attended university for a mere six months, but she nevertheless began calling herself a medical assistant.¹³ At the time of publication, she has not returned my interview request, left with a receptionist at the clinic in Miramar.

In 1994, Bazile and Gonzalez filed articles of incorporation for a Hialeah abortion clinic, A Gyn Diagnostic Center, listing a woman named Siomara Senises as the vice president. Senises also has not responded to a message

requesting an interview, but corporate records show she had served as vice president of A Woman's Care Abortions in Miami, of which she helped found in 1989. A Gyn Diagnostic Center, the original clinic in Hialeah, was dissolved in 1997 for reasons that are unclear, but in 2000, it reopened under the name A Gyn of Hialeah, Inc., located in the same office, with Bazile listed as president, Gonzalez listed as secretary, and Senises listed as vice president and treasurer. In 1999, Gonzalez and Senises began a third clinic, A Gyn of Miramar.¹⁴ The details of Bazile's medical practice at these clinics over the years are unclear, but he does perform abortions at the Hialeah clinic today.

#page# Though addresses changed over the years, these clinics were generally located in strip malls, operating on more or less a walk-in basis. Abortions reportedly cost from \$225 to \$1,000 or more.¹⁵

Gonzalez, Bazile, and Senises hired a doctor named Robelto Osborne in either 2001 or 2002. Like Bazile, he had a fraught medical past.

In 1996, Osborne had performed an abortion at 18 weeks' gestation at A Woman's Care II in Hialeah¹⁶, which was owned by Siomara Senises's business partner in the Miami clinic, Maria Peguero.¹⁷ The procedure went terribly wrong. Osborne perforated the 18-year-old woman's uterus, damaging her intestines in the process.¹⁸ He also failed to completely get rid of the baby; its right arm, right shoulder, and thorax remained in the young woman's abdomen after the procedure.¹⁹ In the end, her small intestines had to be partially resectioned.²⁰ She took Osborne to court, where they reached a settlement, and his insurance paid out at least \$150,000 for the malpractice.²¹

According to the *Miami New Times*, Osborne has been sued for malpractice in Miami-Dade County at least five times since that 1996 error.²²

In 2000, Osborne botched another abortion, according to the Florida Department of Health. A 41-year-old woman went in for an abortion at 18

weeks, which Osborne performed in the early afternoon of January 13. Afterward, she “complained of pain and bleeding, and was given a shot in the leg,” then sent home, where she began to hemorrhage. She called Osborne several times, but he never called back, so she went to the hospital. There, doctors discovered that her uterus had been severely perforated. And once again, parts of the fetus had been left inside. The woman had to endure a “total abdominal hysterectomy.”²³

The state revoked Osborne’s medical license in August 2004²⁴ – at which time he was working at Gonzalez, Bazile, and Senises’s clinics—and he did not dispute the decision. But about three months later, police received a tip that unlicensed personnel, including Osborne, were performing abortions and other medical functions in the Miramar clinic.²⁵

The tip proved valid. According to Miramar Police Department records, Osborne gave a sworn statement on May 23, 2005, in which he said that “both owners, Senises and Gonzalez . . . knew [Osborne’s license] was revoked and knew that he continued to work at the clinic following his revocation. Osborne testified that after the owners found out about his revocation it was ‘business as usual.’”²⁶

Osborne could not be located for comment — phone numbers associated with him have been disconnected — but he also told investigators under oath that Senises, who doesn’t have a medical license, had assisted him with abortions.²⁷ She pled no contest and was eventually sentenced to three years’ probation, beginning on September 28, 2008.²⁸ Gonzalez also ended up pleading no contest to charges that she had practiced medicine without a license.²⁹ Furthermore, a receptionist and another staffer were both successfully prosecuted for performing unlicensed medical tasks.³⁰

Finally, investigators found that the clinics had employed a man named Kieron Nisbet, who was licensed only as a house physician, and who had received that

license only because he had lied on his application papers.³¹ Even if he had been a valid house physician, his work at the clinics would have been illegal; according to the Florida Board of Medicine, house physicians “may only practice while employed by a Florida licensed hospital under the direct supervision of an MD or [doctor of osteopathic medicine],” and “such functions [are] to be performed under the direct supervision of a physician who has an active Florida license to practice medicine.”³² Nevertheless, Nisbet illegally performed abortions at one or more of the clinics, according to several witnesses. In December 2004, a circuit-court judge issued an arrest warrant for Nisbet, but police learned he had fled to Trinidad.³³

Russell Etherington, an engineer, tells me that while he lived in Trinidad for three years building bridges, he became close friends with Nisbet and his family. Around 2006, the fugitive and his wife were fighting, and she called the engineer and blurted out that her husband “wasn’t even a real doctor.”

“I was shocked,” Etherington recalls. “I was absolutely gutted. It wasn’t a thing where people plan to be an electrician and they’re not qualified: I’d actually sat in his surgery [offices] and seen women and children going out.”³⁴

The U.S. has a bilateral extradition agreement with Trinidad.³⁵ But Etherington tells me he called the Miami prosecutors’ office and was told there was nothing they could do. I confirmed with Nisbet’s office that he works as a general practitioner today in Tunapuna, Trinidad. But when I requested an interview, the receptionist told me that “due to ongoing legal matters, [Nisbet] is not able to comment on anything right now.”³⁶

* * *

As police were already investigating the clinics owned by Gonzalez, Bazile, and Senises for unlicensed medical practice, Sycloria Williams, 18 years old, went to the Miramar office for an abortion. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, a doctor

practicing in at least one of the clinics, met with Williams on July 19, 2006, giving her laminaria, which opens the cervix, allowing access to the uterus during an abortion. He also gave her Cytotec, a prescription medication that dilates the cervix.³⁷ But according to the Florida Department of Health, “cytotech and cervical laminaria [should not be] used together because both are designed to ripen the cervix for the evacuation abortion procedure.”³⁸

#page#Renelique told Williams to meet him at 9 A.M. the next day at A Gyn Diagnostic Center in Hialeah for observation. The abortion itself was scheduled for 2 P.M.³⁹

Williams showed up the next morning as scheduled. Renelique did not. The young woman began to feel very ill. According to the complaint later filed by Williams’s attorney, she was given medicine, including prescription medication dispensed by an unlicensed worker and picked up “at one of the other [related] clinics.” Williams claims the staff had her change into a robe and told her to rest, informing her the doctor would arrive soon.⁴⁰

Renelique still didn’t show. Williams, who had come to the clinic to end her pregnancy, ended up delivering a live baby around 2 P.M. after acute pain. She later told police detectives that the infant was “moving and making noises for approximately five minutes.”⁴¹ The complaint filed by her attorney reports that “the staff began screaming, and pandemonium ensued. Sycloria watched in horror and shock as her baby writhed with her chest rising and falling as she breathed.”⁴²

The complaint continues: “Belkis Gonzalez came running into the room, picked up a large pair of orange shears, and cut the umbilical cord,” an assertion echoed in a Florida Department of Health finding of facts.⁴³ An expert in neonatal and perinatal medicine later told Hialeah police detectives that severing the umbilical cord without clamping it, as Gonzalez allegedly did, would cause the

baby to “have exsanguinated within two minutes, and the lack of blood flow to the brain would cause severe debilitation and result in neurological damage.”⁴⁴

According to the Department of Health findings of fact, “Ms. Gonzalez then proceeded to place the baby and all of its remains in a plastic bag. She then closed the bag and placed it in a trashcan.”⁴⁵

Williams’s complaint claims that the staff “did not call 911 or seek any medical or neonatal assistance of any kind for either the mother or the baby at any time.” According to the complaint, Dr. Renelique arrived shortly after the birth, and “Sycloria could overhear Belkis Gonzalez and the doctor screaming at each other about what had transpired and the fact that the doctor had not been present at the Hialeah clinic. The doctor instructed Belkis Gonzalez to start an IV on Sycloria. Belkis Gonzalez attempted to place an IV but was unable to hold her hands steady,”⁴⁶ an occurrence also referred to in the Department of Health’s finding of facts.⁴⁷ Williams’s complaint says Renelique then sedated her and cleaned her up; she “was sent home still in complete shock.”⁴⁸

Soon after, police received an anonymous tip that a baby had been born alive and quickly killed at the Hialeah clinic. Investigators searched the clinic three times before they found the baby, discovering unsanitary conditions in the process. They found blood smeared on the recliner in the recovery room where Williams had given birth.⁴⁹ And Ralph Gracia, a homicide detective who helped hunt for the body, tells me that the clinic “had boxes with all the [aborted fetuses] in the recovery room sitting there, resting behind the chairs where the patients would sit after their abortion. In some of them, I actually saw some small flies just hovering around the boxes.” The smell was terrible, he adds. He had to sort through each of the biomedical bags, searching among the aborted fetuses for the body of the baby who had been born alive.⁵⁰

On July 21, police interviewed Gonzalez about what had happened the day before. Police records state that “she said only that she and Dr. [Renelique] were

in the room with the patient when the abortion was performed. She said the doctor used pliers and suction which broke the fetus apart and [it] came out in pieces. The pieces were placed inside red 'bio-medical' bags and set for disposal. She denied that the patient gave birth on the recliners in the waiting room and restated that the fetus came out in pieces not alive, moving and crying.”⁵¹

According to the Florida Department of Health's finding of facts, Renelique first said that he had begun the abortion process around 2:20 P.M., and that the “fetal sac, placenta, large clots and umbilical cord were removed together as a block. Dr. Renelique stated he thought the fetus was inside the sac. Also according to Dr. Renelique, upon further examination, he could not find the fetus. . . . Dr. Renelique claims he was then informed by staff members that the fetus had already been delivered.” Yet the finding of facts also states that “Renelique prepared a false medical record when he knew what had actually happened.”⁵²

Contrary to what Gonzalez had told them, the police found the body on July 28, 2006, eight days after the baby had died: It was wholly intact, with ten fingers, ten toes, and no apparent abnormalities, though severely decomposed.⁵³

When I contacted Renelique for an interview, he seemed to change his story, saying, “It is simple: I was not there.”⁵⁴ He declined to give any further comments until he had consulted with a lawyer, and by time of publication, he had not called back or responded to further queries.

Florida issued an emergency restriction of Renelique's license in 2007. As the Board of Medicine questioned him, an obstetrician-gynecologist showed him a spear-like medical instrument and several pairs of forceps, asking him if he owned that equipment. Renelique answered that he did. “For the record,” the gynecologist later said, “these are from my antique collection. We don't use these in terminations.” It's unclear whether Renelique had actually used instruments of these types or just did not recognize the equipment as

inappropriate. According to the Associated Press, Renelique later reexamined the tools and “said he had never seen or used the spear in his life.”⁵⁵

#page#Florida revoked Renelique’s license altogether in 2009. He then relocated to New York, where he was placed on probation for two years because of his behavior regarding Williams but was allowed to continue practicing medicine. The New York Department of Health’s Hearing Committee reconsidered Renelique’s medical license, but it finally determined that he “is a physician who provides excellent medical care to an inner city poor population. These patients should not be deprived of this valuable resource.”⁵⁶

Renelique’s office tells me that he does not perform abortions any more, though he still practices medicine. (According to a 2009 Associated Press article, Renelique said that performing abortions “was not part of my goals when I came to Florida. But I had to do it to survive.”⁵⁷ He has made at least three medical-malpractice settlements in New York in the last ten years, the most recent being in 2011, according to the New York State Physician Profile website.⁵⁸

* * *

“Do I think [Belkis Gonzalez] got away because of the laws in the state of Florida?” says Anthony Rodriguez, the homicide detective who led the investigation into the Williams baby’s death. Now retired, he recounts the details of the case, which he says still deeply bothers him.⁵⁹

“I think she got away with murder, yes,” Rodriguez continues, “especially in the cold way she disposed of the body. I mean the fact that the baby landed on the recliner, the mother’s sitting in this room, and she’s witnessing the baby breathing, she’s witnessing the baby moving, and according to Sycloria, Belkis comes and tilts the recliner with the baby on the recliner, dropping the baby to the floor. And then she sweeps the baby into a bag and closes the bag and throws it away. That’s pretty cold for a human being to be able to do something like

that. Yeah, I think she got away with murder. Perhaps in another state, that wouldn't have happened.”

Rodriguez says that after collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses, the police investigators felt they had a strong murder case. “But the roadblock came at the state attorney’s office, when we were told we could not move forward on homicide charges because of the age of the baby. . . . The baby was not viable, so it was therefore not considered a human being, which was shocking to me.”⁶⁰

Denise Burke, a former prosecutor and the vice president of legal affairs for Americans United for Life, an antiabortion public-interest law firm and advocacy organization, tells me that “when abortion is involved [in a legal dispute], it makes everything that much more difficult. It distorts everything it touches.”⁶¹

The federal Born-Alive Infants Protection Act, signed by George W. Bush in 2002, extends legal protection to any live-born baby, including those surviving an abortion attempt, but its application and enforcement are limited. Twenty-four states have passed legislation creating a specific, affirmative duty for physicians to provide medical care and treatment to infants born alive at any stage of development, including babies that are not deemed viable. Three states require treatment at viability, though the definition of viability varies.⁶²

Late last month, Florida’s legislature passed a bill providing legal protection to live-born babies; at the time of publication, it is still awaiting the governor’s signature. Florida does have a fetal-homicide law that provides some protection for unborn infants who have reached the stage of viability, though that gestational age is vaguely defined. And the state bans abortion after viability, unless the life or health of the mother is at stake, Burke says. But *Doe v. Bolton* — the companion decision to *Roe v. Wade* — defined that health exemption broadly; it can mean not only physical health but also mental health and even life circumstances such as age.⁶³

There is some legal disagreement about what should happen in Florida when a baby deemed unviable is born alive and then killed. Burke tells me that “it would still qualify as a homicide,” but investigators and prosecutors who worked on the Williams case have disagreed, speaking on the record with NATIONAL REVIEW.

The autopsy report lists the baby’s cause of death as “extreme prematurity.” The report explains the rationale for this classification: “Based on witness statements, we know the neonate had movements and that the neonate appeared to have been breathing indicating a live birth. The measurements done at autopsy along with the ultrasound findings are consistent with a gestational age of 22 weeks. The literature shows that fetuses before 24 weeks gestation have basically a 0% survival; this data is from mothers who are already in a hospital setting and who are prepped for preterm delivery. The abortion was done legally before 24 weeks gestation. The cause of death is extreme prematurity and the manner of death is natural.”⁶⁴

Chief Medical Examiner Bruce A. Hyma sent an e-mailed response to my query, stating: “This case has a lot of false information surrounding it. It was an abortion handled poorly by the clinic staff. Unfortunately, the fetus had signs of life by the staff’s own observations. It died of extreme prematurity.” Hyma said he cannot further comment without reviewing the original record and speaking with the state attorney.⁶⁵

David Waksman was a prosecutor with the Miami-Dade County state attorney’s office, and he worked on the case until his retirement in 2009. He tells me that “Florida and a lot of states said you’re not a person for purposes of being the victim of a crime unless you’re living independently of the mother. This baby came out and died within seconds, and the neonatal expert we used said, ‘Even if it was born in my hospital and I was there, it was just too immature.’ So that’s why there were no murder charges.”⁶⁶

Mark Overton, who was deputy chief of the Hialeah Police at the time, tells me that he found the legal rationale “disgusting” and “mind-blowing,” adding that “we’re so callous to this issue.”

#page#“We did everything we could in the investigation and getting the facts and being as diligent as we could to bring a case against [Gonzalez],” Overton says. “[But] you can’t just bring a case up without any statutory backing, [and] it was not there. . . . I mean, I looked it up, and I researched it myself, and I had to at the end — unfortunately; maybe I didn’t want to — but I had to agree that . . . the statutes did not support the case we had built or the truth of what occurred there.”⁶⁷

Instead, Overton says, the state attorney filed other serious felony charges against Gonzalez: tampering with physical evidence and performing an unlicensed medical procedure that resulted in a death.

The case fell apart, though, for reasons that I have not been able to fully determine, despite my interviews with prosecutors, investigators, and others involved. Ed Griffith, a spokesman at the state attorney’s office, said medical witnesses changed their testimonies.

“This case was based on doctors’ testimony and medical evidence,” he says. “The doctors changed their positions leaving us without a prosecutable case.”

When I contacted one of the witnesses in question, he told me he wasn’t aware his testimony had changed at all, adding that more could have been done to investigate the case. The state attorney general could not be directly reached for comment.

Sycloria Williams filed a civil suit alleging that negligent and intentional conduct caused the wrongful death of her daughter. She also claimed that she had sustained bodily injury, pain and suffering, disability, severe mental anguish

and emotional distress, loss of capacity for enjoyment of life, medical and other health-related expenses, and other damages.⁶⁸

But according to her attorney, Tom Pennekamp, no one at the clinic had insurance, and “Sycloria kind of dropped off the map, unfortunately.” Pennekamp withdrew from the case, ⁶⁹ and, eventually, the court had to dismiss it without prejudice for lack of prosecution.⁷⁰ Several attempts to reach Williams for comment went unanswered.

* * *

Belkis Gonzalez narrowly missed a murder charge, but by that point, the law had caught up to her for other wrongs.

On August 8, 2006, not long after Williams’s ordeal at the clinic, Gonzalez was arrested. She was charged with unlicensed medical practice, as a result of the earlier investigation that had been prompted by a tip in 2004. But the timing of the charges against her, just after the Williams baby’s death, was not a coincidence, says T. Don TenBrook, who handled the prosecution for unlicensed practice.

“We were aware while my case was pending that there were charges being investigated and contemplated down in Miami-Dade County that appeared to be more serious,” TenBrook says, “and we actually held off for a while in resolving our case hoping to see if, in fact, charges were or were not filed in Miami-Dade. And finally, our case reached a point where it needed to be resolved. . . . the [other] charges had not been filed as of the time we resolved our case.”⁷¹

Gonzalez eventually pled no contest to charges that she had engaged in health-care practice without a license, and she was sentenced to five years’ probation on December 20, 2007, with the condition that she was “not allowed to directly or indirectly [engage in] owning, operating, conducting, managing, or being

employed or associated with any health care clinic, health care professional office or health care business establishment.”⁷²

Yet when I examined the clinics’ corporate records, they reveal suspicious developments that have never been fully investigated. Tom Pennekamp, Sycloria Williams’s lawyer, alleged in a 2009 complaint that “Belkis Gonzalez and Siomara Senises [have] continued to provide abortion services under the cloak of entities and officers that are mere instrumentalities.”⁷³ Corporate records show that ownership of two of the clinics was passed on to close kin of Gonzalez and Senises. At the third clinic, other questionable events occurred.

The first ownership shift was at the Miramar clinic. In December 2004, as police were investigating all three clinics for unlicensed medical practice, owners Senises and Gonzalez filed articles of dissolution for their clinic in Miramar. Four months later, Gonzalez’s daughter, Natali Vergara, and a man named Mario Diaz filed with the Florida Division of Corporations, establishing an entity called Miramar Women’s Center.

According to Williams’s complaint, Diaz had once been Senises’s husband.⁷⁴ In 1992, she had filed a permanent injunction for protection against him, citing domestic violence.⁷⁵ (Diaz and Senises also had a daughter, Natasha, who worked at the clinics, according to the complaint.⁷⁶) In May 2006, corresponding articles of incorporation were filed, listing Diaz as the vice president and Vergara, who had been present at the Hialeah clinic during the Williams baby’s birth there,⁷⁷ as the president, treasurer, and registered agent. In 2006 and 2007, Diaz was dropped from the clinics’ leadership, and Senises’s then-husband, Freddy Guzman,⁷⁸ was added as vice president.⁷⁹ Neither Freddy Guzman nor Mario Diaz could be located for comment. In 2008, the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration fined the Miramar Women’s Center for failing to submit a report of “induced terminations of pregnancy.”⁸⁰

#page#Similar transitions happened at the clinic in Hialeah. In May 2006, as the clinics were still being investigated, Gonzalez and Senises filed articles of incorporation for their new clinic, A Gyn Diagnostic Center, listing an address previously associated with A Gyn of Hialeah. Bazile and Gonzalez filed articles of dissolution for A Gyn of Hialeah in September 2006, about two months after Williams gave birth at the clinic. Also in September 2006, Gonzalez resigned from the new A Gyn Diagnostic Center. In January 2007, Natali Vergara became the vice president of A Gyn Diagnostic Center. A month later, in February 2007, Senises filed papers stating she had sold the business to Vergara. 81

And the final clinic, A Woman's Care Abortions in Miami, listed Senises as secretary and treasurer in 1995 and 1996, and as vice president from 1996 to 2009. She pled no contest to charges of unlicensed medical practice, and her three-year probation began on September 28, 2008.⁸²

In November 2008, the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration issued a notice of intent to fine A Woman's Care for failing to submit a monthly report of induced terminations of pregnancy.⁸³ In 2010, while Senises was still on probation, no annual corporate report appears to have been filed, but the Agency for Health Care Administration found problems during an inspection. A surveyor discovered that several bottles of emergency drugs had expired, though a medical supplier said the replacements had been ordered. Furthermore, the defibrillator for the crash cart needed a new battery and was not functional, and reporting on staff and patients was deficient. The records had apparently been misplaced.⁸⁴ In 2011, a reinstatement was filed, listing Senises once again as vice president.⁸⁵

T. Don TenBrook, the prosecutor, says that if he had been aware that corporate records suggested Gonzalez may have been violating her probation, he would have looked into it. And "if somebody had put together evidence indicating that she was either directly or indirectly owning a health care facility and thereby

violating probation, yes, we would have sought a warrant, and, yes, we would have prosecuted.”⁸⁶

Gonzalez’s probation ended in December 2012, after which point the court could no longer prohibit her from working in medicine. My investigation revealed that she is regularly present at the Miramar Women’s Center offices, and a staff member told me she is the owner.

Overton, the former Hialeah deputy police chief, says that while he is concerned about the abortion clinics’ leadership, “it’s the symptom of the bigger issue, and the bigger issue is the state statutes and what [the law] supports. Whether [Belkis Gonzalez] is running it or not, does it matter? The state supports what they did. Even as horrific an event as it was . . . the law supports what they did that day.”⁸⁷

The clinics’ ownership and the deficiencies of Florida law are both troubling, but the troubled careers of the doctors employed at the clinics are of at least as much concern.

Frantz Bazile, the former owner who first came to the attention of the law with that botched Illinois abortion in 1987, still performs abortions at A Gyn Diagnostic Center. When I visited the clinic, a staffer told me that a “malpractice [history], [Bazile] does not have. You can research him, but . . .”

David Steven Brown is the medical director at A Woman’s Care. He began working at the Miramar Clinic around September 2004, just before the investigation into unlicensed medical practice at these establishments began.⁸⁸ His criminal record is minor — one DUI in 2007⁸⁹ — but, according to a sworn statement by the receptionist who was sanctioned for unauthorized medical practice at the clinics, Brown had trained her to do sonograms although she was unlicensed.⁹⁰ I found no evidence that he was ever prosecuted. He did not respond to my message, left with a receptionist.

Finally, a doctor named Harvey Craig Roth practices at all three clinics. In 1998, Roth performed a circumcision that went horribly awry. According to insurance records, a “Mogen clamp was used during the procedure” and the “circumcision resulted in an amputation of a portion of the glans penis.” Once again, the case was settled, and Roth’s insurance paid out in 2005.⁹¹ I left a message for Roth with a receptionist, but he did not respond.

* * *

Like the Gosnell case, the story of these Florida clinics is representative of the abortion industry’s seedy underside.

Abortion is, quite simply, a lucrative profession for its practitioners, including the crooked or incompetent ones: In August 2012, the research firm IBISWorld Inc. noted that the recession had decreased the demand for babies, boosting revenue in the abortion business. It forecast 4 percent average annual growth for the Family Planning and Abortion Clinics industry through 2017.⁹²

Women seeking an abortion often rely heavily on confidentiality, a reasonable expectation. But the secrecy that shrouds the procedures can also protect unethical doctors. Furthermore, abortion rates are higher among women with lower educational attainment.⁹³ They may be at greater risk for being taken advantage of and harmed.

Finally, the charged politics surrounding abortion prompt many to look the other way, even when a practice devolves, as it did in Kermit Gosnell’s clinic, to truly horrific levels.

These factors can create a situation that puts both women and newborn babies at mortal risk. In the end, the owners and practitioners at sinister clinics are the only ones whose interests are served.

— *Jillian Kay Melchior is a Thomas L. Rhodes Fellow of the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity.*

- [1] Hialeah Police Department supplemental report by J. Elosegui; also recounted by Anthony Rodriguez, lead investigator, in interview with NATIONAL REVIEW
- [2] Interview with investigator Ralph Gracia; interview with lead investigator Anthony Rodriguez
- [3] Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner report; NATIONAL REVIEW also obtained the unsigned Affidavit in Support of Warrant, which is not official public record. It includes the summary of a police interview with an expert physician in neonatal and perinatal medicine.
- [4] Affidavit for Search Warrant filed in the Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, signed by Judge Mark King Leban on July 28, 2006.
- [5] Interview with police detectives Ralph Gracia and Anthony Rodriguez
- [6] Interview with Detective Ralph Gracia
- [7] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., General Allegations
- [8] State of Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, No. 88-631-LEG, Amended Complaint
- [9] State of Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, No. 88-631-LEG, Order
- [10] Green, Joanne. "In the Bag." *Miami New Times*. n.p., 26 Oct. 2006. Web. <"><http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2006-10-26/news/in-the-bag/full/>>.
- [11] Public records available from Florida's Division of Corporations; annual filings for the abortion clinics list the same residential addresses for Frantz Bazile and Belkis Gonzalez.
- [12] *Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al.*, Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009: "Natali Vergara is Belkis Gonzalez's daughter. Frantz Bazile, M.D., is either her father or her half-brother's father." Vergara was born in 1984, according to public records.
- [13] Hialeah Police Department supplemental report by D. Hernandez
- [14] Public records available from Florida's Division of Corporations
- [15] Green, Joanne. "In the Bag." *Miami New Times*. n.p., 26 Oct. 2006. Web. <"><http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2006-10-26/news/in-the-bag/full/>>.
- [16] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2000-02140; 2000-14273, Administrative Complaint, Facts Relating to Patient M.D.; also, State of Florida Board of Medicine, Case No. 2000-02140, Final Order states that "the allegations of fact set forth in the Administrative Complaint are approved and adopted and incorporated herein by reference as the findings of fact by the Board."
- [17] Public records available from Florida's Division of Corporations
- [18] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2000-02140; 2000-14273, Administrative Complaint, Facts Relating to Patient M.D.; also, State of Florida Board of Medicine, Case No. 2000-02140, Final Order states that "the allegations of fact set forth in the Administrative Complaint are approved and adopted and incorporated herein by reference as the findings of fact by the Board."
- [19] Florida Office of Insurance Regulation Medical Malpractice Closed Claims Report, Department File Number M200013984, Claim Number A97-18141-96, Date Submitted 11/8/2000
- [20] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2000-02140; 2000-14273, Administrative Complaint, Facts Relating to Patient M.D.; also, State of Florida Board of Medicine, Case No. 2000-02140, Final Order states that "the allegations of fact set forth in the Administrative Complaint are approved and adopted and incorporated herein by reference as the findings of fact by the Board."
- [21] Florida Office of Insurance Regulation Medical Malpractice Closed Claims Report, Department File Number M200013984, Claim Number A97-18141-96, Date Submitted 11/8/2000
- [22] Green, Joanne. "In the Bag." *Miami New Times*. n.p., 26 Oct. 2006. Web. <"><http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2006-10-26/news/in-the-bag/full/>>.
- [23] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2000-02140; 2000-14273, Administrative Complaint, Facts Relating to Patient D.F.; also, State of Florida Board of Medicine, Case No. 2000-02140, Final Order states that "The allegations of fact set forth in the Administrative

Complaint are approved and adopted and incorporated herein by reference as the findings of fact by the Board.”

[24] Green, Joanne. “In the Bag.” *Miami New Times*. n.p., 26 Oct. 2006. Web.

<“<http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2006-10-26/news/in-the-bag/full/>>.

[25] Arrest Report for Belkis Gonzalez, Case No. 041202953, Arrest No. 21722

[26] Arrest Report for Belkis Gonzalez, Case No. 041202953, Arrest No. 21722

[27] Arrest Report for Belkis Gonzalez, Case No. 041202953, Arrest No. 21722

[28] Circuit Court Disposition Order in and for Broward County, Florida, Case No. 07005004CF10A

[29] Circuit Court Disposition Order in and for Broward County, Florida, Case No. 06021259CF10A

[30] Broward County Complaint Affidavit, Offense Report 04-12-02953; confirmed through several interviews

[31] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2004-41669, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Kieron Nisbet, Findings of Fact

[32] <http://www.flboardofmedicine.gov/licensing/resident-physicians-interns-f...>

[33] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2004-41669, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Kieron Nisbet, Findings of Fact

[34] Interview with Russell Etherington

[35] <http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/18C209.txt>

[36] My reporting

[37] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[38] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[39] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[40] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009

[41] NATIONAL REVIEW obtained the unsigned Affidavit in Support of Warrant, which is not official public record; confirmed through personal interviews with investigators Gracia and Rodriguez

[42] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009

[43] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact

[44] NATIONAL REVIEW obtained the unsigned Affidavit in Support of Warrant, which is not official public record. It summarizes a consultation with “an expert physician who is board certified in neonatal and perinatal medicine.”

[45] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[46] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009

[47] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[48] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009

[49] Hialeah Police Department supplemental report by J. Elosegui; the same information is contained in the unsigned Affidavit in Support of Warrant, which was obtained by NATIONAL REVIEW but is not official public record.

[50] Interview with Ralph Gracia

[51] Hialeah Police Department supplemental report by Detective Domingo Hernandez

[52] State of Florida Department of Health, Case No. 2006-24381, Order of Emergency Restriction of the License of Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, M.D., Findings of Fact.

[53] Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner Department, Investigation Report, M.E. Case 2006-01925, Baby Girl Williams

[54] Interview with Renelique

[55] http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29053830/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/board-r...

- [56] Determination and Order ruling from the NY Department of Health State Board for Professional Medical Conduct
- [57] http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29053830/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/board-r...
- [58] <http://www.nydoctorprofile.com>
- [59] Interview with Anthony Rodriguez
- [60] Interview with Anthony Rodriguez
- [61] Interview and email exchange with Denise Burke
- [62] Interview and email exchange with Denise Burke
- [63] Interview and email exchange with Denise Burke
- [64] Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner Department, Investigation Report, M.E. Case 2006-01925, Baby Girl Williams
- [65] Email exchange with Bruce Hyma
- [66] Interview with David Waksman
- [67] Interview with Mark Overton
- [68] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009
- [69] Interview and email exchange with Tom Pennekamp
- [70] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 09-6136-CA09, Notice of Voluntary Dismissal without Prejudice, Fla. Bar No. 860840, filed May 6, 2010
- [71] Interview with T. Don TenBrook
- [72] Circuit Court Disposition Order in and for Broward County, Florida, Case No. 06021259CF10A
- [73] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009
- [74] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009
- [75] Senises, Siomara v. Diaz, Mario, Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 1992-047901-FC-04, Recorded June 1, 1992
- [76] Sycloria Williams v. Pierre Jean-Jacque Renelique, et al., Circuit Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Case No. 9-6136-CA09, Complaint filed January 27, 2009
- [77] Hialeah Police Department supplemental report by J. Elosegui; also recounted by Anthony Rodriguez, lead investigator, in interview; NATIONAL REVIEW also reviewed a summary of the police interview when it obtained the unsigned Affidavit in Support of Warrant, which is not official public record.
- [78] According to Miami records, the two were married on Oct. 7, 1992.
- [79] Public records from the Florida Division of Corporations.
- [80] Agency for Health Care Administration report, Case No. 2009001169, License No. 895
- [81] Public records from the Florida Division of Corporations.
- [82] Circuit Court Disposition Order in and for Broward County, Florida, Case No. 07005004CF10A
- [83] Agency for Health Care Administration report, Case No. 2008012527, License No. 833
- [84] Agency for Health Care Administration Report on findings of a state licensure survey conducted April 27, 2010, for provider AC13910053
- [85] Public records from the Florida Division of Corporations.
- [86] Interview with T. Don TenBrook
- [87] Interview with Mark Overton
- [88] Information from my query to the Agency for Health Care Administration
- [89] <http://www2.doh.state.fl.us/IRM00profiling/ProfileACTIONS.asp?LicId=48925&ProfNBR=1501>
- [90] Miramar Police Department, Arrest Report for Belkis Gonzalez, Case No. 041202953
- [91] Florida Office of Insurance Regulation Medical Malpractice Closed Claims Report, Department File Number M200535165, Claim Number 5359-A, Date Submitted 5/11/2005
- [92] <http://www.ibisworld.com/industry/default.aspx?indid=1567>
- [93] <http://core.arhp.org/search/searchDetail.aspx?itemId=1001>



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