



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?

Mercè Otero Vidal: Keys from a feminist perspective

Let me begin by mentioning a recent symbolic bold feminist initiative against patriarchy which was brought forth by the Gea Association from Barcelona in 2009. Having in mind that the UN is widely considered as the most inclusive international institution, which adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Gea proposed a petition to the UN to carry out a symbolic act acknowledging the existence of patriarchy, and publicly apologizing for all the grievances that women submitted to patriarchy have endured worldwide throughout the ages and therefore proposing its immediate abolition.

This project was introduced within the II Conference of Women in Barcelona, organized by the City Council Department of Women on October 16th 2009. There, the Executive Director of the UNIFEM (United Nations Fund for the Development of Women) was handed a list of endorsements to the "Statement for the acknowledgement of the existence of patriarchy and for its final abolition" and she was asked to be its mediator in the General Assembly of the United Nations. You may endorse this Statement at www.proyectopatriarcado.com

Actually, this would be an example of a performative text, which not only describes a fact, but makes it real by merely making it known: putting something into words always implies acting. Needless to say, performativity is nowadays a model for analysis which stresses the political and transforming capacities of the statements ready to acquire new meanings by breaking away from previous contexts and by being able to set up new ones. We have examples of texts which may not have "immediately" materialized the verbalized wishes they contained, but these texts have paved the way for their realization later on. The very UN Declaration of Human Rights may be one of these examples.

As said by Gerda Lerner (*The Creation of Patriarchy, 1986-La creación del patriarcado*, Ed. Crítica, Barcelona, 1990), patriarchy is the result of a historical process undergone by men and women, which has taken almost 2500 years to be completed, and that since it had a beginning is bound to have an ending. The time for its demise seems to have come. Patriarchy is no longer useful to women and men and its inseparable links with militarism, hierarchy, racism, capitalism and heterosexism threaten the existence of life on earth.

I'd like to go on with a significant poem (*Thaw*) dealing with the relationship between lesbian feminism and patriarchal divinity. It was written by Maria Mercè Maarzal, a lesbian feminist poet brought up as a Christian, in which she voices her pain at the patriarchal reality represented by her dead father and by the shadow of a Father- God alien to women.

*Sparrow hawk Father who preys on me from heaven!
And calls upon me in the Kingdom of your name,
I am dazed with fear by your will*



EUROPEAN FORUM OF LESBIAN, GAY
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER
CHRISTIAN GROUPS

BARCELONA 2010

*Which is done in heaven and on earth.
My daily blood
Drips on beyond you this day
But I cannot get rid of my old trespasses
And I mirror myself in my blindest trespassers.
I lead myself into the temptation
Of running after you through the shadow of my evil.*

If we put the stress on the relationship of feminism with Christianity and the LGTB movement, the reason for our being gathered here, we should take into account that feminism has traditionally taken a stand against “official Christianity”, especially against the performance and the reality of the national-catholicism which women had to endure under the Francoist dictatorship. One of the slogans of the feminist teachers of the 1980s was “good girls go to heaven and bad girls go everywhere”, which is an explicit transgression of the patriarchal norms and of their consequences related to salvation.

In our research for a genealogy, we feminists have expressed our recognition and thankful admiration for the witches and have taken their persecution as an utterly heartbreaking symbolic historical token for patriarchal control, through the power of the Church, on sexuality, the body and the female free conscience. Patriarchal monotheist religions, represented by their hierarchies, have been perceived by feminism as the most evident and violent elements of mysoginy and homophobia throughout history.

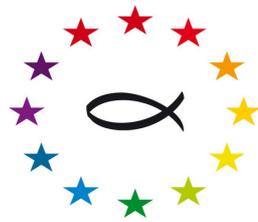
On the other side, feminism also recognises that there have been mystical, visionary women throughout history who by appealing to their direct relationship with divinity, have been able to overcome the Church hierarchy and achieve important breakthroughs for female freedom, even though those had taken place within the walls of monasteries and convents. Characters like Hildegard of Bingen, Margerite Porrette or Teresa de Àvila, just to name a few, would be some good examples.

Allow me now to break off and deal briefly with convents and nuns. I would like to recall with gratitude those women who published the book *Lesbian Nuns: breaking silence (Las Monjas Lesbianas. Se rompe el silencio*. Ed. Seix i Barral, Barcelona, 1985), its authors Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, as well as the other interviewed forty eight women who provided their daring and generous evidence.

The current pluralism of the feminist movement envisions different feelings towards the religious fact, Closer to us, it is worth noticing the presence of the group *Col·lectiu de Dones en l'Església* (Group of Women in the Church) and there has been a widespread welcome to the recent proposals of feminist theology put forward by Teresa Forcades Vila in her book about feminist theology through history (*La teologia feminista en la història*. Fragmenta Editorial, Barcelona, 2007).

Dealing with the relationship between the feminist movement and the LGTB movement, this relationship has been brought about through the presence and activity of those lesbian feminists who have critically distrusted the mixed homosexual venues where the situations of male dominance were reproduced. Likewise, lesbians also complain about the feminist movement in the sense that the latter has tended to be ruled by heterosexual women, and so, we should take into account that while lesbians have given their support to the claims of heterosexual women, they have missed the same reciprocal solidarity in the case of specifically lesbian claims.

However, and taking into account the feminist pluralism, there is now an increasing search for alliances which even encompasses the trans movement, especially among the youth. Patriarchy



EUROPEAN FORUM OF LESBIAN, GAY
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER
CHRISTIAN GROUPS

BARCELONA 2010

reacts to the existence and the claims of homosexual relations and even more to the lesbian ones, because these question the legitimacy of the compulsory heterosexual relationship, but in fact patriarchy mostly attacks anything that escapes the (male or female) normative identities, and does its utmost to keep the identification between biological sex and a determined binary social gender role, while it does not allow any room for shades, for androgyny, for transgender or for no- identification. (Marina Collell Cornelles, Miquel Missé Sánchez i Montserrat Otero Vidal. "Feminismes en trànsit i TransFeminismes: una intersecció de desitjos"- "feminisms and TransFeminisms; an intersection of desires" in *Sexualitats transgressores*. Col·lecció Teranyina, Xarxa Feminista. Barcelona, 2008)

Some feminist sectors have claimed that patriarchy can be taken for dead (*El final del patriarcado (Ha ocurrido y no por casualidad- The end of patriarchy. It has happened and not by chance)*, trad. de María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, Barcelona, Llibreria Pròleg, Barcelona, 1996) , since we no longer give credit to it, but when faced with a male chauvinistic and homophobic patriarchal reality still violently ruling our everyday life everywhere, we cannot lower our guard, and we should go on trying new tactical and strategic positions as well. Patriarchal male hegemony has adopted two forms in the system of symbols though the ages: excluding women from education and keeping the male monopoly on definitions,. Thus, our actions have to aim at overcoming those injustices. Our energies must address the issue of education striving for a type of co-education that can overcome androcentrism and patriarchal thought. One talks a lot about "gender" and there is no doubt that the concept of gender when well understood can help us unravel the structure and the working of the stereotypes and the roles awarded to men and women, but our job is to break those stereotypes and go beyond them. Starting from this, co-education opens the door for children, for boys and girls, for men and women, to have the freedom to be what and how they want to be. The affective sexual upbringing within co-education entails the prevention against any male chauvinistic and homophobic violence and should open up a whole span of relationship possibilities.

To conclude, just let's catch up on the issue of human rights and let's remember that the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th 1948, which amended the corresponding article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, in force since the French Revolution, and introduced the term sex in article 2 of the Declaration. But the feminist movement has always seen androcentrism and ethnocentrism in this Declaration. This has been proved by the need to concrete some of its rights, as for example with the Convention on the rights of infancy, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, and it was not until the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, when it was recognized that the rights of women are also human rights, through the statement that "the human rights of women and young girls are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the universal human rights" . And the story is going on, because the Second Universal Forum of Cultures (Monterrey, Mexico, November 2007) adopted the Declaration of Emergent Human Rights...

So, women know that laws often work like "glass ceilings" and that they are not the only guarantee to female freedom, but we should try to follow our path against patriarchy and with the slogan "another world is possible". We should achieve the intellectual courage to move beyond our understanding and take risks. We live in a period of change and we are in the process of reaching, without patriarchy, a free, just, happy and peaceful world, without violence or hierarchies, a truly humane world where the Christian LGBT community can hopefully await the coming of the Realm of God.