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Mishtal, Joanna, *The Politics of Morality: The Church, the State and Reproductive Rights in Postsocialist Poland*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015, 258 pages.

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Political transitions are times of potential. Things are up for grabs. A new world seems possible. Dramatic improvements in women's electoral fortunes in African and Latin American countries where gender quotas were part of a transitional package show that "regime change" provides an opening for women's activists to embed policy and institutions that support gender justice.

But transitions are also risky. As Joanna Mishtal documents in her important new book on the politics of morality in post-socialist Poland, conservatives can be activists too. There, the Catholic Church manoeuvred to entrench a moral regime such that the "governance of women's bodies in postsocialist politics and gender [figure] as an essential constitutive feature of the Polish democratization process" (11). The upshot is that sexual and reproductive rights were severely restricted after socialism fell in 1989.

Mishtal starts by establishing how the church and its allies manipulated social policy in the new Poland in ways that were particularly damaging for women. The socialist state introduced abortion and contraception in the 1950s, well before these services became legally available in most liberal democracies. Consequently, people were dumbfounded when the new Polish parliament, under the presidency of Solidarity's Lech Wałęsa, rushed to grant "the unborn" legal status. A systematic assault on abortion access followed, culminating in a 1993 law – the most restrictive in Europe, outside Ireland – that forbids abortion in all but three circumstances: danger to the woman's life or health; severe incurable foetal abnormality; or first-trimester pregnancy resulting from a reported crime.

Compounding the situation, the state stopped subsidising contraceptives, replaced evidence-based sex education with "preparation for life in a family" courses based on Catholic ideology, and introduced legal provision for conscientious objection. The last was particularly pernicious. Individual doctors – sometimes out of fear more than conviction – may withhold lawful abortions and "artificial" contraception, advocating church-approved periodic abstinence instead. Worse, some managers bypass medical staff and invoke the conscience clause on an institution-wide level, leaving entire hospitals without abortion services.

The consequences can be harrowing. In 2000, multiple doctors warned Alicja Tysiąc that pregnancy could severely worsen her existing vision problems. But none would perform an abortion. Tysiąc, now legally blind and unable to work or live independently, was vindicated when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled the state had breached her privacy rights. Likewise, the ECHR found that Poland had violated the European Convention on Human Rights provisions on privacy, liberty, and security as well as its prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment in the case of "Agata," a 14-year-old rape victim. Agata was denied an abortion by a hospital director who explained that doctors in his facility would neither perform abortions nor provide referrals because "ethics is above the law" (96). Shockingly, this scenario was repeated several times before the government designated a hospital 500 kilometres away to perform the procedure. (Poland responded to the ECHR verdicts by creating a Patients' Rights Ombudsman.)

Mishtal's perspective on the church is refreshingly incisive: a strategising institution that played a long game "to establish itself as political actor not just in relation to the [postsocialist] state, but within the state structure itself" (34). Figured as an agent of liberation because of its pre-transition support for Solidarity, few suspected the church would roll back women's rights. Mishtal quotes a prominent feminist and key informant explaining that the Polish left was "simply unprepared to respond to the upsurge of the right wing machinery and the wave of moralization that came with it … it came as a shock" (37).

Long-term participant observation and scores of interviews with reproductive rights activists, doctors, religious officials, and women who made reproductive decisions in the new Poland, give Mishtal an intimate appreciation of the difficulty of resisting an emboldened religious regime, the focus of Chapter 3. Before 1989, women enjoyed significant social entitlements: access to education; secure employment; childcare (including for disabled children); and help with domestic labour, including subsidised takeaway meals. Paradoxically, such "state feminism" may have facilitated the replacement of the "red" regime with the "black" one of priestly cassocks (21). Not only did the state discourage independent feminist dissent, functioning as a "virtual husband," it left inequality within families intact: "actual husbands … experienced little change in gender roles" (26). In consequence, women "viewed state-initiated solutions [to gender inequality] with skepticism" after 1989 (89).

More basically, feminists struggled to articulate their case as conservative Catholicism controlled the terms of debate. Before 1989, one activist recalled, "abortion wasn't weighted down by the language of morality, that it's the killing of the unborn … [T]hen it became a sin" (81). Compounding this

"colonization of language," where "access to family planning was pitted against the 'rights of the unborn,'" feminists themselves are regularly paired with staunch Catholics in media coverage (82). The predictably "antagonistic exchange" makes both sides seem "extreme" (83), which, as Mishtal notes in her conclusion, dampens critique by encouraging people to view the status quo as "moderate" and a "compromise" (18). Finally, while most Poles reject Catholic family planning, they do not say so publically, partly because they still want Catholic weddings and other rituals. The upshot is a "duplicitous system in which the symbolic power of the church is maintained" by people who privately "snub religious rules" (95).

Mishtal develops this last point in a chapter devoted to church surveillance of even sporadically practising Catholics. Building on Foucaultian governmentality – "the conduct of conduct" – she explicates how the church achieves "constraining effects on behaviour" through confession, household visits, confession cards, and premarital classes (the price of a church wedding) (113–114). Priests began using these to question and instruct women (but not men) on sexual and reproductive matters in the 1990s, reflecting the "religious and nationalist construction of Polish women as custodians of Catholic purity" (138). Meanwhile, "intensified reproductive governance served to bolster the public consolidation of Polish Catholicism in the early postsocialist years," even if people reject it in their personal lives, as Mishtal's chapter on "Abortion, Polish style" demonstrates they clearly do (138).

Up to 200,000 Polish women get clandestine abortions every year – similar to the number performed legally before the 1993 near ban. Some women travel to a country where abortion is legal. Others opt for abortion pills – cheaper and more convenient but dependant on the integrity of unregulated suppliers. Many, however, use Poland's signature "'white coat' underground" – private provision by trained and licensed doctors who advertise their services in thinly disguised newspaper ads (146).

This system gives Polish women the distinct advantage of safe abortions, though Mishtal's fieldwork shows that the cost can be daunting. Religious and state authorities generally pretend it does not exist, Mishtal says, to maintain the fiction that banning abortion works. Doctors have little interest in pressing for change, partly because private provision supplements incomes eroded by post-socialist austerity. But if it serves as a pressure valve, Poland's abortion underground constitutes a limited kind of resistance. Women "develop their own *unofficial biopolitics*" (159). These are "distinctly different from what the church prescribes" but remain "individualized and privatized strategies for dealing with social and collective concerns about reproductive rights and health as well as gender equality" (159).

Mishtal's final substantive chapter offers a fascinating account of women's engagement with Catholic-nationalist pronatalism. Poland's fertility rate dropped sharply after 1989. It is now among the lowest in Europe, well below replacement levels. But if Poland's religio-political class regards child-bearing as a patriotic act, Polish women do not. Rather than accept blame for low birthrates, Mishtal's informants point out that the post-socialist state presided over intensified inequality and insecurity, while dismantling programs that enabled women to combine work and family. "I think it's great that we're having a demographic crisis," said one woman. "It's what the government deserves!" (168–69). In short, while priests and politicians accuse women of selfishly rejecting motherhood, the women Mishtal interviewed retort that the "state's political position is *anti*family, not profamily" (171).

Mishtal's explication of how the church and its allies built and sustained a duplicitous politics of morality in post-socialist Poland adds a compelling ethnographic account to the by now irrefutable evidence that banning abortion accomplishes little other than to make it more difficult, dangerous, and costly, particularly for poor, adolescent, or otherwise marginalised women. By extension, the book shows how formal democracy can serve as a vehicle for gender-based and class-based injustices, making it harder to see and resist the problems. Here, the effects of neoliberal social policy compound the "liberal bind" entailed in "the conflict between a liberal state's protection of religious institutions and the protection of women's rights" (198). The questions raised are also pertinent in many less obviously "transitional" places. Mishtal's book will interest scholars of feminist activism, political transitions, and political religion as well as anthropologists of Poland and reproduction. Her very accessible prose makes this book suitable for a wide audience, including undergraduates.

Teresa Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015, 272 pages.

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Love's Uncertainty is about child rearing in the context of a major historical transformation in China, which has been, and continues to be, engineered by the state – the economic and human modernisation of the nation. The book takes as a central question the problem of moral agency in contemporary life and argues that Chinese social reality is tremendously contradictory and inconsistent, thus requiring the reconciliation of conflicting moral goods and the location of opportunities for exercising personal efficacy (8). Teresa Kuan presents her book as a critique of the ideological mystification argument, commonly found in studies of motherhood under capitalism (13). A focus on moral agency and experience provides, she argues, a remedy for structural or political-economic reductionism without reverting back to the kind of humanism that assumes a rationally and morally autonomous subject. Moral experience refers to the intermediate space between the force of social norms and moral codes, on the one hand, and the capacity of actors to deliberate about their situation and make the effort to respond accordingly, on the other (15). Moral agency then relates to what Kuan calls an ethics of trying, a kind of practical philosophy that takes causation and efficacy, responsibility and blame, as its central concerns (18). The moral problem for middle-class mothers in modern China consists of whether one has tried everything possible to secure the good life for one's child in the face of intense social competition.