ISCTE IUL

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

School of Social Sciences

Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

Hegemonic regulations of kinship:

Gender and sexualities norms in Italy.

Diego Lasio

Thesis specially presented for the fulfillment of the degree of

Doctor in Psychology

Supervisor:

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ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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July, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

After many years of heated debate, in 2016 the Italian parliament passed a law to regulate same-sex civil unions. Although the law extends to same-sex couples most of the rights of married heterosexual couples, the law preserves legal differences between heterosexual marriage and same-sex civil unions; moreover, the possibility of a partner in a same-sex couple adopting the biological children of the other partner was so controversial that it had to be deleted in order for the law to pass. The research project presented in the present thesis aimed at understanding which discourses and social practices are currently used in Italy by heteronormativity to resist challenges to the hegemonic model of kinship. Three studies have been carried out for this purpose, respectively focused on: 1) the public debate that occurred in Italy while the law proposal was under discussion in parliament; 2) the speeches of the Members of Parliament (MP) who opposed the section of the bill concerning lesbian and gay parenthood; 3) the discourses of Italian LGBT activists about lesbian and gay parenting. The analyses highlight that the opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian couples and their children contributes to maintain the hegemonic gender order and to reiterate restrictive standards of motherhood. Traces of heteronormativity are also present in the discourses of LGBT activists, namely in terms of access to reproduction, the parents' place within the regime of gender and the right standards for childrearing. Theoretical and practical implications of these discourses are discussed.

Keywords

Cultural hegemony; heteronormativity; homonormativity; Italy; lesbian and gay parenthood; same-sex civil unions; public debate; political discussion; LGBT activists; gender order.

RESUMO

Após muitos anos de debates intensos, em 2016 o parlamento italiano aprovou uma lei para regular as uniões civis de casais do mesmo sexo. Apesar da lei permitir a casais do mesmo sexo a maioria dos direitos dos casais heterossexuais casados, a lei preserva diferenças legais entre casais heterossexuais e uniões civis entre casais do mesmo sexo; a possibilidade de um parceiro do mesmo sexo adotar um filho biológico do outro parceiro foi tão controversa que teve de ser eliminada para a lei passar. O projeto de investigação que apresentamos nesta tese pretende entender que discursos e práticas sociais são usados na Itália pela heteronormatividade para resistir às mudanças no modelo hegemónico de parentesco. Três estudos foram realizados para este propósito, respetivamente focados em: 1) o debate público ocorrido na Itália, enquanto a lei esteve sob discussão no parlamento; 2) os discursos de deputados/as que se opuseram á parte da lei sobre parentalidade gay e lésbica; 3) os discursos de ativistas LGBT italianos sobre parentalidade gay e lésbica. As análises mostram como a oposição ao reconhecimento de casais gays e lésbicos e seus/suas filhos/as contribuem para manter a ordem hegemónica de género e reiterar padrões restritivos de maternidade. Encontram-se traços de heteronormatividade também no discurso de ativistas LGBT, sobretudo em termos do acesso à reprodução, ao lugar da parentalidade no regime de género e aos padrões apropriados de educação dos/as filhos/as. Discutem-se também as implicações teóricas e práticas destes discursos.

Palavras-chave

Hegemonia cultural; heteronormatividade; homonormatividade; Itália; parentalidade gay e lésbica; uniões civis de casais do mesmo sexo; debate público; discussão política; ativistas LGBT; ordem de género.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Gender, sexualities and kinship in Italy: Background of the research project

Exiles from recognition

Recent years have been marked by important changes for the civic recognition of same-sex couples and their children in Europe. Most European countries have now begun to recognise same-sex couples and in many cases also lesbian and gay parenthood has been legitimised. In Europe, several countries have passed laws on same-sex marriage or civil partnership and gay and lesbian parenthood. To mention some examples, Denmark was the first in Europe to introduce a register for civil unions and in 1999 this register was opened to same-sex couples. The same country was the first to make accessible adoption to non-married heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Many other Northern European countries, such as Sweden, Iceland and the Netherlands, regulated cohabitation, civil union and gay and lesbian parenthood in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. Incrementally, other European countries, such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany, legitimised same-sex partnerships and in some cases adoption and assisted reproductive technologies have been opened to gay and lesbian couples. Spain was the first to recognise civil marriage for same-sex couples and, despite the fierce campaign against this measure carried out by the Catholic Church and other conservative and right-wing forces, the Civil Code was amended for equating same-sex marriage with heterosexual marriage. Moreover, same-sex couples have been allowed access to adoption or assisted reproductive technologies, excluding surrogacy.

In 2010, Portugal also legalised same-sex marriage. Initially, gay and lesbian married couples could not access adoption or reproductive technologies, but in 2016 these limitations were lifted and same-sex couples were permitted to adopt and to benefit from assisted reproduction technologies. However, as scholars (Oliveira, Lopes, Cameira & Nogueira, 2014) noticed, in spite of the legislative progresses, heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005; Warner, 1991) did not come to the end in the country and discrimination is still present in the public sphere in multiple forms.

Among the last countries in Europe, Italy legislated on same-sex couples only in May 2016. The law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016) recognised same-sex civil unions by extending to

them most of the provisions regarding heterosexual married couples with regards to measures such as widow(er)'s pension, inheritance, admission to hospital during partner's hospitalisation, decisions about medical treatments. Although this almost complete assimilation of same-sex civil unions to heterosexual married couples, the section of the law proposal that would allow a partner to adopt the biological children of the other partner was so controversial that it had to be erased in order for the law to pass. Many commentators stated that the denial to the right to adopt the children of the partner is understandable as a normal and predictable resistance typical of the first step of a country toward homonormalisation and this would be soon resolved as already the case in other countries.

However, in spite of the increasingly widespread norm of homotolerance (Roseneil et al., 2013), and the enthusiasm to which this gave rise, it is evident that heteronormativity continues to be hegemonic and individuals who are considered disruptive of the heteronorms still need to face discrimination, stigmatisation, marginalisation, psychological and physical violence. Episodes of intolerance against sexual minorities are reported every day by media and although they are often allocated to single cases of homophobia and interpreted as they were individual exceptions to universally accepted principles of democracy, they testify the enduring power of hegemonic heteronormativity in contemporary societies. As Celia Kitzinger (1999) stated, the notion of homophobia, while it is a record of the efforts of Lesbian and Gay Psychology to fight prejudices and oppression against homosexual individuals, on the other side it witnesses a certain inclination of psychological disciplines to trace political and social problems back to "health" issues, thus reducing them to problems of "mental illness", personal inadequacies, or specific individuals' suffering from clearly diagnosable disorders. Critical psychology (e.g. Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997) has challenged the "individualism" of traditional psychology, which identifies problems as merely individual, located "inside individual heads" (Amâncio & Oliveira, 2006) rather than in social relations. Individualism is an ideology that serves to hide collective phenomena that depend on class, race, gender and sexuality. Categories traditionally used by individualistic psychological approaches, such as attitude, personality, intelligence, mental health, which are taken for granted, should not be treated as essential and stable individual traits, rather as historical and political categories used by and legitimising power relations. Since the late sixties, the construct of homophobia has been used for describing the persistent fear of homosexual individuals (MacDonald, 1976) and, once it was operationalized, it was related to different personality traits (such as dogmatism and authoritarianism) and several personal and

relational problems. Thus, focusing on an individualistic level of analysis and disregarding the socio-historical and institutional conditions that result in sexuality-based discrimination. And similarly, the concept of internalised homophobia focuses on the internalisation by gay and lesbian individuals of the prejudices towards homosexuality and on the pathological development that can derive from it. By reducing sexuality-based discriminations to homophobia, neoliberal systems of power succeed in hiding structural discriminatory practices behind alleged individual problems. Although it is indisputable the heuristic value and the practical utility that reflections on homophobia and internalised homophobia have had for affirmative psychotherapy with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) persons, and although it cannot be questioned the impact that social problems have on individual health, particular attention need to be paid to the shadow that can hide the structural and institutional power at the origins of discrimination when resorting to individualistic explanations. There is an implicit risk in labelling individuals - persecutors or victims - as affected by an "individual malfunction", because this depoliticises oppression and the system of power relations that maintain it (Kitzinger, 1999). There is no doubt that the analysis of individual inadequacies can lead to effective results in local actions, but if this remains the only level of analysis, the risk is to obscure structural and institutional power on which the individual action may occur.

In Italy, the strong opposition to the recognition of same-sex couples expressed by many parts of the society while the law proposal was under discussion in the Parliament, together with the denial of legal protection for lesbian and gay parents and their children, attest that heteronormativity is still widespread in the country, with civic and religious institutions that concur to maintain it.

The state and the catholic church play an important role in preserving the heteronormative view of intimacy and kinship in the country (Bertone, 2017; Bertone & Franchi, 2014) and they contribute to supporting conservative beliefs about the family, with the result that the percentage of Italian individuals who still consider gay and lesbian parenthood as threatening children is among the highest in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2011).

Hegemonic heteronormativity continues to construe a vulnerable position for LGBT individuals and this impacts on their citizenship and rights (Lopes, Oliveira, Nogueira & Grave, 2017). Furthermore, heteronormativity is embedded in every social and civic institution and it acts as a cultural hegemonic force, which can lead subordinate groups to give

their consent to those dominant worldviews that are at the origins of their oppression (Ludwig, 2011). LGBT individuals may continue to be exiled from kinship (Weston, 1991) both because of the absence of state legitimacy and their own adhesion to the heteronorms. Heteronormativity may be upheld by LGBT individuals who may perceive transgressions of the heteronorms as a cost and a personal risk (Oliveira, Costa & Nogueira, 2013). Studies (e.g. Pacilli, Taurino, Jost, & Van der Toorn, 2011) have highlighted that Italian gay and lesbian individuals many times share the same negative attitude as heterosexual individuals with regards to parental competences of same-sex couples. Moreover, forms of discrimination against sexual minorities persist also in social organisations that are engaged in contrasting social exclusion and marginalisation (Priola, Lasio, De Simone & Serri, 2014; Priola, Lasio, Serri & De Simone, 2018).

Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand what discourses presently maintain the heterosexual privilege to access reproduction and kinship, while they marginalise LGBT individuals from intimacy and kinship.

The present thesis, by framing the analysis within a poststructuralist feminist framework, has the aim of highlighting the practices of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1978) that contribute to maintaining kinship within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). In the attempt to scrutinise the social and institutional practices that reinforce the normative models of sexuality and kinship, and give origin to sexuality-based discriminations, the present work relies on the contribution given by Michel Foucault, and by the poststructuralist feminist reflections influenced by his work, to the understanding of how the normative heterosexual model has been produced in Western culture. Starting from these premises, sexuality is meant not as a natural property of human beings, rather as a category of experience originating within a specific historical, social and cultural framework. Sexuality is conceptualised as a discourse that originates from cultural processes and restricts the possibilities of bodies and subjectivities. The notion of episteme is used by Foucault (1970) to refer to the historical a priori that supports a specific social understanding of sexuality and 'defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (p. 168). The epistemes create the conditions to distinguish which truths can be considered as scientific and which should be banished (Foucault, 1980). Foucault's contribution is fundamental for the understanding of how heteronormativity constructs and reinforces day by day the connection between sex, gender and sexuality, thus exercising pressures on all to fit within the heteronorm. The section that follows analyses the contribution given by the

Foucaultian approach and by the poststructuralist critics who have been influenced by Foucault's work, comprising queer theory and feminist theory, to the understanding of the processes through which sexualities are constructed.

Understanding sexuality

The work of Michel Foucault occupies a prominent role for understanding sexuality in Western countries. The notion of discourse was central for the reflection of the French social theorist since his earlier works "The order of things" (1970) and "The archaeology of knowledge" (1972), with the latter including the translation of the inaugural lecture given in 1970 at the Collège de France and originally published in France with the title "L'ordre du discours" (1971). In these texts, Foucault looks at discourse as the body of knowledge that, in accordance with the features of a specific historical context, constructs what subjects are, what they can be, what they can talk about and what the objects they talk about are. Foucault's reflection on discourse is not about language as the formal system or the technical knowledge by which people produce and recognise written or spoken concepts (Foucault, 1972). Rather, Foucault's interest is in the historical, social and political circumstances that constitute the "a priori" of discourses, the conditions of their reality: "It is not a question of rediscovering what might legitimize an assertion, but of freeing the conditions of emergence of statements, the law of their coexistence with others, the specific form of their mode of being, the principles according to which they survive, become transformed, and disappear" (Foucault, 1972: 127). Thus, Foucault's analysis of discursive practices is not aimed at revealing the silently intended meanings of discourses, but the system of rules (*archives*) which, at a specific point in time and at a specific social location, found the boundaries of what can be said on any social object or practice (e.g. madness, sexuality) (Foucault, 1972; 1978).

In Foucault's view, rationality and truth are not immutable and universal; as well as many aspects of social life that are perceived as outside of time, they have a past (Foucault, 1977a), and they are embedded in complex power relations between institutional practices, bodies, and systems of thought (Foucault, 1977b; 1978). The production of systems of thought and knowledge is the way in which power achieves its outcomes. Power, by recurring to subtle and complex mechanisms that do not require explicit prohibition or coercion, produces subjectivities establishing what people are and fixing the limits of what they can do.

Following Foucault, Bersani (1995, p. 81) states that "power in our societies functions primarily not by repressing spontaneous sexual drives but by reproducing multiple sexualities". Subsequently, processes of classification, distribution and moral evaluation of sexuality generate approval, marginalisation, discipline or normalisation for the individuals who practice them.

The archaeological method adopted by Foucault in his initial works (1964, 1970, 1973) offers insights into understanding the emergence of systems of knowledge in the modern sciences, thus enlightening that every specific system of thought (e.g. the notion of mental illness) is constructed by contingent historical changes, rather than the consequence of predictable tendencies. After the first period in which Foucault resorted to the archaeological method for investigating the archives that define "the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing" (Foucault, 1972: 129), during his middle period (Foucault, 1977b; 1978) he developed a method for discovering the historical a priori (epistemes) that represent the condition of possibility of knowledge within a specific historical epoch. Through genealogy, as Foucault defined his historical approach evoking Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, it is possible to develop the history of the systems of thought not with the aim of establishing whether or not a system of thought is correct, but to examine the conditions of its emergence, identifying what allows the distinction between what is subject of knowledge and what is not. Foucault's genealogical analysis is not aimed at searching for the origins or to establish continuity between the past and the present. Instead, the genealogical method focuses on the plural and contradictory past in order to reveal the traces of the different ways in which power, through the construction of truth and knowledge, realises the control in modern societies. Conceptions of truth and knowledge are fundamentally products of power and it is through the construction of truth and knowledge that power is realised.

The connections between knowledge and power underpin Foucault's history of sexuality (1978). Sexuality, far from being a natural reality, is constructed through discourses and practices which control human subjects and establish, with the collaboration of scientific disciplines (medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis…), their bodies and their conducts. In his analysis of the development of sexuality as a social discourse, Foucault (1978) argues that from approximately the eighteenth century onwards, what took place is a "codification" of sexual behaviour through the impingement of the state into private desires. Social control is exercised through "general politics" and "regimes of truth", which derive from the discourses of scientific disciplines and state institutions (such as health and educational systems). These

have the capacity to produce and sustain fundamental dynamics of power between the heterosexual majority and sexual minority groups (Foucault, 1978). Thus, the transformation of sex into discourse led to the construction of "peripheral sexualities" (Foucault, 1978), which are under examination, with the creation of the "unnatural" as a specific dimension. Such system of power for Foucault is not linked to a centralised ruling apparatus but is the consequence of disciplinary mechanisms (institutional apparatus and technologies) which have contributed to the modern regime of sexuality; a regime within which one can no longer 'freely' choose how to interrelate one's sexual behaviours, personal identity, public life and political struggle (Halperin, 1995). The modern efforts to control sexuality are not evidence of the "repressive hypothesis", according to which sexuality is confined to the space of the conjugal family and absorbed into the function of reproduction. Rather, according to Foucault (1978b) the social control of sexual desire has produced a veritable explosion of discourse - i.e. talks about sex, media features and programmes, popular and 'scientific' literature, legislation, research and sexual practices (e.g. 'safe' sex) - which are not a simple projection of central power but root power "in forms of behaviour, bodies and local relations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 201).

Foucault's genealogical method of inquiry helps to understand how sexuality has assumed its social place and to scrutinise the "traces" left by a particular historical period under which some type of discourses are authorised and some others are not.

Such analytical approach supports a more localised perspective focused on the complexities of particularity, and this is oriented towards a subversive strategy that positions sexual inequalities within official and institutional discourses, as well as contextualised social practices.

A genealogical approach has significant potential for highlighting those limiting systems of thought that guide the perception and evaluation of sexualities, by illustrating that they are the result of contingent cultural axioms rather than the outcome of rationally inevitable trends.

By highlighting the construction of the present as embedded in historical connections, encounters and forces, genealogy aims to show the plural and sometimes contradictory past that reveals traces of the way in which power conditions defined what is considered 'truth' in today's discourses and practices. By embedding the debate on lesbian and gay parenthood within their socio-historical a priori, the studies presented in this work highlight how contemporary heteronormativity is firmly anchored to discourses that underpin Italian society's knowledge of gender and sexualities.

A pivotal role in contributing to deconstruct the common understanding of gender and sexuality has been played by queer theorists who found one of their main inspirations in the Foucauldian analysis of the interconnections between knowledge, power and sexuality.

First used by Teresa de Lauretis (1991), the expression queer theory refers to the reflections coming from different and heterogeneous disciplines aimed at questioning (i.e. queering) the categories of gender and sexuality and their understanding with reference to the nature. A queer comprehension of gender and sexuality conceive them as the result of historical and cultural emergencies instead of viewing them as essential and fixed individual characteristics (Halperin, 1990) and, as such, they can be deconstructed, which do provide for the possibility for deconstructing certain ontologies concerning identity. Queer theory refuses the ontological grounding in a natural and fixed stable reality, but it represents the subject positioning in relation to the norm. In Halperin's (1995, p. 62) words, queer "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm" and refers to all which is at odds with 'the normal, the legitimate and the dominant'. Queer is not restricted to non-heterosexual individuals but it is accessible to anyone who feels marginalised with regards to gender or sexuality that seek to destabilize gender and sexual norms.

Queer theorists (e.g. Bersani, 1995; Halperin, 1995; Warner 1991) critique the dichotomies (e.g. masculine/feminine; homosexual/heterosexual) in which identities have been restricted and they understand sexual and gender identities as the reification of performances that, reiterated within the heteronormative frame, end up appearing as natural substances. Queer reflection helps to trouble the 'gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined' (Butler, 1990: 17) and 'that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance' (Butler, 1990: 33). Queer critics highlight that, as heteronormativity construes gender and sexuality as pre-cultural facts, also power relations between the heterosexual majority and "alternative" sexualities are normalised and taken for granted. As Butler (1990) asserts, the heterosexualization of desire needs the production of distinct and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine," and this implies that gender is understood as an authentic and expressive attribute of the individual, thus limiting who is not suitable with the binary gender divisions and the normative heterosexual model (Butler, 1997).

Discourses of social organisations, of state institutions and of scientific theories converge to create the modern system of discipline which gains legitimacy from the connection with the power/knowledge system. The current order of discourse on sexuality is the result of social, religious and political contingencies, which contribute to construct the representation of

sexuality in its public and private domains, as well as the recognition of sexual minorities. Thus, queering assumptions about sexual behaviours means not only rejecting the essentialist views of gender and sexuality, but also to challenge heteronormativity as a system of power relations. As Bersani (1995) affirms, referring to certain erotic preferences as "character" is not merely a scientific description: "The attempted stabilising of identity is inherently a disciplinary project. […] sexuality now provides the principal categories for a strategic transformation of behaviour into manipulatable characterological types" (Bersani, 1995: 3). Research inspired by queer theory might offer fruitful insights into the oppressive and exclusionary practices within social contexts informed by heteronormativity.

Since the notion of heteronormativity is dependent on specific political and cultural narratives (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005) and it cannot be discriminately applied across different contexts, this work focuses the attention on the Italian peculiarities, thus providing insights on how heteronormativity works in a context from which insufficient queer reflections have come so far.

The section that follows provides an attempt at locating a genealogical position of the current (Italian) social context in order to better contextualise the discourses emerging in the subsequent analysis.

Hegemonic heteronormativity in Italy

Italy represents a paradigmatic example of the way in which the control of sexuality can be fulfilled through a regime of truth that maintains the notion of one 'dominant' sexuality (heterosexuality) and 'other' "peripheral sexualities" (Foucault, 1978, p.38). In the country, hegemonic heteronormativity has been reinforced by establishing clear restrictions to sexualities not so much through explicit prohibitions or persecutions, but distinguishing what is normal and what is instead abnormal, immoral, prohibited (Foucault, 1978). As Kitzinger (2005) stated, heteronormativity acts through cultural, social, legal, organisational and interpersonal practices, which powerfully reinforce the perception of heterosexuality as the natural form of sexuality. Being hypostatised, heterosexuality is considered as the foundation of kinship, which is "always already heterosexual" (Butler, 2002, p. 34).

The Italian institutions have achieved this result without making use of overt obligations; rather, sexualities have been kept under control by constructing truths about gender, body and reproduction, and establishing a clear demarcation of what can be nominated and what must

be silenced (Foucault, 1978). A genealogical analysis of the Italian context offers insights into the historical traces of the way through which the truth about sexualities has been constructed, and reveals how sexual minorities have been condemned to silence. The institutional "repressive tolerance" (Dall'Orto, 1988) has made homosexuality invisible throughout history by requiring alternative sexualities to remain silent in exchange of a renounce to an explicit punishment or conviction by the state. This started already during the pre-republican period when, in 1889, a new penal code was introduced and same-sex acts were decriminalised. The previous penal code, which punished same-sex acts through the article 425, was introduced in the Pre-Unitary period after the fall of Napoleon who had decriminalised homosexuality in France with the penal code of 1791. The Napoleonic code was extended to other countries under French control, such as Belgium and parts of Italy. Following the fall of Napoleon, homosexuality was reintroduced as a crime in the Papal States, in the Austro-Hungarian area (corresponding to Lombardy and Veneto) and in the Kingdom of Sardinia (including Sardinia, Piedmont, Liguria and Valle d'Aosta), whose monarchs ruled the newly formed unified Kingdom of Italy from 1861 until the end of the second world war (Leroy-Forgeot, 1997). The penal code of the Kingdom of Sardinia, which was initially extended to the rest of Italy after the unification (1861), established the reclusion of individuals engaged in sexual acts "against nature" when these implied violence or public scandal. The legislation, however, did not apply to the Southern Provinces, characterised by a cultural attitude toward homosexuality defined as the "Mediterranean paradigm of homosexuality" (Dall'Orto, 1990). Consequently, homosexuality was legal in the Southern areas and illegal in the North. The 1889 new penal code, signed by the Minister of Justice Giuseppe Zanardelli (hence the name "Zanardelli code") did not introduce the article because, as the same Minister stated, "although the law should severely repress what can damage family or what is contrary to the public decency, at the same time the legislator should not intrude upon what belong to the field of morality because ignoring the vice can be more beneficial than making people aware of the punishment" (Camera dei Deputati, 1887: pp. 213-214).

Zanardelli's words highlighted the peculiar Italian discourse on homosexuality, which is grounded in the notion that what is not named does not exist, thus clearly demarking the border between the legal domain and the moral one.

The same kind of choice was made during one of the darker periods of Italian history, the twenty years fascist regime, which in 1930 introduced a new penal code whose basic principles are still in force in Italy. In that occasion, the Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco

decided not to introduce any mention to homosexuality because, as he affirmed during the presentation of the code, "the filthy vice is fortunately not common in Italy". (Manzini, 1936, p. 218.) In the macho sexist fascist regime, male homosexuality did not exist (much less female homosexuality) and even in case of persecution, such as when individuals were not able to hide their orientation, the punishment (brawling, castor oil, dismissal, confinement…) was inflected in reason of a supposed (not necessarily proved) "scandalous attitude" without any specific reference to the sexual orientation (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1931).

While the Fascist regime renounced to control sexuality through the law, at the same time it delegated to the Catholic Church the control over morality in the country. In 1929, the Italian government, led by Benito Mussolini, and the Vatican, in the person of the cardinal Pietro Gasparri, signed the Lateran Treaty, thus consigning to the Church a crucial role for the moral and etic education of the country. The Treaty was aimed at recomposing the relationship between the Italian state and the Pope, which had always been close especially after the 1870 *Presa di Roma* (Capture of Rome), which concluded the process of Italian unification with the annexation of Rome and Latium (controlled until that time by the Pope) to the Kingdom of Italy. Besides financial convention and the recognition of the sovereignty of the State of the Vatican City, the 1929 Treaty established a prominent role of Catholicism in the Italian civil life ("the only religion of the State"), whose principles had to be taught in school (Ginsborg, 2013).

In 1984, a revision of the Treaty was signed by the Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and the cardinal Agostino Casaroli, with the so-called "Agreement of Villa Madama". This new document reaffirmed the importance of Catholicism for the civic life of the country by declaring that "the Italian State and the Church cooperate in promoting the human person (<<persona humana>>) and the sake of the Nation" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1985).

This relationship with the Catholic Church is very important for the Italian civic discourse on homosexuality because if on one hand the state chose not to consider homosexuality in its laws, the delegation of the power on morality to the Church meant the same thing as condemning homosexuality. In fact, the Catholic archives reveal traces of a deeply rooted condemnation of homosexual acts. The Bishop Augustine (354-430), one of the most influential figures for the foundations of the Catholic theology, affirmed that those offences which are contrary to nature, like sodomy, are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished (Agostino, 2005). The inheritance of Augustine arrived till the present days and has also been echoed in several official ecclesiastical statements about

homosexuality. Between the most influential documents, the document "Persona Humana" (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975) contains declarations concerning sexual ethics. Specifically, it is affirmed that "homosexual relations, for according to the objective moral order, are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality […] homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of."

Later, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, presided by the Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who became Pope Benedict XVI), released a new document in 1986 "De pastorali personarum homosexualium cura" (On the pastoral care of homosexual persons) affirming that "although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder" (Sacred Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, 1986).

Even today, the position of Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis), often perceived as progressive with regards to sexual minorities, it is consistent with the tradition. Indeed, in the propositio number 64 of the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" (Bergoglio, 2013), Bergoglio mentions the document on the "Pastoral care of persons with homosexual inclination", written by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States, where homosexuality is defined as "not in accord with God's purpose and plan for human sexuality". Moreover, the document affirms that "God created human beings in his own image, meaning that the complementary sexuality of man and woman is a gift from God and ought to be respected as such."

The Catholic Church distinguishes between individuals' intimate condition and their behaviours; this implies that "potential sinners" can use self-control to block their homosexual inclination and they can be absolved as long as they do not act their intrinsic disorder. This invitation to control one's own sexuality were echoed by the 1889 and 1930 penal codes, which "invited" those who could breach the heteronormative order to remain silent and not to flaunt their diversity.

The Italian state and the Catholic Church, therefore, converge in granting indulgence to sexual minorities as long as they remain silent, invisible, thus avoiding to turn an unnatural and sinful inclination into a scandalous action, which could be subversive of public morality. This need to maintain public moralities within a taken for granted heterosexual order is thus closely associated with certain notions of un/naturalness and *propre* – in the sense of orderly, proper and clean at the same time (Kristeva, 1982) – therefore constituting a form of

normativity. Norms, in the Foucauldian sense, are means of comparison and production of a common measure, that operates through normalization of social practices. Norms are means of production and constitution of subjects, that become subjects by the compliance to these regulations. As Butler (2004) points out, norms govern the social intelligibility of actions, making certain practices and subjects recognizable as such. The power of heteronormativity consists of condemning to invisibility what does not conform to the hegemonic order, thus becoming the only possible vision of the world and manipulating perceptions, beliefs and values.

The ideology of dominant groups does not require forceful actions or punitive and coercive control to take a dominant position; rather, power acts by ensuring that its worldviews become universally valid social norms. Therefore, the social and political status quo may seem natural, inevitable, immutable and beneficial for everyone, even for those who are victims of oppression. The cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1975a) is accomplished through the consent given also by subordinate groups to the conceptions of the world proposed by dominant groups (their vision of what is normal, acceptable, true, universal) (Smith, 2010), which implies that they consent to their condition of subordination.

Modern forms of political government ensure freedom to the individuals so that they replace an external regulation by an internal regulation, and individuals impose to themselves the same rules and forms of control traditionally imposed by the state (Foucault, 1978). The liberal power does not simply impose its rules; it does not merely say what is forbidden; it does not oppress in a direct way. Rather, it normalises, it makes individuals responsible, it disciplines. The state does not need to be coercive: it can be assured that its subjects make their choices in the sacrosanct private sphere of personal freedom (Halperin, 1995).

As queer critiques (e.g., Duggan, 2003; Drucker, 2015; Richardson, 2000) have highlighted with the concept of homonormativity, heteronormative assumptions may be maintained also by LGBT individuals who can support the social order by colluding with the hegemonic views of gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship. The notion of homonormativity has been used to describe the politics adopted by LGBT post-war movements, which expressed an assimilationist position built from the adhesion to the privileged social position of heterosexuality and the resulting demand to homosexuals to pass as heterosexuals (Rosenfeld, 2009). Moreover, in neoliberal times, Lisa Duggan (2003) used the expression "new, neoliberal homonormativity" for describing the politics that does not contest heteronormative institutions, but requires to be assimilated into them.

This is the case of political claims for equal rights for LGBT individuals within the framework of heteronorms (Oliveira et al., 2013), which many times result in demands of equal rights just for well adapted gay and lesbian individuals. For queer theorists (e.g. Duggan, 2003; Eng, 2010; Warner, 1991), through the demands for marriage LGBT social movements expressed their complicity with a model of kinship that normalises the dominant model of gender and sexuality and marginalises those who do not identify with it. This represents a new form of homonormativity (Duggan, 2003) that leads to the assimilation of LGBT culture within the heteronormative institutions and to silence and sanction any possibility to trouble the dominant order. As Judith Butler (2002: 17) states: "to be legitimised by the state means to enter into the terms of the legitimation offered there and to find out that one's public and recognisable sense of personhood is dependent on the lexicon of that legitimation".

The mainstream neoliberal LGBT social movements disown the alternative models of intimacy and family forms that queer communities promoted in the past for embracing a model of marriage grounded on the white, middle-class imperatives, which are conceived as the "normal" and marginalised poor, individuals of colour, transgender subjectivities and any other who refused the hegemonic model. Heteronormative institutions, such as marriage, privatise several functions that should belong to the state by recognising fundamental rights (parenthood, inheritance) only to those who adhere to them. A large majority of LGBT contemporary social movements have focused mainly on marriage equal rights and they have disinvested in more radical struggles against the absence of right to health care, the marginalisation of transgender individuals, the unfair distribution of wealth and any other nefarious consequence of neoliberal regimes.

Ghaziani (2011) uses the concept "post-gay" to indicate LGBT assimilationist politics that emphasise similarities with the dominant heteronormative groups and suppress the peculiarities of gay identity. Discourses around same-sex rights to marry and lesbian and gay parenthood are often imbued with the rhetoric of "no differences" between lesbian and gay families and the heterosexual ones as an argument for demanding equal rights. Although it can seems counterintuitive, claiming for the right to marriage or for the recognition of gay and lesbian parenthood might support those heteronormative assumptions that are at the basis of the marginalisation of sexual minorities, rather than issue a challenge to them.

In the light of the above, the present research project is aimed at examining the discourses that reinforce the heteronormative view of kinship in the contemporary Italian context. Moreover,

it intends offer insights into the heteronormative assumptions about kinship that may endure also in the discourses of LGBT activists who are engaged in endorsing the recognition of same-sex couples and their children, showing how heteronormativity is upheld even by them. The debate that recently occurred in Italy on the recognition of same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood has offered a valuable opportunity to examine how the overlapping of sex, gender and sexuality is reinforced by contemporary heteronormative power, which has revitalised the efforts to contrast any attempt to subvert the social heteronormative order. Not surprisingly, the opposition to the recognition of sexual minorities has pursued the path of reaffirming the well-established gender order of society and the traditional female and male roles by taking up "the various institutionalised routines for preserving men's power over women and over men who deviate from masculine ideals" (Segal, 2007: 132). As the section that follows enlightens, in Italy the resistance to the trend toward sexual democracy can rely on the discourses that naturalise gender and sexuality, which are still deep-rooted in the country and support the traditional heterosexual nuclear family model.

Women and the gender order in Italy

The division of family unpaid work in heterosexual couples continue to be significantly unbalanced in all Western countries: women carry out most of the domestic activities and childcare even when both partners are engaged in paid work outside the home and they equally contribute to family income (Istat, 2012; 2015; IWPR, 2012). The unequal division of family work causes difficulties for women entering or remaining in the labour market, and the norms that regulate the practices of motherhood (Hays, 1996; Rich, 1977) are among the factors that contribute to maintaining the asymmetry at the origin of the invisibility of women as active citizens (Amâncio & Oliveira, 2006; Oliveira & Amancio, 2002). In Italy, the participation of women in the labour market has steadily increased since the second half of the seventies and their social role has undergone important changes (Istat, 2012, 2015). This does not mean that gender inequalities have been resolved: if in Europe there still are significant different employment rates for men and women (respectively at 70.1% and 59.6%), the level of Italian female employment is the second lowest of the entire continent, equal to 46.8% (Eurostat, 2011). The expression "stalled revolution" (Dixon & Wetherell, 2004: 167) offers a good description of the condition lived by women in Italy where the gender gap is among the most noticeable in Europe (Aliaga, 2006).

Research (e.g. Lasio, Putzu & Serri, 2018; Lasio, Putzu, Serri & De Simone, 2017; Ruspini, 2003) has highlighted that the idea of female natural predisposition to care is still very widespread in the country and this has an impact, together with fiscal, labour, social security and social assistance policies (which are not gender neutral), on women's social positions.

In Italy, parental roles are still deep-rooted into the heterosexual gender binary system and the mother remains the main parent responsible for childcare. The emphasis given by both scientific and popular literature to the contemporary "new fatherhood" led to perceive the fathers as more involved than they truly are (La Rossa, 1988), whilst their role can still be described as the 'part-time father', the 'baby entertainer' or the 'mother's bumbling assistant' (Sunderland, 2000).

Research on the distribution of family work has rejected the existence of natural predispositions at the basis of the gendered inequalities in the distribution of roles and responsibilities and scholars have consistently tried to understand the psychological and social determinants of the division of family work. Gender ideologies have been often considered as strong predictors of the division of household labour (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Studies grounded in the gender ideology perspective, exceeding the explanation based on socio-demographic factors, such as income, education (Blood and Wolf, 1960; Brines, 1994), or time spent at work (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000; Davis, Greenstein & Gerteisen Marks, 2007; Pinto & Coltrane, 2009), have investigated the relationship between gender ideologies and the division of routine daily domestic work and childcare. Several findings have confirmed that the allocation of housework is more balanced among couples with egalitarian ideologies compared to the ones with traditional ideologies (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Davis et al., 2007; Greenstein, 1996; Knudsen & Wærness, 2008; Lothaller, Mikula & Schoebi, 2009; Pittman & Blanchard, 1996). However, numerous inconsistencies have emerged and the division of family work is often characterised by a gender gap even when women are engaged in paid work and declare to aspire to an egalitarian division of responsibilities (e.g. Greenstein, 1996).

Explanations of these contradictions have been offered by those approaches that, grounded in the constructionist approach and informed by the feminist thought, started to question the "doctrine of gender socialization theories" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). These approaches queried the idea that gender is a static characteristic, achieved during the first childhood and unvarying as well as sex. The focus shifted to the symbolic and performative aspects of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), to the on-going process of negotiation, and to

the possibility of troubling gender (Butler, 1990; 1993), although the power relationships embedded in social structures impose restrictions to the individual possibilities of moving beyond social expectation (Lazar, 2005). Gender is not to be understood as a stable component, linked to biological sex, but as a performance (Butler, 1993), a gender that is performed, rather than a trait. These performances are nonetheless regulated and recognized by gender norms. By interrogating the notion of gender, poststructuralist feminists redefine it as fluid and negotiable within a regulatory framework, constructed through performative acts and open to multiple possibilities instead of only two opposed and complementary conditions. This also helps to explain why it is possible to come across men and women who declare the aspiration to an egalitarian division of the family work, while, at the same time, they reproduce the traditional gendered division of roles and responsibilities through their performances.

In spite of the declared ideals of equality, men and women can reproduce in their discourses and practices the traditionalist deeply rooted beliefs that keep women in a position of subordination (Edley and Wetherell, 1999; Lazar, 2007; Testoni, 2012). In doing so, a crucial role is played by the "reservoir of arguments" to tap into, which give support to the assumption of an intrinsic sexual difference between men and women. For example, research has shown that the reference to the widely held belief that women have a natural predisposition and talent for care, and that there is a natural bond between mother and child, can serve to justify the attribution to the mother of greater responsibilities in the childcare (Blain, 1994; Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Lasio et al., 2017; Lasio et al.,2018). Moreover, when women are faced with the dilemma between the relevance of paid work and the need to take care of the child they often resolve it by reifying the dominant ideology of the intensive mothering, which defines the "good mother" as primarily centered on the needs of the offspring, dedicated to the care of others and devoted to sacrifice (Hays, 1996; Lasio et al., 2017; Miller, 2007; Nentwich, 2008).

A recent study (Lasio et al., 2017) offered insights into the discursive practices related to the work-family balance when partners are facing the transition to parenthood, a phase during which gender becomes a more salient dimension in the distribution of family work (Cassibba, Balenzano & Settanni, 2010; Paff Ogle, Tyner & Schofield-Tomschin, 2011). The analysis of the speeches on the future division of family work of 20 heterosexual Italian couples of expectant parents revealed the arguments that support an unequal distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the partners, with a strict separation of male and female areas of

competence. Specifically, partners emphasised their gender as criterion to establish the division of tasks and responsibilities, considering this dimension as an essential feature of the person, originating from biological factors. Even when couples considered gender as the result of socialisation processes, they failed to recognise the opportunities to change the gender division of tasks. Partners relied on binary categories to establish their roles and responsibilities within family and in the paid work, consistently with the breadwinner-father and stay-home-mother models. When couples gave attention to the importance of father involvement, this took the form of a "part-time commitment", and the paternal role was described as the mother's assistant, which did not imply the blurring of mother's primary responsibility for childcare, whether she had a paid job or not.

Maternity, therefore, marks a crucial step for women who become targets of "social pressures" (Katz-Wise, Priess & Hyde, 2010, p.26) based on the traditional gender dichotomy. "In other words, while men have families to rely on, women have families to think about" (Dovigo, 2007, p.21).

Essentialist views of gender, which are deeply rooted in Western culture and to which also many theoretical models in social sciences still refer (Nogueira, 2001), naturalise differences between women and men, thus construing a symbolic system that underestimates the role of historical, political and social conditions and justify the inequities that characterise the relationship between men and women (Lasio, 2011).

The division of roles and responsibilities is based on the belief that men and women differ widely for their psychology, attitudes and skills, which justify their different positions within the family and in social contexts. Masculinity and femininity are construed as opposite categories and their differences are reified by inscribing them into concepts such as nature, personality or individuality, which fail to recognise the role of social, cultural and political factors in determining their differences (Oliveira, Costa, Carneiro, 2014). Male social supremacy is justified by reason of the alleged connection between the social order and the biological difference between women and men. Being constructed as opposite categories, men and women are positioned within an order defined by their gender and this gender order (Connell, 1987) implies that they assume a different position in the social hierarchy with women who are subordinated to men.

The debate recently taking place in Italy about same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood has taken place in close connection with a mobilisation against the so-called "gender ideology" or "gender theory". Different conservative groups and institutions used

these syntagmas to designate numerous initiatives intended to overcome discrimination based on gender or sexuality, which were accused of being part of project for subverting the gender order. As Robcis (2015) already pointed out with regard to France, also in Italy one of the peculiarity of the opposition to the recognition of lesbian and gay couples and their children was the focus on the need to preserve sexual differentiation and complementarity, which were described as the very foundation of human identity. The law proposal on same-sex civil unions was described as a threat to the basis of the gender order and to the heteronormative model of reproduction and kinship. Lesbian and gay parenthood was constructed as the symbol of an imaginary conspiracy against the supposed natural and universal model of family in which regulated gender binary relations clearly differentiates the masculine sphere from the feminine one. As a result, while opposing a bill that would protect the rights and duties of lesbian and gay couples and their children, the debate inside and outside Parliament supported the ordering of parenthood within the gender order and strengthened the normative standards on the practices of motherhood. Therefore, the analysis of the debates that occurred in Italy while the law proposal was under discussion in the Parliament is crucial to understand the discursive strategies currently used by the heteronormative power to exclude non-heterosexual subjectivities from kinship and to reinforce the hegemonic model of gender intelligibility.

Aims and outline of the present thesis

The research project presented in the present thesis was designated with the general aim of understanding what are the discursive strategies currently used in Italy by heteronormativity to resist challenges to the hegemonic model of kinship.

The research was carried out in Italy while the law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) on same-sex civil unions and lesbian and gay parenthood was under discussion in the Parliament. The debate on this law proposal started in March 2013 when the newly elected Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, secretary of the Democratic Party, announced the intention to revive the discussion on civil rights of same-sex couples. This was an issue that was already taken into account at the end of the 1980s, thanks to the bill presented by the socialist parliamentarian Agata Alma Cappiello (Camera dei Deputati, 1988), and in 2007 when a bill was presented by the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi (Senato della Repubblica, 2007). As already happened during Prodi's government, Matteo Renzi was also faced with the

difficult task to lead a government sustained by forces with divergent ideological backgrounds, which comprised parties of the centre-left and others of the centre and the centre-right grounded in the Christian democratic tradition. The recognition of same-sex couples and their children was at the origin of strong divergences between the parties that sustained the government. Moreover, important disagreements arose also within the Democratic Party where a large Catholic component opposed the bill. Additionally, a strong opposition to the law proposal came from lay and religious civil society organisations in the country, which took a position in favour of a conservative interpretation of gender, sexualities and kinship.

As part of the present research project, a first study was carried out on the public debate that took place while the law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) was under discussion in parliament. This study, reported in Chapter 1, aimed at scrutinising the ideological assumptions and the discursive strategies deployed by outstanding figures to oppose the approval of the law and that have succeeded in censoring the section of the bill regarding the possibility to adopt the children of one's same-sex partner. The Chapter analyses the speeches of Italian stakeholders who took part in the debate on the legislative proposal and shows how the discourses that opposed the recognition of lesbian and gay couples and parenthood are entangled in the Italian historical a priori, which is the breeding ground for the contemporary opposition to any alternatives to the hegemonic heteronormative model of reproduction and kinship. The study presented in this chapter is based on the speeches of Italian stakeholders, such as members of parliament, prominent exponents of the Vatican or members of civic organisations. Furthermore, the analysis considers some decrees of Italian institutions (e.g. courts, governmental bodies) that were pronounced while the political debate was taking place. The research presented in Chapter 2 has been published in *Sexualities* (Lasio & Serri, 2017).

As mentioned above, a crucial role in the opposition to the recognition of same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood was played by the Catholic Church, which took part in the debate in defence of the "natural family" while the law proposal was under discussion in the Italian Parliament. The Vatican hierarchies and citizens' organisations informed by Catholic thought contested the bill because it was supposed to be aimed at subverting the "natural" order of the family. As many scholars have enlightened (e.g. Bolzonar, 2016; Garelli, 2007),

in Italy the Vatican has always had an extraordinary influence upon law making with regard to sexuality, reproduction and kinship. This influence has become even stronger after the collapse in the early 1990s of the main Christian Democratic Party, which was the prominent representative of the Vatican's will in the parliament since the aftermath of World War II. Thanks to a capillary network of institutions (churches, schools, seminars, its bank, etc.) directly dependent on its authority (Grigolo & Jörgens, 2010), together with the presence of Catholic parliamentarians in different parties across the parliamentary spectrum, the Vatican has always been able to warn electors and politicians against decisions that could represent a threat to "non-negotiable principles" (Santagata, 2014), such as the sanctity of life since the conception to its end (vs. abortion, euthanasia…), the natural reproduction (vs. assisted reproduction technologies, genetic manipulation…) and the uniqueness of family founded upon heterosexual monogamous marriage (vs. legal recognition of same-sex couples, lesbian and gay parenthood…). In the years between 2013 and 2016, the antagonism opposed by the Church had an important influence on the political discussion on the legislative proposal on same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood, causing interruptions in the parliamentary course of the bill and providing arguments against its approval.

As a further contribution to the general aim of understanding the discourses employed by hegemonic power to reinforce the heteronormative order in Italy, a second study was carried out on the influence exercised by the Church on the parliamentary discussion of the law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015). Specifically, this second study, which is presented in Chapter 3, aims at understanding whether and how the resistance expressed by the parliamentarians to the law proposal relied on the hegemonic model of kinship advocated by the Catholic Church and shows how the political debate contributed to maintain restrictive standards of gender and sexuality. This research has been published in the Journal *Sexuality, Research and Social Policy* (Lasio, Congiargiu, De Simone & Serri, 2018).

The research material here is constituted of the speeches of Parliamentarians who were against the approval of the law proposal and, specifically, who opposed the section of the bill that would allow the partner in a same-sex couple to adopt the children of the other partner.

As previous studies (e.g. Oliveira et al., 2013), have enlightened, besides the conservative forces, resistance to the deconstruction of normative paradigms about gender, reproduction and kinship can come also from the same subjectivities who are oppressed by the heteronormative power. In a context such as Italy where lesbian and gay parenthood is still

strongly controversial (e.g. Baiocco, Nardelli, Pezzuti & Lingiardi, 2013), the heteronormative hegemonic power succeeds in presenting its worldviews as natural and obvious. As a result, LGBT individuals can adhere to those assumptions that are at the origins of their marginalisation and alienation from kinship.

Given the above, in order to contribute to this research project aimed at understanding how heteronormative works in the contemporary Italian context, a third study was conducted to investigate whether traces of the heteronormative ideology resist in the discourses of LGBT individuals. Specifically, this research, which is presented in Chapter 3, involved Italian LGBT activists who are members of associations engaged in combating sexuality-based discriminations and in endorsing the recognition of same-sex couples and their children. The aim of this study was to understand whether heteronormative assumptions endure in the discourses of LGBT activists when they talk about parenthood and, if yes, to understand which are the assumptions about kinship to which they refer that testify their adhesion, to a certain extent, to the hegemonic heteronormative model of kinship. The material analysed in this chapter is constituted of the discourses of three groups of Italian LGBT activists who were asked to examine gay and lesbian parenthood and any differences from heterosexual parenting. The findings highlight how heteronormativity may succeed to resist to the possibility of being subverted by insinuating itself also into the discourses of individuals who are engaged in the struggle to overcome it. The research presented in Chapter 4 has been published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* (Lasio, Serri, Ibba & Oliveira, 2018).

Overall, the research project has made possible to identify what strategies have been recently used to oppose the recognition of same-sex couples and their children in Italy while the law proposal on same-sex civil unions (Senato della Repubblica, 2016) was under discussion in parliament. The analysis of public debate on the law proposal, as well as the speeches of the MPs who opposed the recognition of lesbian and gay parenthood, revealed that the connection between heterosexuality and reproduction has been reaffirmed, thus continuing to deny lesbian and gay couples and their children the legal protection they need. Moreover, the research has highlighted how LGBT activists can be influenced by the same heteronormative assumptions that characterize the discourses that oppose the recognition of rights to same-sex parents and their children.

CHAPTER 2

The public debate on same-sex civil unions and gay and lesbian parenting[1]

Abstract

After many years of heated debate, in 2016 the Italian parliament approved a law to regulate same-sex civil unions. Although this can be considered a significant step towards the equality of lesbian and gay couples, the law preserves legal differences between heterosexual marriage and homosexual union and does not guarantee the rights of lesbian and gay parents and their children. In this chapter, we analyse the public debate on same-sex couples and gay and lesbian parenting that occurred in Italy while the parliament was discussing the law. Findings highlight that the 'natural order' argument and the irreducible differences between heterosexual marriage and same-sex union are the bedrock of the current expression of heteronormativity in Italy.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, significant positive changes have happened in terms of civil rights and public recognition of same-sex couples and their children in European countries. However, sexual orientations outside the heterosexual order are still seen as a social problem, especially where the legacy of Catholicism is significant (Santos, 2013). In France and Spain, for example, the Catholic Church and lay groups fuelled by the Church hierarchies persist in lobbying and campaigning against same-sex marriage and any gender equality policies (Digoix et al., 2016). In Greece and Portugal, the Church has succeeded in blocking progressive initiatives and often in determining political decisions on issues related to sexualities (De Michele, 2010; Santos, 2013). In Italy, after years of strong opposition by centre-right parties and the Catholic Church, the law that recognizes same-sex civil unions was passed in 2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016). The law extends to same-sex couples most of the rights of married heterosexual couples, such as the right to receive a survivor's pension

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[1] This chapter is based on the paper: Lasio, D. & Serri, F. (2017). The Italian public debate on same-sex civil unions and lesbian and gay parenting. *Sexualities*, first published 11 December, 1-19.

and to inherit each others' assets. A duty of fidelity between same-sex partners was dropped during the discussion because, according to the opponents, it would have made civil unions too similar to traditional marriage. Moreover, the right to adopt a partner's biological child was so controversial that it had to be deleted in order for the law to pass.

The deadlock on same-sex civil unions and the ostracism of lesbian and gay parenting demonstrates the persisting power in Italy of heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005; Warner, 1991) that reifies the uniqueness of heterosexual relationships and parenthood.

This chapter investigates the public debate that took place in Italy while the law on same-sex civil unions was under discussion in parliament. Specifically, through a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2001, 2003) of the speeches of Italian stakeholders who took part in the debate on the legislative proposal, the study addresses the following research questions: what are the strategies currently used by the hegemonic heteronormative power to oppose the recognition of same-sex couples and their children in Italy? Does the public debate on same-sex civil unions reinforce heterosexual exclusive access to family and, if so, how?

The chapter draws upon Foucault's (1970, 1978) notion of sexuality as a discourse embedded in social and cultural processes and the paradigm of one dominant sexuality and peripheral 'others'[2]. According to Foucault (1978), sexuality is the result of historically and culturally situated discursive practices, which establish what people are and what they can do. By operating in everyday social practices, modern regimes of power/knowledge produced the distinction between normal and abnormal, thus involving forms of social control and constraint (Fraser, 1981). Since heteronormative practices and assumptions are manifested in diverse ways according to the social, cultural and historical context in which they occur (Ryan-Flood, 2005), we analyse the historical antecedents of the emergence of a regime of truth on sexuality in the Italian context. By framing the analysis of the research material in the broader context, this chapter sheds light on the heteronormative premises that created the conditions of acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships and informed the public debate on same-sex civil unions. This approach, which comprises the methodological contribution of this chapter, also works to denaturalize traditional notions of sexuality. Our findings show that although same-sex couples have gained political visibility and Italy has partially filled the legislative gap on this matter, new discursive strategies reinforce the primacy of heterosexuality. By analysing the arguments opposed to the recognition of same-sex couples

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[2] 'Sexuality of children, mad men and women, criminals and the sexuality of those who did not like the opposite sex' (Foucault, 1978, p. 38).

and their children, this chapter contributes to the advancement of understanding of the general politics and regimes of truth that reproduce heteronormativity in the contemporary Italian context.

The chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, we analyse the historical and cultural processes that led to the hegemony of the heteronormative view on sexuality and family relationships in Italy. Secondly, in the research section, we analyse the speeches of the stakeholders who took part in the debate on same-sex civil unions, focusing on the discursive strategies that reinforce the view of family grounded on heterosexual relations and exclude lesbian and gay couples from parenthood. Finally, we shed light on how current heteronormative discourses are intertwined with historical, social and political conditions, and we discuss their effect in preventing same-sex unions and same-sex parenting recognition. As the analysis shows, the late approval was the result of numerous compromises among opposed ideological positions: if on one side the law represents progress for the equality of lesbian and gay couples, on the other side it has itself contributed to reinforcing the opposition between heterosexual marriage and same-sex union and to denying lesbian and gay parents and their children the legal protection they need.

Genealogy of the contemporary discourse of sexuality in Italy

Whereas over the last decades progressive normalization and new regulations for same-sex couples have happened in all Western countries (Roseneil et al., 2013; Seidman, 2002; Weeks, 2007), Italy recognized same-sex civil unions only in 2016. This deferment may be understood as a strategy of Italian institutions – lay and religious – to maintain silent 'peripheral sexualities' (Foucault, 1978), keeping them away from discourses on affection and procreation, and harmless to the heteronormative view of the family.

A distinctive Italian feature for affirming the heteronormative order has been the legislative silence imposed by institutions on deviations from 'normal' sexuality. Traces of this silence can be noted, for example, over successive Italian penal codes, which, since 1889, made no reference to homosexual acts. The decision was inspired by the principle that the law should avoid any intrusion into moral issues (Camera dei Deputati, 1887: 213–214) and that 'the filthy vice [homosexuality] is fortunately not common in Italy' (Manzini, 1936: 218), as the fascist Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco stated. According to Dall'Orto (1988), in Italy there existed and continues to exist a 'repressive tolerance' of homosexuality, which is based on the

impunity of same-sex activities (in advance of most European countries) on condition that homosexuals stay invisible, at the margins of the society, so as not to challenge the heterosexual order. The Mediterranean paradigm of homosexuality (Dall'Orto, 1990) has provided the foundation for the intelligibility of same-sex acts through the same conceptual framework as that used for heterosexuality (distinction between the passive role and the active counterpart), thus protecting conventional categories of normal sexuality (Dall'Orto, 1988, 1990; Plummer, 1975).

While the State renounced bringing sexuality under the control of its laws, through agreements with the Vatican, such as the Lateran Treaty (Legge 27 maggio 1929, n. 810 – see Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1929) and the Agreement of Villa Madama (Legge 25 marzo 1985, n. 121 – see Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1985), it delegated to the Catholic Church the authority on morality and the ethical education of the country.

The Catholic doctrine has not traditionally considered the homosexual inclination in itself a sin, but a tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986), proclaiming that the path to salvation for men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is that of chastity (Holy See, 1993: article n. 2359).

In Italy, the same episteme[3] (Foucault, 1970) has informed both the civil domain and the religious: a clear demarcation has been defined between what is private and intimate and what belongs to the public and social realm. Homosexuality is acceptable, tolerated or forgiven, as long as it remains silent, without questioning the heterosexual order, and avoids turning an unnatural and sinful inclination into a scandalous act that may subvert public morality.

During the 20th century, in response to the challenges of modernity, such as the recognition of same-sex unions and parenting (Bertone & Franchi, 2014), Vatican theology reformulated the 'homosexual problem' and reaffirmed its reliance on a natural order of gender and sexuality, as opposed to a social order unburdened by any transcendent authority (God, Nature, Tradition…) (Fassin, 2010). As a result, homosexual tendencies have since been banned along with homosexual acts[4].

The religious disapprobation of homosexuality has considerable influence on lawmaking (Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014), and the 'Italian case' (Garelli, 2007) is generally recognized as peculiar for the power of the Catholic Church in determining decisions of political leaders

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[3] The episteme is the a priori history that 'defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Foucault, 1970, p. 168).
[4] The Congregation for Catholic Education (2005) excluded from ordained ministry 'those who present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called ''gay culture'''.

with regard to family life and sexualities (Bernini, 2008; Garelli, 2007; Grigolo & Jörgens, 2010; Santos, 2013). Even the collapse of the 'Democrazia Cristiana', the Christian Democratic Party that played a dominant role in Italy until the early 1990s, did not diminish the influence of the Vatican over politics: instead of indicating a specific party to vote for the Church warned catholic electors and politicians across the parliamentary spectrum against decisions that could undermine the family founded upon marriage (Bernini, 2008). And, as a result, controversial issues regarding the family have been postponed or censored, and same-sex couples and gay and lesbian parenting have never become a priority.

The binary of heterosexual/homosexual remains a central dyadic division in Western societies (Sedgwick, 1990), and while heterosexuals have natural access to family, lesbian and gay individuals are considered non-procreative and are alienated from kinship (Weston, 1991). Heterosexuality is hypostatized and becomes the foundation of kinship in itself, which is conceived as 'always already heterosexual' (Butler, 2002: 34). The primacy given by science and common sense to blood bonds (Schneider, 1984) further excludes lesbian and gay individuals from procreation and family relationships. Heterosexual physical procreation is seen as the basis of the perpetuation of society, whilst the non-reproductive feature of lesbian and gay relationships is depicted as an attack on 'the family' and on society in a broader sense (Weston, 1991). Asking for the recognition of civil rights, homosexual couples are emerging from their invisibility and are revealing the 'naturalness trick' that constructed heterosexuality as the only form of sexuality and the very foundation of kinship. Analysing the Italian public debate on the recognition of same-sex civil unions, this chapter shows some discursive strategies used by heteronormative power for resisting requests for recognition of same-sex couples and their children and maintaining ''peripheral sexualities'' silence, far from the realm of affection, procreation and family life.

The debate on same-sex civil unions

In Italy, many people still disapprove of non-heterosexual families and only a small proportion of the population believes that lesbian and gay couples should have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples (ISTAT, 2012). Italian politics, for its part, has discriminated against same-sex couples and their children by delaying the discussion of their rights for about 30 years. The debate on these issues started at the end of the 1980s when the socialist parliamentarian Agata Alma Cappiello first presented a bill on the subject (Camera dei

Deputati, 1988). The discussion of this proposal was, however, never scheduled. In the 1990s, the debate intensified, partly because of calls from the European Parliament to member states to guarantee recognition of the rights of same-sex couples[5]. However, none of the numerous draft laws has been included in the parliamentary agenda. A legislative proposal that seemed to lead to a solution was presented in 2007 during Prime Minister Romano Prodi's centre-left government (Senato della Repubblica, 2007). However, the political parties informed by Catholic thought that were part of the big governmental coalition forcefully opposed the law. The public debate, in which the Catholic Church also participated to a great extent, went on for the duration of the Prodi government, which fell within approximately two years of taking office without passing the law.

Public discussion on same-sex unions and gay and lesbian parenting has grown considerably over the past two years because of the bill (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) introduced in the Italian parliament. After assuming the role of Prime Minister in 2014, the secretary of the Democratic party Matteo Renzi announced his intention to open debate on this issue. The government was sustained by a large coalition comprising the Democratic Party (centre-left) and other parties of the centre and centre-right grounded in the Christian Democratic tradition; among them, the main one was the New Centre-Right, led by Angelino Alfano, who was the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. Differences between the ideological backgrounds of the government parties were immediately evident and civil rights for same-sex couples was among the most difficult problems to solve in the government programme: on one side, most of the Democratic Party supported the proposal, while on the other side, the centre-right government forces, together with a Catholic minority of the Democratic Party, took a stance against the bill, mainly due to the measures regarding parenthood. The law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015), known as the Cirinnà bill after the name of the legislation's main sponsor, the Senator of the Democratic Party Monica Cirinnà, established a certain degree of equivalence between civil unions and marriage, with the extension of the rights and duties of married couples to civil unions. The most contested part concerned the possibility for a partner in a same-sex couple to adopt the biological children of the other partner (article 5). The strong opposition from Catholics, lay and religious, in addition to the tensions between the two main ruling parties, caused many arrests to the parliamentary process of the bill. When even the possibility of passing the law through the

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[5] See, for example, the European Parliament Resolution of 8 February 1994 on equal rights for gays and lesbians that suggests the possibility of same-sex couples being parents, adopting and bringing up children.

support of some minority parties failed, the solution, sponsored primarily by the Catholic component of the Democratic Party, was to drop article 5, concerning the so-called stepchild adoption. Moreover, article 3, concerning the obligation of mutual fidelity, and article 6 concerning the timing for the termination of a registered partnership, were deleted from the law in order to eliminate what were considered excessive similarities with traditional marriage. Once the final agreement was reached, the civil unions bill was passed in a vote of confidence[6] in the Senate on 25 February 2016 by 173 votes to 71, with no abstentions. Not all members of the governing parties took part in the vote and the approval was made possible by the support of a group of senators from different opposition parties, thus revealing the weakness of the government on this issue. On 11 May 2016, the law was approved with 372 votes to 51 and 99 abstentions in the Chamber of Deputies where a larger left-leaning majority resided; the Italian President finally signed the bill into law on 20 May 2016.

The law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016), consisting of a single article and 69 paragraphs, provides that partners live together and grant each other moral and material assistance (para. 11). Community property is the default legal state unless otherwise agreed to by the partners (para. 13). Moreover, partners in a civil union have the same rights and duties as married couples in terms of inheritance (para. 21), survivor's pension (para. 17), access rights in the event of incarceration (para. 38) and health issues such as admission to hospital, decisions about medical treatments and organ donation (paras. 39–41). Finally, they are entitled to remain in the deceased cohabitant's property for up to five years (para. 42), they can take over lease agreements (para. 44) and they are treated the same as married couples (para. 45).

Methods

This chapter analyses the public debate on same-sex unions and gay and lesbian parenting constructed in Italy during the period June 2014 to May 2016 while the Italian parliament was discussing the regulation of the rights of same-sex couples and their children. The research material examined here is composed of texts containing the speeches of Italian stakeholders, such as politicians, key figures in the Catholic Church or members of civic organizations. Moreover, we included in the analysis official pronouncements from Italian institutions (e.g.

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[6] The motion of confidence is the request by which the government asks the parliament to approve without changes a proposal considered fundamental for its political action. It is commonly used to accelerate the legislative process and to avoid obstruction by the opposition.

courts, governmental bodies) that contributed to the construction of the discourse on same-sex unions and gay and lesbian parenting.

For the selection of the texts, we accessed the digital archives of the main Italian newspapers and, using as keywords for the search 'civil unions' and 'Cirinnà bill', we selected those news items whose subject was the opinions of stakeholders on same-sex unions and gay and lesbian parenting, or the pronouncement of an Italian institution on these issues. After selecting the news items, we took into account only those texts for which a video/audio recording or an official document (e.g. the transcript of a parliamentary discussion or the judgment of a court) was available online. The selected texts were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts examined for emerging themes. The analysis of the texts was based on the assumptions of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2003), with the purpose of revealing which discourses and social practices contributed to the maintenance of the social order, thus sustaining the subjugation and discrimination against same-sex couples and their children in the Italian context. Therefore, the analysis explores how heteronormativity as the order of discourse informed the debate on the regulation of the rights of same-sex couples and their children. Moreover, the analysis focuses on the contradictions or paradoxes within the dominant order so as to highlight possibilities for change.

Results

The natural order of things

The legal discussion on same-sex civil unions has led to a deep cleavage within Italian society, with the 'natural order' being one of the main issues under debate. Even State institutions have engaged in serious conflict over what is admissible on the basis of rules considered natural and universal, as was the case when some Italian mayors took the initiative, while the Senate was still discussing the Cirinnà bill, of creating civil union registries in order to transcribe same-sex marriages celebrated abroad. After fierce dispute on the constitutional admissibility of same-sex couples, the Italian Council of State[7] ordered the removal of the transcribed documents. The judgment stated:

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[7] The Italian Council of State is a legal and administrative consultative body that ensures the legality of the public administration act.

It is easy to identify the sexual diversities between partners as the first condition of validity and effectiveness of marriage [...], as it is consistent with the concept of marriage deriving from the age-old legal and cultural tradition of the institution of marriage, as well as from the way in which the natural order is constantly interpreted and translated into the positive law as legitimizing the only marital union between a man and a woman. (Consiglio di Stato, 2015)

The judgment is based on the presumption of isomorphism between the phenomenological level (the way in which marriage has traditionally been organized) and the representational level (what is considered natural and, therefore, legitimate). The Council of State's decree reflects this isomorphism and, at the same time, it upholds it, considering marriage between a man and a woman as a natural fact, not subject to social and anthropological change. The legal and cultural tradition per se is considered a reason for accepting what is 'naturally given' as unchangeable and, therefore, the necessary ductility of the constitutional principles is denied (Rodotà, 2016).

Assumptions on what constitutes the natural order have important implications as regards gender. By suppressing their natural similarities (Rubin, 1975), Western societies construct men and women as naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being (Garfinkel, 1967) and allocate specific and distinct roles to each spouse (Connell, 2009). Gender configurations in lesbian and gay families are often regarded as abnormal because they challenge expectations about standard heterosexual roles, such as the caring/nurturing mother and the providing father (Hicks, 2013).

In view of this, Senator Carlo Giovanardi, a key figure of the New Centre-Right, interviewed during the Family Day demonstration (20 June 2015) – which was organized by the Italian forum of Catholic associations for defending the traditional family – explained his opposition to the recognition of same-sex civil unions:

there are males and females, dads and moms. Then, if there is a child who has the misfortune [of being raised by a gay couple] – a few dozen cases in Italy – [. . .], when the mothers of the other children come to pick them up [at school], and they have a special relationship with their moms – like all of us, right? – how do you explain to that child that he hasn't a mother? (Video interview in Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2015)

The gender order of society (Connell, 2009) constructs as natural the differences between men and women, and the idea that their thinking, emotions and capacities are inherently opposed. The social arrangement based on sex category is the only legitimate one, and the process of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) is neglected; therefore, men and women are identified according to an enduring internal disposition. Although the roles of mother and father have changed over time, the heteronormative conception of the family still defines parenthood along the heterosexual gender binary (Lorber, 1994). Senator Giovanardi's speech reflects the prevalent ideal of motherhood as the intensive mother (Hays, 1996) who has natural and instinctive caring capacities and establishes a special relationship with the child. The notion of a primary sexual difference that constitutes the core of psychic life leads to condemnation of non-heterosexual unions, assisted reproductive techniques and any form of parenting outside the nuclear heterosexual family as damaging to the child, a threat to culture and destructive of the human (Butler, 2004). Lesbian and gay parents are a threat to the symbolic order of the family, as they challenge the ideology of gender, motherhood and family, which together are considered the basis of the stability of society (Romans, 1992).

The parliamentary debate also covered the promiscuity of same-sex couples, due to the possibility of extending the obligation of mutual fidelity to same-sex civil unions. The obligation for spouses to be faithful to one another, established in article 143 of the Italian civil code, occupies a prominent position in the monogamous marriage doctrine (Ruscello, 2011). Although it should not refer only to abstention from extra-marital relations but also to the spouses' commitment not to betray their mutual trust (Ruscello, 2011), the obligation of mutual fidelity is commonly interpreted as a bond of exclusive sexuality, an indispensable condition for creating a stable context for the nurturing of offspring (Gambino, 2015). Article 3 of the Cirinnà bill (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) extended this duty to same-sex civil unions, but the New Centre-Right, together with some other Catholic members of the parliament, forced its removal before approving the law.

The absence from the law of this obligation may represent an opportunity for same-sex unions to get rid of the patriarchal legacy that co-opts non-heterosexuals and aligns their 'equality' with a narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions (Duggan, 2003). However, it should not be overlooked that the removal of mutual fidelity also established a clear distinction between heterosexual couples and non-heterosexual ones, so that the latter, institutionalized as inherently unstable and promiscuous, are considered incompatible with parenthood. Therefore, the law reproduces the supposedly monogamous heterosexual couple

as the only form of socially adequate intimate partnership (Butler, 2004), whereas homosexuality is linked to discourses of moral deviation, perversion, promiscuity and sexual excess (Foucault, 1978).

The irreducible difference between heterosexual marriage and same-sex couples has been further laid down by the law in its definition of civil union: while the text was still being examined preliminarily by the Senate, Senator of the Democratic Party Emma Fattorini, echoing her party's Catholic members, tabled an amendment[8] to the first article of the bill (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) to define same-sex civil unions as 'specific social formations'. The reason for this proposal was to differentiate to a greater extent same-sex couples from the family set out in the Italian Constitution as 'a natural society founded on marriage', thus avoiding any unconstitutionality of the law. A misinterpretation of the statutory constraints may have been behind this issue because, although heterosexuality was likely taken for granted at the time of drafting the Constitution in 1947, the expression 'natural society' was referred to as a 'grandfathering clause', informed by the Catholic doctrine, according to which the family is defined as a natural society because it comes before the State temporally and in terms of importance. Therefore, the purpose was to prevent the State from intervening, as stated by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, in the sanctuary of the family (Ginsborg, 2013). The distinction between family as a 'natural society' and as a 'specific social formation' resulted in a semantic trick that hides the reaffirmation of discrimination (Rodotà, 2015).

Consistencies can be noted between the terms of the parliamentary discussion and the official discourse of the Catholic Church, whose speeches repeatedly occurred while the Italian Parliament was debating the law. On 22 January 2016, just a month before the approval of the bill by the Senate, it was Pope Francis, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who reiterated the importance of distinguishing between heterosexual unions and those between non-heterosexuals for the sake of humanity.

> The Church has indicated to the world that, among other things, there can be no confusion between the family desired by God and any other kind of union [...] The family, founded upon an indissoluble, unitive and procreative marriage, belongs to the 'dream' of God and that of the Church, for the salvation of humanity.[9]

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[8] Emendamento 2.09.2015 n. 1.10000, 2/5. Available at: http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/ showdoc/frame.jsp?tipodo c¼ Emendc&leg¼17&id¼938023&idoggetto¼930558 (accessed 6 April 2016).
[9] Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the officials of the tribunal of the Roman rota for the inauguration of the judicial year, 22 January 2016. Available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/january /documents/papa-francesco_20160122_ anno-giudiziario-rota-romana.html.

The heteronormative paradigm, considered natural and universal, is elevated to the role of an element guaranteeing the future of the human species. Same-sex attraction is a core element in the representation of homosexuality, and lesbians and gays are perceived as selfish, self-centred and, therefore, non-procreative (Weston, 1991). Granting legal recognition to same-sex couples is thought to undermine the institution of heterosexual marriage, since it could accelerate the separation between sex and reproduction, although there is no evidence that giving rights to same-sex couples has any impact on heterosexual marriage (Badgett, 2004): 'reproduction rationalizes nothing about sex' (Warner, 1991, p.9).

Blood is thicker than water

The debate on the Cirinnà bill (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) evoked cultural and anthropological beliefs that are essential to the Western notion of kinship. Among the issues that have been addressed, those concerning biological connections between parents and children have occupied a special place. This emerges from the arguments against stepchild adoption based on the offspring's right to know who had a role in the conception and/or gestation. Centre-right parties unanimously opposed the measure and even the Democratic Party was split into antithetical positions, with a number of parliamentary members disapproving the articles concerning parenthood. The alternative proposal introducing reinforced foster care – a sort of pre-adoptive fostering – was then presented so as to better guarantee children's rights, as explained by Senator Rosa Maria Di Giorgi (Democratic Party) during the Senate debate of 4 March 2016:

> I do believe that a consistent and safe mode could be a reinforced foster. Parenting is recognized in both the partners; in case of the death of the natural parent, the children may be adopted and at 18 they can ask to be adopted. [Reinforced foster care would represent] a linear way to ensure that the child does not confuse parents' roles and to distinguish the parental functions from the generative ones [...]. No theft of functions. Only the clarity and the respect of children's rights, who have, in fact, the right to the love of two people who care for them, but also to know exactly that there is someone who has generated them and for various reasons (the biological parent will explain them) he/she is in the position of not being able to take care of them. (Senato della Repubblica, 2016)

Gay and lesbian parenting highlights the possibility of a discontinuity between procreation and parenting, which commonly overlap in the nuclear heterosexual family (Fruggeri, 2005), because those who participate in the procreation do not necessarily play a role in the child-rearing and, conversely, those who play a parental role may not have contributed to the biological generation. Senator Di Giorgi's discourse assumes that biology is an indelible, pre-cultural substrate, so it has a value in itself regardless of whether or not those who participated in the procreation take care of the child. That is why only in the event of the death of the 'natural' parent (the 'true' one), or when the child comes of age, may the social parent be legitimized by the State. According to the common cultural code, the blood relationship is not merely a symbol, but a 'yardstick for determining who counts as a ''real'' relative' (Weston, 1991, pp. 34–35). This is the reason for claiming the right to know who participated in one's generation and to distinguish, in fact, the biological parent from the non-biological one. Therefore, the opposition to stepchild adoption was not due only to prejudice against same-sex couples or gay and lesbian parenting, but to the reduction of kinship to an organic and natural fact, and as such, immune to critical thinking and the transformative political processes. Opposition to the legitimacy of gay and lesbian parenting reveals the fear of subverting the limits imposed by nature on the human species.

This is also clearly expressed in the words of the Interior Minister Angelino Alfano when, on 25 February 2016, he commented on the success achieved by the government in the vote of confidence on the Cirinnà bill. Minister Alfano, emphasizing the occasion of deleting stepchild adoption from the law, affirmed:

> On civil unions, wisdom has won [...] It was a nice gift for Italy to have prevented two people of the same sex – in which nature prevents it – having the chance to have a child. We prevented an anthropological revolution against nature. (Adnkronos, 2016)

Deviations from the heterosexual family are considered dangerous for the so-called natural and cultural laws that are supposed to preside over human intelligibility (Butler, 2002).

It has been recurrent in the religious discourse to warn against the risk of an anthropological revolution caused by lesbian and gay parenting. For a very long time, the Church has invoked the 'fear of the queer child' (Rosky, 2013) in opposing the recognition of lesbian and gay parenting and promoting child-rearing by both a mother and a father. In the simplest version,

this fear is the claim that the exposure to homosexuality would turn children into homosexuals, but over time it has been reformulated to include the fears that exposing children to homosexuality will make them more likely to be indoctrinated into queerness, to deviate from traditional gender roles or to perceive that queerness is acceptable due to the recognition of equal rights to LGBT people (Rosky, 2013). As Hicks (2005) highlights, Christian opposition to gay and lesbian parenting is based on the epistemological premise that gender and sexuality are direct outcomes of parents' sexual orientation and that they can be easily measured and determined, but this occurs within a normative moral framework which sees homosexuality as an absolutely deficient object.

Differences between old and new kinship patterns emerge and technologies downplay the importance of blood by showing alternative ways to establish family ties in which choice becomes central (Weston, 1991). Assisted reproductive techniques reveal that the connection between biology and kinship is not essential (Hayden, 1995): it is the border between nature and culture itself that cannot be taken for granted (McKinnon, 2015) and kinship can no longer be regarded as given and unchangeable, since it may be shaped by human engagement (Carsten, 2004). Discourses on lesbian and gay parenting become the place where other political fears are reflected: fears about technology, demographic policies, the nation's unity and the transmissibility of culture. As had already happened in other countries, the condition for the recognition of gay and lesbian couples is their exclusion from parenthood, denying them access to adoption or reproductive technologies (Brandão & Machado, 2012). France and Portugal, for example, approved same-sex couples' adoption years later than the law on civil unions. In Greece, the approval of same-sex civil partnership in December 2015 was one of the first measures of the government led by Syriza, a long time supporter party of equality for LGBT people; however, days before the election, the party's leader Alexis Tsipras stated that adoption by same-sex couples was a 'difficult subject' and that it would not be included in their policy programme if elected (Ilga-Europe, 2016).

In the Italian public debate on the law proposal, stepchild adoption has frequently been associated with surrogacy, which is illegal in Italy. 'Womb for rent', 'immoral', 'abominable', 'aberrant', 'inhuman', 'contrary to human dignity', a 'practice of exploitation of the human body' and 'insertion of the market within kinship' are some of the expressions most frequently used to define surrogacy by politicians, ordinary people and celebrities with the aim of opposing what is 'natural' – considered moral in itself – to what are 'unnatural' practices (Parlamento Italiano, 2016). The connection between stepchild adoption and

surrogacy is based on the belief that allowing a gay man to adopt the biological child of their partner would encourage the use of surrogacy, because two men have no other means to procreate. Thus, stepchild adoption would represent a sort of entrapment.

Despite having been widely used abroad for a long time, mostly by heterosexual couples, surrogacy has emerged at the heart of the debate because of the spectrum of homosexual parenting that has been identified as the symbol of technologies exceeding the limitations imposed by nature on human beings. The moral superiority of nature over technology is the result of a naturalistic fallacy that assumes that what is natural is inherently good. The natural order takes the form of necessity, perfection and immutability, coinciding, according to the notion of natural law, with morality. These conclusions are fallacious because 'there is no logical basis for the claim that moral positions (what ought to be) follow from descriptions of nature (what is)' (Cole, Avery, Dodson, & Goodman, 2012, p. 48). Ethics has changed over time in relation to technological developments and their role in the modern world. In fact, since a technique is the universal condition to achieve any purpose, it is no longer a means, but is the first objective to reach in order to be able to pursue all other purposes that, in the absence of the technical device, would remain dreams (Galimberti, 2009, p. 216; Severino, 1998).

Technique – or technology – has therefore become the true subject of the story and humanity is its servant, because, unlike in other animals, it is not codified by instinct and it has had to make up for that 'biological shortage' throughout history: the birth of humanity is located at the time when the first anthropoid raised a stick to take a fruit (Galimberti, 2009). Claiming that what is natural is preferable to what is technical has the effect only of favouring certain relationships and stigmatizing others, justifying discriminatory policies against LGBT individuals (Cole et al., 2012). Italian regulation on assisted reproductive technologies (Legge 20 maggio 2004, n. 40 – see Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2004) restricted fertility treatments to 'stable heterosexual couples', thus producing a new form of 'othering' through the definition of which categories of parents are acceptable and which are not (Parolin & Perrotta, 2012).

Conclusions

Since the beginning of the 20th century, same-sex couples and their children have progressively gained rights and public recognition in European countries. However, same-sex sexual orientations are still seen as a social problem and progressive initiatives related to intimacy and sexualities are difficult to realize, especially in those contexts where the heritage

of Catholicism is stronger (Santos, 2013). In Italy, too long a delay occurred before the parliamentary debate on same-sex civil unions happened.

Objections to the law were raised both from opposition parties and members of the government majority, from every part of the political spectrum; moreover, outside parliament, leading figures of the Catholic Church took part in the debate in defence of the 'traditional family'. Finally, while the law proposal was under discussion, even institutions of the State handed down sentences that contributed to the construction of the discourse on same-sex couples and their children.

The intense political and social controversies have resulted in a parliamentary vote that represents a compromise between opposite ideological demands. If on the one hand the approved law gives same-sex couples similar rights as heterosexual married couples, including mutual financial and moral support and inheritance and pension rights, on the other hand it has also reinforced the distinction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual couples, drawing a veil of silence over lesbian and gay parenting.

This chapter has analysed the assumptions and practices in play in the opposition to the law granting adoption and reproductive rights to lesbian and gay couples. The political delay in recognizing same-sex civil unions, and the themes that emerged during the debate, may be understood as traces of a process embedded in a historical, social and cultural context that in Italy has vetoed the expression of nonconventional sexualities. The analysis of the historical antecedents revealed the common strategies used by the Italian State and the Catholic Church to force homosexuality to stay inactive so as to obtain impunity or forgiveness. The Italian institutions chose not to introduce references to homosexuality into the law, neither providing penalty nor recognizing rights, whereas the Church required that people did not act upon the sinful inclination. The agreements between the civil and religious institutions – the latter wielding the moral authority in the country – meant that explicit oppressive mechanisms were avoided, thus making power invisible. In so doing, the heterosexual order appeared obvious and alternative sexualities were denied.

The newly approved Italian law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016) suggests that the zeitgeist is changing in Italy, and moral discourses on sexuality and kinship are undergoing transformation. In contrast to the condition that denied the existence of homosexuality, same-sex couples and their children have gained a place in the political debate and some rights have been recognized. A process of 'homonormalization' (Roseneil et al., 2013) is underway in Italy; but if on one side the heteronormative legal and political order is changing, on the other

side powerful ideas maintain a clear distinction between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples, with the former only partially admitted to the symbolic order of family, and lesbian and gay parenting still considered taboo.

The discussion of same-sex couples' rights and parenting has broken the silence on homosexuality and contravened the policy of inactivity to which non-heterosexual orientations were bound. The spectrum of unnatural sexualities can no longer make homosexuality invisible, and heteronormative power needs to enlist new strategies to dispute the legitimacy of lesbian and gay couples and to maintain heterosexuality's exclusive link to parenthood. The study has shown that the discourse of 'nature', along with the irreducible differences between heterosexual marriage and same-sex couples, emerged as the leitmotifs for perpetuating the heteronormative view of family and excluding lesbians and gays from kinship. In the speeches of the stakeholders who took part in the debate on the law, heterosexuality is considered essential for parenting because of the natural order. Opposition to the approval of stepchild adoption was based on the primacy of blood, meant as the embodiment of the natural law. Thus, gay and lesbian parents who do not have biological connections to their children are not considered 'real parents', even if they participate, as well as the biological parent, in child rearing. At the same time, under the primacy of nature, the biological connection is in itself the reason for considering the sperm donor or the woman who gestates the child as the 'real parent'.

The newly approved law on same-sex civil unions effectively confirms the idea that there is a superior model of family and that other forms of relationship can be assimilated into it to some extent; but in many respects, they are still excluded from the heteronormative symbolic code of the 'real family'.

CHAPTER 3

The political discussion about lesbian and gay parenthood[1]

Abstract

In 2016, the Italian Parliament passed a law that extended to same-sex couples most of the rights of married heterosexual couples. However, the possibility of a partner in a same-sex couple adopting the biological children of the other partner was so controversial that it had to be deleted in order for the law to pass, thus denying lesbian and gay parents the legal protection they need. In this chapter, we analyse the speeches of Parliamentarians who opposed the section of the bill concerning lesbian and gay parenthood. The analysis shows different discursive strategies deployed by MPs to combat the challenges to the heteronormative family, whose common reference is the hegemonic model of gender which has characterized the resistance of the Catholic Church to the recognition of non-heterosexual reproduction and kinship. Findings highlight that the opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parents contributes to reiterating restrictive standards of motherhood and to maintaining the institutionalization of sexualities and reproduction within the gender order. Implications of the research findings for public and social policies are discussed.

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, European countries have known important changes in the possibilities of living sexual diversities (Roseneil et al., 2013; Seidman, 2002; Weeks, 2007). However, in spite of the "new norm of homotolerance and processes of homonormalization" (Roseneil et al., 2013, p. 186), sexuality-based discriminations are far from being resolved and heterosexuality continues to be normalized and naturalized, while LGBT individuals and their relations are stigmatized and marginalized. In countries where Catholicism still exerts considerable influence on public opinion and law-making, the religious disapprobation of sexualities outside the heterosexual order has played a central role in the way LGBT issues

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[1] This chapter is based on the paper: Lasio, D., Congiargiu, N., De Simone, S. & Serri, F. (2018). Gender Fundamentalism and Heteronormativity in the Political Discussion About Lesbian and Gay Parenthood. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy,* first published 17 August, 1-12.

have been addressed (Santos, 2013). In the Mediterranean European countries, such as France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, the Church has for a long time deadlocked any initiative related to sexualities, and even after the approval of lesbian and gay couples' civil rights, lay and religious conservative Catholics have continued to campaign against same-sex marriage and gender equality policies (Lasio & Serri, 2017; De Michele, 2010; Digoix et. al., 2016; Santos, 2013).

With a notable delay compared to most European countries, Italy recognized same-sex civil unions only in 2016 with the law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016), thus representing a paradigmatic example of the resistance opposed by conservative institutions to the challenges to the heterosexual regime of normality. The legislative process was difficult and was marked by strong opposition inside and outside Parliament, as well as by deep divisions that split the government majority on this matter.

The law has been welcomed from many sides because it extends to same-sex couples most of the rights of married heterosexual couples, especially as regards the property regime, inheritance rights, survivors' pensions, access to medical information, and full hospital and jail visitation. However, a number of compromises were necessary to approve the law and the original draft was subject to subsequent amendments, which testified to the persisting power of heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005; Warner, 1991) in reifying the uniqueness of heterosexual relationships and parenthood.

Lesbian and gay parenthood was the preeminent bone of contention over the three-years-long debate because of Section number 5 of the draft bill, which would recognize the right of one partner to adopt the biological children of the other partner, thus supposedly introducing a view of the family independent of the two genders (Bernini, 2016; Garbagnoli, 2014). As a result, the section of the bill on adoption rights was so controversial that it had to be deleted in order for the law to pass, thus continuing to alienate lesbians and gays from kinship (Weston, 1991) and reasserting the control of heteronormativity over Italian politics despite the fact that the country has partially filled the legislative gap on this matter.

This chapter investigates the parliamentary debate on the recognition of same-sex couples and their children that took place in Italy during the period from July 2013 to May 2016. Specifically, through a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2001, 2003) of the speeches of Parliamentarians who opposed the section of the bill concerning lesbian and gay parenthood, the study addresses the following research questions: What are the discursive strategies currently used by the hegemonic heteronormative power to maintain the exclusive

heterosexual access to reproduction and kinship? Did the hegemonic model of gender intelligibility inform legislative processes relating to family life and, if so, how?

By framing the analysis within a poststructuralist feminist framework, the chapter sheds light on the practices of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1978) that have been deployed to reallocate reproduction and kinship within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) once the parliamentary debate in Italy issued a challenge to the hegemonic heteronormative power. Moreover, this research offers a contribution to the understanding of how the conservative resistance to non-heterosexual families supports the institutionalization of sexualities and reproduction within the gender order, which creates normative standards on the practices of motherhood (Hays, 1996; Rich, 1977) and, at the same time, contributes to maintaining the gender asymmetry at the origin of women's invisibility as active citizens (Amâncio & Oliveira, 2006).

This chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, we analyse the crucial role played by the Church in the reproductive arena (Connell, 2002) by dealing with bodies and reproductive differences, thus contributing to the creation of the cultural categories of women and men as well as influencing the political decisions about reproduction and kinship. Secondly, in the research section, we analyse the speeches of the Italian MPs who opposed the recognition of the right to adopt the biological children of one's gay or lesbian partner, focusing on the discursive strategies that confirmed the foundation of reproduction and kinship on heterosexual relations. Finally, by studying the Italian case as a particularly emblematic example of resistance to the subversion of heteronormativity, we shed light on how current discourses about lesbian and gay parenthood are intertwined with the normative model of gender that serves the reproduction of the normative family (Butler, 1998) and contributes to maintaining the hierarchical gender order of society (Connell, 1987) that imposes constraints to individual choices.

Catholicism and gender fundamentalism in the Italian reproductive arena

Since the end of the twentieth century, conservative religious activists from different faiths have converged in their efforts to build a "natural family" agenda and to combat "secular liberalism" (Buss & Herman, 2003). Against the struggles for the democratization of gender and sexual politics, a composite contingent of conservative social forces agreed on the need to defend the heterosexual family as the fundamental unit of society. In Western Europe, the Vatican has had a leading position on issues related to family life, and it has strenuously

opposed any initiative that was supposed to undermine the heterosexual model of marriage and parenting.

In the effort to resist the contemporary threats of "sexual democracy and the homosexual problem" (Fassin, 2010), the Church has traditionally brought into play the role of the woman, which has been at the core of the naturalizing discourses about gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship. As a result, "new forms of gender fundamentalism" (Segal, 2007, p.196) have risen in the Church's speeches in the effort to fight the challenges to what is considered the cornerstone of our culture: the self-evidence of sexual difference, the centrality of the nuclear family and the heterosexual mutual exclusion of sexual orientations and genders (Zappino, 2016).

By relying on the anthropological view of Karol Józef Wojtyla, who was pope with the name of John Paul II from 1978 to 2005, the Catholic Church has constructed motherhood as a crucial dimension for the fulfilment of the female personality (Pope John Paul II, 1988), thus helping to maintain the idea of a "prototypic psychology of women" (Shields, 1975) grounded on the maternal instinct. At a time when gender distinctions have been disrupted and denaturalized (Segal, 1999), under the fundamentalist regime of John Paul II, the Vatican supported a number of theologically and politically conservative organizations and became very active in the public discussion about reproduction, abortion, contraception and women's rights (Buss & Herman, 2003). Women's dispositions have been reaffirmed as natural and deeply-rooted in the anatomy of the body, while their authentic vocation has been identified in offering themselves to others as mothers and wives. The complementarity of functions and qualities between men and women was designated as a founding aspect of the society and precondition for harmonious social relations (Robcis, 2015), while heterosexuality was hypostatized as the only foundation of kinship (Butler, 2002). Over the last decades, the Church felt that the sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975) needed to be rescued against the threats coming from the feminist agenda and the recognition of same-sex unions. Since the 1990s, the syntagma "gender ideology" or "gender theory" began to be used by the Vatican for identifying a system of thought underlying the planned, slow and steady work of subverting the natural order of gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship.

As Buss and Herman (2003) highlighted, two key moments for the mobilization of Christian conservatives against the so-called "gender ideology" were two United Nation conferences, the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, with the aim of promoting women's rights so women could control their own

fertility. In response to the attention gained by feminist groups toward women rights, the Holy See (1995) reaffirmed that "gender is understood as grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female". Within a short time "gender ideology" became an effective reactionary rhetorical device (Garbagnoli, 2014) to delegitimize any discussion aimed at denaturalizing sexual norms or contrasting the material and symbolic marginalization of non-heterosexualities. The consideration of female and male attributes as effects of historical and cultural conditioning, together with the "liberation from biological determinism" were construed by the Church as the inspiring "ideologies which call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality" (Ratzinger, 2004).

These views of the Catholic Church have had considerable influence upon law-making in European countries where the legacy of Catholicism is still significant; however, the "Italian case" (Garelli, 2007) is recognized as particularly representative of the power that the Vatican maintains in political decisions with regard to family life and sexualities. Church hierarchies' influence over the country took root within a social context in which Catholic ethical values are still implicitly dominant and shared among the population. Moreover, the defense of the Vatican's moral imperatives has traditionally come from both center-right politicians, who have explicitly proclaimed themselves defenders of Catholic values, and their centre-left counterparts, who have often protected the Catholic view of reproduction and kinship through inaction, for example postponing the introduction of a law on civil unions (Bolzonar, 2016).

Thanks to the recognition that "the principles of Catholicism are part of the historical heritage of the Italian people" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1985), the Vatican has been authorized to intervene on moral and critical issues that come to the fore in the political debate, and to reaffirm the unquestionable natural order of gender and sexuality in response to the challenges of modernity, such as the recognition of same-sex unions and parenting (Bertone & Franchi, 2014; Fassin, 2010).

The crucial and vital influence of the Vatican on the Italian political system has been played since the aftermath of World War II, mainly through the endorsement of its views by the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), the major Christian democratic political party, which had a leading part in the Italian Parliament until the early 1990s. After the radical transformation of the political system started in 1992 due to a nationwide judicial investigation into political corruption, the DC lost its power in the country. In the difficulty of indicating a single party to

vote for, the Vatican has chosen a strategy of neutrality, not supporting any existing party. However, the Church has maintained its influence upon law-making by warning the Catholic politicians against decisions that could undermine the family founded upon marriage (Bernini, 2008).

In the years since 2000, with bioethical questions receiving increasing attention in Western countries, the Vatican stated its positions more vigorously, and the conflict with the "demands" of politics and science on assisted reproductive technologies, the use of stem cells in research or and the recognition of same-sex civil unions has become more evident. In different European countries, the syntagma "gender ideology" started to be largely used to oppose any intervention that was supposed to normalize diversities, such as educational school programmes against discriminations based on sexuality and gender, or the draft bill on homo and transphobia submitted to the Italian Parliament in 2013, whose legal process has not yet been concluded. The law on civil unions recently adopted by the Italian Parliament has been the most recent event of major import that led to a mobilization of conservative forces against the risk of subverting the heteronormative order.

The Italian parliamentary discussion on same-sex couples and their children

Although the debate on same-sex couples' rights had already started in Italy at the end of the eighties, no concrete initiative was taken to introduce legal recognition for same-sex couples before the year 2005. The promise of regulating civil partnership (regardless of sexual orientation) became central during the 2005 election campaign of the centre-left coalition headed by Romano Prodi and, although there were numerous conflicts within the government coalition, it was translated into a draft bill known as "DICO" regulating the "Rights and Duties for Stably Cohabiting People" (Senato della Repubblica, 2007). The bill was the subject of fierce criticism in the country, particularly by the Catholic hierarchies, which warned that same-sex unions legal recognition was "unacceptable in principle and dangerous on a social and educative level" (CEI, 2007). The strong obstruction to the adoption of the law went on for the duration of the Prodi government, which fell within approximately two years of taking office without passing the law.

In March 2013, the government led by Matteo Renzi, the secretary of the Democratic Party, reopened the debate on civil rights for same-sex couples. Like during Prodi's government, the political scenario in 2013 also involved a plethora of different ideological backgrounds, with a

ruling coalition comprising the Democratic Party (centre-left) and other parties of the centre and the centre-right grounded in the DC tradition. Although the law was finally approved in May 2016, the process was not easy and the thorny question of the rights of same-sex couples and their children was among the most difficult problems to solve for the government coalition, which was split between a large part of the Democratic Party that supported the proposal, and the centre-right government forces that, together with a strong Catholic component of the Democratic Party, objected to the bill, mainly due to the measures regarding parenthood.

The law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015), known as the Cirinnà bill – named after the main sponsor of the legislation, Senator Monica Cirinnà of the Democratic Party – introduced a regulation of same-sex civil unions on the model of heterosexual marriage, with the extension of the rights and duties of married heterosexual couples to cohabiting same-sex couples. The original proposal underwent considerable changes so as to eliminate what the opponents considered "inconvenient similarities" with heterosexual marriage, such as the obligation of mutual fidelity and the timing for the termination of a registered partnership. The most disputed section of the proposed law was the so-called "stepchild adoption", namely the possibility for one partner in a same-sex couple to adopt the other partner's biological children (Section number 5). In the heat of opposing lesbian and gay parenthood, the debate was also extended to assisted reproductive technologies, which, although they were not taken into account in the draft legislation, were evoked as the forthcoming subversive scenario of reproduction. Specifically, surrogacy, in spite of not being allowed in Italy, was a frequent subject of discussion due to the presumption that permitting a gay man to adopt the biological child of his partner would encourage "reproductive tourism" for using surrogacy abroad, in the knowledge that the non-biological parent would be recognized as a legal parent once he returned to Italy.

Intense lobbying and campaigning against lesbian and gay parenthood were carried out through the entire length of the parliamentary discussion of the proposal, with an unexpected convergence of views between civil society organizations, lay and religious Catholics, and parliamentary groups from whichever part of the political spectrum, which shared a strong socially conservative view on gender, sexualities and reproduction. Moreover, while obstructing the legislative proposal under discussion in the Parliament, the Vatican hierarchies and citizens' movements informed by Catholic thought also opposed any initiatives aimed at preventing discrimination based on sexuality and gender because they supposedly subverted

the gender order of the family. The discursive device "gender ideology" was deployed against the legal recognition of same-sex couples and their children, constructed as the very subversion of a system in which gender, sexuality and reproduction belong to a transcendent order, presocial and unchangeable (Lasio & Serri, 2017). The fierce climate in which the discussion took place testified to the strong conservative resistances towards queer families that are still seen as a threat to the gender order and to society itself (Bernstein & Reiman, 2001). The strong opposition from Catholics, lay and religious, had a large effect on the fate of the discussion of lesbian and gay couples' rights and their children, leading to many delays in the parliamentary process of the bill and fomenting tensions between the two main ruling parties. As a result, the discussion lasted for over three years, and when even the possibility of passing the original bill with the support of some minority parties failed, the solution, sponsored primarily by the Catholic component of the Democratic Party, was to drop Section number 5, concerning the so-called stepchild adoption. In the next session, we analyse the speeches of MPs who opposed the approval of Section number 5 of the Cirinnà bill.

Methods

This research analyses the parliamentary debates on the legal recognition of same-sex couples and their children that took place in Italy between July 2013, when the preliminary examination of different law proposals on this matter started, and May 2016, when the Chamber of Deputies approved in a vote of confidence the bill that had been approved by the Senate, without any amendments. We accessed the parliamentary texts through the digital archive of the Italian Senate, where the entire dossier regarding the law is available. After reading all the texts regarding the preliminary examination of the bill by the Senate commissions, for which only summary records were available, we focused the analysis on the parliamentary sessions for which a verbatim transcript was available (Senate sessions from 9 September 2015 to 25 February 2016). The parties present in the Senate during the discussion of the bill are reported in Table 1. The acronyms of the parties used in the data analysis are indicated in bold. Methodologically, at an early stage, three of the authors independently carried out a content analysis aimed at identifying the MPs' speeches that opposed the recognition of the section of the bill concerning the so-called stepchild adoption. Then, working together, the same three authors grouped all the speeches into broader themes, such as "child interest", "natural order", "gender order", "intensive mothering" and "social

revolution". Finally, the data were organized around four main discourses: a) the essentialized motherhood, b) the monstrous gay fatherhood, c) the commodification of motherhood, and d) the anthropological revolution. The discursive data analysis was based upon the assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2003), with the purpose of revealing which discourses and social practices contribute to maintaining the social order, thus sustaining the subjugation and discrimination of lesbian and gay individuals and their children. According to the emancipatory agenda of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001), the study explores what discourses oppose the solution of the problem, specifically the alienation of gay and lesbian individuals from kinship. The focus is on the ideological dimension of discourses as ways of representing aspect of the world, which contribute to sustain particular relations of power and domination. Moreover, since ideologies represent aspects of the world inadequately, the analysis focuses on the contradictions or failures within the dominant order so as to highlight possibilities for change. Finally, the analysis addresses the public and social policies implications of the research findings, highlighting how the critique can contribute to social emancipation.

Table 1: The Senate composition

Majority parties	Members	Opposition parties	Members
Partito Democratico – **PD** *(Democratic Party)*	107	Forza Italia – **FI** *(Forward Italy)*	60
Nuovo Centro-Destra – **NCD** *(New Centre-Right)*	31	Movimento 5 stelle - **M5S** *(Five Star Movement)*	50
Per l'Italia – **PI** *(For Italy)*	12	Lega Nord - **LN** *(North League)*	15
Per le Autonomie – **AUT** *(For the Autonomies)*	12	Grandi Autonomie e Libertà – **GAL** *(Great Autonomies and Freedom)*	10
Scelta Civica per l'Italia – **SC** *(Civic Choice for Italy)*	8	Sinistra Ecologia Libertà – **SEL** *(Left Ecology Freedom)*	7
Others	3	*Others*	4
Total Majority	173	Total Minority	145

Results

Essentializing motherhood

The opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parents and their children was largely built on the irreducible difference between the mother and the father, and the risks for

children deprived of either of the two figures. Biology is at the root of the differences between men and women, differences that are the "real, natural, anatomical, biological essence of the human species" (Giuseppe Marinello, NCD). On the basis of their biological attributes, men and women were constructed as naturally and indisputably different and, according to the gender order of society (Connell, 2002), distinct and complementary thinking, emotions and capacities were allocated to each spouse. As a result, the parental arrangement based on sex categories was considered the only legitimate one.

Ideologies of "natural difference" (Connell, 2009) draw their force from the conviction that gender will never change. Disowning the deeply historical character of gender has the political and intellectual effect of not recognizing that as it came into existence, it may have an end.

The value of the male-female complementarity would be enhanced by the chance of procreating that many MPs regarded as a unique heterosexual privilege, while they constructed same-sex sexuality as non-procreative and alienated from kinship (Weston, 1991). As Senator Roberto Cociancich (PD) stated, "The generation of life requires the encounter and fusion of two differences, the body of a man and the body of a woman. At the beginning of every existence there is this difference".

The so-called stepchild adoption, initially laid down in the law proposal (Section number 5), was at the heart of the debate precisely because it would detach parental roles from the biological substratum that was supposed to determine different enduring internal dispositions for men and women and their different roles in childrearing. Challenges to the natural order were resisted, with opponents invoking the notion that "motherhood and fatherhood have distinct characteristics, emotions, affects and social functions and this diversity must be maintained" (Antonio Azzolini, NCD).

By referring to gender as a "natural/biological state, an identity, or a role" (Hicks, 2013, p. 150), lesbian and gay parents are constructed as damaging children because they do not reflect the "natural" differences between men and women and the appropriate gender role models. The notion of a primary sexual difference at the base of psychic life and the idea that reproduction follows universally from heterosexual coitus (Butler, 2004) led the opponents of the Cirinnà bill to resist the stepchild adoption section because it supposedly undermined the protection of children. In the parliamentary debate, "family remains the complementary union of two sexes", and for this reason it was considered the best environment to raise children and to educate them to opposite sex role models. The "fear of the queer child" (Rosky, 2013) was

evoked against the recognition of lesbian and gay parenthood that in the speeches of MPs would expose children to queerness and to deviated gender roles. Male and female were considered to be "two archetypes that must be preserved, so that babies have precise reference points that support their development".

In opposing the adoption of the law, so-called gender ideology was often evoked as it was purportedly at the origin of the conspiracy against the natural heterosexual family:

> "This is the so-called gender ideology, that proposes to switch from the sexual duality – human beings as males or females – to the concept of gender, an open word that dismisses the sexual bipolarity of human beings. […] Such measures have only the purpose to progressively dispossess the family, which is the favourite and natural setting of education, and which is responsible for sexual education." (Nunziante Consiglio, LN)

Initiatives aimed at contesting the essentialist heteronormative views of sexual difference have been delegitimized and accused of abolishing male and female identity through educational manipulation. The expression "gender ideology" was commonly used to describe a political project aimed at erasing man and woman's identities, thus thwarting critical theories and practices to dispute the oppression of sexual minorities.

The subversion of the natural role of the mother was considered one of the worst consequences introduced by the law. The speeches reflected the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), the gendered model of a mother who has natural and instinctive caring capacities. By invoking scientifically expert sources, motherhood was stressed in its unique relation to pregnancy and the endless maternal bond was constructed as fundamental to the child identity and health:

> "You cannot evade the tenets of psychology, remove scientific knowledge, bypass the delicateness of the deep paths of pregnancy of a natural mother. Neither can you ignore that the cross talking occurs in the maternal-foetal relationship. Nor can you ignore that the child at birth, even though he is offered to someone else, carries within him an emotional and sensorial heritage, learned from the mother, that can be affected by her emotion, her mood and her well-being." (Laura Fasiolo, PD)

As highlighted by Shields (1975), the emphasis on the maternal instinct, founded on reproductive biology, has the effect of reducing women to the predisposition to mothering,

thus legitimizing power inequalities, with women subordinated to men (Rickett, 2016). In patriarchal culture, dominant ideologies about what mothering means regulate women's bodies and practices and establish normative expectations on motherhood, which implies powerlessness of women (Rich, 1977).

Monstrous gay fatherhood

During the parliamentary debate, stepchild adoption was often considered a "Trojan horse" to legitimize surrogacy, which is forbidden in Italy by Law 40/2004 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2004). The opponents to Section number 5 of the draft bill maintained that its approval would allow gay couples to access the practice of "womb for rent", as surrogacy was commonly called during the parliamentary debate, in countries where it is permitted, in the knowledge that the non-biological parent would then be recognized as a legal parent once he returned to Italy.

MPs defined surrogacy as "immoral", "abominable", "aberrant", "inhuman", and "contrary to human dignity", and referred to it as the "antithesis of natural reproduction". Despite having been widely used abroad for a long time, mostly by heterosexual couples, during the parliamentary debate on same-sex civil unions, surrogacy was addressed only with reference to gay couples. Gay couples were assumed to have an "obvious natural impediment to procreation" and medically assisted reproduction was demonized as an abnormal way of achieving fatherhood.

The legal restriction in access to fertility treatments, which in Italy are allowed only to stable heterosexual couples who are clinically infertile, together with the dominant rhetoric on reproduction and kinship, are embedded in the production of new forms of "othering", through the definition of acceptable and unacceptable parents (Parolin & Perrotta, 2012). This was evident in the construction of the figure of the "gay wealthy couple" who has been demonized because it may escape the legal framework and, on account of its money, "buys parenthood" on the international market to which it has free access:

> "By introducing by law the possibility of same-sex parenting, that category of potential same-sex parents who have means and resources to surrogate their progeny, would be facilitated [...]; thus, a division in the matter of rights would be produced between those who can spend from fifty thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand euros for a

surrogacy in the USA or in India and those who do not have these means." (Aldo Di Biagio, NCD)

By emphasizing the supposed privileges of "rich gay couples", MPs overshadowed the responsibility of the state for the unequal opportunities in the access to reproductive services. The claims to reproductive rights of intended parents who are excluded from fertility treatments, regardless of their sexual orientation, due to the restrictions of the Italian law, are eclipsed by the demonization of those (gay) individuals who receives these services abroad. Right-wing parties constructed the recognition of gay parenthood as the first step to allowing "eugenic practices", and they appealed for a national/nationalist mobilization against those European directives that called for the recognition of same-sex couples, thus resulting in legislations alien to the common wisdom and the natural law.

> "They [the supporters of the draft law] say, 'This is required of us by Europe'. […] it is necessary to go against the tide precisely in the moment in which perversions arrive, such as the eugenic programming of a child. The agreement [between gay fathers and a surrogate mother] provides that she should abort if the child doesn't come out well […] because the gentleman customers want it perfect. They want it blonde, with blue eyes, with no physical defects and with a certain intelligence quotient; otherwise, they throw it away. Senators, is this progress? […] We will fight against this in the Parliament […] and in the country. […] This is a battle of civility against this barbarity. It begins now and we'll carry it forward all over the country together with 80% of Italians." (Carlo Giovanardi, GAL)

By constructing Europe as a reality extraneous to national values, MPs' speeches imputed to the EU anti-discrimination policies the responsibility to subvert the values founding the national culture. The opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parenthood took the value of an appeal for the defence of the community and its future, while "other" citizens were identified with the normalization of immoral practices, a foreign body within a cohesive system which is proud of its values and traditions. The request for recognition of the rights of lesbian and gay parents and their children was assumed to be a conspiracy against the founding values of Italy, thus legitimizing the mobilization for exclusion of those who would threaten "our civilization".

Against the "inhuman and very grave" practice of surrogacy, it was argued that children's rights were superior to the desire of a gay couple to have a child. Likewise, desires of adults should not be confused with the right to subvert the natural law of procreation, and the strong rhetoric of the "best interest of the child" (Clarke, 2001) was deployed by MPs to protect children from becoming commodities of selfish gay couples who should accept the limits imposed by nature to reproduction. Through the appeal to the interest of the child, lesbian and gay parenthood is opposed in the name of a morally superior and universally shared principle. The opposition to the bill was represented as a high moral stance opposed to the wish of lesbian and gay individuals to be recognized as parents, which would be a proof of their selfishness. Although in the opponents' speeches the best interest of the child remained an undefined concept coinciding with parents' heterosexuality in itself, the rhetorical force of this device construed lesbian and gay sexuality as incompatible with the responsibility and the readiness to self-sacrifice that are required to parents.

Heterosexual reproduction was also constructed as an imperative because it was assumed as the only context that might guarantee the right of the child to access his/her biological origin. According to a genetic essentialist view (Witt, 2005), the development of an adequate self-knowledge was described as the result of knowing one's genetic origins, thus undermining the role of social practices in constituting personal identity.

> "A baby who, due to the step-child adoption, grows up with a homosexual couple, may be filled with affection and educated as well as possible, but he will not have the certainty of his biological identity; he will not have both biological parents as legal parents; he will not have a father and a mother who raise him." (Stefano Lepri, PD)

Not having a biological tie to the parents was construed as a case of "fictive kin", thus reifying the hierarchical system in which genetic ties are essential for kinship, while other forms of family relationships are considered fictional (Weston, 1991). By assuming the "bionormative conception of the family" (Witt, 2014), according to which families with children who do not have a genetic connection to both their parents are not the ideal form of the family, MPs maintained the superiority of heterosexual parents with biologically related children compared to other forms of family. Moreover, by arguing that fertility biomedicine would imply not knowing the source of the biomaterial, one's biological identity, MPs did not acknowledge that in lesbian reproduction the narrative of conception has never been

dominated by the secrecy of the use of a donor (Mamo & Alston-Stepnitz, 2015). It is also noteworthy that, by drawing on the new potential offered by the Web, new forms of relationships between donors and prospective parents or individuals who share genetic ties are increasingly expanding.

The commodification of motherhood

If on one side the arguments against the recognition of lesbian and gay parenting stressed the monstrous consequences of gay fatherhood for the child, on the other side they focused on the "wretched" conditions of women involved in surrogacy procedures. Many times, the opposition to the proposed law was justified by the fact that surrogacy would endorse a view of the woman as a "reproductive machine" and that "commodification practices of motherhood would have the chance of succeeding". In the speeches of MPs, surrogacy would represent an "ethical abomination" that "humiliates the dignity of women". The call for a global banning of surrogacy headed by some long-time feminists, such as Sylviane Agacinski in France and Luisa Muraro in Italy, echoed in different interventions across the parliamentary spectrum. "Homo-patriarchy" was evoked as the symbolic cornerstone of patriarchy, which would "exploit" and "humiliate" a woman's body and would consider the uterus a "disposable part", while gay couples were described as "devoid of moral restraints":

> "The legitimization of same-sex parenting inevitably and logically makes necessary the recourse to procedures that humiliate the dignity of the female body, with the objectification and commodification of gestation, which [gestation], instead, for intrinsic and innate qualities, it is rooted in the human, single, unique, unrepeatable mother-child relation, that it cannot ever be cancelled, neither contracted, nor justified for a so-called selfless or solidarity goal." (Lucio Romano, AUT)

New generative possibilities offered by fertility biomedicine have given rise to ethical concerns regarding vulnerability of those hired for reproductive labour. Risks linked to the profit-related fertility industry have been under discussion by feminist scholars and activists who have highlighted how the access to reproductive services may implicate injustice and exploitation if not cautiously regulated. The transnational nature of assisted reproduction practices, with a growing number of Western couples looking for the conditions to having children that are not possible in their countries, might increase the violation of vulnerable

women's rights in countries with an unregulated fertility scenario. Although heterosexual couples represent the vast majority of customers of reproductive assisted technologies, the ethical concerns of Italian MPs focused only on gay couples who were described as privileged exploiters of vulnerable women. If on one side it is true that reproduction is stratified by structural inequities of race, class, and sexuality, and different conditions of rights and privileges are involved, on the other side transnational reproduction began as an option for evading state restrictive regulations (Mamo & Alston-Stepnitz, 2015). Limiting the discussion to lesbian and gay individuals' participation in practices of biomedicine has hidden that "the stratifications imbedded in practices of biomedicine are intensifying in political economies that do not include a right to health, but a right to buy health care and enhance one's own health" (Mamo & Alston-Stepnitz, 2015, p. 535). Commercial reasons were not the only cause for opposing surrogacy and Italian MPs expressed their disapproval even if fecundity assistance services were available free of charge. While the rhetoric of the "gift of life" is often used by brokerage companies to depict the process in less starkly commercial terms, thus not threatening the maternal generosity ideal (Cooper & Waldby, 2014), the opponents to the bill did not consider the principle of non-remuneration sufficient to admit surrogacy, and they questioned women's personal volition and the voluntary nature of their involvement:

> "The new theory of the gift, the altruistic surrogacy, is a theorem, a sophistry essentially, a specious argument, behind which is not always but most of the time, a covert reality of marginalized women. This happens in poor countries as well as in wealth countries."
> (Laura Fasiolo, PD)

By denying any difference in motivations of women who participate in assisted reproductive technologies as gestational surrogates or oocyte vendors, MPs failed to recognize the stratified feature of reproduction and the structural conditions which result in individual's choices. If on one side there is a need to harmonize and regulate these practices on a global level so as to prevent women's exploitation, on the other side, MPs' speeches continued not to recognize women as volitional subjects, relegating them to a passive figure which received form from the male action upon them (Staikou, 2014).

Anthropological revolution

A fourth discourse referred to the Cirinnà bill was an attempt to pursue an anthropological revolution. LGBT groups were described as a lobby that works from the shadows to

overcome traditional values and "to establish new models and examples of family life and to create a new human being who hasn't a father and a mother in its genesis" (Giuseppe Marinello, NCD). The description of the campaign for the recognition of lesbian and gay parenthood as a concerted effort by a lobby has resulted in the construction of a dangerous and organized occult force that wanted to subvert the allegedly common set of values of the country. MPs who opposed the bill characterized themselves as the defenders of the existent social stability, while they promoted a sense of dread in the public opinion or antipathetic sentiments over LGBT individuals.

Some MPs' speeches based the opposition to the bill on the need to respect the Italian Constitution. That was called into play to argue for the impossibility of adopting the law because it would not respect the constitutional definition of family as a "natural society":

> "An attempt is being made, through a normative artifice not that ingenious, to unravel the natural society, which is regulated by the law and the constitution, for putting in front of it a sort of pseudo progressive society planned by the legislator, and this […] damages, in an almost scientific manner, the anthropological harmony and the natural demands to which the legislator himself should bow down to." (Aldo Di Biagio, NCD)

MPs' speeches have favoured the misinterpretation of the expression "natural society" used in the Constitution to define family. Although heterosexuality was likely taken for granted in 1947 when the Constitution was laid down, the expression "natural society" was referred to as a "grandfather clause", according to which the family comes before the State temporally and in terms of importance. Therefore, the purpose was to prevent the State from intervening in the privacy of family life and not to enshrine the heterosexual foundation of the family (Ginsborg, 2013).

Against the subversion of the "natural society", the opponents to the Cirinnà bill deployed the argument of the natural order, "a reality that the norm cannot modify", and the dissolution of the original figures of the woman and the man was constructed as the likely consequence of gender ideology, which would give rise to a new human being, "with no soul, neither face nor identity".

"They want to overcome the compulsory heterosexuality in order to create a new human being, to whom the freedom to choose everything of himself must be recognized, the freedom to unleash his own sexual identity, regardless of his nature and his biologically defined sexuality. If sexual binary stops being the ontological parameter of the human being, any sexual deviation from heterosexuality is understood as normal. […] We were not born as individuals and then we assumed a sexuality, we were born male or female from the moment of conception." (Nunziante Consiglio, LN)

In the words of the opponents, the affirmation of gender ideology would lead to the end of sexual difference and, "in a spiral of lies", schools would teach children that sexual differences are no longer differences, that there are children with two fathers or two mothers, and that babies "do not come from a man and a woman but from the affection of two individuals" (Lucio Malan, FI).

Compulsory heterosexuality was identified by MPs as the natural condition of human beings and sexual binarism as its obvious consequence. In the Parliamentary debate, men and women were characterized by different and opposite dispositions and, consequently, by complementary roles and duties, while the function of performativity in the construction of sexual difference and its signification was disregarded. As a result, the opposition to the bill not only established the supremacy and exclusivity of heterosexual parenthood, but it was also a source of epistemic violence that imposed a prescriptive and unique meaning of gender, while other subjectivities were disowned. Parliamentary speeches demonized the so-called gender ideology by identifying it with a political stance and a social engineering project for ending male and female identities, thus hiding the emancipatory aim of critical reflections on how binarism should be deconstructed in the interest of any oppressed subjectivity.

The refusal to recognize any form of parenthood outside the nuclear heterosexual family was based on the argument that same-sex parenthood would be damaging to the child, a threat to culture and destructive of the human (Butler, 2004). Lesbian and gay parents were opposed to the symbolic order of the family because they "overcome the difference between parents that is necessary in the individual pathway of every person" (Piero Aiello, NCD), and, therefore, they would challenge the ideology of gender, motherhood and family, which together were considered the basis of the stability of society (Romans, 1992).

"The moral strength of a nation comes from the healthy family, united and with children, that represents the future of the nation. Family is the most important social security valve

and the fundamental educational agency. It must be supported, not abandoned and assimilated to others. It is in the family that the individual is recognized and empowered and he learns sociality." (Remigio Ceroni, FI)

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the parliamentary debate on the recognition of same-sex civil unions and their children that took place in Italy between July 2013 and May 2016, which resulted in the approval of the law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016). If on one hand the approved law recognizes same-sex couples' entitlements, on the other, as had already happened in other European countries (e.g. Brandão & Machado, 2012), the condition for the recognition of gay and lesbian couples is their exclusion from parenthood. The opposition to the possibility of a partner in a same-sex couple adopting the biological children of the other partner came from parties from the entire political spectrum, including the majority forces within which the bill was drafted.

The analysis of MPs' speeches has revealed the alacrity of their opposition to non-heterosexual families, and the contribution the MPs have made, as part of the system of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1978) within the specific Italian cultural and historical context, to repress alternatives to the hegemonic model of reproduction and kinship.

With specific reference to the study's research questions, the analysis has shown different discursive strategies deployed during the debate in the Italian Parliament to contrast the challenges to the heteronormative family, whose common reference is the hegemonic model of gender and, specifically, the construction of women as essentially predisposed to mothering. By echoing the gender fundamentalism that has characterized the conservative resistance, mainly by the Catholic Church, to the recognition of non-heterosexual reproduction and kinship, the MPs' speeches have reified the differences between men and women by appealing to "Darwinian fundamentalism" and "genetic determinism" (Segal, 1999), which reiterate women's supposed caring virtues and limit the possibility for change in gender arrangements. Gender configurations in lesbian and gay families have been regarded as abnormal because they challenge the heteronormative views about the discrete 'roles' and characteristics of men and women, such as the caring/nurturing mother and the providing father (Hicks, 2005; 2013). The reference to women's natural caring capacities were accompanied in the speeches by the glorification of gender complementarity as the only

access to reproduction and the requisite for good and healthy parenting (Bertone, 2017), thus contributing to upholding social hierarchies between heterosexual parents and the others.

The analysis of the parliamentary discussion over same-sex couples and their children has offered a contribution to the understanding of how "the oppression of homosexuals is a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women" (Rubin, 1975, p. 180). By opposing the recognition of gay and lesbian parents owing to the challenges they would throw down to the sacredness of motherhood (Rich, 1977), the parliamentary debate has contributed to reiterating restrictive standards of motherhood and to maintaining the institutionalization of sexualities and reproduction within the gender order, thus channelling the experience of maternity to serve male interests.

Our findings highlight the need to implement initiatives at various levels (such as public and social policies, social campaigns, educational programmes), which should address not only issues directly linked to sexuality-based prejudices, but also general matters related to the division of roles and responsibilities based on the heterosexual matrix. As the research has showed, the guarantee to lesbian and gay parents and their children of the fundamental rights they need has been hampered in Italy by resorting to discourses that did not reject homosexuality itself, but rather they have appealed to the hegemonic gender order and its rules about mothering as the only warranty of social stability.

Interventions aimed at recognizing the rights of sexual minorities need to be accompanied by a broader project of cultural change, which, by promoting the deconstruction of gender binarism, might support legislative progresses. The ongoing gender asymmetries in the paid labour market as well as in family work (Fuwa 2004; Ridgeway 2011) call for laws and social policies to challenge social inequities and to problematize the conservative notion of gender. As previous studies have shown (e.g. Pistella et al., 2018), gender inequalities and discriminatory treatments based on traditional beliefs about the superiority of men over women, sustain prejudices against sexual minorities. Public opinion can perceive LGBT groups' political demands for legal rights as a subversion of the social equilibrium based on the gender order, and in some cases political leaders ride the waves of the public fears. In countries such as Italy where the influence of Catholicism is still undiminished, the fundamentalist view of gender and the self-evidence of sexual difference are forcefully defended in public discourses against the risk of subverting the gender order and the heteronormative foundation of kinship. This leads to believe that political initiatives and legislative changes intended to overcome institutionalized sexuality-based discriminations, in

spite of being of key importance in everyday lives, will not suffice to guarantee positive societal attitudes toward LGBT individuals (Costa et al, 2014; Pereira & Monteiro, 2016). Legal changes to support LGBT individuals' demands can fail to promote societal progressive attitudes unless accompanied by a broader cultural challenge to the ruling heterosexual order. Legal initiatives and social policies that address different form of subordination, such as sexism and sexual discrimination, could be more effective in challenging restrictive conceptions of identities and their relationships.

CHAPTER 4

Discourses of LGBT activists about lesbian and gay parenting[1]

Abstract

LGBT activists have a crucial role in fighting sexuality-based discrimination. However, homonormativity can lead activists to adhere to hegemonic heteronormativity, thus threatening their efforts to widen the concept of family. Drawing on the Gramscian notion of hegemony, this chapter analyses the notion of heteronormativity and its homonormative facet as a form of hegemony that impacts activists, sustaining the premises of heteronormativity and seeking inclusion within such norms. This research investigates the hegemonic heteronormative assumptions that endure in the discourses of Italian LGBT activists when they talk about lesbian and gay parenting. Findings highlight the presence of heteronormative traces in their discourses, namely in terms of access to reproduction, the parents' place within the regime of gender and the right standards for child rearing. Hegemonic heteronormativity appears in multiform ways, and as largely consensual even to those it more directly oppresses, making it difficult to detect and therefore to deconstruct.

Introduction

Although most European countries have produced laws regulating same-sex coupledom (Seidman, 2002; Weeks, 2007), and in many cases lesbian and gay parenting has been legitimized, heteronormativity has not lost the power to define sex, gender, and sexuality, thus establishing the boundary between the natural heterosexual family and "others" (Warner, 1991). Civil rights recognition for same-sex couples does not necessarily bring an end to the idea that sexuality outside the heterosexual order is a problem and, although the vast majority of existing research (e.g., Fedewa, Black, & Ahn, 2015; Goldberg, 2010; Tasker & Patterson, 2007) has found no relationship between children's developmental outcomes and parents' sexual orientation, lesbian and gay parenting remains controversial.

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[1] This chapter is based on the paper: Lasio, D., Serri, F., Ibba, I. & De Oliveira, J.M. (2018): Hegemony and Heteronormativity: Homonormative Discourses of LGBTQ Activists About Lesbian and Gay Parenting. *Journal of Homosexuality*, first published 27 July, 1-24.

In Italy, the law that recognizes same-sex civil unions was passed in 2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016) after a debate marked by strong opposition inside and outside Parliament (Lasio & Serri, 2017). However, the section on adoption rights initially laid down in the law proposal was so controversial that it had to be deleted in order for the law to pass. This reveals that, despite the law on same-sex civil unions being approved, heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005; Warner, 1991) in Italy grants only partial access of lesbian and gay couples to state institutions, while, at the same time, it still constructs heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexuality, thus marginalizing parents who do not conform to the dominant views of reproduction and kinship. By operating in everyday social practices, modern regimes of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1978) have established the distinction between normal and abnormal sexualities, contributing to repress, within the specific Italian cultural and historical context, any alternative to the hegemonic model of family.

A challenge to the heteronormative assumptions may occur due to the actions of LGBT social movements, which, besides political bargaining and changing policies and laws, contribute to broader cultural effects that contest dominant norms and behaviours, thus troubling the public understanding of relevant social issues (Bernstein, 2003; Trappolin, 2004). LGBT activists question the stigmatization of identities, supporting the strategic recognition of new identities and deconstructing restrictive social categories (Bernstein, 1997). However, as queer critiques (e.g., Drucker, 2015; Richardson, 2000) have exposed with the concept of homonormativity, LGBT social movements do not necessarily contest dominant heteronormativity, and they can contribute to the social and cultural status quo. The concept of homonormativity was first used to describe the postwar assimilationist politics that embraced a model of gender-conforming homosexuals based on adherence to heteronormativity and public privileging of heterosexuality that demands homosexuals pass as heterosexuals (Rosenfeld, 2009). This is distinct from the new, neoliberal homonormativity "that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan, 2003, p. 50). Equal rights politics under neoliberalism have resulted in a new gay normality that privileges the normative family model over radical social change or a critique of heteronormativity.

In this chapter, the concept of homonormativity is used as a "facet of heteronormativity because it seeks the compliance of LGBT individuals demanding inclusion within the framework of heteronorms" (Oliveira et al., 2013, p. 1478). Homonormativity is therefore an

effect and a condition of the viability of heteronormativity, using the politics of passing off as straight (Rosenfeld, 2009) and gender normalization (Stryker, 2008) while advocating a consumption form of citizenship (Duggan, 2003).

Given the persisting power in Italy of heteronormativity, this chapter focuses on the hegemonic processes that may lead to being complicit with the heteronorms, thus sustaining the uniqueness of heterosexual reproduction and kinship. Specifically, through a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2003) of the discourses of LGBT individuals politically active in endorsing the recognition of same-sex couples and their children, the study addresses the following research questions: Does heteronormativity endure in the discourses of LGBT activists about parenting? If so, what are the heteronormative assumptions about gender, sexuality, reproduction, and kinship that permeate their discourses?

The chapter draws on a notion of heteronormativity and its homonormative facet as a form of hegemony (Gramsci, 1975a) achieved through the consent given by subordinate groups to dominant worldviews. The notion of "hegemonic heteronormativity" (Ludwig, 2011) supports the understanding of how heteronormativity is naturalized and discursively constructed as normal in everyday action, where "the subject exerts power upon itself in a self-guided manner" (Ludwig, 2011, p. 49), thus explaining how LGBT politics may collude with heteronormative neoliberal ways of regulating sexuality. This hegemonic status of heteronormativity is very clear in homonormativity by making LGBT persons themselves adhere to and be compliant with heteronorms and to its subjective position in neoliberal and increasingly depoliticized gay and lesbian constituencies (Oliveira, et al., 2013).

By analysing the hegemonic heteronormative assumptions that endure in the discourses of LGBT activists, this chapter contributes to the advancement of understanding how power operates to maintain exclusive heterosexual access to reproduction and kinship, thus channelling counter-hegemonic forces into the heteronorm.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, since heteronormative practices and assumptions are manifested in diverse ways, according to the context in which they occur (Ryan-Flood, 2005), we analyse the historical, political, and cultural conditions that led the state apparatuses in conjunction with private institutions (and primarily the Catholic church) to affirm the hegemony of heteronormativity in Italy. Second, the research section of this chapter presents the analysis of the discourses of three groups of LGBT Italian activists about parenting, specifically focusing on the heteronormative assumptions that permeate their views about gender, sexuality, reproduction, and kinship. Finally, the chapter highlights how

heteronormativity is resistant to the possibility of being subverted, even in the discourses of LGBT individuals who are engaged in the struggle to overcome it. Implications on how counter-hegemonic forces can challenge the regime of normality are discussed.

Cultural hegemony and homonormativity

Whereas over the last decades progressive normalization and new regulations for lesbian and gay couples and their children have happened in Western Europe, same-sex sexual orientations are still viewed as a social problem, and progressive initiatives related to intimacy and sexualities are still strongly contested, especially in those contexts where Catholicism exerts an important influence on social values with regard to family life and sexualities (Bernini, 2008; Garelli, 2007; Santos, 2013).

Deep social and political divisions have accompanied the adoption by the Italian Parliament of same-sex civil unions, and legislative equal status for gay and lesbian couples and heterosexual couples failed to overcome the heteronormative regime in defining sex, gender, sexuality, and reproduction (Lasio & Serri, 2017). General politics and "regimes of truth" established by scientific discourses and institutions contributed to the social control of sexuality in the country, reinforcing throughout time the idea of one "dominant" sexuality (heterosexuality) and other "peripheral sexualities" (Foucault, 1978, p. 38). The heteronormative apparatus made up of cultural, social, legal, organizational, and interpersonal practices, silently and powerfully strengthened the idea that heterosexuality is the natural form of sexuality and the sole access to reproduction.

Heterenormativity in Italy has acted mainly by silencing and condemning to invisibility what did not conform to the established order rather than operating through forceful actions or punitive and coercive powers. A "repressive tolerance" (Dall'Orto, 1988) has characterized Italian institutions' approaches toward homosexuality in the guarantee of impunity of same-sex activities on the condition that homosexuals do not emerge from invisibility so as not to challenge the heterosexual order. The denial of diversity has had a vast echo on the social, political, and cultural life of the country. For instance, in advance of most European countries, the Italian penal code has excluded any reference to same-sexual activities since 1889; additionally, since the 1930 fascist reform of the penal code, in spite of the aversion of the regime to sexual diversities, no reference has been made to homosexual acts. On that

occasion, fascist Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco stated, "The filthy vice [homosexuality] is fortunately not common in Italy" (Manzini, 1936, p. 218).

The renouncing of Italian institutions to control sexuality through law was also possible because of the treaties between the state and the church[2], which, besides financial convention and settlement of historical conflicts between the Italian government and the Pope, established a prominent role of Catholicism in Italian civil life ("the only religion of the State"), for which principles had to be taught in school, thus consigning to the church an important role in the moral and ethical education of the country (Ginsborg, 2013).

The Vatican's reliance on a natural order of gender and sexuality, established since the foundation of Catholic theology, has been reaffirmed during the twentieth century in response to the challenges of modernity, such as the recognition of same-sex unions and parenting (Bertone & Franchi, 2014; Fassin, 2010).

In Italy, after the collapse in the early 1990s of the Christian Democratic Party, which ruled the country in close connection to the Vatican since the founding of the Republic, the Catholic church continued to influence political decisions with regard to family life and sexualities (Bernini, 2008; Garelli, 2007). Over the last few decades, the Vatican has largely succeeded in silencing the debate about LGBT issues, and it expressed its contrariety every time the hypothesis of recognition of same-sex couples and their children emerged, warning electors and politicians about decisions that would undermine the family founded upon marriage (Bernini, 2008). Despite the numerous law proposals tabled in the Parliament since 1988, the discussion about same-sex couples and their children has been postponed or censored for about 30 years.

The Italian case is a paradigmatic example of how heteronormativity does not depend on a specific intentional decision of a leading group or political party; as a hegemonic force, heteronormativity does not need to resort to explicit oppression or coercion, but it is the result of socio-cultural concepts, shared norms, and habituated normalities.

Antonio Gramsci (1975a) describes hegemony as a power formation of the modern state that operates through both public state apparatuses—such as school, parliament, judiciary, police, government (Gramsci, 1975b)—and private apparatuses, named the civil society (Gramsci, 1975d)—such as trade unions, political, cultural and religious organizations, and newspapers and periodicals. Hegemonic views are repeatedly negotiated during daily interactions in civil

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[2] See the Lateran Treaty (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1929) and the Agreement of Villa Madama (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1985 n.121) that delegated to the Catholic Church the authority on morality and the ethical education of the country.

society, since they become part of the state. As a result, the state gains power over civil society with no need to force or impose its rules. By making use of cultural forms of consensus production, ruling conceptions map the world for others, becoming the border of normality, defining what the world is and how it works for all practical purposes (Hall, 1988). Thus, worldviews of dominant groups turn into what Gramsci called senso comune [common sense] and become universal (Gramsci, 1975e). As a result, the relations of dominance become consensual, because they are continuously reproduced as natural. Cultural hegemony is a process of moral and intellectual leadership that implies that certain ideas and values formulated by intellectuals organic to a social group (social class for Gramsci) become dominant. Consensus can be won in the realm of ideas, with the subordinated groups who confirm the social order, assuming the dominant views about what is normal, acceptable, true, and universal, thus agreeing to their conditions of subordination (Smith, 2010). In Gramsci's view, rather than through repression, hegemony operates through consensus, and this implies that subjects adopting hegemonic worldviews are at the same time directed by external processes and are complicit in their subjugation.

If Gramsci's reflection on hegemony is primarily related to the economic and political stability of capitalism, and he only refers to peasants and the proletariat as subaltern groups, the notion of subalternity emerging from his "Prison Notebook" was on a broader scale and included people from different religions or cultures and those existing at the margins of society (Smith, 2010). As Ludwig (2011) pointed out, broadening the notion of hegemony beyond class relations to include gender and sexual relations may explain why, in the face of increased visibility and judicial equality of gays and lesbians in neoliberal societies, heteronormativity has not decreased its importance for the constitution of intelligible subjects and social order.

Echoes of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony can be found in post-structuralist, feminist, queer, and postcolonial perspectives (Butler, 1993; Castro Varela, Dhawan, & Engel, 2011; Connell, 1995; Hall, 1986; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Spivak, 1988) that have rethought the notion of power and the conditions of its existence in modern societies. According to Mouffe (1979), Gramsci's conception of hegemony shifts the focus from the primacy of economic relations to the variety of forms and levels in which power acts: "far from being localized in the repressive state apparatuses, power is exercised at all levels of society and that it is a 'strategy'" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 201).

Based on the Gramscian "arsenal of concept", Laclau and Mouffe (2001) frame the notion of hegemony in a discursive and post-structuralist perspective. In their analysis, the concept of articulation became central for defining hegemony as a relation of alliance between different groups and different demands that identify with each other so that a particular social force becomes representative of a totality that is incommensurable with it (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The notion of articulation entails that political identities are not given but are constituted and reconstituted through debate in the public sphere. Avoiding identity closure and deconstructing the idea of social relations that pre-exist political practices, the notion of hegemony challenges the essentialist view of dominator and dominated and invites an analysis of consent and complicity expressed from different social positions in relation to domination (Castro Varela et al., 2011). Hegemony works to dissolve the opposition between marginalized and dominant, so that the dominant norm is "reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects" (Butler, 1993, p. 91). The best illustration for this conclusion is homonormativity by which LGBT individuals comply, reinforce, and reproduce the values of dominant groups.

Approaching hegemonic heteronormativity via homonormativity helps to highlight how LGBT individuals adhere to uncontested and normalized discourses on gender, sexuality, and dominant masculinities (Ludwig, 2011; Oliveira et al., 2013; Stryker, 2008).

It should be noted that if, on one side, heteronormativity is powerful in governing and constituting intelligible subjects, on the other side, hegemony always entails a certain degree of openness and ambivalence: "every movement in the thesis leads to a movement in the antithesis, thus to a [synthesis] that is partial and provisional" (Gramsci, 1975b, p. 840, our own translation). Hegemony is an ongoing process, a compromised equilibrium in which competitive power dynamics of forces "permanently try to gain influence and as such organize and reorganize socio-cultural relations (Castro Varela et al., 2011, p. 6). Heteronormativity is a form of hegemony based on a coherent articulation of sex, gender, and desire; conversely, the introduction of incoherence in the articulation of sex, gender, and desire may represent a counter-hegemonic challenge to the heteronormative regime. Hegemonic heteronormativity is constantly subjected to compromises articulated in social struggles; thus, the politics of counter-hegemonic groups can challenge the ruling views of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and kinship.

With regards to LGBT social movements, while they may have a significant cultural impact on challenging the ways in which the social world is accorded meaning (Bernstein, 2003), at

the same time, their actions are embedded in the wider context where heteronormative assumptions are hegemonic, and their politics are "always located within the paradoxical field of simultaneous complicity and challenge" (Ludwig, 2011, p. 59). As Duggan (2003) highlighted, LGBT politics may be complicit in reproducing heteronormativity, an intuition already present in Antonio Gramsci's thought:

> […] "subaltern groups" history is necessarily disjointed and episodic. There is no doubt that in the historical activity of these groups there is a tendency to the unification, although on the basis of provisional plans, but this tendency is constantly interrupted by the initiative of dominant groups […]. Subalterns groups always suffer the initiative of dominant groups, even when they rebel and rise up (Gramsci, 1975f, p. 2283, our own translation).

Methods

Three groups of LGBT activists from three different associations took part in the research. The three associations (A1, A2, A3) were chosen between those politically active in combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and those for endorsing the recognition of LGBT civil rights[3].

Analysis of documents and Web sites and informal conversations with their representatives allowed us to know the main characteristics of the associations. The three associations were committed to promoting different activities relevant to the LGBT communities, which comprised information campaign, awareness-raising and training programs, social campaigns and public demonstrations, film festivals and other cultural events, and legal assistance for LGBT individuals. A1 also offered psychological and medical counseling services. All the associations advocated taking initiatives to legally recognize same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood, and over time, they have organized several actions to this end.

The three associations are based in three different cities of Central and Southern Italy. A3 was founded at the beginning of the nineties, while A1 and A2 were founded between 2000 and 2001. All the associations declared no connection with a specific political party, but members are mostly center-left or left-oriented. The number of members varies between 200 and 250

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[3] In Italy, there is only one association of lesbian, gay, and trans parents or prospective parents (Famiglie Arcobaleno). Since the association differs from all the other Italian LGBT associations, because it is the only one that deals exclusively with issues related to parenthood, it was not involved in the research.

individuals, although only between 15 and 30 individuals are constantly involved in the associations' activities.

The invitation to participate in the focus group was addressed to those members who regularly contribute to the associations' activities. Two groups were composed of 12 participants, whereas the third one was composed of eight participants, for a total of 32 participants of 20 men and 12 women. Participants' ages varied from 20 to 48, with a slightly higher average in the A1 association. The majority of participants did not identify with any religion, whereas nine participants self-identify as Catholic. Only a woman from A3 was a parent.

We carried out three focus groups, one with each association. Focus group method was chosen, because it offers the possibility of observing a group, constructing meaning and evaluations on a subject of discussion (Frisina, 2010).

During the focus group, we asked participants to reflect on gay and lesbian parenting and any differences from heterosexual parenting. Each focus group lasted approximately an hour and a half. Everything was recorded and transcribed verbatim. In operationalizing the analysis, first, transcripts were read multiple times in order to identify emerging themes; then texts were categorized into the main themes and entered them into a list with illustrative key quotes. Themes and the most illustrative quotes were identified. Successively, particular ways of representing lesbian and gay parenting were analysed. Although contrasting argument emerged during focus groups, and in some cases, participants opposed heteronormativity by referring to a variety of co-existing models of family, analysis mainly focused on those discourses that maintain the hegemonic view of reproduction and kinship. In examining the discursive data, we drew on the assumptions of critical discourse analyses (Fairclough, 2001, 2003) with the purpose of revealing social practices that contribute to maintaining social order, thus sustaining the subjugation and discrimination of lesbian and gay individuals and their children.

Results

Blood versus choice

One of the main issues discussed in all three groups was the role of biology in kinship. This happened in A1, for instance, when participants discussed what the daughter of a lesbian couple should call the non-biological mother:

Luciano[4]: Once I met a lesbian couple and they had a daughter, I don't know if they had her or if they adopted her or if one was the mother and the other one wasn't, but anyway, both of them wanted to be called mum, so they were mimicking [biological heterosexual parents]. This is wrong in my opinion; you shouldn't pretend to be something that you aren't. One should raise a child, one should be a parent with no label, to raise the child and that's it, without saying "I'm the mother and she's the mother as well," without instilling these ideas. They are wrong because the child goes to school and he says "I have two mothers," and the other child answers "It's impossible: two mothers don't exist!"

Savina: How should she call them?

Luciano: No, I really don't agree with these things.

Luca: How should she call them?

Luciano: I don't know, maybe by name.

Clara: The mother is the mother!

Luciano: Yes, I also think it's wrong; it means to force the reality.

Savina: No, it isn't.

Valentino: How should she call them?

Savina: Mums.

Valentino: Both of them? Two mothers?

Savina: She calls them mum because both of them are raising her, both of them are mothers.

Luciano: Another consideration, among other things it would be wrong to call her mother, because that one is not the mother.

Dario: May I say something? The biological relationship is a relationship that you can feel, I mean… I'm the son of my mother; I feel that I'm the son of my mother. If my mother lived with another woman, I don't know if I could feel the same way about her.

Luciano presented the case of the mother who wants to be called "mom" despite not having a biological tie to the child as a case of "fictive kin", thus reifying the hierarchical system in which genetic ties are essential for kinship, while other forms of family relationships are considered fictional (Weston, 1991). Although some participants challenged his view by contesting the bearing of blood ties on the meaning of family, the group oscillated between

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[4] All names are pseudonyms.

the view of biology as a mere symbol and the construction of blood ties as the substrate for "feeling" the connection between parents and children.

As a general point, the group discussions largely reflected the primacy given by science and common sense to blood bonds (Schneider, 1984), yet this resulted in different conclusions of what form of parenthood would be preferable for same-sex couples. In the case of A1, Luciano expressed his preference for adoption as the solution for same-sex parents to avoid the privileged relationship between the biological parent and the child.

> **Luciano**: I think that is something unbalanced, actually, I would not raise a child if I were the biological father and the other "that guy". I'd rather prefer to be an adoptive father, two adoptive fathers, because otherwise you could be walking into this unbalanced situation, so it's better if none of us is the biological parent—neither him nor I.

A different position emerged in A3, when participants debated about surrogacy and the differences between genetic and adoptive ties. In this case, some participants considered biological reproduction as the means to satisfy the need to transmit one's own genes. Their discourse rested on the genetic fallacy that genetic connection would ensure that children have the same outlook as their parents, which is, "a mere superstition, in the guise of modern science" (Levy & Lotz, 2005, p. 237).

> **Mirco**: Wouldn't it be better to adopt a child instead of doing it by yourself [through surrogacy]?
> **Elisa**: It would be better because there are so many children.
> **Mirco**: There are so many children around.
> **Massimiliano**: But when the child is yours, he comes from you, because the semen is yours.
> **Daniela**: Yes, obviously.
> **Mirco**: Well, in my opinion to say, "The semen was mine!" is an egoistic point of view. If you really love the child, you love him regardless of the semen being yours or not.
> **Daniela**: This is true, this is true.
> **Massimiliano**: But the fact that he is part of you makes a difference […] There's a deeper tie, in any case this is a blood bond, it's not only a matter of giving love to a child, but you think, you are going on with the continuation of the species, the continuity, a part of

your gene, your things, so it's something of you that goes on. It's not only, "uh, I have so much love to give to someone, so I take a child and it's ok, I give my love to you."

Bice: It's part of the instinct.

Pina: The instinct.

Massimiliano: […] When the children grow up, they want to know who their real parents are. On the other hand, a child who is, somehow or other, your child [talking to Mirco] wants to know who is the mother, but anyway he's your child, he isn't simply adopted from who knows who and where. In any case, there is a part of you.

Two different visions of kinship were at stake in this excerpt, and Mirco's point of view that love makes a family was combated through the naturalization of the need to transfer genes and to continue the species. The "sense of own-ness" (Overall, 2014), attributed to the child's genetic connection to the parents, emerged as the reason that adoptive children could not become equally as successful as genetic offspring. Genetic essentialism led some participants to emphasize the prominence of knowing one's genetic origins to develop an adequate self-knowledge, thus undermining the role of social practices in constituting personal identity (Witt, 2005). In Massimiliano's view, heterosexual reproduction becomes an imperative, and although some same-sex parents cannot fulfil the ideal format, since one of the two parents remains inaccessible (e.g., assisted reproductive technologies with an anonymous donor), the presence of at least one biological parent represents a preferable fictional achievement of the heterosexual standardized family compared to the adoptive family.

The primacy of the biological family was also confirmed in relation to overlapping of reproduction and the sake of humanity, which emerged in A2 when Giuseppe resisted Sandro's attempt to deconstruct the need to reproduce as being universal:

Sandro: I'm not one of those people who say "uh, a child is something that gives you a sense of completion." No, I really think that it's because the importance we give to biology that you feel satisfied when you have a child, it's because you think that at the end there will be something left after you die. This makes me sick, I see the biological imperative as a terrible thing.

Giuseppe: But if we are here after millions of years it's because there were things like this.

Sandro uncovered the human illusion of achieving a vicarious biological immortality through genetic descendants (Overall, 2014) but came up against the very idea of procreation as the fundament of the human: In Giuseppe's view, the supremacy given to biological reproduction is natural and obvious, since it guarantees the sake of the species.

Limits of nature

Participants many times used terms that evoked a dichotomy between "natural" and "artificial" procreation, with surrogacy being the paradigmatic example of an abnormal means to have a child. The following excerpt from A2 is an example of this:

> **Sandro**: I think that if I chose to have a child, I would prefer to have it the natural way instead of surrogacy or other kinds of big messes […] I prefer those who adopt their children.
>
> **Federico**: From a pragmatic point of view, as I'm homosexual, I cannot have a child in a natural way, but I'd really like it. I would choose adoption, I think; then you have to consider what your partner wants, and, well, if they will not allow singles to adopt […] I would like to have children and I would personally prefer to adopt them; I mean, surrogacy is unnatural.
>
> **Marzio**: Yes, me too, adoption, not now, but adoption.
>
> **Giuseppe**: Yes, the same, in the sense that between adoption, or how do you say, "child from egg?" [Laughs] "First-hand child or second-hand child?" [Laughs] Yes, absolutely adoption.

In this case, surrogacy was considered a symbol of technologies transcending what is admissible in the context of procreation. Federico clearly expressed the popular belief that represents gays and lesbians as a clearly distinct species (Foucault, 1978), non-procreative and alienated from kinship (Weston, 1991). Assisted reproductive technologies, exceeding limits imposed by nature on humanity, took on the meaning of something that muddles the natural order, a freakish means for reproduction.

A3 also discussed the opposition between natural access to reproduction and the need to make use of "artificial" techniques. In some discourses, limits posed by nature emerged as criterion for identifying borders that should not be exceeded, as testified by Bice's choice:

> **Bice**: I did the ovarian stimulation three times, but then I got my period. After the third time, the doctor told me, "I will send you to those who make the insemination seriously, they make IVF [In vitro fertilization]"; then I told him, "Listen to me, if nature says no, it's no!"

In Bice's view, assisted reproductive technologies represented a "stretch", an attempt to substitute what nature did not allow for non-heterosexuals with an undue human intrusion into the natural course of life.

In A2, the limit posed by nature emerged in relation to the concept of instinct and supposed "biological urges":

> **Camillo**: I do not feel the longing for fathering. I don't want to have a child, so, I really don't feel this urge, absolutely not. And I gave a lot of thought to this topic, and things that are too thoughtful […] I don't know, paradoxically, I think that certain things should be done with the heart, not the head; they don't need to be very organized—having a child is an instinctive urge. If you think too much about it, it means that there is something wrong or something that doesn't fit with you.

The biological urge is traditionally supposed to be a primary instinct to have a child that inevitably arrives at some point in one's life, and especially in the life of a woman. As a result, the decision to have a child is stripped of its social value without regard to the specific social order where the decision is situated (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Mallon, 2004; Mezey, 2013). By reducing the decision of whether to have a child or not to an instinctual urge, Camillo failed to recognize that beliefs that gays and lesbians "do not, should not, or cannot parent" vary in length and are influenced by stereotypes and by gay cultural norms (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008).

Some participants depicted gays and lesbians as challenging the natural order by failing to fulfil the biological urges on which reproduction rests. In A3, Elisa expressed her desire to have a child, but she did not feel ready for it, and she considered the possibility of recourse to assisted reproductive technologies at a later age as something that might lead to a ridiculous situation. The paradoxical impasse led to the assumption that gays and lesbians are incapable of taking on responsibilities and fail to procreate:

Elisa: Yes, I would like to have a child, but let's be honest, my biological clock is ticking away, but I'm not up for this [having a child] right now. I can't think to take care of a baby. I still have so many things in my life to fix […] I still leave myself 15 years to solve my things and then…

Bice: 15 years?

Elisa: Yes, then I'll do as that woman who got pregnant when she was 60. I don't know how she did it. I would give birth to Benjamin Button.

Luisa: There is also an age limit beyond which we shouldn't go.

Massimiliano: There is also an adolescent in us [pointing at the other participants] who doesn't want to die.

Elisa: We really have the Peter Pan syndrome.

Mirco: And this syndrome of Peter Pan is more frequent for gays and lesbians.

Along with the critique of women (regardless of their sexual orientation) who delay giving birth until middle ages, some participants affirmed that gays and lesbians are more frequently affected by "Peter Pan Syndrome", thus echoing the long-lasting medical conception of homosexuality as a symptom of arrested development that has traditionally distanced lesbian and gay individuals from kinship.

Constructing a natural and straight motherhood

The clear distinction made by some participants between what is natural and what is not was also the leitmotif of many discourses about parents' gender roles. Specifically, a distinctive female connection to mothering emerged in all three groups, referring to a natural, instinctual women's inclination to reproduce.

Clara (A1): I think that women, many women, have the maternal desire, some perhaps not, but most women have it […]. Desiring a child also means that you're creating a family project, and that you have a long-term project in a way; educating, raising, facing difficulties.

Luisa (A3): I'm not a mother by choice; I don't feel a very strong maternal instinct like most women feel. Many women would like to have children; they were born with this idea, they grew up with the idea of having children. It's not my case. Probably because I'm egoistic, or because I've no sense of responsibility.

In the excerpts above, the desire to have children assumed the feature of an instinctual and universal experience for women to the point that, for Luisa, if she did not feel it, this was because something was wrong with her, such as selfishness or irresponsibility. In many cases, the groups constructed motherhood as the most obvious fulfillment for women, and their maternal desire is the main engine for building a family, thus supporting the social device already identified by Hollingworth (1916) that created the ideal of a "normal woman" who wants to be a mother as a form of social control. In some participants' views, motherhood emerged as a primary role for women, and a woman who does not want to be a mother is "other" to this accepted/expected female norm (Letherby, 2002).

In many cases, constructing women as naturally oriented to care led to building complementary gender roles for men and women based on supposed enduring internal disposition as well as family arrangement based on gender order of society (Connell, 2009). This emerged, for instance, when Donatella (A3), the only mother among participants, told what happened when her son's teacher asked her whether the child should be involved in the Father's Day activities or not. Donatella saw the teacher's request as an intrusion and a negative remark toward the absence of a male figure in her son's life.

> **Donatella**: Once the teacher asked me: "Shall we ask your son to do a Father's Day present?" And I answered: "I think you should not worry because the child in the future will identify himself with… I don't know, it's up to him to choose to identify himself with the grandpa, with the uncle, with the father if there is one. Don't worry about it, let the child do the Father's Day present; my son is not different—he's like all the other children."

Although Donatella perceived the teacher's request as out of line and she wanted to contend it, her answer implied the need for the child to self-identify with a same-sex figure, and she could not escape the trap that considers the primary sexual difference as the core of psychic life.

Conclusions

This study has revealed the heteronormative assumptions that endure in the discussions of LGBT activists about lesbian and gay parenting. The main discourses that emerged during the

focus groups were: the emphasis on the biological tie between parents and children; the limits imposed by nature on reproduction; and the construction of straight motherhood.

With regard to the biological ties in parenthood, many participants introduced a clear distinction among biological kinship and family by choice (Weston, 1991) by stressing the discontinuity between procreation and parenting that commonly overlaps in the nuclear heterosexual family (Fruggeri, 2005). Beyond the intelligibility of same-sex families, some participants highlighted that lesbian and gay parenthood poses a risk to the natural mechanism of human reproduction, to the primacy of genetic connections in kinship (Levy & Lotz, 2005), and to the "sense of own-ness" (Overall, 2014) that arises from conceiving a child. In many cases, participants failed to recognize the symbolic value of blood ties; rather, they considered blood as an indisputable criterion for distinguishing who is a real relative and who is not (Weston, 1991). Moreover, kinship based on genetic links would ensure children's access to the real parent. On this basis, some participants claimed that biological reproduction is preferable to adoption, even if, on the other side, lesbian and gay parents always have to face the impasse deriving from the unfair privilege that the biological parent has in the relationship with the child in comparison to that of the non-biological parent. In these discourses, kinship was reduced to a natural fact that escapes critical thought and transformative political processes. The primacy given to biology led some participants to accentuate the importance of the continuity of one's own genetic material and the continuity of the human species, thus connecting reproduction on a micro-level to the reproduction of the social status quo.

The importance of the genetic link is supported by the underlying belief "that it is better for well-off persons (who of course are also likely to be white and well-educated) to increase their fertility rates, rather than persons whose offspring supposedly are less valuable to society and to humanity" (Overall, 2014, p. 101). Lesbian and gay parenting highlights that biology and kinship can be disjointed, and that human reproduction is not predetermined and unalterable; rather, it can be changed by human engagement (Carsten, 2004). Concerns related to the absence of genetic links in kinship express other political fears about technology, demographic policies, the nation's unity, and the transmissibility of culture (Butler, 2002).

The second discourse that emerged during the focus groups underlined the need not to further the limits of "natural" procreation. In some cases, participants' views were based upon the premise that what is natural is intrinsically necessary, perfect, and immutable. The naturalistic fallacy, which suggests that what is moral coincides with what is natural (Cole et al., 2012),

informed the discussion about assisted reproductive technologies, the right timing of reproduction, and the alleged instincts behind the decision whether of to have a child or not. As a result, respecting the limits imposed by nature was considered by some participants morally superior over the use of technologies.

Along with the changes in ethics, the role of technique has changed in modern societies, since it is no longer seen as a means but rather as the first objective to reach in order to be able to pursue all other purposes (Galimberti, 2009; Severino, 1998). However, the use of technologies in reproduction is still stigmatized and restricted. This is the case, for instance, for the Italian regulation on assisted reproductive technologies (Legge 20 maggio 2004, see Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2004) that restricts fertility treatments to those situations - stable heterosexual couples - in which non-natural reproduction is allowed, because it serves to reproduce the normal acceptable family (Parolin & Perrotta, 2012). New assisted reproductive technologies deconstruct the association between biology and kinship, showing that they can be an object of choice (Hayden, 1995; McKinnon, 2015). The limits of nature cannot be taken for granted, and kinship needs to be conceived as flexible and mouldable by human engagement (Carsten, 2004). Claiming that what is natural is preferable to what is technical has the effect only of favouring certain relationships and stigmatizing others, justifying discriminatory policies against sexual minorities (Cole et al., 2012).

The third discourse that occurred during the focus groups outlined that some participants relied on the heteronormative model of family that identifies gender complementarity as essential for raising children. Specifically, the role of the mother was, in many discourses, defined according to the ideology of intensive motherhood (Hays, 1996) that describes women as naturally and instinctively able to care and establish a special tie with the baby.

The gender order of society (Connell, 2009) constructs differences between men and women as natural and it ascribes opposite enduring internal dispositions to men and women, thus defining the gendered division of roles and responsibilities as legitimate and obvious. By suppressing natural similarities between men and women (Rubin, 1975), parenthood is constructed along the heterosexual gender binary (Lorber, 1994), and lesbian and gay parents are perceived as threatening the order of the family, a challenge to the ideology of gender, motherhood, and family that, altogether, are considered the basis of the stability of society (Romans, 1992). Participants' statements that those women who do not have the instinctual urge to procreate are selfish and irresponsible are based upon pronatalist ideology, meant as an invisible device that encourages reproduction and exalts the role of parenthood (Park,

2002; Peck & Senderowitz, 1974). On the cultural level, pronatalism constructs childbearing and motherhood as natural and central to women's identities, while, on the ideological level, the motherhood mandate coincides with a patriotic, ethnic, or eugenic obligation; on the political level, the state intervenes to regulate the dynamics of fertility and to influence its causes and consequences (Heitlinger, 1991). The Western commitment to parenthood, which considers children to be a blessing and barrenness to be a punishment (Miall, 1986), and the persistence of pronatalist beliefs, which encourage reproduction as conducive to individual, family, and social well-being (Park, 2002), strongly affect voluntary childless women, because they evade the responsibility to guarantee the future of the human species.

The reference to these three discourses in the discussion about lesbian and gay parenting disclosed participants' adhesion, to a certain extent, to hegemonic, heteronormative assumptions. This is not surprising, because, although in the last decades some changes have occurred in Western Europe and a process of "homonormalization" (Roseneil et al., 2013) is underway, an alternative and broader model of kinship is resisted by hegemonic heteronormativity that continues to prevail in defining the normal access to reproduction, the appropriate gender roles of parents, and the right standards for child rearing. More particularly, in Italy, many people still disapprove of non-heterosexual families, and only a small proportion of the population believes that lesbian and gay couples should have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples (ISTAT, 2012). Moreover, as the recent debate over the legal recognition of same-sex couples and their children has shown, if, on one side, Italy has partially filled the legislative gap on this matter, on the other side, the "natural order" argument is still powerful in perpetuating the heteronormative view of reproduction and kinship (Lasio & Serri, 2017).

The presence of heteronormative traces in participants' discourses should not be regarded as representative of the approach of associations to which they belong in fighting against sexuality-based discriminations, and neither should participants' individual opinions and the choices they made in their own lives undermine the importance of their daily commitment to opposing discrimination against LGBT individuals. Their action has an unquestionable social value, and their presence in the community represents an important reference point for LGBT individuals, a defence for democracy, freedom, and civic engagement, which offers benefits to the entire community. However, as members of a given society, this does not make them

immune to the apparatus of heteronormativity, and as a result, they oscillate between complicity and rejection of heteronormativity.

The reference to hegemonic heteronormativity during the discussions about lesbian and gay parenting proved that, while LGBT social movements have the potential to deconstruct the hegemonic definition of family, the power of heteronormativity is proportional to its ability to hide its own actions and to appear largely consensual, "natural", and based on common sense, even to the eyes of those it oppresses (Gramsci, 1975a, 1975b). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how repression acts, not only punitively with formal explicit prohibitions but also by using pervasive and multiform strategies that shape public and private discourses, thus saturating the entire field of social representations of non-heterosexualities (Halperin, 1995).

We should not lose sight of the possibility to deconstruct heteronormativity, which, as it is a hegemonic force, is always the result of compromises that imply a certain degree of openness and ambivalence (Gramsci, 1975b, 1975c). Thus, it can be contested and challenged (Ludwig, 2011). Counter-hegemonic forces, such as LGBT social movements, may propose (and they actually do) different and incoherent dvefinitions of sex, gender, sexuality, reproduction, and kinship, contributing to challenging the taken-for-granted meaning of the social world.

If, on one side, it is difficult to disarticulate complicity with the norm from resistance to it (Duggan, 2003), on the other side, the creation of a chain of equivalence among various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination (sexism, racism, sexual discrimination, in defense of the environment, etc.) supports the affirmation of counter-hegemonic projects (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). As Castro Varela et al. (2011) underlined, this would mean recovering the original meaning of heteronormativity as intended by Warner (1993), who was not focused on the social inclusion of a minoritarian identity but rather on a broader challenge to the ruling heterosexual order. As shown by the Italian historical background briefly outlined above, heteronormativity is not restricted to subjectivity and intimacy but is embedded in a wide range of institutions, thus requiring a more general resistance against a the more general "regimes of the normal" (Warner, 1991, p. 16), which furthers the political demands for inclusion or tolerance.

The analysis of LGBT activists' discourses about lesbian and gay parenting has revealed the traces of a conception of reproduction and kinship, deeply rooted in the Italian cultural context, which has historically suppressed any alternative to the heteronorms.

Within the context of a progressive access of lesbian and gay people to formal, conservative institutions in Western countries, Italian sexual politics are marked by contrasting tendencies: in spite of the newly approved law that recognizes same-sex couples and most of the rights of heterosexual married couples, heteronormativity remains hegemonic in the country by denying, rejecting, disqualifying, and stigmatizing parenting that falls outside the social order. The pervasiveness of hegemonic heteronormativity is unveiled by the collusion of LGBT activists with the social, cultural, and political status quo that sustains the premises of their subjugation. While their political action is aimed at advocating the legal recognition of same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood, at the same time, they reproduce a (hetero)normative model of reproduction, kinship, and parenting.

The contribution of this study depends on understanding how homonormativity may present specific characteristics according to the context in which it occurs. In Italy, where sexual politics are marked by deep contradictions, and progressive access of gay and lesbian individuals to dominant conservative institutions co-occurs with the substantiation of heterosexuality, equal rights politics remain harnessed between opposite tenets: on one side, the request to be admitted to a state institution and, on the other side, the absorption of heteronormative assumptions that excludes them from the hegemonic model of family to which they request to be assimilated. As a result, LGBT equal rights demands are caught in the paradox of being complicit of their own marginalization, thus depoliticizing their claims and their rights. Homonormativity stabilizes the complicity in neoliberal sexual politics that demobilize and privatize LGBT constituency. This implies that the efforts to promote LGBT rights should be continued in light of a critical relation to the norms and ability to suspend or defer the need for them (Butler, 2004) so as not to be complicit with the condition of subordination of queer lives.

A counter-hegemonic project needs to be articulated on the basis of an alliance between different demands that pose an overall challenge to restrictive conceptions of identities and their relationships. Only collectively is it possible to articulate an alternative, minority version of the norm "that gives sexuality a domain separate from that of kinship, which allows for the durable tie to be thought outside of the conjugal frame and thus opens kinship to a set of community ties that are irreducible to family" (Butler, 2002, pp. 37-38).

By disclosing some discursive mechanisms that give structure to existing power relationships, the study may sustain subalterns' awareness of the worldviews that maintain their subalternity. In conclusion:

> The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, that is a "knowing yourself" as a product of the historical process so far held which has deposited in you an infinity of traces that have been embraced without the benefit of an inventory[5]. Such inventory must be made at the outset (Gramsci, 1975g, p. 1376, *our own translation*).

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[5] In Italian, to take something with the benefit of inventory means to have some reservation about the truth of information, because the source is not reliable.

CHAPTER 5

General discussion

Italy between heteronormativity and homonormativity: a genealogical analysis

The present research project was motivated by the need to understand what strategies are currently used by the hegemonic heteronormative power to alienate LGBT individuals from kinship. The research was carried out in Italy because of the special condition of this country compared to most European countries where the recognition of same-sex couples and lesbian and gay parenthood has already happened for a while. Despite the widespread processes of homonormalization across Europe (Roseneil et al., 2013), in Italy, after a debate spanning almost 30 years, the law on same-sex civil unions was approved only in 2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016), following fierce political confrontation and numerous public demonstrations in defence of the "natural family". Although the approved law recognises to same-sex couples most of the rights of heterosexual married couples, the conservative forces succeed in boycotting the section of the bill that would allow one partner to adopt the children of the other partner. As a result, in Italy, to this day parenthood represents an exclusive heterosexual privilege since only married heterosexual couples can access adoption and assisted reproductive technologies. Children born within a same-sex couple relationship are still considered as children of single parents and no rights and duties are accorded to the non-biological parents. In this sense, Italy represents an exceptional case for understanding what discursive strategies make possible the heteronormative resistance to the new possibilities of living sexual diversities that are taking place in European countries and beyond.

Theoretically, the research project drew on the poststructuralist feminist and queer theories influenced by Michel Foucault's reflections on sexuality. Specifically, sexuality is understood as a discourse originating within specific historical and cultural circumstances that define the possibilities and the limits of subjectivities. According to this perspective, heteronormativity has become hegemonic by bringing together sex, gender and sexuality, thus silencing anything that escapes the normative standards. The notion of cultural hegemony elaborated by Antonio Gramsci helped us to understand how heteronormativity can become hegemonic without necessarily entailing the use of coercion, but it results from cultural norms and

habituated routines. Hegemonic ideas are so powerful that subordinate groups can also give their consent to those social norms that are at the origins of their subjugation. The reflections on homonormativity coming from queer critics have exposed how LGBT politics can also maintain the social order by asking for the inclusion of sexual minorities within the traditional institutions that regulate intimacy and kinship.

The genealogical analysis conducted on the Italian context has revealed that the heteronormative order is embedded in the wider historical, social and institutional context, within which the hegemonic views on gender, sexuality and kinship are repeatedly reinforced in every social interaction, thus appearing consensual and universal.

A crucial role in maintaining the hegemonic heteronormative model of reproduction and kinship in the country has been played by the strict alliance between the state and the Catholic Church, which has been fundamental to alienating LGBT individuals from the *sacred realm* of family. Since the 1990s, the dynamics of the Italian political system has ensured to the Vatican the maintenance of its influence over the political decisions on issues considered morally relevant thanks to a convergence of conservative positions informed by Catholic thought on the part of parliamentarians from whichever part of the political spectrum.

In the light of the above, the main research goal of the present thesis was to analyse the debate that took place in Italy while the law proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) on same-sex civil unions and gay and lesbian parenthood was under discussion in parliament. In order to address the main research aim, three distinct specific aims were outlined. Specifically, the first aim was to explore the public debate that took place while the law proposal was under discussion in order to understand which discourses and social practices contributed to the maintenance of the heteronormative assumptions on intimacy, reproduction and kinship. The second aim was to investigate the parliamentary debate on the law proposal in order to understand the discursive strategies that were used to oppose the recognition of lesbian and gay parenthood, which resulted in the deletion of the section of the bill that would recognise the right of one partner to adopt the biological children of the other partner. The third aim was to understand whether and how the heteronormative assumptions on reproduction and kinship endure in the discourses of LGBT individuals who are politically active in combating sexuality-based discrimination and in endorsing the recognition of same-sex couples and their children.

These aims were addressed by carrying out the studies presented from chapters 2 to 4. Thereafter, we briefly highlight the main research findings and we reflect on their contribution to the research questions and their theoretical and practical implications.

The public debate on same-sex civil unions and gay and lesbian parenting

 In Chapter 2 we analysed the discourses and social practices that opposed the law proposal on the recognition of same-sex civil unions and lesbian and gay parenthood. The study of the public debate showed how the discursive strategies employed to oppose the bill were tightly anchored in the cultural background that has historically prevented the expression of sexual minorities in the Italian context. Even if today the rhetoric is not the denial of the existence of homosexuality as it happened in the past, the recent debate on lesbian and gay couples constructed them as foreign subjectivities to the symbolic system of kinship, with the delineation of a clear distinction between heterosexual married couples and the "specific social formations", as lesbian and gay civil unions have been defined by the law in order to distinguish them from the "natural family" founded on the marriage between man and woman. Some other crucial differences have been introduced in the law in order to describe lesbian and gay couples as something that is not up to be part of the "natural family", including the exclusion of the obligation of mutual fidelity. As the study presented in Chapter 2 revealed, discourses aimed at stressing the difference between heterosexual unions and non-heterosexual ones came both from politicians and outstanding figures of the Vatican hierarchies.

The debate on the legislative proposal insisted on issues not just related to same-sex unions or lesbian and gay parenthood; what have been evoked were unanswered questions concerning the connection between biological differences and identity, sexuality, parenting and kinship. The stakeholders' speeches expressed opinions not only on the legitimacy of the bill; the dialectic was not only political, but also cultural and anthropological. Among all the issues that have been discussed, those concerning the role of biology, "the blood ties", occupied a distinctive place. The discourses of the natural order has been central for the maintenance of the heteronormative view of the family, which on one side grants the access to reproduction and kinship only to heterosexual individuals and, on the other side, reinforces the gender order of society by constructing as natural the differences between men and women and their roles in childrearing. In the discourses that opposed the law proposal, these assumptions

represented the guarantee for the salvation of human species, while new forms of reproduction and kinship embodied the risk of an anthropological revolution that threaten the social order and its harmony with nature.

Overall, this study demonstrated that a congeries of forces contributed to reinforcing the distinction between forms of kinship that are acceptable and others that are not by leaning on the need to grant the social order founded on the alleged natural expression of human intimacy and reproduction.

The political discussion about lesbian and gay parenthood

In Chapter 3 we analysed the speeches of parliamentarians who opposed the section of the legislative proposal n. 2081 (Senato della Repubblica, 2015) that would allow a partner in a same-sex couple to adopt the biological children of the other partner with the provision known as "step-child adoption". As the findings showed, the opposition to this section of the bill was unanimous on the part of the centre-right politicians, including those from the New Centre-Right, the main government ally of the Democratic Party. Moreover, the disapproval was expressed also by a large number of members of the Democratic Party, thus leading to a profound rift, internal to the party, between those in favour of the recognition of conjugality and parenthood rights, and the detractors of the step-child adoption, largely parliamentarians of Catholic extraction.

One of the main objections raised to the introduction of the so-called step-child adoption consisted in the risk to legitimise the exclusion of the biological parent who had a role in the conception and/or gestation, which would deny children's right to know their biological origins. In this sense, the opposition to the bill can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the discontinuity established by gay and lesbian parenthood between generative and parental functions: as other family structures, such as post-divorce or post-widowhood stepfamilies, in lesbian and gay families those who gave a biological contribution to procreation do not necessarily have a role in childrearing and, vice versa, who plays a parental role may not have contributed to the generation of the offspring. Despite these similarities, the opponents of the bill have constructed this discontinuity as subversive when it involves lesbian and gay parenthood. The reason for a different consideration of lesbian and gay stepchild parenthood was that these cases would modify the traditional reproductive patterns by endorsing the use

of assisted reproductive technologies abroad in the knowledge that the non-biological parent would be recognised once back in Italy.

As emerged in the first study, also in the parliamentary debate blood bonds were considered as the parameter for establishing who is part of a family and who is not. Reproductive technologies have been depicted as a threat to the natural order because they are based just on care and not on blood. Parliamentarians' efforts to maintain the labile boundary between nature and culture was part of the wider discourse that defined relationships between relatives in very concrete biogenetics terms, with an emphasis on the sharing of biogenetic material (Schneider, 1980). MPs valued biology independently from parenting practices, which is why parliamentarians emphasised the right to know from whom a child has been generated and the distinction between the non-biological parent and the biological one. It was not primarily the prejudice against homosexual persons or gay and lesbian parenthood that caused the solid opposition to stepchild adoption, but the reduction of kinship to biology, which was constructed as a natural fact and, as such, immune to critical thinking and transformative political processes. On the basis of these premises, politicians feared that the legitimacy of gay and lesbian parenthood would lead to a sabotage of the restrictions imposed to kinship by nature. This was the reason for the connection that MPs established between stepchild adoption and surrogacy. Although this practice is illegal in Italy and the draft law did not address it, the opponents to the law repeatedly defined surrogacy as "womb for rent", thus underlining the paradox that would derive from the link between "nature", which was defined as moral per se, and the "unnatural" inherent in commercial practices.

Moreover, this research showed that the relationships between gender, sexuality and reproduction has been reinforced during the parliamentary debate by placing in linear continuity heterosexuality with affections and sexual practices. MPs' speeches constructed relations between same-sex individuals as erotic but not procreative, thus further excluding LGBT individuals from kinship. Variations in kinship from the normative model of heterosexual family have been defined as dangerous for the natural laws, which are supposed to preside over human intelligibility. Discourses on the natural family not only reinforced the exclusion of lesbian and gay individuals from kinship, but they also contributed to reaffirm the hegemonic model of gender, which considered women as naturally disposed to care. The analysis has highlighted that the gender fundamentalism embedded in the speeches of parliamentarians resulted similar to the discourses advocated by the Vatican since the 1990s against the denaturalisation of sexual norms.

Overall, this study demonstrated the centrality of discourses in defence of the gender order in the parliamentarians' opposition against the provision of rights to lesbian and gay parents. Specifically, the findings highlighted that the opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parents reaffirmed limits for women and their contribution to childrearing, which is maintained within the framework of the gender order.

Discourses of LGBT activists about lesbian and gay parenting

In Chapter 4 we presented the findings of the study that analysed the conversations of 3 groups of Italian LGBT activists in order to understand whether and how heteronormative assumptions endure in their discourses about lesbian and gay parenting. The findings have shown that different heteronormative ideas on parenthood were discussed within the focus groups and if in some cases participants were able to deconstruct these ideas, in many others their notions on gender, reproduction and childrearing were strongly affected by those discourses that are at the origins of LGBT alienation from kinship. This offers insights into the working of heteronormativity to build its hegemonic power with no need of imposing its worldviews with coercion, but becoming attractive also to those individuals who try to challenge repressive policies and habits.

Also in this third study, discursive strategies that naturalised the social order within which kinship has been regulated emerged as a key feature of the results. This was evident in the discourse of the biological connection of the child with the parents, and especially with the mother, that emerged in many discourses during the focus groups. In many cases, the genetic or biological bond was considered a yardstick for determining who is part of the same family system and who is not. As a consequence, other forms of filiation, *in primis* adoption, was constructed as a form of fictive kinship, which could not ensure to children to satisfy an alleged natural and instinctive desire to access their biological ascending relatives. Moreover, the importance of genetic connections was emphasised also because they would ensure the continuity of one's own genetic material. Thus guaranteeing continuity to the species. Participants did not critically reflect on the implications that can derive from the emphasis on continuity in terms of reproduction of the social status quo.

This study has also showed that interviewees constructed some conservative social imperatives on reproduction and kinship as natural, such as the limits that nature would

impose to procreation. This clearly emerged with regard to the presumed natural instinct that would be at the origin of the desire to have a child, and in the discourses on the right timing to have a child. As a result, the social restrictions to the expression of non-heteronormative subjectivities have been hidden behind the superiority of nature.

Another relevant issue that emerged from this study was the importance given to the division of roles and responsibilities between parents according to their gender, which was defined as an essential aspect for raising children. Specifically, similarly to what was claimed by the opponents to the law on same-sex civil unions, many participants described mothers as naturally prepared to care for the baby. This led some participants to consider same-sex parents as incomplete forms of family and, at the same time, to blame voluntarily childfree women because they would not accomplish their natural mandate.

This study extended existing research and queer reflections on the mechanisms that in a heteronormative context such as Italy are deployed by the heteronorms to remain hegemonic in spite of the process of homonormalization that is growing in Europe.

The heteronormative assumptions on intimacy, reproduction and kinship are normalised and constructed as natural through daily pervasive discourses and social practices and, as a result, also subordinate groups can give their consent to the hegemonic worldviews that are at the origin of their subjugation. The new neoliberal homonormativity (Duggan, 2003) can lead LGBT individuals themselves to give their consent to the heteronorms, thus depoliticising their social actions (Oliveira et al., 2013).

Overall this study highlighted how LGBT politics can be affected by the same heteronormative assumptions that characterise the discursive strategies deployed by conservative groups and institutions to contrast the recognition of rights to same-sex parents and their children.

Theoretical and practical implications of the present research

The importance of the debate on the recognition of same-sex civil unions and gay and lesbian parenthood, which cornered the political Italian scene in recent years since the final approval of the Law 76/2016 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016), goes further than the law itself. The very controversial discussion touched on anthropological questions, which raised issues such as the ultimate goal of sexuality, the conditions that would make kinship possible and the connections between biology and kinship. With regard to these points, the heteronormative

power succeeds in reaffirming the connection between sexual binarism, heterosexual coitus and reproduction, thus decreeing that the only form of acceptable and generative sexuality is the heterosexual one.

Historically, the speeches pronounced by the Italian State and the Catholic Church that substantiate the heteronormative epistemes, have emphasised the natural order and, therefore, the need not to translate transgressive inclinations into actions. In light of this, Italy, with the collaboration of the Vatican, has imposed non-heterosexualities to stay silenced and hidden.

The approval of the law indicates that something is changing because it recognises the existence of gay and lesbian couples and it grants them most of the rights and duties of heterosexual married couples, bringing them out (at least in part) of hiding. However, the opponents to the section of the law proposal that would allow the so-called stepchild adoption, one of the topics that most monopolised the Italian public and political debate between 2013 and 2016, have been able to reiterate the heteronormative model of kinship by using different arguments related to the need to protect the social status quo and its balance with the natural order. As a result, the law continues to exclude lesbian and gay individuals from kinship, thus revealing that the heteronormative imperatives still resist and they exert a decisive influence on the understanding of kinship. Since heterosexual complementarity continues to be represented as the natural condition for reproduction and parenting, couples composed of a man and a woman are still regarded as the only acceptable ones.

In Italy, the veto over lesbian and gay parenthood represents the current expression of the heteronormative power and if on one side the approved law grants new rights to same-sex civil unions, on the other side it reaffirms a superior model of family to the detriment of lesbian and gay parenthood that remains unintelligible.

The three studies presented in the present thesis have highlighted how the opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parenthood relied on discourses that maintained the inscription of intimacy and reproduction in the gender order, which has been depicted as crucial for childrearing and, more broadly, for the preservation of the foundations of human civilization. As a result, the debate on the law proposal not only further alienated LGBT individuals from kinship, but it has also confirmed the gender order of the family and the unbalanced distribution of responsibilities and power between men and women. This is coherent with the meaning of gender constructed within the frame of neoliberalism, which is contradictory because if on one side it requires for women to be competitive and autonomous individuals, on the other side it reinforces their subordination to men (Drucker, 2015). Family plays a

crucial role in the maintenance of the neoliberal economic system because it contributes to absorb the effects of the global crisis by assuming some state's responsibilities, such as the care of people in need. The present research highlighted how discourses on lesbian and gay couples and particularly discourses on lesbian and gay parenthood have become a site for reaffirming the traditional division of gender roles, thus supporting the capitalist gendered mode of social production and reproduction.

Similarly to what Butler (1993) states about drag artists as a case of questioning gender, also new forms of parenthood can be considered as performances that can question normative model of reproduction and kinship. In this sense, the strong opposition to the recognition of gay and lesbian parents can be understood as a form of resistance to the challenges to the patriarchal foundation of society. Public acknowledgment of different parental arrangements could imply a recognition that the traditional gendered binary division within the heterosexual family depends on something that individuals do and not something they are. In this sense, what was at stake in the debate over non-heterosexual forms of kinship was the ontological status of gender and the possibility to trouble it through no conventional performances. To resist these challenges to the social order, different discursive strategies and social practices have occurred to limit the possibility of variance in gender and the possibility to overcome binaries such as male-female or heterosexual-homosexual. Resistance to the subversion of the social status quo is facilitated by the fact that gender is performed as it was natural, with no critical reflection upon it. As a result, gender is continuously confirmed and reconstructed without questioning. Since it is not achievable to not perform gender, the chance is to perform it in somewhat diverse modes, thus contributing to changing the norms. In this regard, we can think of lesbian and gay parenthood as Butler (1990) considers drag artists: an example of subversive subjectivities who can challenge binary identities because with their "parody" they perform gender in non-conventional ways.

However, being a lesbian mother or a gay father does not itself guarantee a subversion of the normative heteronormative models. What is required is not only a performative challenge to the normative model, but also the recognition of how the norms have been constructed and how they are maintained. As Butler (1990, p. 148) affirms "The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself".

Within the framework of queer theory, Drucker (2015) highlighted how the LGBT mainstream politics has succumbed to the temptation to seek assimilation into the dominant

culture, while radical movements have not succeeded in proposing compelling alternative models. Queer liberalism (Eng, 2010) describes the liberal inclusion of certain gay and lesbian citizens within the systems of civic recognition as embedded in the neoliberal political and economic regime. The politics of same-rights is leading to the access of lesbian and gay individuals to the normative structures of kinship, while the historical radical critique of the normative models of family is losing ground. The importance of disparities ground on race, class, sex and gender is waning and critical politics focused on structural and institutional inequities is declining because of the illusion of the universal possibility to access to privileged institutions. Politics for sexual democracy has been disconnected from critical race politics and any other relevant social issue at the origins of marginalisation and subjugation. As a result, the possibility to articulate different emancipatory efforts in a common intellectual and political coalition is wearing off. Within this framework, queer liberalism (Eng, 2010) connives at the distance among groups who are subjugated for different reasons (sexuality, gender, class or race) by agreeing with the assimilation only of those who are more compatible with the neoliberal regime of normality. Within the neoliberal social system, the politics of intersectionality are opposed so as to prevent any risk of articulation between different categories of oppressed, in spite of the fact that they are constituted in relation to one another. Lesbian and gay "normal" identities have been assimilated into the neoliberalism system and if on one side this ensures them progressive forms of recognition, on the other side they have been "warped" (Drucker, 2015), that is shaped so as to fit into the social hierarchies grounded on the patriarchal system of thought. Apparently gender-neutral institutions, which succeed in camouflaging male domination of women, require citizens to respect the heteronormative assumptions that give order to gender and sexualities, offering, in return, the access to the realm of kinship. According to Drucker (2015), in those regions where LGBT rights have been more solidly granted to middle-class citizens, gay identity has converted into a new gay normality, which implies ghettoization, conformism to the gender binaries, the exclusion of non-conforming subjectivities such as trans, racist exclusions, and the pressure to regularise intimate relationships on the basis of the normative model of family founded on marriage. Neoliberal privatisations and deregulation have produced also moral deregulation that brought down many sexual restrictions and gave rise to LGBT clubs, publications, sites and more. Lesbian and gay customers became a fruitful niche market that has gain access to privileges that once were only for rich people. However, this has also fostered new kinds of conformism that establishes who can have access to the neoliberal

market of tangible and intangibles assets and who cannot. As a result, even social organisations committed to the effort to 'include' diversities are frequently grounded on normative ideologies, thus highlighting how the notion of inclusion can be fragile and contradictory (Priola et al., 2018). Heteronormativity succeeds in establishing different modalities of inclusion for LGBT individuals by establishing new hierarchies based on the degree of compatibility with the needs of neoliberal principles, structures and institutions. While some individuals can be normalised, others remain barred because they do not conform to the neoliberal norms.

As the study discussed in Chapter 4 demonstrated, hegemonic heteronormativity can lead LGBT activists to be complicit with the social order that their political action try to subvert. Their political efforts aimed at combating sexuality-based discrimination do not make them immune to the pervasiveness of the heteronormative model of kinship. The adhesion of LGBT activists to hegemonic heteronormativity leads to reflect on the collusion of the victim with the perpetrator of subjugation, but not with the intention of blaming the victim; rather, it is necessary to consider the question in relation to the incapacity of the victim to escape from the hegemonic cultural frame on which unconscious social practices are established. The discourses of the three groups of activists offered an example of how what is considered natural becomes necessary and, as a result, conforming to it appears as the only viable path. A critical reflection on those assumptions that seem obvious and apparently do not need any further consideration, such as the role of the mother in childrearing or the importance of blood bonds for kinship, might help the subversive potential of non-heterosexual sexualities. Not complying with the prescriptions of heteronormative ideology should be accompanied by bringing to light the strategy through which heteronormativity builds its power. A queer perspective on reproduction and kinship does not mean being for or against the legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples or their right to adopt. Rather, queer critics should ask whether the viability is possible for different family arrangements without forcing them to be shaped by the dominant norms (Butler, 2004). We need to question the idea that marriage is the only possible way to access kinship, in the knowledge that LGBT assimilationist politics do not challenge heteronormative assumptions that underpin the unequal social status quo.

If on one side the public and legal recognition of same-sex couples and their children can contribute to challenge the common understanding of kinship as a heteronormative exclusive, on the other side the assimilation of LGBT subjectivities into the traditional institutions do not challenge heteronormativity and its endurance also in the discourses of the same

individuals it oppresses. As a result, processes of homonormalization turns out to be just a partial admission into the regime of normality, which distinguishes between citizens allotted to first class and others to second class. What is needed is a global reconfiguration of the normative recognition of kinship, regardless of sexual orientation, which should detach privileges from one's marital status, thus putting an end to the distribution of resources and the assignment of social value by means of marriage. At the same time, the access of queer families to kinship is possible on the condition that they cease to be defined by comparison with the "natural" biological families. This would allow the possibility of going beyond the traditional forms of family relationships, also offering an example to the heterosexual majority of a way to overcome the institutionalised gender inequalities on which other inequalities are based. A challenge such as this can come from any subjectivity who wants to resist the regime of the normal by denaturalising traditional constraints.

The agenda for an effective queer anti-capitalism and global rainbow politics requires a solid connection between a radical sexual politics and a feminist programme for reproductive freedom (Drucker, 2015). This politics should incorporate position statements against transphobia and Islamophobia, the solidarity toward poor countries and the opposition to the maintenance and transmission of class privilege, the resistance to the privatisation of care and the encouragement of flexible and queer forms of intimate relationships.

This project needs alliances and articulation among different groups so that different struggles against subordination can support each other for the affirmation of counter-hegemonic projects (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). As Warner (1991) specified, we do not need to obtain the social inclusion of a specific minoritarian group into the normative hegemonic institutions. Rather, it is necessary for a global struggle against the heteronormative social order that regulates intimacy and kinship.

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