

4 Marriage and Family Life After the Thaw

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.¹

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.²

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.³

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”.⁴ 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.⁵ 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”.⁶

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

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

⁵ Gruson, “Polish Chiefs near Accord with Church”.

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

tendency to condemn human error rather than to understand it.⁷ 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.⁸ 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-

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹² 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-

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

¹⁰ 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.

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

¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴

¹³ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 47.

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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”.¹⁶

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”.¹⁷

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.

¹⁵ Franciszek, *Rodzina Nowego Miasta*.

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

¹⁷ “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!"¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

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-

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

¹⁹ 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*.

²⁰ See for instance Tartara, *L'Isolotto a Firenze*.

²¹ Bernini, "Non case ma città", 413-30.

ing as crazy, cancerous cells".²² 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.²³

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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".²⁶ None of the housing experiments of the postwar years had gone in this direction.

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

²³ Catelani, Trevisan, *Città in trasformazione e servizio sociale*, 27-8.

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

²⁵ Pizzorno, *Comunità e razionalizzazione*, 170.

²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.

²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹

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

²⁸ 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*.

²⁹ 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.³⁰ It was the combination of children and desired objects that allowed Nina to rejoice in the success of her family life.³¹

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.³² 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.³³

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.³⁴ 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”.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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”.³⁸ 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.³⁹

An even stronger critique was put forward by ‘Odmieniec’ (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

³⁴ Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*

³⁵ Giorgio Amendola, “Riscossa operaia”, discorso alla II conferenza dei comunisti delle fabbriche (1961), quoted in Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 202.

³⁶ Alberoni et al., *L'attivista di partito*, 270-6.

³⁷ Adamski, *Rodzina Nowego Miasta*, 31.

³⁸ “Marta”. *Rodzice, Dzieci, Rodzice*, 12-13.

³⁹ “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]".⁴⁰

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.⁴¹ The following year, the first regular weekly half-hour broadcasts were introduced and, five years later, the first nation-wide programme finally appeared.⁴²

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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ Within the domestic sphere, television quickly became one of the most prominent symbols of the modern

⁴⁰ "Odmieniec". *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 26-7.

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *Telewizja w systemie politycznym i medialnym PRL*, 43; see also Grzelewska et al., *Prasa, radio i telewizja w Polsce*, 266.

⁴³ Foot, *Milan*, 88.

⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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:

⁴⁵ Ferretti et al., *Mamma Rai*; Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*; Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*.

⁴⁶ Grzelewska et al., *Prasa, radio i telewizja*, 267, 279.

⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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

⁴⁸ Roberto Leydi, quoted in Foot, *Milan*, 90.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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!⁵¹

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.⁵² 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.⁵³

⁵¹ Giuseppe Niccolai, *Atti parlamentari*, seduta 16 ottobre 1969, 11098-9.

⁵² Niccolai, *Atti parlamentari*, seduta 16 ottobre 1969, 11100.

⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ Not only was the inclination to have many children disappearing, but so were the norms that had presided over marriage.

⁵⁴ Smoliński, "Przemiany dzietności rodziny", 203-5. See also Smoliński, "Dzietność kobiet zamężnych", 14-18; Adamski, *Modele małżeństwa i rodziny*.

⁵⁵ *Dzietność kobiet*.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ 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".⁶⁷ 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".⁶⁸

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

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Łobodzinska, *Małżeństwo w mieście*, 101-9.

⁶⁷ B.K., *Pamiętniki Polaków, 1948-78*, 476.

⁶⁸ 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".⁶⁹ 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.

69 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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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”.⁷²

Large part of the frustration experienced by younger wives, concluded Harrison, was the consequence of a rise in expectations that

⁷⁰ Łobodzinska, “Dobór małżeński”, 237-8.

⁷¹ Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 77.

⁷² 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”.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

The story highlighted not only the growing determination of young women to have their way in the face of family opposition, but also the

⁷³ Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 92.

⁷⁴ “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.⁷⁵

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".⁷⁶

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".⁷⁷

Kowalska's narratives offered a microcosm of the issues at stake in postwar families and marriages. Her romantic early marriage and the

⁷⁵ Łobodzinska, "Dobór małżeński", 236.

⁷⁶ Kowalska, "Szczęście we własnym domu" [Happiness in One's Home]. *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 156.

⁷⁷ 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".⁷⁸

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

⁷⁸ 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".⁷⁹

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

⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰

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.⁸¹

80 Malinowska, in *Pamiętniki Kobiet*, 19.

81 Harrison, *La donna sposata*, 109.

