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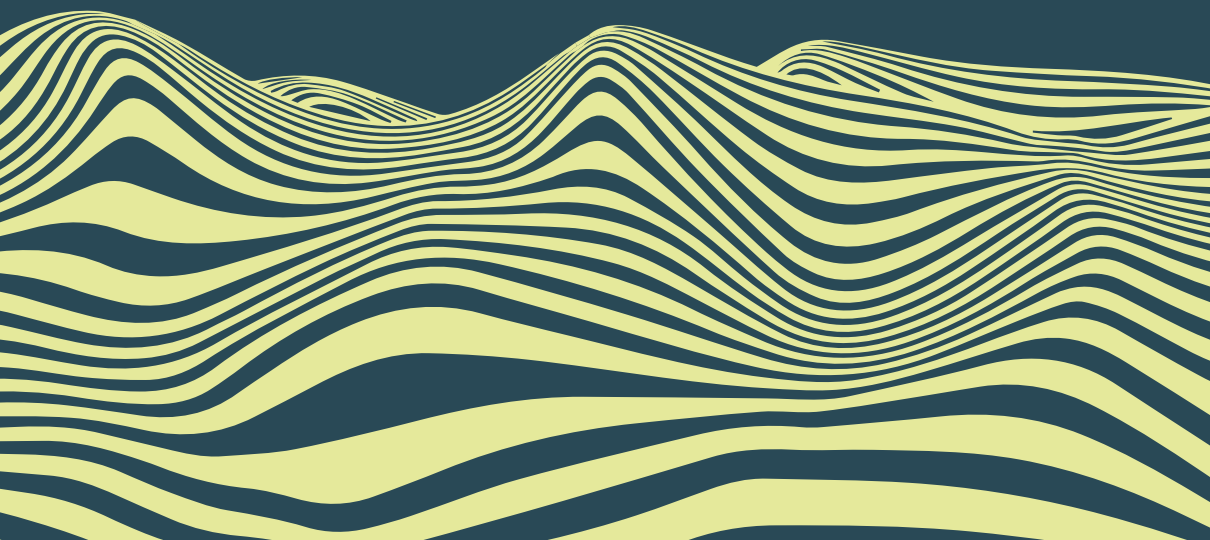
# Marrying and Divorcing in Postwar Europe

## Ideological Struggles Across the Iron Curtain

Stefania Bernini



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



Marrying and Divorcing in Postwar Europe

## **Studi di storia**

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Ca' Foscari

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# **Marrying and Divorcing in Postwar Europe**

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Across the Iron Curtain

Stefania Bernini

Venezia

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Marrying and Divorcing in Postwar Europe. Ideological Struggles Across  
the Iron Curtain  
Stefania Bernini

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# **Marrying and Divorcing in Postwar Europe**

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Stefania Bernini

### **Abstract**

In the middle of the twentieth century, European families found themselves at the centre of radical social and political transformations that affected both the realities of daily life and the way in which family life was discussed in the public arena and regulated by the law.

Taking Italy and Poland as its main case studies, this book re-examines the major political and ideological confrontations that crossed postwar Europe from the perspective of ordinary families and of those who sought to regulate the way in which they lived.

The main protagonists of this exploration are politicians, scholars, priests and, of course, families themselves. The main competitions discussed took place between Communist Parties and the Catholic Church.

While most analyses of Cold War Europe have concentrated on either half of the continent, this book argues that understanding the logic of postwar cultural and ideological competitions requires exploring the commonalities and differences that existed across the iron curtain.

Although hardly ever brought together in historical analyses of the postwar era, Italy and Poland provide a rich terrain for such analysis. In both countries, references to family and marriage were used to promote alternative programmes of transformation and to assert alternative visions of the world. In both countries, the overwhelming influence asserted by the Catholic Church over family affairs made the struggle for ideological influence all the more dramatic, rendering family life a crucial terrain for political engagement. Both in Italy and in Poland, the battle fought over the regulation of family and marriage shaped the postwar social, political and cultural landscape.

**Keywords** Italy. Poland. Cold War. Postwar. Family. Marriage. Divorce. Catholic Church. Communism.



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# **Introduction**

## **The Struggle Over the Family. A Different View on Postwar Europe**

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**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Struggle Over the Family. – 3 Overcoming the Public/private Split: Politics, Kinship, Religion. – 4 Crossing the Iron Curtain. – 5 Legal Reforms and Social Transformations. – Conclusions.

### **1 Introduction**

Most studies of contemporary Europe treat the family as a private matter, separated from and largely irrelevant to political history. The few accounts of the postwar period that pay attention to family life tend to depict it as dominated by unstoppable processes of individualisation and fragmentation, presenting postwar families as small, isolated, and increasingly removed from political participation. After years of terrible upheavals brought about by a long and devastating war, the postwar period seemed to mark the return to the safety of home and the private sphere, conceived as a space of separation and protection from the realm of political confrontation. In this book, by contrast, I will show that families cannot be confined to the private sphere nor treated as a specific (if not marginal) field of history.

In the middle of the twentieth century, European families found themselves at the centre of radical social and political transformations that affected both the realities of daily life and the way in which family life was discussed in the public arena and regulated by the law. Both in Western and Eastern Europe, families represented an essential dimension of the political, social, and economic history of

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the postwar era. The battle fought over the regulation of family and marriage shaped the postwar social and political landscapes.

While most analyses of postwar Europe have concentrated on either the eastern or western half of the continent, this book will cross the iron curtain to compare two countries, Italy and Poland, rarely brought together in historical analyses. The pervasive logic and imagery of the Cold War still encourages us to treat the East and the West as somewhat incomparable entities.

Taking families as our starting point, however, will help us to see new convergences and new points of departure. To start with, many of the challenges that families had to confront in the aftermath of the war were common across both sides of Europe; throughout the continent families had to come to terms with unprecedented losses, of loved ones as well as of material possessions. Although manifesting themselves with different intensity, phenomena such as housing shortages, forced and voluntary migration, and unwanted separations shaped family life across the East-West divide. Postwar reconstruction, while largely dependent on families' participation, transformed ways of living throughout Europe. As political life resumed, new political battles were fought around the family, its social role and regulation. While countries' specific political set up amplified the battles fought and their outcome, in some cases analogous ideological competitions took place over the family, despite the apparently very different political conditions that existed on the ground. This was the case in Italy and Poland.

## **2 The Struggle Over the Family**

The competition discussed in this book was first and foremost over the way in which people should conduct their private lives. Its main protagonists were not only state officials, but also lawyers, scholars, social workers and priests, as well as families themselves. It was a competition that took place not between states governed by different political systems, but within countries themselves.

The main contending parties discussed in the present book were Communists and the Catholic Church. Both in Italy and in Poland, Communists and Catholics tried to assert their influence on family life, seeing in it a crucial tool of social penetration and control, and tried to shape it, according to their vision of the world.

Communists and Catholics seemed to hold irreconcilable visions of family life. Communists saw family as an institution shaped by changing economic relations; Catholics understood it as an immutable institution governed by divine law. Communists advocated women's economic equality to men, Catholics saw women as the cornerstone of family life, a role incompatible with their full participation

in economic and public life. Communists saw fertility as something that could be controlled, Catholics condemned any such effort.

And yet, the comparison proposed in this book shows not only differences, but also some important similarities.<sup>1</sup> Although for radically different reasons, both Communists and Catholics disliked capitalist competition, consumerism, and individualism. Both saw materialist culture as inherently dangerous and corrupting; both held a totalising view of the world, in which only one true interpretation of reality could exist. Even the positions held on family life were not as at odds with each other as the skirmishes of the post-war years could suggest. To start with, both Catholics and Communists assumed that individual decisions should be subordinated to the good of a higher entity, and they both saw the family as an institution governed by principles formed outside of it. The socialist family should act according to socialist morality, the Christian family according to the teachings of the Church. In their competition for the soul of the nation, both Catholics and Communists saw mothers and children as central tools of intervention, and competed with the State to assert their influence over them.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the western and eastern parts of the continent could reasonably appear destined to move in inexorably different directions. The fall of the Berlin wall, however, showed not only that Europe's East and West could find new political convergences but also that significant similarities existed at a social and cultural level.

In the case of Italy and Poland, even a cursory look at the regulation of family life, sexuality, and procreation reveals an enduring attachment to traditional norms and principles, which seems at odds with the transformations that have taken place in most other European countries. Both in Italy and in Poland, legal reforms in the fields of family law and reproduction (from equal marriage to medically assisted procreation) remain highly controversial even today and a highly *familistic* approach dominates.<sup>2</sup> This is not an accidental convergence, but rather the result of long-established cultural patterns and of a complex history of State-Church relations. One of the suggestions advanced in this book is that the dynamics that took place in the aftermath of the Second World War will help us to shed light on contemporary politics.

For all their differences, Communists and Catholics found a fundamental convergence in a paternalistic and patriarchal vision of so-

<sup>1</sup> On the risks and benefits of comparison in historical research, see Marc Bloch's classic work, Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée", and for more recent considerations, Cafagna, "La comparazione e la storia contemporanea"; Kocka, Haupt, "Comparison and Beyond"; Rossi, *La storia comparata*; Salvati, "Storia contemporanea"; Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing"; Skocpol, Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History".

<sup>2</sup> See Bernini, "Saggio introduttivo", 5-21.

cial relations. If Catholics warned against the dangers of women's work, Communists treated them as the most flexible component of the workforce, to be included and excluded from production according to changing economic needs. While Catholics openly asserted women's essential maternal and domestic duties, Communists endorsed the principle of women's equality but without creating the instruments necessary to their actual emancipation from domestic and care work. While radically different in institutional and political terms, Poland and Italy shared an unshakable reliance on families and on women's unpaid work as the only social institutions able to provide individual care and collective welfare. Catholic and communist paternalism converged in ensuring that traditional structures of gender power would be maintained through the upheavals of the Cold War. The long-term consequences of this can be seen until today.

### 3 Overcoming the Public/Private Split: Politics, Kinship, Religion

Since the nineteenth century, the conceptual split between kinship and politics has represented one of the central tenets of Western self-understanding and a defining trait of modern liberal thinking. It is a divide imprinted in public discourse and political practice, as well as in much scholarly work.<sup>3</sup> Similarly pervasive has been the idea that in *modern* societies, religion should be largely insignificant to political dynamics and best relegated to the private sphere. As Casanova observed, the “modern *privatisation* of religion” represented not only a descriptive account of “institutional differentiation”, but a prescriptive notion establishing “the proper space for religion in social life”.<sup>4</sup>

In modern societies, both kinship and religion were assigned to the sphere of the domestic: a realm supposedly alien to politics and power, and constructed as a quintessentially female domain.<sup>5</sup> The idea that family and kinship should be less and less relevant to the working of ‘modern’ societies has been supported through time by influential sociological narratives describing neat paths of transformation from the complex kinship structures of the past to the nuclear family

<sup>3</sup> Relegated to either the past or to non-Western societies, kinship became a way of contrasting divergent paths of development, and has been often seen as a hindrance to economic and bureaucratic modernisation. Bouquet, *Reclaiming English Kinship*; Bamford, Leach, *Kinship and Beyond*.

<sup>4</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions*, 64; on the role played by the Catholic Church in the third wave of democratisation, Philpott, “The Catholic Wave”, 102-16; Stepan, “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations’”, 37-57.

<sup>5</sup> McKinnock, *Toward a Feminist Theory*.

of the present.<sup>6</sup> According to this model, home is where the individual is supposedly free to express her/his own preferences in terms of sexuality, emotions, and faith, unhindered by the influence or control of politics. What home stands for is here much broader than “the physical space of the household”, encompassing “the sphere of love, expression, intimacy, subjectivity [*sic*], sentimentality, emotions, irrationality, morality, [and] spirituality”.<sup>7</sup>

Only recently have historians started to rethink long-held assumptions concerning both the declining relevance of kinship in modern European societies (largely thanks to the influence of anthropological work), and the supposed irrelevance of religion to the working of contemporary politics.<sup>8</sup>

This book carries forward the reassessment of the role and meaning of both kinship and religion in postwar Europe. It shows that far from representing a safe haven from aggressive Cold War politics, families were right at the centre of its ideological and economic struggles, while religion exerted a crucial political and social influence, contributing to form individuals’ political understandings and influencing public policies and interventions.

More than any other postwar phenomena, the ‘marriage boom’ symbolised the desire to return to a normality of sort, recovering individual projects frustrated by the war. More than any other activity, getting married and having children signified the attempt to bring back some kind of order after the upheaval of the conflict. It was an investment in the future that was not missed by contemporary observers. Families became a privileged topic for political discussions, sociological investigations, and economic debates.

The idea that creating viable postwar societies required the reconstitution of a strong domestic sphere cut across the East-West divide.<sup>9</sup> In Eastern Europe as in the West, politicians used families to advertise social transformations and visions of the future, moralists and commentators to examine social reality, priests and bishops to defend the prerogatives and powers of the Church against the men-

<sup>6</sup> On the impact of industrialisation on family patterns, Goode, *World Revolution*.

<sup>7</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions*, 64. For a reflection on the meaning of home in the Polish context, Shallcross, “Home Truths”, 1-11.

<sup>8</sup> The work of Goody remains here an important point of reference, Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*; *Comparative Studies in Kinship*; and *The East in the West*. See also Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*.

<sup>9</sup> In recent years, historians have given growing attention to the material and symbolic value of the domestic. While a number of historians have engaged with the notion of home and the domestic, however, family life has remained at the periphery of most of these examinations. Yet, if it is true that after 1945 the domestic attracted a remarkable amount of public attention, this was largely because of the concerns attached to the future of the family, On the importance of the domestic to the postwar imagery, see Betts, Crowley, “Introduction”, 213-36.



aces of modernity and the intrusion of the State. In Western Europe, the conviction that a “stable family was the best defence against the profound psychological and social dislocation” brought about by the war informed the approach to social intervention pursued by Conservatives, Christian and Social Democrats alike.<sup>10</sup> While the governing parties of Western Europe made reference to family life to advertise stability and gradual economic transformation, the communist parties of the East used the family to advertise a socialist modernisation that invested the domestic sphere directly and dramatically. For the communist parties of the West, excluded from government by the logic of the Cold War, showing that they too had something to say about families served to affirm their political and national legitimacy.

On both sides of the iron curtain, politicians and religious representatives addressed and made reference to families and their (supposed) needs to promote alternative programmes of transformation and to assert their credentials as pursuers of the common good. Moreover, in both halves of the continent, politicians and social reformers understood that families had to get on board for any type of social and political change to take place. For this reason, in the East as in the West, families became a central terrain of ideological competition.

Moving from the premise that no singular notion of family ever existed, nor any homogeneous experience of family life, this book explores the different and often conflicting agendas that motivated interventions in family life, as well as the way in which such interventions were received, appropriated and resisted.

#### 4 Crossing the Iron Curtain

The decision to bring together a communist country located in central-eastern Europe and a Christian Democratic one from the continent’s southern shore may seem surprising.<sup>11</sup> If a sensible comparison should rest on “differing and, at the same time, related realities”, as Marc Bloc posited,<sup>12</sup> then in the case of Italy and Poland the former seem to prevail over the latter.

Italy as an aggressor country and Poland as the victim *par excellence* had different experiences of war and occupation, and followed

<sup>10</sup> Betts and Crowley, “Introduction”, 230.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of western Europe, Skinner, *Families and States*. The main exception to this trend is the growing field of refugee studies, in which the analysis of humanitarian intervention has successfully crossed the East-West divide, best exemplified by Zahra, *The Lost Children*.

<sup>12</sup> Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 35.

different political and economic trajectories once the war was over. If Italy was the first fascist country, Poland could be proud of having refused any official collaboration with the Nazi occupier; if the military performance of Poland could be popularised in terms of tragic (if sometimes ill-advised) heroism, Italy's war record was much harder to narrate in commendatory terms. Not only is the list of wartime differences long, but the destiny of the two countries continued to diverge in the aftermath of the conflict, when Italy and Poland found themselves on the opposite sides of the iron curtain. Understandably, the different trajectories followed by the two countries since the end of the Second World War relegated them to neatly distinct fields of scholarship. Poland's postwar history has been treated as a variant of the 'communist experience', while Italy has found some space mostly in narratives of Western Europe.

For all the differences that characterised the newborn Italian republic and the People's Republic of Poland (PRL, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa), however, some significant connections existed and are worth exploring.

The Second World War constituted a turning point in political, social, and cultural terms. In aggressor and victim countries alike, the war left not only a trail of unprecedented material devastation, but also a moral anguish that could be traced at individual and family level, as well as at the level of the national community. Recreating viable societies required a process of reconstruction that encompassed all levels of social and political life.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the end of the war resulted in the creation of new political institutions, and in the birth of two republican states, governed by newly introduced constitutions. While very different in nature, both the People's Republic of Poland and the Republic of Italy promised a radical break with pre-war institutions and, in the case of Italy, with 'fascist' responsibilities.

The narratives that accompanied the creation of the new postwar republics shared an insistence on national victimhood, resistance, and rebirth that obscured the most uncomfortable aspects of the war (starting with Polish and Italian responsibilities for the Holocaust of Polish and Italian Jews).<sup>13</sup> In the Christian Democratic Republic of Italy as in the People's Republic of Poland, the postwar settlements sought their legitimacy in the anti-fascist struggle, although what counted as anti-fascist differed to some extent in the two countries, as we will see. In both countries, the constitutions adopted in

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**13** On Polish and Italian memory discourse and delayed confrontation with national responsibilities in the Holocaust, Madajczyk, "Experience and Memory"; Fogu, "Italiani Brava Gente", 147-76; Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 212-22; Lagrou, "Victims of Genocide and National Memory", 181-222.

the aftermath of the war represented not only a catalogue of the new rules that were going to govern the postwar states, but the foundational act of new political communities.<sup>14</sup> While the nature of those communities would rapidly evolve in very different directions, some common themes could be detected throughout the postwar years.

The search for political legitimacy, for instance, represented a major feature of both Polish and Italian politics. In Italy's *blocked* democracy, the Cold War order guaranteed the continuous power of the Christian Democratic party, but it also institutionalised a culture of reciprocal suspicion and delegitimisation, which would remain a long-term feature of the Italian political system. In Poland, the control exercised by the Soviet Union could guarantee that Polish communists remained in power, but could do little to foster their legitimacy within the country.<sup>15</sup>

Most crucially for this book, both in Italy and in Poland the postwar years were marked by a mammoth confrontation between catholic and communist projects of social transformation. It was a confrontation between two movements, "each aspiring to enlist all mankind, each with comprehensive but reciprocally contradictory convictions about the nature of the universe and man, and each supported by a far-reaching organisation".<sup>16</sup> The contest between Communists and Catholics pervaded all aspects of social and political life and found in the family a major terrain of engagement.

Somehow surprisingly, even the most recent and attentive historiography of postwar Poland has tended to relegate the catholic question to a rather marginal position, as if of little relevance to the transformations pursued by the communist governments.<sup>17</sup> This is possibly a reverberation of the enduring tendency to look at Eastern Europe as a more or less homogeneous space, shaped by the near-omnipotent power of the party-state. As John Connelly noted, however, "separate national traditions continued through the Stalinist period" in much of central-eastern Europe, "creating different contexts for politics and for social experience".<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On the meaning of constitutions, see among others Pombeni, *La costituente*; Elgie, Zielonka, "Constitutions and Constitution-Building", 25-46.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of *cultural memory*, best conceptualised by Jan and Aleida Assmann in the field of literary and cultural studies, gives us a key to the understanding of the postwar moment and its representative canons, see Assmann, "Collective Memory" and *Cultural Memory*.

<sup>16</sup> Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 41. On the place of Italy and Poland in the Catholic Church's postwar's international strategy, Chamedes, *A Twentieth-century Crusade*, 241-70.

<sup>17</sup> See Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialisation*; Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*.

<sup>18</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, 2. Sabina Mihelj has described the lack of "literature addressing the symbolic mappings of Europe after WWII" as the result of an enduring

The pervasiveness of Catholicism, together with the historical memory of the Russian occupation, constituted the factor that set Poland most apart from other countries in the eastern bloc. Putting an end to the religious pluralism that had characterised much Polish history, the Second World War left the Catholic Church as the only religious institution able to assert voice vis-à-vis the State. It was a strong voice, which found in family affairs an important terrain on which to confront an unwelcome and hostile political power.<sup>19</sup> The Church occupied a much more comfortable position in Italy, where its interests and instances found direct representation in the Christian Democratic party, and a less than hostile reception by a usually accommodating PCI.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the power exercised by Catholicism went well beyond the political and institutional sphere; an even greater influence was exercised over culture and society, informing daily practices, language, and rituals. It was a diffused power that permeated the political and domestic cultures of both countries and from which not even communists were immune.

If we take a look at Italian and Polish Communists, they seem to occupy opposite positions. In Italy, war and occupation had transformed a small revolutionary party in a mass political organisation, whose prestige had been greatly enhanced by the leadership exercised in the resistance movement. The Cold War, however, excluded the PCI from national government. Polish Communists, by contrast, enjoyed a near monopoly of power. Unlike their Italian counterparts, however, they could count on little spontaneous support and scant popularity.

Despite the reversed circumstances in which they operated, both Italian and Polish communists confronted similar challenges vis-à-vis the family, starting with the overwhelming influence exercised on family matters by the Catholic Church.

The comparative dimension of the book is discussed at greater length in chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 traces the main lines of the postwar settlements in Italy and Poland, giving particular attention to the position occupied by Communists and Catholics in the two countries. Chapter 2 focuses on the ideological struggles engaging Communists and the Catholic Church and discusses some of the main theoretical and ideological tenets that accompanied postwar debates over issues such as marriage reform, divorce and the changing role of women.

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tendency to assume that, during the Cold War ideology, international politics and class trumped culture and nationality. See Mihelj, "Drawing the East-West Border", 277.

**19** See among others Flores and Gallerano, *Sul PCI*, Gozzini, "Italian Communism".

## 5 Legal Reforms and Social Transformations

This book looks at the family as a social and cultural construct that needs to be understood at the crossroad of political, legal, social, and affective realms. Both in Italy and in Poland, different authorities sought to establish their jurisdiction over family life, setting alternative agendas for transformation and putting forward competing sets of values and world views.

State institutions, political parties, and religious authorities looked at the family as a major terrain of intervention and tried to regulate (and in some cases control) family life and private relations according to different blueprints of social transformation. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explore the main legal reforms pursued in the postwar years in the field of family legislation, discussing them in relation to different parties' ideological tenets, as well as in relation to the different political and social situations that characterised postwar Italy and Poland. Chapter 3 concentrates on the immediate postwar years, discussing the place occupied by the family in the new constitutions adopted in Italy and Poland in the aftermath of the Second World War and the debates that accompanied the new constitutional settlements. Chapter 4 expands the examination into the sixties and the seventies. This shows the impact that shifts in political power had on the treatment of the family, as well as the importance that the confrontation over the family had over changing political equilibria. While the immediate postwar years were marked in Poland by an open conflict between State and Church, reflected in the introduction of significant reforms in the field of marriage and family life, the same years were characterised in Italy by the overwhelming influence exercised by the Catholic Church over the treatment of marriage and family, an influence already reflected in the Republican Constitution approved in 1947. The sixties and seventies, however, saw the emergence of an opposite tendency in the two countries. While in Poland an increasingly discredited leadership reluctantly sought a compromise with the Catholic Church, in Italy the strong pressure exercised by the new social movements forced reluctant political parties (starting with the PCI) to take over an agenda for social reform that had one of the main fields of intervention in the family. In the seventies, this resulted in a series of reforms of family law, starting with the introduction of divorce in 1970, 25 years later than in Poland. The question of divorce is discussed at length in Chapter 5.

While having lost much of the radical ideas of the twenties in relation to family and gender relations, postwar communists advocated, and when possible engineered, social and legal changes that could still be read as progressive. In the Polish case, the introduction of universal secular marriage in 1945 brought with it the possibility of di-

voiced and affirmed the legal equality of the spouses.<sup>20</sup> This opened the first dramatic conflict with the Catholic Church, and with Pius XII, strenuously and vociferously opposed to any intervention aiming to modify the institution of marriage or the gender roles upon which it was supposed to rest.

From an external, secular position, the introduction of universal State marriage and the affirmation of women and men's equality may only appear as a decisive moment of modernisation of family life. That this should take place in the same years that marked Poland's descent into tyranny could seem a paradox. Similarly paradoxical could appear the Italian case, where the transformation of the country from a fascist monarchy into an anti-fascist republic, founded on the ideals of the Resistance, brought no consequences for the regulation of marriage and the family, which until the seventies continued to be regulated by fascist laws.

In this sense, comparing the processes taking place in Italy and Poland and the different political circumstances that shaped them questions the extent to which broad processes of political democratisation and the democratisation of family life proceed hand in hand. The question, to which I will return throughout the book, becomes particularly poignant when we look at gender.

Gender dynamics represent a crucial dimension in the structuring and restructuring of societies, essential to the understanding of social practices and power relations, both within and outside the domestic sphere.<sup>21</sup> In the aftermath of the Second World War, gender relations represented one of the main fields in which alternative visions of family life, economy, and social relations clashed and found accommodation.

Without denying or ignoring the specificities of the Eastern European context, the Italian-Polish comparison encourages a rethinking of gender dynamics in relation to both Communism and the Catholic Church. The pervasiveness of popular Catholicism and the Marian cult, influenced both the Polish and the Italian understanding of family and gender roles, particularly by promoting a model of maternity based on notions of sacrifice that proved lasting despite the different political and social contexts.<sup>22</sup>

Both in Italy and in Poland, moreover, gender relations stood at the core of the complicated transactions and tentative accommoda-

<sup>20</sup> According to Małgorzata Fidelis, "Eastern European stalinism was a force that brought radical social change rather than a conservative backlash", in contrast with the Soviet Union, where Stalinist reform could be read as a reaction "against the socially progressive legislation of the first years of Leninism" (*Women, Communism, and Industrialisation*, 9).

<sup>21</sup> Among others, Frader, "Introduction", 3.

<sup>22</sup> Blom, "Gendered Nations in International Comparison"; Banti, *Sublime Madre Nostra*; Bernini, "Patrie, popoli, corpi".

tions that accompanied the social and economic transformations of the postwar era. Although with different intensity, both in Italy and in Poland, postwar women found novel opportunities and roles, but had also to confront enduring gender norms that left upon them the overwhelming responsibility over domestic matters. Even in Poland, where the state put forward aggressive policies aimed to include women in the industrial workforce, services remained marginal, leaving the unpaid work of care almost exclusively on women's shoulders. Earlier than in the West, Polish women experienced the 'double burden' resulting from the combination of new paid work and undiminished domestic roles.<sup>23</sup> What in Eastern Europe appeared as a specific feature of state socialism, was described by the Italian feminist sociologist Laura Balbo as a characteristic feature of a capitalist transformation in which the (late) inclusion of women in the labour market had not been accompanied by a transformation of their role within the family. Defective social policies and an entrenched patriarchal culture left women in the difficult position of having to mediate between production and reproduction, carrying a double burden that would become a characterising feature of their lives.<sup>24</sup>

## 6 Conclusions

This book examines the relationship between family and postwar politics by bringing together the analysis of broad political and social transformations, ideological confrontations, and the experience of ordinary families. To this end, the sources used combine official documents, media reporting, and autobiographical narratives of transformation. The outcome confirms at once the importance of the family as a place of political and ideological contest, and the great flexibility of an institution able to bend and adapt to very different circumstances. By looking at families both as ideological constructs and as lived experiences, I aim to question any uniform notion of 'family', pointing out the many tensions, and the great distance that usually separated normative expectation and even expert discourse from the experience of ordinary people.

A focus on the family also helps us to question assumed national or regional specificities. While real socialism certainly left a significant mark on Eastern European societies, it was not the only force

<sup>23</sup> Fidelis among others has sought "to redefine the notion of the double burden of work inside and outside the household as a social phenomenon specific to women's experiences under communism", which "helped perpetuate a subordinate role of women". (*Women, Communism, and Industrialisation*, 12).

<sup>24</sup> Balbo, *Stato di famiglia*.

at work, nor the only one that should be taken into account. Long-term influences, starting with Catholicism, were as important in shaping attitudes and values. Moreover, while specific in the power that it was able to assert, Eastern European Communism cannot be completely separated from the Western variant. Although operating in different contexts, and having at their disposal very different possibilities and powers, Western and Eastern communists had to confront some similar issues in terms of their social and cultural influence. How to approach family life and gender relations represented a major question across the iron curtain.

Examining the relationship between family and State across the East-West divide allows rethinking long-lasting assumptions concerning the two halves of the continent. For a long time, the role of the party-state in postwar Eastern Europe has been presented in one dimensional narratives of oppression, incomparable with the role played by Western institutions. A focus on the family, however, reveals a more nuanced situation. The Polish case highlights the importance of the family for a regime determined to modernise the country through forced processes of industrialisation, as well as the response of ordinary citizens to socialist politics. To families, Communists promised the elimination of want, the provision of state interventions able to answer the needs of each citizen, and the creation of a modern and rational society, far removed from the backwardness of the past. To women, the State promised the elimination of their economic dependency and the full recognition of their equality to men. Against this proclaimed agenda, however, very traditional notions of sexual differences and family life persisted.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the battle over the family had social, political, and ideological dimensions. In both countries, Communists and Catholics were the main contenders over family life, its nature and its regulation. In both countries, women and children attracted the greatest attention. For both Communists and Catholics, asserting their influence on the carriers of the nation was more than a symbolic matter. It was a competition for hegemony that found in the family a privileged terrain of confrontation.





# 1 Family Life and the Challenges of Reconstruction

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**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 1.2 Cities of Rubble and Ashes and the Loss of Home. – 1.3 Destroyed Lands. – 1.4 Separation and Displacement. – 1.5 Political Legacies: Families in Divided Societies.

## 1 Introduction

The Second World War saw cities and infrastructures razed to the ground, ideologies discredited and political systems overturned. The war also transformed the lives of families and communities beyond recognition. The upheaval left behind by the conflict encompassed material, political and moral dimensions, and also caused disruption to social bonds and the intimate relationships in domestic life.

Although the war had been a significantly different affair in Italy and Poland, in terms of material devastation, number of victims, and political consequences, its impact on family life had unsurprising commonalities. Losses and separations transformed families' physiognomy, while political struggles and civil wars undermined their cohesion. Material destruction and forced departures deprived people not only of material dwellings, but also of places of identity and belonging.

Both in Italy and in Poland, as in many other parts of Europe, recreating the conditions in which family life could resume was not simply a matter of building new dwellings. The material circumstances created by the war required a rethinking of countries' social and economic structures. Forced separations, hasty war marriages and the uncertain faith of the wives of absent soldiers, questioned existing legal arrangements in relation to marriage and family law. The crucial role

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played by women in the conflict showed the limits of legal systems that still denied them fundamental rights, both in and outside the home.

The issues left behind by the war challenged existing provisions and questioned the role of the State in relation to family life. It was obvious that postwar recovery could not simply be a return to the past. On the contrary, it required a thorough rethinking of the relationship between states and citizens, which directly questioned the role of the postwar State in the family and domestic life. The consequences of the war gave new relevance to the question of whether what happened within families should be considered a private matter or an issue of collective interest. It also questioned which public actors should or could play a role in it.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. The first part of the chapter highlights three issues, which had a lasting impact on the reorganisation of family life in both Italy and Poland, namely the destruction of cities and dwellings; the devastation of the countryside in two heavily agrarian countries; the losses and separation endured by families. The second part of the chapter introduces the postwar settlement in Italy and Poland and discusses its relevance for the family.

## 1.1 Cities of Rubble and Ashes and the Loss of Home

The Second World War left behind a threefold destruction: it deprived people of the physical dwellings where they had lived; it destroyed the communities in which they found meaning; and it undermined the political communities to which they had belonged. No reflection on family life in the postwar era can ignore these starting points.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of postwar reconstruction must also be understood as a complex notion, encompassing material, political and symbolic levels, and the same applies to the work of reconstruction that took place at the level of family life.

Few places in Europe made the all-encompassing meaning of reconstruction clear as the Polish capital.

Between 1943 and 1944, Warsaw became the very emblem of the physical, moral and human devastation resulting from war. The destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943 and the razing to the ground of large parts of city in the aftermath of the 1944's rising, transformed the Polish capital into "a city of rubble and ashes", where those who had escaped death struggled for survival in locations "never conceived as human dwelling".<sup>2</sup>

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**1** On the idea of home as encompassing "both the life lived within a specific dwelling and the larger space or community within which a person is at home in the universe", Levine, "Home Loss", 98.

**2** Szpilman, *The Pianist*, 185.

UNRRA analysts estimated that, by the end of 1945, “half a million of the evacuated population of Warsaw had returned to the ruins of the city”, where they lived “in cellars, single rooms and patched up buildings”, and where contagious diseases festered.<sup>3</sup>

Although no Italian city experienced anything resembling the annihilation of Warsaw, here too the devastation caused by the war hit hard families suffering from the consequences of poor housing stock, multiplying the number of those who lived in dangerous and precarious accommodation.<sup>4</sup>

For the survivors of the war, material devastation represented the first huge challenge to be confronted with. Both in Italy and in Poland, providing new and healthy shelters was not only a matter of material urgency, but an issue of huge symbolic and political relevance.

In Poland in particular, rebuilding dwellings and cities acquired an explicitly political meaning. The new Communist powers called upon the workers to build a new political community, in radical discontinuity with the past. As the sociologists Aleksandra Jasińska and Renata Siemieńska noticed in 1983, this act of collective (re)building, quickly became a crucial trait of the “socialist personality”, and a founding element in the construction of a new Poland in which the working class was due to hold power.<sup>5</sup> Testimonies from the period give us a sense of how collective and individual projects intersected.

The worker Kazimierz Szymczak narrated in a memoir published in the early seventies how in 1945 he had refused to leave Warsaw with his wife and daughter to take up “a well-paid job” in the north of the country. Despite the fact that the family home was reduced to rubble, Szymczak could not bring himself to leave the city “when she needed any available pair of hands willing to do work”.<sup>6</sup>

Szymczak’s narrative provided a model response to the call of the new Communist government. By taking part in the rebuilding of his old apartment block, Szymczak showed his commitment to the rebuilding of the common home. The determination and even self-sacrifice he described in his memoir read as a measure of his commitment to the new political project.

<sup>3</sup> *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 31, “Health Conditions in Poland”, Division of operational analysis, UNRRA European Regional Office, London W1, March 1947, 8; *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 32, “Health Conditions in Italy”, 4.

<sup>4</sup> UNRRA analysts estimated that, by the end of the war, nearly 6 million rooms had been damaged, a million and a half, completely destroyed. This represented 1/8 of the total rooms that existed in the country. *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 32, “Health Conditions in Italy”, 3. On Italy’s housing needs, see also, Alberti, “Fabbisogno e costruzioni di abitazioni in Italia”, 345-6, and Cardelli, Calcaprina, “Premesse a un programma di edilizia sociale”, 29-37.

<sup>5</sup> Jasińska, Siemieńska, “The Socialist Personality”, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Kazimierz Szymczak ‘Samum’, “Jaskinie, nory, mieszkania” [Caves, Burrows, Flats], 39. All Polish and Italian quotations have been translated into English by the Author.

In later years, the housing issue would assume a very different political meaning in Poland, as the State's struggled to provide good quality housing, particularly for young families. In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, the first wave of reconstruction carried with it a huge symbolic significance, which helped to rally ordinary Poles behind the State.

Fitly, the Italian Communist daily newspaper *L'Unità* celebrated the reconstruction of Warsaw as the very symbol of the socialist victory against fascism. In the "largest building site in the world", wrote Luciano Barca in 1950, each builder worked not only for his salary, but to bring life back to the capital and to participate in the recovery of the county. Through their work and thanks to the planning abilities of the Socialist state, "thousands and thousands of families pushed away from their city by Nazi violence" had been able to return "to welcoming apartments, full of modern comforts".<sup>7</sup>

In the same year in which Luciano Barca praised Poles' dedication to work and reconstruction, the Law on Socialist Work passed by the government in Warsaw imposed harsh penalties for ill-disciplined workers, "in effect classifying recalcitrant or slack workers as enemies of the State".<sup>8</sup> The same legislation punished strikes and introduced labour camps throughout the country. The rhetoric of rebuilding the common home could do little to obscure the iron fist of Stalinism, which ensured the work would be done.

For the Communist Barca, as for many others, the housing plans pursued in Poland in the immediate postwar years, together with the full employment imperative that accompanied them, stood in sharp contrast with Italy's economic conservatism. The objective of reaching monetary stabilisation dominated Italy's postwar economic policy. While this succeeded in keeping inflation under control and progressively reduced the country's economic deficit, it also curbed public spending dramatically, limited housing provisions, and contributed to the spiraling of unemployment, which reached over 2 million people in 1948.<sup>9</sup> Despite a housing plan launched in 1949, largely motivated by the aim to tackle unemployment, the economic and political investment put in the (re)building of housing and infrastructures remained modest in the early years of the Republic.<sup>10</sup>

In post-war Italy, housing was mostly left to private initiative. This meant that in many areas of the country, poor housing conditions and

<sup>7</sup> Luciano Barca, "Su ogni casa in costruzione l'effigie del miglior operaio". *L'Unità*, 15 June 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Kopka, *Obozy pracy*, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Bortolotti, *Storia della politica edilizia*.

<sup>10</sup> On the "Provvedimenti per incrementare l'occupazione operaia, agevolando la costruzione di case per lavoratori", usually referred to as the *Ina casa plan*, Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, 22-3.

overcrowding would last well into the sixties. In 1969, the Communist Maria Antonietta Macciocchi described life in the *bassi* of Naples in a way that was uncomfortably reminiscent of the description made by Matilde Serao long before her.<sup>11</sup>

Although attracting less visibility than Naples, similar conditions of precariousness in housing could be found across the country and more acutely in its southern regions.

The modest attention given in Italy to building programmes stood in direct contrast to a political rhetoric that emphasised the commitment of the postwar State to the protection and upholding of family life.

In both countries, the issue of how to rebuild intersected the question of what sort of economic and social development should be pursued, which is to say whether the rural economy which still dominated both Italy and Poland could still have a future.

## 1.2 Destroyed lands

Both Italy and Poland entered the war as agricultural countries and both emerged from it with their agriculture in tatters. In Poland, the “systematic and injurious exploitation of the country by the Germans” and “the death, displacement or migration of a large part of the farming population” resulted in a “complete disorganisation of agriculture”.<sup>12</sup> The impact on food supplies was devastating and added to the struggle of families, both in the cities and in the villages.

In Italy, the double occupation experienced between '43 and '45 resulted in the decimation of villages and in the disarticulation of much of the rural economy.

If the destruction of cities left a particularly strong impression on the postwar mind, the impact of war on the countryside was perhaps less visible, but not less dramatic in its consequences.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the so-called ‘rural question’ played a crucial part in postwar politics and had huge implications both for family life and for society at large.

From the perspective of the family, the transformation of the rural economy and the tumultuous processes of urbanisation that took place in both countries in the postwar years, affected women’s social status, altered the relations between generations, and revolutionised the shape of the household. As it is often the case in this story, Italy and

<sup>11</sup> Macciocchi, *Lettere dall'interno del PCI*, 90-1; Serao, *Il ventre di Napoli*.

<sup>12</sup> *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 30, “Agriculture and Food in Poland”, Division of operational analysis, UNRRA European Regional Office, London W1, March 1947, 1. The report estimated that the production of wheat had fallen by 68% compared to pre-war levels, that of barley by 59%, and that of potatoes by 51%.

Poland followed different paths to the same goal, namely the modernisation of the rural economy. In Stalinist Poland, transforming the countryside was part of an overall project aimed to remoulding the country's social structure. In the Italian (rather conservative) approach to postwar recovery, the improvement of the rural economy should act as a stabilising mechanism, necessary to avoid growing social tensions, particularly among the landless rural labourers of the South.

The contexts in which intervention took place were also different. In Poland, the redrawing of borders brought both losses and gains of agricultural lands. Poland lost in absolute terms, with circa 20% of its pre-war territories ceded to the Soviet Union; the territories gained from Germany, however, brought far more fruitful and better run land than the lost territories of the East. The 'Polonisation' of the newly acquired western territories was an effort that encompassed economic, cultural and political dimensions. No less than the reconstruction of the cities, the transfer of more than two million people from the eastern territories to former German cities, towns and villages became part of the postwar narrative of patriotic responsibility. The model of the pioneer became the shorthand for "a person possessing an iron will and unshakable faith and courage to begin life over again on the new lands".<sup>13</sup> As in all good Wild West stories, the family of the pioneer represented an essential component of his success.

The reality encountered on the ground, however, was hardly romantic. The observers sent by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (from now on, UNRRA) to Poland, noted that migrants often lacked even the most basic dwellings and were left to fend for themselves, while the priority assigned to the reconstruction of cities made it "exceedingly difficult" even to get the building material necessary to the construction of new houses for the peasants.

The issue of land redistribution figured highly both in the Italian and Polish political agenda; in both countries the reforms implemented fell short of expectations.

In Poland, the transformative drive of the immediate postwar years envisaged the elimination of the country's largest holdings, the redistribution of land, the creation of cooperatives and state farms. The Land Reform Decree passed in 1944 allowed the State to take over and redistribute among previously landless peasants and small farmers 1.3 million hectares.<sup>14</sup> The redistribution of land, accompanied by the establishment of new agricultural services, was designed to advantage collective and state farms over private holdings.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jasińska, Siemińska, "The socialist personality", 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 30; "Agriculture and Food in Poland", 5.

<sup>15</sup> Most of the family/private farm-holdings (about 35 per cent) measured between 2 to 5 hectares and only 6 per cent had more than 15 hectares of arable land; the size

The government's effort to introduce collectivisation in Poland in accordance to the Stalinist blueprint provoked, however, huge resistance. The collectivisation drive produced patchy results and great resentment and it was officially abandoned in 1956. Out of ten thousand co-operatives (in fact collective farms) created by the State, eight thousand ceased to exist shortly after the official abandonment of collectivisation.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically, the attempt to eradicate small private farming conducted in the Stalinist years ended up strengthening the idea that family farming held an irreplaceable value among Polish peasants. The result, unique to East Central Europe, was that family farms continued to exist in Poland throughout the postwar era, becoming, together with the relative autonomy of the Roman Catholic Church, a significant reminder of the shortcomings of the socialist transformation.<sup>17</sup>

In Italy, the first effort to reform exploitative systems of land tenure was put forward in 1944, with the war still ravaging the country, by the anti-fascist coalition government headed by Bonomi. The reform, put forward by the Communist Minister of Agriculture Fausto Gullo, sought to ensure that peasants retained at least 50% of production, encouraged the creation of cooperatives through the right of taking over abandoned or poorly cultivated land, and promised the extension of all agricultural contracts.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike in Poland, the reform largely failed not because of the opposition of family farmers, which were virtually non-existent in the *latifundia* of southern Italy, but because traditional forces did not hesitate to use violence and intimidation against agricultural labourers fighting for the application of the Gullo's decrees. The reform was also hampered by the lukewarm support of the national leadership of the Communist Party, fearful of a "radicalisation which could become an element of disturbance" to the fragile alliance of the coalition government.<sup>19</sup>

Calls for a transformation of the rural economy affected not only the *latifundia* of southern Italy, but also the central and northern areas of the country, where peasant asked for the modification of the sharecropping contracts, predominant in the area. The transformation of a traditionally conservative sector of society into a political subject

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of state and collective farms were, "respectively, slightly more than 4000 hectares and about 350 hectares" (Gorlach, Mooney, "Defending Class Interests", 261). See also Halamska, "The Specificity of Family Farming", 107-29.

**16** Gorlach, "On Repressive Tolerance", 25. The fact that peasants were left to fend for themselves on lands that had lost most of their productivity and the obligation to deliver quotes of production at a very low fixed rates, and to provide for the need of the urban population, further diminished the popularity of the State in the countryside. See UNRRA, *Operational Analysis Papers*, nr. 30, "Agriculture and Food in Poland", 39.

**17** Kersten, "1956-Punkt zwrotny", 13-26.

**18** Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 60.

**19** Paolo Spriano quoted in Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 63.



ready to mobilise owed much to the impact of the war and the Resistance, which had helped to forge significant links with Communist and socialist parties, as well as with the trade union movement. The mobilisation showed the extent to which the large peasant family typical of Italy's sharecropping areas could become a centre of political activation. As trade unionist recalled, meetings took place in the "great kitchen", which was the heart of the rural house. In a cautious breaking down the rigid hierarchies of the sharecropping multigenerational households, political meetings saw the participation of the younger members of the family, as well as of women.<sup>20</sup>

Far from representing islands of tradition and separation from the world of politics, the rural household had become a place of political elaboration and engagement. As Paul Ginsborg noticed, the mobilisation of 1945-46 left a significant legacy. Not only had a tradition of collective action been established, but "family and collectivity had been drawn sharply together" and the younger generations had found a voice within the traditional set up of the rural family.

As we will see in the next chapter, significant differences characterised the relationship between the peasants and the Communist parties in Italy and Poland. While the resistance against forced collectivisation strengthened the hostility of the Polish peasantry against communism, the PCI benefitted greatly from the struggle for reform, establishing a new and lasting presence in the Italian countryside.

### 1.3 Separation and Displacement

Similarly to the environment in which they existed, postwar families hardly resembled those that had entered the war. Throughout the Second World War, families had found themselves hostage in a conflict that found in population politics a privileged means of waging war. Displacement and deportation accompanied the war and its immediate aftermath, with unparalleled violence in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the war, as a result of the redrawing of Poland's borders and of the overall determination to create homogeneous national spaces, over two million people considered as Poles were resettled from the territories now incorporated in the Soviet Union within the boundaries of the new Poland. Between 8 and 11 million ethnic Germans fled or were forcibly removed; half a million 'Ukrainians' were expelled, while 140,000 were forcibly moved from the southeast part of Poland to the newly acquired western territories. In many cases, Ukrainian speaking families were scattered around,

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**20** Quoted in Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 108.

“as to forestall the consolidation of a Ukrainian ethnic community”.<sup>21</sup>

The forced moves produced traumatic experiences of eradication and loss among millions of families. The sense of isolation and the feeling of not belonging would last a lifetime. The memoirs of Ukrainian-speaking families dispersed across different villages in the western part of the country, often among hostile neighbours, told of the near endless struggle to recreate a sense of community. For this Orthodox minority, resettled in a now homogeneous Catholic country, the possibility of attending religious services provided both a sense of belonging and a source of fear, amply testified in memoirs and personal narratives.<sup>22</sup> “During the studies in high school – remembered Janina Kisielewicz, who had been brought to the Wrocław region as a young girl – I attended the religious classes and went to Catholic mass. When I was with my family, however, I always tried to go to the Orthodox Church. In my class there were a few Lemkos. We knew of each other, but we tried not to attract attention”.<sup>23</sup>

No comparable population movements took place in Italy, where the main instance of population transfer concerned ethnic Italians (circa 270,000 people) forced to leave Istria and Dalmatia, following their annexation to Yugoslavia. The evacuation took place over a number of years, stretching from 1943 to 1956. In the absence of a central plan for relocation, families were scattered in the north and central areas of the country. For most of those who left, the sense of disorientation produced by the loss of home was amplified by the less than warm reception they often found in the country they thought of as their homeland.<sup>24</sup>

If forced transfers represented the extreme example of the upheaval caused by the war, resuming family life was only marginally easier for those who had experienced long separation or extensive family

**21** Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 198; Snyder, “To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem”, 111-15 and *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 179-201; see also Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 108-38; for a Polish perspective, see Madajczyk, *Przylączenie Śląska Opolskiego*, and Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie ludności niemieckiej*. On the effect of forced population movements on Polish society, Kersten, “Forced Migration and the Transformation of Polish Society in the Postwar Period”.

**22** Sitek, *Mniejszość w warunkach zagrożenia*, 20. On the experience of the new inhabitants of the Recovered Territories, Popiołek, *Wspomnienia nauczycieli śląskich* and Karp, *Codziennosc zapamietana*; Filipowski, *Oswiata na Warmi i Mazurach*.

**23** *Mniejszość w warunkach zagrożenia*, 21. Lemkos represented one of the Ruthenian minorities of Poland, who had historically inhabited the southeastern region of Galicia; they were forcibly resettled to the Recovered Lands as part of Operation Vistula, in 1947, see also Magocsi, “Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying”, and Michna, *Lemkowie*. On the historical role of Galicia in the history and imaginary of Poland and Central Eastern Europe, see Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia*.

**24** Colella, *L'esodo dalle terre adriatiche*; Gustavo Corni, “L'esodo degli italiani”; Crainz, *Il dolore e l'esilio*.

losses. The slow return of prisoners of war and the uncertain faith of missing soldiers created existential and legal limbos that could last for years. Waiting was an integral part of the postwar families' experience.

In a memoir published in the seventies, the Italian feminist Alessandra Bocchetti, gave a glimpse into the suspended space occupied by families waiting for missing soldiers from the perspective of a child.

So my father was 'disperso' (missing). It seemed almost another surname: Federigo Bocchetti Disperso. Disperso meant that my mother cried all the time and kept waiting for this man, who could arrive at any moment. At the same time, she and I travelled across the city, from one Ministry to the other to try to obtain a certificate of 'presumed death', which was necessary to obtain a pension.

Between those two irreconcilable poles, the desire for the husband's return and the request for a death certificate, stood the dilemmas lived by postwar families. 'Presumed' widows needed a death certificate not just to get a pension and eventually to remarry, but to be able to exercise full authority over children.<sup>25</sup> Family roles and bureaucratic practices shaped social roles and individuals' experience. For women in particular, the protracted experience of running and providing for households in the absence of men produced both in Italy and in Poland a crucial social discontinuity, whose far-reaching implications would become clear in the aftermath of the conflict.<sup>26</sup>

The disruption brought by the war would remain a running theme in post-war Italy and Poland, informing the debates on how to regulate marriage and, eventually, allow it to end.

#### 1.4 Political Legacies: Families in Divided Societies

The social and political legacies of the war ensured that both in Italy and in Poland family life should emerge as a big issue in the postwar years. In both countries, the war saw the birth of new political regimes, which claimed a strong discontinuity with the past and promised a far-reaching transformation of the social, legal and economic landscapes in which postwar families would exist.

In Poland, the rise of Soviet-backed Communists to power promised to transform the relationship between State and citizen and the position of the family in Polish society. In Italy, the creation of a republic that defined itself as 'anti-fascist' also imposed a rethinking of

<sup>25</sup> Bocchetti, "La mia guerra", 44-8.

<sup>26</sup> For a reflection on the impact of men's absence on the social role and image of Polish women, see Fidelis, "Czy 'nowy matriarchat'?", 433-4.

the prerogatives of the State, particularly in regard to the family, after the systematic attempt made by fascism to render families subservient to its needs and desires.

In Italy, the new republic had to mark a clear discontinuity with the intrusive politics of the past. In a reverse direction, the new Communist regime of Poland promised a far greater intervention in family life that had been the case in the past. If protecting families' freedom became one of the catch phrases of postwar Italy, the Polish state fashioned itself as a benevolent and all-powerful father, aware of the needs of its citizens-children and able to intervene in their favour, also within the domestic sphere.

The different power dynamics at work over the regulation of family life are at the core of this book. They cannot be understood without looking at some crucial political elements at work in both countries.

Three elements stood out as of particular relevance. The first concerns the nature of the postwar settlement in the two countries; the second, the role of Communist parties in those settlements; the third, the relationship between State and Church.

#### 1.4.1 National Settlements

For sometimes now historians have debated whether what took place in Poland in the aftermath of the Second World War is best described as a brutal Communist takeover or as a revolution.<sup>27</sup> The interpretation followed in this book is that not only the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, but that both highlight crucial aspects of the transformation undergone by the country.

As Brian Porter-Szűcs succinctly put it, the revolution was at once “real enough” and “most definitely channeled” by Stalin “along paths that few Poles would have chosen on their own”.<sup>28</sup> It is undoubted that Communist Poland was oppressive and often violent and corrupted. This narrative, however, should not obscure the far more complex and nuanced reality experienced by ordinary and less ordinary Poles. Polish communists were certainly powerful, but not powerful enough to shape all aspects of people's lives, nor all the transformations that went on in the country.

<sup>27</sup> Examples of the first readings are Hammond, *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers*; Davies, *Heart of Europe*; Torańska, “Them”: *Stalin's Polish Puppets*; Ekiert, *The State Against Society*. For a reading stressing the revolutionary nature of the transformations, Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*. A particular contribution to the reassessment of postwar political and social transformation has come from recent works focused on the experience of ordinary people and of women in particular, among them, Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia* and Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialisation*.

<sup>28</sup> Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 187.

A particular dimension of the Polish situation concerned the fact that the establishment of Communist rule was enacted by a political group that until the war had no significant following, and in fact by a party that had not existed until 1941.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, it can be said that the seizure of power was made possible only by the back up provided by the Soviet Union, against the will of the majority of Poles.<sup>30</sup>

In Italy, the transition had gone in the opposite direction. A fascist dictatorship was substituted by a democratic republic, inspired by the values of the anti-fascist struggle. Here too, however, the changes could hardly be read as representative of Italians' general will. Although constructed in the postwar years as a national war of liberation, the years 1943-45 had seen a violent civil war fought throughout the country, with both anti-fascist and fascist fighters claiming for themselves the label of 'true patriot'. By the end of the war, Italians were divided on just about all the most important events that had occurred in the previous five years, as well as on the shape of things to come.<sup>31</sup>

Even among those who had fought on the same side of the Resistance, and who defined themselves as anti-fascists, deep divergences existed when it came to reconstruction. The Resistance had been a complex and composite struggle. If everyone had fought against a common enemy, the political values they had hoped to affirm in the aftermath of the war had ranged from monarchy to a communists revolution, with several other positions in between.

In Poland too, the war against the German occupier had coincided with a struggle between resistant groups, each with a different idea of what a liberated Poland should look like. If Polish communists had envisioned an overall change of the system as its ultimate goal from the day of its formation, the bulk of the resistance movement, represented by the Home Army, was as anti-Communist in outlook as it was anti-German. At the end of the war, the Soviet power guaranteed the communist victory and helped to physically eliminate or silence those who had fought for a different outcome of the war.<sup>32</sup>

Although no external power could eliminate the deep divisions that existed among Poles of different political persuasions, the Soviet Union made all the difference in terms of what kind of postwar settlement could be achieved. Its ubiquitous presence ensured that the winning

<sup>29</sup> Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, 149-54; Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism*; Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity*.

<sup>30</sup> See Polonski, Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule*, 128-9.

<sup>31</sup> On the deep fractures left behind by fascism and by the conflict, Pavone, *Una guerra civile*, Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra*. On the position of Italy and Poland in the early Cold War, Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, 122-56, 196-230.

<sup>32</sup> On the broader process of sovietisation in East Central Europe, Naimark, "The Sovietization of East Central Europe", 63-86.

side was able to impose its will, effectively crushing opposing views. This would result in a series of reforms, and eventually in a constitution, which reflected the coherent ideology of the party in power.

By contrast, the Italian return to peace was characterised by a far-reaching exercise in compromise, first of all between Communists and Catholics. The Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democratic one emerged from the war as the main anti-fascist forces in the country; although divided on just about every issue, they agreed on the fundamental principle that Italy should have a new democratic constitution, able to mark a clear transition from the fascist past.<sup>33</sup>

The constitution that emerged from this difficult compromise was a patchwork of conflicting ideologies. As the socialist Giuseppe Saragat pointed out in 1947, despite the revolutionary rhetoric that had accompanied the Resistance, what had happened in Italy had little to share with those “political revolutions” that in other parts of Europe “had brought down the old social order” and the “political societies of which they were the expression”. The collapse of fascism had produced a collapse of Italy’s “political structures”, but not of the country’s “economic and social structure”. One could be pleased or sorry for the continuities that still existed in Italy, but this was a fact that could not be ignored.<sup>34</sup>

Poland, by contrast, could be taken as an example of the alternative scenario presented by Saragat: the Communists’ political victory brought with it an economic and social revolution that found expression in the reforms undertaken since 1945. Little of those reforms could be traced back to the different political traditions that had existed in Poland before the war. When the new Constitution of the People’s Republic was approved in 1952, its ‘linearity’ confirmed Saragat’s observation that writing ‘coherent’ constitutions was far easier when “minorities [had] no voice” and when there was only one party in charge. It was far more complicated when, as in the Italian case, the parties were many and all determined to leave their imprint on the text.

The compromise forced upon Italian political forces, wrote Saragat, helped to leave behind ‘individualistic’ notions of the economy in favour of an idea of social economy that safeguarded individual freedoms.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, however, the constant bargaining that took place in a pluralist but fragile system produced a complexity that bordered on contradiction.

**33** On the inability/unwillingness of the Italian state to pursue a real discontinuity with the fascist past at an institutional level, Pavone, *Alle origini della repubblica*.

**34** *Atti Parlamentari*, Assemblea Costituente, Seduta Pomeridiana di giovedì 6 marzo 1947, 1842.

**35** *Atti Parlamentari*, Assemblea Costituente, Seduta Pomeridiana di giovedì 6 marzo 1947, 1843.

The treatment of the family in the Constitution and in the law, as we will see, stood out as a major example of the costs of continuous compromise.

The ambiguities that surrounded the treatment of the family in Italy contrasted sharply with the apparent coherence of Poland's transformative zeal. Of particular relevance to this outcome was the very different political voice that Catholics could exercise in the two countries. The failed attempt in Poland to transform the *Stronnictwo Pracy* (SP) in a Christian democratic force able to act as the official political representative of Polish Catholics meant their *de facto* exclusion from the legislative process.<sup>36</sup> This had huge implications for family law. It is well illustrated by the Italian case, where the family became a major terrain of political bargaining between Catholics and Communists.

The determination to keep the uneasy alliance with the DC and the fear to alienate Catholic masses encouraged the leader of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, to accept the bulk of Catholic tenets and a notion of the family in strong continuity with the past. In Poland too, power relations dictated the nature of the competition over the family. Unlike their Italian counterpart, however, Polish Communists had no interest in seeking a compromise with the Church on a matter that was very close to its interests. On the contrary, the new party-state did not hesitate to assert its vision of secular modernisation in the regulation of family life and its exclusive authority over family matters. This also bore high costs, starting with the risk of alienating a large part of the public opinion that was still imbued with Catholic values.

The different approaches that Italian and Communist parties displayed towards the legal treatment of family life reflected broader political patterns and the opposite, and yet mirroring, positions they occupied in the two countries.

In Italy, Communists emerged from the war hugely popular, but with little chances of ever reaching the national government. In Poland, they held an incontestable power, whose authoritarian nature quickly eroded any popularity they may have had.

Conversely, the Catholic Church occupied in Italy a position of influence that was safeguarded by the power held by the Christian democratic party. Its proximity to power and its obvious manipulation of the political system in defence of her own privileges, would have in time contributed to a sharp critique, even from the faithful. In Poland, by contrast, the Church had to confront the open hostility of the State, and saw its institutional power significantly reduced from the early postwar

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**36** Confusingly for a western audience, the name of the reformist catholic party in Poland, *Stronnictwo Pracy*, translated as Labour Party. On the attempt to create a Christian Democratic party in postwar Poland and on the political conditions that prevented it, see Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricade*, 129.

years. Far from harming the Church's social standing, the battle engaged with a State increasingly devoid of legitimacy, strengthened her authority, not only on moral matters, but also in political terms.

#### 1.4.2 Communists and the State

Both in Italy and in Poland, Communists sought to ground their appeal to represent national interest to the anti-fascist credential gained through the war and through the Resistance. These efforts, however, produced very different outcomes.

As Tony Judt observed, "it was in western Europe, where real resistance had actually been least in evidence, that the myth of the Resistance mattered most". In the East, "where large numbers of real partisans had engaged the occupation forces and each other in open battle, things were, as usual, more complicated".<sup>37</sup>

While Italian communists could bask in their long record of anti-fascist opposition, matters were indeed more complicated in Poland.

In Italy, the celebration of the Resistance dominated the postwar political discourse, as the only source of collective national pride. The myth of the Resistance delayed Italy's reckoning with the past and provided reassuring models of individual and collective behaviour that were celebrated throughout the postwar years.<sup>38</sup>

Constructing the Resistance as a 'national struggle' allowed Italians to think of the fascists years as a sort of juvenile error, to be left behind without confronting all its implications. It also allowed to relegate to the margins the bitterness and resentment left by the civil war, both among the defeated fascists and among those Communists who had fought not only against fascism, but for the beginning of a socialist revolution.

Although by no means an exclusively Communist affair, the armed struggle against nazi-fascism had seen a predominant Communist presence, both in the leadership of the movement and among the rank and file. This put party leaders among the founding fathers of the postwar democratic state. The decision taken by the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti to abandon any idea of class war in favour of a reformist path set the basis for the PCI's full participation to the postwar political settlement. The strategy secured to the PCI a mass membership, which reached two and a quarter million in 1947. The compromises accepted by Togliatti's party included an appeasing attitude towards the Catholic Church, considered necessary both to avoid the hostility of Catholic masses and to defend the fragile alliance with

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<sup>37</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 41-2.

<sup>38</sup> Lepre, *L'anticomunismo e l'antifascismo*, 100.



the Christian Democratic Party, in the face of the unrelenting attacks of the catholic hierarchies.<sup>39</sup>

Dynamics were very different in Poland. As the pre-war Communist Party (KPP) had been dissolved by the Comintern in 1938 and many of its leaders executed, the new party created in 1941 was a product of Stalin's politics, with little to share with the earlier history of Polish communism. Even the name of the new party, Polish Workers Party (PPR) suggested a discontinuity with the past.<sup>40</sup>

Equally important was the marked anti-communism of the Polish Resistance movement. Throughout the war, Polish resistants had managed to keep alive an Underground State and a military organisation (the Home Army), which had no parallel in Europe.<sup>41</sup> Despite the ability of the Home Army to provide the foundations for postwar institutional and administrative reconstruction, however, any such possibility vanished once Poland fell under Soviet control.<sup>42</sup> Portraying the partisans of the Home Army as reactionary forces, Soviet authorities quickly disbanded the Army's units and dismantled the Underground State's network, leaving minority Communist organisations as the only authorities in liberated Poland. The paradoxical result was that the largest and best organised Resistance movement in Europe played no role in the country's political reconstruction.<sup>43</sup>

Contrary to the Italian situation, Polish Communists could not build on the authority gained through the Resistance struggle.

If Italian Communists had to make a complicated transition from a small revolutionary party to a mass organisation adherent to the principles of democratic politics, Polish communists found themselves in charge of the country and with the power to pursue a revolutionary agenda. However, they had to do so against the will of a large part of the population and against the prestige gained throughout the war by a Resistance movement that had been anti-Nazi and anti-Communist in equal measure.

The harshness and ultimately undemocratic nature of the postwar confrontation, however, should not let to ignore the widespread consensus that had existed during the war on the need for far-reaching transformations to be introduced in Poland.

<sup>39</sup> On the role of the Church in the Italian political confrontation, Kent, *The Lonely Cold War*, 198-200.

<sup>40</sup> For a broader discussion see among others Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 13-15.

<sup>41</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> The Polish resistance's underground military organisation counted more than 300,000 members; the network of political institutions and civil society organisations was equally impressive. See Gross, *Polish Society*, xi.

<sup>43</sup> Gross, *Fear*, 6.

The programme *What the Polish Nation is Fighting for*, released by the AK in 1944 and representing a common statement from social democrats (the PPS), agrarians (the PSL), right-wing nationalists (Endecja) and the Christian Democrats (SP), envisaged a “fundamental rebuilding of the structure of economic life”, able to “satisfy the interests of the broad masses of rural and urban people”. Moreover, the programme envisaged a crucial role for the State in the management of the economy, including the right “to acquire or socialise” firms and key industries when general welfare and common interest demanded it. Private property should no longer be seen as an unrestricted “personal privilege”, but as the basis for the realisation of social goals; labour, in turn, should be regulated as to guarantee the dignity of workers and avoid their exploitation.<sup>44</sup>

In Poland as in Italy, the idea that the fight against the Nazi occupation should also represent the beginning of a struggle against the oppression determined by an archaic and exploitative social structure was by no means limited to the small faction represented by the Communists. Equally widespread was the expectation for men and women’s legal equality and the transformation of women’s economic position.<sup>45</sup>

The legal reforms pushed through since 1945 set the ground for a socialist transformation and in many aspects adopted a Soviet model that was very much resisted by Poles. However, they also responded to broadly felt expectations with regard to economic and social reform. The idea that the modernisation of the country’s economy should also bring an end to the nefarious influence of outdated cultural models, of which the Church seemed the main bastion, had also an appeal that went far beyond the limited reach of communists.<sup>46</sup> Resentment against economic exploitation and anti-clerical feelings were diffused in postwar Poland and could coexist with anti-communist feelings. In Italy as in Poland, the “struggles of the immediate postwar years pit different varieties of socialists against each other, with all of them sincerely believing that their ultimate goal was to advance the cause of freedom and democracy”.<sup>47</sup>

The postwar international settlement set the basis for what would quickly become Communists’ *de facto* unchallengeable power.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 194.

<sup>45</sup> Dudek, Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół*, 15-17; see also Adamski, *Rodzina między sacrum a profanum*.

<sup>46</sup> Although the strategy of the national front had been pursued in Poland as in the rest of Eastern Europe, this represented no more than a temporary strategy, paving the way to Communist rule. The rigged referendum of 30 June 1946, held instead of the elections formally agreed at Postdam, confirmed the unwillingness of Poland’s new authorities to stick to the democratic game. See Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule*, 280-3.

<sup>47</sup> Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 193.

By 1947, the intensification of Cold War tensions and Moscow's decision that the experience of the postwar coalition governments should come to an end solidified the power of the one-party regime. In September 1948, the substitution of the Party's Secretary Władisław Gomułka with the hard liner Stalinist Bolesław Bierut further aligned Poland to the Soviet's plans for transformation. Shortly afterwards, the merge of the Polish Workers Party (PPR) with what was left of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) made the Polish United Workers Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or PZPR) the only official representative of the country's working class.

The same years that sanctioned Communist control in Poland marked the relegation of the Italian Communist Party to the opposition, following the heavy loss suffered by the party in the elections of April 1948. By the end of 1948, both Italy and Poland had reached a political stabilisation of sort. In Poland, this coincided with the beginning of the heaviest period of Stalinist rule; in Italy, with the beginning of Christian Democratic Party's rule, which only the fall of the Berlin wall would end.

#### 1.4.3 State and Church

Of the various issues that accompanied postwar political dynamics, few were as relevant for the family as the relationship between State and Church. Having long seen itself as carrying a special responsibility for family life, the Church tried to maintain its authority in the altered circumstances of the postwar years. While the effort would prove hardly challenging in Italy, the Polish situation presented far greater obstacles.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the political and moral role of the Church was as important as it was complicated. The Church's anti-Communist credentials could not be doubted. In the complex dynamics of the interwar years, the Catholic Church had given language and ammunition to the anti-Communist and anti-Bolshevik discourse across Europe, even at the risk of getting dangerously close to fascist and nationalist forces. In Italy, Catholicism had been quickly adopted by Mussolini in his effort to consolidate power; in Poland, Catholic devotion had been an essential element of the exclusionary and ethnic nationalism that had emerged in the country in the thirties. During the war years, the Church had accumulated in both countries a mixed record. On the one hand, it had provided important networks of support, often acting as the only existing authority and organisation in occupied countries. On the other hand, the Church had accumulated a less than honourable

moral record in Pius XII's refusal to speak up against the Holocaust.<sup>48</sup> Both in Italy and in Poland, Catholic organisations, as well as lay Catholics, had played a crucial, although sometimes ambiguous role in regard to persecuted Jews, offering shelter and protection, but often at a price – most often that of conversion or, in the case of Polish Jewish children, the forsaking of one's past.

In Poland, the position of the Catholic Church was, in the words of Norman Davies, “stronger than at any previous period of its thousand-year mission”.<sup>49</sup> Although depleted in her ranks, the Roman Catholic Church could now claim to represent nominally 90% of the Poles, thanks to the redrawing of the country's borders and the dramatic transformation of its population. In 1931, Roman Catholics had represented the 64.8% of the population; by 1945, the murder of Polish Jews and the expulsion of Germans and Ukrainians left an overwhelmingly homogeneous population in what had been one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse regions of Europe.<sup>50</sup> The open hostility of a little-liked new power provided further boost to the Church.

Both in Italy and in Poland, Catholics advocated their right and duty to play a role in the work of reconstruction and transformation that awaited their countries. In both countries, the participation of the Catholic Church to the work of reconstruction was heralded as essential to avoid the dangers of political regimes that ignored the primacy of the spiritual over the material world and against the risk of a new “pagan idolatry of the state”.<sup>51</sup>

In both countries, the Church faced the challenge of redefining its role in the face of rapidly changing political and institutional environments, in which its pre-war interlocutors no longer held power. The challenges faced, however, were of a different nature.

In the immediate aftermath of Mussolini's fall, the Italian catholic hierarchies had been uncertain as to whom to look as the best new political ally; the Christian Democratic Party, founded in 1943 from the remnants of what had been the anti-fascist People's Party, quickly emerged as the natural choice. The DC would provide a committed and faithful defender of the positions of the Church for the following

**48** The strongest indictment of the role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust remains. Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*; see also, among others, Phayer, *The Catholic Church, and Pius XII, the Holocaust and the Cold War*; Zuccotti, *Under this very window*; Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi*.

**49** Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 10.

**50** For a description of Polish religious geography through time, Bilska-Wodecka, “From Multi-Confessional to Mono-Confessional”, 341-55.

**51** The expression made reference to Pius XI's encyclical letter *Non abbiamo bisogno*, 29 giugno 1931.

decades.<sup>52</sup> Christian Democrats would ensure the “Christian inspiration” of the new Constitution, in supposed accordance with the will of Italians, who “being a Christian people” could not “wish or accept a secular or agnostic State”.<sup>53</sup> The determination of Italian Communists to avoid any major conflict with the Catholics contributed to ease the position of the Church.

The Polish episcopate also looked with great sympathy to the possibility of rendering the SP the “party of Polish Catholics”, envisioning it not as a party of pure resistance and conservatism, but rather as a force able to bring “Christian patriotism” to the “healthy revolutionary content of the times”.<sup>54</sup> To have a party able to represent the Catholic voice seemed all the more important in the very uncertain situation of the immediate postwar years.<sup>55</sup>

Already in July 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation had repudiated the 1935 Constitution (defined as ‘fascist and illegal’), bringing back the provisions included in the Constitution of 1921. This had significant implications for the Church. Although asserting religious freedom and describing the Roman Catholic Church as occupying a “leading position in the State” on account of being the religion of the majority of Poles, in fact, the 1921 Constitution did not recognise any special entitlement to it.

This was followed, in September 1945, by the decision of the provisional government to declare null and void the Concordat signed in 1925, which had granted special rights to the Church in the fields of education, marriage, and family life, as well as a series of privileges in terms of property, taxation, and the clergy’s civil duties.

The situation could not have been more different in Italy, where the Lateran Pacts, signed by Mussolini in 1929, were about to be included without modification in the new constitution, against the opposition of smaller secular parties, but thanks to favourable vote of the PCI.

Despite the obviously different atmosphere, it is important to underline that in Poland too the years 1945-1947 were marked by efforts to negotiate as much as by conflict. The Catholic University of Lublin was the first university in the country to re-open, followed shortly but all catholic schools; mandatory religious teaching was also reinstated across state schools. Unlike in most other Eastern European countries, moreover, the restoration and rebuilding of the many churches

<sup>52</sup> On the dynamics that rendered the DC the only interlocutor of the Church in Italy, Miccoli, *Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione*, 377-87; Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana*, 90-111; Poggi, “La Chiesa nella politica italiana”.

<sup>53</sup> Gonella, *La DC per la nuova Costituzione*, quoted in Ginsborg, 99.

<sup>54</sup> August Hlond, “Chrześcijaństwo czy materializm”. *Tygodnik Warszawski*, 2 December, 1945.

<sup>55</sup> Chappel, *Catholic Modern*, 144-81.

destroyed during the war was included in the general state plan for reconstruction. Equally importantly, three major lay Catholic weeklies, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Tygodnik Warszawski*, and *Dziś i Jutro* were founded in Poland in 1945. All three publications were steeped in the tradition of interwar social Catholicism, and all three had the declared ambition of reaching a mass circulation and to contribute to the radical transformation of postwar Poland.<sup>56</sup> The three publications were joined in 1946 by the monthly *Znak*. Each of these publications could be seen as an important part of the effort to carve a space for Catholics in the political discourse, not entirely rejecting the transformation but trying to influence it.

As the new powers tried to solidify their hold on the Country, reforms obviously hostile to the interests of the Church, such as the new marriage legislation, which will be addressed later, went hand-in-hand with at least a superficial attempt to keep a dialogue of sort open with the Polish episcopate (in contrast with the sharp criticism moved against the Holy See). In this complicated environment, the Polish Church too tried to maintain a space for manoeuvre with regard to the State and the Party, which included a willingness to find an understanding on symbolic issues (such as agreeing to hold masses when Władisław Bierut gave his presidential oath in 1947), as well as on more substantive matters.

The kind of dual policy that the Church would try to follow in the first years of Communist rule was sketched by the Primate August Hlond in the first public statement issued under the new powers: the Church would not compromise its ethical principles by opening to materialist ideology, but it would remain willing to cooperate with the authorities in the pursue of national recovery, and in order to build a system “without privileges and injustices”.

Translating this plan into action was far from easy. In September 1946, Hlond intervened in the electoral campaign, to remind the faithful of their obligation to oppose organisations or parties that supported positions contrary to Christian teaching, and to warn them against any activity aimed (whether overtly or not) at the undermining of Christian ethics. Catholics should be equally discerning with their vote, supporting only those candidates and electoral programmes that did not contradict Catholic teaching and morality.<sup>57</sup> In a clear manifestation of the new government’s determination to limit the Church’s field of action and the reach of its voice, however, the letter was suppressed by the authorities.

Both in Italy and Poland, the confrontation between Communists and the Catholic Church took a sharp turn between 1947 and 1948.

<sup>56</sup> For an extended discussion of the role and nature of these publications, Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades*, 116-20.

<sup>57</sup> *The Tablet*, London, November 16, 1946.

In Italy, this took the rather benign form of the Church pulling all its weight in the electoral campaign of 1948, in which Communists were represented as godless barbarians set to destroy all western civilisation. If in some parts of Italy, particularly in Emilia Romagna, the propaganda made room for physical clashes and sporadic attacks to priests, on a national scale, the Church's offensive instead saw the PCI on the defensive.

In Poland, however, the confrontation took a rather more sinister turn. In 1947, any dream of creating a Polish Christian Democratic party came to an end, while hostilities against representatives of the Church intensified. In 1948, the first wave of priests' arrests under a range of specious accusations marked the beginning of an anti-clerical campaign that would result in a widespread effort to silence the Church. This included the suspension of its broadcasting and the banning or heavy censorship of its publications, including *Znak*, shut down in 1949. Youth organisations were also closed down and the control of charitable organisations taken over by the State. In early 1950 most of the Church's land was expropriated. The delicate position occupied by the Polish Church was hardly helped by the hardening of the intransigent line pursued by Pius XII, in his effort to present the Church as a bastion against communism.<sup>58</sup> The excommunication of Catholics working with Communists decided by the Holy Office in 1949 contradicted the effort of the Polish Primate Wyszyński to keep negotiations open with the Communist authorities.<sup>59</sup> The Holy See's refusal to accept the new German-Polish border contrasted not only with the policy of the country, but also with the Polish episcopate's own national(ist) position.<sup>60</sup> While in Italy the position of the national Church largely coincided with that of the Vatican, this was not the case in Poland.

Indeed, not even the heightened conflict of the late forties stopped a dialogue of sort from taking place. The result was the agreement announced in April 1950, according to which the Church was to rally behind Polish *raison d'état*, by taking distance from the Holy See ambiguous attitude towards the status of Poland's Recovered Territories and by refraining from any effort to boycott State's initiatives, such as elections or the setting up of rural cooperative. In exchange, many privileges and rights of the Church would be restored.<sup>61</sup>

This ambiguous and to some extent contradictory relationship continued in the following years, with short relaxations of tensions followed

<sup>58</sup> On the complicated diplomatic situation faced by Poland and the Vatican in 1947, Kent, *The Lonely Cold War*, 185-90.

<sup>59</sup> Kent, *The Lonely Cold War*, 217-36.

<sup>60</sup> On the relationship between the Polish episcopate and Pius XII, Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades*, 158-62; on the position of the Church in relation to the Oder-Neisse, Dudek i Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół*, 10-18, 33-6; Żaryn, *Stolica Apostolska wobec Polski*.

<sup>61</sup> Weigel, *The Final Revolution*; Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, 85-150.

by new sharpening of the confrontation, which, somewhat paradoxically, would enter its worst period in the aftermath of Stalin's death.

A widespread reading identified the Polish Catholic Church with national resistance to Communism. This is an appealing narrative, but it fails to capture much of the complexities, tensions and contradictions that characterised the relationship between State and Church in Communist Poland. There is little doubt that Communist authorities tried to subordinate the Church to the State, limiting the extent of its activities and trying to control them; it is also fairly clear that the State failed in its attempt to undermine the Church's legitimacy.

Although crucial, the narrative of conflict should not obscure the complicated pattern of mediations that took place throughout the Communist period.<sup>62</sup> It was the combination of conflict and negotiation that shaped the relationship between State and Church and that contributed most to transform the nature of both actors over time.<sup>63</sup>

While conflict and negotiation could be detected in Italy as well, the prevailing modality here was one of accommodation, as the political predominance exercised by the Christian Democratic party, organically linked to the Catholic Church, secured the protection of Catholic interests and the upholding of the Church's positions throughout most of the postwar period.

Historians of postwar Europe have long agreed that the notion of reconstruction needs to be understood as a multifarious process, encompassing material, political, economic and even moral and psychological aspects.

For all the differences that characterised the process of postwar reconstruction in Italy and Poland, a number of common dynamics existed, which directly invested in family life and its regulation.

While the political and economic system differed dramatically in Italy and Poland, a number of similar dynamics sharpened families' political and social relevance. The birth of new republics compelled the new political actors to spell out the prerogatives of the State in relation to the family, while the effort to pacify fractured political communities encouraged to look at families as a symbol of national unity. The need to renegotiate the relationship between the State and the Church also found in the family an important terrain of confrontation.

Despite the very different political circumstances that existed in postwar Italy and Poland, family figured prominently in both countries' postwar political discourse. This was all the more obvious in the political confrontation that opposed Catholics and Communists, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Pawlicka, *Polityka władz wobec Kościoła*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> For a sociological appraisal of the struggle for legitimacy in the eighties, Wałaszek, "An Open Issue of Legitimacy".





## **2 The Struggle Over the Family: Ideology and Propaganda**

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**Summary** 2.1 Introduction. – 2.2 Talking About Families, Speaking to the Nation: the Family in Political Propaganda. – 2.3 Women and Families, on the Placards and in the Sermons. – 2.4 Ambiguous Models. – 2.5 Countryside Against the City. – 2.6 The Limits of the Revolution. – 2.7 Marina, Mary, and the Others. – 2.8 The Protector of Family and Nation. – 2.9 Conclusions.

### **2.1 Introduction**

The family played a prominent role in the political propaganda of the early Cold War.

As political, economic and ideological blocs solidified, alternative models of family life were used to articulate opposite visions of social transformation and to assert parties' national and political credentials.

Political and religious leaders, as well as obscure political activists and priests, spoke about visions of family life, articulated families' supposed needs and proposed alternative ways to respond to individuals' expectations and desires. Families abounded both on electoral posters and in political rhetoric, across the political spectrum.

This chapter discusses the ways in which family entered the ideological confrontation of the early Cold War years, its use as an instrument of propaganda and its employment as a means of channelling fears and anxieties. It argues that the family proved a fertile instrument of political communication because of its resonance across the social spectrum and its ability to engage social and cultural values.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the influence of the Catholic Church rendered the family an unavoidable issue for postwar parties will-

ing to put forward a radical agenda of social and legal transformation. Centuries of nearly immutable Catholic doctrine and the Church's established authority on family matters set the stage for the confrontation. Communist parties, although historically much less equipped to talk about family issues, quickly rose to the occasion. Unable to compete with the Catholic Church in terms of doctrine, Communists talked about the family mostly through exemplary war time narratives. Through family stories, postwar Communists sought to advertise both their national commitment (through virtuous examples of wartime struggles) and the glorious future to be delivered by the socialist revolution. Catholics, on the contrary, used families mostly to put forward dystopic and terrifying visions of social transformation under Communist rule. Catholic fears and Communist optimism represented the two poles between which family propaganda oscillated.

## 2.2 Talking About Families, Speaking to the Nation: the Family in Political Propaganda

Already during the war, both Catholic and Communist leaders realised that families were relevant to political propaganda.

In 1944, the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti spoke of the family as the ultimate symbol of the devastation brought to Italy by fascism and as a proof that even those who had been seduced by the promises of the regime should now realise that they had been betrayed. Togliatti chose the magazine *L'alba*, published in Moscow for Italian prisoners of war, to describe the recovery of family life as the first endeavour to be pursued in liberated Italy. Freeing family life from the "corruption and hypocrisy of the present" should become the first task for everyone willing "to save the sources themselves of national life"; on the success of this, wrote Togliatti, depended the possibility of forging stronger national solidarities and of creating a new political community in a renewed country. Most of the articles published in *L'alba* sought to convert POWs who had fought in a military campaign waged in the name of anti-communism to the ideals of anti-fascism and the Resistance, by denouncing the corruption of the fascist elites and the atrocities committed by the German army in its offensive against the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> By talking about families, Togliatti evoked a cause for engagement far more urgent and con-

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<sup>1</sup> *L'alba* started its publication in February 1943, as a collaboration between the Soviet army and exiled Italian Communist leaders, see Mola, "Attraverso L'Alba", 65-80. On the strongly anti-Communist feelings of Italian soldiers operating on the eastern front, Lepre, *L'anticomunismo e l'antifascismo*, 83-4.

crete than political ideologies alone. Moreover, recalling the dangers in which the fascist war had precipitated Italian families was bound to strike a particularly sensitive cord among men who had long been separated from their families and who saw the possibility of being reunited with them as a distant and uncertain prospect.

In many ways, Togliatti's article introduced an approach to the family that would become standard in Communist postwar propaganda, namely the double commitment to the protection and renewal of family life. This went hand in hand with the idea, variously affirmed by Togliatti, that backwardness, particularly in relation to women's condition, should not be seen as the by-product of Italy's deep catholic roots, nor of Italian women's religious culture. On the contrary, women's social position depended primarily on Italy's economic structure and their transformation was therefore compatible with the survival of traditional popular religiosity.<sup>2</sup> Although often difficult to translate in political action, the double commitment to protect and reform helped the party to defend itself from the accusation of being an enemy of family life and traditions, while asserting its difference from its catholic political counterpart.

If Italian Communists showed to be aware of the political relevance of the family, the Christian Democratic Party had put it at the centre of its political proposal since its foundation, in 1943. Fatherland, family, freedom and religion were the four words on which the newly born party founded its political programme and would become the mantra of the postwar years, with the family heralded as the pivot of Italy's moral and social reconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

Appeal to the family and the domestic sphere as a means of political propaganda seemed to become even more relevant once that Italian women were finally granted the vote.

The Catholic Church had long opposed women's suffrage and Pius XII remained openly sceptical of women's political judgment, fearing, as he explained in 1945, that "the sensitiveness and fine feeling proper to woman" would likely impede "clarity and breadth of vision", as well as "serenity of judgment and forethought for remote consequences".<sup>4</sup>

Having begrudgingly accepted women's vote as a political inevitability, however, the Italian catholic hierarchies soon understood the political potentialities opened by the new voters. The electoral campaign of 1948 gave ample evidence that the significance of women's

<sup>2</sup> Togliatti, *Discorso alle donne*, 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> "Valori morali e libertà delle coscienze", *Le idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*.

<sup>4</sup> Pius XII, "Woman's Dignity: Political and Social Obligations", Broadcast from Vatican City, 21 October, 1945; Groag Bell, Often, *Women, the Family and Freedom*, 2: 415-7.

vote had not gone amiss, starting with the Pope's reiterated calls to women to exercise their new right in defence of family and religion.<sup>5</sup>

Faithful to the teaching of Pius XII, the electoral propaganda put in place by the DC in 1948 also addressed women almost exclusively as mothers and called them to vote to protect their families' material and spiritual wellbeing. While men could be seduced by a propaganda that promised social progress and workers' rights, so the message ran, women knew that what mattered most was the safety of the private sphere, of which they were implicitly recognised as the main responsible and protectors.

Communists also understood the relevance of women's vote. In Poland, both the 1946 referendum and the 1947 elections saw the mobilisation of Communist organisations and political propagandists to ensure women's support.<sup>6</sup> As the women's magazine *Kobieta dzisiaj* (Today's Woman) explained on the eve of the 1946 referendum, only by saying "three times yes" could women protect the future of their children, guarantee lasting peace and allow the reconstruction of the country.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Polish Women's League took it upon itself to educate and mobilise "backward women", transforming them in citizens "knowledgeable and devoted to socialism".<sup>8</sup> Educating women to the importance of industrial work and a secular conception of marriage figured highly on the agenda.

Against the secularising programme of the Communists, the Church responded with equal vigour. Between 1945 and 1947, the Polish episcopate used pastoral letters and the Catholic press to attack not only the threatening of private property and any measure designed to subjugate the individual to the State, but also the undermining of established family and gender norms by the new powers. Both in the campaign that preceded the referendum proclaimed by the Provisional Government in 1946 and in the elections of 1947, Catholic authorities reminded the flock that their faith forbade them from supporting those political forces whose programmes contradicted the position of the Church on a variety of matters, family, sexuality and gender roles first among them.

<sup>5</sup> A crucial part in the production of propaganda material was played by the Civic Committees, the catholic organisation formed by Luigi Gedda in early February 1948. Officially formed to fight against abstention and supposed to operate as pressure groups and as point of reference for the Catholic organisations, the civic committees proved an extremely powerful weapon for the DC. See Novelli, *Le elezioni del Quarantotto*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Zaremba, "Komunizm jako system mobilizacyjny", 110-26; Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych*.

<sup>7</sup> "Pracujemy". *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, 1 July, 1946, quoted in Nowak, *Serving Women and the State*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Alicja Musiałowa, *Nasza Praca*, 13, July-August 1950, quoted in Nowak, *Serving Women and the State*, 84. On the role of the Women's League, see also Jarosz, "Idee, programy i realia", 307-30.

In the first electoral confrontations of the postwar years, both Communists and Catholics called upon women to vote as mothers, and both looked at them as immature and potentially unreliable voters, in need of education and control. Both told them how they should structure their life.

The consolidation of the Cold War order brought no respite. In Poland, the effort to educate and mobilise women to the cause of communism intensified during the Stalinist period, when organisations such as the *Liga Kobiet* (Women's League) became less autonomous and more organic to the Party. In Italy, any common ground that may have existed between Catholic and Communist militants withered away as the battle against fascism receded into the past. As any space for dialogue was fatally eroded, the family remained a crucial means of ideological warfare and scaremongering.

You may be ready to give up many things for the triumph of your idea - wrote the Catholic activist Giorgio Giorgi to an imaginary Communist reader - but I am certain that if those who are dearest to you were in danger, then you would forget that you are a Communist: you would act first of all as a father and a spouse.<sup>9</sup>

Giorgi, a staunch Catholic from Bologna, was one of the many activists who sought to contribute to the political struggle through pamphlets aimed to illustrate the evil of Communist government. Attacking the private sphere, as Stalin had done in the thirties, was not an aberration but the inevitable outcome of Communist ideology. Any complacency, explained Giorgi, stemmed from a "treacherous underestimation of the danger that lied ahead".<sup>10</sup>

Although based on questionable historical analysis, even pamphlets such as Giorgi's provided powerful ammunition for political debate in a field characterised by a significant and undeniable imbalance of authority between the two contending parties.

### 2.3 Sources of Authority: Teaching from Above and Virtuous Models from below

The sources of authority on which Catholics could rely to talk about family life were powerful, clearly defined and largely unquestionable. A century-old doctrine and a series of Papal pronouncement provided a powerful guideline to political action.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgi, *Il comunismo e la famiglia*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Giorgi, *Il comunismo e la famiglia*, 26.

Family and marriage represented recurrent themes in Pius XII's teaching, although little of what the Pope said and wrote showed original thinking or suggested a willingness to reconsider inherited doctrine. The encyclical letter *Casti Connubii*, published by Pius XI in 1930, remained the point of reference on marriage and family life at least until the Vatican II, and in many ways afterwards.<sup>11</sup> Pius XI had in turn reiterated established tenets and reasserted the full authority of Leo XIII's *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, published in 1880.

At the core of the Catholic doctrine on matters of family life remained the indissoluble bond of marriage, understood as a divine institution whose sacramental nature reflected the holy love that linked Christ to the Church, and procreation.<sup>12</sup>

The Catholic Church's understanding of marriage and family as immutable institutions in the face of far-reaching social transformation hampered possibilities of dialogue and negotiation across the political spectrum, but offered a clear platform to Catholic activists. For those who took the position of the Church most heartedly, following its precepts provided a political line that was alternative to both Communist and capitalist visions of the world and of the economy.

The Marxist position that saw the family as "a variable product of human development", a function of the economy that did not carry any specific inherent value, represented the very antithesis of Catholic thinking.<sup>13</sup> Seemingly irreconcilable seemed to be the ways in which Marxists and Catholics looked at the impact of material circumstances on family life. Although Pius XII denounced poverty, lack of decent housing and the spectre of (male) unemployment as dangerous plights, no material shortcoming seemed to the Pope as detrimental to family life as the weakening of its morality, understood as adherence to religious norms. Moreover, as Pius XII emphasised, no material comfort could compensate the reduction of the family "to an organism totally subservient to the needs of society". No material wellbeing could compensate for spiritual impoverishment.

If historical materialism presented the Church with a worldview antithetical to a religious understanding, however, unbridled capitalism was not without problems. Although preaching opposite economic and political receipts, from the point of view of the Church, the

<sup>11</sup> It is worth recalling that, before becoming Pope with the name of Pius XI, Achille Ratti had served in Poland first as visitor apostolic and then as Papal nuncio, playing an instrumental role in setting the way for the concordat, eventually signed in 1925. On the legacy of Pius XI, Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 41. On the paradoxical role of the Holy Family as a model for the human family, see Koschorke, *The Holy Family and Its Legacy*.

<sup>12</sup> Bernini, *Family Life and Individual Welfare*, 50-5. See Barberi, Tettamanzi, *Matrimonio e famiglia nel magistero della Chiesa*.

<sup>13</sup> Orfeo, "La concezione della famiglia", 40.

two systems shared a dangerous disregard for religion and fostered an unwelcome preoccupation with the material side of life.

While the real socialist systems denied the very existence of God and the spiritual nature of humankind, the acquisitive spirit of capitalism filled people's lives with false ambitions and fallacious pre-occupations. Socialism undermined the solidity of marriage by rendering it a purely secular institution that could be dissolved at will; unrestrained capitalism threatened the "constant faithfulness and the solid perseverance of the spouses"<sup>14</sup> by exposing them to unhealthy models of life and unrestrained sexuality.

Crucially, both socialism and capitalism threatened the gender order that the Pope saw as the very foundation of a Christian society. The Pope urged Catholics to resist the "wonderful promises of modernisation" and the "unbridled freedoms" that could only lead to "hopeless misery" and desolation, while restoring "as far as possible the honour of the woman's and mother's place in the home".<sup>15</sup>

Against the bulk of ecclesiastical doctrine, the sacred texts of communism had little to offer to postwar activists. The founding fathers of communism had either given cursory attention to family matters or had left behind analyses that had little political currency after years of disarray, which left people longing for the peace of the domestic.

Marx himself had dedicated little reflection to the family, other than describing it as a function of the economic system. The analyses of those who had paid more attention to the issue, starting with August Babel and Frederick Engels, were far from easily applicable to the postwar situation. While providing a central reference on the issue of women's emancipation, Engels' prediction that the bourgeois family would wither away following the triumph of the proletarian revolution, seemed either too vague (if located in a hypothetical distant future), or too menacing, if imagined as a close prospect.<sup>16</sup>

While providing an important instrument of political education inside the party, the main texts of Marxism were of limited use outside it. Against the powerful voice of the Catholic Church, Communists faced a complicated task. They had to defend themselves from the accusation of wanting to undermine everything private, while trying to present an idea of family life at once alternative to the Catholic one and able to appeal to the broader audiences that postwar Communists aimed to reach. The task was all the more challenging in coun-

<sup>14</sup> Pius XII, "Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP.XII al Convegno del 'Fronte della famiglia' e della Federazione delle associazioni delle famiglie", Martedì, 27 Novembre 1951, *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, Tredicesimo anno di Pontificato, vol. 13, 2 marzo 1951-1 marzo 1952, 413-18.

<sup>15</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>16</sup> Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*; similar considerations applied to the analysis of August Babel's *Women and Socialism*, published in 1879.



tries such as Italy and Poland, where Catholicism had long informed gender norms and models of family life.

In this difficult situation, a powerful means of counter-propaganda was found not in philosophical texts, but in exemplary life stories able to highlight from below the main tenets of what being a Communist entailed – at least in principle.

#### 2.4 Women and Families, on the Placards and in the Sermons

In the early Cold War years, Catholic parties and organisations represented women and families mostly to evoke fear of unwelcome transformation; Communists used them to advertise the optimism of the socialist revolution. In Italy, the Democratic Front used cheerful families under blue skies to express the socialist and Communist commitment to peace and prosperity; similarly, Polish Communists made a great display of smiling and confident-looking young men and women to suggest that the future of the country was in safe hands. Against this display of optimism, Christian Democrats' placards showed Italian mothers fighting to defend their children from the soviet monster.

In 1948, and in following local and general elections, women appeared on Italian placards as models of feminine modesty and domestic respectability, their sober dresses and attires hinting to the difficult conditions left behind by the war and to the struggle to make ends meet experienced by most Italian mothers. Polish propaganda, by contrast, focused not on mothers, but on young working women. Images of women welders, builders, joiners, and tractor conductors broke a standard narrative that saw these as quintessentially male jobs, while putting forward a representation of womanhood that merged new roles and conventional models. Whether portrayed next to a big industrial machine or on a modern tractor, the new working women of Poland were beautiful, carefully made up, and unfailingly smiling.

Both their new prospective roles as industrial workers and their confident and self-assured representation were highly subversive for a Church governed by a Pope who saw in the transformation of women's role one of the greatest dangers that awaited postwar societies.

As Pius XII often remarked, defending the Christian family equalled to defending the very essence of Christianity in modern society. This required not only asserting Christian marriage as the only acceptable marriage form, but also defending a 'gender order' that the Church saw as the very basis of family life.

Throughout his pontificate, Pius XII used all available means, from meetings with newly-weds to letters and radio broadcasting, to warn against the risk of undermining the domestic order. By this, the Pope meant the rigid hierarchies and inequalities of rights and duties that

should characterise the catholic marriage.<sup>17</sup> Women's subjugation in marriage had been defined in the *Casti Connubii* as a "fundamental law", to be "maintained intact" always and everywhere. The same idea informed Pius XII's image of an ideal catholic household as a place of female unwavering devotion to domestic duties, male commitment to the moral and material welfare of the family, and parental dedication to the Catholic upbringing of their (ideally numerous) children.<sup>18</sup> Against this Catholic ideal stood the "marvellous" but deceptive pledges made to women by political forces advocating widespread social and political reforms. Equal rights, "care during pregnancy and childbirth, public kitchens and other communal services", as well as "public kindergartens", "free schools and sick benefits", were grouped together by the Pope as examples of deceptive promises stemming from false notions of emancipation. Far from representing real improvements in women's life, their inevitable outcome was the undermining of women's "true dignity and the solid foundation of all [their] rights". Any reform bound to reduce women's maternal and domestic duties, posited Pius XII, not only prepared for them "a worse kind of subjugation", but threatened to weaken "the intimate coordination of the two sexes", on which both family and social life rested.<sup>19</sup>

The promotion of women's work by the State subverted Catholic ideas about the domestic order and challenged the strongly-held conviction that women's work outside the home could be a necessity, but it was rarely a choice and should never be encouraged.<sup>20</sup> In his staunch defence of women's natural domestic role, Pius XII reasserted his predecessor's view that, particularly in the case of married women, work represented either an unwanted imposition caused by the inadequacy of male salaries or the result of excessive and dangerous material desires.

In Italy, the Pope's warnings found immediate echo in political propaganda. The already mentioned Giorgi had little doubt that women should show "a certain submission" to their husbands, since even popular wisdom "condemn[ed] those women who wished to take over the ruling of their homes".<sup>21</sup> He was equally certain that the economic emancipation promised by Communists concealed a greater tyranny. In the Soviet Union, explained Giorgi, women had been deprived

<sup>17</sup> Pius XII, Encyclical letter *Casti Connubii*, 31 December, 1930, ch. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Pius XII, Encyclical letter *Casti Connubii*, 31 December, 1930, ch. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Pius XII, "Woman's Dignity: Political and Social Obligations" (*Questa grande vostra adunata*), Broadcast from Vatican City, 21 October, 1945, in Groag Bell, *Often, Women, the Family and Freedom*, 415-16.

<sup>20</sup> Menozzi, *La chiesa cattolica*, 72-95.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgi, *Il comunismo e la famiglia*, 6.

of “home, family, [and] religion” and transformed “in a devise for collective work and reproduction”.<sup>22</sup>

From a Catholic perspective, women’s work was dangerous both for the economy (taking jobs and authority away from men) and for the family. Accordingly, the introduction of a male family wage would remain an unfulfilled DC’s pledge throughout the postwar years. The rejection of women’s economic emancipation through work went well beyond Catholic circles. It was an idea subscribed by a number of sociologists and physicians, as well as by political activists across the political spectrum.<sup>23</sup>

Against the gender norms prescribed by the Church and echoed by the Catholic party stood the experience of the many women engaged in often heavy and badly-paid work or attracted in growing numbers to the new jobs made available in the expanding service sector.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.5 Ambiguous Models

Both in Italy and in Poland, cultural representations both reflected and subverted normative narratives of female and family morality.

In Italy, the hugely popular photo-romances such as *Bolero Film* and *Grand Hotel* popularised accessible and involving romantic stories, in which the quest for love and marriage appeared as women’s only aspiration. In a similar direction went several postwar melodramas focused on family and marriage troubles, whose plots were in some cases directly lifted from photo-romances.<sup>25</sup> Among the most prolific film makers of this genre was Raffaello Matarazzo, whose movies put forward a whole catalogue of tragedies resulting from behaviours that broke the norms of family and sexual morality. Hugely successful among the public, such movies presented women as “victims of males’ prejudices and false sense of honours” and the family as “an institution that repressed any form of individualism, independence and personal fulfillment”.<sup>26</sup> Far from providing an alternative

<sup>22</sup> Giorgi, *Il comunismo e la famiglia*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> The position emerged strongly in the congress organised in august 1950 by the Italian Sociological Society. See Gini, *Atti del 14 Congresso internazionale di sociologia*.

<sup>24</sup> See also Tentori, *Donna lavoro famiglia*.

<sup>25</sup> This was for instance the case of Matarazzo’s *Catene* (1949) and *Tormento* (1950); on the political use of photo romances also as a political tool, see Bonifazio, “Political Photoromances”, 393-413. On the popularity of photo-romance in postwar Italy, see Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, and Cardone, *Con lo schermo nel cuore*. On cultural confrontation in the cold war context, Baranski, Lumlev, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*.

<sup>26</sup> Among Matarazzo’s greatest commercial successes were *Catene*, *Tormento*, and *I figli di nessuno*, see Vitti, *Giuseppe De Santis and Postwar Italian Cinema*, 40-1.

vision of family life, however, Matarazzo's movies regularly ended re-establishing the norm and resolving any confusion with a safe return to conformism.

Although hugely popular, those models did not go uncontested.

In 1949, De Santis' *Riso Amaro* brought to international fame a very different model of femininity, destined to become one of the most powerful symbols of postwar Italy's contradictory transformations. Already protagonists of popular stories and songs, the rice workers of northern Italy (the *mondine*) narrated by De Santis seemed the very antithesis not only of the Catholic ideal of femininity, but also of the conventional model proposed by Matarazzo and the likes. Far from passive and respectful of authority, the cultural representation of the *mondine* showed them as assertive and boisterous.<sup>27</sup> In the cinematic representation made by De Santis, the *mondine* showed all the tensions that traversed a society suspended between traditional values and new cultural models, between old peasant culture and emergent American myths, including through the portrait of an explicit and free sexuality.<sup>28</sup> The explicit eroticism of the *mondine* exposed De Santis to the accusation of sexual exploitation for commercial success, both at the release of the movie and in later years. When the movie was released, both conservative and Communist cinema critics and commentators attacked De Santis. Communist critics, in particular, were not impressed by the fusion of melodrama and social and political denunciation attempted by De Santis and even less happy with the explicit sexuality of the protagonists, accused of distracting audiences from the seriousness of the social matter at hand. De Santis, it appeared, had jeopardised the very morality of the *mondine*. The Vatican, for its part, put the movie on the list of forbidden films.<sup>29</sup>

Against such accusations, and particularly against the criticisms advanced from the left, the Communist De Santis claimed that he intended to show unionised, independent and sexually-free women, while showing the damaging impact of Americanisation on Italy's lower educated classes. Aptly, the photo-romance entered *Riso amaro* as the recognisable medium of a message aimed to spread individualism and materialist aspirations among young peasant women.

Independently of De Santis' intentions, there is little doubt that the representation of sexually explicit and free women broke both

<sup>27</sup> On the cultural representation of the *mondine*, see Castelli et al., *Senti le rane che cantano: canzoni e vissuti popolari della risaia*.

<sup>28</sup> *Riso Amaro* was widely distributed internationally, including in the US; on the reception of the film, Lawton, "Foreword" to Vitti, *Giuseppe De Santis*, x-xi, xvii-xx. See also Celli and Cottino-Jones, *A New Guide to Italian Cinema*.

<sup>29</sup> Vitti, *Giuseppe De Santis*, 36-7, 39-40. On the role of Silvano Mangano in *Riso Amaro*, see also Carman, "Mapping the body", 322-35.

Catholic and Communist normative representations, reminding Italian and foreign audiences that no easy formula could encompass the variety of experiences and positions occupied by postwar women.

The battle over gender models was even stronger in Poland, where women's economic activation became an explicit goal of the State. As the country embarked in a far-reaching project of forced industrialisation, official rhetoric, magazines, and even cinema converged in promoting a model of femininity that was, at least on the surface, radically different from the Catholic one. Publications such as *Przyjaciółka* (Girlfriend) and *Sztandar Młodych* (Youth Banner) told young Polish readers not only that work was essential to guarantee women's equal rights and prestige (both within and outside the home), but that women's "activeness and success in productive work" was what made them attractive as prospective wives.<sup>30</sup>

The message had unsurprising overlaps with the ideal of womanhood upheld in Italy by the Communist magazine *Noi Donne* (Us Women): a new woman forged in the anti-fascist struggle, no longer interested in frivolous activities and attires, but devoted to the common cause of building a better future. Far more strongly than in Italy, however, Polish representations celebrated women's productive work as their greatest asset and most attractive feature.

The appearance of the 'Superwoman' on Polish placards, magazines and films suggested the end of the discrimination and disempowerment of the past in favour of women's full inclusion in the economic and political community. As the documentary *Kobiety naszych dni* (Women of Our Days) dutifully explained in 1951:

Yesterday, the ruling classes provided women with the left overs of human rights. Today, in the People's Republic of Poland, for the first time, a woman feels the warm-earthed care of the State. Yesterday there were lies about the so called 'feminine vocation', today unlimited possibilities for learning are open to women.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation of women's economic and social role advocated by postwar Polish Communists necessarily invested parental and gender roles within the home. While women were expected to find in paid work their new dimension as individuals and citizens, men were encouraged to rethink their role in marriage and *vis-à-vis* their children, while devoting themselves to the rebuilding of Poland. In the worker hero model of the early postwar years, public and private morality should mirror each other. Where the *Casti Connubii* had proclaimed

<sup>30</sup> See Kłoskowska, *Z historii i sozjologii kultury*, 436.

<sup>31</sup> From the voice over of the documentary, *Kobiety naszych dni* [Women of Our Days], dir. Jan Zelnik, 1951, see Ostrowska, "Polish 'Superwoman'", 57.

the immutability of marriage's hierarchies, the socialist pedagogy upheld equal marriage as the new norm. While the Socialist state promised to act as a benevolent patriarch to the nation, older versions of patriarchal order came under attack.

## 2.6 Countryside Against the City

One of the crucial confrontations that took place both in Italy and in Poland concerned the urban and rural models of family life.

The confrontation had a much sharper character in Poland, where postwar industrial modernisation rapidly came to signify the overcoming of the old peasant household – large, multigenerational and imbued in catholic values –, now substituted by an urban family model: nuclear, based on close emotional relations between parents and children and (ideally) secular. In this process, the large peasant family quickly became a symbol of bigotry, ignorance and backwardness.

Many life stories published in the aftermath of the war recorded and advertised the transformation, contrasting the material and cultural poverty of the peasant past with the endless possibilities opened up by the Socialist state.

The publication in 1954 of a collection of peasants' life stories, originally put together in the mid-thirties by the Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, presented readers with a reminder of what life in the countryside had been like. The life stories, explained Stróżecka in the foreword to the collection, constituted a "monument of the miseries, exploitation, and oppression" that had accompanied the bourgeois order. Story after story, wrote Stróżecka, the same picture emerged, "grim calculations, budgets of hunger: how many potatoes, how big a piece of bread for each member of the family, as to day of starvation".<sup>32</sup> The memorialists spoke of the

many many families in which bread [was] only backed at harvest, and afterwards only in the great festivities, which is four or five times a year, and where mothers [gave] children not a piece of bread, but a couple of roasted potatoes to take to school, and where sugar [was] so seldom bought, that they have forgotten its taste.

As an example of what had been and remained a remarkable Polish sociological tradition, namely the collection and analysis of life stories, the collection had a great scientific value. The main aim of the 1954 publication, however, was openly political. The goal was to show the responsibility that the bourgeois ruling class of Poland had in the

<sup>32</sup> Stróżecka, *Pamiętniki chłopów*, v.

penury of the interwar period and to alert to the danger that capitalist economy still entailed.

The same aim, showing the progress made by the country through socialism and industrialisation, characterised the collections of memoirs carried out throughout the postwar period, in which younger memorialists were able to describe both the backwardness of capitalist Poland and the transformation carried out by the State.

A model example of such narrative was offered by Krystina Malinowska, in a collection specifically dedicated to women's life stories. Malinowska wrote about the extended family of her childhood as too poor and preoccupied with surviving out of their small plot of land to take care of their children's desires and needs. As well as of material penury, Malinowska wrote about her abusive father and the local priest, both symbols of oppressive patriarchal institutions. While attributing her father's poor behaviour in the home mostly to ignorance, Malinowska was far more critical of the priest, unwilling to help those in needs, and having the authority and social prestige of the Church as his sole concern. Of his presence, Krystina remembered most vividly the visits he would pay at Easter, to collect presents from the hard-pressed family, and his reluctance to intervene in times of need.

Far from offering a supportive environment open to the outside, the peasant family of Krystina's youth had been an oppressive home, from which she had managed to escape thanks to the help of the Socialist state. The achievement of a hard-gained education and the possibility of following a career as an educator in the city had marked her emancipation. Having "struggled for years to reconcile [her] idea of a compassionate God with the actions of the Church", Malinowska eventually "abandoned the Church completely" after moving to the city; the overcoming of the patriarchal logic of the peasant family had gone hand in hand with the refusal of the institution that had governed it.<sup>33</sup>

The contrast between peasant and urban culture was much less sharp in Italy. While Polish Communists saw country's peasant culture as a remnant of the past to be swiftly eradicated, the PCI embraced the peasant tradition of Italy, finding in them a model of uprightness that the new and unwelcome cultural influences threatened to undermine.<sup>34</sup>

Even a movie such as *Riso amaro* offered a critique of the damaging effect that growing Americanisation could have on peasant values, seen as symbol of honesty and moral decency.

<sup>33</sup> Malinowska, "Wykorzystane Szanse". *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of the sharecropping system as exploitative system, Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne*.

While, before the war, socialism and communism had been essentially urban phenomena, the conflict had transformed the countryside of central and northern Italy into a politically dynamic area, where the PCI could gain ground. The participation of the peasants in the Resistance had been considered as a crucial transformative factor by several contemporary observers, Gaetano Salvemini and Ferruccio Parri among them.<sup>35</sup> The sharecropping patriarchal family, which had been first adopted by Mussolini as the fascist family model for its unshakeable hierarchies, numerous children and clearly defined gender roles, could now be reinvented as the new metaphor for anti-fascist Italy.

Fittingly, Italian Communists found in a peasant family from northern Italy one of the most powerful example of anti-fascist heroism. The seven Cervi brothers had been arrested in November 1943 in a small village near Reggio Emilia, by Italian collaborators, accused of having helped escaped Allied prisoners of war. They had been shot shortly after their arrest by a local fascist squad. Their village, Gattatico, situated north of the Gothic line, was one of the areas in which the war between German occupiers, Italian fascists and resistant fighters had been longest and harshest. In the early fifties, the story was transformed in an exemplary Resistance tale, and the celebration of the Cervi quickly became the celebration of the peasant family.<sup>36</sup>

The story of the Cervi offered not only a narrative of principled decisions paid with the ultimate price, but also a story of familial solidarity and sufferance with which many could identify. Furthermore, it was a story of political commitment by a family of peasants, which was both traditional and modern, attached to the past and yet eager to improve its conditions through education and technology. In sum, the Cervi provided the perfect myth for a party busy trying to present itself as a national party, able to understand the traditions and values of rural Italy, while offering a model of transformation.

As all powerful myths, the story of the Cervi spoke to different audiences. The liberal-socialist Piero Calamandrei saluted the Cervi and the peasantry they represented as the example of “the most human, simple, natural aspects of the Resistance”. He did not hesitate to praise the patriarchal family for its ability to act with absolute unanimity in defence of freedom; as in the best of collectives, “one was

<sup>35</sup> Absalom, “Allied Escapers and the contadini”, 413-25, and Absalom, *A Strange Alliance*; see also Albanese, *Le campagne italiane*, 9-10, 54-5; Ragionieri, “Dall’unità a oggi”, 2380 and Revelli, *Le due guerre*.

<sup>36</sup> The first to narrate the story of the Cervi was the writer Italo Calvino, in two articles published respectively in January and December 1953 in *Patria indipendente* (“Nei sette volti consapevoli la nostra faticosa rinascita”) and *L’Unità* (“I sette fratelli”).



like seven, and seven like one".<sup>37</sup> The Cervi, stressed Calamandrei, had not followed an abstract ideology but a deep sense of morality, motivated by their deep connection with the land in which "they worked daily", transforming their labour in hard earned fruit.

In contrast to the Polish situation, in which the peasant culture appeared as the emblem of what should be overcome, the story of the Cervi helped to accommodate the many fractures of postwar Italy.

In the Cervi's household as in many others, socialism had coexisted with the catholic influence exercised by the mother, and far from appearing as irreconcilable ideologies, both could be celebrated as expression of Italy's "best popular cultures". As Alcide Cervi explained in the autobiography written with Renato Nicolai:

If it were true that different progressive faiths cannot get on together, then the history of my family would be destroyed, because if we have done something good, we have done it because we have the strength of those different faiths.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.7 The Limits of the Revolution

Italian Communists' determination to find ways of mediating between different messages and cultures found a reverberation on their approach to women. Where Polish propaganda emphasised the strong discontinuity that the state had made possible in women's lives, including through their emancipation from the patriarchal peasant family, the models that the PCI presented to Italian women were somewhat less clear-cut. If Polish Communists found in the discourse of women's emancipation a strong terrain on which to attack the Catholic Church, the PCI was too preoccupied with defending itself from the attacks of the Church to go on the offensive.

The messages sent out in Poland and in Italy, however, converged in the cautious attitude that both Polish and Italian Communists held *vis-à-vis* the institution of marriage.

Even when strongly advertising the 'new woman' and condemning backward models of family life, Polish socialist propaganda never put into question marriage as an institution, nor ventured to show the recently introduced divorce as a fully acceptable alternative to marital unhappiness.

This can be seen both in biographical narratives, as well as in cultural artefacts.

<sup>37</sup> On the myth of the Cervi, Lucenti, *I fratelli Cervi*; Cerri, *Papà Cervi*; Bernini, "Mothers and Children", 242-58.

<sup>38</sup> Cervi, *I miei sette figli*.

A string of movies released in the mid-fifties under the strict agenda of socialist realism, and clearly designed to convene the image of the emancipated woman to postwar audiences, highlighted both the innovative elements and the limits of the transformation. Films such as *Przygoda na Mariensztat* (An Adventure in Mariensztat) directed by Leonard Buczkowski in 1954 or in Jan Rybkowski's *Autobus odjeżdża 6.20* (The bus leaves at 6.20), also released in the same year, portrayed young women who escaped traditional female positions to take up typically male jobs – in these cases, constructor worker and welder respectively.<sup>39</sup>

As well as presenting new models of female emancipation, both movies provided a mild critique of conventional romance and marriage, portrayed as disappointing experiences undermined by betrayal and lack of sincerity. Both narratives presented emancipation through work not as an ideological choice, but as a lucky chance, encountered in the aftermath of sentimental disappointment.

While showing the potential pitfalls of romantic liaisons and marriage, however, neither narrative could avoid a rather conventional ending. In both cases, marriages were saved, thanks to women's ability to educate their husbands to the virtues of companionship. Once men could understand women's legitimate desires and aspirations, marriage happiness was restored.

The role assigned to women in these representations suggested that, even when they became skilful industrial workers and equal contributors to the family's economy, good socialist women retained most of the responsibility for the success of family life, through their performance as wives and mothers. Even mainstream aesthetic norms were only partially broken. If *Przyjaciółka* told its young readers that women's working ability was what made them attractive, cinema continued to portray beautiful women, who once dismissed their working clothes quickly went back to conventional feminine attires.

In their effort to keep new models and established expectations together, these early representations of women's life in the new Poland already pointed to what would soon become one of the most critical issues of the socialist economy: women's acquisition of a new economic role did not diminish their domestic centrality, but left them to carry the double burden of professional and domestic work largely unaided.

In Italy, the limits and contradiction of the postwar Communist reflection on marriage was well represented by one of the most successful biographical narratives published in the fifties.

Marina Sereni's *I Giorni della nostra vita* (Days of our life) was published in 1955 and became an instant success, with five editions

<sup>39</sup> Similar narratives could be found in other movies from the same years, such as *Niedaleko Warszawy* [Not Far from Warsaw], dir. Maria Kaniewska (1954) and *Irena, do domu* [Irena, Go Home], dir. Jan Fethke (1955).

and nearly one million copies sold by the end of the decade. Much more than Engels or Babel's writing on the family, Sereni's memoir provided postwar Communist households with a guide to family life and political militancy. The fact that it was written by a woman and the compelling story of Marina ensured the popularity of a book that touched different cords and could be read as a family novel as much as a political text.

The daughter of Russian revolutionaries, Xenia Silberberg, had arrived in Rome with her mother as a child and married Emilio Sereni in 1928. For Emilio, she had converted to Judaism and joined the anti-fascist underground movement, suffering both political and racial persecutions. Marina shared Emilio's political activity from the beginning of their relationship, risking being arrested several times, and keeping up Sereni's political network when he was detained. In 1935, she followed him to France, where she contributed to the creation of the clandestine paper *Noi donne*.<sup>40</sup> Separations, uncertainty and fear were the constant companions of Marina and Emilio's marriage and Marina brought up largely by herself two of the three daughters born to the couple. The third was still very young when Marina Sereni died in early 1952.

Contrary to Marina's hopes and expectations during the war, separations and anxieties did not end with the 'anti-fascist' victory. After 1945, as Emilio Sereni rapidly became one of the leaders of the PCI, Rome, the newly constituted Republican parliament and the party replaced prison and exile in taking him away from the family. Political engagement in times of peace proved less dangerous but not less pervasive than the anti-fascist struggle.

Marina Sereni's account of her complicated marriage and family life could have hardly been told in a more reassuring tone; her highly polished narration of a complicated and often dramatic life left no space for tensions, regrets or complaints. Not even loneliness was ever admitted.

The key that Marina offered for her actions and feeling was an absolute trust in the Party, as instrument of universal transformation:

The Party is for me fused with my private life, so intimately and completely, as to give me the certainty that I am a part of that immense strength that moves the world forward.<sup>41</sup>

Sereni's faith in universal progress and the strong sense of being part of it coexisted in her account with a striking modesty when talk-

<sup>40</sup> The same title would be taken in 1944 by the official monthly of the women's organisation of the PCI, the *Unione Donne Italiane* (Union of Italian Women), or UDI.

<sup>41</sup> Sereni, *I giorni della nostra vita*, 110.

ing about her role in the anti-fascist struggle and in the building of the postwar Party.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the book, Sereni's political role and commitment appeared secondary when compared to that of her husband and even somewhat accidental: her political engagement was the result of Mimmo's teaching and dedication.<sup>43</sup>

Although Marina Sereni had been without doubt a prominent protagonists of Communist politics during the fascist years and throughout the war, *I giorni della nostra vita* left all this in the shade. The clearly pedagogical aim of the narrative was to show how a Communist family should be: equal, open to learning and to constant improvement, but also based on a clear and recognisable division of responsibilities.

In a letter written to her newly married daughter and her husband, Sereni spelled out both the difficulty and the importance of running a Communist household.

There are several very good comrades who think that their work is finished once they return home. They think that at home there is nothing to do; they don't realise that *to be* a Communist means to be a Communist always and in everything: educating children as a Communist, speaking to the wife as a Communist, being attached to the parents as a Communist. [...] It is only this unity that can allow a Communist to be happy. And this of course applies also to the wife of the militant comrade.<sup>44</sup>

Sereni did not spell out what behaving like a Communist in the home meant exactly. The way in which she and Emilio had run their household, however, would suggest a rather conventional distribution of responsibilities. The words that Marina Sereni addressed to her husband from Moscow, where she was undergoing cancer treatment, must have sound extraordinary and yet familiar to many Italian women. Marina apologised for the unusual domestic chores that her forced absence had imposed on her husband; that Emilio should be busy with the care of their youngest daughter, Clara, at a time in which he "really needed to be free" was a real inconvenience, wrote Marina. However, she added, the Communist leader might have found "some consolation" in the experience: "as it had never happened be-

<sup>42</sup> A different picture of the Sereni household was painted by Marina's youngest daughter, Clara, in her autobiographical novel, cf. Sereni, *Il gioco dei regni*; on Marina Sereni and the Sereni family, Gabrielli, *Tempio di virilità*; Casalini, *Famiglie comuniste* and "The Family, Sexual Morality and Gender", 229-44; Bellassai, *La morale comunista*. For a broader discussion of Communist identity in Italy, Accornero, Mannheimer, *L'identità comunista*; Agosti, "Il militante comunista torinese".

<sup>43</sup> Sereni, *I giorni della nostra vita*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Sereni, *I giorni della nostra vita*, 112.

fore that you had to take care of any of our children, so now for the first time you have a sense of what it means to be a mother. This thought gives me so much pleasure, you cannot imagine...".<sup>45</sup>

Was Marina's remark ironic? Or was it meant to convey the idea that her husband's lack of participation in the work of care had really deprived him of an important dimension of his life? Was Marina making a subtle point on the lack of equality that had characterised their domestic life, or had she tried to emphasise that her husband's dedication to politics had been at the cost of his sacrificing his family and personal sphere?

The interviews conducted with Communist militants by the American political scientist Gabriel Almond in 1954 revealed the many tensions that political activity provoked within the household: from the competing demands of young families and party's activities, to the ideological divisions that could separate family members. If those tensions could be revealed to a researcher from abroad, however, very little echo of them could be found in Communist public narratives. The accepted ideal of militancy born out of the Resistance dictated that political commitment should always prevail over the private.

In 1952, the publication of the last letters written by Resistant fighters sentenced to death between 1943 and 1945 consecrated this ideal of devotion to the cause paid with the ultimate price.<sup>46</sup> Here too, the family appeared as a painful reminder of the often irreconcilable duties that confronted committed anti-fascists, as deep and moral devotions could however never prevail over political commitment.

The idea that, even in times of peace, political commitment should always prevail over private preoccupations remained the dominant model of militancy throughout the postwar years. As the Communist leader Gian Carlo Pajetta succinctly explained in his own autobiography: "I often wondered then, whether there were cases when the 'private' should be given priority over the 'public'. And I wondered about it later in life. The answer has always been the same: never".<sup>47</sup>

*I giorni della nostra vita* helped to promote the idea that pursuing the goodness of the family while being a good Communist was a difficult, but possible and even necessary task, and that behaving morally within the home was a condition for any good Communist militant. Such moral behaviour, however, did not entail freeing their wives from the work of care.

<sup>45</sup> Sereni, *I giorni della nostra vita*, 110-11.

<sup>46</sup> Antonicelli, *Lettere di condannati a morte*.

<sup>47</sup> Almond, *The Appeals of Communism*, 318.

## 2.8 Marina, Mary, and the Others

The idea that private and political commitment should feed on each other, creating a smooth and powerful continuum, was at the core of Marina Sereni's autobiography. By determinately putting her own political life in the background, however, Sereni seemed to suggest that the main role of a good Communist wife was to keep family life going, allowing the husband-comrade to dedicate himself fully to political work.

Although motivated by a very different faith, the family life that she described was not so different from the ideal of reciprocal support and virtuous conduct so often advocated by the Church. Sereni would have certainly not subscribed to Pius XII's open endorsement of hierarchical marriage. The Pope's call for homes open to the outside, but not dominated by mundane concerns, where the spouses could help each other to improve in the moral virtues that held marriages together and help them to grow, however, was not so far from her own description of an ideal Communist marriage. Although Sereni would have probably taken exception to the Pope's invitation to women to attend their duties gladly "forgetting themselves" and "enduring and forgiving" for the good of the family, her own biography seemed to have followed a rather close model of femininity, although motivated by different beliefs.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult not to read the last pages of Marina Sereni's memoir as a form of secular devotion akin to Catholic tales of selflessness and sacrifice.

Ill with cancer, between 1950 and 1952 Marina Sereni spent long periods alone in Moscow and in Lausanne, undergoing medical treatment. Her published correspondence presents us with a model of virtuous tolerance and endurance, veined with irony and playful affection:

as far as your visit is concerned, don't feel pressured: come when you are free. I am in fact very pleased that you are not here; given that we have mastered this model, of being two in one, we have to make the most of it, sparing the other what we can. The same joy that I felt in Milan, when they came to arrest you and your were not at home, I felt it again on the operating table, thinking that you knew nothing, and would not worry.<sup>49</sup>

Marina suffering alone and sparing her husband the pain of her illness could have been lifted from a Catholic representation of holi-

<sup>48</sup> On the model of the Christian family, see also Festorazzi, "La famiglia nella Bibbia", 157.

<sup>49</sup> Sereni, *I giorni della nostra vita*, 14.

ness, and even Marina's trust in the Party, only and absolute mover of the world, suggested a faith akin to transcendental religiosity.

In a Communist household, suggested Sereni, political struggle and family life should go hand in hand, responding to the same morality, and sharing the same commitment and self-abnegation. The only way in which this could be done, however, was through the upholding of rather traditional gender roles.

In her biography, Sereni said hardly anything about her life before marriage and about her own family of origin, including her revolutionary mother. Marina's story had started with marriage. As if to confirm her personal and political rebirth, the biography was published under the name that Xenia had assumed while in hiding.

The complexity of Sereni's life and the way in which she told her story produced a powerful portrait. The mode of the narration, the mixing of power and submission, the commitment to family and maternity, but also the willingness to subordinate them to a higher cause, evoked a figure of womanhood with whom not only Communists but also Catholic women schooled in the cult of Mary could easily identify.

Marina Sereni's powerful self-narrative laid bare the question that would have accompanied the representation and self-representation of women throughout the postwar period: was power to be found within the home or outside of it? Should women reject the primacy of the domestic postulated by centuries of religious teaching and consolidated national traditions in favour of full political, economic and social emancipation? Or should they accept that even the participation in a political movement that promised radical social transformations could go hand in hand with their overwhelming responsibility in domestic matters?

Both in Italy and in Poland, the figure of Mary provided the most powerful archetype for an idea of womanhood in which power and submission, domestic devotion and participation in the greatest historical revolutions merged.<sup>50</sup> No discussion of family models in Italy and Poland can ignore her influence.

The attractiveness of Mary laid largely in the multifarious and mysterious prerogatives that made her a pliable figure. Mary signified acceptance and innocence, as well as strength and power and offered the perfect model of maternal devotion, faithfulness and perseverance.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Rubin, *Mother of God*, xxi. On the symbolic importance of Mary in the definition of women's social and political role in Catholic contexts, Accati, "Il marito della santa", 79-104. For classic anthropological accounts of the place of women in southern European societies, Schneider J., Schneider P., *Culture and Political Economy*.

<sup>51</sup> See Warner, *Alone in All Her Sex* and Zemon-Davies, *Culture and Society*.

Mary was both the ultimate mediator between God and humanity, and a sign of the triumphant Church, which through her celebrated both the virtues of domesticity and the power of the Ecclesia.

To women, Mary offered a model at once unachievable and unavoidable. While putting a woman at the centre of the event that had defined the history of the western world, Mary's attribution restricted the perimeter of what was deemed acceptable for them. She could therefore be used both to celebrate a general notion of womanhood and to discipline actual women into their assigned role.

In the Cold War confrontation, Mary displayed all her political relevance.

## 2.9 The Protector of Family and Nation

On 1 November 1950, the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissus Deus* proclaimed the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven as a dogma, to be accepted by all the faithful. In this way, Pius XII brought to completion a process started by Pius IX a century earlier, with the proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception.<sup>52</sup> Both Popes intervened on issues on which no theological unanimity existed, but that were certain to help the Pontiff's popularity.

As he had done since the beginning of his Pontificate, Pius XII turned to Mary to call the flock to resist the siege of the modern world, never losing sight of the real models that should inspire their life. As Pius IX before him, Pacelli reminded the faithful that Mary signified not only virtuous womanliness but also Mother Church and "the triumph of the spiritual family of Christ over sin and worldliness".<sup>53</sup>

The Marian celebrations of the mid-fifties represented the culmination of a process that had started with the big political confrontations of the late forties, in which the power of Mary had been fully displayed through hugely popular pilgrimages and novenas, miracles and apparitions.<sup>54</sup>

Both in Italy and in Poland, the resurgence of religious devotion in the aftermath of the Second World War represented a powerful phe-

<sup>52</sup> On the cultural and theological implications of the dogma see Hamington, *Hail Mary?*, 18. The Pope's devotion to Mary had found a first manifestation on October 31, 1942, when Pius XII had consecrated the human race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The decision to make 1954 a special Marian year, to celebrate the centennial of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the institution of a new festivity dedicated to the Virgin in the same year, completed the appraisal of the figure of Mary.

<sup>53</sup> Corrado Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful", 175-7.

<sup>54</sup> Christian, *Visionaries*, 40. On the wave of miraculous apparition and their meaning in early Cold War, Ventresca, "The Virgin and the Bear", 441. On Marian apparitions more broadly, Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*.



nomenon, signifying deep-seated sentiments and beliefs, stirred by the rising ideological conflicts of the early Cold War. The particular relevance assumed by the Marian cult in both countries demonstrated the resonance of gender in popular piety and in its manifestations.

In Italy, the grand Marian pilgrimages organised by the Church in 1947-48 were followed by a wave of apparitions and miraculous interventions in the eve of the 1948 election. Despite the caution of Catholic hierarchies, popular devotion readily accepted the idea that Mary had mobilised in what the Pope had often defined as a battle for or against Christ.

Ventresca has argued that the pre-electoral apparitions of 1948 reflected "Italy's unique position as the seat of the universal Roman Church", as well as the many tensions that throughout history had accompanied the uneasy coexistence of civic and religious institutions in the country. Faced with the concrete possibility of a victory of the Popular Front, Italian Catholics reached to Mary to ask for protection against the prospect of an atheistic government, the "spectre of civil unrest" and even "the faint but frightening prospect of armed military invasion from behind the Iron Curtain".<sup>55</sup>

I would suggest that something else was also at stake. In the aftermath of unprecedented violence and disruption, praying for Mary's intercession brought the comfort of a maternal presence that not even the war could take away. This was as strong in Poland as it was in Italy.

Far from being a typically southern European phenomenon, in Poland invoking Mary's help in time of political crisis and danger had a tradition that was at least equal to Italy and quite possibly stronger. In the nineteenth century, while Italian Catholics called on Mary to help them resist the secular national State, Poles invoked the intercession of Mary in defence of a nation deprived of statehood by its aggressive neighbours.<sup>56</sup> On at least two occasions in the history of Poland, Mary had been credited with saving the country, thanks to her miraculous interventions.

In 1944, as Warsaw engaged a desperate struggle against the Nazi occupiers, hundreds of chapels dedicated to Mary were erected in the city's courtyards. The shrines were not only a sign of devotion to the patroness of Polish combats, but also a desperate effort to obtain protection at a desperate time, by bringing Mary as close as possible to the domestic space. While no otherworldly intervention saved Warsaw in 1944, the shrines erected during the battle became so powerfully associated to the resistance of the city that no attempt to eliminate them was pursued by Communist authorities; even when Mary became a point of reference in the battle engaged by the Cath-

<sup>55</sup> Ventresca, "The Virgin and the Bear", 442.

<sup>56</sup> See also Blackburn, *Marpingen*.

olic Church against the new powers.

The political force of Mary found a powerful display in the Polish Primate Wyszyński's appeal to the Mother of God as the ultimate defender of the prerogatives of traditional family life. As a protector of the Polish nation and the family, Mary provided powerful symbols both of national cohesion and of political resistance. Images such as the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, credited with having saved Poland from the Swedish invasion in 1655, and whose cult Wyszyński strongly supported, embodied both a maternal and regal figure. At once suffering and powerful, caring and bereaved, she provided the perfect representation of the suffering but undefeated nation that the Catholic Church wished to represent.<sup>57</sup>

In 1956, Wyszyński solemnly declared Poland's servitude to Mary in recognition of the special tie that linked the Poles to the mother of God. The prayer that accompanied the national devotion proclaimed by the Primate made special reference to the family, invoking Mary's protection against the unwelcome intrusion of the state.

On 26 August 1956, the great pilgrimage called by Wyszyński at the monastery of Jasna Góra, where the image of the Black Madonna was preserved and venerated, saw the participation of at least one million people. Organised as the first public act of the Polish Church in the aftermath of the worst of Stalinist repression, the pilgrimage was a mass demonstration of devotion that belittled the State's effort to promote Poland's secularisation and to restrict the perimeter of the Church's social engagement.<sup>58</sup>

The litany recited by the pilgrims, moreover, called for direct divine intervention to redress the wrongs that the new atheist government had brought to family life, to eliminate divorce and abortion and to protect parents' ability to educate their children in the spirit of the Church.<sup>59</sup>

The invocation to protect traditional family life was even stronger in the prayers of the Great Novena launched by Wyszyński in 1957. The prayer *Rodzina Bogiem Silna* (Family is Strong with God), in particular, reasserted that marriage was primarily a sacrament, dependent solely on God, and that family was a natural institution independent of the State. Family and nation, both consecrated to religious values, were one and the same, and their rights should always prevail over those of the State. Motherhood remained women's first

<sup>57</sup> See Niedźwiedz, "Mère et reine", 320-2.

<sup>58</sup> This demonstration of unwavering faith in Mary would have been renewed in even greater form in 1966, when massive gatherings of people saluted the image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa taken in pilgrimage across Poland. See Porter-Szűcs, "Hetmanka and Mother", 151-70.

<sup>59</sup> Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła*, 158-9; Thiriet, *Marks czy Maryja?*, 264-5.

role, and the ideal household was one blessed by generous fertility, informed by religious values, and attached to the traditions that had informed Polish culture through the centuries. The nine-year Jubilee launched by Wyszyński in preparation for the Millennial anniversary of Polish Christendom, celebrated in 1966, offered an extraordinary platform for Catholic mobilisation. In Kosicki's words, the Jubilee was a "testament to the strength of popular religious sentiment on a continent long confronted with the specter of secularization".<sup>60</sup>

In the harshest moments of the confrontation, Wyszyński had emerged as the "international face of the Catholic Church's resistance to Communist encroachment".<sup>61</sup> As the rigours of Stalinism finally started to relax, few could doubt that the Church had managed to retain a powerful voice, which was determined to assert especially on family issues.

## 2.10 Conclusions

In an article published in 1967, the progressive catholic intellectual Ruggero Orfeo reflected on the shortcomings of the ideological war fought by catholics over the family since the end of the war. He complained about the superficiality of the Catholic position, which had often preferred propaganda to the actual analysis of the Communist conception of family life.<sup>62</sup>

A deeper analysis of the Communist position, argued Orfeo, would have revealed little originality and scant clear thinking, but not the immorality of which Catholics routinely accused Communists.<sup>63</sup>

Not only could Communists be highly moral, pointed out Orfeo, but their vision of family life was not necessary at odds with the Catholic one, at least as daily life was concerned. Catholics and Communists diverged radically in their conception of the family as either a manifestation of natural law (for the Catholics) or a variable product of human development (for the Communists), but not necessarily on how to run a household.<sup>64</sup>

Orfeo's comments had a particular ring in Italy, where the models of virtuous family life put forward by the PCI gave ample man-

<sup>60</sup> Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricade*, 126-7; see also Micewski, *Stefan Kardinal Wyszynski*.

<sup>61</sup> Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricade*, 125.

<sup>62</sup> Orfeo, "La concezione della famiglia" 35.

<sup>63</sup> Orfeo, "La concezione della famiglia", 40.

<sup>64</sup> Orfeo, "La concezione della famiglia", 40. Unable to find contemporary Catholic thinkers seriously engaged in this debate, Orfeo had to remind his reader of the analysis published by Agostino Gemelli in 1921. See Gemelli, *L'origine della famiglia*.

ifestations of Communists' own conservatism in family and gender matters. It applied somehow less to Poland, where the effort to put forward an alternative vision of family life was pursued with much greater determination by postwar Communist government.

The factors that most explained these differences in approach are to be found in the political situation that existed in the two countries: the position of power occupied by Polish Communists and the relative marginality of the PCI to national government.

The differences in the immediate political circumstances lived by the two countries, however, could not affect the impact of a deep-seated cultural model and by the imagery of popular Catholicism, in particular in postwar narratives of family and gender roles.

The huge popularity of Mary, in particular, provided an unavoidable term of confrontation in both countries. From the Catholic side, Mary could be upheld as the ultimate model of femininity, and brandished as the ultimate defender of family and nation. From a Communist perspective, the popular devotion to Mary could appear as a remnant of the past, whose pervasiveness had nonetheless to be reckoned with. One way of doing so was to incorporate themes such as maternal sacrifice and devotion into Communist narratives of model family life. The autobiography of Marina Sereni is an exemplary case.



## **3 Struggling for Authority and Influence: the Regulation of Marriage in the Early Post-war Years**

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**Summary** 3.1 Introduction. – 3.2 Historical Antecedents. – 3.3 Marriage in the Republic: the Place of Marriage in the Early Post-war Settlements. – 3.4 Defining Family and Marriage. – 3.5 A Patriarchal Republic. – 3.6 At War Over the Family: A Struggle for Faith and Social Relevance. – 3.7 Marriage Socialist Style. – 3.8 An Equal Institution, Under the Gaze of the Socialist State. – 3.9 Catholic Resistance. – 3.10 Conclusions.

### **3.1 Introduction**

Historians of the twentieth century tend to look at marriage within the very narrow remit of the couple, as if marriage mattered only to the two people standing in front of the priest or the registry officer. Moreover, marriage has been often considered as the twentieth century's norm and the battles fought over it in the early modern period (particularly between emerging State authorities and the Church) as something of the distant past.<sup>1</sup>

The result has been the neglect of two issues: first, that the legal and symbolic dimensions of marriage go well beyond the narrow circle of the spouses and their offspring; second, that controversies over the nature of marriage and its significance were far from over in the twentieth century.

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**1** For significant examples of histories of marriage over a long historical perspective, see the seminal Gillis, *For Better For Worse*, as well as Coontz, *Marriage, a History*; Abbott, *A History of Marriage*.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, as in earlier historical periods, the way in which marriage was understood and regulated remained controversial and, in those countries characterised by strong ideological confrontations, became a fertile ground on which to present different visions of society and the place of the family in it.

Post-war Italy and Poland exemplify the broad meaning of marriage and its political relevance. At a time when both countries embarked on far-reaching projects of political and legal transformation, the place of marriage and family life also came under scrutiny. In the search for new legal settlements that accompanied the formation of the two post-war republics, the regulation of marriage sparked a nearly unsolvable conflict between Catholics and secular parties, including Communist ones.

As both Communists and Catholics tried to shape the emerging post-war states in ways that reflected their values and aspirations, they both found in marriage and family life an important terrain of engagement.

In both countries, Communist parties advocated a drastic break with the past, which should involve countries' political and economic structures, as well as social praxes and ways of living. In Poland, post-war Communists saw in the regulation of marriage an important aspect of the social transformations they wished to pursue. The immediate and uncompromising opposition of the Catholic Church was no deterrent. On the contrary, it provided Communists with a means of showing their power.

Italian Communists also advocated a far-reaching transformation of the country's political and social structures, as well as a thorough reform of marriage and family life. Unlike their Polish comrades, however, they quickly realised that power relations were not in their favour and swiftly decided against pursuing reforms likely to upset the Catholic Church.

The outcome was paradoxical, if not perverse. The PCI's restraint in the field of family policy did not stop the attacks of the Church, but helped to undermine the credibility of the Communists' demand for a clear break with the past. Communists' *de facto* acceptance that in the new republican state family matters would continue to be regulated by fascist legislation introduced an institutional and legal continuity that questioned the supposedly anti-fascist character of the post-war Republic.

If in Italy a strong and aggressive Catholic Church put the Communists on the defensive, the opposite was true in Poland, where the Church quickly found itself under attack. A legislative void dating back to the reunification of the country in 1918 offered Polish Communists the opportunity to introduce a sweeping reform of marriage

legislation already in 1945.<sup>2</sup> By asserting the power of the State in a realm historically under the control of the Church, Polish Communists showed their determination to break with the past and push the Church to the margins of the political realm. Paradoxes, however, were not absent in Poland either.

While an apparently obvious political victory for the State, the reform of 1945 provided the Church with a strong platform on which to campaign against the new government. Far from silencing them, the reform of marriage offered Polish catholic hierarchies a powerful instrument of propaganda that would come back to haunt the government for years to come.

Both the far-reaching reforms of family life pursued by Polish Communists and the lack of intervention that characterised Italy's democratic transition carried practical and symbolic consequences that went far beyond the limits of the domestic sphere.

### 3.2 Historical Antecedents

Both in Italy and in Poland, the issue of marriage regulation had represented a central aspect of the confrontation between political and religious authorities, at least since national reunification.

In the mid-19th century, the newly formed Kingdom of Italy had sought to establish its authority over marriage as part of a broader effort to affirm a secular notion of the State.

Respectful of “the conscience of each citizen” and determined to keep out of religious matters, the new State recognised as legally valid only those marriages that were “communicated by the Spouses [*sic*] to the State itself, in front of the registry officer”.<sup>3</sup> Introduced by the Pisanelli Code in 1865, universal civil marriage was immediately condemned by the Church. This was not surprising. Only one year earlier, the First Vatican Council had stated that civil marriage was unacceptable and, in 1865, Pius IX included it among the *Errors of Our Times* condemned by the Church.<sup>4</sup> The conciliatory gestures

<sup>2</sup> Poland's return to independence in 1918 did not bring an homogenisation of the different matrimonial regulations introduced during the partition era; efforts to produce a unitary code were repeatedly frustrated throughout the interwar period.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ungari, *Storia del diritto di famiglia in Italia*, 157-8. On the genesis of the new code, Acquarone, *L'unificazione civile e dei codici*.

<sup>4</sup> The *Syllabus complectens praecipuos nostrae aetatis errores*, promulgated by Pius IX together with the encyclical letter *Quanta Cura* on 8 December 1865, contained a list of 80 errors condemned by the Church; within these, ten prepositions concerned the Christian marriage and the dangers brought to it by liberal thought. Civil marriage was strongly condemned in Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, promulgated on 10 February 1880.



included in the Pisanelli Code, first among them the banning of divorce for all marriages, failed to appease the Pope.<sup>5</sup>

For the first and nearly last time in the history of Italy, the Pisanelli Code tried to assert the right of the State to regulate marriage as the secular “foundation of family and Nation [*sic*]”, while declaring it “incompetent” in respect to its sacramental nature.<sup>6</sup> While the Church’s condemnation of civil marriage endured, the issue seemed to die down in the following years, to the extent that, as Carlo Jemolo noted, the political programme of the first catholic party, officially formed in 1919, failed to raise the question.<sup>7</sup>

The situation, however, changed during the Fascist years. Mussolini’s determination to forge a new alliance with the Church, bringing to an end a conflict that had endured since unification, proved of great consequence as far as marriage was concerned. In early 1929, the conflict that had opposed State and Church since the reunification of the country, and particularly since the proclamation of Rome as its capital in 1870, was finally overcome. With the Lateran Accords, signed on February 11, 1929, the Pope recognised the Kingdom of Italy and surrendered his claims to Rome. In exchange, the Church was granted a number of privileges, which included the proclamation of Catholicism as the sole religion of the State and the recognition of the civil value of the marriages celebrated in accordance to Canon law.

Rejecting the secular prerogatives pursued in the aftermath of unification, the State was now willing to endorse the sacramental nature of catholic marriage. In the words of article 34 of the new agreement: “The Italian state, wishing to restate to the institute of marriage, which is the basis of the family, a dignity conform to the catholic traditions of its people, recognises civil effect to the matrimonial sacrament disciplined by Canon law”.

The ‘concordatary marriage’ helped to mitigate the conflict between Church and State and reflected the significant convergences that existed between fascists and catholic authorities over family and gender relations. Fascists and Catholics shared a vision of the family as a hierarchal and patriarchal institution, in which women’s rights were rigidly anchored to their marriage position and subordinated to their husband’s entitlements. Although for different reasons,

<sup>5</sup> The impact was particularly strong in the north of the country, where the pre-unitarian codes had included the institution of divorces for civil and non-catholic marriages. On the heated parliamentary debates that accompanied the reform, see Jacini, *La crisi religiosa del Risorgimento*, and Ruffini, “La codificazione del diritto ecclesiastico”.

<sup>6</sup> Torelli, *Lezioni di Storia del Diritto*, 106. Since the Pisanelli code allowed civil registration to take place after the religious celebration of marriages, religious only marriages remained common in post-unification Italy, see Ungari, *Storia del diritto di famiglia*, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Jemolo, *Chiesa e stato in Italia*, 189.

they also shared a predilection for large families, seeing maternity as women's first duty and only social dimension.<sup>8</sup>

The recognition of Catholicism as religion of the State and the agreement found on the concordatarian marriage guaranteed the Church a position of absolute privilege in the regulation of family life, which it fought hard to retain in the post-war years.

As in pre-unification Italy, several systems of family law had operated in Poland during the Partition era. By the time of reunification, four major codes existed, giving different rights and duties to married couples and their children.

In western Poland, once under Prussian control and governed by the German code of 1896, civil marriage was compulsory for all and ordinary courts held authority over family matters, including the possibility of granting divorce. In the eastern part of the country, by contrast, ecclesiastical authorities maintained full control over matrimonial jurisdiction in accordance with the Russian law of 1840. Catholic marriages were regulated by Canon law, with civil law applying only to mixed marriages and transfers between denominations. In southern Poland, ecclesiastical marriages were recognised by the Austrian Civil Code of 1811; divorce was prohibited for Catholics, but allowed for other religious groups. In 1868, civil marriage was introduced in Austrian territories for the cases in which a clergymen refused to perform a marriage, for reasons other than those recognised in the Civil Code. The remit of civil marriage was expanded in 1870 to include denominations not recognised by the State.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, no civil marriage had existed in Congress Poland, where Catholics and Uniates were allowed to get married according to Canon law, while marriages among Protestants were treated according to the provisions for foreigners residing in Russia.

The reunification of Poland in 1918 presented the new State with a puzzle of legal arrangements difficult to harmonise in a country of deep religious and cultural diversity.

The treatment of marriage in the March Constitution of 1921 illustrated the difficulty of settling the matter in a way that could satisfy both State and Church.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> On the convergences between fascist and catholic notions of family life, see among others Willson, *Women in Twentieth Century Italy*, 61-95.

<sup>9</sup> On the legal organisation before 1939, Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, *Małżeństwo*, 5-6, Siekanowicz, "Poland", 2: 1337, also Rosada and Gwóźdź, "Church and State in Poland".

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Wynot, "Reluctant Bedfellows", 93-4. Within the constitution of 1921, the Catholic Church was granted the status of "primus inter pares"; as such the Church received a number of privileges, first of all the right to provide religious training in all state schools. No formal definition of State-Church relations was however provided in the Constitution. On the reaction of the Polish Church to the Constitution, Porter, *Faith and Fatherland*, 172-3. See also Pease, *Rome's Most Faithful Daughter*.

Although civil marriage was introduced for those who did not belong to any religion, the State refrained from establishing universal norms over marriage. In 1926, a proposal to introduce universal civil marriage, which also envisaged provisions for nullity, divorce and separation under the jurisdiction of civil courts, was blocked by the uncompromising opposition of the Church. For its part, the Concordate signed between Poland and the Holy See in 1925 sanctioned the privileged role of the Catholic faith and of Catholic institutions (granting special entitlements to the Church in terms of education, property and taxation), but did not introduce an equivalent of the Italian Concordatarian marriage.

The legislative interventions carried out during the war by occupying powers complicated the situation further. In eastern Poland, in particular, the Soviet occupation brought with it a disavowing of the authority of the Church that directly affected marriage. Ecclesiastical marriages were declared invalid, together with birth certificates issued by Churches; in April 1940, all churches were ordered to deposit marriage and birth records in the state record offices. Priests were no longer allowed to celebrate marriages. Soviet divorce legislation was extended to the occupied territories. This would set the model for the post-war reform.

### 3.3 Marriage in the Republic: the Place of Marriage in the Early Post-war Settlements

Both in Italy and in Poland, the return to peace coincided with the creation of new political and institutional structures, set to depart radically from the past. Although the conditions under which the two processes took place differed greatly, a number of common issues existed, as far as the family was concerned.

In Poland, the coming to power of Communists promised (or threatened) an overall transformation of social and economic relations that would inevitably include a radical reform of family life. In Italy, the creation of an anti-fascist republic posed the question of how to deal with the cumbersome legacy of Mussolini's regime in relation to family and gender relations.

In both cases, the issue of how to deal with family life in the process of political reorganisation directly engaged the relationship between the State and the Church, bringing into question the many entitlements enjoyed by the latter in relation to family matters. In a Poland rendered uniformly Catholic by the ethnic cleansing that had accompanied the war, the Catholic Church faced the prospect of having achieved near absolute control over marriage matters. This, as we have seen, was already the case in Italy. It was a position of control that the Church was determined to retain. The task, however, presented very different challenges in the two countries.

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In Italy, one of the trickiest issues that the post-war republic had to confront concerned the question of what to do with fascist legislation. This was a far-reaching issue, which involved most aspects of the country's political and legal structures.

A specific part of this general problem concerned the question of whether the Lateran Agreements, signed between the fascist government and the Holy See in 1928, should find room in the new Constitution. The question went to the core of the relationship between State and Church and threatened to split the Constituent Assembly formed in June 1946.

Defending the institutional prerogatives granted to the Catholic Church in the Lateran Pacts, and therefore promoting an approach to State-family relations in tune with catholic sensitivities, constituted the central pillar of the Christian Democratic Party's strategy within the Constituent Assembly.<sup>11</sup>

The Church's privileges were opposed by the representatives of a broad political constituency, which stretched from the Socialist to the Republicans, Liberals and Action party (known in Italy as *partiti laici* or secular parties). Divided on almost every issue, these diverse parties shared a desire to defend the prerogatives of the secular State. Since they represented a minority within the Assembly, their chances of seeing the instances of laicity affirmed depended mostly on the support of PCI.

Within the Constituent assembly, the PCI could count on 104 seats and the Socialist Party on 114. The Christian Democrats (DC), by contrast, could count on 207 seats.<sup>12</sup> If on a number of issues related to the economy or the architecture of the State, Christian democrats could count on a safe majority, thanks to the support of smaller moderate parties, on issues such as the relationship with the Catholic Church or the modernisation of family relations, left-wing parties could win the vote.

The PCI, however, proved extraordinarily reluctant to move in this direction.

The goals pursued by the Communist Party led by Palmiro Togliatti were not straightforward. Having started as a radical revolutionary party, the strategy of the PCI had undergone a fundamental transformation since Togliatti's 'democratic turn' of 1944. In the aftermath of the war, the party faced the challenge of trying to define its political agenda in a country in which international and domestic factors made not only the revolution, but even the acqui-

<sup>11</sup> Martina, *La Chiesa in Italia*; Scoppola, *La proposta politica di De Gasperi*.

<sup>12</sup> The fourth political group was represented by the Liberal party, with 33 seats followed by the Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque with 30, and by the Republican party with 23 seats.

tion of a solid parliamentary majority a very uncertain prospect.<sup>13</sup>

Having abandoned any revolutionary ambition, Togliatti's efforts concentrated on establishing the political basis that could allow the party to pursue what he defined as a 'progressive democracy': a democratic system characterised by a degree of economic planning, nationalisations, redistributive social policies, and the partial subordination of private property to the pursue of common interests.<sup>14</sup>

The alliance with the Catholic party seemed to Togliatti necessary to realise an Italian road to socialism that kept into account "the particularities, traditions and conditions" of the country.<sup>15</sup> Even more importantly, Togliatti was convinced that many among Catholic workers and even among the Catholic middle classes desired social and economic transformations compatible with the Communist project. In order to successfully penetrate society, it was therefore essential not to antagonise ordinary Catholics; to them the party should appear as a legitimate political force and not like a dangerous enemy.<sup>16</sup>

Togliatti's determination to protect the fragile alliance that existed between the 'anti-fascist' forces and his stance on the Catholic question go a long way to explain the approach taken by the PCI in the Constituent Assembly in relation to the Church, family life and gender relations.<sup>17</sup> Nothing like the position taken by the party on the Lateran Accords demonstrated Togliatti's determination to keep the dialogue open with the catholic forces.

Having initially opposed the inclusion of the agreement in the constitutional text, Togliatti changed his mind as the vote on the relevant article approached. Against the strong protests of Socialists, Action and Republican parties, the PCI voted in favour of the inclusion of the Lateran Accords in the constitution (art. 7), "in the interest of the unity of workers and of religious peace".<sup>18</sup> In this way, the Communists became directly responsible for the incorporation of a central piece of fascist politics in the founding document of the new republican state. Article 7 was variously denounced as a breach of freedom of conscience and religion and as the obvious demonstration

**13** On the impossibility of pursuing a revolutionary road to power in 1945, Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party*, 31-3. See also Pajetta, "Dalla liberazione alla repubblica", 90-9.

**14** Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party*, 42.

**15** Palmiro Togliatti, "La nostra lotta per la democrazia e il socialismo", quoted in Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party*, 36.

**16** On the cultural roots of Togliatti's understanding of the Catholic question, Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 50-1.

**17** Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 101.

**18** "Nell'interesse dell'unità dei lavoratori e della pace religiosa il Partito Comunista Italiano aderisce a votare l'articolo 7". *L'unità*, 26 marzo, 1947. See also Catalano, *Sovranità dello Stato autonomia della Chiesa*.

of the State's acquiescence to the Church. Against such criticisms, Togliatti's insistence that the Concordate provided a useful instrument for international and national politics sounded woolly and unconvincing. It was a position nearly indistinguishable from that of the DC and in sharp contrast with the PCI's overall rhetoric and declared ambitions of modernising the country, freeing it from the undemocratic inheritance of the past.<sup>19</sup>

Irrespective of whether Togliatti's decision was the result of mere political opportunism or of a sincere conviction that the Communist and catholic masses should not be set against each other, the Communist vote undermined any real possibility of limiting the influence of the Church in Italy, starting with family matters.

### 3.4 Defining Family and Marriage

The relationship between the State and the Catholic Church was not the only issue on which the PCI was willing to compromise.

Routinely accused by the Church of being a natural enemy of Italian families, the Communists missed no opportunity to underline their commitment to the family as the foundation of Italian society and to deny any intention to pursue radical reforms in the field of family and marriage legislation. As Togliatti had explained in his speech to the first conference of women Communists, in June 1945, the PCI was committed to renew and modernise the family, but without undermining its unity and strength. To start with, the modernisation that Togliatti was willing to pursue did not include divorce.

If the double commitment to defend and modernise family life sounded convincing in a speech, however, transforming it in political action was a far trickier matter. This became painfully obvious in the work of the first subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly, in charge of working out the constitutional relationship between the family and the new State.

The most vocal representative of the DC in the sub-committee was Giorgio La Pira, a highly respected representative of the faction of the party that was most committed to making the social teaching of the Church the basis of political action.<sup>20</sup> A religious and spiritual man, La Pira proved an eloquent and determined advocate of the State's duty to uphold a notion of the family informed by the teaching of the

<sup>19</sup> Terracini, *Come nacque la Costituzione*; Calamandrei, Levi, *Commentario sistematico alla Costituzione*.

<sup>20</sup> On Giorgio La Pira, see among others, Campanini, *Fede e politica*; Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano*; La Pira, *La casa comune*; La Pira, *La nostra vocazione sociale*; La Pira, *Architettura di uno stato democratico*.

Church. La Pira understood society as developing organically in an ordered and growing series of social entities that went from the family to the religious community;<sup>21</sup> he believed the state had the role of guaranteeing the free and ordered development of those social entities, never undermining their natural rights and prerogatives.

Accordingly, La Pira advocated for the insertion in the Constitution of a definition of the family as *unità naturale* (natural unity), preceding the State in time and based upon immutable principles. La Pira also stressed that marriage, the only basis upon which a family could be formed, should be seen first as a sacrament and only secondarily as a legal institution. As such, the Church should retain full authority over marriage and family life. Faithful to a vision of marriage as an institution resting on clear and unchangeable hierarchies, La Pira opposed the principle of the equality of the spouses, arguing instead for the primacy of the father-husband.

Whilst the PCI and other secular parties were ready to accept a definition of the family as “basis of the material and moral prosperity of the nation”, they resisted the notion of marriage as a hierarchical institution and La Pira’s call for different rights recognised to men and women. The issue that raised the greatest disagreements within the subcommittee, however, concerned marriage durability.

Although divorce never became central to the discussion of the Constituent Assembly, largely as a consequence of the PCI’s unwillingness to pursue the issue, the DC campaigned vigorously for the introduction of the principle of marriage indissolubility in the Constitutional text.<sup>22</sup> The formula defended by the DC, according to which the law should “regulate the legal condition of the spouses, with the aim of guaranteeing the unity of the family”, provoked significant disagreements, but was eventually approved in the subcommittee’s final vote, held on November 13, 1946, after a lengthy discussion.

To the Christian Democratic defence of indissolubility as a matter of principle and faith, the Communists tried to respond with pragmatic arguments. The unwillingness to touch the issue of divorce, however, resulted in an ambiguity that the Communists were unable to solve. On the one hand, Togliatti’s party stressed that the breaking down of marriages (for instance as a result of wartime disruption) could not be solved by declaring marriage indissoluble. On the other hand, they *de facto* accepted the idea of marriage indissolubility, by refusing to bring to the table the issue of divorce. It was an ambivalence that fatally undermined the party’s credibility.

**21** See in particular La Pira’s speech at the Constitutional Assembly on the 9th September, 1946, *Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione. Prima Sottocommissione. Resoconto Sommario della Seduta di lunedì 9 settembre 1946*, 14-15.

**22** Azzariti, *L’indissolubilità del matrimonio*.

The definition of the family as “a natural society based on indissoluble marriage” eventually voted by the subcommittee marked an obvious political victory for the DC. This unambiguous reference to ‘indissolubility’, however, sparked off resistance within the Assembly. In the week-long discussion that preceded the final vote on what would become Article 29, the relationship between family and State was examined from different perspectives and according to different political sensitivities. Liberals argued that the family should be left out of the Constitution; Catholics defended a definition of family in accordance with the teaching of the Church; socialists and Communists (particularly through their women representatives) declared the duty of the State to help Italian families to free themselves from the damaging inheritance of the fascist years, becoming equal and democratic institutions. Even the most lucid analyses coming from the left of the Assembly proved unable to avoid the ambiguity produced by Togliatti’s determination not to break with Catholics over marriage.

On 21 April 1947, the Communist Maria Maddalena Rossi presented the Constitutional Assembly with a far-reaching analysis of the situation of marriage in post-war Italy. Rossi convincingly illustrated the many instances in which no legal prohibition could prevent marital breakdown and the many cases in which the impossibility of divorcing worsened the predicament of those condemned to marriages that no longer existed in reality. She recalled the plight of the children of illegitimate families and the sufferance of those who, having been abandoned by their spouses, could not free themselves from their marriages’ legal ties. For all these people, argued Rossi, the possibility of legally ending a marriage that no longer existed in reality would have amounted to an act of humanity; the Church demonstrated to understand this, through its increasingly inclusive approach to the question of annulments.

These faultless premises suggested only one logical conclusion, namely that the question of divorce was indeed a relevant one in post-war Italy. Rossi, however, did not reach such conclusion. Political opportunity (or opportunism) dictated otherwise. Although reasserting that the PCI objected to the inclusion of the principle of marriage indissolubility in the Constitution, Rossi reassured her audience that Italian Communists had no intention to bring up the issue of divorce, since this was not ‘felt’ as a pressing issue by the majority of Italians.<sup>23</sup>

Against the intransigent coherence of the likes of La Pira, such a position appeared hollow and contradictory. It was a stance dictated by political concerns, which had little chance of asserting it-

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**23** “Critica dei comunisti all’art. 24. Maria Maddalena Rossi parla alla Costituente”. *L’Unità*, 22 Aprile, 1947.



self against a catholic position that could appear at odds with social reality, but which had at least the merit of ideological consistency.

In the end, it fell upon the socialist deputy Umberto Grilli to avert the introduction of the indissolubility principle in the Constitution, thanks to a last minute amendment that forced Togliatti to take the clear position he had determinedly tried to avoid. Voting against Grilli's amendment would have been unthinkable. Thanks to a very narrow majority (194 vs 191 votes), the word indissoluble did not make it into the Constitution, leaving the door open to future legislation on divorce. We will come back to this in chapter 5.

### 3.5 A Patriarchal Republic

On the whole, the place given to the family in the Constitutional text responded to some of the instances put forward by the PCI and other secular parties, but represented in many ways a catholic victory. In its final formulation, art. 29 defined the family as "a natural society founded upon marriage". The article both endorsed and denied the equality of the spouses, by declaring that marriage was based on "the moral and legal equality of the spouses", but "within the limits established by law in order to guarantee the unity of the family itself". The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, propounded by La Pira as essential to safeguard the family "as a moral and juridical institution" based upon a "moral bond", was also preserved in the final text, with the rights of natural children subordinated to the protection of the rights of the legitimate family (art. 30).<sup>24</sup>

The full scale of the catholic victory appeared when the Constitution was read in combination with a Civil Code written by fascist legislators and adopted unchanged by the Republic. The Rocco Code, introduced in 1940, guaranteed husbands' right to choose the family's place of residence, established a different legal treatment for male and female adultery, and maintained the existence of unequal parental rights.

Unmarried mothers had the right to acknowledge a natural child, but this did not modify the legal definition of the child as 'illegitimate'. Married women, by contrast, could neither acknowledge a child fathered by a man other than their husband, nor reveal the name of the natural father. Even when separated, their husbands retained paternity rights unless they renounced them. Natural fathers, on the contrary, had the power to acknowledge a 'natural' child independently of the will of the mother. In Chiara Saraceno's words, the acknowledgement of the offspring was a right negotiated among men, without any power left to the mother.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Rodotà, "Il diritto di famiglia", 161-206.

<sup>25</sup> Saraceno, *Mutamenti della famiglia*, 41.

As Anna Rossi Doria observed, the familist culture that dominated post-war Italy did much to reduce the rights promised to women by the Constitution.<sup>26</sup> Despite its rhetorical statements, the PCI contributed significantly to preserve such culture.

Togliatti had often insisted that his vision of a progressive democracy included the necessary emancipation of women from a condition of inferiority that the fascist years had done much to perpetuate. The legal settlement that came out of the Constituent Assembly marked a double defeat of Togliatti's agenda for social change. Not only had the Communists proved unable to put forward a model of family life alternative to that of the Catholic Church, but they had decided to compromise on the very issue on which their credibility depended, namely their anti-fascist credentials.

Catholics had good reasons to be proud of their achievements. In 1955, the catholic jurist Domenico Barbero aptly commented that, "if the Union of the Italian Catholic Jurists had been called to write the Constitution", they could not have adopted "a judgement more consistent with the dogmatic principles and the aspirations of Catholics". Reading the articles of the Constitution dealing with marriage and family was "like reading a passage from the social doctrine of the Church translated in founding norm of the State".<sup>27</sup> By the mid-fifties, it seemed undoubted that, in Italy, the Catholic Church had won the confrontation over the place of the family in Italian law.

### 3.6 At War Over the Family: a Struggle for Faith and Social Relevance

A very different situation existed in Poland. In September 1945, the introduction of universal civil marriage demoted religious marriages to a private affair of no legal significance. The new Marriage Law, passed by decree and effective from January 1, 1946, envisaged the possibility for men and women to marry at 18, introduced divorce, and spelled out the reciprocal rights and duties of the spouses, in accordance with socialist morality and the overall interest of the socialist nation. It also relieved clergymen of the function of keeping records, the responsibility of which passed to State authorities.

The 1945 legislation found final systematisation in the new Code on Domestic Relations approved in 1950, which among other things established the absolute equality of husband and wife, in strong dis-

<sup>26</sup> Rossi Doria, "Le donne sulla scena politica", 846.

<sup>27</sup> Barbero, *Matrimonio fondamento della famiglia*, 66.

continuity with pre-war legislations.<sup>28</sup>

As the British family law expert Olive M. Stone noted in 1967, against the messy legal background that had existed in Poland in 1945, one was tempted “to applaud unreservedly the abolition by the Provisional Government in 1945 of the religious form of marriage and the imposition of a uniform civil ceremony upon the whole country”.<sup>29</sup> There is little doubt that Stone’s virtual applause would have to be qualified in the light of Poland’s rapid descent into an autocratic system that would dramatically affect both the administration of the law and the realities of family life. It is equally difficult, however, not to recognise the importance of a reform that redefined marriage as a secular institution founded on the equality of the spouses and regulated by the same laws across the country.<sup>30</sup>

The reform of 1945 represented a clear moment of modernisation and democratisation of family life; that this should happen in the same period that marked the country’s descent into tyranny could seem a paradox. In fact, this suggests that perhaps one should be careful in drawing too easy unidirectional connections between the nature of political systems and the treatment of family life. Political democratisation and the democratisation of family life do not necessarily proceed hand in hand.

The reaction of Polish catholic authorities to the plans for reform circulated since early 1945 leaves no doubt as to the concerns raised.

As Pius XI had asserted in 1930, the sacramental nature of marriage constituted “an immutable and inviolable” part of catholic doctrine, from which no derogation could be admitted. In the eyes of the Church, matrimony was a divine institution: God himself was the source of the “perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness”. This was a fundamental tenet of the catholic faith, which went back to the Council of Trent, and could not be questioned.<sup>31</sup>

While catholic members of the Italian Constitutional Assembly fought to have the law of the Church enshrined as law of the State, in the spring and summer of 1945 Polish bishops and the Catholic press mobilised against a reform bound to undermine the very notion of catholic marriage.

**28** *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr. 34 (1950), 308-9. While radically changing the norms that had regulated marriage in pre-war Poland, the 1945 legislation found inspiration in the 1926 draft law that had never seen the light, mostly thanks to the intransigent opposition of the Catholic Church to the introduction of divorce.

**29** Stone, “Review of “Polish Family Law”, 1033.

**30** As Zofia Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, noted, the very notion of “secular marriage” was introduced in Poland in the aftermath of Second World War. Gawrońska-Wasilkowska *Małżeństwo. Istota-Trwałość - Rozwód*, 11-12.

**31** Pius XII, Encyclical letter *Casti Connubii*, par. 5.

In 1945 Poland, as in 1865 Italy, the Church condemned universal civil marriage as akin to State concubinage, as a measure designed to diminish if not eliminate catholic influence from the public sphere, and as a clear “breach of religious freedom and of freedom of conscience”.<sup>32</sup>

Even a magazine open to matters of social reform and keen to keep politics out of its pages, such as *Tygodnik Powszechny* [Universal Weekly], saw little possibility of openings over the marriage issue. Since for Catholics no marriage could exist that was not “by the same token and simultaneously” a sacrament, no marriage contract stipulated outside the Church could be considered of any validity; no successive blessing could remedy the initial fault. As several of the contributors to the magazine noted, universal civil marriage put Catholics outside the pale, banning them from sacraments, excluding them from the possibility of performing the required religious rites, and even excluding them from burial in consecrated cemeteries after death.<sup>33</sup>

Memoirs testified the strong reactions that civil marriage could provoke among Catholics, and the very different reception that the reform had among different generations. A memorialist who wrote under the pen name of ‘One of many’, remembered the anger of her and her husband-to-be’s parents at the news that they had decided not to marry in the Church. “For this reason too, this religious family decided to withdraw the financial help they had promised us”. The couple did not go back on their plans, settling instead for a modest wedding, and borrowing money from friends.<sup>34</sup> In very similar tones, ‘Julianna’ remembered her mother “reproaches and cries” at the news that her daughter “was going to have just a civil marriage”.<sup>35</sup>

At a political level, in the spring and summer of 1945, the decision by the Provisional Government to intervene swiftly and unilaterally on marriage legislation increased the tensions that already existed between the new Polish authorities and the Church and further complicated a situation that was already far from straightforward. From Rome, the Pope had showed clearly his unwillingness to enter into any dialogue with the new government of Poland. Pacelli had supported the government in exile during the war and continued to do so. He supported Polish bishops in their resistance to the Communist attempt to create a Polish Catholic Church independent of the Holy See. Lines of conflict between the Polish Episcopate and the Holy See, however, were provoked by the Vatican’s refusal to redraw dioc-

<sup>32</sup> Ks. E. Ch., “Małżeństwo cywilne” (Civil marriage). *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 29 April, 1945, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ks. E. Ch., “Małżeństwo cywilne”. *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 29 April, 1945, 4. See also Halecki, *Poland*, 206.

<sup>34</sup> “Chcieliśmy jak najwięcej”. *Moje małżeństwo i rodzina*, 81-2.

<sup>35</sup> “Nauczeliśmy się być we dwoje w trudnych chwilach”. *Moje małżeństwo i rodzina*, 90.

esan lines in Poland's newly acquired western land, which the Vatican continued to consider under the jurisdiction of German bishops.<sup>36</sup>

The immediate post-war years were characterised in Poland, both by a tentative dialogue and by an emerging confrontation over the legal position of the Church and its role in public affairs.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the fight over marriage was on all counts also a struggle for power and influence. As several Catholics feared, the aim of the reform was not only to displace the Church's authority over marriage, but to reduce religion to a private affair.<sup>38</sup>

The argument went to the core of Pius XII's concerns. Throughout his pontificate, Pacelli called the faithful to reject the idea that the authority of the Church should be limited to religious issues or excluded from political decisions. As he kept repeating, social problems concerned the conscience and salvation of men and, as such, they involved the Church. Polish catholic commentators agreed and stressed that Catholicism could not abandon its social role without losing its very essence.<sup>39</sup>

The question of civil marriage engaged both theological and temporal issues, raising the fear that what was taking place was nothing less than the beginning of a transfer of authority over moral matters from the Church to the State and its representatives.

In the weeks that preceded the passing of the law, Polish catholic commentators stressed that, while some form of secular union could be acceptable for those 'of no religious faith', the difference between such unions and marriage should be clearly marked, including in the type of ceremony performed. In fact, catholic authorities went so far as asking that no ceremony at all be performed for the 'non-marriages' contracted in the registry office, emphasising that no moral authority should be accorded to the registrars, whose only function should be that of recording the will of the parties.

### 3.7 Marriage Socialist Style

Predictably, the reform went in the opposite direction. The Marriage law of 1945, adopted with none of the lengthy debates that had ac-

<sup>36</sup> Halecki, *Poland*, 275-6; Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism, and Ethnicity*, 103-4. See also Valkenier, "The Catholic Church in Communist Poland"; for an analysis of the limits of what the Communist leader Jerzy Borejsza called the "gentle revolution", Zarembo, *Wielka Trwoga*, 15-20.

<sup>37</sup> On the impact of the war on the Polish Catholic Church, Osa, "Resistance, Persistence and Change", 268-99.

<sup>38</sup> "Trzeźwo o małżeństwo" (Soberly on Marriage). *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 19 August, 1945, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Piwowarczyk, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 20 April, 1947.

accompanied the Italian Constitutional process, did nothing to reduce the social relevance of marriage. What it did was to shift the authority over it from the Church to the State, changing the very meaning that marriage carried with it. No longer a step in the path of individual salvation, marrying became a social responsibility and a way of contributing to the process of socialist construction.

Marriage in socialist Poland was to be based on equality, solidarity, faithfulness, reciprocal help and common work for the good of the family. Through “love, respect and trust”, the spouses were expected to create a “spiritual, physical and economic unity”, which was to stay at the centre of Polish social and economic life.<sup>40</sup>

For earlier generations of Poles matrimonial prescriptions had been primarily a religious matter; in multicultural and multi-religious Poland, this had resulted in significant diversity in terms of expectations, duties and sanctions. One of the most remarkable aspects of the post-war reform was the introduction of a universal notion of what constituted married life, with the State as the only authority in charge.

In 39 articles, the new marriage law spelled out the rules that would now govern married life in the People’s Republic. The law detailed the conditions according to which celebrations could be considered valid, the rights and duties of the spouses, the conditions that invalidated a marriage, and the grounds upon which the spouses could seek a divorce.<sup>41</sup>

Impediments to marriage included not only the existence of a previous valid marriage and direct kinship, but also mental illness, TB, and venereal disease, in a clear affirmation of the power of the State, in charge to decide which marriages should be prevented in the name of collective welfare. The law had something to say also about engagements and marriage cancellation, setting the rules under which the non-guilty party and their family could seek financial compensation for the expenses incurred during marriage preparation.

Far from seeing registrars as silent notaries, the marriage law adopted in September 1945 gave them significant powers and responsibilities. As Gawrońska-Wasilkowska noticed, the new role of registrars should not surprise anyone; “given the significant social function of marriage and family”, it was natural that “the State should take an interest not only in the working of this important social cell, but also in the way in which it [was] formed”.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> From a directive of the Polish Supreme Court, dated May 28 1955, see Breyer et al., *Kodeks Rodzinny*, 813-16; Lasok, “The Polish Code”, 1023 and, by the same author, “A Legal Concept of Marriage”.

<sup>41</sup> For a broader discussion, Szer, “Zmiany w Prawie Malżeńskim” and by the same author *Prawo Rodzinne*. See also Nagorski, “Marriage Law in Poland”, 493.

<sup>42</sup> Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, *Małżeństwo*, 29-31.

Registrars were not only responsible for collecting the spouses' free exchange of marriage vows in the presence of two witnesses, but also for checking impediments, explaining rights and duties to the spouses, and overseeing that the marriage took place with the required propriety and decorum. As the representatives of the State, registrars were the only authority that could allow or stop a marriage and the only responsible for ensuring its validity. For the first time in Poland, the State had become the sole arbiter of matrimonial legitimacy.

Marriages were now expected to be celebrated with rites that stressed their civic relevance. The newly-weds were to be declared married not in the name of God, but in the name of the law. In the place of the traditional religious prescriptions received by their parents, young Poles should be reminded of the social importance of marriage and of the rights and obligations they were assuming vis-à-vis each other and towards the larger community of the socialist nation.

In its new role, the State incorporated functions and powers that had previously belonged to the Church and, to some extent, to the family. A clear instance of this, was provided by the way in which the first condition of marriage validity, namely the age of the spouses, was reformulated.

According to the marriage law of 1945, both men and women could marry from the age of 18. Younger people (although not below the age of 16) could marry on the basis of a Court order, motivated by the new family's welfare or by the welfare of society. While apparently unremarkable, the new norm went against two deep-set principles of Church and family authority.

Equal minimum age for men and women would come to represent a common principle in socialist countries, but contrasted with most Western European civil codes (including the Italian one), which usually established a higher marriage age for men. More importantly, equal minimum age was in contrast with Canon law, which set the minimum age to 16 for men and 14 for women.<sup>43</sup>

The principle that exception could be granted by courts, irrespectively of the opinion of the parents, moreover, broke the principle of parental consent. By giving courts the authority to act as statutory guardian on behalf of the State, the reform asserted the principle that the State rather than the parents should now be seen as the guarantor of young people's welfare and protection.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Canon 1083, the *Codice di Diritto Canonico* published by Benedict XV in 1917 allowed Episcopal Conferences to raise the minimum age required for marriage, in order to endure the maturity of the spouses.

<sup>44</sup> Again, this constituted a common principle in Eastern Europe, with similar provisions operating in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. For a comparative analysis of family law in socialist countries, Wierzbowski, *Prawo rodzinne*. As we will see, the age of consent was raised in the early sixties, as

### 3.8 An Equal Institution, Under the Gaze of the Socialist State

There is little doubt that the legal situation that existed in Poland in 1945 made intervening in family life almost inevitable for a government set to take the country to the road of socialist transformation. The existence of different systems of family law inherited from the partition era and the chaotic situation left behind by the war made legal reform an urgent matter and provided the Provisional Government with a golden opportunity to intervene.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the fifties, the regulation of marriage and family life remained an important terrain on which to affirm the values pursued by the Socialist state.

The Family Code of 1950 further spelled out the prerogatives and rights of civil marriage. Article 1 of the Code restated that, once in a valid marriage, husband and wife became committed to maintain a community of life, which included faithfulness, reciprocal help and cooperation for the welfare of the family that resulted from the marriage.<sup>46</sup> The Code stressed that, as a unit of equals, marriage in a socialist society should be based on equal work and commitment to the common good.<sup>47</sup> Both spouses should contribute to the maintenance of the family, in accordance with one's abilities and resources.<sup>48</sup> What this meant in practice was open to some negotiation and changed over time. According to the Family Code of 1950, looking after the children and the home could be considered as satisfying the duty of contributing to the family economy "in part or in total".<sup>49</sup> In time, and more markedly from the mid-sixties, the reference to care as exclusive contribution to the family economy would become stronger, supporting an inexorable return to traditional gender roles. (To this, I will come back in the next chapter).

This was not the case in the early fifties, however. When the Family Code was introduced, the recruitment of women to the industrial

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part of a 'conservative turn', justified in public discourse by the need to ensure a greater awareness and experience of Poland's new parents. See Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, *Małżeństwo*, 41-2.

<sup>45</sup> The Provisional Government of the Polish Republic was formed in December 1944, as the evolution of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, created a few months earlier to take charge of liberated territories. The Soviet sponsored body eventually merged with a group associated with the leader of the Peasant movement, Stanisław Mikołajczyk; renamed Provisional Government of National Unity, the body lasted from 28 June 1945 to January 1947.

<sup>46</sup> Dział II, "Prawa i obowiązki małżonków" [The Rights and Obligations of the Spouses], Art. 14, Kodeks Rodzinny, Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 1950 r., *Dziennik Ustaw*, 34, 308, 364.

<sup>47</sup> Art. 14 of the Constitution of 1952.

<sup>48</sup> Łobodzińska, *Małżeństwo w mieście*, 34-9, 45-6.

<sup>49</sup> Dział II "Prawa i obowiązki małżonków", Art. 18, Kodeks Rodzinny, Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 1950 r., *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr. 34, poz., 308, 364.



labour force still represented a major political and economic goal in Poland and no reference to a gender-based division of duties could be envisaged. In fact, the decision not to work, unless taken jointly, could be considered disruptive to marriage, and as such considered as possible grounds for divorce.

This strong assertion of gender equality within the marriage economy found further confirmation in the proclamation of work as a fundamental duty for all citizens, contained in the 1952 Constitution.

The Constitution of 1952 must be read with the double lens that characterised the Stalinist years. The essence of the political transformation underway was the establishment of the near absolute power of the Party-State, at least on the surface. However, the new Constitution guaranteed civil liberties, universal suffrage and a parliamentary government, and promised to expand individual and collective social rights. As far as family life was concerned, the Constitution went close to the ideal that Italian Communists had propounded but had been unable to pursue.

The text included both traditional and innovative elements in relation to the social role and nature of marriage. To start with, marriage was treated as an essential element of family life, and both were put “under the care and protection of the Polish People’s Republic”, in view of their fundamental social role. The State assumed special responsibility towards “families with many children”, and towards the upbringing of younger people.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, the Constitution stressed the absolute equality of men and women and the equal rights of children born within and outside marriage.<sup>51</sup>

Gender equality within marriage was one of the elements that should most distinguish a socialist union from its bourgeois equivalent, at least on paper. In sharp contrast with catholic positions, Polish law made no concessions to the idea of marriage as a hierarchical structure, recognising neither the existence of a “head of the family” nor of a breadwinner. In a Constitution that defined work as “the right, the duty and a matter of honour for every citizen”, no difference could be made in the way in which men and women should contribute to the prosperity of the family and to the “full realisation of the socialist system”.<sup>52</sup> No special prerogatives were therefore envisaged for husbands and wives. Polish husbands were not responsible for representing their families in the social and political sphere, nor had the power to choose the family home or making decisions on behalf of their wives, as it was the case in Italian law.

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<sup>50</sup> Polish Constitution 1952, ch. 7, art. 67, § 1, and Art. 68.

<sup>51</sup> Polish Constitution 1952, ch. 7, art. 66, §§ 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Art. 14, § 1.

On the contrary, the State promised to guarantee women's equality of rights, mainly by ensuring that maternity and work could both be pursued under the auspices of the People's Republic. Women should "work and be paid" according to the principle "equal pay for equal work", and they should have the same rights as men "to rest and leisure, to social insurance, to education, to honours and decorations, to hold public appointments". As part of the commitments towards women were special provisions for "mother-and-child care", the protection of expectant mothers, paid periods of maternal leaves both before and after confinement, the creation of maternity homes, *crèches* and nursery schools, and the setting up of a network of service establishments, restaurants and canteens, aimed to reduce the impact of domestic chores.<sup>53</sup>

The treatment of family life and caring relations in the Constitution reflected a strong notion of individual welfare as collective responsibility. As we will see in the next chapter, however, many of the promised measures of social interventions remained unfulfilled, leaving Polish social policy to rely on much more traditional notions of care, as a private and heavily gendered duty.

### 3.9 Catholic Resistance

As Polish Catholics had feared, the marriage reform of 1945 left no space for religious marriage. Only Art. 37, as part of the law's final dispositions, explained that the law "did not prevent the performance of complementary rites", in accordance with individuals' membership in a religious association.<sup>54</sup> Far from offering any reassurance to the Church, the concession confirmed the determination of the State to eliminate its privileges.

At first sight, then, one could conclude that the Polish state had won easily the battle for control over family and marriage that in Italy had seen the near triumph of the Church. In this sense, the marriage reform could be seen as an important step in the pursuit of the secularisation of Polish society and as part of a broader project aimed at limiting the Church's influence over Polish politics and law.<sup>55</sup>

But had Polish authorities really succeeded in the effort to relegate religion to the private sphere, pushing the Catholic Church out

<sup>53</sup> Polish Constitution 1952, ch. 7, art. 66, § 2.

<sup>54</sup> Art. 37, *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr. 48 (1945), 270-1.

<sup>55</sup> According to Szajkowski, secularising Polish society represented one of the three pillars on which the socialist project of neutralising the influence of the Church rested. The other two were the weakening of the Church's relation with Rome, and the undermining of clerical and lay organisations. Szajkowski *Next to God*, 9.

of political life? While affirming the authority of the State over marriage and the family, the government's universal civil marriage offered the Church a clear platform on which to articulate her resistance to an atheist and oppressive State.

The Church relentlessly denounced universal civil marriage as a sinful imposition and a manifestation of the regime's determination to tear Poland away from its faith and traditions. The battle for the defence of the catholic family quickly turned into a battle for the soul of the nation.

Reminding the faithful of the true nature of marriage – a marriage that the State was now denying to its citizens – became a way of reminding catholic Poles that they were living under an illegitimate authority, which ignored if not vilified their values.

If, throughout the second half of the forties and the early fifties, the iron fist of Stalinism put a lid on the Church's ability to have its voice publicly heard, the fire kept burning under the ashes, ready to rise again at the first sign of government's trouble.

Catholic authorities did not have to wait long. In the second half of the fifties, as the revelation of Stalin's crimes, economic discontent, and a growing disaffection with national leadership presented the Communist regime with its first big political crisis, the Church quickly seized the opportunity to show its undiminished authority over the nation.

Not by coincidence, marriage and family life provided the main topic to the Sunday sermons in 1956. By reminding the faithful where the truth lay on the issue of marriage, priests and bishops made a much broader statement on the country's present and future situation.

In the month of May, traditionally dedicated to Mary, sermons were devoted to *Marriage as the Institution of Life, God as the Creator of Marriage, Through the Lawful Performance of the Matrimonial Duties to Heavenly Prize, The Essence and Importance of Marriage*. The series of sermons dedicated to the sacramental nature of marriage continued in June, when priests addressed the flock on *Marriage as a Sacrament, the Meaning of the Sacramental Ceremonies of Marriage and the Benefits of the Indissolubility of Marriage*.

At the end of the same month, Poland's first workers' revolt exploded in Poznań, showing the gulf that had already opened between the Communist party and the class it was supposed to represent. While giving blessing to the workers demonstrating in Poznań, priests continued to talk about the catholic vision of marriage, and its incompatibility with the materialist rules imposed by the Polish state. In July, sermons were dedicated to the *Harmfulness of Divorce* and the *Divine Help in the Tasks of Married Couples*, as well as to the *Obligations of Parents in the Beginning of the School Year*.

In August 1956, half a million people took part in the annual pilgrimage to Częstochowa, in a mass display of faithfulness to the au-

thority and the teaching of the Church. There, the empty seat of the Primate of Poland Stefan Wyszyński, under arrest since September 1953, stood as the emblem of the persecution suffered by the Church, as well as by ordinary Catholics.

In September, the teaching on married life continued, with sermons on the responsibility for *Solidarity of Married Couples, The Church's Attitude towards Marriage, The Purpose of Marriage Impediments* and *Christ the King of the Family*.<sup>56</sup>

In October, severely bruised Communist leaders finally accepted their inability to bring the by-now open discontent under control, and decided to seek a new understanding with the Church.

In November 1956, in the encyclical *Laetamur ad morum*, Pius XII "noted with joy" that Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw had been readmitted to the dioceses from which he had been removed three years earlier.<sup>57</sup>

The liberation of the Archbishop of Warsaw was one of the several events that demonstrated the failure of the Communist attempt to remove the Catholic Church from Polish politics. The return of Wyszyński to Warsaw was neither an act of State 'benevolence' nor a concession; it was the result of negotiations that gave back to the Church much of its public voice.

Together with the return of ousted Communist leader Władysław Gomułka to power, the new understanding with the Church marked the acceptance by Moscow that Poland could follow a path to socialism that kept into account specific national characters, starting with the country's religious traditions.

This acknowledgement of national peculiarities was to be of great relevance for family and marriage. As political leaders tuned down their rhetoric, the radical reforms of the early post-war years also started to be amended, in an effort to calm widespread resentment and disaffection.

As we will see, issues such as the religious education of children and the role of women as workers and mothers would become central themes in the search for compromise that engaged the Church and the State throughout the sixties. So did the issue of which authority should preside over marriage.

<sup>56</sup> *Kronika Diecezji Sandomierskiej* [Chronicles of Sandomierz Diocese], LIII, 1960, 77-9. See also Marian Mazgaj, *Church and State in Communist Poland*, 186.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, 3 November, 1956.

### 3.10 Conclusions

In the post-war years as in earlier historical periods, the struggle over marriage encompassed legal, political, religious and symbolic dimensions. As in the past, religious and civil authorities saw in the regulation of marriage a means of both asserting and measuring their influence and their ability to keep control of social mores.

Both in Italy and in Poland, marriage and family life entered fully in the ideological struggles that characterised the Cold War years.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, dynamics appeared very different in the two countries.

In the early post-war years, Polish Communists showed a staunch determination to *modernise* marriage, by rendering it a secular institution based on equality and subject only to the authority of the State. The blueprint of reform followed in Poland fully reflected the model of marriage and family life advocated in Italy by the PCI. Italian Communists, however, readily sacrificed this reformist agenda, first in an effort to preserve a fragile alliance with the catholic party, and later in the attempt to appeal to catholic voters. While, in Poland, the Catholic Church had to defend itself from the sustained attack of the new Communist government, little resistance was put up in Italy against the catholic determination to remain the dominant voice as far as family and marriage were concerned.

Power relations and historical legacies shaped the different approaches to marriage and family legislation in the two countries.

In Poland, a legislative void dating back to the reunification of the country offered the justification for the introduction of a new marriage law already in 1945. In the same year, the fascist civil code of 1940 became the law in the Italian Republic, bringing with it provisions on marriage and family formulated under the auspices of Mussolini's regime.

Both the far-reaching reforms of family life pursued by post-war Communists in Poland and the lack of intervention that characterised Italy's democratic transition carried significant practical and symbolic consequences.

By seeking to assert the power of the State in a realm historically under the control of the Church, Polish Communists showed their determination to break with the past. Although they successfully showed the State's ability to reduce the political influence of the Church, they also opened themselves up to the accusation of ignoring and willfully neglecting the values and beliefs of the people they governed. This would become a powerful weapon, used by the Church to demonstrate the arbitrariness and illegitimacy of Communist power.

In Italy, on the other hand, the Communist determination to seek a compromise with catholic forces contributed to shape an approach to family life in staunch continuity with the past. By accepting the

inclusion of fascist family legislation into the Italian civil code, Italian Communists accepted an institutional and legal continuity that would seriously question the supposedly anti-fascist character of the post-war Republic.

To sum up, while the immediate post-war years were marked in Italy by the overwhelming influence exercised by the Catholic Church over the treatment of marriage and family, the same years saw in Poland an open conflict exploding between State and Church, reflected in the introduction of significant reforms in the field of marriage and family life. This, however, started to change already in the second half of the fifties, and throughout the sixties and seventies, when opposite tendencies started to emerge in the two countries. In Poland, an increasingly discredited leadership reluctantly sought a compromise with the Catholic Church, leading to a conservative turn in matters of family life. In Italy, growing pressures from below would gradually force reluctant political parties (starting with the PCI) to take over an agenda for social reform that had in the family one of the main fields of intervention.



## **4 Marriage and Family Life After the Thaw**

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**Summary** 4.1 Introduction. – 4.2 The End of an Era. – 4.3 Changing Worlds. – 4.4 City Living. – 4.5 Consumption. – 4.6 The Most Ubiquitous Object: Television. – 4.7 Shrinking Families. – 4.8 New Marriages Under Test: Husbands, Wives, and their In-laws. – 4.9 Conclusions.

### **4.1 Introduction**

The legal framework that emerged in the aftermath of the war provided the formal backdrop in which people arranged their lives, formed relationships and decided how to plan families. No less important was the social and economic transformations that invested both countries.

Among the vast transformations that occurred in Italy and Poland in the shadow of war, and in particular between the mid fifties and the late sixties, three processes stand out as highly significant: the rapid decline of the peasant economy and the growth of the industrial sector; the mass movements of population from the countryside to the city; the growing aspiration to consume. The three phenomena were closely related, and this chapter discusses how contemporary observers conceptualised the complex processes – and their crucial impact on family life – as they happened.

Both the Italian and the Polish constitutions declared the State's commitment to the family. This was expressed through the protection of children and youth, the support of maternity, and more generally through the creation of an economic and social environment that was conducive to a well-functioning family life. Such obligations were supposed to go well beyond family law and the regulation of marriage, to embrace economic decisions and social policy provisions. Whether



or not it was explicitly questioning the prerogatives and duties of the State, the Catholic Church also relentlessly asserted its commitment to ensure the moral and physical wellbeing of the family. This chapter attempts to answer the following questions: how did State and Church respond to the changes underway in postwar Italy and Poland? How did the two countries confront the impact of economic and social transformation in the fifties and sixties on family life? And how did Italian and Polish families respond to the fast-changing environment of this era?

## 4.2 The End of an Era

In 1953, the announcement of Stalin's death was accompanied in Italy by a huge public display of grief. Unlike in Poland, public mourning was not staged by the authorities, but reflected a deep-set conviction that Comrade Stalin had indeed embodied the cause of the workers' revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Three years later, the XX Congress of the KPSS and the releasing of Khrushchev's secret report put into question the very foundations of Stalin's mythology. Although the PCI seemed to manage the trauma with remarkable ease, swiftly rebuking calls for renovation within the party, the damage suffered by the Communist cause at a deeper level was harder to estimate. The admission of Stalin's crimes confirmed the tyrannical nature of Soviet Communism, destabilised an ideological system that had hitherto been presented as a granitic whole, and put into question the very commitment to a struggle that had marked the life of millions of militants.<sup>2</sup>

If 1956 was a "memorable year" for Italian Communists, as the PCI leader Pietro Ingrao remarked, its impact was all the greater in Poland. Momentous political transformations took place in the country, mostly as a result of widespread workers' protests against the government and the party that had supposedly represented them. The outcome was not only the end of the harshest period of political repression, but also the abandonment by the government of the most radical efforts to change the country's economy and society, symbolised most vividly by the abandonment of the seven-year plans and of the effort to collectivise agriculture.<sup>3</sup>

1 On the cult of Stalin in Italy, Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 99-100.

2 Flores, Gallerano, *Sul PCI*, 105-6; see also Spriano, *Le passioni di un decennio*, chapter 10. Similarly swift had been the response of the PCI to the Hungarian revolution, with the Soviet intervention promptly saluted as the only way of ending a dangerous and violent reactionary revolt. See for instance Adriana Castellani, "Finalmente è possibile circolare nelle vie di Budapest, dove la vita civile sta riprendendo con grande lentezza". *L'Unità*, 13 novembre, 1956.

3 In 1956 in Poland, see among others, Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite*.

In October 1956, the release of Stefan Wyszyński from detention suggested to international observers that “a new spirit of cooperation” was now emerging between State and Church, in which the government “found it possible to give way on issues that it fought most bitterly during the last ten years”.<sup>4</sup> Among them were the acceptance of the nominations of the bishops made by the Vatican in 1951 for the five dioceses of the “recovered lands”, the lifting of veto power possessed by the government to claim ecclesiastical appointments, and the reinstatement of religious instruction in schools.

The appeasement sought with the Church reflected an effort by the government to “reinforce itself for the political struggle now under way”; it also showed that the battle for the secularisation of Poland had largely failed.<sup>5</sup> In the short term, the government’s u-turn secured a declaration of support by the Church for “works undertaken by the government to strengthen and develop” the country and for the “conscious observation of the rights of the People’s Poland and the fulfilment of the obligations of the citizens with regard to the State”.<sup>6</sup>

The new course affected all aspects of social life and the daily experiences of ordinary Poles.

As political controls relaxed and new cultural models found their expression, the desire to leave behind the material hardship that had accompanied years of reconstruction became increasingly obvious. As the workers’ protests of 1956 showed, the inefficiency of a system that had reduced the lives of workers and their families to a daily struggle for survival became the ripe catalyst for political protest.

Not least for political reasons, the austerity-focused economic model and heavy industrial production that had been sworn in with the Stalinist reign had to be rethought and reconfigured. Even more importantly, the frustration of workers and their families dictated it.

Together with Stalin’s death and the revelations of the XX Congress, another event marked the end of the first phase of postwar recovery. In the Autumn of 1958, Pius XII died after nearly twenty years of Pontificate. Throughout his reign, Pacelli had relentlessly preached against modernity and the perils of social change. By condemning both consumerism, which he saw as the result of unrestrained capitalism, and Communist materialism, the Pope upheld a view of the world that was sharply antagonistic to the present. Pacelli’s Church had incarnated an intransigent idea of Catholicism, marked by a staunch resistance to social transformation and by a

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<sup>4</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Polish Chiefs near Accord with Church”. *The New York Times*, 1 December, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Gruson, “Polish Chiefs near Accord with Church”.

<sup>6</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Church Supports Regime in Poland”. *The New York Times*, 8 December, 1956.

tendency to condemn human error rather than to understand it.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the way in which the majority of Catholics conducted themselves in terms of sexuality, reproduction and married life by the time of his death showed that this inflexible teaching and dogma had been largely ignored.

No less significant than the death of Stalin five years earlier, the end of Pius XII's long reign produced a remarkable shift - not only within the confines of the Catholic community, but in society at large.

### 4.3 Changing Worlds

Among the factors that most affected family life both in Italy and Poland throughout the fifties and sixties was the combined effect of industrialisation, urbanisation and population movement.

Both Italy and Poland had entered the war as agricultural countries, hardly touched by the industrial transformations that had already taken place in other parts of Europe.

In Italy, 60% of the population worked in agriculture at the turn of the century; in Poland, the same proportion still stood in 1931. In both countries, the proportion of agricultural workers had declined by the early fifties, but remained substantial, with 47.1% recorded in Poland in 1950 and 42% recorded in Italy in 1951. It was in the following twenty years that both countries would see a more marked fall. By 1966, 33.5% of total population was employed in agriculture in Poland; only 17% in Italy according to the census of 1971. The same Italian census assigned 44% and 38% respectively to the industrial and services sector.<sup>8</sup> Even without the economic and industrial politics pursued in Poland which had been explicitly geared towards the reconfiguration of class composition, the 'working class' was without doubt the new major social protagonist in postwar Italy too, accounting for nearly half of the total population in 1971.

The transformation of the countries' economies went hand in hand with the character of population movements. In Italy, this had been historically characterised by transoceanic emigration; in the aftermath of the Second World War, the significance of long distance migration shrank in comparison to emigration to other European countries and even more so to movements taking place within the country. Nearly 25 million people changed their place of residence within It-

<sup>7</sup> Guido Crainz suggested specular views between the PCI's conviction that "capitalism was no longer able to foster development" and Pius XII's catastrophic view of modernity. See Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 40-1. On the Pope's reaction against modernity see also Scoppola, "Chiesa e società negli anni della modernizzazione", 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Rocznik Statystyczny 1967, 43-4; see also Tryfan, *Pozycja Społeczna*, 10-11.

aly between 1955 and 1970, in the vast majority of cases by moving from the countryside to the city.<sup>9</sup> The 1971 census recorded 29% of the population living in cities with over 100,000 residents.

Mass movements of population started in Poland earlier than in Italy and for different reasons. It has been estimated that, between 1939 and 1950, one in four Poles changed their place of residence, in many cases as a result of wartime displacement and of the multiple processes of expulsion and repatriation that had accompanied the return to peace. More benign movements were produced by the industrialisation campaign engineered by the Communist government, with the creation of new industrial plants exercising a powerful attraction, particularly for young men from the countryside.<sup>10</sup>

Although the reasons behind the decision to move to the city and to an industrial job were almost as varied as the individuals who took them, a desire to leave behind material poverty and an exploitative and socially oppressive environment figured highly in the exodus from the countryside.<sup>11</sup>

As Katherine Lebow rightly points out in relation to Nowa Huta, the decision by young Polish peasants to take up heavy industrial work in a partially built city could not be understood as a desire to recover a dimension of quiet postwar “normalcy”. In Poland as in Italy, at least part of the allure of industrial work and the city had to do with a desire to break with patterns that had dictated the lives of former generations, and a war that had interrupted their livelihoods in the most dramatic way. Young people went to the city in search of a life radically different from that of their parents, and far away from the norms and conventions that regulated and dominated peasant societies.<sup>12</sup> The search for ‘adventure’ was certainly less pronounced for the many married men who left their families in search for a better salary, but for them too, life in the city often brought a break with the norms and traditions that even exceeded their own expectations. The first wave of postwar migration to the city increased the distance between generations, and between family members. Children were separated from parents, as were husbands from wives. Both physical distance and differences in experience provoked deep emotional and cultural fractures. The cumulative effect of the decision by millions to move from the countryside to the city – rather than political deci-

<sup>9</sup> Sonnino, “La popolazione italiana”, 538; Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Tryfan underlined that the decline in agricultural occupation was much sharper among Polish men than women, with significant consequences for the position of women living and working in the countryside, Tryfan, *Pozycja społeczna*, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> For a thorough analysis of the exodus from the countryside in Italy, Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 87-103.

<sup>12</sup> Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 46.

sions made at the top – determined the dismissal of the rural economy and of the society that had existed around it. The first victim of this transformation was the peasant family.

#### 4.4 City Living

Most Polish cities emerged from the war as barren and empty landscapes. In the terrible losses of human life provoked by the conflict, urban areas paid the heaviest price. Particularly in Poland, coming back to the city after the war meant embarking in the perilous and uncertain journey of reconstruction, not only of individual life, but of the most basic environment in which this could take place. It was therefore all the more remarkable that, fifteen years after the war, the proportion of people living in the cities had reached and surpassed pre-war levels.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the influx of peasant masses to the city produced a social revolution. If peasants had long been treated by Polish urban elites “as a lower order of civilisation”, in Italy they had been broadly regarded as the epitome of backwardness.<sup>13</sup>

Internal migration transformed the configuration of Polish and Italian cities and gave birth to complex and often contradictory processes of social integration.

Once they arrived in the city, many Italians and Poles had to confront a harsh reality of penury and tribulation. In Poland, a pervasive propaganda machine which celebrated the construction of bright and modern dwellings could do little to obscure the reality of crippling housing shortages. This was accentuated by the acceleration in the birth rate that took place in the country in the early fifties. In Italy, even fewer efforts were made to accommodate the new urban population. Improvised shanty towns, often lacking in the most basic facilities necessary for human sanitation, sprung up in the main industrial cities of the north. For those who had dreamed of leaving behind the challenges and misery of rural life, the arrival in the city was often a bitter disappointment.

What people left behind, however, was rarely to be missed. In Poland, housing surveys and sociological analyses pointed out the dire conditions in which people lived in the countryside. Endless memoirs of peasant childhoods recalled homes with no electricity, heating or running water. In Italy, at the beginning of the fifties, only 8% of existing accommodations enjoyed the combined comforts of electricity, running water, and internal toilet. The proportion would rise to 30% by the beginning of the sixties.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> See Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 84; also Cacioppo, “Condizioni di vita familiare negli anni Cinquanta”, 8.

For all the disappointments and difficulties, the city offered at least hopes of improvement. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the city was for many of its new inhabitants an encounter with modernity and an occasion to free themselves from the immutable ascribed status of the village.<sup>15</sup> Young workers in particular, and later young students, found in the city new identities, fashions, and means of identification. In Poland, those young workers recruited to work in state-sponsored building and industrial programmes could also find new means of political participation.

From the point of view of family life, cities offered both possibilities and challenges. The penury of decent habitations that characterised the urbanisation process both in Italy and in Poland, forced many young parents to confront hardships they had not expected, while the absence of extended family networks exacerbated the task of childcare.

In Poland, where most of housing was in public hands, the possibility of getting decent dwellings went to the core of the relationship between the Socialist state and its citizens.

For some, the move to the city and social policy provisions encouraged strategic decisions. Anna Filek recalled how she decided to take advantage of a 1950 regulation that gave priority to newly married couples in the assignment of newly built dwellings in Warsaw: “We got married on 1st of April, on that same day, we got keys to two rooms with kitchen. The move was easy. We left the registry office with our bags, an English military woollen quilt, and one change of bedding, which we got as a present from our friends”.<sup>16</sup>

Most people, however, were not so lucky. An anonymous memorialist (who called herself ‘MTM’) recalled how her and her husband, both young and highly educated, had arrived in Warsaw in the mid-fifties, impatient to start a family. Committed Communists, they were keen to contribute to the demographic growth of People’s Poland and happy at the idea of educating their children to the good values of socialism. Their desire to start a family in accordance with the spirit of the time, however, was frustrated by the impossibility of finding a home. “We were young, healthy and enthusiastic, and keen to start our family in People’s Poland. The Socialist state, however, was not yet ready for us”.<sup>17</sup>

In a less polemic spirit, but with heartfelt memory of their struggle, Maria recorded that her and her husband had received their “much awaited” three room apartment (M-4), two and a half years into their marriage, when they already had a child. Until then, they had lived in an unsanitary room, lacking the most basic comforts.

<sup>15</sup> Franciszek, *Rodzina Nowego Miasta*.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Filek, “Siła przebicia” [Internal Strength]. *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> “Rozwód jest jedynym naszym osiągnięciem” [Divorce is Our Only Achievement]. *Moje Matżeństwo i rodzina*, 34.

The relief felt when they had finally moved was still fresh in Maria's mind many years after the event: "when we got it, the joy was endless. We moved the furniture around in different ways. There was a nice bathroom, bathtub, an even nicer kitchen, with gas and boiler - it was fantastic!"<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Poland, the role played by the Italian state in the provision of housing remained marginal throughout the postwar era. Whilst in Poland, insufficient progress on housing provision could be blamed on the State and its planning effort; in Italy, the growth of cities happened in a largely unregulated and uncontrolled way.<sup>19</sup> When public housing was put into place, as in the case of the UNRRA and INA-Casa plans, the new residential areas were often criticised by their first residents, usually for the poor quality of the common areas, the distance from the centre of town, and the lack of shops and services. Distrust of fellow residents also ran high.<sup>20</sup> The Piano INA-Casa, launched in 1950, represented one of the few positive examples of public housing, for the generally good quality of the dwellings; here too, however, the poor planning of the services made life hard, especially for the first residents. Testimonies collected in the INA-Casa estate in Florence echoed those of several other Italian towns in their complaints: they had moved to areas where roads had still not been paved, where no shops existed, and with poor transport to the centre of the city. Moreover, while the area had been designed with the specific aim of housing families, neither a kindergarden nor schools had been built. In contrast to the experience of the residents of Nowa Huta, where no church was built until the late sixties, the families who moved to the new Ina-Casa settlements invariably found huge churches awaiting them. Other crucial services, however, were often missing. In the INA-Casa village of *Isolotto*, in Florence, children were schooled in temporary wooden buildings (usually referred to as the *baracche verdi*, green shacks) well into the seventies.<sup>21</sup>

The difficulties were greatest in those cities where the pressure of migration was strongest and the possibility of private speculation highest. Describing the growth of Milan in 1963, the journalist Giorgio Bocca likened it to a "*neoplasia* of the city, with houses multiply-

<sup>18</sup> Maria Kwiatowska, "Nieugięta koszuba" [Relentless Kasciuba]. *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> The difficulties encountered by the Polish government in providing housing able to answer "the needs of contemporary monogamous families of European type, living in the city, whose main source of income is the paid work of adult members" was admitted by several planners. See Czeczzerda, *Sytuacja i potrzeby mieszkaniowe*, and Czeczzerda, *Rodzina i jej potrzeby*.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Tartara, *L'Isolotto a Firenze*.

<sup>21</sup> Bernini, "Non case ma città", 413-30.

ing as crazy, cancerous cells".<sup>22</sup> Overcrowded, unsanitary and/or segregated, the peripheries of the industrial cities in which migrants had their best chance to find affordable housing seemed hardly conducive to a satisfactory family life.

Both in Italy and in Poland, sociologists and social workers looked with concern at the "social pathologies" of the new residential areas, first among them the residents' apparent inability or unwillingness to participate in social life and a pervasive tendency to find in the nuclear family the only dimensions of life outside working hours.

Individualism and familism were reported by social workers engaged in monitoring the INA-Casa estates, as well as by several Polish observers. A common assumption in Italy was that the experience of having been uprooted from their original environment, together with the pronounced differences in the origin and cultural level of those who lived in the new areas, produced "a moral and cultural depression" among families, which resulted in social isolation and neglect.<sup>23</sup>

As Caniglia and Signorelli observed, many of these considerations ignored the material and social conditions that many of the new residents had faced in the past and the experience of uncertainty and exploitation which had rendered the family and the home the only sphere of individual protection. Few of the new urban environments provided sufficient reassurance for such fears to be dispelled.<sup>24</sup> In his study of the effect of the new urbanisation on a community in Lombardy, Alessandro Pizzorno emphasised how the loosening up of kin networks that in the past had often exercised an unwelcome control over individuals, could give origin not to a new type of networks, but to forms of individualism detrimental to social life.<sup>25</sup>

In the mid-seventies, the urban sociologist Luciano Cavalli observed that the retreat into the sphere of family and home had represented a common phenomenon throughout the Western World. The explanation, according to Cavalli, could be found in the failure to create "the conditions for a real participative integration", particularly for the lowest sectors of society. Proper social integration, argued Cavalli, would require the realisation that social fabric was made up of "democratic cells, from the factory to the neighbourhood, to the city centre, able to make everyone feel an active part of the community".<sup>26</sup> None of the housing experiments of the postwar years had gone in this direction.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Bocca, "Cina a Cinisello". *Il Giorno*, 2 September, 1963, quoted in Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Catelani, Trevisan, *Città in trasformazione e servizio sociale*, 27-8.

<sup>24</sup> Caniglia e Signorelli, "L'esperienza del Piano Ina-Casa", 201.

<sup>25</sup> Pizzorno, *Comunità e razionalizzazione*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> Cavalli, *La città divisa*, 48-9.



Cavalli's observation found resonance in Poland, where much more attention was given by planners and sociologists to the issue of workers' social engagement.

Among the shortcomings of the material environment identified by Polish sociologists was the fact that the small size of the new dwellings made it harder for people to make the home the centre of their social life. The main obstacles to the pursue of an active social and cultural life by workers, however, was generally identified in the lack of time and energy, resulting from long hours of heavy factory work. As workers left the factory tired and wishing for some 'quiet time', worthy social, cultural or political activities were easily replaced by 'inactive' private time in the home.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the temptation to spend idle time at home, rather than engaging in social activities seemed to become stronger and stronger as consumption made the domestic sphere increasingly comfortable.

#### 4.5 Consumption

Consumption stood at the core of city living. Cities poorly prepared for the arrival of hundreds of thousands of newcomers confronted the new urban residents with bad housing, high costs of living, and the difficulty of providing for families' needs far away from the traditional networks of care.

Moving to the city meant for most families protracted struggles to make ends meet. Both the actual ability to buy and the desire to do so defined urban life. As the rigid hierarchies and the spartan ways of rural life became something of the past, for the new inhabitants of the city material possessions acquired a relevance that they had not had for earlier generations.

Reports from the new housing estates in which migrants from the countryside had moved, whether in Italy or in Poland, described a very similar process of adaptation to the new urban environment.

The first families that settled in Nowa Huta in the early fifties tried to recreate in their new urban life the peasant homes they had left behind, bringing in old furniture and decorating the walls with rugs and religious pictures. They also tried to recreate the formal separation between private and public parts of the home that had been characteristic of the countryside.<sup>27</sup> A very similar behaviour was observed by Italian sociologists and urbanists among the families who moved to newly-built council estates in the early fifties.

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<sup>27</sup> Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 158.

By the end of the decade, however, the situation had changed in both countries and refurbishing their apartment in accordance to contemporary taste started to figure highly among families' projects.

The second half of the fifties marked a turn towards consumption. Although individual ability to spend would remain very limited for most Italian and Poles for several years to come, the practical and symbolic importance of being able to buy grew steadily and became an essential component of the domestic economy.<sup>28</sup>

For the new industrial and third sector workers, buying meant first of all the possibility of achieving new levels of domestic comfort. While in Italy the ability to purchase desired goods depended essentially on the consumer's ability to buy, the situation was different in Poland. Despite the moderate expansion of domestic consumption that took place from the late fifties, shortage crises and the historic penury of consumer goods available in the country frustrated potential buyers. The State's failure to respond to its citizens' needs and expectations, including those of the young families on which the future of the country was supposed to be built, contributed to the disenchantment with the promises of real socialism.<sup>29</sup>

In the longer run, the growing realisation by Polish authorities of the political dangers posed by a stale economy encouraged a radical rethinking of Poland's economic strategy, the impact of which would reach full effect in the seventies.

Even before the fruits of economic reorientation became visible, however, the very notion of consumption started to be rethought. Rather than rejecting the very idea of consumption as a capitalist perversion, growing attention started to be given to the development of a notion of 'socialist consumption', able to channel people's changing needs and expectations in a suitable model of socialist transformation. By the early sixties, the first Poles to reach adulthood in the aftermath of Second World War were starting to form their own families. On the behaviour of these young parents and their children, also in relation to consumption, the State could measure its ability to forge new socialist citizens.

Memoirs give us a powerful representation of the role played by consumption in the achievement of a sense of satisfaction with one's life, often fusing things and people in narratives of family growth and consolidation. Two children, a renewed apartment, and some money

<sup>28</sup> Only 13% of Italians owned a TV set and a fridge in 1958; the proportion reached 50% by 1965. See D'Apice, *L'arcipelago dei consumi*.

<sup>29</sup> On the gulf that separated the promise of state socialism from its ability to deliver, Verdery, *What Was Socialism*. On the political significance of consumption in Poland, Mazurek, Hilton, "Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism", 315-43; for an earlier perspective, Mieczkowski, "The Relationship between Changes in Consumption and Politics", 262-9.

to spend in quality recreation came to represent the very definition of a desirable modern urban family life.

“Now, we had everything” – wrote a satisfied Nina in the late sixties – “a beautiful two-rooms apartment, nice furniture, beautiful, healthy children”.

Nina’s juxtaposition of children and furniture underlined the growing importance occupied by objects in the construction of individual narratives and identities.<sup>30</sup> It was the combination of children and desired objects that allowed Nina to rejoice in the success of her family life.<sup>31</sup>

Very similar feelings could be detected among young Italian families. In contrast with Poland, where the push to buy was counterbalanced by the short supply of items to be bought, consumerism was actively promoted in Italy, first of all by the influx of American commodities.<sup>32</sup> The DC had played a crucial role in Italy’s economic boom, and never ceased to present the American way of life as a positive model. As consumerism became a reality, however, the Party was forced to realise that the society it had forged had very little in common with the moral and social values that the Party continued, at least in principle, to uphold.

As consuming became an increasingly important part of family life, the critique of consumption also became widespread. The Church of Pius XII had seen in consumption the perverse sign of a growing materialism destined to undo traditional family life. Suspicion towards the effects of the modern world on family life remained high among Catholic commentators after his death.

In 1963, the progressive catholic sociologist Achille Ardigo summarised the fears felt from the left and the right of the political spectrum in his critique of an economic and social transformation that had set the “artificial life of industrial and urban society” against the life of the family and its real needs. The worshipping of economic success and consumerism by the new mass media eroded traditional values and threatened the most vulnerable social groups.<sup>33</sup>

Rather similar concerns were expressed from the socialist and Communist side of the political spectrum, where families’ effort to improve their living standards were often seen as the sign of a mis-

**30** Important references are Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, and Miller, *The Comfort of Things*.

**31** For a broader discussion of the significance of consumption in Polish family life, Bernini, “Consuming Socialists”, 205-23.

**32** Scrivano, “Signs of Americanization”, 317-40.

**33** Ardigo, “Le trasformazioni della società italiana”, 52-4.

guided individualism.<sup>34</sup> In 1961, the Communist Giorgio Amendola affirmed his conviction that workers would not give up their revolutionary mission, for “televisions, fridges, washing machines and scooters”, which were “the emblems of monopolistic expansion”. Not only, was the Italian Communist workers’ desire for social justice stronger than any wish for material comfort, but they followed the “exhilarating example of socialist countries”, where “man was not enslaved to the factory, but work and factory served men, helping him to develop his creative potential”.<sup>35</sup> While the PCI’s members’ spending habit were scrutinised and investigated as attitudes antithetical to an ideology that deplored individualism and material comfort, and while Amendola spoke of the enduring revolutionary mission of the working class, Italian and Polish workers were living all the contradictory power of consumption. They were not only starting to enjoy growing material comforts, but they were also extending their working hours, often taking up a second job, to increase their capacity to buy goods, most often for their families.<sup>36</sup> The paradox of workers taking up extra work to afford commodities that they had no time to enjoy was pointed out by Polish observers with dismay.<sup>37</sup>

Several echoes of this moral critique of consumption can be found in Polish memoirs.

Marta, a professional woman of 38 years old writing in 1967, observed that her two children had “everything they need[ed] and maybe more: a bicycle, a guitar, a camera, a record player”. Still, they were not satisfied: “Agata says that any girl must have at least four pair of stockings... Paweł dreams of a scooter... when we tell them to be patient, they tell us that it’s our fault, that other parents are more resourceful”.<sup>38</sup> By converse, two young sisters described their family as “atypical from a material point of view”, since they did not “have a fridge, nor a television, nor a washing machine”. They attributed the situation to the illness of their mother, which preventing her from working deprived the family of a crucially important second income.<sup>39</sup>

An even stronger critique was put forward by ‘Odmienec’ (a pseudonym that could be translated as Proteus) against contemporary parents. Unable to say no to their children and pushed by their own “snobbism” to buy for their offspring “all the most beautiful things, especially those that none of their friends still had”, parents used the

<sup>34</sup> Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*

<sup>35</sup> Giorgio Amendola, “Riscossa operaia”, discorso alla II conferenza dei comunisti delle fabbriche (1961), quoted in Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 202.

<sup>36</sup> Alberoni et al., *L'attivista di partito*, 270-6.

<sup>37</sup> Adamski, *Rodzina Nowego Miasta*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> “Marta”. *Rodzice, Dzieci, Rodzice*, 12-13.

<sup>39</sup> “Ola i Marzena”. *Rodzice, Dzieci, Rodzice*, 34-5.

pretext of their children's wellbeing to satisfy their own vanity. Obsessed with providing their children with all the material comforts that they themselves not enjoyed, contemporary parents failed to teach children the value of things. They ended up transforming them into little consuming monsters who did not hesitate to blackmail their parents in order to obtain "everything they want[ed]".<sup>40</sup>

Among the culprits of the diffusion of acquisitive social models, none attracted more attention than television.

#### 4.6 The Most Ubiquitous Object: Television

The first TV emissions started in Italy in 1954, although it was only three years later that most of the peninsula was able to pick up programmes. The inaugural programme of Polish television was broadcast on 25 October 1952 and it consisted of a thirty-minute transmission received at 7pm by twenty-four television sets located in the common rooms of the biggest workplaces around the country.<sup>41</sup> The following year, the first regular weekly half-hour broadcasts were introduced and, five years later, the first nation-wide programme finally appeared.<sup>42</sup>

Both in Italy and in Poland, the first television sets came from abroad, from the US and the USSR respectively; their arrival was showcased as the example of the technological modernity of the superpower under whose umbrella each country existed.

In both countries, the first to acquire television sets were organisations and enterprises, such as cultural clubs, church organisations, as well as factories, bars and canteens. Getting a television was a way of attracting new customers, members and followers, but also of controlling the way in which television was used and interpreted.<sup>43</sup>

Much has been written on the impact of television within the domestic sphere and in broader society. Socially, television contributed both to temporarily remove class barriers (as in the early practice of watching television in neighbours' apartments) and to create new hierarchies and social divisions, for instance around the possession and access to a set.<sup>44</sup> Within the domestic sphere, television quickly became one of the most prominent symbols of the modern

<sup>40</sup> "Odmieniec". *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 26-7.

<sup>41</sup> Grzelewska et al., *Prasa, radio i telewizja*, 264. The first feature film broadcasted in 1954, as a Soviet action movie, *Serebristaya pyl* (1953), dir. Pavel Armand, Abram Room. Pikulski, *Prywatna historia telewizji publicznej*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *Telewizja w systemie politycznym i medialnym PRL*, 43; see also Grzelewska et al., *Prasa, radio i telewizja w Polsce*, 266.

<sup>43</sup> Foot, *Milan*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> Foot, *Milan*, 88.

home. Increasingly integrated in furniture advertisements and in the design of the ideal modern apartment, television sets had the power to change not only the destination of the domestic space, but also the model or the relationship taking place between family members.

For those lucky enough to possess a sitting room, television transformed a space traditionally reserved for formal occasions into a “viewing-room”, no longer prepared to “receive” guest, but to consume programmes.<sup>45</sup> For the many who did not possess a sitting room, television found a place in the kitchen. In Poland, where the size of apartments tended to be smaller than in Italy, watching TV added yet another function to already multi-functional spaces.

Both in Italy and in Poland, TV sets entered private homes largely thanks to the expansion of buying on credit. In Poland, eighty “Leningrad” television sets were imported in 1953; the number had grown to 10,000 by 1955. The expansion of demand led to the first Polish TV set, the Wisła, which appeared on the market in 1956. The number of sets reached 3.5 million in the sixties.<sup>46</sup> Numbers were considerably larger in Italy, where the majority of Italians owned a television by the early sixties.

The preoccupation with the dangerous effects of television on family life was expressed from all sides of the political spectrum.

The analysis of the impact of television intersected a broader discussion on the use of time by the new urban working class. The issue of “free time” bothered both Polish and Italian Communists, who saw it as a space of likely capitalist colonisation. The idea that ‘free time’ could be occupied by watching TV appeared on both sides of the Iron Curtain as a negative detraction from more worthy pursuits, such as going to the theatre or reading books. In the effort to make even television worthy, Polish TV programming was teemed with cultural programmes, theatre and academic lectures.<sup>47</sup>

A common source of anxiety was attached to the likely impact of television on family communication. A mixture of nostalgia and idealisation of family life emerged from Roberto Leydi’s observation on the impact of television on meal times:

<sup>45</sup> Ferretti et al., *Mamma Rai*; Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*; Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*.

<sup>46</sup> Grzelewska et al., *Prasa, radio i telewizja*, 267, 279.

<sup>47</sup> Polish TV broadcasted classic and contemporary original dramas as well as book dramatisations, either as live theatrical performances or recorded stage plays. From 1956, Teatr Telewizji (TV Theatre) was given a stable slot in the programme schedule. Ample space was given also to programmes aimed to promote art and high culture, with programmes such as *Kronika Kulturalna* (Cultural Chronicles), which discussed topics relating to film, theatre and literature, and *Pegaz* (Pegasus), running from 1959 to 2004, which tackled issues from current affairs to cultural events. Grzelewska *Prasa, radio i telewizja*, 268-9.

The table was a meeting place. The members of the family sat in front of each other, looked into each others' eyes, talked to each other. With television all this has disappeared. The family sets itself up in a line, so that everyone can see the screen and pass the evening in silence.<sup>48</sup>

The Catholic Church also looked at the impact of television with great suspicion and tried its best to control its content.

Although inspired by different actors, both in Italy and in Poland effective censorship ensured the appropriateness of programme content.<sup>49</sup> While Polish television invested heavily in culture and education, the Italian programming concentrated on light entertainment and on the careful avoidance of any difficult or critical issue.

Despite all the efforts to transform television into a benign amplifier of society's values, however, neither Italians nor Poles could control the impact of this new medium on cultural and material consumption, on free time, and on family and social relations. The Italian regulation of advertisement provides a poignant examples of the paradoxical outcomes that the effort to govern television could produce. Fearful of the dangerous impact of advertisement, the controllers of Italian broadcasting imposed that ads should be grouped in specific sections of TV programming, rather than showed across different programmes. The result was that the evening advertisement slot, with its cartoons, short dramas and catching songs, quickly became the most popular programme of Italian television and a new and inescapable family ritual. Introduced in 1957, *Carosello* marked children's bedtime hour for the following two decades. What had started as an effort to protect families and the domestic sphere from the dangerous impact of advertisement had transformed ads into a crucial part of the daily routine of millions of Italian households.<sup>50</sup>

By the late sixties, society seemed to many observers a very different place from the one they had inhabited only a few years earlier. In particular, families' propensity to consume seemed to many to have become the main trait of an unwelcome modernity. From the margin of the Italian political spectrum, consumerism was heralded as the real winner of the postwar confrontation, and the deleterious outcome of anti-fascist politics.

In 1969, the deputy of the extreme right party Italian Social Movement Giuseppe Nicolai accused both DC and PCI of having given up

<sup>48</sup> Roberto Leydi, quoted in Foot, *Milan*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> The first General Director of the Italian broadest corporation (RAI) earned himself the nickname of "Savonarola of television". For his staunch refusal to allow any reference to sexuality and any content liable to be interpreted as critical of the family as an institution, see Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 163.

<sup>50</sup> On the Carosello phenomenon, Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 172-3; De Rita, *I contadini e la televisione*; Calabrese, *Carosello, o dell'educazione serale*.

their core values, in the face of unrestrained capitalism. The DC's subjugation to their American patron had opened the gate to consumerism. Unable to resist the allure of "mercantile and plutocratic America", the Christian Democrats had allowed a new dictatorship of the market to take hold. The "collective celebrations" dictated by the new shopping mall and the consumerist propaganda spread by television, were eroding family life and transforming the relationship between parent and child:

The girl who hug me with special tenderness reminding me that today is Mother's Day, is my daughter only by half. For the other half, she is the little unaware victim of mercantile speculation, a little robot, the implementer of a fiction. And so, little by little, we forget our real birthday and our name day, to celebrate all the same feasts, ordered by the shopping malls.

While Catholics were busy fighting ideological battles against the "conceptual materialism" of the Marxists, argued Niccolai, Italian society had fallen victim to the actual materialism "of things". "State television" under Christian Democratic control had spread

images of a false life and its grotesque offers: breasts, legs associated to any sort of objects on sale, from fridges to aperitifs, to mineral water. Is our society Christian? No, it's commercial!<sup>51</sup>

The PCI, added Niccolai, had remained mute in front of the transformations, unable to defend its ethical position from the "bourgeois cosmopolitanism" that had become the mark of contemporary society.<sup>52</sup> Almost a decade earlier, and from a very different political position, the progressive catholic sociologist Achille Ardigò had warned against the deleterious impact of the constant exaltation of economic success on mass media, and of a style of communication that used the "beauty of the woman lover" to sell all sort of products. The main victims of this aggressive consumerism were not only traditional values, wrote Ardigò, but the most vulnerable families, at once allured and excluded from the consuming society. The main responsibility for this state of affair rested, according to the sociologist, with the ruling classes, and with the DC in particular, who had proved unable to govern social and economic transformations.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Giuseppe Niccolai, *Atti parlamentari*, seduta 16 ottobre 1969, 11098-9.

<sup>52</sup> Niccolai, *Atti parlamentari*, seduta 16 ottobre 1969, 11100.

<sup>53</sup> Ardigò, "Le trasformazioni della società italiana", 52-4.



## 4.7 Shrinking Families

One of the most remarkable consequences that critics attributed to consumption was the reduction in the size of the family.

After the rapid growth in birth rate that had occurred both in Poland and in Italy in the immediate aftermath of the war, from the mid fifties the number of births started to decline. In Poland, the birth rate went from 26.2 per one thousand people in 1946, to 31 per thousand in 1951; four years later, the birth rate had fallen to 29.1 per thousand, with 793.8 thousand births. The decline continued sharply in the following years, with only 520,000 births in 1967 (16.3 per thousand people). A comparable decline took place in Italy.

Several commentators were quick to attribute the fall in birth rate to the growing desires and material aspirations of the postwar generation.<sup>54</sup> Censuses showing that a marked reduction in fertility had occurred between the cohorts born up to the thirties, and those who had reached adulthood after the war, seemed to confirm the diagnosis.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, data confirmed that fertility levels were lower among city and town dwellers, that is to say where the wish for a more comfortable life was supposedly stronger. In Poland, where the inclusion of women in the workforce had represented an explicit goal of successive postwar governments, women's economic position emerged as a crucial determinant of their approach to reproduction.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of the sixties, both Italian and Polish censuses showed that large families had become a minority, particularly in urban areas, while the two-child household was quickly becoming the norm.

Industrialisation and urbanisation had subverted traditional customs, starting with traditional family life.<sup>57</sup> Not only was the inclination to have many children disappearing, but so were the norms that had presided over marriage.

<sup>54</sup> Smoliński, "Przemiany dzietności rodziny", 203-5. See also Smoliński, "Dzietność kobiet zamężnych", 14-18; Adamski, *Modele małżeństwa i rodziny*.

<sup>55</sup> *Dzietność kobiet*.

<sup>56</sup> An investigation on the state of Polish family conducted in 1972 by the Central Statistical Office suggested a direct correlation between women's work and fertility; while working women had on average 1.70 children, whereas non-working mothers had on average 2.14. Further differences could be found between manual and non-manual workers, with the latter showing an even lower propensity to reproduce (1.53 against 1.86). A similar impact had the work of the husbands in the case of non-working women. Data also indicated that having more than 3 children was definitely becoming a minority choice, with 15.9% of families having four or more children, 19.2 three, 35.9 two and 23.1 one. The tendency was more marked in the cities, where couples without children were also more numerous (7.5% against 4.0%), Smoliński, "Przemiany dzietności rodziny w xx wieku", table 3, 208.

<sup>57</sup> Smoliński, "Przemiany dzietności rodziny", 214; Piotrowski, *Praca zawodowa kobiety a rodzina*.

Both in Italy and in Poland, much attention was given by sociologists and family experts to the new set of rules that supposedly governed marriage and family life. Sociologists of different persuasions, as well as doctors and priests, interrogated the criteria that presided over partner selection, marriage expectations, and reproductive behaviour.

An overall agreement was quickly established, according to which the interlinked processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and internal migration had produced a significant transformation of family mores, largely as the result of declining parental authority and the changing role of women.

Many observers agreed that, whereas in the patriarchal family of the past marriages had been either arranged by parents or dictated by material circumstances, a much greater role was being played now by individual interests, character compatibility and romantic aspirations.<sup>58</sup>

As the Polish sociologist Barbara Łobodzinska observed, “the decline in parental authority, the atrophy of hereditary property [...], the limitation of the role of the family to education and care” determined a “refusal of traditional criteria in the choice of the partner” in favour of more individualised processes.<sup>59</sup> Similarity of experience and world views, emotional and psychological closeness, shared personal objectives and goals were now more important than economic factors in the choice of a partner. Moreover, while in the past family and neighbourhood had played a central role in marriage selection, that role was now taken up by peer groups of students or work colleagues.

The ‘individualisation’ of marriage choice was even more pronounced for economically independent women. Polish sociologists, far more so than Italian ones, stressed how the economic activation of women had produced a growing equality within the family, starting with the choice of marriage partners. Paid work freed women from the imperative of marrying for economic reasons and made them equal contributors to the welfare of the household. Women’s work rendered marriage a choice rather than an economic necessity.<sup>60</sup> In People’s Poland, compatibility, shared interests and sexual affinity took over socio-economic considerations, to the extent that marriage seemed to represent one of the factors that most contributed to the dilution of class differences.

**58** Italian and Polish sociologists broadly agreed with some of the most influential analysis of the period, starting with Burgess and Locke, *The Family from Institution to Companionship*.

**59** Łobodzinska, “Dobór małżeński”, 234. See also Adamski, *Młodzi przed ślubem*.

**60** Piotrowski “Niezbędne przystosowanie pojęć”, 1.

Overall, Polish analyses tended to present a positive picture of the changes that had taken place in marriage, seeing in them a welcome transformation from marriage as a family affair to marriage as a free individual decision. Accounts from Italy followed a similar pattern.

Analyses conducted in the early sixties highlighted significant continuities in terms of courtship, attitudes towards pre-matrimonial sexuality, marriage.<sup>61</sup> A decade later, Lieta Harrison's enquiry into the matrimonial experiences of women from different generations showed both important changes and significant continuities in the way in which younger and older women approached marriage.<sup>62</sup> Several of her younger interviewees declared that, similarly to their mothers, they had married for fear of remaining alone or out of social conformity. Those who had married 'for love' explained that they had been attracted by their future husbands' appearance, character and attitude towards work and family.<sup>63</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the most marked difference between Polish and Italian analyses concerned the economic position of women. While the transformation of Polish women into industrial workers was at the core at least of the revolutionary agenda pursued between 1945 and 1956, the women question remained far more marginal in Italy, even within the PCI.

Still in 1964, the sociologist Ardigò could correctly observe that of the many predictions that had been made about family life, the one that found less actuality in the Western world concerned the economic emancipation of women. Contrary to expectations, only a minority of married women were in full employment; in most cases, women remained at home and in this way guaranteed the continuity of family life. The catholic Ardigò saw in women's part time work (still barely practiced in Italy but much more common in other European countries) a good compromise between the needs of traditional family life and women's growing desire for self-realisation.<sup>64</sup> Taking a rather more critical view, Cavalli pointed out that for most women part-time work represented often a forced economic choice. The slight increase in male salaries, the absence of reliable care services and increasing expectations in terms of domestic care left few al-

**61** Gabriella Parca, "SOS amore. Anche il maschio italiano scrive alla piccola posta". *L'Espresso*, 27 marzo, 1960; see also Parca, *Le italiane si confessano* and *I sultani. Mentalità e comportamento del maschio italiano*.

**62** Harrison's main aim was comparing how mothers and daughters differed in their understanding and experience of marriage; Harrison focused on women with "hardly any history of social mobility"; her conclusion was "that a housewife from the mothers' generation [was] more similar to a working woman of the same age than to her own housework daughter" (*La donna sposata*, 12).

**63** Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 83-8.

**64** Ardigò, *Emancipazione femminile e urbanesimo*.

ternatives to women than to try to combine domestic and paid work.<sup>65</sup>

The issue of women's position in the family was closely linked to the question of the aim of marriage. Surveys conducted both in Italy and in Poland in the sixties and early seventies highlighted the shift in expectations that had taken place across generations, particularly in relation to reproduction. While those who had grown up before the war had little doubt that the first purpose of marriage was the raising of children and the provision of family care, younger people tended to put first economic security, emotional, psychological and sexual satisfaction.<sup>66</sup> As 'BK' summed up in her memoir, the ideal husband was someone she could "feel safe with", someone she could think of "not only as a husband but as a close friend", with whom one could share happiness and sorrow. The ideal companion was not someone "who looked good or was well off, but someone of real depth and value".<sup>67</sup> Similar responses were gathered by Lieta Harrison in Italy. Compared to their mothers, who advocated that raising children was the "most important" aspect of marriage, most younger women aspired to companionship, reciprocal understanding and individual realisation.

This new emphasis on emotional satisfaction was not without problems. As both Polish and Italian surveys made clear, high expectations could lead to quick disillusionment.

BK for example was quite exceptional in her attempt to secure that her expectations would translate into firm commitment "before taking the vows". Before the wedding, the couple had agreed "that they would both work, share duties, and take decisions together". They also agree not "to complain about each other with their parents". "This is how we understood love: reciprocal comprehension, help, support with problems, of which there were in abundance".<sup>68</sup>

BK approached marriage with a clear idea of what she wanted: a married life with a contemporary man, free of prejudices and male complexes". She was not disappointed; her husband shared the burden of domestic chores and the task of looking after the children, helping her to pursue a professional career. Fitly, BK found work in the registry office, and was now in charge of "accepting the promises of young couples" to do everything in their power to create "an agreeable, happy and durable marriage". To all those couples she wished that "after 11 years of marriage they could give their husbands the opinion that

<sup>65</sup> Cavalli, *La città divisa*, 39-42. In 1954, Alessandro Pizzorno was one of the first to observe that modern appliances reduced hard physical labour in the home, but not the time dedicated to domestic chores. Pizzorno, "Il fenomeno del lavoro femminile", 374-96.

<sup>66</sup> Łobodzinska, *Małżeństwo w mieście*, 101-9.

<sup>67</sup> B.K., *Pamiętniki Polaków, 1948-78*, 476.

<sup>68</sup> B.K., *Pamiętniki Polaków, 1948-78*, 476-7.

I today give of mine". Such open stipulations before marriage seemed rarer in Italy, where conventional notions of women's positions continued to prevail, and where limited participation of women in the labour force made their negotiating position much weaker.

When compared to countries such as Britain, Italy and Poland showed remarkable stability as far as approaches to sexuality and reproduction were concerned. The enduring Catholic influence ensured negligible levels of births outside marriage and single motherhood. This did not prevent Polish sociologists from starting to worry about emerging phenomena that they attributed to the new 'individualised' approach to marriage. Among them, a moderate rise in divorces, an emerging tendency among young people to live together before marriage, and a relaxation of sexual mores. Łobodzinska also complained about what she perceived as a growing tendency to call love what was in fact "accidental or superficial relationships".<sup>69</sup> The sociologist linked the relaxation of sexual mores and the tendency to live together before marriage to the growing trend of children conceived (but not born) outside marriage. According to a 'family survey' conducted by GUS in 1970, around 24% of married women living in the city had given birth to children eight months after the wedding. It was easy to conclude that a good proportion among them had married while already pregnant. Łobodzinska further inferred that a number of those marriages were unplanned and contracted with 'occasional partners'. Such early pregnancies created the context in which marriage was treated not as a choice but as a compulsory act ("przymusowy małżeństwo").

In the story of a twenty-two year old man, Łobodzinska found the example of the unwelcome situation in which sexual relations outside marriage had become acceptable, but unplanned pregnancies automatically led to marriage. Having just joined the army, the author received the visit by an unknown man, who reminded him of a brief encounter he had had with already forgotten Hanka. Predictably, it turned out that the visitor was Hanka's father, who had come to inform the young man that his daughter was seven months pregnant and he "had to be the father". "I knew that this was possible, and I told him so", commented the young man. Marriage ensued as a matter of fact. "Hanka was not yet 18; she first gave birth and then we got married. Then, I went back to the army. I go to see Hanka only to see my son". Shortly after marrying Hanka, the young man fell in love with another woman, whom he wished to marry. Hanka's refusal to divorce prevented him from pursuing his plans.

Łobodzinska, one of the most prolific researchers on marriage and family life in Poland, presented a situation in which tradition and modernity coexisted in an uneasy alliance.

<sup>69</sup> Łobodzinska, "Dobór małżeński", 237.

The researcher herself seemed caught between an open-minded approach to social transformation and the tendency to fall back on well-established stereotypes. While saying nothing on the scant availability of reliable contraceptives, Łobodzinska insisted that getting pregnant was still used “by some girls” as a way of accelerating their partner’s decision to get married. This was not always a successful strategy, however, and the sociologist suspected that a certain proportion of births outside marriage in Poland (5% of total live births in 1970) were the consequence of “deluded girls”, who up to the last moment remained convinced that their boyfriend would marry them.<sup>70</sup> Such delusion prevented them from terminating their pregnancy.

For Łobodzinska, young women also occupied a complex and contradictory position with regards to sexuality. On the one hand, she suspected that women engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage were not following their physical desire, but rather wished to offer a “proof of love” (*dowód miłości*) to their partner. On the other hand, more ‘pragmatic’ couples decided to live together before marriage as a way of testing their sexual partnership and to practice a shared life.

More broadly, available evidence suggested that sexual satisfaction figured highly in the choice of a marriage partner and that less and less young people found a married life without it acceptable.

Very similar conclusions were reached in Italy by Lietta Harrison, who insisted that in contrast to the past, the expectation of a sexually fulfilling married life was now a strong and openly asserted aspiration for most women. Her interviews of mothers and daughters indicated a clear pattern. While only 0.1% of the mothers saw “sexual agreeability” (*accordo sessuale*) as something that strengthened a marriage, over 22% of the daughters thought that this was the case. Conversely, more than half of the mothers indicated women’s “tolerance, patience and sense of sacrifice”(also towards expected marital infidelities and sexual frustration) as a necessary element of marriage; less than 8% of the daughters agreed.<sup>71</sup> Again, the rise in expectations vis-à-vis sexuality in marriage did not mean a rise in actual satisfaction. After many interviews, Harrison reached the bitter conclusion that “daily reality was very different from the models proposed by mass media”. While many women assumed that they were the only ones unable to achieve a happy married life, the reality was that “matrimonial happiness was in fact a very rare occurrence”.<sup>72</sup>

Large part of the frustration experienced by younger wives, concluded Harrison, was the consequence of a rise in expectations that

<sup>70</sup> Łobodzinska, “Dobór małżeński”, 237-8.

<sup>71</sup> Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 77.

<sup>72</sup> Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 179.

was not matched by reality. While their mothers “had grown up in the mystic of sacrifice”, younger women lived “in a society that bombard[ed] them with the message that there [was] a right to happiness, personal and sexual”. The “imperative of duty, sacrifice, frugality, resignation, modesty” that had governed earlier generations had been substituted “by the idea that there [was] a right to equality, to happiness, to physical pleasure”.<sup>73</sup> The gulf which opened between expectation and experience generated broad disappointment.

#### 4.8 New Marriages Under Test: Husbands, Wives, and their In-laws

One of the most obvious signs of discontinuity revealed by the enquiries carried out from the late fifties concerned the position of parents in relation to the new family.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the relevance of parents’ opinions had clearly diminished as far as marriage choices were concerned. While parental approval had been considered essential in the past, younger men and women saw it as something desirable, but not as a necessary condition. This did not mean, of course, that parents refrained from expressing their opinions. As postwar memoirs clearly show, parents voiced their satisfaction and displeasure even when they knew that they could not exercise sanctions nor impose obedience on their offspring. Issues of class, religion, age, health were the more common reasons to object to a partner choice.

An anonymous contributor to the collection of memoirs *Pamiętniki Polaków* told a story that echoed many others. She had married in 1955 “a very good looking” young man working as a tractor driver. Both her parents and the mother of the prospective husband had objected to the match, as the boy was considered “a drinker and a hooligan”. The young woman stood by her decision, arguing that the chosen partner, who was only 16 when they met, had all the qualities of a “hard working and serious” man. She put his current behaviour down to bad influences, which marriage would cure. They married after two years of engagement, when she was 19 and he was 18. Despite the initial opposition of her parents to the marriage, the couple remained to live with them for a number of years. Time proved the author right, as the marriage evolved in a successful partnership, characterised by reciprocal support.<sup>74</sup>

The story highlighted not only the growing determination of young women to have their way in the face of family opposition, but also the

<sup>73</sup> Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 92.

<sup>74</sup> “To mój dom” [This is my Home]. *Pamiętniki Polaków, 1948-78*, 152-1.

fact that parents' declining influence in partner choice did not mean that they were expected to play no role in the ensuing marriage. On the contrary, helping with accommodation, money or child care often became a way of healing earlier conflicts, and allowed parents to keep a role in the married life of their children.<sup>75</sup>

In some cases, in-laws could provide the kind of support that parents were unable to offer. In the case of Maria, the hostility of her parents towards her marriage with a man considered beneath her social standing resulted in a complete breaking down of relationships. Her loneliness was partly healed by the warm support she received from her mother-in-law; a simple woman from the countryside, whom Maria saw as "a model of virtue", who gave her much needed "maternal love" and with whom she never had a "harsh word".

As with marriages, relationships with in-laws could also become very sour. The story of Renata Kowalska provided a perfect example of the unwanted consequences of what Lobodzinska saw as rushed romantic marriages. Kowalska married young and with little financial security. Following a common path, the young couple moved to Warsaw with high hopes; there, however, they were unable to find anything more than precarious accommodation and badly paid work. When Renata found herself pregnant and unable to work, she was convinced by her husband that their best option was to go back to the country and live with his parents. The forced cohabitation quickly descended into "hell". Back in the parental home, Renata's husband started drinking and became distant and uncaring; her mother-in-law appeared "hostile and indifferent". Feeling "morally and psychologically crushed", Kowalska eventually left with her boy and headed back to Warsaw. There she found, in the helping hand of the State, the support that her extended family had not been able to provide. "My boy was born [...] in the times of which my father dreamed. The Polish state took care of women and especially of children, by building nurseries and kindergartens. There are now many state services that support a single mother".<sup>76</sup>

Although stressing the support that the Socialist state could provide to single women, Kowalska could not refrain from wishing for a different outcome. "We women often ask what is happiness... A family home, with a child and a husband. Not an ideal one, but someone able to be a friend and a carer, and a real partner in life; in good and bad times".<sup>77</sup>

Kowalska's narratives offered a microcosm of the issues at stake in postwar families and marriages. Her romantic early marriage and the

<sup>75</sup> Łobodzinska, "Dobór małżeński", 236.

<sup>76</sup> Kowalska, "Szczęście we własnym domu" [Happiness in One's Home]. *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 156.

<sup>77</sup> Kowalska, "Szczęście we własnym domu", 158.



move to the capital echoed the hopes for a future far away from the countryside that shaped millions of individual trajectories. The capital itself played a crucial role in Kowalska's life. As a young child, she had lost her father in the Warsaw uprising, an event that would shape the rest of her life. She went back to the city as a young woman only to be sorely disappointed by the failure to build a life in it. Only when she returned to the city as a single mother, Kowalska was able to enjoy the 'caring' State that her Communist father had wished to see. Kowalska experienced much of the tensions and contradiction that characterised the postwar era; her comments on the place of marriage in women's life was itself a fitting representation of the processes underway. Although bitterly disappointed by her husband, Kowalska remained faithful to an idea of happiness that could not be detached from marriage.

Her words echoed Harrison's discovery that so many of her interviewees were at once unhappy in their marriages and yet unable to see themselves alone. For all their disappointments, the majority of her interviewees remained convinced that marriage was still the best option for women and although only few of them described their actual husband as "the best choice they could have made", even fewer were willing to consider that they "would have been happier if they did not marry".<sup>78</sup>

#### 4.9 Conclusions

In 1956, the bishop of Prato, Monsignor Fiordelli hit the headlines when he asked one of the priests in his dioceses to publicly condemn Mauro Bellandi and Lorian Nunziati as "public sinners and concubines". The two were baptised Catholics who had a civil marriage. In a letter, published on the parish's magazine on 12 August 1956, Fiordelli reminded the faithful that getting married through a civil ceremony was an act of open and contemptuous rejection of religion, which could not be condoned. For two baptised people, to choose a civil marriage meant entering into an unacceptable state of concubinage, which had to be sanctioned. As such, and in accordance with Canon Law, the couple should be denied the sacraments and a religious funeral - which presumably they did not desire. The couple's parents should also be sanctioned; their home should not be visited in the occasion of the Easter and no aspersion with Holy Water should take place, since by allowing the sinful union to take place they had clearly failed in their duties as Catholic parents.

Fiordelli's initiative gave a peculiar visibility to the intransigent approach to family and marriage pursued by Pius XII's Church, bringing

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<sup>78</sup> Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 88.

a local matter to national attention. The reaction of the couple was to take the bishop to court for defamation, of which Fiordelli was initially found guilty. Far from representing an act of strength, Fiordelli's action gave the measure of the growing difficulty encountered by the Catholic Church in its effort to keep family and marriage under control.

While the Italian Catholic hierarchies had triumphantly won the battle for the legal control of the family in the Constitutional assembly and were successfully fighting against the introduction of divorce (as we will see in the next chapter), they could do little against broader social and economic transformations. Although constrained by laws designed to preserve the family as an 'immutable institution', Italians were fast changing their way of living together. Crucially, most transformations were taking place not within the few marriages contracted outside the Church, as in the case of Prato, but actually within Catholic marriages themselves. Catholic married couples were contravening in mass the obligation to abstain from sex unless aimed at procreation and, despite the prohibition to sell and advertise contraceptives, were successfully controlling their reproductive capacities. They were also attending religious functions much less regularly than in the past, and taking a rather personal approach to catholic religious duties, such as confession. Despite repeated warnings against the danger of modern mass media, they were becoming avid readers of gossip magazines, and imitators of cinema stars. The keenness with which the family budget was squeezed to buy TV sets suggested that the 'domestic hearth' so dear to the Church as a place of Christian teaching was being transformed in the ultimate place of consumption.

Mass political parties looked at the changes underway with no less dismay than Catholic hierarchies. In Italy, neither the DC nor the PCI had predicted the industrial transformation of the country, and both were taken aback by its consequences.

The DC had successfully created a consumption society and was now confronted by the unwanted consequence of a social transformation that went far beyond its desires and expectations. The PCI, whose leadership had grown up in years of struggle and in the cult of austerity and self-sacrifice, was even less prepared for the cultural changes that were unfolding. Both parties found themselves powerless in the face of demographic and social transformations that impacted on models of political militancy and activism. As less and less people found themselves attracted to the alternative family offered by the Party, membership declined and so did political activism and traditional forms of mobilisation.

The situation was hardly less complex in Poland. After a decade of brutal political control, extreme austerity and a social revolution imposed from above, the end of Stalinism brought with it expectations of social and political change. As the immediate postwar struggle for

the reconstruction of the country came to an end, new needs which could not be ignored emerged. First among them was the availability of decent housing and affordable goods for domestic consumption.

In Poland as in Italy, the combined effect of industrialisation and urbanisation transformed not only the environment in which families existed, but also their aspirations. In both countries, the influx of new residents to the city tested the State's ability to answer new and growing necessities. This proved all the more challenging for a Socialist state that based its legitimacy on the ability to respond to workers' needs.

Polish families no less than Italian ones reacted to broad social transformations far more than to the teaching of either State or Church. Declining birth rates, sex outside marriage, and new models of married life suggested an inexorable march towards what a Polish sociologist called a "European family model". The definition encompassed several characteristics, among them the prevalence of nuclear households informed by an individualist ethos and by a strong investment in the private/domestic sphere. The satisfaction of desires, whether towards the acquisition of material objects or towards the satisfaction of sexual yearnings, represented an important element of the contemporary household. Both in Italy and in Poland, this suggested a significant discontinuity with the past. Especially as far as women were concerned.

Both Catholic and Communists had long agreed that the success or failure of family life depended largely on women. In particular, Catholics insisted on women's ability to sacrifice, to tolerate men's 'weaknesses', and to act with self-abnegation. Communists stressed the virtue of women able to act as 'comrades', making up for their husbands' political engagement and seeing their domestic life as part of their contribution to the struggle. Testimonies collected both in Italy and in Poland throughout the late fifties and sixties confirmed the idea that marriage's success or failure depended on women, but in a rather different sense.

"In the past, women accepted any frustration and bitterness to keep a marriage going; they could not even conceive the idea that they could be happy", explained a thirty-one year old housewife from Rome to Lieta Harrison. However, added another interviewee, "marriage is no longer considered as something sacred and inviolable, and women are more independent and no longer willing to accept everything".<sup>79</sup>

As the twice divorced teacher and educator Krystina Malinowska explained: "After a while, I also had my expectations and set my conditions". The husband's unwillingness to respond to her needs made

<sup>79</sup> Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 105.

her decide to leave. The Polish state, tragically absent in the life of many young couples, was still able to provide a safety net for single women. “I got a room, a bed and table with a chair. But that was nothing. I was independent, and my one-year-old son was cared for with love”, also thanks to the helping hand of the State.<sup>80</sup>

In Poland, divorce made it possible to end a marriage with some legal and financial protection. That remained impossible in Italy and appeared more and more as an unsustainable anachronism.<sup>81</sup>

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**80** Malinowska, in *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 19.

**81** Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 109.



## **5 Ending a Marriage in Two Catholic Countries**

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**Summary** 5.1 Introduction. – 5.2 When is Marriage No Longer a Marriage?. – 5.3 Divorce Italian and Polish style. – 5.4 Continuity and Change. – 5.5 Annulments in Name, Divorces in Intent. – 5.6 Living Apart, But Forever Linked. – 5.7 Struggling for Change, in Parliament and on the Street. – 5.8 Conclusions.

### **5.1 Introduction**

Talking about the battle over divorce in Italy and Poland brings to mind two apparently opposite scenarios. In the Italian context, the battle was about the recognition of the right to divorce. In Poland, the battle was against the introduction of divorce, together with secular marriage. In Poland, the battle was led by the Church against a State controlled by the Communist party; in Italy it was led by secular parties (the Communist party most importantly among them) against the ‘holy’ alliance of State and Church.

In many ways, Italy’s long and tortuous road to divorce, which saw a law passed only in 1970, can be seen as the struggle of a weak liberal culture to assert individual rights in a context dominated by a strong Catholic culture. In Poland, the swift introduction of divorce in 1945 could be read as part of the successful assertion of the State’s authority over the institution of marriage, and more broadly over the family, against the influence historically exercised by the Catholic Church. This different chronology is reflected in the structure of this chapter. Polish law was hardly modified after the early fifties, which is at the time when the first proposals for divorce were advanced in Italy.

Despite these different scenarios, the issues raised in the two countries by divorce were similar and went to the core of the rela-

tionship between citizens, State and religious institutions. From the perspective of the Church – as for many priests and even practicing Catholics – fighting against divorce represented a battle for civilisation, and not just an effort to retain a strong voice in marriage and family issues. The Catholic struggle against divorce took different forms, depending on local circumstances. The concerns that motivated the Church, however, were universal. In many ways, divorce measured the Church's ability to defend its prerogatives in the regulation of family life as well as its enduring (or dwindling) social influence. From the point of view of the State, divorce measured the extent to which family and marriage were considered a collective issue: are family matters to be decided by the State, or by individuals? From the point of view of the individual, divorce was about liberty and the right to assert one's desires vis-à-vis the State.

In some senses, therefore, divorce was the key battleground where collective and individual rights clashed. It was the frontline between different visions of a society: a secular and a Catholic one. It was the arena where the balance between the rights of the State and the rights of the individuals were to be decided. The Polish and Italian dynamics highlight this very well.

The Italian slow road to divorce has often been linked to the supposedly peculiar importance attributed to the family in national discourse and in the country's political culture.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, however, the family was not less central to the Polish discourse. Cultural patterns alone cannot explain the very different attitudes towards divorce that emerged in the two countries in the post-war years. In Italy, the idea that Italians 'were not ready' to accept divorce influenced even those political forces more committed (at least in theory) to a secular view of family life, starting with the Communists. In Poland, such uncertainties and political anxieties were cut short by the State's determination to modernise the family from above. These different outcomes depended not on cultural differences, but on the different power dynamics that existed, first of all, between the Church and the State.

In the immediate post-war years, the inability of the Italian state to assert norms on marriage and family life independent of the prescriptions of the Catholic Church showed where the balance of power rested. In the same period, the introduction of civil marriage and divorce in Poland marked the affirmation of a political power not only independent of, but clearly hostile to the Church. Whilst in Poland the reform of 1945 seemed to solve the question of divorce in a swift and incontestable way, in Italy the question became of national concern only in the late sixties, when growing pressure exercised by new

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1 Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters*.

social movements forced political parties to take over an agenda for social reform they had long tried to ignore.

So far, the story could seem rather simple. Whilst in Poland a powerful and undemocratic government decided to confront head-on the influence traditionally exerted by the Church, in Italy, weak political institutions and the search for a fragile political consensus helped the Church to maintain its primacy over matters of family and marriage. As we will see, however, things were more complicated in reality.

Far from declaring the triumph of a secular notion of marriage, the introduction of divorce in Poland became part of an enduring struggle between state authorities and the Church – not so much on different conceptions of individual rights, but on their respective ability to govern marriage and its role in society. The Socialist state and the Church competed over different conceptions of marriage durability and over the reasons that could end a marriage before the death of one of the spouses. The outcome of this competition shaped the scope of the influence both these actors were able to exercise on ordinary Poles.

In 1945, the introduction of divorce was part of a raft of reforms intended to transform Poland in a secular country, free of the ‘obscurantist’ influence of the Church. However, by the end of the fifties, the limits of the secularisation project were already painfully clear. As it quickly emerged, the legal possibility of divorcing had not made divorce socially or culturally acceptable.

By the seventies, Catholicism and the symbolic investment in traditional notions of family life (including in the unbreakability of marriage) had become for many a sign of political resistance.

The rallying of Poles behind the banners of the Church stood in sharp contrast to the increasing disaffection manifested by Italian Catholics with the prescriptions of the Church, which was perceived as oppressive and out of touch with daily reality.

## 5.2 When is Marriage No Longer a Marriage?

Divorce was introduced in Poland in 1945 by decree, as part of a general reorganisation of family and marriage legislation. It was a decision imposed from above, with little space left for discussion. The opposition that had been mounted by the Church in the months preceding the passing of the decree had been defeated, at least at the level of the law. With the passing of this decree in October 1945, the regulation of marital affairs assumed a legal coherence and simplicity that it never had in the past. From this point onwards, only one form of marriage existed for Poles, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Marriage could be ended in accordance with the law, on the basis of grounds of which the sole arbiter was the State. We will come back to this later in the chapter.



The situation was much messier in Italy. Three forms of marriage existed in post-war Italy. People could choose an exclusively religious marriage (regulated by canon law), a purely civil marriage (regulated by the law of the State), or a so-called ‘concordatary marriage’, which was a religious marriage having civil effects, in accordance with the norms agreed in the Concordate stipulated on May 27, 1929 (art. 847). The main common feature of these three forms of marriage was the near unbreakability of the marriage tie.

The denial of the right to divorce for all married couples was introduced in the Italian civil code in 1865, together with universal civil marriage, as an unspoken concession to the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> The moment when the State took over the responsibility for marriage, proclaiming itself unfit to judge or intervene in matters of faith, also marked the inclusion in the Italian civil code of a norm that had been at the core of Catholic doctrine. It was a contradiction that influenced all successive developments. The effect of the introduction of concordatary marriage in 1928 was further strengthened by the Rocco code of 1942, whose article 149 proclaimed that marriage could only be “dissolved on the death of one of the spouses”.

The situation did not change with the advent of the Republic. Tellingly, the issue of divorce entered the Constituent Assembly only indirectly. The big debate was around the question of marriage indissolubility, a discussion that put secular parties on the defensive and rendered largely inaudible the voices of those who upheld a secular notion of marriage.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, moreover, even the PCI was reluctant to support a law that threatened to weaken the stability of family life. “Having dropped our guns we will reconstruct our families”, proclaimed the Communist magazine *Noi Donne* in 1945, capturing the widespread desire to return to domestic normality felt by a population exhausted by years of war and occupation.

A genuine preoccupation with preserving family life, together with Togliatti’s conviction of the importance of not alienating Italy’s Catholic masses, undermined the possibility of asserting a secular notion of the State. As the liberal Catholic Arturo Carlo Jemolo observed, the inability of the State to assert its role and responsibilities in the face of the Church produced an array of legal inconsistencies of which the regulation of marriage was one of the best examples.

In 1954, the jurist Mario Berutti described the political climate of post-war Italy as “apparently democratic, but authoritarian and paternalistic” in nature. In this climate it was “not simple for those

<sup>2</sup> Acquarone, *L'unificazione civile*; Ungari, *Storia del diritto di famiglia*; Torelli, *Lezioni di storia del diritto*, 105.

<sup>3</sup> See among others Saresella, “The Battle for Divorce”, 401-18.

who failed to adapt to a sort of prudent and systematic conformity to speak, or write serenely and objectively about divorce".<sup>4</sup>

This description well captured the context in which the socialist MP Renato Sansone first put forward a proposal for a law that would allow divorce to take place in a limited number of situations. The cases contemplated by Sansone included attempted murder by one of the partners, long-term imprisonment, and de facto separation of over fifteen years. Sansone himself termed his proposal "piccolo divorzio", explicitly distancing this project from divorce understood as the possibility of ending a marriage on the basis of individual desires alone.

Sansone, a lawyer first elected as deputy in 1948, and then again in 1953, insisted that his interest in divorce derived from a concern for the actual effects that the impossibility of ending a marriage had on ordinary people, rather than from a political or ideological stance. In October 1954, Sansone described those caught in marriages that existed only in the law as *fuorilegge del matrimonio* (matrimonial outlaws), a definition that would embed itself in the Italian public discourse. The *fuorilegge* were the same people whom Maria Maddalena Rossi had powerfully evoked in her speech at the Constituent Assembly: people whose first marriages had broken down and who were now living in situations considered illegitimate and beyond the pale. Sansone stressed that the core cause of this situation was a law out of sync with most European legislation, including that of other Catholic countries such as France, Belgium, and Poland, and unable to cope with the changed social reality. Sansone's estimate that at least 4 million Italians, both adults and children, lived in illegitimate families, and that 40,000 marriages broke down every year, relied on scant evidence and might very well be exaggerated. He was certainly right, however, in stressing the damage caused by backward and punitive legislation that deprived people of the possibility of changing the course of their marriages and family lives.<sup>5</sup>

Sansone's proposal has been dismissed by most authors as little more than a manifestation of the 'familistic' climate of the period. Mark Seymour suggested that the expression "piccolo divorzio" en-

<sup>4</sup> Berutti, *Il divorzio in Italia*, became a point of reference in the debate.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics on personal separations suggested that, although a significant increase had taken place in the aftermath of the war, jumping from 4,523 in 1933 to 8,152 in 1952, the numbers of those who were officially separated remained modest. The question of how many people lived in long-term separations, however, remained controversial. See, for instance, the speech by the Christian Democrat Mattarella on the 10th of October, 1969, *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei deputati, V Legislatura, Discussioni, Seduta del 10 Ottobre, 1969, 10878. Mattarella lamented both the lack of reliable data on the number of separated couples and the absence of an in-depth analysis of the "conditions that led to separations".

dured because “it was both ironic and accurate”. Accurate because of its extreme conservatism; ironic because of the “impossibility of having degrees of divorce”.<sup>6</sup> The idea that Sansone’s proposal was just a reflection of Italy’s familistic culture, however, overlooks the logic that underpinned the effort of specifying the conditions under which divorce could be considered acceptable.

At the core of the idea that only specific situations could justify ending a marriage was a notion of divorce not as an individualistic act or as the result of individual desires, but as a means of asserting what constituted acceptable family and married life. It was a normative statement, in which the State, through the courts, became the ultimate arbiter of marriage.

Although Sansone was criticised for being too cautious and too acquiescent to Christian democratic pressure, his logic was in fact similar to that adopted in Communist Poland in 1945. In both cases, divorce was linked not to the will of the individuals involved, but to objective and measurable grounds, which the State considered incompatible with marriage. Both in the Polish law of 1945 and in Sansone’s proposal, grounds for divorce included long prison sentences, the attempted murder of the spouse, the presence of an incurable mental illness, and lengthy abandonment or consensual separation (15 or more years in Sansone’s proposal, only 3 in Polish law).

According to Polish law, which was certainly much broader and more comprehensive than Sansone’s proposal, divorce could also be granted for adultery (unless condoned or committed more than three years before the petition was filed), an attempt on the life of the petitioner’s child, the refusal to provide for the maintenance of the family, desertion, felony, debauchery, dishonourable occupation, drunkenness or drug addiction, venereal disease, and impotence, or other inability to consummate the marriage (if the spouse was under 50 years of age). In a reflection of the strongly nationalist stance that characterised Polish Socialism, divorce could also be granted if one of the spouses had made a declaration of allegiance to Germany during the war.

From the point of view of the Socialist state, as well as from the point of view of the socialist Sansone, divorce was first of all a means of ending those marriages that had ceased to perform their social function and had in fact become a liability, not only for the individuals involved, but for society at large. In this light, allowing marriages to end for reasons other than the death of one of the spouses did not undermine the value of marriages’ durability, nor did it mean that the State accepted divorce as a way of answering individual expectations and desires. Divorce was an inevitable evil, necessary to

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6 Seymour, *Debating Divorce in Italy*, 169.

protect society from even greater threats. More than an issue of individual freedom, the question concerned who should be the arbiter of married life and its social role.

In 1952, with the aim of simplifying court proceedings, the 11 grounds for divorce introduced in Poland in 1945 were substituted with the general principle of “complete and permanent disruption” of marriage.<sup>7</sup> On paper, this reform could appear as a step towards a more comprehensive approach to divorce. In making the grounds upon which a divorce could be sought less specific, however, the move had also the effect of expanding the discretionary powers of the Courts, acting in the name of the Socialist state.<sup>8</sup>

The results were a series of interventions by the Polish Supreme Court, in which the country’s highest legal authority offered restrictive interpretations of what constituted marriage disintegration and urged caution, particularly when divorce was sought by the guilty party. In several of its pronouncements, the Supreme Court emphasised the social importance of marriage, stressing that divorce should never be read as an acceptance of an individualistic notion of marriage in which individual desires sufficed to end the marital bond. For the State, no less than for the Church, marriages should last; if the State accepted divorce it was only to end “the social evil of marriages that [had] already ceased to exist”. In the eyes of the State, the durability of marriage should be achieved not through the “formal indissolubility propounded by the command of religious dogma”, but through “the social conscience of the husband and wife”, which itself should result “from a mature and responsible attitude towards family duties”.<sup>9</sup> In this optic, divorce should be seen as little more than a certification of a situation that already existed and could not be reversed. As it was the right of the State to determine when this was the case, courts could and should refuse granting a divorce when individual wishes seemed to prevail over the common good.

There was a stark convergence between the Catholic and Socialist preoccupation with ensuring that individual wishes and desires should remain subordinated to a higher good, whether this was Christendom or the Socialist nation made only a marginal difference to ordinary people. This apparent paradox was well illustrated by the story of E.B., reported by Lasok as a typical example of the sort of considerations that dictated Polish Courts’ rulings in matters of divorce.

<sup>7</sup> *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr. 48, 1945, 270.

<sup>8</sup> The provision was modelled on a decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR of 8 July 8 1944, which left to the courts the responsibility to decide whether the circumstances presented by the parties justified a decree of divorce. See Szuldrzyński, *The Family*, 48; see also Mazgaj, *Church and State*, 108.

<sup>9</sup> Directive issued on the 26 April, 1952, in Lasok, “A Legal Concept”, 75.

In 1955, 'Ewa' tried to put an end to her marriage with 'Adam'. The fact that Ewa's husband had continued his "association with another woman" after the marriage, and the resentment that she and her family felt for the lack of a religious ceremony – which had been opposed by the husband – had caused a disruption of the marriage that could not be resolved. While the Court of first instance agreed to the divorce, the judgment was reversed by the Provincial Court, appealed to by the husband, on the grounds that the "parties were not treating the institution of civil marriage seriously". This verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court, which found "no serious causes" of disruption, but blamed the parties for showing "contempt for the institution of civil marriage". Only when Ewa entered into a new relationship and gave birth to a child whose parentage was disputed by her husband was the divorce granted – this time in answer to Adam's petition.<sup>10</sup>

While the husband's infidelity had been read as the sign that the spouses had not taken marriage seriously, the wife's betrayal and the birth of a child of uncertain paternity made divorce acceptable. For a State that had proclaimed the absolute equality of men and women as one its core principles, the double standard employed by the courts appeared blatant. Communist Poland had pursued a systematic reshaping of women's identities in favour of work and productivity; the way in which sexual behaviour was judged, however, remained hopelessly gendered.<sup>11</sup>

While the introduction of a divorce law like the one operating in Poland would have certainly have been saluted as a huge advancement in Italy, here too the possibility of ending a marriage remained subordinate to the State's determination to stamp its authority on marriage, subject to prescribed norms rather than to the beliefs and desires of the spouses.

### 5.3 Divorce Italian and Polish Style

Sansone's moderate proposal never reached the stage of parliamentary debate in Italy, and another attempt made by Sansone and Giuliana Nenni in 1958 proved equally unsuccessful. Sansone, however, succeeded in embedding the issue in Italian public discourse, particularly thanks to his collection of first-hand accounts of marriage breakdown. The publication of a selection of the many letters he had received from men and women whose marriages had ended

<sup>10</sup> Supreme Court, decision of December 12, 1955, No. CR.1889/54, Lasok, "A Legal Concept", 76.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Klik-Kluczevska, *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm*. For a useful East German comparison, see Harsh, *Revenge of the Domestic*, and Betts, *Within the Walls*.

in all senses, except for the law, provided a snapshot of matrimonial illegality and its unwanted consequences. Particular emphasis was put by Sansone on the dramatic consequences of “war marriages”. These were unions decided hastily with little-known soldiers, many of whom disappeared as soon as the war ended, sometimes to return to faraway countries, leaving behind women who could not marry again and children whose legitimate fathers existed only on paper. Such situations, argued Sansone, made a mockery of the notion of indissoluble marriage as basis of family life, as many of those abandoned women had gone on to reconstitute successful family lives that did not exist in the law.

The painful stories collected by Sansone had no reason to exist in Poland, where the reform of 1945 allowed similar situations to be solved relatively promptly. Unsurprisingly, the number of divorces grew steadily in Poland, particularly in the first years of the reform before beginning to decline. Numbers, however, remained modest (11,133 divorces were recorded in 1949, 13,936 in 1956). The reform did not render divorce a fully acceptable path, nor one that Poles resorted to easily.

In fact, Poland contradicted the assumption dear to Italian Catholics that “divorce call for divorce”, and that allowing marriages to end would inevitably open the way to a spiralling increase of matrimonial dissolutions.

Diaries and memoirs portray lengthy separations that never resulted in divorce, as well as long years of marital unhappiness, not rarely accompanied by abusive behaviour.

Testimonies from below suggest that divorce was more acceptable among highly educated couples; here too, however, women’s tolerance towards marital neglect and absence appeared remarkable. ‘MTM’, a teacher married to an engineer, described in harrowing detail the breakdown of her marriage, following the birth of the couple’s second child. MTM’s narrative was constructed around her husband’s physical and emotional absence, his betrayals and his obvious unwillingness to act responsibly towards his family. Whether faced by economic troubles or by the children’s precarious health, MTM faced it alone. Hers was a tale of ever growing loneliness and depression, worsened by the decision of giving up work to dedicate herself entirely to the family. In the event, it was the husband who petitioned for divorce, which was agreed in 1969, after sixteen years of loveless cohabitation. Reflecting back, MTM concluded that, divorce had been “the only real achievement” of the marriage. Divorcing had been wholly beneficial for MTM, who had returned to work, and enjoyed the regular payment of an alimony by her ex husband. It was, however, a decision that she could not bring herself to take, and the reasons why the marriage had failed continued to trouble her throughout her life. Had the main cause been the birth of the second child,

to which the husband “had never got used”? Or the material difficulties of the early years of marriage? MTM blamed in particular the difficulties that had been caused by the inadequacy of their first apartment, too small and unfit for a young couple to live happily in. If the Socialist state wished to support young marriages, explained MTM, the single most important investment should be to guarantee anyone with a marriage certificate access to a three-room apartment.<sup>12</sup>

Popular culture, starting with cinema, confirmed the social stigma that continued to be attached to divorce.

The representations of the emancipated ‘new woman’ put forward by socialist propaganda throughout the fifties fell short of presenting divorce as a fully acceptable alternative to marital unhappiness. Even movies more obviously designed to convey the image of the newly emancipated woman failed to acknowledge that escaping traditional positions could mean not only taking up typically male jobs, but also deciding to opt out of unhappy marriages.

Movies such as *Przygoda na Mariensztat* (An adventure at Mariensztat), directed by Leonard Buczkowski in 1954, Jan Rybkowski’s *Autobus odjeżdża 6.20* (The Autubus leaves at 6.20), *Niedaleko Warszawy*, directed by Maria Kaniewska in 1954 and *Irena, do domu*, directed by Jan Fethke in 1955 portrayed ‘new women’, able to react to social and personal difficulties. Moreover, they did not refrain from showing the betrayals and lies that could beset marriage and family life; they refrained, however, from indicating divorce as a solution. The almost inevitable outcome of the sometimes harrowing stories presented by the Socialist Realist movies was the recovery of married life, usually thanks to the good influence that women were able to exercise on their husbands, educating them on the virtues of proper companionship. Even when bringing in salaries, socialist women remained the one primarily responsible for family life. The duty of making marriage work fell upon them. The inability to do so carried with it the stigma of failure.

Somewhat paradoxically, it was an Italian and not a Polish movie that made the issue of divorce the subject of popular debates.

*Divorzio all’italiana* (or *Divorce Italian Style*), directed by Pietro Germi in 1961, depicted the agonies of the nobleman Fefé Cefalù, who, in the fictional Sicilian town of Agramonte, dreamt of ending his 12-year marriage to be free to pursue his new love for a beautiful cousin, the sixteen-year-old Angela. Faced with the impossibility of divorcing, Fefé, played by the Italian cinema star Marcello Mastroianni, found in ‘honour killing’ the only way to free himself from matrimonial boredom.

<sup>12</sup> “Rozwód jest jedynym naszym osiągnięciem” [Divorce is Our Only Achievement]. *Moje Matżeństwo i rodzina*, 41-2.

Already present in the pre-fascist Zanardelli code, honour killing had been reinforced and extended in Italy during the fascist years in accordance with the patriarchal norms that governed the regime's legislation. The norm passed unchanged into post-war legislation. Article 587 of the penal code established that the killing of a spouse, daughter or sister committed upon discovering "her illegitimate carnal relation" and in a "state of anger" provoked by "the offence caused to the honour" of the murderer themselves or of their family, carried with it a reduced sentence, of 3 to 7 years. The same applied to the killing of the person with whom the "illegitimate" relation had been established. While the killing of a husband could also fall into the category of "honour killing", the reduction of the sentence was much less sensible if the culprit was a woman. The institution of "matrimonio riparatore", regulated by art. 544, completed an approach to family and marriage governed by patriarchal norms, which reduced women to male property. According to art. 544, marriage extinguished the penal consequence of rape, itself understood as a crime against morality and as an offence to the honour of the family, rather than as crime against the person.<sup>13</sup>

In *Divorzio all'italiana*, Fefé managed to achieve his goal after a series of mishaps, used by Germi to highlight the many levels at which the patriarchal norms that governed family life and its regulation could operate. Germi's movie was loosely based on the novel *Un delitto d'onore*, published by Giovanni Arpino in 1960. Arpino's novel was a dark tale of possessive love, jealousy and violence, condoned by the law under the rubric of honour. Set in the twenties, the novel linked sexual backwardness and immorality to the emerging fascist power. Germi's re-reading of the story showed how the approach to sexuality and marriage seen in Arpino's story as something of the past remained at the core of post-war Italy's legal culture. The great success of the movie among Italian audiences, as well as its critical acclaim, proved that Germi had touched a raw nerve.

In many ways, Germi's movie marked the beginning of *commedia all'italiana* as a particular genre, in which dark humour and farce were used to highlight some of the most serious plights of Italian society. In *Divorzio*, Germi ridiculed both an outdated legislation and the perverse outcomes of a model of masculinity at once violent and ineffective, obsessed with sexual desire and unable to free itself from social conventions. Mastroianni's magisterial interpretation of Fefé provided a memorable portrait of male misery. Both Fefé's murderous plans, and his determination to use marriage to assert his con-

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, Sandrelli, *Il delitto d'omicidio a causa d'onore* and *Abrogazione della rilevanza penale della causa d'onore*; see also Garofalo Geymonat, "La lunga storia del diritto d'onore", 135-43.



trol over the young Angelica, appeared as the outcomes of a familistic and repressive culture that seemed destined to perpetuate itself.

#### 5.4 Continuity and Change

While the socialist revolution had supposedly transformed Poland into a nation of equals, in traditional southern Italy class and gender hierarchies, underpinned by the rigid prescriptions of the Catholic Church, were still dominant. Italian law, administered in perfect continuity with the fascist past, condoned and supported a notion of marriage and family life built upon inequality of power and access.

By the early sixties, however, all this was becoming increasingly untenable.<sup>14</sup>

The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that engulfed the country in the fifties and sixties had produced new needs and expectations, particularly among women and younger people and challenged the norms that had long governed gender and generational relations. The papacy of John XXIII, started in 1961, indicated a possible different role for the Catholic Church in Italy, at once less prone to open political intervention and less fearful of social change. After the morally intransigent and politically hyperactive reign of Pius XII, the new Pope put forward the image of a more compassionate church and advocated dialogue in the place of uncompromising ideological confrontation.<sup>15</sup> Even the political sphere showed that the dynamics of the early Cold War were open to redefinition. The experience of the centre-left coalition, started in 1962 and based on the alliance between the DC and the Socialist Party, was hardly a model of fruitful progressive politics. Nonetheless, it suggested that new dynamics were at play across Italian politics and society and that new instances were emerging, which would prove difficult to contain.

The surge in interest for family and marriage matters that emerged in the early sixties was unsurprising and confirmed that something significant was happening also in the domestic sphere.

For many Catholics, this meant new preoccupations.

The anxiety for the “increasingly popular” idea that “absence of love could allow ending a marriage” was palpable in Catholic circles and in the Christian Democratic party. In 1963, the Christian democrat MP Franca Falcucci urged Italian Catholics to react against

<sup>14</sup> On the debate of the early sixties, see Siré, *Il divorzio in Italia*, 21-6.

<sup>15</sup> The 1961 encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) and the 1963 *Pacem in terris* (Peace of Hearth) marked a crucial discontinuity with the teaching of Pius XII both in terms of social doctrine and in terms of the international role of the Church. See Gorresio, *La nuova missione*.

such ideas, guilty of lowering the status of marriage as an institution, of making birth control acceptable, and of reducing the responsibility of parents towards their children. Freedom, true love and sacrifice, insisted Falcucci, belonged together and could not be separated without undermining the very fibre of Italian society, whose future depended on the preservation of “the values embodied by the family”.<sup>16</sup>

Against the unflinching opposition to divorce maintained by the DC, a growing number of experts argued in favour of a reform of the law in accordance to changing sensitivities. In *Il Divorzio in Italia*, Mario Berutti, jurist and president of the National Association of Magistrates, presented the impossibility of ending a marriage as an “anachronistic” and anti-historical position, whose only result was to force decent citizens to break the law or to live outside its protection. If Sansone had emphasised the dramatic situation of marriage outlaws, Berutti highlighted the many legal inconsistencies and paradoxical results produced by a legislative setup unable to free itself from the influence of the Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup>

Even the communist magazine *Noi Donne* finally picked up the issue in the summer of 1965 with a series of articles based on interviews with ordinary women. Contrary to Togliatti’s stance in the aftermath of the Second World War, namely that the issue of divorce was not felt by the majority of the Italian people, *Noi Donne* became convinced that the question could no longer be ignored.

The issue eventually found a political voice thanks to the socialist MP Loris Fortuna, author of a law proposal presented to Parliament on 1 October 1965 and aimed to regulate the *Casi di scioglimento del matrimonio*. Fortuna’s proposal followed in the footsteps of Sansone’s, although relaxing the grounds upon which a divorce could be sought. Still, specific grounds were once again spelled out, including a prison sentence, mental illness, abandonment of the conjugal home for more than 5 years, a de facto separation for the same period of time, or the obtainment of divorce outside of Italy by one of the spouses.<sup>18</sup> Fortuna was able to mobilise broad sectors of civil society, and gained the unflinching support of the small but defiant Radical Party. The main secular parties, however, remained unmoved.<sup>19</sup> Since the Radical party had failed to bring any MPs to Parliament in

<sup>16</sup> “The family and the Transformations of Italian Society”, symposium organised by the Women’s Movement (*Movimento Femminile*) of the Christian Democrat Party, Rome, 1963.

<sup>17</sup> Berutti, *Il divorzio in Italia*.

<sup>18</sup> “Il progetto di legge sul divorzio illustrato dal socialista Fortuna”. *Corriere della sera*, 18 April 1966.

<sup>19</sup> On PCI’s position, Tiso, *I comunisti e la questione femminile*, 97-108.

the 1963 elections, the political battle for divorce was fought much more outside Parliament than inside it.<sup>20</sup>

The Catholic Church responded to the growing campaign for divorce with a weapon that would become customary in later years, which is through the official intervention of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI, Conferenza Episcopale Italiana), which through its documents reminded the faithful that marriage indissolubility represented a non-negotiable truth, and called all Catholics to mobilise in the defence of family and marriage.

In the long and tortuous *iter* of the law through Parliament, both the constitutional soundness and the social consequences of divorce were explored and discussed at length. In the broad discussion of whether the proposed law went against the Constitution, few stones were left unturned by Catholic MPs. As well as referring to the constraints brought to the Italian legislative freedom by art. 7, Christian Democrats argued that the very definition of family as “a natural society founded upon marriage” was rooted in Catholic doctrine and precluded the possibility of ending a marriage through divorce. Although ultimately unsuccessful, such arguments showed the extent to which Catholic deputies saw the Italian basic law as an instrument through which to protect the values and interests of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of divorce brought once again to the fore the question of the relationship between the Italian state and the Church, a question that had remained more or less dormant since the works of the Constituent Assembly. The numerous public interventions made by the Italian Episcopal Conference proved the bishops’ determination to retain their full influence on the Italian political process. The arguments used by Christian Democratic MPs showed beyond doubt their resolve to assert the position of the Church in the law of the State. At the core of their position was the idea that the principle of “marriage indissolubility” pertained not only “to Catholic morality”, but represented an “achievement of human reason, of *humanitas* [...] a patrimony of universal conscience, and of each human conscience able to think of itself and of those dearest” as well as “of the future of the fatherland, which is not an empty word”.<sup>22</sup>

Not all Catholics agreed. In a country traversed by fast and far-reaching social and cultural transformations, and with the Catholic

<sup>20</sup> The Radical Party managed to act as a vocal advocate of divorce within society, also through the Italian Divorce League (Lega Italiana per il Divorzio-LID), founded by the party in early April 1966.

<sup>21</sup> See among others Azzariti, “Brecce al muro della indissolubilità del matrimonio”, 852-6 and Spadolini, *La questione del Concordato*, 402-22.

<sup>22</sup> Mattarella, *Atti Parlamentari*, on the 10th of October, 1969, 10883. On the political and cultural debates that developed around the Fortuna’s proposal, Sciré, *Il divorzio in Italia*, 27-37.

world engaged in the discussion of what should be its mission and role, thanks to the stimuli coming from the Second Vatican Council, the Church no longer appeared as a centralised source of unquestionable authority. Critical voices on the issue of divorce included both liberal Catholics, such as the jurist Arturo Carlo Jemolo, and critical theologians such as Adriana Zarri.

For critical Catholics, an intransigent position on divorce did not protect the Church, but risked undermining it, by putting into question the fundamental principle of freedom of conscience. In opposing divorce, argued Zarri, the Catholic Church showed little respect for those religious minorities present in Italy for whom divorce was allowed and risked encouraging a new wave of anti-clericalism, which would fatally wound the cohesion of Italian society. Zarri reminded Catholics that they had no reason to look at divorce as a threat, since their marriages were regulated by Canon law and their decisions should be dictated by a sincere religiosity and not by authoritarian prescriptions. Far from representing the needs of the faithful, keeping an intransigent position on divorce alienated those ordinary Catholics who sought the comfort of an open and compassionate Church and not the wrath of an uncompromising institution.<sup>23</sup>

### 5.5 Annulments in Name, Divorces in Intent

As the debate on divorce grew in intensity, one of the new stars of Italian cinema, Vittorio Gassman, ended his marriage to the actress Nora Ricci, thanks to an annulment. The *Sacra Rota* [i.e. ecclesiastical tribunal] decreed the marriage null on the basis that, at the time of marrying Ricci, Gassman had not sincerely believed in the dogma of marriage's indissolubility. The event, duly reported by popular and high-brow press, seemed to many a typical manifestation of the hypocrisy that reigned in Italy and in the Church, a perfect example of an 'annulment in name, divorce in intent'. While ordinary people were condemned to either stay in unhappy marriages or become 'outlaws', those with the means necessary to afford expensive annulment processes could be reasonably certain to see the end of their marriages.

Ten years before the Gassman-Ricci annulment took place, the Catholic jurist Giovanni Perico had opposed Sansone's small divorce proposal on the basis that the only grounds for ending a marriage should be those "exceptional" circumstances "defined and subscribed by God, who, having created the law of marriage indissolubility, had also the

<sup>23</sup> Zarri, "Perché i cattolici", 57-88 and *Il divorzio fonte di divisione*.

power to suspend such law in some specific cases”.<sup>24</sup> What made divorce unacceptable was the fact that, unlike annulments, the grounds on which it rested derived not from the will of God, but from “purely human” considerations, mostly likely “of a sentimental nature”.

From a secular perspective, however, annulments could easily appear as a way out of marriage, at least for those rich enough to go through the costly process set up by the ecclesiastical tribunal. A retrospective declaration regarding their beliefs or State of mind at the moment of pronouncing their vows, it appeared, was enough to end a marriage. The same outcome was precluded to people of less means and, paradoxically, also to those who, not believing in any Catholic dogmas, had celebrated a civil marriage. The very version of marriage that should depend solely on the will of the contracting parties was the one most difficult to break.

The issue of annulment, and the criticism it attracted, underlined the gulf that was opening between Catholic hierarchies and a growing number of Catholics increasingly disenchanted with the prescriptions of the Church. The issue also put into sharp focus the fact that, contrary to much propaganda, the question of indissolubility was far from straightforward in terms of doctrine. Historically, the hardening of the Church’s position on the issue of marriage indissolubility went hand in hand with its growing claim to jurisdiction over matrimonial matters, the definition of the marriage prerogatives, and the proclamation of the sacramentality of marriage. The introduction of marriage indissolubility in Canon Law, at the Council of Trent of 1560, was largely a response to attacks by protestant reformers.

The possibility of ending a marriage and of remarrying, however, had been contemplated since Christians started to busy themselves with family matters. The so-called “Pauline privilege” (described in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians) allowed remarriage to take place for Christians who had been deserted by their non-Christian spouses, and marriages to be dissolved “in favour of the faith” – which is to say if one of the spouses wished to enter into a religious order, as well as when they had not been “sexually consummated.”

Despite the Church’s insistence that a crucial difference existed between divorce and annulment, by the mid-sixties the distinction appeared less than obvious and more and more difficult to justify, particularly from a secular perspective.

To make things even more confusing, the State had its own version of annulment, whose administration was not necessarily less rigid than in Canon law.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Perico, *Il Divorzio*, 7-8; see also Perico, “Il matrimonio, comunità d’amore fecondo e responsabile”. *Aggiornamenti sociali*, 1 gennaio, 1967, 1-16.

<sup>25</sup> For a critical appraisal, Berutti, *Il matrimonio concordatario*.

The Italian civil code contemplated six grounds that rendered marriage void. Proving that such grounds existed, however, was an almost impossible task; so much so, that only 59 civil marriages were annulled in 1954, 72 in 1962. As the anti-divorce lawyer Oreste Gregorio noticed, “Canon law was much more generous” than the Civil code, both in the individuation of the grounds upon which a marriage could be declared void and in the way in which the actual existence of such grounds was ascertained. Gregorio recognised that the lenient approach followed by the Church almost inevitably favoured those who did not hesitate to lie in order to end their marriages. Strangely, however, this did not seem particularly problematic to the author, who urged the State to follow the model of the Church, relaxing the grounds upon which marriages could be annulled as an alternative to the introduction of divorce.<sup>26</sup>

The situation was similar in Poland.

Under Polish law, impediments included the existence of a previous marriage, direct kinship between the spouses, treacherous behaviour against the existing spouse of the person once wished to marry, as well as sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and mental illness.<sup>27</sup> A married couple able to prove that any of these conditions had existed when the marriage had been contracted could have it annulled. Since 1945 the publication of banns in the Church had been substituted in Poland by the submission of documents certifying that no impediment existed to the marriage. Issues such as impotence and inability or wilful refusal to consummate, on the other hand, did not provide grounds for annulment. They could, however, be considered as factors contributing to or determining the disruption of marital life, and as such constituting grounds for divorce. The law also established that either spouse could initiate proceeding to have the marriage declared void, but only within 3 years from its celebration, and before a pregnancy occurred.<sup>28</sup>

The grounds envisaged by the Polish state in 1945 were therefore markedly stricter than those identified by the Church, which includ-

<sup>26</sup> Gregorio, “Come si possono risolvere i casi più dolorosi”, 158-9.

<sup>27</sup> Art. 9 § 1, Code of Family Law, 1950. A similar provision could be found in the Russian Code of 1926, which prohibited the registration of marriage if one of the parties was found to be of unsound mind, or suffering from mental deficiency; both in Poland and in Russia, courts had the power to lift the ban. Similarly to Polish law, Italian law also considered insanity as an impediment to marriage rather than as a factor affecting capacity, as for instance in English law.

<sup>28</sup> Szer, *Prawo Rodzinne*; Lasok, “A Legal Concept”, 59. The grounds for impediment were reduced in successive systematisations to insanity, an already existing valid marriage, blood relationship, affinity and adoption. According to Szer, the simplification was introduced to “preserve marriage as long as it did not contradict the substance and purpose of marriage in the Polish People’s Republic” (Szer, quoted in Lasok, “A Legal Concept”, 59).

ed among its impediments not only consanguinity and affinity, prior to matrimonial engagements, and existing marriage, but also lack of consent, whether parties had taken religious vows, impotence, and the lack of belief in marriage as defined by the Church – even when declared *post factum*.

Commenting the paradoxical situation created in Italy by the Concordat, which rendered marriages governed by Canon Law easier to end than those governed solely by the law of the State, the Catholic jurist Giovanni Brunelli observed that such a paradox was difficult to solve, since the State had also an interest in keeping families together, although for different reasons than the Church. Brunelli suggested that a way out of the conundrum would be the adoption by the State of the same approach that the Church used as basis for annulments; this would make sense, added Brunelli, given the Catholic Church's greater experience in and ability to deal with marriages, including how to end them. The Polish situation, in which divorce had been introduced by decree and presented as a crucial step in the democratisation of family life, offered some support to Brunelli's warning that in fact much was shared in the way in which State and Church looked at marriage and its role.<sup>29</sup>

## 5.6 Living Apart, But Forever Linked

Across the Catholic world, separations were heralded by the Church as the best way to regulate relations between spouses who were no longer able to live together. The institution of separation, regulated by Canon Law, did not destroy the marriage bond and as such did not allow remarriage. It allowed, however, spouses to live separately, and freed them from the obligation of having sexual intercourse.

While the institute of legal separation did not exist in Poland, the Italian Civil Code allowed married couples to officialise their separation, either as a consensual act or on the basis of the request of one of the spouses. In both countries, however, the vast majority of separations remained informal. Official data for Poland indicated that until the late sixties, between 4,000 and 5,000 separations were granted by courts each year, a number largely overshadowed by informal separations, whose numbers, albeit difficult to estimate with absolute accuracy, were estimated in tens of thousands.

Many of those who opposed divorce upheld separation as a viable and less damaging alternative. While divorce degraded the status of marriage and encouraged both “irresponsible marriages” and their equally “irresponsible breaking down”, therefore resulting in

<sup>29</sup> Brunelli, *Divorzio e nullità*.

the unstoppable dissolution of family life, separation reminded people of their responsibilities and did not risk rewarding irresponsible behaviour nor condoning the acts of the culprits of matrimonial breakdown.<sup>30</sup> Unlike divorce, separation would encourage a careful approach to marriage, discourage hasty decisions, and sustain the parents' interest and involvement in the life of their children.<sup>31</sup>

Only the most committed Catholics could grasp the supposedly positive sides of a situation that condemned people to a life of abstinence, kept them legally connected to an estranged spouse, and effectively prevented any possibility of living a full family life. To a growing number of people, legal separation appeared as a cruel and messy way to manage the end of a marriage.<sup>32</sup>

The limitations and punitive aspects of separation, however, was exactly what appealed to the opponents of divorce. According to Pittau, while divorce campaigners went out of their way to emphasise the damages produced by the impossibility of ending a marriage, hardly anybody spoke about the danger of remarriage. This, however, was the very essence of divorce. Allowing people to remarry encouraged irresponsible behaviour and made the State liable for the cost of such failures.<sup>33</sup> Second marriages seemed to Pittau particularly damaging for the children of first marriages, who would be exposed to the "grave scandal" of seeing one or both parents "with other people and having other children". This, according to Pittau, could only "produce grave damage in a delicate period of physical and psychological development".<sup>34</sup> For all these reasons, separations seemed to Pittau far preferable to divorce.

The Christian Democrat MP Bernardo Mattarella followed a similar logic in the long and articulated speech against divorce delivered to the Lower Chamber on 10 October 1969. By its very essence, argued Mattarella, divorce "undermine[d] the duty and the need to endure, to be tolerant, to comprehend and to sacrifice, on which any society, and principally the conjugal one, must rest". On the contrary, divorce encouraged selfish and hasty decisions and transformed momentary difficulties in unstoppable processes. The legislator had the duty to predict and prevent the consequences of marriage disso-

**30** For Brunelli, for instance, a clear advantage of separation was that it prevented the guilty parties from remarriage, and therefore from inflicting further humiliation on the abandoned spouse, Brunelli, *Divorzio e nullità*.

**31** Pittau, *Il divorzio*.

**32** Canon Law admitted separations, ratified by the Ecclesiastical tribunal in very specific cases, such as the decision of one of the two to enter a religious order, or in the case of non-consensual separations requested of the non-guilty party, in case of serious fault of the partner, spiritual or physical danger, or adultery.

**33** Pittau, *Il divorzio*, 8.

**34** Pittau *Il divorzio*, 24-7.



lution, not on the basis of religious convictions, but because of their human and civil implications.<sup>35</sup>

Both critics and supporters of separation in Italy agreed on one point: they both saw the alternative between separation and divorce as a social matter and the result of political decisions, taken from the top.

However, as the Polish case highlights, separations could also be a decision taken from below, by couples whose marriage had broken down but who remained unwilling to divorce.

Throughout the fifties and sixties, Poles continued to divorce at a much lower rates than in any other socialist country, with only 5.0 per 10,000 population in 1960 (compared for instance with 20.1 per thousand in Rumania). This did not necessarily mean that marriages were happier or more durable than elsewhere, but rather than many marriage breakdowns continued to be dealt with through separation, even when one of the spouses had children and a family life with a new partner.<sup>36</sup>

For the Church, divorce inevitably produced bigamy, given that the sacramental tie of marriage could not be broken. For the pro-divorce campaigners, by contrast, bigamy was the dramatic outcome of the impossibility to put a legal end to marriages that had broken down.

As we have seen, however, for many Poles 'bigamy' was a choice. Why did many Poles refrain from divorcing, although being able to do so? Did they do so on religious grounds? Out of social stigma? Or simply because they found separation a good enough solution? Ordinary people's stories reveal that individual behaviour is more complicated than legislators may predict, and that divorce is not the only way to manage the end of a marriage.

The life stories left behind by Polish women confirmed a widespread reluctance to recur to divorce, even in case of irrecoverable marriage breakdown. Stories of early marriages ended in separations, such as the one narrated by Renata Kowalska, were common. When her marriage broke down, Kowalska resumed her work as electrician and set up a new household with her only child. Despite the complete disappearance of the father-husband from the picture, however, divorcing did not enter into her plans. It was eventual her husband who, after three years of separation, petitioned for divorce, in order to remarry. His decision had positive implications for Kowalska, who was finally able to receive some alimony. The decision, however, had not been hers. In fact, the dominant note in her memory of being a divorcee was a "great sense of loneliness, of missing the presence of a 'dad' in the home", an anxiety that was finally resolved only when Kowalska married again. No longer young and naive, she choose someone who

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**35** Mattarella, *Atti Parlamentari*, 10 ottobre 1969, 10886.

**36** Rossett, "Dezintegracja małżeństw a rozwody", 71-94.

was “not only a good man, but a dear friend, who cares for my child”.<sup>37</sup>

Long separations appeared as a common occurrence in many biographical narratives, usually brought to an end only by the decision of either spouse to marry again. Much less often, it appeared, people decided to divorce just to sever unwanted legal ties. The ‘shocking effect’ that divorce often had on local communities and within the larger family acted as a powerful deterrent particularly for women. In this sense, choosing to divorce could be seen by some women as a measure of their own independence, not only in economic terms, but also from a social and psychological point of view. Kristina Malinowska remained married to her first husband for many years, although having no contact with him. When her second marriage failed because of the alcoholism of her husband, however, she had no doubt that a swift and amicable divorce was the right thing to do. Much older and confident, she managed to end her marriage in an atmosphere of “mutual respect”, which allowed her and her husband to remain in a friendly and affectionate relationship afterwards. It was her new confidence that allowed her to ignore the social stigma attached to a “two-time divorcee”, determinate to raise her two children alone, in an “unconventional but supportive environment”.<sup>38</sup>

## 5.7 Struggling for Change, in Parliament and on the Street

Throughout the debates that had accompanied the Fortuna’s law proposal throughout its long parliamentary journey, Christian Democratic MPs had missed no opportunity to stress that the real question was not how to allow marriages to end, but to understand what determined their undoing and how this could be avoided. Catholic MPs found one of the main culprit in the “dehumanising aspects of modernity” and in the dangerous and widespread idea that individual interests and desires should always prevail. Occasionally, they also acknowledged that the State had so far done little to support family life in its changing needs.<sup>39</sup> While refusing the accusation of upholding a clerical position, moreover, Christian Democrats had nonetheless insisted that a divorce law would conflict with the principles established in the Concordate, and risked undermining the “religious peace of the Italian people”.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Kowalska, “Szczęście we własnym domu”, 155-7.

<sup>38</sup> Malinowska, *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance the speech by Gerardo Bianchi, *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei deputati, V Legislatura, Discussioni, Seduta del 10 Ottobre, 1969, 10860-2.

<sup>40</sup> Matterella, *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei deputati, V Legislatura, Discussioni, Seduta del 10 Ottobre, 1969, 10876. See also Greggi, *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei depu-

On 28 November, the Fortuna law proposal was finally approved by the Lower chamber, thanks to a majority of 42 votes. The parliamentary debate over divorce took place in a very special period of Italian post-war history. While the Deputies debated whether Italians should be allowed to divorce, students and workers were occupying universities and factories in an uneasy alliance that put into question the nature of post-war democracy and sought a revolutionary way to transform it. The protests and occupations of the autumn of 1969 showed the gulf that had opened between the model of social and economic development pursued by the post-war ruling classes, and the expectations of an ever growing number of people.

While Catholic MPs were busy arguing for the immutable character of the Italian family, “which in popular sentiment has always been linked to the concept of marriage indissolubility”, women and young people were taking to the streets in search of voice and representation. They mobilised not only against existing political structures, but also against marriage and family hierarchies and outdated notions of authority within and outside the home.<sup>41</sup>

Many Catholics also took part in this popular mobilisation. In the footsteps of the Vatican II, so-called ‘dissenting Catholics’ sought a new approach to liturgy, faith and society, able to bring down the barriers that still separated the Church from the lay people. Their call for a Church animated by a spirit of compassion and informed by a true sense of community, rather than by rigid adherence to dogmatic truths, also extended to marriage and family life.<sup>42</sup> Against the intransigent position of the Catholic hierarchies upheld in the political sphere by the DC, a growing number of priests and lay Catholics openly manifested their support for divorce as a measure necessary to improve family life.

On 2 December 1969, Fortuna’s proposal finally reached the Senate. Ten days later a bomb went off in Milan killing 17 people, and wounding many more. This was the first act of what would become known as the “years of lead”, a long period of political terror that would stretch into the eighties.<sup>43</sup>

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tati, V Legislatura, Discussioni, Seduta del Antimeridiana del 15 ottobre 1969, 11022. In a long speech to the Lower Chamber, Greggi argued for the opportunity to proceed not by approving the law, but by calling a referendum, and proposed that no decision on divorce could be made in the absence of a clearer analysis of the condition of family life in Italy. For this reason, he proposed the creation of a Commissione Parlamentare d’Inchiesta sulla famiglia.

<sup>41</sup> The existence of a natural link between the Italian family and indissoluble marriage was postulated by Ferdinando Storchi, in the discussion of Lower Chamber on 14 October 1969. See *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei deputati, V Legislatura, Discussioni, Seduta del 14 ottobre, 1969, 10947.

<sup>42</sup> On Catholic dissent, see Giovagnoli, *1968: fra utopia e Vangelo*; Burgalassi, “Dis-senso cattolico”; Guasco, *Chiesa e cattolicesimo in Italia*; Martina, *La Chiesa in Italia*; Saresella, *Dal Concilio alla contestazione*.

There was a deep contradiction between the radical contestation of the country's political and social order that was taking place in the street, and the discussions taking place within Italian main political institutions.

Civil unrest and political stalemate showed the growing fragility of the settlement that had emerged after the Second World War. The struggle over divorce that now engulfed the Senate, and the effort of the Italian Church to assert its authority in the debate, moreover, showed the inability of the political class to understand the extent to which the country had changed. More than any other political crisis since the 1948 elections, divorce mobilised parties, associations and the Church in what was labelled as a 'battle for civilisation'. Never before, however, had the battle appeared to many so anachronistic.

On 1 December 1970, the law was finally approved by an exhausted Senate, after six days of uninterrupted sessions. The Law 898/70 envisaged the possibility of ending a marriage once a judge had verified the irrecoverable breakdown of the "spiritual and material communion of the spouses". The conditions that allowed a single spouse to seek a divorce included well-known grounds, such as a long prison sentence, the attempted murder of the spouse or of one's child, a conviction of any length for specific crimes (such as those connected to prostitution), and the non-consummation of the marriage. A legal separation of at least 5 years (7 in the case in which the 'fault' of divorce rested exclusively with the petitioner) was required for the marriage to be dissolved.

On the same day in which the law was passed, Gabrio Lombardi, professor of Roman Law at the University of Milan, and a long-standing supporter of marriage indissolubility, founded the National Committee for a Referendum on divorce.<sup>43</sup> By June of the same year he had collected nearly three times the number of signatures required for a referendum to be called. Far from ending, the confrontation over divorce was entering a new and very tricky phase.

In the complex social and political situation of the early seventies, the referendum that the DC had imposed on its political allies quickly became a new source of tension and preoccupation, even for the Catholic party. The DC governed in coalition with secular and even left wing parties, in a complicated alliance that its position on divorce threatened to undermine. The fact that the only party that shared the DC's anti-divorce stance was the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) offered little consolation. For the DC, which continued to profess its antifascist values and aimed to represent a variety of inter-class interests, being associated with an extreme-right force was a risky business.

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<sup>43</sup> Lombardi, "Sul divorzio", 295 ff.; Lener, *Idee chiare sul divorzio*.

The idea of having to campaign over divorce caused no less concern for the PCI. Faced by mounting social tensions, the party was engaged in pursuing a dialogue with the Catholic world, which made the prospect of an ideological confrontation over divorce very unwelcome. In strong continuity with the prudent attitude that had characterised its actions in relation to marriage since the early post-war years, the PCI tried once again to find a compromise with its Christian democratic counterpart. In December 1972, a new law proposal signed by a Communist senator, Tullia Carrettoni, sought to further restrict the grounds of divorce by eliminating non-consummation and extending the separation period to 7 years for those who requested a divorce a second time. The proposal failed to attract support in Parliament. It took another five years of brinkmanship for the referendum to finally be called in the spring of 1974.

The ensuing campaign showed that few of the political concerns that had dominated the approach of both the Catholics and Communist parties mattered much to Italians.

Most striking was the position taken by Catholic groups and associations, which openly challenged the position of the Church by declaring themselves either neutral on the issue, or openly in favour of divorce. The public declaration of the Association of Christian Italian Workers (ACLI) and the formation of a Catholic pro-divorce committee showed the gap between the Church's hierarchies and growing sectors of the faithful. As Mark Seymour noticed, the years between the passing of the law and the referendum "gave the law time to prove itself and to take its place in the mental landscape of Italians".<sup>44</sup> More crucially, the moderate number of those who sought a divorce proved that the new provision was hardly a menace to the cohesion of Italian families.

On 12 and 13 May 1974, Italians finally had their say on the matter. Fifty-four percent of Italians voted in favour of divorce. In 1970, Loris Fortuna had feared the DC's call for a referendum. He saw it as an instrument easily manipulated by Catholic circles and feared that the majority of Catholic voters would constrain the rights of a minority seeking divorce. In actuality, the referendum gave divorce the popular legitimacy that its tortuous parliamentary route had failed to convey.

## 5.8 Conclusions

Examining divorce offers a good insight into changing notions of what is considered acceptable or unacceptable within marriage. As Roderick Phillips observed in relation to the nineteenth century, divorce

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<sup>44</sup> Seymour, *Debating Divorce*, 216.

is more about reinforcing conventional norms of family life than it is about changing them.

Considering adultery as grounds for divorce reinforced the norm of sexual fidelity; detailing the conditions under which a divorce could be sought was a way of restating social values, rather than of giving individuals the possibility of freely deciding about their status. In post-war Poland, the declaration of German allegiance made by a spouse during the war was considered grounds for divorce not in virtue of what it meant for the marital relationship, but because it constituted a betrayal of the fatherland. In Italy, prison sentences constituted ground for divorce, but not if committed for political crimes; again, the difference concerned not the impact that imprisonment had on marriage or on the spouse who sought the divorce, but the relationship between the imprisoned, the national community and the State.

Even when the generic formula of 'irremediable breakdown' substituted the complex specification of the grounds upon which a divorce could be sought, the possibility of ending a marriage remained a concession from above, dependent on the will of courts and judges. The imposition of long periods of separation, typified by Italian legislation, underlined the notion that marriage remained a public affair, down to its final stage.

Both in Italy and in Poland, divorce went to the core of the relationship between citizens, the State and religious authorities. Although having apparently followed very different trajectories, the way in which the end of marriage was discussed and regulated in the two countries confirmed the idea that 'public' investment in the family was stronger than any sense of individual entitlement. This was not only the consequence of the strong influence of the Church, which in both countries opposed any notion of divorce as antithetical to Catholic values. States also upheld an idea of the family as a common good, to be given priority over individuals' rights and expectations.



## Conclusions

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Throughout this book, I have explored the cultural, social and political connections that marked approaches to family life in postwar Italy and Poland. I have argued that family life and its regulation can provide us with a powerful means of looking at postwar Europe outside the Cold War binary logic, which for a long time has seen East and West as two opposed and incomparable realities.

Three elements have been particularly relevant to the comparison pursued in the book.

The first is the influence exercised by Catholicism and the Catholic Church. Both in Italy and in Poland, popular devotion and the ubiquity of Marian worship supported an enduring model of maternity as devoutness and sacrifice, and a representation of womanhood concentrated on the domestic, which informed broader understanding of family life.<sup>1</sup>

To this should be added the influence exercised by the Catholic Church at an institutional and political level. Both in Italy and in Poland, the Concordats signed in the twenties had assigned to the Church a privileged position, particularly with regard to education, marriage, and family life, as well as in terms of property and taxation. The question of how to deal with the privileges recognised to the Church by discredited regimes emerged in both countries in the aftermath of the Second World War. Different political dynamics and power relation ensured different outcomes.

The second element concerns the impact of the war on the two countries' institutional arrangements. Both in Italy and Poland, the end of the war coincided with the creation of new political institu-

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**1** Blom, *Gendered Nations*; Banti, *Sublime Madre Nostra*.



tions, which, albeit different in nature and purpose, shared the aim of establishing a radical break with the past. Both in Italy and in Poland, the new republics born in the aftermath of the war anchored their political identity to the vague but politically powerful notion of anti-fascism, and promised a reshaping of the relationship between State and citizens, which had far-reaching implication for family life and its regulation.

The third and final element regards the impact of the Cold War on two deeply polarised societies. For a long time, studies of eastern Europe have looked at State socialism as a political and ideological monolith, with little space given to the study of social and cultural differences. Far more than in the case of western Europe, ideology, politics, and class dominated the analysis of the Eastern side of the continent. The analysis of Poland and Italy, however, shows that comparable issues emerged in two countries both deeply affected by the Cold War, and yet characterised by elements that deviated from both American and Soviet blueprint. While it remains essential to consider the consequence of political, social and economic transformations taking place under direct Soviet control, Poland's historical traditions and cultural values put significant limitations to the transformation of the country. Few of those 'historical traditions' had the same impact as the role of the Catholic Church.

In Italy, by contrast, the strong control of Italian politics exercised by the United States could do little to reduce the popular appeal and significant social role of the Italian Communist Party. If postwar reconstruction in Italy was under the banner of 'americanisation', the Communist tradition that has put its first roots in the Resistance proved a tenacious and rich source of political and cultural identification.

The enduring influence exercised in the two countries by the Catholic and Communist cultures respectively and the dynamics of conflict and accommodation that this forced coexistence originated in the aftermath of the war has represented one of the main axes of the book.

It was a confrontation that took place in both countries in the face of the far-reaching social changes produced by industrial transformations. Issues such as how to reform agriculture and land tenure, how to govern internal migrations, urbanisation and a rapidly expanding industrial workforce tested both Polish and Italian political parties, as well as the Church. In both countries, family and gender relations were central to those processes and to the effort to govern them.

Throughout the book, I have looked at family life as a major terrain of competition between the authority of the State and the authority of the Church.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the deep influence exercised by Catholicism and the actual political and social role played by catholic institutions in the aftermath of the Second World War limited the transformation of family life. In both countries, the battle engaged by the

Church with the secular State (and in the Polish case with the atheist State) had significant reverberations both in the domestic and in the public sphere. Historically a major provider of social services, with a near-monopoly over family matters, the Church fought hard to retain this role in the altered circumstances of the postwar years. As new states sought to redefine their duties and prerogatives in family life, the competition with the church became all the more crucial.

In Poland, the new Communist state presented itself as the enlightened protector of mothers and children, as part of broader project of national and political transformation. In the modernising rhetoric of the Polish Socialist state, promoting family welfare should go hand in hand with the overcoming of the traditional family structures and family cultures of the past. Particular emphasis was put by the Socialist state on the promise of liberating women and children from the oppression of the backward patriarchal order, also through their emancipation from religious institutions. Far from seeing in the State an ally and a provider of welfare, however, many Poles saw the family as the last line of protection against its new pervasive powers. Reacting against the expanding role and (arbitrary) powers of the State, the Church found in the family a place of resistance.

In Italy too, the passage to democracy required some redefinition of the position occupied by the family, in this case first of all in relation to the inheritance left by the fascist regime. The centrality that the reference to the family had in the fascist politics and propaganda rendered the family a particularly tricky topic for the Republican state.

Already in the Constitutional assembly, the issue of how to regulate marriage showed how politically sensitive and divisive the regulation of family life could be. In contrast to Poland, however, the Italian state did not embrace a project of radical transformation, but rather a moderate and cautious intervention, in significant continuity with the past. Most crucially, the State refrained from challenging the authority and claims made by the Church.

The issue of what kind of power could be exercised by the Catholic Church is one of the central themes of this book, and the analysis put forward is in many ways an exploration of the mechanisms through which the Catholic Church managed to retain a strong authority over family matters in the complex context of the postwar years.

Most analyses of the Catholic Church in postwar Poland have concentrated on its role as centre of political opposition. The depiction of the Church as an institution deprived of formal power and yet able to concentrate legitimate authority is a powerful and appealing narrative. However, it fails to capture much of the complexities, tensions and contradictions that characterised the relationship between State and Church in Communist Poland. There is little doubt that communist authorities tried to subordinate the Church to the State, limiting the extent of its activities and trying to control them; it is also fairly clear

that while succeeding in limiting the autonomy and formal presence of the Church, the State largely failed to undermine the Church's legitimacy and its social relevance.

Both State and Church won and lost battles over the years; both of them fought to gain or to retain an hegemonic presence in the country; both of them recurred to agreements and mediations, when political circumstances required it. The combination of conflict and negotiation shaped the relationship between the two and contributed most to transform the nature of both actors over time.

If conflict and negotiation characterised the relationship between State and Church in Poland, accommodation prevailed in postwar Italy. The political predominance exercised by the Christian Democratic party, organically linked to the Catholic Church, secured the protection of Catholic interests and the upholding of the Church's positions. Even this process was of course not without mediation, starting with the cautious acceptance by the Church of the new democratic institutional setting.

Mediation between conflicting cultures and ideologies did not take place only at a political and institutional level. The daily life of both Poles and Italians was marked by the ideological confrontation of the Cold War, including in the context of family relations.

Ordinary people's accounts testify to the importance of reaching forms of accommodation at family level, between different faiths and alternative political values. In both countries, mediations were necessary in daily life as in national politics. If many Poles found in Catholicism an avenue for political resistance, for many others, Catholicism and communism coexisted in daily practices and family life. While many Italian Catholics saw the presence of a communist in the family as an unacceptable contravention of political and religious values, in many other cases, the two faiths coexisted without insurmountable tensions.

The family remained at the core of both Italian and Polish postwar societies. In Poland, far-reaching processes of economic, legal and social transformation failed to undermine the investment in the family as an institution and in marriage as its foundation. Although economic change affected in Poland far more than in Italy both gender roles and intragenerational relations, family life remained remarkably stable. Low divorce rates and negligible levels of births outside marriage showed the enduring influence of an understanding of family life that found in catholic teaching its first source of authority. The Communist' project of legal, economic and social modernisation found a significant obstacle in the enduring social influence of the Catholic Church.

Although deprived of political representation and confronted by a hostile political environment, the Polish Church continued to make its voice heard on matters of family life and education. What Poles did in their homes, even more than in the street, testified to the Church's enduring influence. In Italy, the social influence of the Church found

perfect correspondence in a political system ready to adopt its principles as the pillars of the State.

In both countries, Catholics had to confront questions of strategy as well as of vision in the reshaping of their relationship with the State. In both cases, they successfully used their influence on family life as a means of asserting a broader social presence and public authority.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, gender relations represented one of the main fields in which alternative visions of family life, economy, and social relations clashed and found accommodation.

Without denying or ignoring local specificities, the Italian-Polish comparison encourages to rethink gender dynamics in relation to both Communism and the Catholic Church. Neither the impact of communism nor that of Catholicism, in fact, can be fully understood within the narrow borders of the nation-state. Although both Communist parties and Catholic hierarchies adopted national strategies and pursued agendas specific to the countries in which they operated, both ultimately answered to a much broader set of interests and engaged with each other in a battle that could be correctly defined as universal at least in ambition.

Both in Italy and in Poland, the pervasiveness of popular Catholicism and the Marian cult shaped an understanding of the family as an institution characterised by rigidly defined gender roles, maternal devotion and womanly sacrifice. It was a deeply set model, which both Italian and Polish communists had to confront. In postwar Poland, the radical project of economic and social transformation envisioned by Stalinist politics informed family life and gender roles. The transfer of authority over marriage from the Church to the State, the tumultuous process of industrialisation and the recruiting of women to jobs considered typically male, together with the rapid urbanisation of the country, transformed families and the social structures in which they lived. Yet, as Małgorzata Fidelis has observed, no social structure can be changed by “sheer coerce and repression”. Even in Stalinist Poland an inevitable negotiation had to take place between State and society, between “a new political order and existing national and local conditions”.<sup>2</sup> Gender relations and family roles were at the core of the complicated transactions and tentative accommodations that accompanied the restructuring of Polish economy and society. No uniform social response to the transformations engineered from above can be identified. Social and economic changes both opened and closed individual chances, and as such they were both embraced and resisted. For women especially, postwar transformations created novel opportunities as well as new burdens. Their new role as industrial workers and their greater access to education opened up possibilities for social

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**2** Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialisation*, 5.

mobility that had been precluded to earlier generations. At the same time, established gender norms and the insufficient help provided by the State to working women meant that the unpaid work on which even the new socialist society rested continued to weigh almost exclusively on women's shoulders. Much more and earlier than in the West, the combination of productive and reproductive duties structured the experience of postwar Polish women. The notion of the 'double burden', often presented as a specific trait of the process of social engineering undertaken in Eastern Europe, captures that experience.

Here too, however, an East-West comparison encourages us to question some assumed notions of uniqueness and socialist specificity. While sociologists and historians of Eastern Europe have often seen the 'double burden' as a specific feature of state socialism, in the late seventies the Italian feminist sociologist Laura Balbo described the *doppia presenza* (double presence) as a characteristic feature of capitalism, and more specifically of a capitalist transformation in which the (late) inclusion of women in the labour market had not been accompanied by a transformation of expected social roles, particularly within the family. Both defective social policies and an entrenched patriarchal culture ensured the continuation of women's double role and double burden, leaving to them the responsibility of seeking a difficult mediation between production and reproduction.<sup>3</sup>

Although operating in deeply different economic and political systems, both Polish and Italian women experienced forms of inclusion and exclusion from the labour and domestic sphere that were shaped not only by immediate relations of power, but by deeply-set traditions and cultural norms.

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**3** Laura Balbo, *Stato di famiglia*.

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Taking Italy and Poland as its main case studies, this book re-examines the major political and ideological confrontations that crossed Cold War Europe from the perspective of ordinary families and of those who sought to regulate the way in which they lived. Crossing the iron curtain, and looking at two countries hardly ever brought together in historical analysis, the book shows the extent to which the battle over the regulation of family and marriage shaped the social, political and cultural landscape of postwar Europe.

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