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A Family Matter
Asymmetrical Metonymy
and Regional LGBT Discourse in Italy

Abstract

In this project, I use the LGBT movement in Italy as a case study to investigate how social movements in culturally diverse social environments strategically employ contentious language to develop discourses that maximize cultural and policy outcomes without encountering discursive fragmentation. My research shows that supporters of LGBT civil rights in different Italian regions relied on a tactical use of particular words in order to respond to regionally specific norms of cultural expression regulating the boundaries drawn around the concept of family. Taking a cultural and linguistic approach to the study of social movements, I present the mechanism of asymmetrical metonymy as an example of the strategic use of polysemic language to achieve discursive convergence through culturally specific tactics, and I argue that discourse and rhetorical analysis offer a way to understand how movements make sense of different cultural limitations in a fragmented social environment.

Keywords: LGBT; Italy; civil rights; contentious discourse; language; culture.

IN THE PAST few decades Europe has witnessed a movement towards a growing recognition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) civil rights. Although policies regulating same sex unions in different countries show remarkable similarities in terms of legal content [Waaldijk 2005], European countries have adopted a wide variety of forms of recognition, ranging from civil marriage to civil unions and to registered or unregistered partnerships [Paternotte and Kollman 2013]. Scholars have pointed to national cultures and religious values as elements greatly influencing both the timing of enactment of these policies [Fernández and Lutter 2013] and the framing of the debates, including the choice of which particular model to implement [Kollman 2007].

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The European Union has been calling for policy convergence across countries towards social and legal equality through two major channels: official parliamentary resolutions and transnational institutions, such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Both channels have been advocating a sociopolitical approach that promotes a discursive inclusion of non-heterosexual couples into the concept of the normative family, bringing the contested notion of "normal" to the forefront of the political debate.

In this project, I take the cultural analysis of social movements and the strategic relevance of contentious discourse [Polletta 2008; Tarrow 2013] as starting points to address two interrelated questions: if culture influences framing and limits discourse, how do movements in culturally diverse countries make sense of the different limitations? What allows activists to develop a discourse that maximizes both cultural and policy outcomes while simultaneously avoiding discursive fragmentation? In answering these questions, I strive to move beyond the limits of framing theory [Steinberg 1998] as I develop an approach that is more inclusive of the linguistic and cultural elements guiding the development of contentious discourses.

I focus on Italy as a particularly significant case for the investigation of the impact of the cultural context on the discursive normalization of LGBT families promoted by the EU. On one side, the strong connection between citizenship and the strength of "traditional" family ties in Italy limits the discursive space for a homonormative, familised subject [Saraceno 1994; Bertone and Gusmano 2013]. On the other side, cultural fragmentation at the regional level [Cartocci 2011, 2007] poses particular challenges for supporters of civil rights for non-heterosexual families: with regional cultural constraints posing different discursive limitations, Italian groups need to balance the unifying goal of policy convergence with the tension implicit in divergent discursive strategies.

Drawing on content and rhetorical analysis, I argue that supporters of LGBT civil rights in different regions relied on the conversational mechanism of metonymy, a figure of speech in which a concept is used to signify another, in order to respond to regionally specific norms of cultural expression regulating the boundaries drawn around the concept of family. Although the legal definition of family specified in the Italian Constitution applies equally to the whole country, cultural understandings of what counts as a family vary dramatically at the regional level. For example, in regions where most weddings are traditionally performed in Church the idea of family is almost

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invariably connected to the idea of religious marriage. Conversely, in more secularized regions, where non-religious ceremonies are just as numerous as religious ones, the idea of family is not necessarily tied to religious marriage.

My research responds to a call for a more explicit analysis of the role of language and rhetoric within social movements research [Ignatow 2009], and supports theoretical developments that see ambiguity as a key element in the discursive legitimation of contentious words [Tarrow 2013]. By so doing, I suggest that this type of culturally informed linguistic analysis may pave the way for a more thorough understanding of how social movements tactically employ discourse in culturally divided countries.

Culture, discourse, and strategy

In a sense, the incorporation of culture in the study of social movements is as old as social movement theory itself. Even as resource mobilization theory and the political process model in the 1970s shifted the focus of analysis on the structural conditions affecting movement mobilization, social movement scholars have strived to incorporate cultural elements in the structural analysis of protest. In fact, even the text that is often considered the manifesto of the political process model—McAdam's 1982 *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*—emphasized the pivotal importance for mobilization of a subjective, collective understanding of shared injustice. The process, termed cognitive liberation, recognized "people and the subjective meaning they attach to their situation" [McAdam 1982: 48] as the necessary mediating element between opportunity and action.

McAdam's conceptualization of cognitive liberation foreshadowed a key approach that would later be developed by scholars calling for further inclusion of cultural elements in the study of social movements: the emphasis on meaning points to an approach centered on the strategic interpretation of cultural symbols, best represented by the framing perspective [Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Gerhards and Rucht 1992]. On the one hand, this theoretical perspective emphasizes agency, and the ability of activists and organizations to strategically produce symbols and meanings in order to align their messages with the beliefs and ideas of the constituency they hope to mobilize

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[Benford and Snow 2000]. On the other hand, however, the emphasis on cognitive factors [Jasper 1997; Davis 2002] risks depicting culture as a stable resource rather than a dynamic element, and frames as equally stable messages [Steinberg 1998]. Moreover, frame theory has been critiqued by cultural analysts for its limited power in explaining the communicative aspects of protest [Klimova 2009] and for its insufficient inclusion of language and discourse as key aspects in the analysis of movement messages [Steinberg 1998; Ignatow 2009; Polletta 2009].

Incorporating an understanding of social movements as "carriers of messages" [Snow and Benford 1988; Koopmans 2004] with increased attention to the sociocultural context in which movements are embedded, some scholars have recently developed the notion of "discursive opportunities" as a way to bridge political opportunity structure approaches with framing perspectives [Ferree *et al*. 2002; Koopmans and Olzak 2004]. Taking as a starting point the idea that public discourse provides opportunities for mobilization by allowing people to perceive (real or imagined) opportunities, this perspective incorporates culture as part of the context that determines a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere [Koopmans and Olzak 2004]. This approach introduces an understanding of cultural, and specifically discursive, elements as potentially constraining, moving beyond an understanding of culture solely as a strategic resource.

If culture sets the terms for communicative action by simultaneously providing opportunities and constraints, however, social movements operating in situations that are culturally uneven represent a tactical and theoretical puzzle. Since movements rarely work on a single scale, they are much more likely to operate in social environments governed by varying cultural assumptions and conventions [Polletta and Jasper 2001: 295]. Activists' framing efforts often face a cultural environment that is far from homogenous [Johnston and Klandermans 1995: 4], and must take into account multiple audiences and oppositions [Polletta 2009: 35]. This sometimes leads to the emergence of internal disputes or "frame contests" within the movement [Ryan 1991 cited in Ignatow 2009: 159], as well as to an internal discursive fragmentation reflective of outside social structures [Steinberg 1998, 1999].

I argue that a possible solution to this puzzle can be found in approaches and methodologies that can capture the fragmentation and ambiguity of meanings, and that can engage with the dialogical process through which meaning is constructed, i.e. the relational

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dynamics of meaning construction linking speakers and their audiences [Silverstein 1996; Kane 1997; Polletta 2002; Ignatow 2009]. I suggest an approach in line with an understanding of culture as discourse—and movements as "communities of discourse" [Taylor and Whittier 1995: 181] or "bundles of stories" [Fine 1995: 134]. This not only allows for increased attention to be given to the dynamic dimensions of cultural production, but it grants special importance to the indeterminacy and flexibility of discourse, and the power of polysemic language to condense multiple meanings that change depending on context [Silverstein 1996; Polletta 2006, 2009 and 2012].

Therefore, I suggest an approach that elevates language to the center of the analysis, as the pivotal element in the creation and diffusion of discourses and in the definition of collective identities. Language sets limits and creates opportunities for activists within a discursive arena, and it simultaneously informs and constrains strategy. Its meaning is mutable, contestable, and negotiable; and it changes dialogically and dynamically. Language can be conceptualized as a polysemic system of symbols in an ambiguous, metaphorical relationship with their meaning [Kane 1997; Polletta 2006]. Most importantly, language is embedded in social structures and defies categorizations as either purely cultural or structural. Linguistic analysis thus yields the promise of potentially bridging the divide between meaning and structure, allowing for an understanding and an analytic conceptualization of them as mutually constituted [Meyer, Whittier and Robnett 2002: 295].

This research aims to test the promise of linguistic analysis in understanding how activists balance the need to address culturally diverse audiences with that of promoting a uniform discourse. The strategies adopted by the LGBT movement in Italy provide an ideal case to explore this puzzle for two main reasons. First, LGBT activists in Italy need to engage in this balancing work due to the country's high level of regional fragmentation [Daniele and Malanima 2014; Alfano and Baraldi 2012; Cartocci 2007; Putnam 1993], especially in terms of cultural assumptions and constraints connected to the normative concept of family and marriage [Cartocci 2011]. Second, LGBT civil rights in particular represent a case in which specific terms are at stake and are tightly connected to the notion of "normal," especially since legislative change in the form of recognition of same-sex couples implies a decoupling of the notion of the respectable citizen from heterosexuality [Taylor 2011; Browne 2011]. In the next

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section, I will show how institutional cultural constraints and changes in family policy at the regional level pave the way for an analysis of the mechanisms guiding discursive strategies adopted by supporters of LGBT civil rights in Italy.

The Italian context

LGBT activism in Italy emerged during the wave of political unrest in the late 1960s. The first LGBT organization, the Italian Homosexual Revolutionary United Front (FUORI, *Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano*) was officially founded in 1971 after an organized protest against the First Italian Congress on Sexology held in Sanremo [Mudu 2002: 191]. From a political perspective, since the early days of the movement, LGBT activists were met with neither support nor outright opposition, but rather found themselves working in a climate of "repressive tolerance" [Dall'orto 1987], i.e. a situation in which the state "relinquish[es] social control of sexual expression to the Church" [Nardi 1998: 577]. By keeping with the historical stance of confining homosexuality to the private moral sphere as a matter to be judged by religious authorities, the Italian state effectively condemned homosexuals to political invisibility, as the institutional position became one of denial rather than repression [Zanola 2014].

The absence of a clear political "enemy" to counter limited the potential for mobilization and prevented a public construction of homosexuality as a legitimate sexual identity. Moreover, it limited the potential for mobilization: as Italian scholars have noted, the road to the emergence of identity politics is slow and difficult "in a country which has not experienced an openly anti-gay movement or an AIDS epidemic related to same-sex behavior (and where medical costs are covered by the state)" [Nardi 1998: 581]. Although the national LGBT group, Arcigay, started pushing for a law to recognize LGBT couples at the end of the 1980s, the lack of visibility undermined the organization's political leverage and prevented activists from gaining momentum in their fight for civil rights.

The situation seemed to partially change in the mid-2000s, when the Italian Parliament started discussing a proposal for the *Patto Civile di Solidarietà* (PACS, Civil Solidarity Pact), a form of civil union inclusive of same-sex couples similar to the *Pacte Civil de*

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Solidarité in France [Ross 2008]. Discussion of the PACS proposal became prominent in the public sphere during the 2006 elections. The two major candidates, Silvio Berlusconi and Romano Prodi, both commented extensively on the bill during public debates, the former defending a traditional and Catholic-oriented concept of family and the latter timidly leaning towards an approval of the bill [Holzhacker 2011]. Despite Prodi's electoral victory, his delicate center-left coalition was torn apart on the issue of the PACS, and later tried to find a compromise by changing the proposal into a draft for *Diritti e Doveri delle Persone Stabilmente Conviventi* (DICO, Rights and Responsibilities of Stable, Co-Habiting Couples). The collapse of the coalition in 2008, however, and the return of the center-right guided by Berlusconi, effectively led to the failure of the legislation [Giachino 2011]. It would take almost another decade for the approval of a national law legalizing same-sex civil unions in May 2016. During that time, LGBT activists laid the groundwork for the recognition of civil rights starting at the local level, where organizations could more easily develop partnerships with political institutions.

Between 2010 and 2013, some of the largest urban centers in Italy (Turin, Naples, Milan, Genoa, Bari and Palermo, among others) were pressured by LGBT organizations into passing legislation to create local Registries for Civil Unions. Registries grant registered couples of any gender a series of rights that had historically been limited to married heterosexual couples only. Such rights vary depending on location, and include access to social housing, retirement benefits, parental rights relative to the partner's children in educational institutions, and visiting rights in hospitals. The institution of the Registries brought the contested notion of family to the forefront of public discourse, often giving rise to intense discursive battles among various actors in the public sphere.

For regional activist groups pushing for the institution of local Registries, the key challenge was to include LGBT couples in the definition of family. In the Italian constitution, family is defined as a "natural society founded on marriage" (Art. 29), which posed a discursive challenge for the normalization and legal recognition of couples legally excluded from the institution of marriage. Moreover, although the constitutional definition of family applies equally to the entire country, activists had to face different tactical difficulties informed by regional *cultural* understandings of what counts as a family and of what a family looks like, as different regions have different criteria for inclusion in that notion. In particular, marked

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differences in the perception and definition of family can be extrapolated from regional rates of religious marriages, rates of alternatives to marriages (such as cohabitations), and regular Church attendance rates.

In regions where the vast majority of marriages occur through a religious ceremony held in Church, it is the religious rite that officially validates the discursive transformation of "a couple" into "a family." On this front, regions in Southern Italy and the Italian islands display a cultural understanding of family closely connected to religious marriage. Despite a slight increase in the number of non-religious weddings in the years preceding debates on the Registries, in 2010 in the Italian South only 20.1% of ceremonies were non-religious ones (27.3% for the Islands)—well below the national average of 36.5% for that year (ISTAT 2010). In contrast, in the Northern and Central regions almost half (48.1% and 43.6%, respectively) of the heterosexual couples deciding to get married opted for a non-religious ceremony that same year [*ibid*.]. Thus, the marriage mentioned in the constitution as the defining element of a family has two different meanings depending on the region: it almost invariably means religious marriage in the Italian South, but not in the Northern and Central regions.

Another reliable indicator of cultural perceptions of what family means is the existence of alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitations. The National Institute of Statistics updated the demographic definition of family in 2011, defining it as "all persons related by marriage, kinship, affinity, adoption, guardianship, cohabiting and having their usual residence in the same municipality." The

TABLE 1
Weddings by rite and area, 2010 (ISTAT)

Area	Weddings	Marriage Rate (per 1000)	Civil Weddings (%)	Religious Weddings (%)
Italy	**217,700**	**3.7**	**42,5**	**57,5**
North	86,571	3.2	55,3	44,7
Center	40,056	3.5	51,1	48,9
South	62,575	4.5	23,8	76,2
Islands	28,498	4.3	31,2	78,8

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percentage of cohabiting couples in each region also has an impact on how family is culturally defined: the more unmarried couples living together, the higher the likelihood of a discursive separation between family and marriage. Once again, a clear difference seems to emerge between Southern, Central, and Northern regions. In 2011, the percentage of cohabiting couples in Southern regions (5.2%) was lower than that in Central regions (9.4%) and half of that in Northern regions (11.1%). Regions in both the Italian Center and North had a higher percentage of cohabitation than the national average of 8.8% (ISTAT 2011).

Lastly, the level of religiosity in a region has an important bearing on whether couples can be defined as a family. This has a bearing on both the preferred type of ceremony (religious vs. civil) and the presence/absence of cohabitations, since religious marriage is preferred and premarital cohabitation is not allowed under the rules of Roman Catholic family morality [Shröder 2006]. Using attendance at Mass as an indicator, the results in this case paint a less fragmented picture of Italy. The Northern and Central regions still report a lower percentage of people attending Mass at least weekly (29.1% and 28.5%) compared to Southern regions and the Islands (37.9% and 33.65%), but there is a less dramatic deviation from the national average of 32%.

While aggregated data on marriage and cohabitation rates paints a rather polarized picture of Italy, it is not the intention of this article to reinforce a dichotomized North-South understanding of Italian culture as a whole. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that regional visibility (or invisibility) of alternatives to religious marriage has an impact on the social meaning attributed to the concept of family. From the perspective of cultural constraints on discourse, this means that public debates over the extension of civil

TABLE 2
Cohabitation rates in 2011 (ISTAT)

Area	Cohabiting Couples (%)
Italy	**8.8**
North	11.1
Center	9.4
South	5.2
Islands	6.3

TABLE 3
Attendance at Mass, 2010 (ISTAT)

Area	At Least Weekly (%)	Never (%)
Italy	**32.0**	**19.2**
North	29.1	20.7
Center	28.5	21.1
South	37.9	11.9
Islands	33.6	14.8

rights to LGBT couples presented regional groups with different limitations.

For activists in the Southern regions where couples are assigned the label family only after a religious ceremony, calling for normalization of LGBT couples and their inclusion in the notion of family would be akin to asking for access to religious marriage—an extremely risky challenge to local cultural commitments. Conversely, for groups in the Northern and Central regions, where marriage is a civil matter open to—and defining—families, inclusion in the notion of family represented instead a necessary step to discursively separate LGBT families from cohabitations. In both cases, activists had to enter "the struggle for dominance implicit in the rendering of certain ideas, expressions, feelings, and aspirations as normal" [Bröer and Duyvendak 2009: 339], and to do so they fought for the notion of LGBT families to gain diffusion in the public sphere. Discourses and debates in mainstream media outlets were a pivotal part of the negotiations, as it was there that groups worked to establish (or move) the boundary between the sayable and the unsayable, the normal and the unacceptable [Cooper 2006].

Data and methods

In order to map out regional dynamics in negotiation over discourse, I conducted an extensive content analysis of nine Italian regional newspapers and online materials published by regional Arcigay chapters across a four-year span, from 2010 to 2013. Aside from the institution of the Registries, the 2010-2013 timeframe captures pivotal changes on multiple other levels. On the political

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front, Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing government gave way to the Mario Monti's technocratic government at the end of 2011. On the religious front, Pope Benedict XVI resigned and Pope Francis was elected in March 2013, a change that greatly eased the pressure of the Church on the LGBT community.[1] On the legal front, between April 2010 and March 2012, the right of LGBT couples to receive equal treatment in Italy was deliberated in two important legal cases, while the European Parliament passed a resolution along similar lines.

In order to analyze regional media discourse, I selected all the regional editions of one of the major national newspapers in Italy, *La Repubblica* which is the second most widely read newspaper in the country, surpassed only by the *Corriere della Sera* (*Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa*, ADS). Both newspapers also have regional editions published as supplements to the national paper, making either of them an ideal candidate to evaluate variation in regional discourse. However, while the *Corriere della Sera* is mostly read in the Northern regions, *La Repubblica* is the only Italian newspaper whose diffusion is relatively uniform across the entire territory [*ibid.*]. *La Repubblica* publishes a total of nine regional newspapers, covering the same number of regions. Regional editions of *La Repubblica* are named after the region's capital, but they are published across the entire region (so, for example, *La Repubblica di Milano* is published in all cities and provinces of Lombardy). Out of the nine regions, I selected the seven which instituted local Registries between 2010 and 2013, plus one (Emilia Romagna) which houses the historic stronghold of the Italian LGBT movement[2] and was at the center of important debates over the meaning of family.

Of course, eight regions out of twenty constitute a limited sample, and this should be kept in mind even when I talk about "media" and "the public sphere" for the sake of brevity. The research is not aimed at exploring in detail how LGBT issues are treated in the Italian public sphere, but rather to analyze regional variations of discursive patterns. Two of the eight regions in the sample (Apulia and Campania) are located in the South, one (Sicily) is a Southern Island, four are in the North (Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, and Emilia Romagna), and one (Tuscany) is considered part of the Center-North.

[1] In June 2013, Pope Francis famously declared: "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?"

[2] Bologna was one of the pioneers in the institution of Registries of Civil Unions, approving the legislation as early as 1999. By the end of 2009, Emilia Romagna had approved a regional reform extending welfare rights to unmarried cohabiting couples, which was nicknamed "Dico all'Emiliana" [Emilia Romagna-style Dico]—the open and accepting social climate won Bologna the nickname "San Francisco of Italy."

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For the purpose of this analysis, I group them into three Southern and five Northern regions. This distinction is not meant to represent a North-South dichotomy in general, but it is analytically useful in this case because the two groups fall on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of rates of religious vs. civil marriages, cohabitations, and levels of religiosity. As such, while not fully representative of Italian regional diversity, they are ideal for a comparison of discursive negotiations around the concept of family.

The regional editions of *La Repubblica* rank among the top newspapers read in each region, but they are seldom the top publication in any particular region [*ibid*.]. However, there are some clear advantages in using regional newspapers belonging to the same editorial group: from an analytical perspective, variations in discourse will more likely mirror regional differences rather than differences in editorial group alignment; from a more practical perspective, online archives of regional publications outside major national newspapers are extremely scarce, and access to older publications is limited. Additionally, given the prominent status of *La Repubblica* as one of the top Italian newspapers, its regional editions can be considered relevant validators for other types of media, signaling "who is to be taken seriously as a player and what ideas are important enough to be considered newsworthy" [Ferree *et al*. 2002: 47].

There are two main reasons why newspapers are to be preferred to televised news. First of all, television archives are less accessible from the United States, and not all news programs are available in their entirety and across a large number of regions. Second, Italian sociologists have argued for the superiority of newspapers over television-based content analysis, on the basis that newspapers are the media that, "within a process of trivialization and spectacularization of information [...] more than any other media presents both the news themselves and the frames in which such news are produced[3]" [Tipaldo 2007].

I downloaded articles from *La Repubblica* official online database, and selected them so that the final dataset would be composed of those articles that presented in their body of text at least one of the following words or their pluralized version: "gay, homosexual, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, Arcigay"[4]. I discarded articles mentioning any of those

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[3] All excerpts and quotes from articles appearing in this paper are my own translations as a native speaker of Italian.

[4] The articles are in Italian, so the actual list is "gay omosessuali omosessuale lesbica lesbiche transessuale transessuali bisessuale bisessuali arcigay." "Transsexual" was used as opposed to "trans" and "transgender" as the latter terms had not been introduced in Italy in the years considered in this research. A search for those two terms yielded no results in the archive.

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terms in reference to film reviews in the movie pages (e.g. a homosexual character mentioned as such), as they yield no information about framing. Additionally, since the focus of the research is specifically directed at the Italian context, I also discarded articles dealing with LGBT issues outside of Italy, save for cases in which international examples were used in a comparative fashion with the Italian case. At the end of the selection process, I had a total of 775 articles.

As a complement to newspaper articles, I also selected all original articles published on the website of the national LGBT organization, Arcigay, in the 2010-2013 timeframe. Materials published by Arcigay are a good indicator of the discursive negotiations underway at the regional level, especially as it has been recognized as the only group with the institutional capacity to bridge the LGBT community, the government, and society at large [Holzhacker 2011]. I further selected the articles downloaded from the Arcigay national website by isolating those concerned with the nine regions covered by the newspapers. Whenever possible, I supplemented those with articles downloaded directly from the websites of the regional Arcigay centers, although there was significant overlap between the two datasets. After the selection process, I had a total of 521 articles.

The content analysis partially followed the coding approach of Ferree *et al*. [2002], differentiating into two main units of analysis: the *article* and the *utterance*. Looking at the article as a whole allowed me to assess the change in coverage from the broader point of view of topic: this coding gave me a measure for the percentage of articles focused on civil

T A B L E 4
Number of articles by year and region (C. Fugazzola)

Newspaper	Articles #				Region
	2010	2011	2012	2013	
La Repubblica di Genova	13	19	11	24	Liguria
La Repubblica di Milano	25	25	59	27	Lombardy
La Repubblica di Torino	15	19	19	27	Piedmont
La Repubblica di Bologna	28	55	52	65	Emilia Romagna
La Repubblica di Firenze	23	19	25	22	Tuscany
La Repubblica di Napoli	12	14	12	28	Campania
La Repubblica di Bari	10	18	19	13	Apulia
La Repubblica di Palermo	14	14	19	30	Sicily

TABLE 5
Arcigay publications by year and region (C. Fugazzola)

Region	Articles #			
	2010	2011	2012	2013
Liguria	5	16	13	8
Lombardy	29	43	71	29
Piedmont	14	4	10	8
Emilia Romagna	21	14	22	15
Tuscany	10	19	9	8
Campania	6	10	20	22
Apulia	7	2	6	12
Sicily	19	17	23	9

rights vis-à-vis homophobic violence, for example. Most of the time there was no overlapping between topics but, in those few cases where the article moved between topics, two codes were allowed to coexist. Conversely, looking at utterances—defined as "a speech act or statement by a single speaker" [Ferree *et al.* 2002: 50]—allowed me to recognize and study the discursive and rhetorical repertoires employed by different actors [Johnston 2009]. The analysis of the mobilization of the rhetoric of family in its different forms is based on utterances.

I used MAXQDA11, a mixed-method analysis software, to analyze these data. Reliance on this software allowed me to address a number of issues connected with analyzing foreign language text, as I was able to work with accents, stemmed words, and pluralized forms of verbs. Coding took place in two separate phases: an initial round of open coding which was mainly descriptive, and a second round specifically centered on discourses mobilized by actors and concerning the concept of family in its regional variations.

Discursive convergence? From homophobia to civil rights

Analysis of newspaper articles on the basis of topic revealed a major discursive shift in the selected timeframe for almost every region included in the study. In 2010, the predominant approach to LGBT issues in all regions entailed a framing of the LGBT community as

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a victimized minority, with the majority of articles reporting homophobic attacks or discussing the threat of violence and bullying in schools. For regions that instituted the Registries in the selected timeframe, the following two years saw a drastic change in trend, with the percentage of articles about homophobic violence greatly decreasing, reaching a minimum in 2012 (fig. 1)[5]. Conversely, the same timeframe saw a rapid increase in the percentage of articles addressing civil and family rights (fig. 2), with a peak in the same year. The change ran parallel to the institution of Registries of Civil Unions in some of the largest urban centers in the country, and resulted in a shift in the media framing of the LGBT community away from a passive minority in need of protection and towards an active part of society demanding equal rights and inclusion in the family sphere.

Most regions in the sample achieved converging policy outcomes and converging discursive outcomes, at least as far as public media coverage of the *topic* of LGBT rights is concerned. How did Italian groups achieve this convergence despite regionally specific boundaries drawn around the concept of family? In the next section I shift the focus of the analysis to the level of rhetoric and language, analyzing the discursive tactics that supporters of civil unions mobilized in response to regional norms of cultural expression.

Family or families? Discursive strategies in different regions

The greatest cultural and legal challenge for Italian LGBT activists and supporters of the Registries was that of connecting LGBT couples to the sphere of family law and family rights. A discursive opening in that direction came from two legal documents produced in early 2012 within two days of each other. On 13 March 2012, the European Parliament passed a resolution declaring that the Union "regrets the implementation by some Member States of restrictive definitions of 'family' in order to deny legal protection to same-sex couples and their children; recalls that EU law applies without discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation, in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" (Resolution n. 2244,

[5] In two cases, Naples and Genoa, articles about homophobic violence sharply increased in number in 2013. In the case of Naples, this is connected to an "anti-homophobia law" convention held in the city that year; as for Genoa, the death of the presbyter Don Andrea Gallo in 2013 prompted numerous news article written about his work in trans communities, as well as his fight against homophobia.

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FIGURE 1

Homophobia/violence discourse by region (for regions that instituted registries between 2011 and 2013)
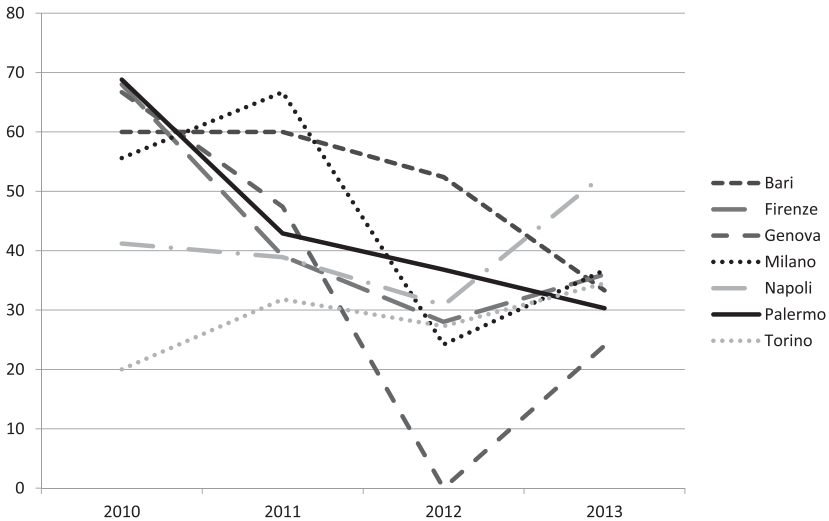
point 7). Two days later, on 15 March 2012, the Italian Supreme Court delivered a ruling stating that "a cohabiting homosexual couple in a stable de facto relationship belongs to the notion of domestic life [*vita familiare*]" (Ruling 4184/2012). Both documents were abundantly mentioned in regional newspapers, as well as in Arcigay articles, and they played an important role in the negotiation of access to the family sphere for LGBT couples. Due to the different regional understandings of the meaning and value of family, however, they were interpreted rather differently in Northern and Southern regions.
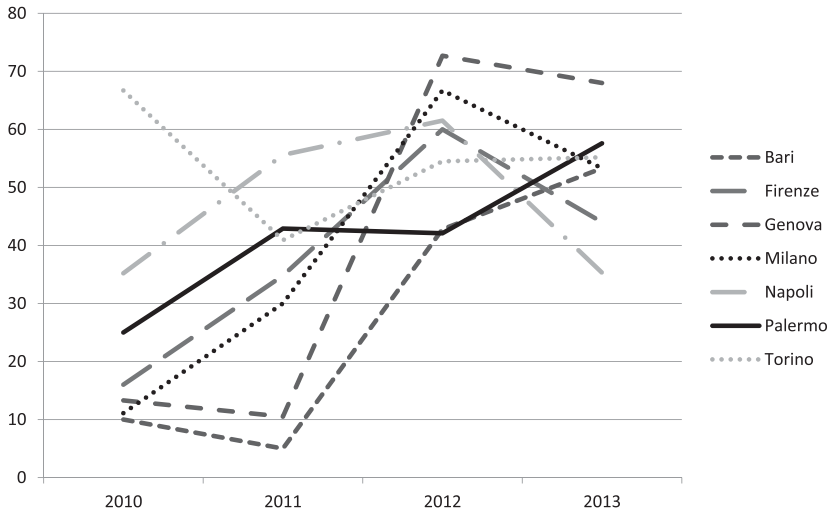
Southern regions: different families, equal rights

In the three Southern regions, where the concept of family is tightly connected to the idea of religious marriage, activists faced an

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FIGURE 2

Civil rights/LGBT family discourse by region (for regions that instituted registries between 2011 and 2013)

* Turin instituted the Registries in 2010. Milano, Napoli, and Bari instituted them in 2012; Genova and Palermo in 2013. Florence had formally instituted the Registries in 2001, but an update and public promotion was debated between 2011 and 2012.

opposition that took the form of a fight in defense of the family. In Naples, Campania, opponents of the annual Gay Pride Parade mobilized family language in order to protest the event in 2010:

> Militants of "*Forza Nuova*" [New Power] displayed a banner with the slogan "Defending the family and life. No Gay Pride" at the corner of via Scarlatti and via Luca Giordano. "We don't want to repress sexual freedom —says the provincial leader of *Forza Nuova*, the lawyer Riccardo Cafaro—but we're against the Gay Pride, which is instrumental to obtaining homosexual marriage, the adoption of children by homosexual couples, and the legalization of de facto couples." (*La Repubblica di Napoli*, 26 June 2010)

Reinforcing the discursive barrier, in the three Southern regions "family" was seldom mentioned in conjunction with LGBT issues, except for those cases in which it emphasized the disruption of family dynamics due to the threat of violence faced by homosexual youth:

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> On the wave of the Sicilia Pride, the Arcigay booth in Palermo registered a spike in reports of homophobic cases within the family. It's especially the very young who contact the organization, either in person or online. "We've never had as many reports as in these weeks," says Daniela Tomasino, vice president of Arcigay Palermo. (*La Repubblica di Palermo*, 19 June 2010)

Along similar lines, newspapers in Bari (Apulia) only mentioned the term "family" twice in the first two years of the study, both times to indicate families of origin negatively affected or "dishonored" by children who identified as gay or transgender.

As legislation concerning the Registry started being discussed, this oppositional dynamic was exacerbated even further. In Palermo, Sicily, opposition groups appropriated the symbolism of marriage to oppose the bill. In a reversal of the symbolic wedding ceremonies characterizing Gay Prides in other parts of Italy and the world, right-wing groups staged symbolic same-sex marriages to protest against the institution of the Registries (*La Repubblica di Palermo*, 16 December 2011). Similarly, opponents of the Registry in Naples condemned the initiative as "another hard blow to the family, the one recognized by Article 29 of the Constitution, founded on marriage" (*La Repubblica di Napoli*, 25 November 2011). Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe, commenting on the inclusion of the term *famiglia anagrafica*[6] in the legislation, voiced his disappointment and disapproval:

> Respect is one thing […], but it's a whole other thing to equate the family, on which rests an important part of our Constitution, to other entities that are not families. (*La Repubblica di Napoli*, 27 November 2011)

Faced with an opposition painting same-sex couples as a danger to the family, organizations responded by separating LGBT couples from the idea of *the* (traditional) family. To do so, they framed their demands in light of the 2012 Supreme Court judgment, which stated that homosexual couples have a constitutional right to a domestic life:

> The Supreme Court has established that homosexual couples have full claim to the "right to a domestic life," following the direction of the European Court for Human Rights in 2010 and restating what the Constitutional Court had said with the sentence 138/2010. […] It's no longer possible, after what was stated by the Constitutional Court and the Court of Strasbourg, and after the constant appeals of the European Parliament, to say that homosexual couples have no social role. (*Arcigay Palermo*, 16 March 2012)

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[6] This term has no real equivalent in English, as it indicates "a family that is called a family for purely demographic purposes." The closest translation would be "households," but the presence of the word *famiglia* simultaneously includes and excludes cohabiting couples from the idea of family, depending on how it is interpreted.

Rather than claiming sameness with married heterosexual couples, which would have been perceived as a threat to the traditional understanding of family, Arcigay chose instead to emphasize the right to be treated the same way married couples were treated—in other words, claiming equal treatment for *different types* of social formations. The EU resolution was similarly mobilized to justify the institution of the Registries, with groups pushing for a pluralized understanding of family and for the coexistence of "new" and "traditional" families:

> The European Community, in fact, has highlighted more than once that *families in the EU are diverse* [emphasis added] and include married parents, unmarried parents in stable unions, single-parent family, different-sex parents and same-sex parents, natural parents and adoptive parents, who all deserve equal protection in terms of national legislation, as well as in the EU, and this is despite the fact that some member States adopt restrictive definitions of "family" in order to deny legal protection to same sex couples and their children. *So that we can reach full equality between "traditional family" and "new families,"* [emphasis added] we found it important to aim for the clearer individuation of civil unions based on emotional connection […] (*Arcigay Bari*, 23 January 2013).

As part of the tactical approach to defining LGBT families in non-oppositional terms to the traditional family, groups also worked to explicitly detach the idea of marriage from the Registry, publicly stating that Registries had "nothing to do with marriage" (*La Repubblica di Palermo*, 9 November 2011). The non-confrontational stance adopted by Arcigay groups allowed the LGBT community in the Southern regions to simultaneously claim their belonging to the family sphere and leave the traditional family alone, without questioning its importance:

> In times of crisis, *protecting all families in the plurality of forms they can take* [emphasis added], such as homosexual families, doesn't mean defending only one side, but it actually means that we're moving one step forward towards the end of social conflicts and lack of rights, which have both been exacerbated by the economic crisis in our country.
>
> We think that granting rights to subjects who have so far been excluded is not in any way an action in opposition to those who rightfully defend the so-called "traditional family," which in these years has been vexed by an economic and moral crisis, by the absence of real politics of support for its development, but not certainly by other institutes, such as the certification of *famiglia anagrafica*. *This [type of family] doesn't in any way intend to invalidate the value of the first, but should instead be seen in a harmonious image of civilization that doesn't fear difference* and protects all members of a modern and European society. [emphasis added] (*Arcigay Naples*, 26 November 2011)

The unavoidable terminology of family connected to the institution of the Registry thus forced Arcigay not only to promote a plural

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understanding of families in society, but also to reassure and support the defenders of the traditional family. Supporters within the political class, such as the newly elected President of the Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, also promoted this discursive approach, pointing to a clear separation of the LGBT community from the idea of family:

> Supporting homosexual rights cannot and should not in any way be juxtaposed to the support for the family, whose centrality is absolutely not in question. Reinforcing policies supporting the family is a need I feel strongly about. […] But this doesn't stop me from restating the need to respect the rights of the LGBT community as well. In sum, recognizing rights to those who don't have them doesn't mean taking them away from someone else. (*La Repubblica di Palermo*, 14 June 2013)

The separating approach was pivotal during the final deliberation inside the Naples City Council. Opponents of the Registry accused the proposal of "discriminating against families founded on marriage" (Councilor Moretto) and even called it "an aggressive attack on the traditional family founded on marriage" (Councilor Pace). Supporters, however, were able to tactically negotiate around the sensitive meaning of the "family," and reached a compromise based on an understanding of civil unions as "forms of cohabitation […] different from the family" (City Council Deliberation, 13 February 2012). Moreover, the final document officially recognized civil unions as social formations that "cannot modify or alter the institute of the family founded on marriage" [*ibid*.].

After the Registry bill passed, the words of right-wing exponents reveal how effective the pluralizing frame had been in dissipating some of the tension over the contested term:

> According to Santoro "recognizing rights cannot and should not mean questioning some foundations that go beyond right itself: over the course of history even Italy has had different forms of family, from the extended family to the more recent single-person family. There might be others in the future. But at the basis of it all there will always be the natural family, a man and a woman united for the purpose of procreation and nursing of children. And that in our State is recognized through marriage. The biggest challenge is managing to avoid creating a competition between marriage and other forms of social aggregations that we want to recognize and protect." (*La Repubblica di Napoli*, 13 February 2012)

This pluralizing approach continued even after Registries were officially instituted, with organizations carefully articulating their satisfaction in a way that would not endanger the notion of the traditional family: homosexual organizations rejoice at the news.

> This means—states Antonella Favia, President of Arcilesbica Bari—that *a different form of union* exists [emphasis added]. As a citizen, I too have the right to

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a form of recognition. The city of Bari has proven to be greatly civilized (*La Repubblica di Bari*, 30 November 2012).

Families, all families, no matter their composition, are in these days crowding the Palermo Pride Village, and I'm certain they will participate to the parade organized in the name of rights, meaning everyone's rights. (*La Repubblica di Palermo*, 19 June 2013)

In sum, discursive tactics employed by LGBT groups and supporters of the Registries in the South entailed a non-contentious stance towards "traditional family," and an emphasis on the existence of multiple types of family. This led to the association of the term "LGBT families" to a family system parallel to, but never overlapping with, traditional families. Rather than demanding access to "the norm," this association differentiated between "the norm" and a parallel system of unions mirroring the norm in terms of access to civil rights—positing the existence of multiple types of families, all entitled to the same rights.

Northern regions: same things should have the same name

In the five Northern regions, a higher rate of cohabitation, single-parent families, and non-religious weddings contributed to the cultural separation of the concept of family from that of religious marriage. As a result, activists calling for an extension of civil rights to non-heterosexual couples were able to mobilize the language of civil marriage to ask for inclusion in the family sphere, framing their demands for civil rights at the local level as a first step towards full equality in the form of legalization of same-sex marriage.

Opponents of the Registry in the Northern regions mobilized similar discursive tactics to those in the South, denying unmarried couples inclusion in the concept of family on the basis of the constitutional definition of family as a "natural society founded on marriage" (Art. 29). For example, Cardinal Scola vehemently opposed the institution of the Registry in Milan, declaring that "not all cohabitations can be called families" (*La Repubblica di Milano*, 29 March 2012). Northern activists, paralleling the reaction of groups in other regions, cited the 2012 Supreme Court judgment and the European Parliament resolution in response to the opposition but, in contrast to the Southern regions, they tactically used those legal sentences to subvert the traditional meaning of family in the public sphere and to appropriate the language of marriage. Marco Mori, President of CIG Arcigay Milan, stated:

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> The Constitution recognizes the family as a society founded on marriage, and Scola doesn't tell the truth about the nature of civil marriage. *The recent Supreme Court sentence and the 2010 Constitutional Court sentence clearly state that the concept of family is not crystalized in society, but on the contrary it evolves* [emphasis added], and art. 29 of the Constitution doesn't mention the gender of the spouses. (*Arcigay Milan*, 28 March 2012)

This approach called for a redefinition of *what a family is* rather than an extension of civil rights to *new families* that do not conform to the norms of tradition. This discursive nuance was tightly connected to the larger scope of Arcigay demands, as only by claiming to belong to the notion of family was the group able to draw the connection between the fight for local rights and the legalization of civil marriage on a national scale. Groups in the Northern regions actively questioned the concept of "traditional family," and the usefulness of the term in talking about civil rights:

> We want [the National Pride] to be an international event, to bring to the forefront themes and accounts that, because of ignorance, are neglected in Italy. Starting from the family, moving beyond the concept of "traditional" family, that doesn't exist anymore. We'll talk about marriage, or about equivalent institutions that grant equal rights to all couples. (*La Repubblica di Bologna*, 30 June 2011)

Rather than pushing for a parallel system of unions and for an understanding of same-sex couples as one of the various possible types of families, this discursive strategy called for a full inclusion of cohabiting couples in the notion of family, understood as an ever-changing concept following the evolution of social relationships. Bologna, location of the Cassero—the national Arcigay headquarters—and historic stronghold of the LGBT movement, became a prominent arena for the negotiation of the contested notion of family in late 2011, when the two national organizations for LGBT families, Agedo and Rainbow Families, asked to be admitted as members of the City Council for the Family. Responding to the uproar from the political right, who rose in defense of the "natural family" (*La Repubblica di Bologna*, 19 October 2011), the organization involved in the debate wrote an open letter to the local political class.

> We are having a hard time remembering we are homosexuals in our everyday life, and we struggle like everyone else between school, the doctor, the bank, and bills. Does anyone really think we're not families? Where should the families you refuse and exclude go? No one can stop history, we can only try to understand the world as it changes, and grow up together to create a place made of sharing and respect, where there's room for everyone. (*La Repubblica di Bologna*, 24 October 2011)

The letter, co-signed by Arcigay, relies on an understanding of family as a fluid concept, suggesting that the immutable notion of

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traditional family belongs to a misguided interpretation of the past. This particular approach to the idea of family sees pluralization not in the various types of family that can exist in society (in addition to the traditional one), but rather it pluralizes the meaning of family itself, expanding it to encompass multiple social dynamics.

Inclusion of LGBT couples in family discourse thus entailed a deconstruction of the traditional notion of family in the Northern regions. In terms of discursive approaches to the institution of the Registry, groups supported the movement towards deconstruction by pushing for the inclusion of the term "family" in the document, and by stressing the connection between the bill and a national law on civil marriage.

> "We hope to see the word 'family' in the final version of the document," said the president of Arcigay Milan, Marco Mori. Who remarked: "We'll open the locks when Italy approves a law on gay marriage." (*La Repubblica di Milano*, 27 July 2012)

These discursive tactics led to mixed results: the bill approved in Genoa justified the institution of the Registries citing "the right to constitute a family" (City Council Deliberation: 5), but simultaneously underlined that "civil unions or de facto unions [are] different from the family" [*ibid*.: 4]; in Milan, the term "family" featured quite predominantly in the bill, which listed in its premises the "recognition of the role of the family in its various expressions." The document also stressed that "Article 2 of the Constitution surely extends to the de facto family, since, as noted by the Constitutional Court, a stable relationship, although de facto, cannot be considered constitutionally irrelevant as far as the importance of recognition for social formations is concerned" (City Council deliberation: 1). Lastly, the Registry entailed a double set of certificates: before obtaining the certificate of civil union, couples would be required to register as "*famiglia anagrafica*" in the civil registry, thus obtaining administrative status as a family. This linguistic concession was only a mild victory for the movement, however, as the final part of the document clearly specified a separation between civil unions and family:

> The reference to the *famiglia anagrafica* contained in art. 4 of D.P.R. 223/1989 should be understood in a purely demographic sense, in consideration of the difference between civil unions, as social formations provided for and protected by art. 2 of the Constitution, and the family, provided for and protected by art. 29 of the Constitution.

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Representatives of Arcigay, who were present during the deliberation, expressed their approval for the outcome of the decision but also explicitly addressed it as the first of a long series of steps:

> Arcigay Milan President Marco Mori […] rejoices "for the beginning of an important path, although real happiness will be realized only when we reach true equality," i.e. national equality through marriage. (*La Repubblica di Milano*, 28 July 2012)

The connection between LGBT civil rights, family rights, and access to marriage was further developed through specifically themed campaigns and Pride Parades. While groups in the Southern regions were actively working to separate symbols and language connected to marriage from their demands for LGBT civil rights, activists in the North of Italy chose to do the exact opposite. In 2012, groups in Turin gave life to a Pride Parade entitled "I would but I can't! It's Wedding Time," which featured a heavy political presence and the public celebration of symbolic weddings (*La Repubblica di Torino*, 30 May 2012).

On the day of the Pride, which opened with a banner reading "We're not asking for the moon!" and attracting 40,000 participants, groups relied heavily on visual symbols such as rice, bridesmaids, and pageboys to focus the attention on the float where the weddings were being celebrated. In line with the approach of supporters of same-sex marriage in other Northern regions, groups in Turin appropriated symbols of civil marriage and pushed for an understanding of the family as a changing entity to which everyone should be able to claim to belong. And, in this case as well, the idea of a separate institution parallel to that of the "traditional family" was absent from the discourse.

A similar approach fueled the Arcigay campaign entitled "Time's Up" [*Tempo Scaduto*], publicized in Bologna through the collective event "I'm getting married tonight" [*Stasera mi sposo*] in February 2013. Notably, at the heart of the protest was not simply a demand for civil rights, but a linguistic battle over the term "marriage."

> "This way we're going towards another discrimination. *Same things should have the same name, and the only one is marriage*" [emphasis added] attacks Cassero President Vincenzo Bran. From the Towers, the Arcigay protest will move to the rest of Italy through a poster campaign in favor of gay marriage and with an eloquently titled website […] that will publish the positions of candidates to the Parliament on this theme. "That's because—continues Bran—this is not a passing fancy, we have families to regulate" (*La Repubblica di Bologna*, 7 February 2013).

The celebration displayed a mix of traditional symbols and innovation: wedding photos, cakes, and confetti were prepared as a nod

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to tradition, but the ceremony was collective rather than private and there was no minister to celebrate it. Further, the traditional wedding formula was discarded for an original one, explained by Arcigay as "a gesture of self-determination" (Arcigay, 22 February 2013).

Lastly, perhaps the boldest suggestion of the convergence of LGBT families with the notion of family consisted in the name change of the Turin Gay Pride, which became the Turin Family Pride in 2013. The event manifesto explicitly addressed the organizers' stance towards the notion of family:

> *Ours are families*. We're united by the awareness that a family stems from love, responsibility, and respect, more than from exclusive biological bonds. *It's not a matter of reformulating the concept of "extended family," but rather of extending the concept of family.* […]
> We want to emphasize the words of Chiara Saraceno in *Couples and Families* [Feltrinelli 2012][7], the author writes: *"There is nothing less natural than the family."* Family and couple are among the more regulated social institutions; it's society that defines which relationships are legitimate, identifying them as family and giving them a social and legal relevance, and which ones shouldn't have social recognition and should be left informal and illegitimate. Historically and culturally these definitions […] have changed, just like the subjects who have the right/obligations to normalize the family have changed; and the obligations and responsibility connected to family bonds have changed; and the understanding of couple and family as distinct or isomorphic. In our current situation, the family model we have used as a term of reference for a few generations has by now reached the end of the line. [Emphasis in original] (Turin Family Pride Manifesto)

In conclusion, LGBT activists in the Northern regions adopted a discursive approach to the notion of family diametrically opposed to the non-contentious stance observed in the Southern regions. Rather than emphasizing the existence of multiple types of family, groups promoted a fluid understanding of family as a historically contingent notion, and a deconstruction of "traditional family" as a necessary step in order to obtain the legal right to marry. LGBT families therefore came to stand not as a symbol of the pluralization of the existing *types* of family, but an expansion of the *meaning* of "family."

When different things have the same name: asymmetrical metonymy

The linguistic analysis of the debates characterizing the Italian public sphere during the years of significant policy change at the local

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[7] Saraceno Chiara, 2012, *Coppie e famiglie: Non è questione di natura* (Milano, Feltrinelli).

level revealed notable differences in the discursive tactics employed by LGBT groups across the country. As shown in the previous section, activists negotiated policy convergence over matters of civil rights responding to regionally different cultural understandings of family. Regional differences led to the construction of two main discourses justifying the same outcome, i.e. a movement towards recognition of rights for LGBT families: the three Southern regions proposed a pluralization of forms of family, and the creation of a parallel system of "new families" in addition (but not in opposition) to the traditional heterosexual family founded on marriage; the five Northern regions proposed instead a deconstruction and extension of the concept of family in order to include non-normative couples as part of the definition.

In both cases, groups fought for the discursive normalization of "LGBT families," but the term "family" was charged with varying implications depending on the regional culture that informed the group's tactics. Regional culture simultaneously acted as a constraint—limiting discursive opportunities for local groups—and as a strategic resource—allowing groups to respond to specific challenges by mobilizing culturally resonant discourses. The mobilization of such discourses should thus be understood as both strategic and as a consequence of the cultural context in which they were generated.

The link established between the contested term "family" and its meaning is best understood through the concept of metonymy, a literary figure of speech in which a concept is used to signify another, provided that the two terms are tightly connected to each other. Common examples of metonymy include the names of countries to signify their government ("England approves a new immigration law"), or common expressions such as "the pen is mightier than the sword," in which the two substantives stand in for the written word and military action. The connection between two terms linked through metonymy is usually culturally established and unequivocal but, in the Italian case, "family" was metonymically linked to two separate definitions. In the three Southern regions, LGBT groups had to contend with a definition of family as "a couple united through religious marriage," while the five Northern regions could work with a broader definition of the term.

As a polysemic term, family constituted both an obstacle and a solution for LGBT activists. Groups in different regions created an equally polysemic version of the term "LGBT family," allowing for it to be metonymically linked to two different definitions. By so doing,

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LGBT groups created a strategically advantageous asymmetry: the statement "we are LGBT families and we demand equal rights" could assume two distinct meanings depending on the cultural context. In the Southern regions, the emphasis was placed on the "LGBT" qualifier, signifying separation from traditional families; in the Northern regions, the same statement implied an emphasis on the term "families," signifying belonging.

This rhetorical mechanism of asymmetrical metonymy allowed activists to capitalize on the ambiguity of the term, and to push for discursive convergence while simultaneously respecting regional cultural assumptions. While less ambiguous words such as "marriage" created a clear polarization and a discursive fracture in the movement, it was precisely the ambiguity and culturally informed understanding of "family" that allowed for multiple meanings to be condensed into the same term. This mechanism explains how Italian LGBT groups came to terms with a regionally fragmented cultural environment, but its application goes beyond the single Italian case. This type of linguistic analysis can be useful in analyzing cases of policy convergence in supranational systems such as the European Union, or in federated countries such as the United States, as it offers a means of exploring how movements bend language to fit diverse and culturally informed boundaries.

Conclusion

Recent analytical approaches to the study of social movements point to language, narratives, and the use of rhetorical figures as important elements in investigating the impact and strategic relevance of culture in the creation and diffusion of contentious discourses [Johnston 2009; Ignatow 2009; Tarrow 2013]. At the interactional level of conversation, rhetorical figures such as metaphors and metonymies can be used as indicators of how cultural associations shape strategy [Polletta 2006], since different terms are discursively coupled on the basis of a shared cultural understanding of their connection.

In this research, I have argued that discourse and rhetorical analysis may be the key to understanding how activists strategically employ polysemic language in order to address culturally diverse audiences. At the level of language, cultural fragmentation creates a need for contentious words whose meaning is both "ambiguous and available"

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TABLE 6
Asymmetrical metonymy (C. Fugazzola)

Term	Stands in for	Discursive approach
LGBT families	New families, a form of union parallel and separate to traditional families.	Pluralization of the term, indicating a plurality of types of family existing in society.
LGBT *families*	Unions that fully belong to the fluid and constantly changing concept of family.	Deconstruction of the idea of "traditional family," inclusion of a plurality of unions in the new concept of family.

[Tarrow 2013: 15], which enables activists to condense a multiplicity of meaning in them [Polletta 2006; Tarrow 2013]. The case of Italy shows that, through a tactical use of language, groups in culturally fragmented social environments can maximize cultural and policy outcomes without encountering discursive fragmentation. Groups limited by different discursive boundaries were able to achieve normalization of the contested notion of non-heteronormative families by metonymically linking the concept to two separate understandings of it in relation to traditional families. This allowed for discursive convergence in the public sphere through regionally and culturally specific tactics.

This work contributes to ongoing conversations in the field of social movement studies, engaging in particular with work that is moving towards a conceptualization of culture as flexible, fluid, di-alogically constructed, both internal and external to social movements, and simultaneously enabling and constraining [Steinberg 1998; Polletta 2002 Williams 2004]. My analysis and findings share with this literature a focus on discourse and narrative as "a crucial cultural domain to construct shared meaning" [Fine in Johnston and Klandermans 1995: 133], and an understanding of social movements as engaged in a cultural and symbolic struggle against dominant representations [Gamson 1988; Fine 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995]. By analyzing discourses, narratives, and microlevel rhetorical choices on the part of Italian LGBT groups, I have shown how external constraints imposed by the culturally available "packages" [Gamson 1988] or "cultural repertoires"

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[Williams 2004] are linked to creative processes of meaning construction, and to strategic approaches to social change.

The mechanism of asymmetrical metonymy offers a possible explanation of how social movements operating among different, and sometimes incompatible, cultural constraints make sense of such differences through a strategic use of discourse to link equal terms to separate concepts. I thus suggest a way of moving beyond framing, and its static conceptualization of activists' cultural work as a series of instrumental calculations aimed at maximizing recruitment [Steinberg 1998; Snow 2004; Williams 2004], proposing instead an approach that emphasizes dynamic processes of meaning negotiation and construction. This shift—from a focus on overly cognitive framing processes to multivocal, polysemic discursive tactics—has practical and theoretical implications. On a practical level, it offers a way to approach the study of processes of policy change in culturally fragmented countries. And, on a theoretical level, it proposes an analytical approach that successfully captures the dialogical interplay through which meaning and structure are mutually constituted, contested, and negotiated in processes of social and cultural change.

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Résumé

Dans cet article, le mouvement LGBT en Italie est utilisé comme cas d'étude pour enquêter sur la manière dont les mouvements sociaux, dans des environnements sociaux culturellement variés, utilisent de façon stratégique un langage controversé pour développer des discours qui maximisent les résultats culturels et politiques tout en limitant les risques de fragmentation discursive. Ma recherche montre que les défenseurs des droits civiques des LGBT, dans différentes régions italiennes, se sont appuyés sur l'utilisation tactique de mots spécifiques afin de répondre à des normes régionales spécifiques d'expression culturelle régulant les démarcations autour du concept de famille. En adoptant une approche culturelle et linguistique pour l'étude des mouvements sociaux, l'article discute le mécanisme de la métonymie asymétrique comme exemple d'utilisation stratégique du langage polysémique destiné à atteindre la convergence discursive à travers des tactiques spécifiques à chaque culture. L'article affirme par ailleurs que le discours et l'analyse rhétorique permettent de comprendre comment les mouvements sociaux donnent sens aux différentes limitations culturelles associées à un environnement social fragmenté.

Mots-clés : LGBT ; Italie ; Droits civils ; Controverse ; Langue ; Culture.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Projekt nutze ich die italienische LGBT-Bewegung als Fallstudie, um zu untersuchen, wie soziale Bewegungen in kulturell unterschiedlichen sozialen Umgebungen ganz bewusst eine umstrittene Sprache einsetzen, die es erlaubt, Diskurse zu entwickeln, die kulturelle und politische Ergebnisse maximieren und gleichzeitig das Risiko einer diskursiven Fragmentierung mindern. Meine Forschungsarbeit zeigt, dass die Anhänger der LGBT-Bürgerrechte verschiedener italienischer Regionen bestimmte Wörter taktisch bewusst verwandt haben, um auf regional spezifische Normen kultureller Ausdrucksformen des normierten Familienbegriffs zu reagieren. Anhand eines kulturellen und sprachlichen Ansatzes zur Erforschung sozialer Bewegungen stelle ich den Mechanismus der asymmetrischen Metonymie vor, beispielhaft für den strategischen Einsatz polysemischer Sprache, die durch kulturspezifische Taktiken zu einer diskursiven Konvergenz führt. Der Beitrag behauptet, dass Diskurs und rhetorische Analyse einen Lösungsansatz darstellen, um aufzuzeigen, wie Bewegungen unterschiedliche kulturelle Grenzen in einem fragmentierten, sozialen Umfeld für sich sinnvoll nutzen können.

Schlüsselwörter : LGBT; Italien; Bürgerrechte; kontroverser Diskurs; Sprache; Kultur.

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