

Stefania Bernini. *Family Life and Individual Welfare in Post-War Europe: Britain and Italy Compared.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 199 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4039-8795-2.



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Almost every day, leading newspapers contain articles on parents, children, and childhood. Family life is largely a public issue even though many of the problems that are discussed purportedly belong to the private sphere. Family life is also a societal concern. Whether, when, and how the state or social authorities should intervene, and how responsibilities should be divided between state and family, and between state and the individual, have been important issues since the late nineteenth century. Stefania Bernini's book on family life and individual welfare gives insights into the discussions and negotiations on norms as well as rules and regulations concerning family life in postwar Britain and Italy.

Bernini describes the point of departure of the book as "a desire to understand how changes in family life have been perceived, conceptualised and discussed in two different political, social and cultural contexts throughout the post-war period" (p. 2). She focuses specifically on care. The main issues Bernini addresses pertain to whether, how, why, and to what extent investment in the family

differs between Britain and Italy; whether it is possible to identify differences in how family relations have been conceptualized; and whether differences in family politics are due to cultural factors, socioeconomic structures, or political conditions. Bernini is interested in the main actors shaping the dominant definitions of "family." In her interpretation, she applies theories of Jacques Donzelot and Christopher Lasch to understand the regulations of the family in the welfare state; however, she could have used their theoretical frameworks more explicitly in her analyses. Throughout the book, Bernini uses many quotations, long and short, some consisting of only one or two words. The quotations give contemporary color; however, using many quotations sometimes tends to make the text more reporting than analyzing.

This is a comparative study using different kinds of sources. Every chapter discusses conditions both in Italy and Britain, examining similarities and differences, and Bernini points to a demand for studies with a historical and compara-

tive perspective. She gives some information about the countries at the time when the study begins: Italy is described as an agrarian country, while Britain was industrialized long ago; Italy went through a period of fascism, while, in Britain, democracy was strong; and Italy had a system of corporatism that included employees, leaving others outside this system, whereas Britain maintained welfare systems. However, I would like to have seen a more thorough presentation and discussion of the sources, about advantages and disadvantages of the different types. Within welfare research, many studies on quantitative sources are published, but fewer studies use more qualitative sources. Statistics and different kinds of rules and regulations open for comparisons in another way than qualitative sources, and an examination of the sources could have contributed to the discussion on difficulties and possibilities concerning comparative studies.

A chapter about the family in political debates draws on material from the countries' most important parties: the Christian Democratic Party and the Communist Party in Italy and the Conservative Party (Tories) and Labour Party in Britain. The family played an important role in politics for all parties, but in different ways. All of the parties emphasized children, but gender politics was not on the agenda of any. According to Bernini, the Christian Democratic Party translated traditional Catholic values to the political sphere, and the party defended a specific image of the family in which it was implied that the mother was at home. They opposed giving children born out of wedlock the same rights as other children and considered the husband the natural head of the family. The Christian Democratic Party considered "that it was only through the church that family and state could fulfill safely and perfectly their respective duties," she writes, "the family as the first source of Christian education and the state as the guarantor of the law" (p.29). Concerning the Communist Party, Bernini suggests that it defended the family, upheld the housewife role, and consid-

ered individual desires to be subordinated to those of the family. According to Bernini, this can be explained by the fact that the Catholic Church considered the Communists to be a danger to the family, which forced the party to emphasize the family to reach the masses. She describes this as a change from a party of proletarians to a party of proletarian families.

In Britain, the Conservatives used the family concept to emphasize private property and oppose what they considered too many welfare services. They stressed that the family should maintain responsibility for its members, and, if it needed help, it could turn to philanthropy and voluntary donations of aid. Labour emphasized the male breadwinner model, Bernini writes, but she also mentions a discussion on family relationships. Labour considered calm and peace in the family as a prerequisite for calm and peace in society.

Another chapter deals with medical and moral discussions. In Britain, Bernini writes, medical and psychological views on family life became dominant after the war; at the same time, emphasis on the relationship between mother and child relegated fathers to the background. In Italy, the Catholic Church kept its authority regarding family issues and sexuality; however, Bernini suggests, many Italians viewed the issues differently from the church. According to Bernini, a comparison between the Anglican Church in Britain and the Catholic Church in Italy demonstrates that the churches valued the family in the same way when it came to its responsibility and functions, but they differed on such issues as birth control, women's work, and divorce. The difference was more of an acceptance of changes than a different doctrine, Bernini considers, but the Anglican Church also affected society less than the Catholic Church.

From a Swedish perspective, the discussion on family size that Bernini mentions is interesting. How many children should a family have? Ac-

cording to Bernini, in Britain there was an emphasis on having many children. In Sweden, a two-child norm has been dominant since the 1930s, and daycare centers have been regarded as compensation for having few siblings.

Two chapters deal with questions on a more practice-oriented level. The chapter titled “The Edges of the Family: State, Citizens and ‘the Children Deprived of Normal Home Life’” discusses what the treatment of children in risky milieus can tell us about the view of the family and how it was defined. What was considered normal, and in which cases was it felt that the state ought to intervene? In Britain, preventive measures were stressed; it was felt that children should stay in their homes instead of being sent to foster homes or institutions, but the resources were limited. In Italy, the state was supposed to intervene only if no one else acted. This implied a greater acceptance of behaviors that otherwise were considered as not so good—such as small children begging for money for their families. Many children in Italy were placed in institutions; in 1951, Italy had three thousand institutions with two hundred thousand children, Bernini writes. Most of the institutions were run by private organizations and individuals; the state had no control over them. There were more institutions for girls, and these were smaller than those for boys. This pattern can also be found in Sweden during the first part of the twentieth century, and it indicates that girls and boys were viewed differently, and seen as having different possibilities and needs. In Britain, too, a number of children were placed in institutions, but here, as in many other countries after the Second World War, in the public debate these institutions were viewed negatively, and there was an ambition to improve conditions for children. Bernini’s passage on institutions is interesting and gives glimpses into children’s lives and concrete examples of how childhood was valued.

In the chapter “Recreating the Family: Single Mothers, Maladjusted Children and the Search for

a New Home,” the aim is to discuss the relation between changes in family life and the understanding of children’s needs. Bernini uses the situation of single mothers as an example—having a baby without being married, Bernini suggests, was considered both as a sign of maladjustment and as a way of shaping maladjustment. The chapter deals with foster homes, adoptions, support to single mothers, and the possibilities of being a family.

The family is an essential institution in society and during the period of this study. Bernini describes the family as a catalyst for different fears and as an instrument for political propaganda. The family has been described as a problem and a threat to society but also as a strength and a stabilizing force. In both countries, the family was considered an important institution for providing personal care; however, the view was different regarding whether and how society should intervene to improve the family’s ability to provide that care. In Britain, a system of allowances and services was developed, but in Italy, the authority of the Catholic Church in relation to the family was not challenged, nor was the family’s overall responsibility concerning individual care. Bernini mentions Italy’s low fertility rates today and asks if there is any wish to invest in the family or even to consider the status of the family at all.

Bernini argues that “classical” studies on welfare state issues have not emphasized the relationship between state and family very much; she also argues that studies on gender and social policy have often overlooked the concept of family. I would argue that many studies have been published with a focus on family, gender, and social policy; however, these studies cover the topics in a broad sense. In contrast, it is easy to agree with Bernini concerning the need to bring out family as an important political issue, not only as part of what sometimes is called “the little world,” but also as something that influences and is influenced on all societal levels.

The book takes a broad approach and not all questions are elucidated, but Bernini clearly displays the importance of family and family issues in and for politics. Family life is always on the agenda in one way or another. She also displays the importance of comparative research, and her bibliography contains extensive references for further reading.

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