

THE POLITICS OF MORALITY

The Church, the State,
and Reproductive Rights
in Postsocialist Poland

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Study Guide



INTRODUCTION: WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

What is the main topic/argument of this ethnography, as overviewed in the introduction? According to the author, how did she become interested in the topic of gender politics in her native Poland?

What is democratization?

This book is shaped by the ethnographic research process – what does this mean?

What were the author's main research questions?

In this section of the book the author introduces several theoretical frameworks that are useful in understanding this study. What are these frameworks?

CHAPTER 1

"THE CHURCH WAS HELPING US WIN FREEDOM": DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND THE RETURN OF GOD

What is the historical importance of the Catholic Church in Poland?

What is Catholic nationalism?

It can be easily assumed that the Catholic Church and the state socialist regime were at odds with each other during the communist period, but this relationship was far more complicated.

What were the agendas of the church and the state during this time, and how did they manage this relationship?

What does the term *antagonistic interdependencies* refer to?

What were Polish women's experiences under state socialism?

What was the effect of the separation of church and state on women's rights?

What was the *radicalization* of the church?

What was the political position of the church when state socialism collapsed in 1989?

What does "The Church Was Helping Us Win Freedom" mean?

CHAPTER 2:

RESTRICTING ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES: RELIGIOUS POWER AND MORAL GOVERNANCE

After the fall of state socialism in 1989 the author describes a *wave of moralization*— what does this mean? How did the discourse of *family demise* fit in this process?

What were the reproductive rights restrictions that were instituted after 1989?

What is conscientious objection?

The perspectives of doctors about the reproductive rights restrictions varied; what were the different perspectives that doctors held?
Explain the concept of *moral governance*. Whose morality is reflected in this governance?
Returning to the concept of democratization, consider how this moral governance relates to democratization.

CHAPTER 3:

WOMEN RESPOND: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING AND ACTIVISM

What was the “initial shock” that women in Poland experienced, as described in this chapter?
Why was it difficult for women to collectively mobilize themselves to protect reproductive rights?
To what extent is there a feminist movement in Poland?
How were women’s rights perceived?
What was the status of women’s rights vs. workers’ rights in the struggle against the state socialist regime? What about women’s rights after 1989?
How do some of the women recall the struggle for reproductive rights during this time?
What was the role of language and control of the discourses in this struggle?
How were feminism and feminist identity perceived?
Why and how was feminism stigmatized?
What were some of the ways in which women’s rights activism, and reproductive rights specifically, was waged? Who participated and how?
Who is Wanda Nowicka and how does she exemplify feminist activism in Poland?
Consider the following examples in the context of a struggle for reproductive rights—what happened and why?:

- Sex education and social schizophrenia
- The Agata case
- The Alicja case

CHAPTER 4:

CONFESSIONS, KOL<E>DA RITUALS, AND OTHER SURVEILLANCE

What is the *Kol<e>da* ritual and what is its role?
What are the various aspects of surveillance in the religious rituals described in this chapter?
Consider the different levels of power relations embedded in the rituals.

- Examine specifically the following rituals from the perspective of power:
 - Confession and the sacrament of penance
 - *Kol<e>da* ritual
 - The “system of cards and stamps”

What is the gendered aspect of confession? How are women perceived vs. men in the context of these rituals?
What is the symbolic relationship between “women” and “nation”?
What is *governmentality* and how does the case of Maya illustrate this theoretical concept?
How does Michel Foucault conceptualize power? And how does his scholarship help us understand religious rituals analyzed in this chapter?
What might be the limitations of Foucault’s approach, given the gendered case described here?

CHAPTER 5:

ABORTION, POLISH STYLE

Recall the abortion laws during state socialism and what happened after 1989.
To what extent did Polish women use abortion services when abortion was still legal?
After abortion was restricted in 1993, what strategies did women begin to use when in need of abortion and/or faced with a mistimed or unwanted pregnancy?
Were there any changes to the birth rate after 1989? If so, what were these and why is this significant when we analyze reproductive policies?
What does it mean when we say that the abortion underground in Poland is *white coat*?
To what extent is clandestine abortion in Poland safe or unsafe? Explain your answer.
What is abortion travel?

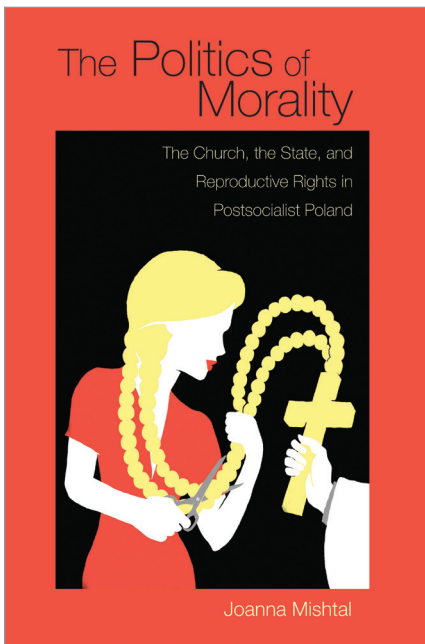
Why is it often easier for women to get an illegal abortion rather than seeking a legal procedure, even if a termination is allowed under one of the abortion ban exceptions? The author argues that the Polish abortion law functions as a “tension diffuser.” What does this mean?
What is the concept of *unofficial biopolitics* discussed in this chapter in relation to women controlling their reproductive lives? What would *official biopolitics* be?

CHAPTER 6:
THE “DYING NATION” AND THE POSTSOCIALIST LOGICS OF DECLINING MOTHERHOOD

What is the demographic situation in Poland and why is it depicted as a “crisis”? Explain the aims of neoliberal economic changes in Poland and discuss what the effects of these changes have been in the following two areas:

- Social services
- Health care

How do Polish women in this study strategize about their lives in the context of the postsocialist neoliberal changes?
Why are women’s decisions to limit childbearing perceived by some to be “irrational”? By whom? How do women understand their own decisions?
What are the pronatalist policies and programs launched by the state? How do women understand the state’s pronatalist policies?
The state’s policies have not been effective in increasing the birth rate in Poland. Explain why this is. The author argues that women in postsocialist Poland find themselves “between a rock and a hard place.” What does she mean by this?



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CONCLUSIONS : THE FUTURE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN POLAND

In the concluding chapter the author argues that paradoxes are the “new status quo” in postsocialist Poland. What are the key paradoxes, and why are these paradoxes entrenched in the political dynamics since 1989?
What is the *in vitro* struggle?
Consider the agendas of the church and the state in the *in vitro* debate.
What is the role of the reproductive rights activists in the *in vitro* struggle?
What are the parallel aspects of the *in vitro* rights vs. the abortion rights struggles?
Revisit here the question of the political role of the Catholic Church and think about the key actors in the Polish political scene.
Consider where the Polish feminist movement fits in this setting.
What is the role of the EU as a supranational entity in the arena of reproductive rights in Europe?
To what extent does the EU’s position on reproductive rights matter in Poland and how?
What about in the future?
Revisit the question from page 1 of this book: Poland has been democratizing. “But what kind of democratization” is it?
The author ultimately argues that there are serious limits on the ability of Poland to become a true democracy. Explain the fundamental obstacle to Polish democratization to which she is referring.