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Queer Motherhood: Challenging Heteronormative Rules beyond the Assimilationist/Radical Binary¹

By Luciana Moreira²

Abstract

In Spain, same sex marriage and adoption was legalized in 2005, and in 2006 the Law of Assisted Reproduction made this available to every woman regardless of their sexual orientation or marital status. Drawing on interviews carried out in Madrid about assisted conception and lesbian parenting, as well as on previous contributions advanced by queer and gender scholars, this article questions to what extent the assumptions of assimilation to a normative system adequately apply to queer families. Some activists and academics characterize lesbian, gay and/or bisexual partnering and parenting as (hetero)normative, at the same time as the very same forms of constituting a family are the object of rejection from politicians, lawmakers and cultural institutions. Taking this context as the premise, in this article I discuss the need for more diverse analytical instruments which take into account more human and psychosocial aspects of life alongside the political and academic analysis of queer trajectories concerning maternity decisions and everyday experiences of motherhood.

Keywords: Queer motherhood, Spain, families

Introduction

In Spain, same sex marriage and adoption were legalized in 2005 and in 2006 a new Law of Assisted Reproduction stated for the first time that every woman could have access to those techniques regardless of their marital status and sexual orientation³. Based on the research I carried out in Madrid within the project INTIMATE—Citizenship, Care and Choice: The micropolitics of intimacy in Southern Europe⁴, about assisted conception and lesbian parenting, I will consider the following questions: How are those partnerships negotiating parenthood? Are legal rights leading to the assimilationism of LGBT people regarding conservative family models? Are lesbian or bisexual mothers continuing or changing traditional, normative rules on how to raise a child? Some activists and academics characterize lesbian, gay and/or bisexual partnering and parenting as

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³ Nevertheless, previous legislation did not forbid it either. Every woman could already have access to those techniques, although, in the case of lesbian couples, the non-biological mother could not register the child.

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(hetero)normative and therefore dismiss it; simultaneously, the very same forms of living are object of rejection from politicians, law-makers, cultural institutions, and society in general. Parallel to this, others defend the radical possibilities of queer families and queer parenting.

Shane Phelan (1997) elaborates on queer as a political identity (more than a sexual one) and on its significant possibilities to challenge the heteronormative regime. I am using it in this article as an umbrella term able to bring together sexual orientation and gender or sexual identities along with other categories (such as class, ethnicity, age, dis/ability...) that also question norms, therefore assuming a larger political and a wider scholarly definition. Throughout the text, I intend to use “queer” in a broader sense, beyond self-identification, taking into account Sara Ahmed’s suggestion that

There are feelings involved in the self-perception of ‘queerness’, a self-perception that is bodily, as well as bound up with ‘taking on’ a name. But these feelings are mediated and they are attached to the category ‘queer’ in ways that are complex and contingent, precisely because the category is produced in relation to histories that render it a sign of failed being or ‘non-being’.(Ahmed 2004: 146)

Therefore, I propose to stretch the concept of queer, using it in a way where self-identification with the name “queer” will not be exclusive, since the case study does not come from a western English-speaking country and, as such, the centrality of self-definition would be elitist and unfair, since it would require people to know a term foreign to their mother tongue, as well as its history and usage. Furthermore, relying on Ahmed’s conceptualization, I will use the term based on peoples’ stories, on their sense of failure, difference or non-belonging regarding the heterocisnormative⁵ system, concerning the traditional model of family.

Roseneil et al. (2013) define heteronormativity as a range of “multitudinous (social, legal, political, cultural) ways in which heterosexuality is normalized, naturalized and privileged as an institution, and to the ways in which homosexual practices and relationships are excluded, stigmatized, marginalized, and minoritized” (2013: 166). Bearing this definition in mind, I propose that assumptions of heteronormativity regarding lesbian or bisexual mothers are part of a much wider and in-depth cultural system and anything that could resemble some of its characteristics, even though a queer subversion of it, may be (mis)read as normative.

According to research on the Spanish context, we can identify patterns of both transformation and sameness in lesbian motherhood, regarding the role of the family (Pichardo 2011; Platero 2014; Trujillo and Burgaleta 2014). This does not mean people are embracing normativity necessarily. As the visibility of lesbian couples always implies risks, they are constantly set apart from the so-called ‘normal’ lifestyle. My proposal here is that, on the one hand, women in same sex relationships tend to justify themselves as being “good” mothers or in “normal families” because of the stigmatization of the lesbian subject and, as such, not having the right to become a parent. On the other hand, this kind of motherhood is a way of resistance that changes the social heteronorms as those families face social and cultural discrimination that transform them on a daily basis into activists against homophobia. Beyond that, Ivette Taylor, drawing on original empirical material, speaks about “the narratives which encompass both change and continuity

⁵ I am using the term heterocisnormativity to characterize a social system that legitimizes first reproductive and (apparently) monogamous heterosexuality among cisgender people, that is, people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

within a familiar context” (Taylor 2009: 59), affirming that there is a fluidity between maintaining some norms and doing away with others (Ryan-Flood 2009; Taylor 2009).

Thus, scholars need to move forward from heteronormative standpoints at the time of analyzing lesbian everyday experiences concerning coupling and parenting, which would be useful in addressing fairly new family formations. For instance, on the one hand, to stay home with babies may be seen as normative and old-fashioned, after female entrance in the labor market; on the other hand, one may question, from an anti-capitalist point of view, the short parenting leaves people are entitled to⁶ (returning to work and becoming profitable again) and the difficulties to find day childcare. Some of those examples may be found in *Maternidades Subversivas* (2015)—*Subversive Maternities*, in English—where María Llopis presents a wide range of interviews with people experiencing motherhood focusing on a vast array of feminist, sexual and/or gender dissident people.

To understand lesbian motherhood better requires an approach beyond the Manichean binary of the good transformative queer and the bad normative assimilated individual, which seems to be far from providing the much-needed tools for a more encompassing analysis.

Sample and Methodology

In this article, I draw from the research I carried out in Madrid for the project “INTIMATE—Citizenship, Care and Choice: The Micropolitics of Intimacy in Southern Europe”, a 5-year long project involving qualitative studies on LGBT partnering, parenting and friendship across Portugal, Spain and Italy. Between April and June 2016, the research team collected a sample of 30 in-depth biographical interviews with queer people, on the topics of parenting and Assisted Reproductive Techniques, using the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) designed by Tom Wengraf (2006). Moreover, a series of interviews with law-makers, health professionals and activists strengthened the sample. In this article, I will consider four interviews collected in Madrid with cis women in lesbian relationships at the time of the interview.

In BNIM interviews, the interviewer first asks only a single narrative question such as “As you know, I am interested in Assisted Reproductive Techniques. Please, tell me your story, all events and experiences that have been important to you, personally (...)” then listens to the interviewee without interrupting her for as long as she speaks. The method starts from the idea that individual narratives express both conscious concerns and unconscious presuppositions and subjectivities. In the second part of the interview, the interviewer uses narrower, strategic questions to explore specific pieces of information.

Given the question asked and the target population, interviewees generally saw the interview as an opportunity to denounce experiences of rejection at a more intimate level, but also situations in which their rights were not fully recognized at the institutional level. The information collected thus enabled me to analyze the political dimension of the visibility of lesbian motherhood, as well to identify somewhat transformative practices bearing in mind that “It is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience (Scott 2008, 273)”. Following feminist research methodology in general and Joan W. Scott’s considerations concerning experience, in particular, peoples’ experiences or practices should not

⁶ In Spain maternity leave consists of 42 calendar days after giving birth and a rest period of 16 continuous weeks. Paternity leave consists of 13 consecutive days. They are not interchangeable. Furthermore, even if same-sex marriage and parenting were accommodated under the Spanish law, the truth is that the names of those periods of leave have not been changed and lesbian couples have to ask for maternity and a paternity leave.

be used as instruments to essentialize identities or illustrate social systems but rather as a pathway to understand better the subjects or the identities analyzed, considering both the “discursive nature of experience” and the “politics of its construction” (2008, 280). More than labelling people through their narratives, the related experiences must themselves be analyzed, taking into account the trajectories and contexts of the interviewees, their own experiences and motivations - and what all these aspects may imply in their trajectories.

The Heteronormativity of Family Law and the New Possibilities of Family

Since the first public claims of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people in streets, in the 1960s and 1970s in the western world (mostly in democratic countries), many discriminatory laws have been abolished, giving space, some years later, to anti-discriminatory laws. The truth is that this was and still is a long battle, where queer people had and have to be very inventive and find different strategies in order to gain some space in a heteronormative society. As Weeks et al. put it: “Non-heterosexual people have had to be the arch-inventors, because so few guidelines have existed for those living outside the conventional heterosexual patterns (2001: 20)”. One of the queer ‘inventions’, in a world where the rejection of queer identities lead to the loss of family and (straight) friends’ support, were the new networks of care and support and families of choice (Weston 1991), that contrast with biological families, for many different reasons but mostly when the latter were/are homophobic and violent. Weeks et al. further stated that “the new narratives of intimate life (...) do not represent a thinning of family commitments and responsibilities, but a reorganization of them in new circumstances” (2001: 23). Thus, new commitments among queer people, looking for care, love and support, beyond the traditional family, does not mean a total rejection of what family means, rather than the traditional social and biological norms that characterizes it. Regarding the basic human need for affection, support and care, networks are still needed, albeit in the new forms of families of choice or supportive networks. Even in neoliberal, Western societies, where the individualization of the subject is a premise, there seems to exist, in queer networks but also amongst other resisting living practices, a continuous search for a balance between individualization and the need for a community, a network of support, or a chosen family.

Nevertheless, queers are sometimes accused of assimilating to a (hetero)normative system when engaging in coupledness or, perhaps even more so, in parenting (Halberstam 2005, Ripper 2009, Machado 2016). J. Halberstam, for instance, creates a divide between gays and lesbians embracing family, and queers who challenge heteronormativity as if the concept of family should be directly linked to conservatism. According to the author:

At a time when "gay and lesbian community" is used as a rallying cry for fairly conservative social projects aimed at assimilating gays and lesbians into the mainstream of the life of the nation and family, queer subcultures preserve the critique of heteronormativity that was always implicit in queer life (Halberstam 2005, 153-154).

If, on the one hand, legislation pushes people towards rigid social models such as marriage or the nuclear family, that is, pillars of Western political and economic models, as denounced by Halberstam, on the other hand, queer families, especially with children, instantiate themselves in such a way that they face constant difficulties that, when analyzed, may help to understand familial experiences beyond the normative/disruptive frame. Furthermore, despite the discourse that claims

that LGBT struggles for the right to have a family through both marriage and parenting are normative, the first achieved rights were individually-based rights. LGBT claims led slowly to the achievement of rights concerning same-sex practices, non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, the right to work without hiding one's sexual orientation which happened without strong civic or political contestation. Nevertheless, the same did not happen when the claims started to be about marriage and the right to parenting. Based on the Portuguese context, which could mirror many other countries, Ana Cristina Santos indicates that "individual claims face less resistance in the legal sphere because they do not challenge the dominant value-discourses of 'the family' and 'the child'" (2012: 180). Grounded on Yvette Taylor's approach to the heterosexuality of family law (2009: 170) and on the relevance of 'value-discourses' (Roseneil and Williams, 2004, *apud* Santos 2012: 173), Santos draws on the conceptualization of family as a heteronormative category. Political 'value-discourses', based on biological and 'nature' arguments used to defend the heterosexuality of the family are used to refuse LGBT relational claims, such as the right to marriage and parenting.

In her book *The cultural politics of emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed develops the idea of the heteronormative society and denounces the politics of love based on the assumption of love as "love for difference", which creates 'others', those who do not fit within the norm because they feel "love for sameness" (2004: 126). Going further, she links the love for difference—heterosexuality—with the rejection of homosexuality or queerness, even more when those 'others' weaken the heterosexual construction by trying to rebuild concepts such as coupling or parenting while trying to access them. For instance, according to the heteronormative conceptions of emotion, reproduction is about heterosexual practices, and the desire to create new beings according to the norm. Ahmed argues as follows:

The normative conflation of hetero-sex with reproduction means that the bond gets structured around the desire to 'produce well'. Good reproduction is often premised around a fantasy of 'making likeness' by seeing my features reflected back by others, whose connection to me is then confirmed (the question that is always asked: who does the child look like?) (Ahmed 2004: 128).

This explains why, even when love is invoked, some parents, mostly men, use violence against their sons or daughters when they know they are queers, going so far as to put them out, even nowadays, in western countries where legal rights have been achieved⁷. It also explains the rejection that occasionally arises against queer parenting, and even more when it happens among non-monogamous 'others'. The 'value-discourses' based on the lack of a father, or a mother, or those defending promiscuity as a queer characteristic and the need to defend children from such an environment attest that the heteronormative society (Ahmed 2004) works as an ivory tower to

⁷ The report "Social exclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Europe" (2006), indicates that 51% of the respondents reported discrimination in their families and, in some cases, being "forced to leave the family home" (Takács et al. 2006: 40-42). A more recent and general survey (not just about youth specificities) – "European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey" – states that 7% of the most recent incidents of violence concerning LGBT respondents were committed by a member of the family (FRA 2013: 23). Furthermore, the study "Serving our youth: findings from a national survey of services providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless", based on the USA, states that while 46% of the respondents run away because of family rejection, 43% were forced to leave by parents because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Durso; Gates 2012: 4).

which queers could not have access. Within this reality, claims concerning the broadening of the concept of family are a way of revising and disrupting standards. In that sense, Weeks et al. affirm that “through interactions in the social worlds they inhabit, non-heterosexuals shape new ways of understanding their relationships, and acquire the new skills necessary to affirm the validity of different ways of life (2001: 25)”.

The Spanish case offers some good examples of both the impediments implicitly created, even after the approval of the laws, and political discourses questioning the legitimacy of families that do not fit into the heterosexual nuclear norm. Same sex marriage and adoption were legalized in 2005, and in 2006, with the Law of Assisted Reproduction, by which every woman could access this regardless of their marital status and/or sexual orientation. However, legislators and policy makers seemed to forget about lesbian couples, even if sexual orientation was added as a non-discriminatory aspect. Therefore, in 2007, and strangely, in the new law on gender identity⁸, an additional provision was added in order to give the right of maternity to the non-biological mother just if the two women were married, which is not mandatory for heterosexual couples.

Moreover, in 2013, the former Health minister, Ana Mato⁹, changed the law so that only infertile women could use the National Health Service (NHS) to get pregnant. Before that, it had already been difficult to access the NHS because of the waiting time for an appointment. However, since 2013, Assisted Reproduction for single women and lesbian couples is only possible in private clinics with all the material costs that this implies (Trujillo and Burgaleta, 2014). To defend these “cuts representative of a neoliberal revolution imposed by the PP government”, in the words of Lucas Platero (2014: 107), and assuming the very ‘value discourses’ analyzed by Santos, Ana Mato publicly argued that “The lack of a male is not a medical problem”.

Therefore, despite the processes of normative change, when the political discourses assume those conservative values and the law requires more from lesbian couples than straight ones, the truth is that discriminatory acts become legitimized to a certain extent. In view of these situations, normativity features seem to better characterize laws and/or social models than people’s experiences, whether they are queers or not.

Reproduction and Non/Reproductive Systems

Focusing on legal and policy changes relating to same-sex sexuality over time, Roseneil et al. refer to “three processes of normative change: the legitimation of same-sex sexual practice, the protection of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people and the recognition of intimate relationships” (2013: 173). As such, the authors argue for the emergence of a process of “homonormalization”, through normative changes that lead to the changing of norms and value systems through law and policy, “that is, the formal legal inclusion of lesbians and gay men as full and equal citizens”, also remarking on the “incompleteness of the process” (Roseneil et al. 2013: 186). In this sense, more than a question of assimilationism to heteronormativity, it seems fairer to talk about a process of legal homonormalization underway, which is not being effectively accompanied by social and cultural changes, as I will demonstrate with my interviews in the next section.

⁸ Law 3/2007 of 15th march (Ley 3/2007, de 15 de marzo) specifies that “When the woman is married, and not legally or de facto separated, with another woman, the latter may express her agreement (before the childbirth) to the civil registrar in registering the child also in her name” (my translation).

⁹ Minister of the PP, or People's Party (*Partido Popular* in Spanish), a conservative, centre-right and Christian democratic political party in Spain.

For instance, when one refers to reproductive rights nowadays, it is supposed that after so many feminist struggles, there is no longer a direct link between reproduction and sexuality. However, when this concerns queers, the link between reproduction and sexuality is still there, as the example of the Spanish minister Ana Mato so well illustrates. If the chances of parenting for queer people are increasing, through normative changes over the right to adoption and assisted reproduction, it is also true that the constraints are still there, and social rejection grows, as the visibility of these new family models increases through laws and (a few) social policies.

It seems easy to identify assimilationism to the heteronormative society when queers decide to live in partnerships and raise children. After all, those are basic characteristics of the traditional family and, as pointed by Róisín Ryan-Flood, scholarly studies are known for their conclusions of sameness among lesbian, gay and straight parenting practices. In her book *Lesbian Motherhood* (2009), Ryan-Flood undertakes an historical approach to scholarly studies on LGBT parenting, and shows an “assimilative model of lesbian parenting” (2009: 150) that may now be seen as politically strategic, comparing homosexuals with heterosexuals and concluding that there were no differences in child rising, as a strategy to combat discriminatory laws and value systems. Ryan-Flood suggests that the “normative performance” in partnering and parenting, found in some interviews in different works, may be a “discursive resource” (2009: 155) to justify themselves as good parents. These first studies, while being strategic and crucial to new possibilities of family, also raised critics regarding assimilationism and heteronormativity—even if those families are far from being naturalized and privileged as an institution, as the traditional heterosexual model is. Ryan-Flood then argues that the achievement of relational rights allowed the move to a “transformative model of lesbian parenting”—a new approach defended by many authors based on the fact that LGBT parenting could be a model because parents engage in family practices based on equality and may also challenge biological discourses of parenthood (2009: 155). It is also important to bear in mind that those kinds of approaches are not just diachronic, but that they may co-exist at the same time, depending on the countries the study is based in, the scholarly approach and the personal idiosyncrasies of interviewees.

When Lisa Duggan elaborated the concept homonormativity (2003), recalling the term heteronormativity, introduced by Michael Warner (1991), she remarked that “there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling (Duggan 2003: 94)”. In that sense, the author drew up a concept that could serve as a tool to ground a specific political instrumentalization of LGBT sexual politics within a conservative and neoliberal context of consumption, more than an analytical tool with which to consider people’s choices on how to live relationships and deal with parenting desires.

It is possible to find lifestyles beyond (hetero)normativity, not just in the “queer subcultures” analyzed by Halberstam in the previous example, albeit the binary assimilationist/queer does not seem to fit to the vast range of possibilities of building families, of being visible and of being against traditional models. For instance, regarding marriage in the Spanish case, my fieldwork has confirmed that lesbian or bisexual mothers essentially get married when one of them gets pregnant, so that the non-biological mother can also have a legal affiliation

with the child¹⁰. Marriage is moving from a romantic pattern of love to a legal mandatory procedure for those who want to have children and avoid further problems.

Going further, when lesbian or bisexual women fight for their right to raise a child, they are fighting for their right to intimacy, to intimate life and the public implications of this. Queer motherhood (or queer parenting) is a possibility that is enormously upsetting and which highlights the tensions of the value-discourses based on nature and on the ideal of producing sameness (Ahmed 2004), that is, producing boys like their fathers and girls like their mothers; the same as other forms of raising children beyond the norm of gender roles.

Rebuilding Spanish Families

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), especially within non-normative sexualities, but also in heterosexual contexts, brought about the possibility of subverting the traditional concept of family and reproduction by splitting coital sex and procreation (Weeks 2001: 165). Those transformations are connected with feminist and LGBT movement claims for their rights regarding sexual and intimate citizenship. As argued by Roseneil et al.:

the concept of intimate citizenship offers a new way of thinking about citizenship that recognizes the importance of political, social and cultural transformations of recent decades, and grants a central importance to women's movements and lesbian and gay movements (Roseneil et al. 2012: 42-43).

Therefore, ART are at the same time good examples of the difficulties in matching queers' sexual and intimate citizenship with reproductive citizenship. That is, those are not different models of citizenship involving different rights, but with regard to queers, their rights concerning sexual citizenship highlight them as being not welcome to the "reproducing well" system. Legislation on ART continues to benefit the heterocisexual model and laws are based on the assumption of the heterosexuality of the population.

Despite the controversial nature of ART, it allows mostly women (but also gay men in the much more difficult context of surrogacy) to have easier access to parenthood, and avoid problems that could arise with adoption processes, where people detect (or are afraid of) homophobic attitudes among social workers. Even if this implies a medical process for women, the truth is that with some luck, where they do not have to make many attempts, access to ART is to some extent affordable by middle class women living in Spain. Thus, queer motherhood is a process of choice that is becoming easier through ART. Actually, even before those techniques, in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Adrienne Rich re-evaluated motherhood outside the patriarchal system, that is, motherhood by election and not as a product of the patriarchal institution where motherhood is understood as a woman's obligation. In that sense, queer mothers are going beyond the assumptions of heteronormativity, raising children by choice and without the patriarchal figure.

Drawing on the interviews I carried out on women in the context of lesbian motherhood, one of the most striking conclusions is that lesbian and bisexual mothers are experiencing many

¹⁰ All the interviewees became mothers while engaging in a relationship, within a project as a couple. Only in one case did marriage occur prior to the decision to have children. In another case, one of the mothers is divorced from another woman, with whom she never had children.

difficult situations, even in a pioneering country concerning LGBT rights like Spain, at different institutional and on various intimate levels, because they do not fit within the norm and thus have to face countless challenges, in this way proving the political dimension of lesbian motherhood through their very visibility. Despite the processes of homonormalisation through normative changes mentioned by Roseneil et al. (2013), lesbian couples have to face different forms of resistance to their existence. A careful analysis of the interviewees' narratives has enabled me to understand the tensions between normative changes and an effective social and cultural acceptance of a wider range of families beyond the traditional heterosexual model.

Tasha, a second lieutenant in the Army, in her early forties, mother of a child with Luna, her Serbian wife, gave me an interview where the word "fear" appears extremely frequently, due to both her job and to her family. In addition, she related some cases of discrimination in the law and in the hospital where she gave birth. The couple decided that Tasha would go for an *In Vitro* process with donated sperm and her partner's eggs, in order to avoid invasive questions being put to the non-biological mother¹¹, and she commented about something that happened to a couple of lesbian friends:

If you are two fathers or two mothers, wait, you have to be psychologically stable, you have to be as supposed. I ask you a question [to the non-biological mother]: are you going to take care of the children? And so on... When this friend told me what happened to them when they were registering their son, it freaked me out so much that I said, "I don't want this. Look, I do not care if I will spend more money", but, really, I think it is a personal humiliation, if someone asks you if you could take care of that child (Tasha, 2016).

Tasha is mentioning the procedures in the clinics for two women to be able to register a child. The two women need to marry and then prove this to the clinic, so they may obtain a document attesting they started the ART process together. Then, once one of them is pregnant they both must go to the civil registry with the document from the clinic to start a pre-registration process before birth. Tasha was referring to a case where the couple was not legally married, and as such, they had to move forward with a co-adoption process, during which the non-biological mother may have to answer some very invasive and humiliating questions.

However, this does not occur with straight couples, even if the father is not the biological father and the mother has had to use donated semen. The assumption that heterosexuality makes one capable of raising a child, even when the father is not the biological father is a huge discrimination against non-biological lesbian mothers, who have to go through an inquiry. The same happens with the mandatory marriage of lesbian couples, as already mentioned. Another example from Tasha's interview concerns the hospital where she gave birth and the power and legitimization that some people and institutions feel when criticizing queer families:

A gynecologist went there (...) well, the typical, right? She asked Luna "Who are you?" and Luna said that she was the mother of the child. And the gynecologist asked if it was an insemination and after Luna's explanation (...) what she replied was something like this: "Ah, it is a donation, and then do not say it out loud

¹¹ According to the law, they are both biological mother; one gave birth but the genetic material belongs to the other. Yet, contrary to what the interviewee expected, this does not facilitate the registration process for the two mothers.

because that's illegal". And Luna said, "Well, it is not illegal, you can call it a gap in the law, or a loophole, or whatever, but it is not illegal." And the other replied, "Yes, yes, yes, it is illegal, fertility clinics do what they want, and they do not care about legality". (...) I was hallucinating, of course I had no strength to defend myself, obviously... Luna had no strength to defend ourselves because we had been sleepless for 48 hours [difficult labor]. More concerned about our babies than about what that crazy lady said, right? And we were not able to defend ourselves (Tasha, 2016).

The unanswerable question here is if this gynecologist said that because she was a very conservative and traditional person that just wanted to hurt the couple at a moment where Tasha had already been monitored for 24 hours, or if she, being a gynecologist, did not know a law that had come into force already 10 years previously. Another possible explanation is that the doctor did not realize they were a lesbian couple and assumed that it was a surrogacy, which is illegal in Spain. In that case, this would be a strong example of the invisibility of lesbian and queer families, despite the legal change.

Those examples show that even if lesbian or bisexual women want to have access to motherhood, the heteronormative system is almost non-reproducible for them. They are not allowed within it, their very existence is seen as a threat and those who feel threatened create obstacles for queer families, as demonstrated by both the legal aspects related by Tasha and the behavior of that doctor. It seems, therefore, that the processes of legal homonormalization are far from leading to a process of assimilation to a normative system (even if people would prefer that).

Another interesting example is that of Juana, and her partner and the difficulties they faced with Juana's family. Juana is in her early forties and she and her partner are both shop assistants, working and living in one of Madrid's peripheral neighborhoods. They kept Juana's pregnancy secret for four months and finally they announced to her parents that they were going to marry and to have a child. With an already difficult story concerning the acceptance of her daughter's sexual orientation, this was how they reacted:

My parents felt it was outrageous, saying that our child would not have a father, that everyone was going to point the finger at us, and it would be seen as if I was going around sleeping with everyone, all that... Now here they are, they are fabulous grandparents and like them [the twins] madly ... but we had to go through all that (Juana, 2016).

This story confirms that grandchildren are usually the reason why homophobic families start to accept their son's or daughter's sexuality (Pichardo 2011), but this is more motivated by the idea of family continuity and the desire to have grandchildren than true respect for their son's/daughter's sexual orientation and parenthood desires. However, the approach to the biological family, even though it has been homophobic in the past, should not be a factor in arguing whether people are or are not assimilating to normativity. Both Juana and Tasha argued that they have normal families, that they are normal and they do not understand why people do not accept that, which can be analyzed through Ryan-Flood's (2009: 155) proposal where normative performance can be considered as a discourse resource, more for themselves than for me, as interviewer. A straight couple would hardly talk about parenthood like that. All in all, it seems that the visibility that parenting ascribes to queer lives transforms them on a daily basis into activists

for queerness and queer possibilities motivated by the difference they feel between themselves and straight parenting.

Therefore, queer families may barely be considered normative, because of external factors, such as their insertion within a larger landscape where homophobic situations unfortunately happen in their lives with some degree of regularity, which maintains their sense of non-belonging. Moreover, such families also present some internal factors, their own idiosyncrasies within a neoliberal society, that make them reinvent new models of family, of child-raising, that are crucial to enlarging different family models and, as such, to contribute to a larger range of possibilities beyond a binary gender system, a patriarchal system or a capitalist system. Given this, and as proposed by both Róisín Ryan-Flood (2009) and Yvette Taylor (2009), the binary model of analyzing queer families as normative or transformative is not enough.

According to the various contexts that these mothers have to deal with in their daily lives, their experiences, more than their identities, can be considered as somewhat transformative. The more social resistance emerges, the more transformative will visibility as a queer family be in a dominant heterosexual and conservative context.

Queer motherhood implies a constant negotiation with society, with queer mothers making themselves visible in spaces that go beyond their comfort zone. For instance, one of my interviewees, Raquel, in her late forties, talks about her and her partner's doubts about choosing a school where their son would not be discriminated and, when they had decided about the school, they did something very interesting:

Yeah, well, the thing is that our rainbow families' association gave us five or six books [children's books representing queer families]; it was the "colour library" as I've said you before. But we, as we were obsessed with the issue of stories, the school issue, and with the issue of what they would say (...). So we have now a collection of stories, but this big, come on. And we again went to buy [books] to take them to school. And besides, I told them, to read them please, read the Penguins, and Chives and Paprika, read, because there are very beautiful stories (Raquel, 2016).

Raquel and her partner felt the fear of rejection, and even more destructive, they were afraid that their son could be discriminated against for having two mothers. Therefore, they decided to be very present in the school. They participated in all its activities and showed themselves as a queer family. Raquel gave workshops there (not about diversity within families, but about Art history, which is her specialization) and, as there was a lack of such material in the school library, they bought books about diversity in families, mostly about queer families. Therefore, the existing social and cultural inequalities led lesbian mothers to undertake a constant effort involving reinvention and negotiation with their broader context (in that case a normative institution such as a school).

Another example is Blanca's case. She is in her early thirties, and she and her partner are mothers of a two-year-old boy. For them, to put him into a pre-school as soon as her maternity leave finished would have been very neoliberal and patriarchal, because their son would have been without them both the whole day, lacking care and affection from them. Therefore, they both agreed that Blanca would stay at home, as long as they could economically afford that situation. According to her, it was not a difficult decision:

That is, she prefers to go to work, even though she doesn't want to send her child to daycare. For her, the ideal is that I'm with our son, and for me the ideal is to be with him, that is, it is by mutual agreement. But if we had the roles the other way round, the two of us would be uncomfortable: I would not want to go to work and leave our son here, and she would not want to be here all day with him, because she would go crazy (Blanca, 2016).

It would be easy to read their situation as normative, since the biological mother stays at home, and the other mother goes to work. However, this would be misreading what they are really doing. The non-biological mother is an autonomous worker, so, in addition to her own preferences, she is more likely to earn more if she works more, than Blanca. This model was also present in Ryan-Flood's study, where the author also found examples of lesbian women preferring to spend more time with children: "a model of motherhood whereby the ideal situation for a child is to have a caregiver who is at home at the same time as the child" (Ryan-Flood 2009: 165). Blanca and her partner agree that to leave her son at an early age in daycare for the whole day would probably mean that he would not develop affectivity in the same way that he does at home. They also agree that in capitalist societies women are encouraged to go to work soon after they gave birth, relegating care and affection to others, such as nannies or daycare facilities. In that sense, more than being normative, they are disrupting both the patriarchal and the capitalist model into which women rights have been framed. In her interview-book, *Maternidades Subversivas* (Insubordinate Maternities), María Llopis argues that there are many people living motherhood "beyond the capitalist patriarchy that ignores that care is the basis for the survival of society" (2015: 19). Indeed, Llopis's interviewees are a good example of a broader sense of disruptive motherhood as the insubordination may be based on gender, sexuality, anti-capitalism, feminism or the intersection of two or more of those different categories that set subjects apart from hegemonic standards.

Final Considerations

In times when queer lives and choices have come under the scrutiny of scholars, activists, policy and opinion makers, it is urgent to combine political criticism of heterosexism, heteronormativity, capitalism and neoliberalism with an effective sense of the different stages of homonormalisation of queer people in different societies, as well as the political dimension of lesbian motherhood. At the same time, and as a way to avoid any deprivation of humanity, feelings, desires and/or fears of queer people while addressing them in reports or scholarly work about queer lives it is fundamental to understand that both change and continuity regarding social and familial models are present in people's trajectories.

Accordingly, daily struggles and concerns such as those of the interviewees should be at the forefront of the analysis of queer families: more equal education with respect to gender (often the situation for families of origin and kindergartens); the difficulties in choosing a kindergarten or school; the need to find other queer families to feel some support, and so on. These are examples of queerness on a daily basis, examples of struggles against a normative system, much more than assimilationism to it. Even so, the assimilationist/radical binary is not enough to evaluate complex and intersectional realities such as those presented in this paper. To be part of a queer family with children is a huge process of choice, negotiation and the search for the necessary networks to face

injustice against human rights and it may, at the same time, involve a very transgressive model against modern neoliberal and patriarchal societies.

Santos's notion of Syncretic Activism (2013) is fundamental here in order to imagine queer dialogues between heterogeneous political positions and/or lived experiences. Therefore, reflexive motherhood – motherhood as a process of horizontal choice between two or more persons – is far from reproducing a normative script. On the contrary, it is about women in lesbian relationships exercising their reproductive rights as citizens, while still facing suspicions regarding their parenting skills. My interviewees' experiences of motherhood are an act of legitimation of both their own desires and the common desires within a couple and, at the same time, a struggle to create a future over past and present difficulties.

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