

WHO CARES? NARRATIVES ON FAMILIES IN EUROPE

Eds. Adriana Zaharijević, Anca Dohotariu and Joanna Wawrzyniak

What is family today? Although seemingly self-evident, this question has the power to stir fierce debates – more often political than academic ones. These debates indicate something significant happening in the way we talk and think about family. *Who Cares? Narratives on Families in Europe* seeks to analyze narratives framing family life in Europe, paying particular attention to narratives that emphasize the importance of returning to a by-gone ideal of family – narratives of return.

The family of today has changed from what it was only a century ago with regard to its function and form (Vangelisti 2012; Peterson 2012; Sussman and Steinmetz 2013; Robila 2014; Farris and Bourque 2020). At the same time, the narratives on what constitutes a family in a given space and time have multiplied and diversified, more or less reflecting the rich varieties of lives of contemporary families. Competing narratives are not necessarily founded on empirical findings about how real families live but are rather based on the prescriptive visions of how they should be living. While narratives are changeable, they have durable discursive effects on real families, as well as on how state and various non-state actors contribute to the (re)definition of the notion of family.

Specifically, the narratives of return have a prominent role in the struggles around these (re)definitions. These narratives use *care for the family* as its main discursive strategy. Bolstered by the recession of the welfare state and the collapse of the socialist states, the deep societal transformations and severe curtailment of the state care for the family, these narratives build on fears and trepidations of the ‘common people’. Their political promise is to procure care and to ‘give it back’ to the family – but only to a *family proper*. Within this framework, the family is seen as the static, immutable unit, which has a socially productive and nationally reproductive function. In effect, family is understood as the ‘natural place’ which precedes socio-political order of the state; that should be granted rights on a par with individual human rights; that is defined exclusively as a consequence of a procreative marriage between a man and a woman.¹ The narratives of return campaign for the restoration of the family – for a return to its ‘better days’ – in the name of the care for the family, especially undermined by the emancipation of women and the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights.

This volume will analyze the struggles around these (re)definitions of family and will build on the recent literature on anti-gender movement in Europe (Kováts and Põim 2015; Grzebalska, Kováts and Petó 2017; Von Redecker 2016; Fassin 2016; Graff and Korolczuk 2017; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Zaharijević 2018; Kubisa and Wojnicka 2019). This literature demonstrates that the defense of the family is a crucial trope of this essentially transnational movement of ‘return’. Although

¹ “Male and female He created them”, Congregation for catholic education (for Educational Institutions); *Convention on the Rights of the Family*, Ordo Iuris; *Restoring the Natural Order*, An Agenda for Europe.

there is a general consensus that family is in the midst of anti-gender debates, not sufficient attention has been given to how this discourse on new familialism functions.

Starting from an ostensibly essentialist question – what is family – this volume will demonstrate that no essentialist, one and simple definition of family is possible, without detrimental consequences on the liberties of all who comprise it. Contemporary families lead complex lives and they are constantly negotiating social, political, economic and institutional settings, which are integral to what families *are*. As such, they put in question the notion of the *family proper*. Thus the driving force behind this volume is to answer the question: how is it possible to care for families in Europe without denigrating the current diversity of family life?

The specific objectives of this volume are to a) map the competing narratives on families both in the specific country cases, and in the pan-European space; b) to discern the normative framing of the conservative narratives of return and describe the collective memories and mythicized historic time(s) to which the narratives of return aspire. The general aim of the volume is to offer a collective answer to the question what it means to care for the family, if family is understood as a dynamic, mutable entity whose structure, social meanings and political role proves dependent on larger processes.

The design of the volume

Springing from the COST action [Who cares in Europe? \(CA18119\)](#), the volume should act as an alternative answer (or series of answers) to the *narratives of the return*. In doing this, it will rely on transdisciplinary approaches and comparative analysis.

The chapters will cover all regions of the European continent. We aim to provide both country cases and transnational insights focusing on family narratives in EU politics, family during the accession processes, cross-border families, and families and grassroots activism across Europe.

Depending on a number of proposals we will consider either a format of an edited volume or a journal special issue. We will aim at a recognizable publisher or an IF journal. We envision the chapters/articles as communicating with each other, and we will organize on-line workshop with authors to discuss draft versions of submissions and ensure the volume overall coherence. Chapters may be co-authored and we are open for submissions coming from different fields of humanities and social sciences.

Submission guidelines:

Potential contributors are kindly invited to submit an abstract (**max 300 words**), as well as a short bio/institutional affiliation/contact details, no later than **May 1st**, to:

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Editors:

Adriana Zaharijević is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. She writes at the crossroads of political philosophy, social theory and gender studies. In the last several years she has been following the rise of anti-gender movement, particularly in the region of former Yugoslavia and other postsocialist countries. Her latest books are *Život tela. Politička filozofija Džudit Batler (Life of Bodies. Judith Butler's Political Philosophy)* (Akademska knjiga 2020) and *Rethinking Vulnerability and Exclusion. Historical and Critical Essays* (Palgrave 2020), coedited with Blanca Rodriguez and Nuria Sanchez Madrid.

Anca Dohotariu is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Bucharest. Her publications and research interests are related to social and family policies, care research, family sociology and gender studies. She conducted two post-doctoral research projects on family policies (a comparative perspective Romania-Hungary) and on work-life balance in academia, and she is currently team member of the CAGE joint research project (Campagnes „anti-genre” en Europe: enjeux de savoir, enjeux de pouvoir) – developed through the collaboration of the University of Bucharest (Romania), Sofia University (Bulgaria) and Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium).

Joanna Wawrzyniak is a senior researcher and Director of the Center for Research on Social Memory at the University of Warsaw. She is interested in developing memory studies at the intersection of sociology and history, as well as in exploring Eastern European memory processes in a global comparative framework. Her current projects include work on memories of socialism, neoliberal transformation, and deindustrialization in Poland and contributions to collaborative research on cultural heritage and memory processes in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and East and South Asia. She has published, among others, in *Memory Studies*, *Contemporary European History*, *East European Politics and Societies* and *Polish Sociological Review*. Her books in English include co-edited *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* (Berghahn Books 2016); co-authored *The Enemy on Display: The Second World War in Eastern European Museums* (Berghahn Books 2015); and *Veterans, Victims and Memory: The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland* (Peter Lang 2015). Her more recent co-authored book in Polish is *Cięcia. Mówiona historia transformacji (Cuts. Oral History of Post-Socialism)*, Wyd. Krytyka Polityczna, 2020). Her work was supported by grants of the European Commission, national agencies, and fellowships at several European universities.