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The Edges of the Family:

Family Life, Political Concerns and the Treatment of Children in Post-War Italy and Britain

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Abstract

The paper explores approaches to child protection in post-war Italy and Britain between 1945 and the mid 1960s. Both in Italy and in Britain, the Second World War represented a watershed in the treatment of children, giving them a new visibility and political relevance. In both countries, post-war political discourses made frequent reference to children, presenting them alternatively as the main victims of the war, the most vulnerable elements in post-war societies and the most valuable assets of the new democratic states. By looking at the way in which children's needs were articulated and acted upon in Italian and British social policy, the paper discusses conceptions of parental responsibilities and the role of the state in the post war period.

Particular attention is given to the analysis of how Britain and Italy's different historical and cultural contexts influenced the transformations taking place in three areas, crucial to the treatment of children: the rethinking of the social responsibilities of the state that took place after the war - although leading to different outcomes in different countries; the role played by voluntary organisations, particularly those linked to the Churches, in the provision of social services addressed to families and children; the transformation of the expectations attached to the family.

The paper has two main aims. The first is to identify differences between the British and Italian approach to child welfare; the second is to explore the transformations taking place in the relationship between state, voluntary sector and the family in the post-war period, and to discuss which factors were most relevant in shaping such process of transformation in different political and cultural contexts.
a systematic role for international law in domestic judicial decision-making.

Keywords

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore approaches to child protection in post-war Italy and Britain between 1945 and the mid 1960s.

In both countries, the end of the Second World War represented a watershed in the treatment of children. Both in Italy and in Britain, the Second World War seemed to give a new visibility and political relevance to children, often presented in political discourses as the main victims of the war, the most vulnerable elements in post-war societies and the most valuable assets of the new democratic states. In Italy, the collapse of fascism ended the regime's effort to garner young people's support through a pervasive network of youth organisations and its upholding of procreation as a civic duty. The republican constitution approved after the war recognised that parents held a unique responsibility towards their children's physical, moral and educational needs, limiting the intervention of the state to cases of parental incapacity. In Britain, no

written constitution defined the duties of the state towards children. The creation of the welfare state, however, created a new framework for the treatment of children and encouraged the scrutiny of existing provisions.

By looking at the way in which children's needs were discussed and acted upon in Italian and British social policy, this paper tries to discuss differences and similarities in the way in which parental responsibilities and the role of the state in the promotion of child welfare were articulated in different political and social contexts in the post war period. Three interrelated issues are given particular attention within this analysis: the different ways in which the British and the Italian states expanded and transformed their social presence in the aftermath of the war; the changes intervened in the role played by voluntary organisations (particularly those linked to the Churches) in relation to the changed role of the state; the transformation of the expectations attached to the family.

The objective is on one hand that of identifying differences between the British and Italian approach to child welfare and on the other that of using the treatment of young people to explore the transformations underwent by the relationship between the public and the private sphere and the conceptualisation of the family in post-war political discourses.

The state and voluntary bodies

State and church in Italy

According to Articles 29 and 30 of the Italian Constitution, the state has the duty to provide for children's maintenance and education in case of permanent or temporary parental incapacity. The acknowledgment in the duties of the state towards children was part of the definition of the social functions assumed by the new republican state. Such duties included taking up parental rights in case of parental 'idleness, ineptitude, amorality and physical inability' to provide for the children's physical, moral, and educational needs.[1]

As in other sectors of assistance, most of the Italian post-war legislation was based on 19th century measures, systematised during the 1920s. The state was only obliged to intervene (through the so-called *assistenza legale*) when no voluntary provision (*assistenza istituzionale*) was available.[2] The statutory responsibility for the under 18 who found themselves in a state of 'material and moral abandonment' fell upon the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (from now on ONMI), a fascist organisation left largely unreformed after the war. The duties of the Opera included the supervision of young people's institutions, but not the actual provision of institutional care. Abandoned illegitimate children, children with 'mental deficiencies', and the 'blind, deaf, and mute' also remained outside the responsibility of the ONMI, and under the care of provincial administrations, operating through the Enti Comunali di Assistenza (Local Boards of Assistance, from now on, ECA). Finally, a number of educational and judicial authorities dealt with specific categories of children, providing

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[1] For a contemporary comment on the implications of the new responsibilities assumed by the Italian state towards children, M. Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve studio su alcuni concetti di ordine etico e giuridico', in *Relazione della Commissione Speciale per un'Indagine sulle Condizioni dell'Infanzia nella Provincia di Milano*, Milano, Giuffré, 1955, p.142-145.

[2] Article 403 of the Civil Code dealt specifically with provisions for young people in need, on the basis of Art. 21 T.U. of R.D. 24.12.1934, concerned with maternity and child protection.

assistance to groups such as the orphans of parents killed in work accidents or during the war.

Institutional care remained the most common form of intervention throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Most children's institutions were run by voluntary (often religious) organisations and operated without the state's economic support and outside its controls.[3]

In 1944, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) launched its first plan specifically addressed to children. The management of the operation fell in Italy under the Amministrazione Aiuti Internazionali (International Aids Administration, from now on AAI), directed by the Ludovico Montini, a catholic personality close to the Christian Democratic Party, brother of the future Pope Paul VI. The AAI's functions included the distribution of food and clothes, and the financing of refurbishment works.

Soon however, the growing economic difficulties experienced by voluntary organisations during the war brought into question the responsibilities of the state and the ability of a system based mostly on the voluntary sector to provide adequate standards of care. Difficulties worsened rather than ease from the early 1950s, when the slowing down of the immediate post-war assistance imposed growing economic constraints on charitable organisations.

Many of those involved in the running of voluntary children's homes commented bitterly against the 'feverish (and mortifying) searches for money' to which they were forced. Fund-raising strategies based on the attempt to inspire pity in the general public and wealthy benefactors became common practice but proved rarely adequate to satisfy homes' financial needs.[4] In 1952, the AAI itself expressed concern for the diminishing availability of nutritional food, following reductions in international aid. An attempt made by the Amministrazione to substitute the goods previously imported with national products proved impracticable in large areas of the country.[5]

In many cases, homes' economic stringencies were aggravated by the unreliability of the public bodies responsible for the payment of charges. In 1951, a leading figure in the debate, Ivo Pini, wondered whether the time had come for orphanages to 'resort to coarse forms of protest, reclaiming help from the state and at least the payment of charges in time'. He concluded that this was against the character and nature of charitable work:

> None of us could think of taking children in the streets like workers on strike, protesting under the windows of ministries, prefects and those that should remember their commitments towards us. You must forgive us then,

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[3]According to an inquiry conducted in 1954, only 5 per cent of the institutions operating in Italy (dealing with both children and adults) were run by the state or local government, AAI, *Guida Nazionale degli Istituti di Assistenza con Ricovero*, Roma, Stabilimento Tipografico Fausto Failli, 1954, p.vii.
[4]Fund raising initiatives included sending children 'in sad processions to the funerals of the friends' of their home, publishing 'calendars and magazines full of children's photographs and their most pitiful stories', and placing alms-boxes at the entrance of the orphanages', for a critical commentary of such practices, I. Pini, 'Duecentomila bambini negli Istituti Italiani per l'Infanzia', *Maternità e Infanzia*, 2, 1951, p.8.
[5] *L'Amministrazione per gli Aiuti Internazionali*, Roma, 1952, p.33.

if we have to appeal again and again to the heart of our private benefactors for the good of our children.[6]

Nonetheless, contemporary studies confirmed that the system in place was both inefficient and largely unaccountable. An enquiry conducted in 1951 by the Istituto Centrale di Statistica (Central Institute of Statistical Analysis), and the AAI, acknowledged the difficulty of categorising institutions and obtaining reliable data. The study estimated the existence of 'at least three thousand institutions', providing assistance to 'around 200,000 children'. Most of these institutions had been created for 'specific categories of children', following the isolated initiatives of individuals and local associations.[7]

Ivo Pini summed up in an article published in *Maternità e Infanzia* the dilemma faced by practitioners favourable to a system of assistance largely independent of the state and yet confronted on a daily basis with the shortcomings of the present situation. Pini defended the 'richness' and 'variety' of the Italian voluntary sector. This, Pini argued, was the result of the liberal and Christian tradition upon which Italian culture was based; only a totalitarian state could attempt to assume directly the responsibility of a function assigned to the family by nature, such as the education of young children. Nonetheless, it was the duty of the state to create a framework through which the 'solidarity of the nation' could be expressed. In this duty, the Italian state had been gravely lacking.

An even more critical position was taken in 1953 by the *Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sulla Miseria*, according to which the minimal social presence of the Italian state was incompatible with the principles of social solidarity affirmed in the 1948 Constitution.[8] The final report of the Commissione criticised fragmented and uncoordinated responsibilities, which duplicated costs without providing satisfactory care. Different semi-public bodies and different independent administrations, often of fascist origin, held uncoordinated responsibilities for legitimate and illegitimate children, war orphans, young people who had lost their parents in work accidents and so on. The oversized and expensive bureaucracies of these administrations were rarely justified in terms of the services provided. Moreover, lack of coordination between different organisations or different sectors of the same one hindered the provision of continual care and efficient follow-up of individual cases, often frustrating any possibility of restoring children to their families. Outdated and overcrowded premises and lack of qualified personnel and training facilities made institutional care deeply unsatisfactory.

According to the *Guida Nazionale agli Istituti di Assistenza e di Ricovero*, a census of children's institutions published in 1954, 3,200 institutions provided in Italy a total of 216,540 residential places for 'normal children'.[9] These included residential schools taking in quotas of non-paying children and represented by far the most diffuse kind of child assistance. The number of institutions diminished steadily as one travelled south: 64 per cent of all institutions could be found in centre-northern part of the

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[6]From a letter quoted in I. Pini, 'Duecentomila bambini', p.8.

[7] *Ibid.,* p.6.

[8]Camera dei Deputati, *Atti della Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sulla Miseria in Italia e sui Mezzi per Combatterla*, Roma, 1953, vol.III, p.28-29.

[9] *Guida Nazionale degli Istituti di Assistenza con Ricovero*, Roma, 1954.

country, 22 per cent in the South and 14 per cent in Sicily and Sardinia. It was however in the south of the country that poverty and marginality (the most common causes behind the admission of children to institutions) were higher. Gender mattered as much as geography in influencing the type of care a child was likely to receive. Although a similar number of beds was available for boys and girls, the number of girls' homes was more than double that of boys', thereby allowing for smaller size and better accommodations. The imbalance was particularly noticeable in the south. Institutions admitting both sexes were rare throughout the country, mostly due to the reluctance of religious organizations to move in this direction. The length of care was also different for boys and girls, with the first being generally discharged shortly after the end of elementary school (at ten years of age), and girls retained until they were eighteen. Boys and girls shared, however, rather grim perspectives in terms of the quality of education and professional training. The vast majority of institutions (2,809 out of 3,200) provided schooling up to elementary level; only 938 of these, mostly in the centre and north of the country went on sending children to the *media unica* (unified secondary school) or to vocational schools. Professional training, in the few cases in which it was offered, consisted almost invariably 'in needle work, sewing, knitting, darning and tailoring' for the girls and in mechanics, woodwork and agriculture for the boys.[10]

In his introduction to the *Guida*, Ludovico Montini argued that no improvement of the situation could take place within the present legislative framework. The presence of so many different private and public bodies represented 'a deterrent to any attempt to improve and modernise', while the Ministry of the Interior undermined its supervisory role by operating according to inadequate and backward criteria of assistance.[11]

Financing was also unsatisfactory. Only 15 of the 21 billion lire spent in 1952 by institutions of assistance had been paid by the state and other public bodies, leaving a huge gap to be filled in by private charity. The outcome, commented Montini, was the structural inability to answer the existing need and to improve standards of care. Mediocrity, Montini commented, dominated 'every aspect of the organisation'. Throughout the country, institutions experienced a generalised state of decay, where poor education, low standards of hygiene, unsatisfactory recreational provisions and lack of trained personnel constituted the norm. Montini advocated centralisation as the only means of guaranteeing uniform criteria of intervention, a clearer structure of responsibilities and the coordination necessary to promote the adoption of solutions more suitable to children's individual needs.

Lack of political interest and complex political allegiances between the charitable sector, the Catholic Church and the ruling party hindered the cause of a comprehensive reform of the system of assistance, included the sector specifically concerned with child welfare. Montini's own influence within the Christian Democrat Party and as head of the AAI, could do little to modify attitudes towards assistance throughout the 1950s, when the overcoming of the immediate post-war emergency contributed to the progressive disappearance of the question from the political debate.

State and voluntary associations in Britain: the 1948 Children Act

The war had had a dramatic impact on child assistance in Britain as well. In London and the country's other main urban areas, most residential schools had been

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[10] *Ibid.*, pp.9-11 and 26-31, table 2.
[11] *Ibid.*, pp.x-xiii.

closed or transformed in 'transition centres' for children waiting to be transferred to safer areas.

The re-opening of residential schools and children's homes in 1945, revealed shortage of staff, outdated premises, clumsy administrative machinery and over-lapping powers. At a Conference on *Children Without Homes* organised by the Women's Group on Public Welfare in February 1945, strong criticism was raised against a system whose structure led to a 'chaotic state of affairs which often must of necessity allow abuses and injustices to go undetected'.[12] The following year, the Curtis Committee confirmed a lack of clarity in the organisation of responsibilities as well as poor coordination between government's departments, local authorities and voluntary organisations.[13]

The findings of the report informed the Children Act of 1948, which promoted a widespread reorganisation of the system, with the creation of a Children's department within the Home Office and the establishment of Children's Committees and Children Officers at local level.[14] The 1948 Act widened the means of intervention available towards children, and stressed the importance of pursuing either adoption or the restoration of children to their families in all suitable cases. It also recommended a more careful handling of children taken into residential institutions, starting with a careful assessment of their physical and psychological needs at the time of admission.

Among the reasons why the 1948 Children Act has been seen as a turning point in the history of child welfare provisions in Britain was its support for casework and preventive care.[15] Among the measures intended to improve prevention was the possibility given to local authorities to foster a child with one of his or her parents or relatives, a provision interpreted by Bob Holman as a challenge to the Victorian idea according to which 'once removed from their parent, children were best kept away from them'.[16] Such a supposed upholding of the family, however, had at least two limitations. First, the act did not go as far as to envisage economic help for families in those cases where financial hardship constituted the principal source of problems within the household. On the contrary, economic difficulties were still interpreted often as a symptom of parent's moral and temperamental defects. Second, the Act effectively

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[12] *Children without Homes*, Proceedings of a Conference called by the Women's Group on Public Welfare, London, 8th- 9th February 1945, p.2.

[13] Local Authorities - under the supervision of the Ministry of Health – were responsible for 'Poor law cases' and for the supervision of children under nine fostered for rewards or placed for adoption 'by private persons'. Welfare authorities' child protection visitors inspected institutions receiving children under nine years of age 'for rewards', while the Home Office held responsibility over children sent to 'approved schools' for remedial training or placed in 'remand homes' awaiting a Court's decision. No public authority was responsible for children over nine and for those placed without rewards, and no powers of inspection existed in the case of homes not receiving public contributions and not dealing with Poor Law cases, *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, London, HMSO, 1946, Cmd.6922, para.95-99, pp.24-27; also, Heywood, *Children in Care,* pp.143-144. Similar points were made for Scotland by the Clyde Committee, *Report of the Committee on Homeless Children,* Edinburgh, HMSO, 1946, Cmd.6911, para.13, pp.31-33.

[14] Children's Officers were responsible for the care and supervision of children maintained for reward, third part adoption cases, registration of adoption societies, appearance of children before Juvenile Courts and the care of children committed by Courts, provision and management of remand homes and approved schools.

[15] Among the others, R. Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain Since 1945*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999 (first published, 1993), p.263 and Hendrick, *Child Welfare in England,* p.219.

[16] B. Holman, *Putting Families First. Prevention and Child Care*, London, Macmillan, 1988, pp.35-6.

limited parental powers by allowing local authorities to assume parental rights on the basis of a Children's Committee resolution, without need to apply to a court of law.[17] Finally, prevention was endorsed in principle but received little practical support, partly as a result of the limited resources available to the sector of child care as a whole. A child welfare officer working in a voluntary organisation summed up the dilemma in these terms in 1949:

> It is true to say that an ounce of prevention in this work is worth many pounds of cure. Unfortunately, there is no statutory provision whereby even the smallest expenditure can be made by the Children's Officer to avert the drastic step of removing the child from its home. Once removed, the state is prepared to spend money on the child's upbringing.[18]

The issue of prevention, the assessment of the conditions under which the removal of a child from his family could be considered as the best option, and the establishment of the criteria according to which children removed from their homes should be cared for, represented the main questions around which debates developed throughout the 1950s in Britain.

Child Care Officers, originally appointed as Boarding Out Officers, had been traditionally concerned with 'methods of care' rather than with the process through which children entered the care system.[19] It was now suggested that the present system produced an excessive readiness to remove children from their families, overlooking the harmful effect that even a relatively short separation could have. An improvement of the assessment of the circumstances leading to children being taken into care could help to maintain a growing number of children either with their families of origin or with relatives or friends of the family.[20] By the end of the 1950s, a shift in attitudes seemed to have taken place at least in the guidelines according to which child officers were asked to operate. It was now widely suggested that the practice of placing children in residential establishments as the first step, with possible alternative solution sought only afterwards, should be abandoned. Instead, Children's Officers should seek solutions that either allowed children to remain with their parents or should try to place them with someone they already knew, leaving the transfer to an institution only to those cases where both alternatives had failed.

Two elements converged in promoting the shift away from institutional care. The first was the growing attention given to young people's emotional as well as physical needs, partly as a consequence of the increasing concern expressed by medical opinions for the consequences of the separation of young children from their mothers.

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[17] *Hansard, House of Commons, Standing Committees*, session 1947-48, vol.III, coll. 10-18, also R. Parker, 'The Gestation of Reform: the Children Act 1948', in P. Bean, S. MacPherson (eds.), *Approaches to Welfare,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p.202.

[18] P. Atkin, Magnolia House, Suffolk, *The Times*, 15/7/49, in PRO, MH 102/1961.

[19] J. Stroud, *An Introduction to the Child Care Service,* London, Longmans, 1965, p.11.

[20] In 1954, Hilda Lewis defended the role of reception centres in the child care system against suggestions that their use could be harmful to children and encouraged hasty removal from the family (the second objection had been advanced by John Bowlby in 1951, in J. Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health,* Geneva, WHO, 1951), H. Lewis, *Deprived Children. The Mersham Experiment. A social and clinical study,* Oxford, The Nuffield Foundation/Oxford University Press, 1954, pp.128-134. Also, O. Stevenson 'Reception into care – its meaning for all concerned', (1963), in R. J. N., Tod (ed.), *Children in Care. Papers on Residential Work,* London, Longman, 1976 (first published, 1968), pp. 8-17.

The second was a lack of trust in the fact that existing institutions could be reformed in such a way as to make them suitable to answer what were not seen as children's needs.

Public opinion, political awareness and the establishment of the Curtis Committee

The Report of the Care of Children Committee, the first British inquiry 'covering all groups of children' in care, has been described as the almost inevitable outcome of wartime concerns and solidarity.[21] The circumstances leading to the appointment of the Committee tell a different story and question the idea of a state ready to mobilise in the name of solidarity.

In February 1944, Marjory Allen (later Lady Allen of Hurtwood) sent a letter to *The Times* denouncing the appalling conditions of children's homes throughout the country, and urging the setting up of a public inquiry.[22] Allen's letter elicited the reaction of many ex-internees and workers, who wrote to confirm backward methods of care and inadequate premises and personnel. The letters received were collected and published by Allen in July 1944, in order 'to stir into action the Government, Members of Parliament, Local Authorities, Governors of Charitable Organisations and the general public'.[23]

In a Letter to Lord Woolton, then Minister of Reconstruction, Allen explained that she had 'hesitated for a long time' before bringing her findings to the public notice', in consideration of the engagement of the government 'with other urgent matters'. The government's lack of concern for children in care, however, had finally persuaded her to act.

> Since the Government is concerning itself with many fundamental reconstruction plans, I felt it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that these particularly unfortunate children have, so far, found no place in the Education Bill, the White Paper on the Health Service, or in any other reconstruction plans.[24]

The popularity of the matter and its possible political implications were not lost to the members of the Cabinet. Consultations between the Home Office and the Ministries of Health, Education, and Reconstruction indicated an awareness that the present 'public agitation about alleged conditions in children's homes' demanded the setting up without delay of a committee of enquiry, despite the practical and political problems that this was likely to bring about. In November 1944, a joint memorandum of the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education announced the establishment of a committee of enquiry, while

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[21] N. Frost, M. Stein, *The Politics of Child Welfare. Inequality, power and change,* London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p.33.

[22] M. Allen and M. Nicholson, *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady. Lady Allen of Hurtwood,* London, Thames and Hudson, 1975, chapters 7-12 in particular. Allen had been the chairwoman of the Nursery Schools Association, and a member of the Advisory Council on the Welfare of Mothers and Young Children, set up by the Ministry of Health during the war. Despite her political credentials as member of the Independent Labour Party, a pacifist activist and wife of the Labour MP Clifford Allen, she presented her campaign as entirely motivated by her concerns as a private citizen.

[23] *Whose Children?*, London, The Favil Press, 1944, p.1. In order to substantiate the content of the letters, Allen asked every sender to make themselves available to give evidence in case of a public enquiry and left out the letters of those who refused, PRO, MH 102/1449, *Care of Children Committee. Evidence submitted by Lady Allen of Hurtwood*, 11th June, 1945.

[24] PRO, MH 57/297, letter dated 28th July, 1944.

reiterating that available evidence did not 'support any suggestion of general neglect and abuse'.[25] To speed up the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry intervened in January 1945 the death of a young boy, Dennis O'Neil, for 'neglect' and 'ill-use' at the farmhouse in Pontesbury (Salop) where he had been boarded out the year before. The wave of public indignation that followed the case gave new grounds to Marjory Allen's denunciations - whose ultimately successful campaign owned as much to her political skills and connections than to her perseverance.[26] A report into the death of Dennis O'Neill, published in May 1945, highlighted a lack of communication between the two local authorities involved (Newport and Shropshire), neither of which had realised 'the direct and personal nature of the relationship between a supervising authority and boarded-out children'.[27]

Despite the mounting pressures for a public enquiry, government officials accepted this proposition only reluctantly. The reason given more often to justify the postponement of the enquiry was that such a 'lengthy and troublesome' procedure would have put a further burden on 'Government Departments, local authorities and voluntary organisations' already 'understaffed and overworked'[28]. However, equally important seemed to be the preoccupation for the impact that such an investigation was likely to have on the delicate confrontation underway between the government and voluntary organisations over the role that the latter were to play in the newly born welfare state.

The sensitivity of the issue was confirmed by the reactions of some of the leading children's charities to the announcement of the establishment of the Curtis Committee. In 1944, the Children's Society formally welcomed the establishment of a committee of enquiry, required by the fact that 'one [could not] pick up a paper without seeing some new 'revelation' or expression of opinion'.[29] The Society stressed, however, that the Inquiry should not become a trial. As for themselves, the Society was confident that they had 'nothing to defend and nothing to hide' and still retained 'a profoundly important part to play in the future of child care', in co-operation with government, statutory authorities and their welfare workers.[30]

The need to re-affirm the role of the voluntary sector was felt even more urgently after the introduction of the Children Act in 1948. At the aftermath of the passing of the Act, the Children's Society criticised the press for having 'barely

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[25] *Ibid.*, War Cabinet Record Committee, Joint Memorandum by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education, Whitehall, 30th November 1944.

[26] Among those who called for the appointment of a committee of enquiry into the death of Dennis O'Neil (and more generally over the state of child residential care) were the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Lambeth Trade Council and the Transport and General Workers Union, whose Bristol Branches declared that they were 'horrified at the revelation in the Pontesbury (Salop) case'. All agreed that the government could not 'escape responsibility for this tragic state of affairs'. PRO, MH 57/297.

[27] *Report by Sir Walter Monckton on the circumstances which led to the boarding out of Terence and Dennis O'Neill at Bank Farm, Minsterley and the steps taken to supervise their welfare,* London, MHSO, May, 1945, Cmd.6636, para.50, pp.16-17.

[28] PRO, MH 102/1161, note from A. Maxwell to N. Brook, 22nd August, 1944.

[29] Previously 'The Church of England Incorporated Society for Providing Homes for Waifs and Strays'; the name of the Society was changed in 1945, following the consideration that the original title, was 'no longer symbolic' of the Society's work, CSA, Policy Circular, Conference of Homes Representatives, St. Anselm's Hall, September 20 1945.

[30] Children Society's Archive (from now on CSA), *Annual Report for 1944*, Report of the Executive Committee for the year ended 31st December, 1944, p.2.

mentioned' the position of voluntary associations, giving the impression that there was 'now no need for the Society's existence and that everything will be attended to by the state'. This misled impression, together with the 'many severe criticism of certain forms of child care' that had been 'very rightly brought to public notice', had 'cast a shadow' on the voluntary sector, which could result in a 'serious curtailment of financial support'.[31]

> We can say, humbly but confidently, that where the voluntary societies lead the State has followed. There is room – indeed a desperate need – for both, and one augments the other. Voluntary service is a worthy cause by men and women of Christian principles possessing an ideal, represents a tremendous driving force for good, and the State cannot possibly replace – and has no desire to suppress – such warm humanitarian impulses.[32]

In 1950, the Society made again the point that only the 'national but unnationalised work' of individual citizens could lay 'the foundation on which could be erected, strong and secure, the building of Christian life and character'.[33] The Annual Report for 1957 explained that people's 'simple desire […] to help the children who suffer distress' and the incapacity of the welfare state 'to offer help as widely as it [was] in demand' confirmed the importance of voluntary action in the sector of child assistance.[34] The role played by the Society was 'of great consequences' for the safeguarding of 'posterity', 'the nation', and 'the Commonwealth'.

Although from different perspectives, both the Children's Society and Marjorie Allen appealed to individual responsibility as the foundation of a cohesive society and identified in the work done for the children the measure of individuals' civic engagement.

In her evidence to the Curtis Committee, Allen had stressed that her involvement in the matter was that of 'a layman and a citizen'. Her motivations did not lie in any specialised knowledge, but in the duty to speak against 'tradition and vested interests' represented 'in the ministerial quarters, in religious organisations, in voluntary bodies and in the very Homes themselves'.[35] As she recalled in her memoirs, 'I had seen acts of grave injustice … and if I took no action I would become an accomplice'.[36] As members of a community, citizens were directly involved in the destiny of its more vulnerable members, - 'for we pay for their [children's] upbringing either through taxes or by voluntary contributions' - and had a duty to speak in their name. The state, on the other hand, had 'for too long, evaded its responsibility', creating 'an army of disillusioned and

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[31] *Ibid., Annual Report for 1948*, p.2. The Society's Report for the following year lamented that '18 months after the passing of the Children Act', the general public had still not fully realised that the Voluntary Child care organisations had not been 'absorbed into the State' and were therefore still dependent on voluntary support', *ibid., Annual Report for 1949*, p.2.

[32] *Ibid., Annual Report for 1950*, p. 6.

[33] *Ibid., 'Laying Foundations', Annual Report for 1955*, p.321.

[34] *Ibid., Annual Report for 1957*, p.513.

[35] PRO, MH 102/1449, *Care of Children Committee, evidence submitted by Lady Allen of Hurtwood*, 11th June, 1945. Also, *Whose Children*, p.1.

[36] Allen and Nicholson, *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady,* p.176.

unhappy citizens', excluded by the new welfare entitlements, isolated 'from the main stream of life and education', and living 'under the chilly stigma of charity'.[37]

In search of definitions: state and voluntary organisations in the care of neglected children

According to Philp and Timms, 'the term 'problem family' was first consciously used in 1943 in an attempt to characterise a group of families living in squalor and unable or unwilling to make constructive use of the social services'.[38]

In the post-war years, the identification of a particular group of families where social marginality and individual pathologies combined and were reproduced from generation to generation was intertwined with the attempt to identify 'child neglect', as a specific, identifiable and treatable phenomenon. Defining what constituted neglect, however, proved far from easy.

According to a report published in 1944 by the Women's Group on Public Welfare and the National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare, a child could be considered to be growing up in normal circumstances when had been born to married parents, lived in 'reasonably good housing conditions', and had a mother who was 'well enough to look after her child' and was not compelled 'to go out to work' for financial reasons.[39] Deviations from this norm constituted potential threats, of which neglect seemed to represent the culmination.

At the end of the war, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Children (from now on NSPCC) denounced that the nearly 100,000 children dealt with annually by the organisation constituted only the 'grossest cases' of an 'unexplored region of child suffering' that existed in the country.[40] A widespread concerns seemed to exist around the fact that neglect was mostly the consequence of parental and especially maternal 'inadequacy, ill health, limited mentality, ineducability, or apathy'.[41]

The difficulty of identifying suitable criteria of intervention towards neglect was reflected in the absence of specific statutory duties in this area. Voluntary organisations had traditionally dealt with a variety of family situations that could be related to neglect, but they had done so without a specific definition of the condition and using a variety of methods of intervention.

When the discussion on how to tackle child neglect in a comprehensive manner reached Government's officials, one of the first questions to be posed was which of the existing services could be equipped to take charge of the matter. The Ministries of Health and Education, together with local authorities, seemed to be the institutions most

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[37] *Ibid.*

[38] A. F. Philp, N. Timms, *The Problem of the 'Problem Family'. A critical review of the literature concerning the 'problem family' and its treatment,* London, Family Service Units, 1957, p.vii.

[39] PRO, MH 102/1158 *Post War Provisions for the Care and Education of Children up to 7 Years of Age*, Conference of the Women's Group on Public Welfare and National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare, 22nd-23rd February 1944.

[40] *The Neglected Child and His Family*, pp.17-19.

[41] PRO, 102/1961*, Mrs. Ayrton Gould and others. Neglected Children*, cutting from *The Times*, 6.7.49.

suitable to take the initiative in this field, possibly through the creation of specific family care services employing trained social workers. The Children's Department supported the idea of providing health visitors and housing managers with the training necessary to make them able to deal with families at risk. Health visitors' approach was considered to be already 'excellent in dealing with the physical care of children'; it could now be broadened to include work with mothers who 'through illness, discouragement, unemployment or sheer callousness and indolence', failed to provide adequate care to their children.[42]

The housing managers employed by Local Authorities (women of 'wide social interests', trained 'on Octavia Hill lines') could be given some form of domestic training enabling them to train young mothers. School attendance officers, school nurses and teachers could all contribute to the discovery and early treatment of symptoms of neglect. It was however above all the voluntary organisations dealing with rehabilitation, neglect and abusive family life, such as the NSPCC and the Family Service Units (FSU), that seemed to have the expertise that state services now needed to acquire. The FSUs held a unique style of work, based on the establishment of 'warm, personal and long-term' relationships between caseworkers and parents. The caseworkers aimed to provide 'a stable, reliable person for the parents, someone who can understand their feelings without having to see things their way and who will not be harmed by the phantasies [sic] which they find frightening'.[43]

The combination of innovative methods of work and traditional views of family life made the FSU an appealing model in the search for a new type of state sponsored social intervention. Their praxis based on 'daily, even hourly, example', however, was difficult to incorporate into the work of a public department. The NSPCC was only partially of greater use. Although they employed 'a few women visitors' who worked with families not yet requiring prosecution, none of them was a trained social worker; even more importantly, the attitude of the society towards rehabilitation seemed to remain on the whole 'a not very whole hearted one'.[44] In other words, although working with troubled family, the NSPCC seemed to operate on the assumption that in the majority of cases children's wellbeing would have been best served by removing them from their homes.

Despite differences in the interpretation of the causes of child neglect and its best remedy, a widespread agreement existed around the usefulness of extending health visitors' responsibilities to the whole family, and of expanding the presently very modest domestic help service as a means of relieving many housewives from otherwise 'intolerable burdens'.[45] Providing practical help (and ideally domestic training) seemed

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[42] PRO, MH 102/1961, Adjournment Debate n 6th July 1949, Note for parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.
[43] A. F. Philp, *Family Failure. A study of 129 Families with Multiple Problems*, London, Faber and Faber, 1963, pp.288-89. Philp indicated in failure to earn and manage money, bad housing, poor health of the parents, poor affective relationships with their larger families, problems in marital relationships, petty crime and poor care some of the more characteristic traits of the family upon which the FSU was called to intervene, *ibid., passim.* For an example of the FSU's approach, T. Stephens (ed.), *Problem Families: an Experiment in Social Rehabilitation,* Pacifist Service Units, Liverpool, 1947.
[44] PRO, MH 102/1961, Adjournment Debate, 6th July, 1949.
[45] *Ibid.*, 19th July, 1949, Note by the Ministry of Health.

crucial in a situation where most neglectful mothers appeared to be 'loving mothers and faithful wives, although thoroughly incompetent housekeepers'.[46]

Observations carried out in the Salvation Army Training Home Mayflower, in Plymouth and in Holloway prison in London, suggested that most neglectful mothers shared a combination of below average intelligence, unusually difficult home circumstances and pregnancy before marriage. A study of the IQ of one hundred neglectful mothers conducted in Holloway prison during the mid-1950s suggested that defective intelligence was so marked among these mothers that it was 'incredible' that they had 'remained in the ordinary community apparently undiagnosed, long enough to marry and have several children'. Many of these women, however, were considered 'temperamentally stable, and within their limited capacity … gentle, friendly, contented, and teachable'.[47]

Nevertheless, the use of training (including practical education, probation and fines) rather than punishment towards mothers convicted of neglect, was both politically controversial and practically difficult to implement. The possibility of providing home training and domestic help was shuttered by lack of financial resources and by shortage of trained women power, while probation officers seems hardly suitable to provide the kind of intensive training envisaged. In the end, the difficulty of finding a working definition of neglect and to envisage a practical way to intervene encouraged the conclusion that action against child neglect did not require any extension of statutory powers, but rather the adoption of measures enabling the existing services to intervene at an early stage. To this end, co-operation between different authorities and the designation of an officer in charge of child neglect at local level were recommended but never fully implemented throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[48]

In Italy as in Britain, social deprivation and maternal ignorance or incapacity recurred in the representation of neglectful families. Poverty emerged as the main single cause behind 'moral degradation, the breaking up of families, and the abandonment of children'.[49] The link between family size, poverty and neglect, emerged clearly from the few contemporary studies made in this area. In 1953, the Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sulla Miseria found that 15.5 per cent of families in the south and 11.6 per cent in Sicily and Sardinia lived in dwellings with more than four people per room. Families with more than five members constituted 33.3 per cent of the total of the Italian population, 45.1 per cent of families with low standards of life (*disagiate*) and 50.4 per cent of those severely deprived (*misere*).[50] Practices such as child labour, the use of children for begging and the practice of fostering children with relatives or acquaintances were found to be widespread among these families. Besides poverty, women's shortcomings were widely pointed at as the main cause of families'

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[46] PRO, MH 102/1964, *Cruelty and Neglect of Children. Note for the Secretary of State on the Motion to be taken on 12th December, 1949.* The Salvation Army's training home *Mayflower* had been opened in January 1948 and housed 24 mothers.

[47] M. D. Sheridan, 'The Intelligence of 100 Neglectful Mothers', *BMJ*, January 14, (1956), p.91. Follow up studies showed that improvement had occurred in the majority of cases, but also that this had revealed more difficult in the case of women of higher intelligence and greater emotional instability.

[48] Circular Home Office 157/50, Ministry of Health 78/50, Ministry of Education 225/50, quoted in Sixth Report of the Children's Department, Home Office, May 1951.

[49] U. M. Colombo, 'Osservazioni sui Dati Statistici Relativi agli ECA', in *Relazione Della Commissione Speciale per in'Indagine sulle Condizioni dell'Infanzia nella Provincia di Milano*, p.21.

[50] Camera dei Deputati, *Atti della Commissione parlamentare d'Inchiesta sulla Miseria*, vol.I, pp.77, 78.

breakdown. Few observers questioned the assumption that women carried the greatest responsibility for domestic management, including that of making the best use of the family income and of finding ways to save the situation when this was not enough. Among them was Giuseppina Savalli, a doctor operating with the ONMI, who, in 1947, urged the Opera to support the introduction of protective maternity legislation, while denouncing the devastating effect of frequent pregnancies upon women and their families:

> Those who live in daily contact with mothers of 6, 8, 10 children, as do we doctors, know the Calvary of any new pregnancy for a woman of the people, in a country where birth control is forbidden by law and practised only by better off families.[51]

To break the link between deprivation and family size, however, was nearly impossible in the context of a social policy inspired by Catholic values, still influenced by fascist inheritance and hampered by economic shortage. Rather, the low propensity of the Italian state to intervene in family life resulted in a greater tolerance towards practices considered questionable but inevitable and necessary to the survival of the household, including the exploitation of children. While newspapers denounced periodically the trafficking of children to be employed as 'professional beggars' throughout the country, a few commentators pointed out that the phenomenon was long established and socially accepted.[52] Begging was a form of exploitation and misuse of children that society should not tolerate, but the eradication of which seemed likely to provoke even worse evils, unless a radical transformation of society took place:

> If we take away those three exploited children to their unlucky mother, and we put them in an institution in the name of civility, any income of the family ends, and for those who remain at home then, is starvation. Unless we decide to take away all the children and older people in the family and we find a job for the unemployed man.[53]

To sum up, mothers' inadequacy, fathers' desertion, or imprisonment, and both parents' mental and physical illness were identified as the main causes of child neglect both in Italy and in Britain. In both countries, despite ample evidence that poverty constituted the main cause of family trouble, observers' attention concentrated mostly on individual characters and the question of how to reform them. In both countries, the complex causes of neglect and the difficulty of defining the specific characters of the phenomenon justified the modesty of the intervention by the state and the prominent role left to voluntary organisations. In Britain, the expansion of the social services made it possible to think of means of intervention shaped on the model provided by the voluntary services. In Italy, the more limited influenced exercised by medical expertise over social intervention and the more modest expansion of social work, contributed to create a framework where less attention was given to parental education and training, and greater emphasis was put on poverty and marginality as the long lasting roots of neglect, towards which no specific responsibilities seemed to exist.

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[51] G. Savalli, 'Maternità e Lavoro', *MI*, xix, 1, September-October, (1947), pp. 35-37.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp.111-12.
[53] L.D. Veronese, 'Bambini Mendicanti', *MI,* xxii, 1, January-February, (1950), p.14.

Children in care

Who goes into care

Both in Italy and in Britain, young people admitted to care could be divided in three main categories: children 'with particular needs', 'young offenders' and 'normal children in special circumstances'. However, these categories were far from being clear-cut and determined only marginally a child's destiny once in care.[54]

Both in Italy and in Britain, inadequate provisions at the time of admission and the absence of agreed criteria of classification rendered it difficult to gain a clear picture of why children came into care. However, available local studies showed relatively common paths. Poverty remained the main cause of admission in the Milanese province, where 33 per cent of children in institutions were 'legitimate children coming from poor families'. The death of both parents constituted a reason for admission only for a minority of children (8%) while an even smaller proportion of admissions (2%) was caused by the child having been abandoned by the mother.[55] Similar patterns were showed by a study conducted by Hilda Lewis on 500 children in care at the Mersham Reception Centre, in England. Lewis found that most children came from families with low income, low occupational stability, and overcrowded housing conditions. 'Children with no parents or no mother or deserted by the mother' constituted 13% of the newly arrived and 23% of the total. Children committed under a fit person order represented 29.6% of the total and 8.6% of new admissions. Most of the court orders had followed charges of ill treatment and neglect; only one sixth of court orders had been caused by the child having committed an offence.[56] Mother's illness or death was seldom the direct cause of a child's admission. More often, the father or other relatives had tried to care for him', and it was only after the failure of such attempts that the children's officer entered the scene.

Values in care

In July 1944, George Bernard Shaw explained in a letter to *The Times* that modern child care should combine scientific approach and maternal comfort, supplementing 'trained nurses with no time to spare for cuddling' with 'affectionate masseuses' to be found among 'motherly and grandmotherly' women.[57] The Curtis Committee discovered institutions rarely in touch with updated conceptions of care and

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[54] Partially different was the situation of young people taken into care as 'short terms' cases, following acute family emergencies, a group that attracted increasing attention in Britain during the mid-1950s following an apparent rise in these instances. Such increase was attributed both to changes in social policy (particularly the fact that a growing number of women went now to hospitals to give birth under the new NHS provisions) and to the fact that fewer families lived sufficiently close to relatives able to help in the absence of the mother. In 1955, short-term cases constituted 'about half' of the total number of children taken into care in that year. New admissions, however, amounted to only 6% of the total number of children in institutions, the large majority of whom remained long term cases, likely to be retained until the age limit, PRO, BN 29/4 *Reasons why children come into care*, 1955, p.6.

[55] Lancillotti Mari, 'Breve Rielaborazione', p.156.

[56] Lewis, *Deprived Children*, pp.20-31. The data collected at the Mersham centre showed that 'the illness or death of his mother was seldom the direct cause for a child's admission', because usually 'the father or other relatives tried to care for him', and 'it was only when these attempts failed that the children's officer entered the scene', *ibid.*, p.27.

[57] 'A contrast in method: Connemara and Berlin', letter by George Bernard Shaw, *The Time*, 21st July 1944, cutting, in MH 102/1160.

unable to give adequate attention to children's psychological and emotional needs.[58] In most of the Homes they had visited, the Committee had not found evidence of 'neglect or harsh usage' and only 'occasionally' they had found use of corporal punishment and locking up. Moreover, most of the Homes seemed able to provide 'more material advantages' than the 'average poor family'. When standards were 'below average', this was mostly the consequence of 'dirt and dreariness, drabness and over-regimentation'.

In most cases, what had shocked the Committee were not material circumstances but a widespread 'lack of personal interest 'and' affection', that had brought them to the conclusion that in most cases, the 'institutional child' was not 'an individual with his own rights and possessions, his own life to live and his own contribution to offer', but 'merely one of a large crowd' with no one 'vitally interested in his welfare or who cared for him as a person'.[59]

According to the Curtis Committee the use of large premises encouraged a military atmosphere, which accustomed children to 'the anonymity of collective life' and diminished their 'vivacity and natural ease'.[60] In Italy, Sigismondo Barbano explained in 1953 that large institutions rationally organised were able to provide for the material needs of the children, but deprived them of the emotional and spiritual nurture necessary to their social life as adults.[61] Despite a few 'admirable efforts', in both countries most homes continued to reflect the punitive approach associated with the admission to an institution. In the worst cases, the 'traditional chocolate and buff paint', the 'bare boards and draught' and 'the continuous smell of mass cooking, soft soap and disinfectant' constituted not only an inevitable side effect of institutional life, but also a symbolic demarcation between outside and inside worlds, reinforced by methods of discipline and organisation.[62]

In both countries, long established institutional praxes were more powerful than considerations of children's needs in influencing institutional arrangements. Grouping children in different categories according to age, sex, physical and mental health catered for the aim of creating institutions that were easy to manage and reflected moral, sanitary, and educational criteria informed by fears of sexual promiscuity and normative notions of physical and moral health and normality.

In Britain, the division of children according to sex was increasingly criticised during the 1950s, particularly when this resulted in the separation of siblings, but also for the negative effect that lack of contact with people of the other sex was bound to have on children at the time of discharge. A policy circular of the Children's Society explained in 1941 that mixing 'naturally with the opposite sex' was essential to teach girls 'to choose [their] friends with discretion, and be warned against the undesirable type of male acquaintance'.[63] Keeping together infants under two or three, toddlers, and

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[58] The Committee visited once, without pre-warning, a sample of homes estimated to give care 'to some 30,000 children'. Commenting on the 'surprise factor', the report noted that 'it [was] perhaps a measure of the care taken in the care of children that a large number had no heard of the appointment of the committee to enquiry into these questions', *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para.101, p. 28.
[59] *Ibid.*, para.418, p.134.
[60] *Ibid.,* para.241, p.78, and PRO, MH 102/1448, *Care of Children Committee*, evidence of the Association of Municipal Corporations, 11th April, 1946.
[61] S. Barbano. 'Occorre rivedere il metodo', *MI*, 9 (1953), p.17.
[62] *The Report on the Care of Children,* para.141, p.39. On the lasting inheritance left by 19th century approach to the organisation of children's institutions, S. Millham, R. Bullock, K. Hosie, *Locking up Children. Secure provision within the child-care system*, Westmead, Saxon House, 1978, p.17.
[63] CSA, *Policy Circulars*, 1939-54, letter circulated to Homes in 1941.

older children could also have positive effects on the younger children, providing them with the kind of psychological and emotional stimulation that in a 'normal home' they would have received from their older siblings.

The principle that children should be divided according to criteria of physical and psychological 'normality', on the other hand, remained unchallenged. In their evidence to the Curtis Committee, the Association of Municipal Corporations explained that different provisions should be made for 'normal children, that is, children normal in every way, normal intelligence, normal physique, normal habits, and manners, and normal behaviour', and 'children who are not normal in all these respects'.[64] The latter 'should be accommodated in special homes suited to their abnormality' with the aim of restoring them and transferring them 'to foster parents or the ordinary children's homes if and when they become normal'.[65] They emphasised that the kind of education given within the homes should conform to the kind of education available to the majority of the population, and recommended sending children 'to the ordinary schools of the district' whenever possible.

> Although one section of the community are persuaded that boarding schools and public schools are the best possible form of education, it still remain a fact that the boarding school make provision for a very small section of the community… Children's homes should therefore be patterned as far as is practicable upon the normal life of ordinary citizens.[66]

In order to create a home-like atmosphere, the Association stressed the importance of discontinuing the use of 'large barrack type of homes', in favour of small numbers of children of mixed ages and sexes. Among the voluntary organisations operating in the sector of child assistance, the Church of England Children's Society had distinguished itself for its early experimentation in boarding in smaller homes and foster families.

The Society's Handbook for Workers, published in 1948, acknowledged that avoiding 'anything that savours of an Institution' was necessary to make life within the premises 'really home-like'. It recommended the use of small buildings, 'light cheerful colours for the walls, curtains and coverings, suitable pictures, flowers in the living rooms and the dining tables'.[67] Moreover, it recommended avoiding uniformity in food and clothing, and adopting daily routines as similar as possible to those followed in normal households. Children should not get up before 7 a.m. or go to bed before 7 p.m.; family prayers should be held only once a day, preferably at breakfast time; meals should be 'well served'; during the day, children should lead 'a happy and occupied life'. Different rooms should be accessible to children for the purpose of studying, playing and developing their own interests and hobbies. Time should be found to teach children 'proper manners', 'respect for the elderly', 'consideration for others', including 'showing appreciation for anything given to or done for one'.[68] Great emphasis was put on the fact that housework should not be used as a form of punishment.

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[64] PRO, MH 102/1448, *Care of Children Committee,* Evidence of the Association of Municipal Corporations, para.45.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid.*, para.39-40.

[67] CSA, 85.110/11, *Handbook for Workers*, 1948, p.2.

[68] *Ibid.,* pp. 14-18. The recommendation was advanced again, unchanged, ten years later, *ibid.,* 85.110/14, *Handbook for Workers*, 1959, p.38.

During the 1950s, an important step towards the development of a more family life approach to child care was identified in the introduction of mixed age groupings - or 'family groupings' - under the care of individual nurses.[69] The image that dominate the Society's publication throughout the decade, was that of children playing happily and with 'no sign of irritability', singing while sweeping the floor or enjoying their favourite activities together with housemothers 'often more loving than wise', ready to distributing extra sweets at any time of the day.[70] The rosy representation of life within the Society's homes constituted an idealised version of ordinary family life and it was based on the idea that a combination of freedom, planned occupations and moderate discipline could transform deprived children into 'normal' citizens.

The possibility of translating these guidelines in everyday praxis, however, depended upon homes' resources in terms of premises, money and personnel and proved often difficult to achieve. The London County Council Education Committee, for instance, reacted with scepticism to the remarks of the Curtis Committee against large institutions, refusing 'to bind themselves to a policy of closing a particular type of school'. They assured that children lived 'as happily' in barrack-type schools 'as in any other type' of residential provision, adding that large homes were easier to organise, helped superintendents and senior members of the staff 'to get to know the children individually', and allowed the employment of fewer personnel. Their institutional nature could be overcome encouraging a large participation of children to the local community, particularly sending them to different schools.[71]

In the case of the Children's Society, economic stringency imposed a policy of austerity that made avoiding regimentation a difficult task. For many years after the end of the war, Headquarters invited homes to buy food in bulk, avoiding expensive items even if this meant long planning ahead and little variety, and to exercise a 'constant and rigid economy' in the use of fuel and light, although trying to avoid 'spoiling the eyesight or making the house dim and gloomy'.[72] Providing good quality and varied clothes proved equally difficult. In 1943, local branches of the Children's Society had been asked to allow children to choose their own clothes whenever possible; two years later, the Conference of Home Representatives stressed that 'children should be dressed like children in ordinary families' without 'distinctive features or dress' making them 'conspicuous'. The importance of overcoming the 'present tendency to regimentation' in clothing, however, would have continued to be stressed for years to come, suggesting the incapacity of the organisation to deal with the issue in a satisfactory way. The achievement of a varied and personal approach to clothes could not be helped by the parallel insistence by Headquarters that Children's Society's branches kept the acquisition of clothes to a minimum, recycling them whenever possible. The difficulty encountered by branches was testified by the many complaints coming from

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[69] See for instance K. Wood, *The Story of St. Mary's Cold Ash,* Child Care Study Paper n.7, London, Church of England Children's Society, 1981, p.10-11.

[70] On the situation of playing facilities in children's homes, E. Ingram, 'Play and Leisure Time in the Children's Home', *Case Conference*, vol.7, January 1961, in Tod (ed.), *Children in Care,* pp. 40-54.

[71] PRO, MH 102/1447, *Curtis Committee*, Statement of Evidence Submitted by the London County Council, p.4.

[72] CSA, Policy Circular, 25th November, 1943; *ibid.,* Conference of Homes Representatives, St. Anselm's Hall, 20th September, 1945; *ibid., Important Memorandum (H/JCH/17)* 1st May, 1949, and H/RI/JCH/1, 14th February, 1952.

Headquarters concerning the custom of retaining children's best clothes when transferring them from a home to another. A circular letter in February 1952 pointed out that giving children clothes 'inadequate and in poor condition' was unfair on the receiving home and tended 'to make the child feel inferior' upon his or her arrival to the new place.[73]

Similar problems were faced by Italian institutions. Summing up the findings of the enquiry over the conditions of child assistance in the Milan province, the lawyer Maria Lancillotti Mari affirmed that providing young people in institutions with 'clothes similar to those of anyone else' was 'dutiful rather that advisable'. At present, however, 'the rule was a different one', and it was common to see 'parades of little grey orphans and old-fashioned girls, all looking the same in their mortifying uniforms', marching along the streets of Milan.[74]

One of the main recommendations of the Curtis Committee had concerned the importance of promoting contact between children in institutions and the outside world, avoiding the creation of what Marjory Allen had called 'complete closed' communities.[75] Both in Italy and in Britain, however, this was hindered by the fact that most large homes provided their own schools and held religious services, making it unnecessary for children to go out. Moreover, many homes expressed an enduring suspicion towards the negative influence exercised over children by the outside world. Looking at the conditions of children in care in Milan, Lancellotti Mari commented that many homes avoided sending children to state schools because of their diffidence towards an environment extraneous to the life of the institution and the fear of exposing children to moral danger.[76] She pointed out that this was particularly true of religious institutions, predominant in Italy.

The problem, however, was not unknown in Britain. A report on the activities of Barnardo's Garden City at Woodford Bridge, Essex, in 1953, revealed that only some of the children attended outside Sunday schools and only a few boys had been able to enter local Scout troops. All the children attended religious services in the church located within the establishment.[77] The local authority officer in charge of the supervision of the children complained against Barnardo's houseparents' strong opposition against 'outside contacts'. According to the Children's Department, Barnardo's acted following the belief that a child was 'better off' in one of its homes than 'in a poor, dirty or immoral home', and that what the organisation was able to give was all a child might need. The organisation had therefore no interest in 'working with the parents for the child's ultimate good', and did not 'see the value' of integrating children in the activities of the neighbourhood. Barnardo's failed 'to build their service round the needs

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[73] *Ibid.*, circular letter, 14 February 1952. In October 1950, the Society established that girls being boarded out should have 2 coats of which one 'worn', two pairs of shoes, two dresses and one skirt, 2 jumpers and one cardigan. Clothing was even tighter for boys, *ibid.*, Boarding out outfits, 1st October, 1950.

[74] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve Rielaborazione dei Dati Statistici e Note Aggiunte alla Precedente Relazione', *Relazione della Commissione Speciale*, p.158.

[75] PRO, MH 102/1449, *Care of Children Committee. Evidence submitted by Lady Allen of Hurtwood*, p.3.

[76] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve rielaborazione', p.157

[77] PRO, HO 361/1, Woodford Bridge Garden City was a large establishment housing 116 boys and 20 girls in 7 permanent houses, 60 children in three nursery houses, and 80 girls in the 'Princess Margaret School', *Summary of Points for Barnardo's Discussion* on 8th December, 1953.

of individual children', and tried instead 'to make children fit in to these services'. Paramount to their intervention was the aim of providing 'a good Christian background':

> In their passionate desire to form this mould into which they can put the children, they seem convinced that a child must be better off in clean hygienic surroundings than in its squalid or immoral homes. Once children are separated from 'bad parents' there seems little effort to return them, and we are even tempted to believe that there is resistance to the parents' wishes to have a child back.[78]

The making of reliable citizens

One of the issues at the hearth of the discussion over the management of the institutions was a view of their ultimate aim as that of transforming children with unsuitable background into reliable citizens and parents. An ideal institution was one that helped children to acquire 'good social habits', to develop their own interests, to look after themselves and their possessions, and to learn co-operation and general social adaptability'.[79] For this to be successful, institutional regimes should avoid praxes likely to produce rejection or apathy, and should provide adequate education and professional training. Prejudices, lack of economic resources and shortage of trained personnel could easily hamper the success of such a strategy. In England, the Curtis committee had found only a few institutions that allowed children to have personal possessions, and to keep pictures and photographs 'in their bedrooms and dormitories as children in ordinary households'. Equally unsatisfactory was the management of children's education and training, based on the assumption that boys and girls in institutions 'were not of good enough calibre for skilled occupations, and that the best that could be done was to find them a job on a farm or in domestic service'. It was a 'long standing traditions' that work arrangements could be made directly by the Matron, usually sending girls to domestic service without giving them sufficient opportunity to hear about or follow other possibilities.

Greater efforts were made in both countries to provide children with a solid religious education. In most children's homes, the reference to the spiritual dimension of care meant communicating to children a sense of devotion to the church, through the achievement of 'a sure faith in God and a training in worship'.[80] Providing religious guidance was explicitly required of homes by the Home Office, since 'a child who has to grow up away from his own parents needs even more then any other the comfort and help of a religious faith and the inspiration to right thinking and right doing which it gives'. Religious upbringing was to be rooted in examples, and if those who cared for the children were 'sincere in their convictions', even if they pertained to a different denomination, their guidance would have had 'an added significance'.[81] In case of fostering and adoption, however, the 1948 Children's Act recommended to local

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[78] *Ibid., The Chief Inspector, Dr. Barnardo's Homes*, December 1953.

[79] *Ibid*, para.207, p.62. In 1949, the Children's Society stressed the importance of teaching 'good manners' as a means of improving the chances of boarding out children, since foster parents expected 'a child to be trained up to its age', CSA, Children's Society, *Bulletin*, n. 13, August (1949), p.1.

[80] CSA, 85.110/14, *Handbook for workers*, 1959, p.86.

[81] CEA, Board of Education/CC/WP/4/1, Central Training Council in Child Care, paper for meeting on Friday, 15th May, 1953, 'Notes on the training of housemothers and housefathers of children's homes', p.5.

authorities to make sure whenever possible that the person taking over the care of a child either shared the religious persuasion of the child's parents or undertook to respect it in the education of the child.

In both countries, the effort of raising reliable future citizens implicitly limited children's possibilities of self-definition. The main aim of most institution was that to produce 'normal' individuals, where normality meant first of all to be polite and grateful, to subscribe to a sexual morality acceptable to Christian ethics; to aspire to a social position adequate to one's conditions of birth; and most of all, to be able to create a stable and well performing family.

Both in Italy and in Britain, institutional children underwent a process of progressive loss of individuality, through a monotonous and rigid control of their time (in many case aimed at 'not wasting time'), a limited access to unsupervised space, and restricted possibilities of developing individual interests.[82] This process was symbolically sanctioned by the little attention given to the causes that had brought children into care in the first place, and the 'irrelevance' of their previous lives to their experiences within the institution. The Curtis Report had criticised the poverty of data concerning family background, reasons for admissions, and medical records, and had recommended greater co-ordination between central administrations (particularly Public Assistance Departments) and individual institutions.[83] However the problem remained largely unsolved during the 1950s, hampering the work of the Children Department itself.[84] In January 1955, the Children Officer of Birmingham commented the lack of data concerning reasons for admission in the following terms:

> The original reason is sometimes rather obscure in the case of children admitted twelve or fifteen years ago. […] Personally, I feel the original reason for admission become rather less significant than the course of subsequent events which lead to the assumption of parental rights.[85]

New and old families

Fostering and adoption

In November 1943, Home Office inspectors complained that most children committed to the care of local authorities by Juvenile Courts ended up in institutions due to 'shortage of foster parents willing to take them in'.[86] A Home Office's attempt to

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[82] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison,* London, Allen Lane, 1977 (originally published, 1975), pp.149-156.

[83] The only data registered by LA institutions concerned identifying facts, religion, dates of admission and discharge and entries about health; with the exception of certain health conditions, no written records were kept of the stay in the institution or home. Complains concerned the state of medical records as well, *The Report on the Care of Children,* para.124-127, p.29.

[84] During the preparation of the report on the work of Children's Department for 1955, E. Anstey lamented that it was impossible to obtain 'information about children in care on a given date analysed according to reasons of original admission', PRO, BN 29/4, Reasons Why Children Come into Care, sample survey, January 1955, hand written note on the back of the cover, 21st December, 1954.

[85] *Ibid.,* letter sent by E. J. Holmes, Children's Officer of the City of Birmingham to Miss Rosling, Children's Department, Home Office, on 19th January, 1955.

[86] PRO, MH 57/300, Letter sent from Odgers (Children's Branch) to Miss MacKinnon, 10th November, 1943.

improve the situation by increasing the payments made for fostering of 'court cases' provoked large criticisms but did little to change parental attitudes.[87]

In its evidence to the Curtis Committee, the Association of Municipal Corporation confirmed that boarding out was at present hampered by shortage of suitable homes and the preferences expressed by foster parents 'as to the type of child they want'.[88]

According to the Curtis Report, 'a number of very suitable foster parents' had become unavailable after the war due to the 'strong desire' felt by many of those who had given hospitality to evacuated children during the conflict, 'to have their homes to themselves'. The housing situation, the fear of becoming too attached to a child who was then going to be removed, the uneasiness towards extensive controls, and the increasing employment of women constituted further reasons for the reluctance of prospective foster parents to come forward.

Although encouraging a more extended use of fostering, the Curtis Committee had stressed that the shortage of suitable homes should not encourage accepting any candidate, and that not any child could be considered suitable for placing.[89] Moreover, 'supervision and the possibility of removing the child from a bad or indifferent home' should not be regarded as a sufficient safeguard against the risk of bad placements. The removal from an unsuitable home was in itself 'bad for the child' and 'children undergoing several changes of foster parents [were] often worse off than if they had never been boarded out at all'.[90] According to the Curtis report, 'a considerable proportion of children' were 'unsuited by habits, age, or by physical or mental condition to be placed in a private home'. The most difficult children to place were older children and boys, as well as 'coloured children', who could 'hardly be placed at all'.[91]

The Children's Society considered boarding out unsuitable for children with 'psychological or physical defects' requiring special care, and for those in regular contact with their parents - or whose parents objected to them being placed with a family. Moreover, the Society complained that while 'pretty, docile girls with curly hair' were in great demand, 'foster-mothers of the real motherly sort' 'willing to tackle a brace of energetic young brothers [...] or a brother and sister' were difficult to find.[92] A census made at the beginning of 1949 revealed that of the total children available for fostering in the Society's branches, 35 were single girls under five, 20 were girls over five, and 18 were pairs or groups of sisters; the equivalent figures for boys were

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[87] *Ibid.*, Letter sent from Howell Jones to Mr. Beckett, 10th March, 1944.

[88] PRO, MH 102/1448, *Care of Children Committee, Evidence of Association of Municipal Corporation*, January 1946, para.25.

[89] Jane Packman has suggested that evacuation, Bowlby's theories, and economic considerations contributed to fostering been seen as 'the ideal method' of child care during the 1950s, J. Packman, *The Child Generation, Child Care Policy in Britain,* Oxford, Blackwell and Robertson, 1981 (first published, 1975), pp.21-23. According to the 1955 *Boarding Out of Children Regulations* foster parents' living conditions and age, and number and sex of the members of the household should be compatible with the aim of creating foster families resembling as closely as possible normal households. The Regulations lifted up statutory regulations on the maximum number of children in a foster home, and introduced greater flexibility in the procedures to be adopted in local situations, therefore increasing the powers of LAs.

[90] *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para.461, p.153.

[91] *Ibid.,* para.460, p.152.

[92] CSA, ' No Place Like Home', *Our Waifs and Strays*, Children's Society Support Magazine, XL, 680, Christmas, (1946), p.52.

respectively 151, 110, and 40.[93] The attempt to render children more appealing to potential foster parents by teaching them good manners and education did little to correct the imbalance.[94]

A central issue in the evaluation of possible placements concerned the relationship between foster families and natural parents.

In 1950, the Children's Society asked its branches to 'neither inform parents when their child was boarded out nor send to foster parents letters from parents'. The Society specified that this was not meant to 'cut off communications between a suitable parent and her child', but simply to protect foster families from inopportune interference, which could easily result in the Society losing a foster home.[95] It was added that a successful fostering (which is one resembling as much as possible normal family life), required a stable and exclusive relationship between foster parents and children, protected from the intrusion of the family of origin, often already diagnosed as unable to answer the child's needs.

The situation remained very different in Italy, where fostering failed to be conceived as an alternative to institutional care throughout the 1950s.[96]

Two kinds of fostering were practised in Italy after the war. The first was a placing without reward organised directly by children's homes, which retained full responsibility over the child. The second, defined as *collocamento familiare* o *collocamento mercenario* (paid fostering), was the closest equivalent to the kind of fostering practiced in Britain. It consisted mostly in a form of nurseling organised by maternity homes (*brefotrofi*) and paid for by Councils or Provinces. Although generally limited to very young children, this form of fostering was welcomed by many observers as the opening to modern approaches to child welfare. Following Bowlby's theory, for instance, Lancellotti Mari explained that fostering allowed children to form the early emotional attachments upon which the future development of their whole nervous system depended. Moreover, a greater use of fostering could make it possible to overcome 'excessively standardised methods of care, harmful to children's physical and intellectual development'.[97] Lancellotti Mari stressed that greater efforts were necessary in Italy to extend the use of the system and to introduce reliable controls over foster parents. The enquiry over assistance conducted by the AAI in 1954 also recommended a growing use of fostering, considered beneficial to children's physical and mental development and likely to increase the likelihood of providing them with stable homes for the rest of their lives. In reality, however, institutional life remained the most likely destiny for most children in Italy, and it was not unusual to find children of school age 'left' in young children and maternity homes.[98]

In the cases in which fostering took place, this could be transformed, after three years, in *affiliazione* (affiliation), with the acquisition of the full patria potestas by the foster parents. The legal institute of *affiliazione* differed from adoption in the fact that it

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[93] *Ibid.*, *Bulletin*, 11, April (1949), p.1.
[94] *Ibid.*, *Annual Report for* 1945, p.8, and *Annual Report for* 1955, p.327.
[95] *Ibid.*, *Bulletin,* 17, May, (1950), p.1. (My italics).
[96] L. Rocchi's intervention in *Matrimonio Fondamento della Famiglia*, Atti del VII Convegno Nazionale di Studio dell'Unione Giuristi Cattolici Italiani, Roma, 3–5 Novembre, 1955, pp.86-87.
[97] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve studio', pp.148-149.
[98] AAI, *Guida Nazionale degli Istituti di Assistenza*, p.17.

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did not imply the transmission of rights of inheritance. Lancillotti Mari described it as the most common means of child assistance within the family practised in Italy and praised it as a method widely adopted by people with modest economic possibilities. Although its use to this end remained controversial, *affiliazione* represented also the best means of 'creating a legal relationship between the natural parent and the adulterine child'.[99] Adoption, on the other side, as the only solution providing the transmission of rights of inheritance, remained open in Italy solely to people without legitimate heirs. Being an institution originally aimed at the preservation of patrimony and name, prospective adoptees could be of any age, while child-less adopters should have passed their reproductive age.

The place of the natural family
The Curtis Report had emphasised that the decision 'of taking a child away from even an indifferent home' could only be justified if 'something better – indeed much better' could be offered'.[100] The Report had also criticised institutions' frequent assumption that children 'had been deserted' and most parents 'had proved themselves unworthy of guardianship', commenting that

The possibility that some children might have relatives, who with encouragement might take an interest in them, seemed an idea which had never been really considered, at any rate by members of the staff.[101]

In Italy, sociologists and doctors' 'observations of children living in filthy environments, not eating properly and being neglected and exposed to bad examples' had given support to the idea that 'even a mediocre family' was 'always better than an excellent institution', lacking 'the warmth and intimacy that only the family can give'.[102]

Nevertheless, the consideration of the child's emotional and psychological needs played often little part in the choice of the best form of intervention. In 1953, the Inchiesta sulla Miseria criticised the fact that most associations representing particular categories of orphaned children treated institutional care as the only viable solution, even when relatives existed and were willing to take up the care of the child. In 1955, the inquiry conducted in Milan found institutions overcrowded with children from poor families, often with only one parent. The prejudices and 'wrong assumptions' attached to single parents, 'even when they were not invalid, immoral, or unable to give affection, and had a 'healthy although modest education', prevented providing single-parent families with the economic help necessary to prevent the removal of the chil.[103]

Following similar considerations, the Children's Society ran 'its own private scheme of unsubsidised 'family allowances', paid weekly to families whose home

[99] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve Studio', p.150.
[100] *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para.447, p.148.
[101] *Ibid.*, para.202, p.60.
[102] A. Cappelli Vegni, 'Come Sono e Come Vorremmo Fossero gli Istituti di Assistenza all'Infanzia', *Relazione della Commissione Speciale per un'Indagine delle Condizioni dell'Infanzia in Provincia di Milano,* p.183.
[103] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve Rielaborazione', p.155-6.

conditions were good, apart for financial hardship.[104] The cases dealt with under the grant scheme remained however a minority within the activities of the Society, possibly due to the 'criteria of suitability' applied to the selection of the families to be supported.[105] Examples reported in the Society's magazine portrayed deserving widowed or deserted mothers struggling to keep their families together, generous grandparents taking the place of a prematurely dead daughter or 'good-hearted' neighbours looking after someone else's children without reward. In the case of 'unmarried mothers', however, the Society preferred to admit them to a home, together with their babies, where they were usually employed as carers.

For the children in its care, the Society encouraged relationships with suitable parents and relatives, through the exchange of letters and the organisation of visits and holidays. Local branches were invited to send letters with news of the children both to those families already taking an interest and to those less present. Since 1943, the Society followed a policy of disclosing to children particulars concerning their families of origin about a year before their discharge.[106]

In many cases, the policy followed by homes towards children's families of origin had to be negotiated with LAs, which retained the final responsibility over children admitted to the care of a voluntary association as poor law and fit person cases. This sharing of responsibility was not free from tensions, as divergences in opinion emerged as to what parents and relatives could be considered suitable for the children to have a relationship with, as well as concerning the modality and extent of such relationships. [107]

In the case of the Children's Society, the guiding principle was that while every effort should be made to maintain links between children and 'worthy' but unlucky families, equal commitment should be put in protecting them from the negative influence of 'unworthy' parents, especially once they had reached wage-earning age and could be 'reclaimed' by their families. It was the Society's duty to place 'every possible obstacle' 'in the way of a child being withdrawn to an undesirable home'. In 1945, Mr. Vaughan

> Expressed the hope that it would soon be possible for the society to emigrate some of the children again to the Colonies, as in the past that had proved a most effective safeguard in cases where a child had unworthy parents.[108]

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[104] CSA, *Annual Report for 1945*, p.3. The principle was reaffirmed 14 years later: 'It is a generally accepted principle that the best place for any child is his own home. […] We keep constantly before us the possibility of so helping parents that they are able eventually to provide a really suitable home for their children', *Annual Report for 1959*, p.706.

[105] In 1955, out of 1194 children admitted to the care of the Society, only 148 cases had entered the Grant scheme, bringing the total number of children assisted in such a way to 538, CSA, *Annual Report for 1955*, p.325. 395 children had been restored to their homes at the end of 1955.

[106] CSA, *Circulars*, November 25th, 1943. It was left to Masters and Matrons to withdraw aspects 'which would be neither wise, necessary or expedient' for children to know, particularly in the case of the illegitimate children whose mothers had remarried.

[107] CSA, *Bulletin*, March 1948.

[108] CSA, Conference of Homes Representatives, St. Hanselm Hall, London, 20th September, 1945.

Protection from 'unworthy parents' could be seen as a variation of the 'religious concern to 'save' the individual slum child from the immorality of his or her environment' that Hendrick has indicated as one of the reasons for child emigration.[109]

The findings of the Curtis Committee had shown that within children's homes' personnel were often more concerned with the negative influence of unsuitable parents than with the consequences of severing contacts between children and their families. Opening incoming and outgoing correspondence was a common procedure wherever correspondence was allowed, justified by the consideration that letters 'might unsettle' some of the children. According to Theodore Tucker, who wrote on the basis of his experience in Barnardo's, the list of unsuitable letters included 'twin letters' from separated parents abusing each other, 'well meaning but equally harmful letters' sent by mothers describing their love and longing for the child, and letters promising unrealistic reunions.[110] Tucker explained that Barnardo's provided children with a far more desirable environment than their families of origin, and claimed that no attempts should be made to bring children 'up to a normal home life, if by that is meant the kind of homes that can be provided by what is sometimes described by politicians as 'the lower income group''.[111] Bringing up Barnardo's children in a manner similar to that of many of their contemporaries 'who are left in their own homes', would have required eliminating regular hours of going to bed, withdrawing a balanced diet and cooked food, and introducing 'irregular punishment', 'cuffing, smacking, nagging and abusing'.

For the Children's Society, 'unworthy families' were chiefly careless parents who thought, 'that anybody and everybody can take full responsibility for their children except themselves'. They included mothers 'satisfied if a baby can be taken off their hands so that they can be perfectly free once more', and fathers who despite earning a 'good wage', felt that their duty had been performed if they could 'persuade the society to take their children'.[112] The 'unwanted baby' symbolised parental failure and moral collapse, and confirmed the importance of voluntary assistance:

> We are not bound by rules as to means or domicile of the parents. We judge solely by the needs of the child. It would be difficult for any State-controlled organisation so to widen its rules as to take in some of the children we freely admit and for whom we exist. Yet all our children need help badly.[113]

Nonetheless, the Society acknowledged the doubt that releasing the parents 'from their natural duties' could indirectly contribute to the 'loosening of family ties':

> We do not want to encourage the unworthy type of parent. We believe most emphatically in the importance of family life, and in our careful consideration of each case and in our practice of making grants so

[109] Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p.82. Clause 17 of the 1948 Children Act admitted the possibility of sending children to Ontario and Western Australia.
[110] T. F. Tucker, *Children Without Homes. The Problem of Their Care and Protection,* London, The Bodley Head, 1952, pp.84-87. The book collected articles originally published in *The Forum,* the *Barnardo Staff Gazette.*
[111]*Ibid.,* p.40.
[112] 'Parents who don't care', CSA, Our *Waifs and Strays*, Children's Society Support Magazine, 673, Summer (1945), p.14.
[113] 'Heirs of Unhappiness', *ibid.*, Lent (1946), p.10.

that the mother may in suitable cases retain full responsibility for her child, we work always to preserve the sanctity of the home.[114]

The question of the attitude to be maintained towards the natural parents was particularly sensitive in the case of single mothers and their children. The matter was discussed during the third reading of the Adoption of Children Bill in relation to an amendment intended to reduce the period during which the mother was entitled to reclaim her child from three months to six weeks, in order to protect the adoptive parents. Criticising the proposal, Ayrton Gould (MP for Hendon, North) suggested that the position of the unmarried mother needed greater protection for two reasons. The first was that the 'mental suffering' endured by the mother during pregnancy could require a considerable amount of time before she was able to make a balanced decision. The second was that adoption societies believed 'that anyone rather than the real mother of an illegitimate child – I mean any respectable, suitable person – [was] a better parent than the natural mother'. For this reason, Gould argued, many mothers were persuaded to give up their children for adoption early after childbirth while still unable to make a reasoned choice.[115]

In 1953, partly under the stimulus of the work of the Adoption of Children Committee, the Church of England Moral Welfare Council started a review of its position on adoption and its responsibilities in its management. A report presented at a meeting of the CEMWC in November 1953 explained that although until the war the Council had opposed adoption, preferring fostering or the placing of the child in an institution, the situation had changed since the conflict. This was due partly to the increasing difficulty of finding foster parents and partly to the Council's recognition that the mother's decision could be 'a mature and responsible' one, taken 'at great cost and self sacrifice', and constituting the best plan for the child.[116] Boarding out and adoption strongly influenced their respective possibilities of development. The growth of prospective adopters contributed to the shortage of foster parents, while the increasing tendency to consider boarding out as a preliminary step towards adoption during the second half of the 1950s imposed stricter conditions on the selection of suitable parents.[117]

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[114] 'Parents who don't care', *ibid.*, Summer (1945), p.14.

[115] *Hansard*, 24th June, 1949, pp.679-680. The amendment, proposed by Levy (Eton and Slough) and Parker (Dagenham), was eventually rejected. The idea of the 'abnormality' of the period following giving birth was endorsed by Boyd Carpenter (Kingston-upon Thames), Jean Mann (Coatbridge), Mr. Younger (Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department), and Mr. Nield (Chester).

[116] CEA, CEMWC/D/3, Adoption Policy, meeting held on 5th November, 1953. In his study of child health in Newcastle, conducted in 1954, James Spence suggested that physical hazard mortality and morbidity rates were particularly high among illegitimate children because of higher percentages (30% against 4.7%) of single mothers who returned to work before the child was one year old. The findings were used by the paediatrician Christine Cooper (herself a member of the Durham and Northumberland Adoption Society) to support the possibility of proceeding to adoption before the six weeks foreseen by the present policy for breast feeding mothers, C. Cooper, 'The Illegitimate Child', in *The Practitioner*, vol.174, n.1042, April, (1955), pp.488-493.

[117] CSA, *Annual Report for 1955*, p.328. In 1955, 620 children had been boarded out by the Society and 156 had been legally adopted (500 since 1951); in 1956, 775 children had been boarded out and 132 legally adopted. The Annual Report for 1956 estimated that 70% of the children boarded out were suitable for adoption, CSA, *Annual Report for 1956*, p.425. The Society expressed strong support for adoption at early age in suitable cases and, in 1956, expressed 'great disappointment' on behalf of 'all adoption societies' for the Parliament's delay in considering the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children, published in 1954, *ibid.*, p.423.

Conclusions

Examining the duties of the state towards children, the Italin expert in family law Lancellotti Mari explained that the interaction between state and family was both necessary and inevitable because it was 'through the family that the citizen becomes part of the state', and it was easy for the state 'to penetrate within family life', through its economic, educational, and health provisions. When the family was capable and trustworthy, then the state had simply the duty of complementing its functions, notably through the provision of education and health assistance. When the family was unsuitable to answer the needs of the child, however, the state had the duty of substituting for it. Questions such as what responsibilities should be attributed to the state and the family respectively, where the power of intervention of the first ended, and how permeable private relationships should be to state and voluntary interventions are central to the examination of child care policy. They assumed different connotations in Britain and Italy.

In Britain, the rhetoric that accompanied the creation of the welfare state suggested the beginning of a new relationship between state and family, where welfare provisions would have constituted a new and constant companion to family life and a new means of family and individual support.

The relationship between family and state in the new welfare society, however, proved complex and contradictory. The acquisition of greater means of social intervention by the state was accompanied by a renewed insistence on the unique capacity of the family to provide for the care and support of children. Problems of organisation, finance and personnel limited the actual capacity of the state to deliver services and implied the maintenance of a large role for voluntary societies, both in the delivery and shaping of policies. The idea that the state could take over functions traditionally attributed to the family never informed the type of intervention pursued in Britain. Rather, the ideal seemed that of creating social services able to provide a suitable training for those most responsible for the welfare of the children and the family as a whole – mothers in the first place. Neglectful mothers and problem families came to be seen during the post-war years primarily in medico-social rather than in penal terms, requiring rehabilitation, close supervision, and skilled case work. However, lack of clear responsibilities over intervention and limited resources hindered the achievement of successful policies, leaving major responsibilities to the voluntary sector. If doubts were raised in some quarters concerning the long term consequences of the renunciation by the state to assume full responsibility for child welfare, many advocated a flexible and dedicated voluntary intervention, free from bureaucratic hindrances and based on the work of strongly motivated individuals as the best approach to family problems. The best example in this sense remained the Family Service Units, often portrayed as a heroic organisation, able to compensate for its limited resources thanks to the total commitment of its workers. The dilemma remained of whether such characteristics could be adapted to the characteristics and requirements of state provided services.

A rather different situation existed in Italy throughout the period considered, because of the very limited role assumed by the state in the provision of child assistance. In a situation in which voluntary, mostly Catholic, organisations maintained the complete responsibility over children's institutional care, and public social work was in its infancy, the state's attitude towards the family remained inevitably even less

interventionist and gladly left the family to solve its own problems. This resulted in a smaller role for the helping professions in the definitions of pathologies and criteria of interventions.

Britain and Italy's different approaches to fostering and adoption reflected not only the slow pace with which Italian social services changed their approach to child care, but also different perceptions concerning the nature of the family, its prerogatives and functions, and the possibility of correcting and recreating its founding relationships. In Britain, the emphasis put on fostering and adoption privileged the creation of satisfactory new families over the possibility of 'recovering' or preserving the family of origin. In Italy, the wish to maintain the privileged status of the family as a natural institution based upon procreation within marriage motivated the reluctance to allow adoption where a legitimate succession already existed. Differences in cultural and legal traditions converged in dictating different approached to adoption and to the possibility of creating families based on social kinship rather than on relations of blood. *Affiliazione* was accepted in Italy as a solution able to offer the advantages of family life to a child 'in moral and material difficulties', safeguarding at the same time the superior legal status of the relationships taking place in a legitimate family. The solution was said to be most successful amongst 'the more modest and unselfish people'. Very little rights were recognised to the 'affiliated' children, and little was said concerning their position of inferiority respect to their stepsiblings. The fact that foster fathers could impose their own surname before that of the natural parent was welcomed as a measure strengthening the links within the new family:

> The identity passed through the name contribute to the fraternal relationship established with the new comer; the word affiliazione itself shows that the child becomes part of the family, with great relief for the materially and morally abandoned child and the whole of society.[118]

For all their differences, Britain and Italy shared a language based on family values as the only possible basis of a morally strong society. In both countries, women's individual capacities were deemed the most important factor within family life, often more important than economic and social conditions. Moreover, a significant convergence emerged during the 1950s between the Catholic ideology dominant in Italy and the values promoted in Britain by the Conservative Party on matters such as parental authority, marriage, and the identification of the ideal family with a middle class, conservative household broadly informed by religious principles. Finally, in both countries normative definitions of moral values and acceptable behaviour were used to construct a strong idea of normality, based upon an idealised view of legitimate, stable, and monogamous families as the only environment suitable to the proper (or normal) development of a child.

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[118] Lancellotti Mari, 'Breve Studio', p.150.