



EUROPEAN FORUM OF LESBIAN, GAY  
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER  
CHRISTIAN GROUPS

BARCELONA 2010

## ROUNDTABLE 25/6/2010

### Deconstructing patriarchy in order to build up the Realm of God of LGBT Human Rights?

#### **Rosa M. Playà (Families GLBT): Keys from the perspective of the LGBT Movement**

*"In the same way as divorced and foster families, as well as monoparental families are being accepted, so will gay and lesbian families be eventually accepted. This will happen thanks to their being open and public. Experiences make up the reality of each one of us. Suzanne M. Johnson i Elizabeth O'Connor: Madres lesbianas. Guía para formar una familia feliz. Lumen México, 2005.- For Lesbian Parents: Your Guide to Helping your Family Grow Up Happy, Healthy and Proud.*

My name is Rosa and I'll participate in the Round Table of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups on behalf of the Association of Lesbian and Gay Families of Catalonia (FLG) and also as a member of a homoparental family, in my case made up by two mothers and two children. Before dealing with the main issue of this Round Table I would like you to get acquainted with the FLG, its origins and its goals. Therefore, allow me first, to explain my/our situation as a family and then focus on what I think is our contribution to the necessary deconstruction of patriarchy in order to build up the Realm of God of LGBT Human Rights, in order to build up a fairer world where diversity may be respected and human rights are equally guaranteed for everybody.

**The FLG** was born in 2001 out of the interest of some families who were known to each other and who thought it necessary to meet in order to talk and share their daily problems and concerns. At a time when the legal position of our families was not legally recognized, this small founding group grew up considerably fast until it was decided to get it organized as an association.

Throughout these years we have done our best to participate in achieving the legal and social changes carried out in Catalonia as well as in the whole of Spain: our right to adopt (Law of Co-adoption for gay and lesbian parents of March 30th, 2005, amending the Family Code, passed by the Parliament of Catalonia) and to marriage (Law of June 30th 2005, amending the Marriage Law in the Spanish Parliament). Since that year we have achieved the same legal equality as the rest of so-called traditional families. This has implied the recognition of our families, many of them already existing, and especially of the rights of our children. These laws meant a breakthrough and are an important legal advance, going beyond most countries in the world. These laws, which, although they may have been part of our dreams, many of us thought we would never see them passed, were the result of the effort and the hard work of many daring and determined people.



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Even so, there is a long way to go, there is a lot of pending work and we know that our children can still be discriminated in many places for belonging to a type of family different from most others. Because, even though the law is in force, a part of our society has not yet taken this reality, our reality, for granted. This is why the LGB has a reason for existing and has set up some general goals:

- To promote the visibility and the normalization of homoparental families in society.
- To achieve full equal rights for us and our children.
- To establish a common space of relationship for ourselves and our children (where they can meet, get acquainted and live together with family models similar to their own).
- To provide support, assistance and help to the families , and to all those who get in touch with us.

In order to achieve these goals, we organize outings and formation and fun meetings so that we can share experiences, make friends and let our children play, get to know each other and share their experience. Our association is also open to other family models which value tolerance and plurality. Besides, we participate in forums, conferences and talks so as to disclose our family and social reality. We keep in touch with political institutions and other public administrations to watch over full equal rights and respect for our families. Some pending issues are, among others, full equal rights in assisted reproduction for lesbian couples, equal opportunities for adoption and its proceedings, social awareness, equal treatment at school and in education and pedagogical material.... Our contribution in this field has been the documentary ***Homo Baby Boom*** of Anna Boluda, produced by the FLG, with a complete didactic guide, and which we are circulating in schools, libraries, centres for pedagogical resources and among politicians.

Around 300 families are presently members or just supporters who receive our information and participate in our activities. Most of the families are made up by two mothers and 20% by two fathers. Men have a more difficult access to parenthood, but that does not prevent them from giving up the chance to form their own family.

There are children of all ages, some are adopted and others are the result of assisted reproduction or coming from previous relationships. We should mention that there are various national and international surveys, sustained by our daily experience, suggesting that our children are no more or no less happy than those of traditional families and besides, ours are wanted children, the result of a very thought over decision. Actually, some surveys indicate that our children are more open and tolerant when it comes to accepting diversity. Our association is starting to work out on how they live this "difference", which they have to come to terms with every day, and on how we can help them to have the tools not to suffer because of this. Our association plays an important role in fighting against this homophobia enshrined at school, in our society in general and in ourselves (because there is also an inner homophobia...our education, what we have lived through has not prepared us for the present situation...)

Within the FLG you can find families of different religious beliefs, and so even though we are not allowed to have a Church wedding, some have taken the option to have their children baptized and they have them, or are planning to, receive their first communion. Likewise, some families form part of a Christian community. Such a step allows their community to be closely acquainted not only with the existence of homosexuals, but of families made up by homosexual parents.

Every day implies an act of visibility and activism: when we visit the doctor, when we look after our children while they play in the park, when we pick them up at school... So much visibility is sometimes tiring, but we think it is our duty to explain ourselves- not to justify ourselves- and we cannot leave for our children the job to explain their family model.



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The structure of our families is different from that of most others, but its contents are the same that should shape all families, whatever kind they may be: love, respect, solidarity, care, personal development for their members.

The Association of Lesbian and Gay families strives to create a strong social mass, which can comprise the LGBT families. We aim at reaching the most possible representativeness, which can allow us to strengthen our situation before public administrations and discussion forums where the future of our families and the education and welfare of our children are debated. We think that an inclusive and plural society is possible and we are looking for ways to make this visible to the citizens as a whole.

### **But what do I think is our contribution as an LGBT association to deconstruct patriarchy in order to build up the Realm of God of LGBT Human Rights?**

A lot has been said about the formation of patriarchy throughout our history, and I guess this has been dealt with more deeply from the anthropological and feminist perspective, but I would like to quote a few paragraphs :

*“ (...) patriarchy, which is **a form of dominion and of social organization** which almost all societies historically known have shared and **which has not been questioned until recently**. All known societies share up to a point the features identified as patriarchy, a social organization in which men hold power and keep women subjected. (...) **Its universality is one of its strongest psychological weapons, since it can use nature as a basis for its legitimacy. Religion, philosophy and literature help in making up its supporting ideology and values, which in turn are used as instruments of learning and as a model of behaviour for coming generations. Law brings them to definite form by turning them into norms of conduct.**”*

*(“Orígens i evolució del codi patriarcal”. *La violència domèstica. Informe sobre els maltractaments a dones a Espanya*, La Caixa, p.37 i ss.- Origins and evolution of the patriarchal code. Report on harassment to women in Spain)*

***“Patriarchy is a primary construct upon which any present society is set up. (...) It is a form of political, economic, religious and social organization based on the idea of men’s authority and leadership, in which men prevail over women, husbands over wives, fathers over mothers and children, and male over female ascendancy (...) Since this is a cultural and social convention, it is subject to correction, reform or substitution by another cultural and social construct”.***

*(Dolors Reguant Fosas, *Explicació abreujada del Patriarcat*. Barcelona 2007- An abridged explanation of patriarchy)*

I would like to point out these key words-phrases:

Universal institutionalized form; legitimized by myths; tradition; nature; religion; predominance of men over women; convention subject to correction and reform

What does patriarchy say about our families? Which objections are raised to our existence? Which experience can I share?

*“It is not the natural thing. It is not possible for two women to make a family. They cannot conceive children on their own.”*



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Neither can many heterosexual couples. And what is natural? Not respecting diversity? This principle has been used having in mind that patriarchy is what is taken for natural. Having been imposed to most societies through history does not make patriarchy natural. By taking nature as an excuse many injustices have been justified. On the other hand, the not widely known Anthropology of sexuality and cultural diversity\*, has shown us various examples of non-patriarchal societies, or of others which have adapted to diverse situations with non-patriarchal solutions (\*See manual by José Antonio Nieto Ed. Talasa Ediciones S.L. Madrid, 2003).

Our experience related with the first statement: My wife and I had a *shotgun* marriage, she was almost six months pregnant. Once our twins were born and while I was trying to register our newborn babies at the Register Office, I learned they would not be registered as my children, even though my name could be put in as the "spouse of the biological mother". Since I insisted, arguing that the current law allowed this and that I considered this refusal to be unjust, because if my wife had wanted to register the children with the upstairs neighbour and had said that he was the father, nobody would have checked anything and the registration would have been accepted, I was told " *Hold on, you cannot possibly have put in the little seed*".

In 2006, the law was amended so that direct descent registration could be allowed, but some officials are still reluctant to accept the changes. The Family Code which applies in Catalonia had already accepted this recognition for married couples or domestic partners to have their direct descent recognised without the need for the other partner to adopt them.

We were provided with a new family book (an official document) ( We had already been given the original one when we got married) in which only the name of my wife was included. The space for spouse-husband was left blank (even though her status was written down as "married") and my two children had the two surnames of their biological mother ( in some cases one surname of the father had to be included, but not in our case) . Society- the Administration - was not ready for those recent very advanced laws.

*"How do you do it? Who plays the male and who plays the female?"*

The assigned roles, so deeply entrenched in everything. These roles that make both men and women to behave in a certain way in order to be "normal". Lack of freedom for every one to be the way they are.

*"Children need a father and a mother. They need a father figure."*

The roles. What they need is to be loved and respected. Such a statement is a denial of family diversity in all its forms. Are orphan children without a father stigmatized? Having a father does not guarantee having a "good" father". A good development for both girls and boys requires male and female referents. Children can find them in our families. We should never become a ghetto. We are acquainted with all kinds of families and our children find male referents in our fathers, our brothers, our friends...

*"Can a man on his own or two men look after a child?"*

Let's contribute to break the social prejudices: the fear of what is unknown or uncommon can be seen underpinning some questions repeated once and again.

*"I am not against homosexuals or their domestic partnership, but this union cannot be named marriage or matrimony."* We cannot be like them, citizens of second class, differences ... not equal to equal. We should remember the etymological origin of the term: "*matri-monium*", that is, the right a woman achieves when marrying so as to be able to become a mother within the law.

*"Children who grow up in homoparental families are different."*



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As I mentioned before, there are several scientific surveys that compare the development of children brought up in homoparental families with others brought up in heterosexual families. These studies conclude that there is no difference in the psychological development of the two groups of children, that the children brought up in homoparental families have their sexual identity quite clear, that they have a high degree of self esteem and that eventually there is a similar percentage of homosexuals among the children of both groups. These studies contradict the prejudices you may have heard as a result of ignorance and homophobia. When these children become adults, the upbringing received by their families makes them very tolerant and understanding adults, who accept and transmit the respect for their family model.

*“I think it is all right for homosexuals to get married, but not to adopt.”*

Do we set a bad example for our children? Is homosexual a synonym for sexual deviation, for pederasty? There are many people in the LGBT world that don't find it proper for us to form a family, have children... the inner homophobia.

*“Gay marriage is destroying the family as an institution.”*

M. José, a fellow member of the Association says, and I quote, that even though some voices have risen complaining that gay marriage is destroying the family as an institution, the birth of our children has brought enormous joy to our families (parents, siblings, cousins...) and that this *“has been like a magnet which has united each other even more.”*

*“Having children means being selfish, it implies not thinking about them, and about their suffering for being children of homosexuals.”*

The experience of our children in the Association of Lesbian and Gay families is very positive. The families explain that their children have received no indication of rejection in their school or social environment. We recommend that your milieu should learn about your condition of homoparental family from the very beginning. It is the adults and not the children who have to explain that they have a homoparental family from the beginning. This way, the child will grow up in an environment aware of their type of family and they won't have to give any further explanations. We also recommend avoiding openly homophobic environments. To give you an example, we used to travel wherever we could afford to and we liked, now I am thinking of only going to those places where I don't have to hide my family condition, even if that implies avoiding many destinations...

*Walt Disney or how to be waiting for our Charming Prince...*

What is transmitted by tradition, literature, cinema, myths, our imaginary, our upbringing, advertisements...referents from patriarchy. Our obvious or inner homophobia, as a result of years of repression within the norm. My example: I shall never be able to be a mother by another woman, it is not natural, it is difficult to understand... It does not follow the standard or the stereotype... If I had been able to choose I would not be homosexual... The negative picture of one's very self.

Patriarchy has made the norm to exist and a great majority of people don't even question the chance to be different. We take things for granted too easily. For example, since my children were born I have had to leave home to work out in the Holy Week. I have met many people and if they know I have two little children their usual comment is something like how I have been able to leave them those days. These comments imply the feeling that a mother cannot separate from her children, they suppose that I leave them with my husband, but they don't seem to approve... What is the position of my supposed husband? Isn't that his job? Isn't he as capable as a woman to be in charge of little children?

Patriarchy may end up by swallowing you completely. Personally, I have to say that it has been really hard for me to accept and communicate my sexuality. I started my “coming out of the



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closet” well before having children, but I have come out in the open thanks to them. Otherwise I would still be in the closet in many ways. My mother’s response, as expected, was terrible, although she quickly changed thanks especially to the support of my father, my siblings and some of my village neighbours who talked to her and made her see that what she had taken for “the great misfortune” was not so tragic. On the contrary, they transmitted normality and acceptance to her.

Some comments recently made by mothers in the school attended by my children:

Prejudice and ignorance:

*“My daughter asked me how can Jan have two mothers, and I ignored her question, and thank goodness she then forgot the question...”*

Positively, the change of attitude and mentality:

*“How nice that my children have yours in their class and they can live with diversity from an early age. They will be able to understand their aunt, who is like you...”*

*“My daughters play being two mothers like those of Jan...”*

Our experience shows that when you openly say that yours is a homoparental family, after the initial surprise, people react positively and naturally accept your family condition. So, first with your extended family and then with your neighbours, the best thing to do is show the way you are naturally in order to guarantee that our children are treated in a normalized way. It has to be said, though, that we recommend avoiding those openly homophobic environments, which unfortunately still exist.

The existence of our families entails a confrontation with patriarchy. In the case of couples made up by women there is not a man leading or with power over our descent, even though some male activity has been required so that we could become mothers (not as a father, although even LGBT people ask us things such “.. *what if some day they want to know about their father?... Will they look like their father?...*”). There is not and there has never been a father figure in our case. A man has intervened as a “donor” and that is the only “name” we give to him. It is high time we re-structured what it has been so structured, so entrenched in our world, in our culture, for ages and ages (*in secula seculorum*).

We all, as homoparental families, break with the traditional division of roles. There is not a role for each sex: “*we share the household chores the way we can, each one does what she likes best*”, “*nobody plays the father or the mother*”... (these are some of the sentences which can be heard in the documentary **Homo Baby Boom**, which reflects on the daily life of six families belonging to our association). Within each family, we can find different forms of organization among its members, and also different ways the children name their two mothers or their two fathers.

In practice, our reality and our visibilization contributes day by day to this deconstruction of patriarchy. When we go and register our children in the Civil Registry (dealing with all the outdated forms.....having to put the name of one of the two, in the entry for husband or father..) in the forms to fill up for any issue, in the paper where we sign our consent for our children to go out to school camps... The school teacher of our children had the gesture to personalize the report forms where we were supposed to write how our children resembled us (the teachers know I am called mama while my wife is known as mother, and this is how it was written down in the forms). With all these everyday visibilization moves we help change mentalities, application forms....



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Obviously, we all know that the LGBT reality is quite diverse, as diverse as all of us can be. But, globally, our existence allows for this deconstruction about which we cannot stop talking. The favourable legal framework in Catalonia and Spain has allowed a dramatic increase in the visibility of this family model. Although this is like an island, surrounded by a wholly patriarchal reality in most countries in our world, ours is an emerging reality that keeps spreading up. Last year the NELFA (Network of European LGBT families associations) was set up and we are holding our first European meeting in Paris later this year, in September. Its members are associations from different European countries and there are applications for membership from many other associations. It is a great step forward. As it was the Declaration of Human Rights at its time, but we also know that they are not defended in a considerable number of countries, in which many injustices are left unpunished. We know that we exist and speak out, but that does not guarantee that we are respected everywhere, as women are not respected in many countries, or the rights of children ... We should go on fighting to reach more and more places so as to open the door to dreaming of equal rights and of an end to injustice. The fact that this may be a complicated task should not justify our giving up.

The getting together of different families in the same situation (associationism) has allowed us to show the plurality of current family models, to claim a series of rights and to share experiences, setbacks and hopes among adults, but also among children and adolescents

The experiences undergone by some of these boys and girls, children of homosexual parents, with their counterparts and their environment prove that respect for diversity is an increasing value..

It is necessary to keep making homoparental families visible, and to change the language so that the existing diversity of family models in our society can be integrated in the imaginary of people.

To conclude, I would like to say that homoparental families are living evidence that love does not abide by rigid norms or prohibitions, that what is important is respect for diversity and openness of minds. I think we should explain ourselves better, because ignorance still prevails in many cases, patriarchy has done its advertising job too well internally and externally. Many clichés and prejudices have to be broken down and our visibility is a steady, encouraging step forward.

*Suggested bibliography:*

See bibliography and documentation section at the web [www.familieslg.org](http://www.familieslg.org) (homopaternality, homomaternity, child and juvenile, essay, web, family diversity, scientific surveys and legal documents).