
"Mujer, levántate y anda."  
(Woman, get up and walk.) Says Natalia in La Plaza del Diamante.  
Mercé Rodoreda

CHAPTER 1. WOMEN AS NEIGHBORS

Introduction

"My husband is a communist, and so was my father, but I am more like my mother, I am a Catholic."

This was the kind of answer often given when, in a previous study, in 1983, I asked women about their political and religious opinions (Thurén 1988). It was an answer that indicated that political and religious opinions were of the same general kind, and that within this one field, it was a male thing to have political opinions, while women were more interested in religion; it also hinted that men tended to be radical, women more conservative. The same thing has been reported in most ethnographies from Spain, throughout the 20th century.

This is no longer so. And even in 1983 it was being challenged. The answer quoted was common, but it was far from the only one possible. Still, the taken-for-granted quality the answer had for those who gave it, in combination with the unanimity of ethnographic reports, indicate that such a general idea has been pervasive and may therefore be slow in changing. So it is worthwhile to ask what it looks like today. What contradictions are at work in and around the ideas about gender and politics?

As a feminist, one must be wary of easy optimism and ask which apparent changes might be old ideas in new clothing. Throughout Europe, women have been excluded from political life to a very large extent for centuries, and if they are now entering, it is a relatively recent phenomenon, the numbers are still small even though growing, and the proportion of women varies very much among various political scenes. It is no wonder women's political participation is a major topic for feminist studies.1 It is theoretically important to understand how the changes are coming about and to interpret the discourses about them. Empirically, it is necessary to gather information on what is actually happening, what women are actually doing, and what women and men are saying about it. We need testimonies and case studies, and they should contain carefully contextualized data that are empirically rich, informative and probing.

This book reports on a study of women in a social movement in Spain. It is not a women's movement, but there are a lot of women in it. It is called the neighborhood movement, el movimiento vecinal. It is one place where women participate in political life in a most unusual proportion: they are about half of the activists.

The study is anthropological in methods and intentions: it is based on fieldwork and it uses qualitative data to describe one human context for the double purpose of making that context known, for its intrinsic interest, and contributing to the always ongoing effort of comparative understanding of social and cultural phenomena of the kinds that are found in that type of context. It is also a feminist study in the sense that it analyses the workings of gender not just out of descriptive curiosity but also in order to contribute to the struggle against circumstances that

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disadvantage women and create hierarchies and rigidities in the gender order. Feminist theory, and gender theory in general, has developed in an interdisciplinary field of thought, and this book addresses all colleagues in that field; it therefore seeks to avoid anthropological jargon, and even if most of the references are anthropological, it seeks to make the anthropological understandings relevant for research on gender in other disciplines as well. My hope is that the book will also be useful and interesting for feminists outside the academic world, including the women in the neighborhood movement itself, and for other activists and politicians interested in democratic experiments.

First questions

In Spain, politics is still to a very large extent an activity for men. To be sure, most urban Spaniards, both women and men, would protest that statement. They would say that it used to be so, but that everything has now changed. According to statistics, however, men still dominate numerically. The number of female parliamentarians, for example, hovered around 6% during most of the 1980s. In the 1990s it went up to around 16%.² This was an important change, of course, and it is even greater if we compare with the forty years of Franco regime (1936/39–1975/78), when the percentage was close to zero.³ Things have changed, and they continue to change, and that is what is culturally most visible. There has been constant and aggressive questioning of the old gender order in all domains of society, by feminists, in TV debates, and so on, for close to thirty years. Since this is a noticeable fact, it is logical for people to focus on how things have changed and reject anything that smacks of traditionalism.

However, most public activities in Spain continue to be gender marked as either female or male, and the ones considered political are male. Over 80% of parliamentarians were still men in the 1990s. If we look at party leadership, higher levels of administration, etc, we see the same general picture (Las mujeres en cifras 2003). And professional women politicians have problems that their male colleagues do not.⁴

There certainly are public activities where women participate. None of them are clearly political, and they are not usually considered to be about politics at all, but some have political overtones, such as charity work, parish work, and the parent-teacher associations of many schools.⁵ However, the degree of political content in such activities is uneven, and they are often outspokenly conservative, including a conservative stance on what women can and should do. Furthermore, to the extent women in them do political work, they do so in a way that is close to traditionally female roles, especially that of mother. Most importantly, these are domains where women are in overwhelming majority. In other words, they may be public, but they are gender marked as appropriate for women. Men can participate in them, if they choose to, but mostly men do other things. Women's participation in them does not contribute very much to changes in the gender order.

In spite of this division of labor, however, there are a few public spaces that are slowly becoming gender neutral. One of the clearest examples is the neighborhood movement. This is a big movement, with some one and a half to two million members. It is political in that it is

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² And as I write this, in 2004, it has just taken a dramatic jump to 30%.
³ All in all thirteen women sat in the Francoist parliament between 1942 and 1977. All but two of these entered after 1963 (Asociación "Mujeres en la transición democrática" 1999:220).
⁴ For instance, in a booklet published by a feminist group in Madrid, women active in political parties describe the lack of understanding they encounter. Family and friends complain of neglect, party colleagues accuse them of obstructing "real" party work with their feminism, and the people they work so hard for, women, feel that women politicians no longer understand ordinary women's everyday life, that they act distant in personal relationships, that they become callous, that their thinking turns abstract, etc – that is, that they become unfeminine (Forum de política feminista 1991). See also the personal testimonies by women with prominent political careers, such as Alberdi 2001, Alborch 1999.
⁵ By politics I mean approximately activities that take as their concern decision-making about issues affecting a community larger than a family and not defined by kinship but otherwise of any size and type. When I say "clearly political" or "conventional politics" I refer to a narrower sphere, activities that are seen as political in everyday speech, especially party politics. There will be more discussion on the concept of politics below.
concerned with public issues of all kinds. Yet about half of its activists are women. And it is not gender marked.

In view of the fact that women do not participate much in other political spaces, one must ask: why here? What is it about the neighborhood movement that attracts women? Who are the women who are attracted to it? What do they give as their reasons for preferring it to other possible activities? What does it mean for women to participate in it? What happens to women who do? Do their ideas of politics and gender change because of their experiences in the movement? What experiences do they themselves consider important? Is it possible to discern any relationship between women's participation in the neighborhood movement and the overall changes in the urban gender orders of Spain?

The purpose of this study is to examine the processes of gender change in this one specific context in such a way as to point to their wider significance. This special movement and its meaning for women has both theoretical significance and intrinsic empirical interest. I ask political studies questions about motives and obstacles for participation in public life and gender studies questions about processes of power in the gender order.

**Short on method**

I participated, observed and interviewed in the movement, in six different towns and cities, plus some contacts with a few more places, in 1994–1995 and again, for short re-visits, in 2002–2003. The six places were Madrid, Valencia, Cordova, Vigo, Linares and Elda. During the main fieldwork period I lived in Madrid and spent about one month in each of the other places. I worked intensely with interviews and participant observation during field months, and spent every other month in Madrid (where I had a place to live), writing notes and sorting material, while also doing fieldwork in Madrid. The central movement office in Madrid helped me contact the federations in the other places. In three of them (Vigo, Linares, Elda), I was invited upon arrival to speak at a federation board meeting to explain my project, whereupon the federation called a larger meeting, where I gave a talk and answered questions. This led to invitations to visit various associations. Usually I also participated regularly in the federation meetings that were held during my stay, studied federation archives, especially newspaper clippings, participated in demonstrations and other activities and interviewed leading persons in the federation, grass roots activists in the associations and whenever possible people who had been active but no longer were. The meetings in both federations and local associations were usually lively occasions with lots of questions about and opinions on my project, where I could discern local discourses. I collected boxfuls of typed and printed material, such as posters, bulletins and correspondence. In Valencia and Cordova I approached the federation through personal contacts, otherwise the pattern was similar. In Madrid I also interviewed some key persons and participated in some federation meetings, but I concentrated mainly on doing participant observation in one association, in the *barrio*6 where I lived in order to follow events over the full year.

The revisits followed a similar pattern.

In the intervening years I have also kept up contact with one association in Valencia, which I have visited many times, and where old friends keep me informed of events on all levels of the movement.

There is more information on fieldwork in chapters 9–12 and also in Appendix I, where I especially develop the reflexivity required of a study like this one.

I used to participate myself in the movement in the 1970s, when I was married to a Madrilien man and lived in a peripheral area of Madrid, mostly as a housewife and mother, but also active in associations, among them the neighborhood association of that barrio. During my first anthropological fieldwork, in Valencia 1982–83, I participated regularly in the neighborhood association of the barrio where I worked.

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6 *Barrio* means approximately neighborhood. More on this basic concept later in this chapter and in chapter 3. Because of its special connotations, I do not find it appropriate to translate it into any of the approximate English equivalents like ward, district, area, part of town or neighborhood. For this and other Spanish terms used, cf. Glossary.
My special relationship to the movement has certainly influenced this study. First of all, it was a precondition. I would not have had access to so many contexts without this personal background. Second, it made the fieldwork experience emotional for me. And third, it has inevitably influenced my analysis. I do not consider these influences negative. Quite on the contrary, my personal interest has fueled my search for keys to understanding. This is not a project from a cool, distant standpoint; it is involved, committed, and therefore also committed to the hard work of not taking things for what they seem. I do my best to offer readers tools and empirical data so that they can engage critically with my perspective and procedures. I believe strongly that this is what all social scientists should do. In good feminist tradition I have tried to place the researcher on the same plane as the researched, and as far as possible also give readers access to this plane.

This book contains many stories women have told me about their own experiences. There are also descriptions of a number of events and situations that I witnessed directly. They have all been chosen to present discourses that are prominent in the movement and as different from each other as possible. They are illustrations, of course, but my intention is also to present stories and contexts fully enough so that readers may obtain a feeling for the atmosphere in the movement and perhaps try out interpretations different from mine.

Organization of the text

This book is organized in the manner of a spiral. There is a movement from general information on the movement, narrowing in on general information on women's participation, then on to specific stories and finally back to a generalizing and analytical level.

The aim of this first chapter is to give a quick introduction, as an appetizer. It begins with a short historical background. Then it explains what a barrio is and how women's lives in a barrio influence their participation in the movement. There is an introductory scene from an actual meeting in a neighborhood association. Finally, I briefly present the questions and issues of the study in the light of relevant theory.

The chapter ends with an overview of the book.

Background

Spain has gone through dramatic processes of economic and social transformation during the last few decades. In the 1950s it was a mainly agricultural country with a problem of feeding its population. During the 1960s it was urbanized and industrialized at a rapid pace. Of all OECD countries, only Japan had a faster growth rate during that decade. This meant that a large proportion of the population moved from villages to cities. Around the largest cities, shantytowns mushroomed in the 1960s and slowly disappeared during the 1970s.

There was an improvement of average living standards, but it came at a high social cost. Not only was village social life destroyed and workers' health strained by having several jobs, stress and poverty, but all of these processes took place under conditions of dictatorship. Then even that changed. During the 1970s a political "transition" was begun. The dictator Francisco Franco died in 1975. More or less democratic general elections were held in 1977 – for the first time since 1936. A new constitution was approved in 1978, democratic local government came in 1979 and after new general elections a socialist government took over in late 1982. The degrees of democracy and socialism are certainly issues for debate, but it is a very different country from the one Franco governed.

Individual lives changed too, of course: experiences and expectations had to be re-interpreted. There was cultural change that was just as dramatic as the economic and political change.

In the Mediterranean area, gender usually plays a special role as a root metaphor. The relationship between women and men is used in proverbs, poetry, song, jokes, drama, gestures, insults and so on, to illustrate political power, religious feelings, philosophical abstractions and

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7 During fieldwork, the socialist party, PSOE, still governed. In the elections of 1996 it lost and the conservative party, Partido Popular (PP) took over. In 2004 PSOE came back to power. These power shifts have been carried out peacefully, so the risks of backsliding into violence now seem small.
almost anything else. When something important happens in such a society, it is bound to affect the gender order. The gender order also shapes the general processes of change. And change is *culturally perceived in gender terms*. If you mentioned "change"—any kind of change—in Spain during the 1970s and 1980s, chances were that people would start debating sexual morals or mothers working outside the home. The tendency is still there, but weakening. Perhaps because gender is retreating from its privileged cultural place. The gender order *is* really changing.8

The neighborhood movement was born as a semi-legal resistance movement against the Franco regime, in the late 1960s. Its express purpose was to improve conditions in the areas of towns and cities (*barrios*) where poor people lived, but since this entailed a struggle against the dictatorship, "participatory democracy" became an essential objective. During the 1970s and early 1980s, it played a role in the country's transition to democracy. Now it is slowly finding a new place for itself on the Spanish political scene.

It has been and still is a true grassroots movement. There is a relaxed "come as you are" style about it. Many who join are not at all interested in politics to begin with. But they learn.

Most barrios of Spanish towns and cities now have a neighborhood association, usually with small storefront premises, where the activists meet once a week or so, where debates and courses are held, where the association keeps its sports trophies, and posters from all kinds of campaigns decorate the walls. Often too there are newspaper clippings and photos from events in the barrio. The movement activities can be seen as a kind of mirror of rising living standards and of the other great changes in Spanish society. In the early years the issues were elemental ones, like housing, piped water, transportation, electricity. During the 1970s, as the dictatorship lay dying, the movement campaigns were mostly about political liberties; during the 1980s they were about schools, public libraries, medical care and similar things now seen as necessities. Now,9 in the 1990s, many associations are concentrating on social work and course activities. Exercise and folk dances for housewives, literacy for the elderly, plastic arts for children, handicraft, dress-making; a football club, a film club; an 8th of March demonstration, a day of international solidarity; a cultural week with a concert, a couple of lectures and a photo contest; a sports week, a barrio *fiesta* and so on. But still also watching out for barrio interests, trying to improve the material conditions of daily life.

Such a place10 can tell us something about the relationship between the gender order, the political order and cultural change. It also has much to say about the Spanish urban working class,11 its living standards, history, present day worries, values and pleasures. This is not an ethnography of that aspect, but the attentive reader will be able to glean information on it, on and between the lines of the descriptive chapters. These conditions of everyday life form the context of the neighborhood movement.

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8 As it would have to after such fundamental changes in other spheres of life (cf. Thurén 1988). But please note that this sketch of the changes is offered only as background. A discussion of the possible causal relationships between different facets of these processes would take us too far from the main purpose of this study. Likewise, I leave open the question of the depth and extent of change in the gender order.

9 The present tense refers throughout the book to the mid and late 1990s, when most of the work of observation and analysis was carried out. For comments on what happened later, see chapters 13 and 14 and the epilogues to some of the chapters.

10 I will treat the movement as a whole as a "place", i.e. not a physical locality, of course, but a social context with a discernible specific shape connected to its surroundings.

11 A discussion of the class concept would take us too far from the purposes of this book. Let me just say that I use it in an approximate and descriptive way, similar to the way it is used in the movement itself: people are working class if they (or their father or husband) have manual jobs, or lack higher education, or enjoy no more than average living standards of their barrio. In more sophisticated movement discourses one can encounter a more Marxist class concept, according to which all persons who sell their labor power in order to survive are working class, and there are also discussions on such issues as class in itself and for itself. But this is becoming more and more unusual. The common attitude is that class differences are evident, barrio people are not rich, and it is not unusual for the word *vecinos* (neighbors, inhabitants, cf. chapter 3 and Glossary) to be used as a near synonym to working class.
During the early years, the movement was almost all male, sprinkled with a few exceptional women (for instance nuns, lawyers, social workers), but the proportion of women has steadily increased. The newly recruited activists in the 1980s and 1990s were mostly women, and mostly average barrio women.

The gender order in Spain has traditionally separated women and men into different life styles, different domains of activities and different daily spaces, all marked with contrasting gender symbols. The key metaphor for it all is that "women are of the home, men are of the street". "The home" stands for family life, household chores (even outdoor ones), maternal duties, privacy and intimacy. "The street" stands for economic activities, friendship and sociability, sexual activities outside marriage, formal education, and all decision-making that affects units larger than the nuclear family.

The "street" is thus not just the physical street where traffic passes by between buildings. Metaphorically, it is social life beyond family life. It is the Spanish word for "the public sphere", one could say. This used to be the male arena. Women can and could be in the physical street, but if they were there for purposes related to family life, they were metaphorically still "in the home" (Sánchez Pérez 1990, Uhl 1991).

The separation street/home is growing less rigid and less important, and it is under constant debate, but it is still a fact of life (cf. Thurén 1988 and forthcoming). Most women lead lives very different from those of most men. And since different vital experiences produce different subjectivities, women's political priorities are often different from those of men. So are their styles of interaction and communication. This makes it difficult for women and men to work together, even when they share some goals.

Women are now "conquering the street" – a feminist slogan from the 1980s, still sometimes heard. It refers to the struggle for the right to be in the street physically without having to suffer risks of sexual assault or comments on your looks or gossip about your morals. Women claim the right to use the street at all hours, even at night, because women, like men, participate in associations, go to evening classes, sometimes work overtime and have to return home late, etc. But the slogan also, and above all, refers to the struggle for the public sphere. To conquer the street means to transcend the gendered division of spheres.

For example, women have conquered the labor market. They are still a minority there, but not as small as it used to be. It is very difficult for women to combine family life and a career, but some do, the numbers are growing, and the cultural evaluation of the effort has changed radically.

Women are also conquering associational life. It is no longer unusual for women to participate actively in associations of all kinds; they can even sit on the board in associations dominated by men. It is true that much associational life is gendered. Women dominate in parish activities, parent-teacher-associations and other activities related to domestic and family duties, i.e. activities that are still in some extended sense "of the home". Some of these may come close to having a certain political content, but they are not seen as such. They are women's activities; therefore by definition not political, not "of the street", and very few men participate in them. Men dominate in associations related to public life in general, such as sports, culture, human rights, ecology, and most especially in associations related to politics, like political parties and trade unions.

In other words, the world of associations as a whole is quite gendered, in spite of variations in details, and that genderization is parallel to the gendered division of life into public and private spheres. In spite of this rather clear division of labor, however, there are a few activities that are becoming gender neutral. One of the clearest examples is the neighborhood movement.

It was self-evident, according to the cultural logics of the times, why men initiated and ran the neighborhood movement in its early phase. But now the women are coming in. The numbers vary greatly according to region, but as a whole about half of the activists in the 1990s are women. And men make up the other half! This is not a trivial statement. According to the logic of the home : women :: street: men metaphor, when women enter a domain in important numbers, the domain is redefined from "street" to "home", i.e. from male to female, so men must leave. This has happened in some parts of the neighborhood movement, as we will see, but as a whole it has not. The
The neighborhood movement is half male, half female, and that, not the presence of women, is the really unusual thing about it. Nowadays, there are women in political parties and labor unions, too, and the proportion is growing, but as yet they are too few to threaten the male gender mark on them. If the future is to be degenderization, the neighborhood movement is "farther ahead" on the road, and that is exactly how some activists express it.

But that does not mean that all women in it see it as a political arena. For many women, the neighborhood movement is undoubtedly something very similar to a parent-teacher-association, i.e. a suitable place for an extension of their duties as mothers and homemakers. In this sense, the movement has played a role for women similar to that of movements in other coun-tries that have been compared to the neighborhood movement (Castells 1986, Salida 1989): *ollas comunes* in Latin America, for example. Women tend to see political parties as male/ difficult/ distant/ uncomfortable spaces, whereas the neighborhood movement is seen as something closer to home, easier to understand, less of a power game, more of an instrument for improving the surroundings of your own home, the life of your own children. It is not politics, they say.

Political or not, the associations are a public context, and it is more gender-neutral than almost any other public context in Spain. Many of the women activists do things not marked as feminine. And even when they do traditionally female work, such as handicraft or being in charge of the relationship between the neighborhood association and the parent-teacher association of the local school, they do leave their homes and get involved in issues that concern more people than their own families. They cannot avoid learning new things.

But such women are often despised by more "advanced" women, i.e. those who feel that gender markers must be explicitly criticized. There is tension inside the neighborhood movement between people who want to use it as a platform for radical social change and people who see it more as an instrument to solve problems of everyday life, and this tension is also reflected in debates on women's issues. Should women in the movement stay as they are and do "feminine" things in "feminine" ways, or should they "learn" and "move forwards" towards being "persons"?

We can distinguish several reasons for women's increasing presence in the movement.

First, during the political transition, a lot of people left the movement in order to work instead within the just legalized political parties, and the people who left were men, since very few women were party activists. So the proportion of women in the movement rose automatically. And this in turn made it easier for more women to join, as we will see.

Second, the movement is territorially defined. It is in and of and about the barrio. And the barrio is where women not only live but also work. Women do not stay indoors; even in traditionalist places where they are expected, according to hegemonic norms, to remain within the confines of "the home", they move along city streets as much as men, or more, because while men

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12 *Ollas comunes*, literally 'shared pots', are arrangements in which food is prepared communally in order to save on costs. Usually women do not just do the cooking but most of the organizing.

13 "Person" is a key symbol in Spain, with various meanings but always strongly positive. In the context of everyday discussions on gender, or on personal growth, "to be (or have become) a person" usually means approximately that one has changed from being enclosed in a role in being able to take individual decisions and steer one's life according to one's own wishes, and/or that one has moved from loneliness to having a number of acquaintances and places to go to, and/or that one has obtained recognition as someone who counts (in whatever sense, in whatever context). In more explicitly feminist contexts, it usually means that one has liberated oneself from stereotypical ideas of what a "woman" should be and that one has organized one's life to be able to maintain a more "enlightened" lifestyle materially, usually by means of a salaried job. It is sometimes used as the opposite of gendered categorization: "Let us stop talking about women and men, we are all persons." The most general meaning is (in my words) someone recognized as a full member of society and with the capacity to act as one.

14 I speak of activists, not of members in general, for two reasons. First, it is principally as activists that members influence the movement and are influenced by it. Second, it is as activists women are about half. This can be seen at meetings, demonstrations, and so on. As members, it is difficult to know. Cf. chapter 3 on membership files.

15 That in turn has to do with the general view of politics as a male sphere, of course, but "progressive" women who reject that interpretation often stay away from party politics anyway with the argument that existing parties do not understand or bother with women's issues, or, worse, manipulate them. This is a common view, among all sorts of women, and many feminists share it. The acrimonious debate on "double militancy", i.e. whether feminists could / should also be active in political parties, divided the Spanish women's movement into opposed camps during most of the 1980s and is still a sensitive issue. Cf. chapter 5.
are at their jobs, women's family duties take them on errands all around the barrio. During the daytime, typical barrio streets are full of women and only a few men, and it is full of activities that form part of family life, such as children walking to school and housewives shopping for food. In other words, the barrio is a mediator between "home" and "street". It is outside the home, but it is close to home; and it is a women's space during much of the day.

An association that takes the barrio as its object of concern is thus a suitable place for women interested in public life. The decision to go into the "street" is not so momentous, since in a way they stay in or near the "home". There may be opposition to their presence, but less than in other political contexts. It is a place where they can learn about things that interest them without having to adopt a different interaction style before they can take part.

From a practical angle, too, it is much easier for a woman to be active in a neighborhood association than in a party or a union. The premises are close to home; so going to a meeting takes less time, which is important for most women, especially mothers of small children. Also, you can take the children along if you have to, or you can tell neighbors where you are so they can come for you if necessary. Proximity is also an advantage for older women and/or people who do not read very well.\footnote{16}

The timing fits both women and men, with inevitable individual variations. The meetings are in the evening, when most people are back from work, but before dinner time, and Spanish children go to bed late, so even mothers of school-children can attend to family duties after the meetings\footnote{17} For mothers of small children, it is more difficult.

Pleasure is a motive for participation, too, for men as well as for women, but more so for women, since they have fewer alternative meeting places. In spite of the serious purposes and in spite of frustrations and conflicts and sometimes personal risks, most activists have fun in the movement; and many activists told me that they had all their friends in the movement.

Perhaps the main reason for women's presence, however, is that women usually know more about the barrio than men, and this legitimates their participation to some extent even in the eyes of those who would uphold traditional gender specifications of domains. Only about one fourth of working class married women work outside their homes.\footnote{18} For the other three fourths, the barrio is

\footnote{16} Women tend to organize on the basis of the barrio, not only in the neighborhood movement, but also when they form groups for other purposes. Cf. Maquieira 1995:290. Territoriality is also an important principle for traditional Spanish associationism. Cf. chapter 2. Cf. also Cucó 1991 and Cucó and Pujadas 1990.

\footnote{17} For readers with no knowledge of Spanish daily life, here is a simplified description of the main divisions of time: Most people wake up around 7 or 8. Factory and construction work usually starts at 8, schools and offices around 9. Breakfast is very light. Around 10 or 11, schools and work places have a break, called almuerzo (morning snack) or hora del bocadillo (sandwich time), when people have a sandwich, a filled baguette, coffee or beer... School children have lunch approximately between 1 and 3, adults between 2 and 4. Most stores close between 1 and 4, food stores between 2 and 5. (In recent years a few major establishments have stopped closing for lunch.) Younger school children are back home around 5, older ones any time between 5 and 8. They have an afternoon snack. Most workers come home some time between 6 and 9. Stores close between 8 and 9. Dinner is traditionally at 9 or 10 in the evening, but nowadays in many families different members eat at different times, according to their various activities. This is especially so in families with teenagers and in families with activists in associations. Children go to bed some time between 9 and 11, teenagers and adults much later. Housewives usually start the day by washing dishes, making beds, cleaning house, then doing the daily shopping for food and cooking lunch, which is the main meal in most families. After lunch they take it easy for an hour or two. To take a nap is unusual in winter, more common in summer, but it depends very much on the husband's working hours. In the afternoon, i.e. between approximately 4 and 9, housewives prefer lighter work: sewing, cleaning vegetables, etc. Things that can be done sitting down. Or possibly ironing. Very many also help their children with schoolwork.

\footnote{18} This figure should be contextualized in many ways for which there is no room here. It varies according to kinds of city and region, there is much unregistered work, and so on. One fifth was the approximate proportion in the Valencian barrio where I did fieldwork in 1983. Since then it has become more common for married women to work until they have their first child, and some are going back to work after the children have grown up. On the other hand, unemployment has grown worse. Statistics show that about one third of all adult women were in the labor market, either as employed or as unemployed, in the early 1990s, and by 2002 the proportion was about 40% (Las mujeres en cifras 2003). My data from previous studies in both Valencia and Madrid indicate that women are indeed eager to enter employment if they can, but it is still very difficult and few have regular jobs over long periods. The typical pattern is rather in-and-out of a variety of activities with intervening periods in unemployment or as "students" or "housewives". Flexibility, insecurity and adaptation to whatever comes up are the main conditions. Adding it all up and trying to arrive at an approximate average figure, I estimate that in the 1990s no more than 25% of married women of the
their daily territory. They know its places and its people. The content of women's family work, too (whether or not they also have another job), has much to do with the barrio as space: they know where the children play and what dangers surround them and what they would need to grow up happier and healthier; they know the food stores and prices and qualities; they know if drug dealers gather in some corner, and so on. They also find out long before the men about trends in youth activities, signs of land speculation, strange goings-on down by the factory parking lot, traffic danger spots, etc.

One aspect of the traditional gender-specification of domains that is still relatively alive, albeit not explicit, is the feeling that women cannot represent anyone but themselves and possibly their children. Not their whole family, usually, and definitely not non-kin. This probably explains some of the difficulties women encounter when trying to work in other political contexts. The same is true for the neighborhood movement beyond the barrio; the proportion of women decreases drastically as one moves up in the organizational pyramid. Already at the level of city federations, there are few women. People in a federation represent their barrio. So activists tend to elect men, and women tend to avoid being elected. I am inclined, however, to see practical reasons as foremost for the absence of women in the federations, nowadays. Federation premises are farther away; so going to the meetings takes too much time for people who have to get dinner ready in time.

In the barrio association, at any rate, the activists do not represent anyone but themselves. They are there as individuals. This is a further factor facilitating women's participation.19

As more and more women enter the movement, this fact in itself makes it easier for even more to join. The style of interaction, the issues taken up, and so on, become more "woman-friendly" and the fact of participation becomes less unusual, requires less legitimating, awakens less gossip, suspicion and resistance. It also becomes more probable that network links will draw women in.

The importance of gender as such also decreases as women move in. The assignment of tasks on a gender basis is disappearing. Women used to be secretaries and work with "soft" issues such as culture, while men were the treasurers and presidents and worked with issues that required negotiations with the authorities. Now, both women and men take on all sorts of duties. When I asked about the division of labor according to gender, it was always vehemently denied; whether or not it existed, it was clearly not acceptable as an idea to the activists.

The atmosphere of a meeting, at a demonstration, in the bar, and so on, also influences women's possibilities and well-being in the movement. Perhaps it is even the major factor, in comparison to other political contexts. So let us take a closer look at this. Let us enter a scene from a meeting, to get a first flavor of what the neighborhood movement is like: issues, participants, interaction.

working class actually held a job at any one moment in time, and of those who did very many worked in the informal (black or grey) sector of the labor market.

If the question is phrased as: How many women, married or not, mothers or not, participate in the labor market, formally or informally, at any time during their lifetime? the figure is of course much higher, perhaps approaching 100% among women younger than 50 in urban contexts.

In the chapters on the towns and cities local circumstances that make a difference are indicated.

19 To be sure, it has been argued that women are less individuated than men in Western countries, and this is certainly true for Spain. But it is a separate matter; the degree of individuation can vary according to context. One major obstacle for women's participation in any public life is their close connection with a small collectivity, the family, and the relatively lower degree of legitimacy accorded to their doing things as individuals, outside the family context, for their own benefit or because they feel like it. But if and when they overcome this basic obstacle, it is easier for them to act as individuals than as representatives of larger collectivities, e.g. a whole barrio.
An association meeting

It was raining violently, the way it often does in Valencia in December. It was not very cold, perhaps 10 degrees centigrade outdoors, but in the bare association room the air was damp and not much warmer. Carmen, the president, arrived first, as usual, just five past eight. When the anthropologist arrived, just behind her, she sighed,

"When are we going to learn! We'll never get anything done if we don't learn to be punctual! I am sick and tired of all the people who just want to look important in the eyes of their friends; they brag about knowing their way around the corridors of Town Hall, but they'd rather get sick than clean the toilet."

While talking, she entered the toilet, which really did give off terrible fumes, and found a rag and broom. I wet the rag and wiped the ping-pong table, which was the center of activities in the room, for instance meetings, card games, lessons in the Valencian language and art lessons for children. And sometimes ping-pong. The table was covered with dust, ashes, dried paint, ink and chalk marks. Carmen swept a cloud of dust over the concrete floor towards the street. Then she closed the new door and we commented for the hundredth time how happy we were to have it.

Until just a month ago, we had had to lower the metal shutter when the weather was bad, but it could not be wholly closed, since it could only be manipulated from the outside, and also because people were always coming and leaving. Now there was a thin wooden wall with a door inside the shutter.

We sat down beneath the harsh fluorescent light and blew into our hands to warm them. Maruja and Antonio arrived, ready to defend themselves with ironical faces from Carmen's predictable complaints. "It's only a quarter past! Don't pick on the most faithful!" Maruja had brought an ashtray, which she donated, to the association with a florid gesture. Antonio had brought the latest issue of the communist party magazine Mundo Obrero (Workers' World). We flipped through it together, exchanging opinions about the change of leaders that was coming up. Maruja teased Antonio about his mustache, saying that he looked like the secretary general, Gerardo Iglesias. Antonio looked uncomfortable. He had been expelled from the party a few years earlier and was apparently bitter about it, but as his friend José used to say, "Antonio will always be loyal at heart."

Carmen and Maruja were independents (that is the word used in Spain for persons who do not belong to any political party). It was no secret that Maruja sympathized with a Valencian leftist-nationalist party, the MC, in which her husband was an activist, but she was not a party member herself and she wanted to be considered as ideologically unattached. Carmen was also a Valencian nationalist, but she was not at all interested in party politics, and her husband was thought to be close to the communist party, the PCE. That is why she had been elected president; she was a compromise between the two "factual powers" as these two parties were sometimes called in the movement in Valencia (with an ironic reference to the social factors in Spain that are usually called thus: the Church, the Military and Big Finance). At the moment, the association was dominated by independents, so we could read the communist magazine together without any tension in the air.

A man none of us knew came in and stopped indecisively half way between the door and the table. Antonio asked him what he wanted. Well, he lived in one of the new buildings at the outskirts of the barrio, the big yellow ones, you know, not far from the road towards... Yes, yes, we know. Oh, fine! Then perhaps you know about the garage fraud, too? No, we did not. The man came up to the table and told a long complicated story about illegal contracts, suspicions among neighbors, rumors about kickbacks, how the construction company had fixed the lawn in the end, as promised, but not the garage driveway, and besides there were not garage places enough...

Carmen explained that we could not do anything directly about a construction company that did not keep its word, but we could recommend a lawyer who would probably take the case and not

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20 This is a translation, with only minor changes, from a part of an article I have published in Swedish (Thurén 1997c). It is based on notes taken during my fieldwork in Valencia, 1982–83. Since then the room has obtained a new floor and more furniture, and the number of members in the association has gone up and down a number of times, but other than that the association was still very much the same when I re-visited it in 2003. Even some of the board members were the same. For that reason it must remain anonymous. All names are fictitious.
charge too much. The man was upset, "Aren't you the association for the neighbors? What the hell do you get paid for, then?"

Antonio explained patiently that we were not paid by anyone, that we worked voluntarily, and that he was welcome to participate, too, if he wanted to, we needed all the extra people we could get, and we knew that there was a lot of building fraud going on, and of course we struggled against that, of course of course, but we were not lawyers, we could only act politically.

The man did not understand this point, even though Carmen, who was an elementary school teacher, explained it pedagogically. After he left, Carmen wondered nervously whether we had scared off a potential supporter, but the others laughed it off, saying that he was probably a rightist anyway, the yellow buildings had expensive apartments, only people with money moved in there. The activists were used to misunderstandings and suspicions. Antonio's little speech sounded well practiced, and it was.

Meanwhile the secretary Amparo, the treasurer Paco, Enrique who was in charge of the youth club, and the former president, now vice president José had arrived and the real meeting began. Amparo had forgotten to bring the minutes from the previous meeting, so no one said anything about reading or approving them. I suspected that she had not forgotten them but just never written them; it happened, she had confessed, that she wrote all the minutes for a whole year the day before the annual assembly.

Paco said he had gone over the books, as he had been asked to do the previous week, and that he had found that the membership dues for three months were missing. A moment of silence followed. Then Maruja wondered tentatively, "Has anyone asked the collector?" (Since most inhabitants of the barrio did not have bank accounts, the association paid a person to visit members' homes to collect the dues.) No, no one had. José laughed emphatically, "That's it then, the collector has just not turned over the money yet, so no problem! What's the next item on the agenda?"

Carmen threw him an angry glance but said nothing. Ever since Paco had become treasurer, it had been impossible to get the books straight. Nobody suspected him of keeping any money for himself, he was just a bungler, but a lot of money was missing, we had to do something about it. But José felt sorry for Paco, and as long as he protected him, we could do nothing, because the association needed José's experience and energy.

Enrique told us about his attempts to start a film club. José interrupted him with lots of anecdotes about the problems he and Paco had had to get the football club going. After many digressions about the problems of the young boys in the barrio, Enrique came to the point: three teenagers had offered to take responsibility for the film club and use Enrique as an adviser when needed. We cheered. The film club had been born, in spite of everything! Well, not quite, said Enrique, there was a small catch — they did not want the neighborhood association to "control" them. "Who said we wanted to control them!" thundered José. Carmen muttered something about money. Amparo pointed out that the film club could have its own dues and perhaps charge a small entrance fee for each movie they showed, so we would not have to give them any money. Fine, but they wanted us to help them apply for a subsidy from the municipal Culture Council. Sure, we can help them with the paperwork without taking on any responsibility for bookkeeping. Or? Can they really handle money? Most of them are dropouts from school, aren't they? "Evidently! Illiterates is what they are!" sentenced José, amiably sarcastic as always. We discussed the problem for five more minutes and then dropped the topic without deciding anything.

We had to get on with the agenda, because Maruja had to go home early to fix dinner for her children. José, always eager to tease her about her feminism, clucked, "Are you going to fix dinner for the kids?! Can't your husband do that?! Doesn't he comply with his matrimonial duties?" Enrique, Paco and Antonio laughed about the double meaning. Maruja was irritated but just a little. "Sure he does. More than most husbands! What about you?!!" Now it was Carmen's, Amparo's and my turn to giggle. Amparo even dared a gesture towards José's imposing paunch, "At least he seems to comply with certain duties!"

Without further ado, Antonio started to report on his visit to the urban planning office in Town Hall. They had promised him a copy of the committee report on the new general town plan over a month ago; they had not given it to him this time either. A good amount of meeting time was now spent on ironic and bitter comments about the so called socialists who used to be comrades in
the struggle, but now that they sit on the other side of the table, they seem to be growing as arrogant as the Francoists. But they are afraid of the neighborhood movement, that is why they will never give you a straight no.

"Don't forget," said José suddenly, "that precisely because they have retired to their fortified offices, they don't know how much the movement has changed. They believe we can still get out five thousand persons on the street tomorrow afternoon, just in this barrio, if we want to."

"And we can, too!" Paco exclaimed, defiant, inspired, but not very realistic. José muttered to himself, "We had better let them believe it."

Maruja was squirming nervously. "When do I get to report on the culture committee? I have to leave soon!" Antonio snapped, "Go ahead and report! Who is stopping you?" Maruja looked surprised and hurt, Antonio was not usually irritable. But then she shrugged and reported, quickly and efficiently: The culture week of the barrio can be held in February, just as we planned: we will get a subsidy... José interrupted, "How much?" Maruja said it was not decided yet, but our barrio will get something, that is for certain, and they said we could go ahead contracting musicians for two concerts and one or two evenings of dancing on the square, with games for the children, and we can also contact people for lectures, but it's too early to say anything about pay to them. So we can start discussing which concerts and which bands we want, and which themes for lectures, and so on. We should have a photo contest, too, it was so popular last year, and perhaps...

Suddenly Emilia rushed in from the street without closing the door. José started to raise his fist towards her, "clo-o-o-se tha-a-a-t do-o-or..." but fell silent when he saw that she was pale and excited. "Have you heard about the accident?" What accident? The train tracks again! "No, not the train this time. A wall collapsed, a whole wall, the building they are tearing down by the bus stop, and there was a long line of people waiting for the bus..." She was not allowed to finish, the questions rained over her: Which wall, which bus stop? Was someone hurt? Did it fall over the sidewalk? Oh God, my aunt was going to take the bus downtown! Did it happen just now? Did you see it? What is happening now, should we rush over and see if we can do anything...

"No, no, be quiet, let me finish! It was this afternoon, and no one was hurt... "But someone could have been hurt! And it fell on the lot, but there were several workers there, it was pure luck that it did not fall on them either."

As soon as we had recovered from Emilia's dramatic show, we realized that she was right. Something very serious could have occurred. And we had complained so often about the lack of security around the construction sites in the barrio, we had to do something now. "Too bad it did not fall over the line by the bus stop – then we would really have had a headline!" said Antonio, in jest, but Amparo and Maruja protested firmly that such ideas were not allowed, not even as jokes.

The remaining agenda was put aside and the meeting concentrated on what steps to take. Energetic tension vibrated around the table. Suggestions: letters to the editors of all three daily newspapers of the city, and perhaps to El País in Madrid, too, because that is the paper everyone who counts reads; perhaps a telegram to somebody important; a protest meeting in the barrio; a group of neighbors to go to see some responsible person in Town Hall and refuse to leave until he receives them; contact the labor unions and offer our support, etc. Antonio hesitated: we must not overreact; we have to safeguard credibility. The others enjoyed showing each other how creative they were, but after a while they settled on letters to editors and contacting the labor unions. They often thought Antonio was too cautious, but even though nobody said so, a consensus was reached that he was right this time.

Now Maruja really had to leave. She shouted from the door, "Just don't forget to think about the lectures and the concerts! We can discuss the details next week."

Turning, she collided with Vicente on his way in. He smiled flirtatiously. "Are you leaving already! And here I come just to see you!" Maruja snarled in a friendly way and ran off. Antonio looked up, also friendly and joking, but cooler, "Vicente! You are perfect! It never fails! Always in time for the beer!" Carmen nodded and forced a sour smile. Vicente entered noisily, clowned around, slapped shoulders. "Naturally! I have no patience with long boring meetings, you know
that." Then he sat down and produced his trump card: the drawings for the new state school to be built in the barrio. We pored over them, commenting from all possible angles, for almost half an hour. When Amparo's husband arrived, straight from his job to pick her up, Carmen realized she would be late for dinner, it was past ten o'clock and her husband would be upset, so she left with great haste. The rest of us locked up and went to the bar next-door for a beer and a chat.

Questions and issues

What questions can be asked about the participation of women in a movement like this? Some have been suggested above, the mostly descriptive ones about how women participate and what they say about it. But what theoretical issues can the analysis illuminate? What is the significance of this ethnographic study for questions asked about women and politics in feminist theory?

The literature on social movements in general is vast. This study can certainly be made relevant for many issues in that field, too, but it is not its purpose and I will not elaborate very much in that direction, i.e. I will not discuss such things as processes of decision-making and issue-definition inside the movement or the relationship between the movement and conventional politics (except of course as they concern the main issues of this study). I have focused more on participants' motives and the effect on their lives (cf. Melucci 1989, Willis 1999) but the study does not stop there. It asks theoretical questions directed toward other issues.

These issues concern the relationship between this social movement – and social movements of this general type – and processes of change in the gender order. Simply put: What is it in the dominant gender order that makes some women choose to participate in this kind of movement, and why is it that they act as they do and learn what they learn? How do their actions, motivations, pleasures, difficulties and learnings influence the gender order as a whole?

More specifically, we will see that the patterns of women's participation in the neighborhood movement are relevant for feminist debates around difference and separatism, women as victims versus women as actors, issues of equality and complementarity, strategic choices in organizing for change, construction of power and consciousness of hierarchy, definitions of justice and a host of related strategic questions, as well as more substantial issues related to time, space and sexuality. I especially want to probe the constant but always imperfect reproduction of the gender order. What is happening in Spain with gendered symbols, gendered division of tasks, gendered possibilities and limitations in individual lives? What matters are being redefined, how and why? What matters are not questioned? And what can we learn about such processes from the descriptions of what happens in the neighborhood movement?

There is no doubt that there is an intimate connection between the gender order in general and the political sphere. This is true by definition, if we define the concept of gender to include hierarchy by definition (Scott 1988). I prefer to define gender in a more neutral way, as that which has to do with the reproductive distinctions between bodies (Connell 2002:10) as they are culturally constructed in a given time and space. The analytic focus on gender should not be prematurely limited to issues of power but include anything that might be relevant, whether directly or indirectly or not at all related to power. I prefer such a definition, not in order to exclude domination and hierarchy, but precisely in order to be able to scrutinize the forms and degrees of domination and hierarchy. In other words, I do not take anything for granted about the relationship between gender and power; I focus on that relationship, in order to describe it and try to understand it (Thurén 2003).

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21 My thinking is strongly influenced by Bourdieu, but, in line with some other feminist thinkers, I adapt his theory to feminist problems (Moi 1991, Järvinen 1999, Lovell 2000, McNay 1999, Mottier 2002). One starting point is that gender orders tend to reproduce themselves to a high degree, because they concern very long-lived figures of thought and strongly entrenched social structures, and at the same time intimate things that hurt to question. All of these things tend to reinforce each other. But unlike Bourdieu, I focus more on that which creates contradictions and thus forces change in spite of everything. In this I have been influenced by other thinkers within a general framework of critical practice theory, e.g. Calhoun 1995, Connell 1987, Giddens 1979, Ortner 1996, not to speak of Marx himself. My use of Bourdieu has very little to do with his La domination masculine (1998), and much more with his central concepts habitus, dispositions and doxa (Bourdieu 1977).
The women in the neighborhood movement, being women and living in a gender order where gender is construed as relevant for political activities, always work with gender issues inside the movement, whether or not they realize it and whatever other issues they work with.

The ethnography will shed light on processes of redefinition of private and public domains and the location of the separation between them. The examples discussed will also show that the role of gender as a major principle of social organization is being renegotiated. Such renegotiation is not unproblematic. Men's resistance to certain gender changes result in conflict but also cultural innovation. So do women's fears, ambivalence, enthusiasm and learning, as new arenas of activity come within reach. The analysis will show interconnections between the organization of time and space and gender in the *barrios*, and what they mean for political activities and how women and men negotiate among themselves for space in their partially common, partially different political struggles.

**Overview of the book**

The next two chapters contain more detailed information about the movement in general, information the reader will need to contextualize what follows. Chapter 2 is about the history of the neighborhood movement: its beginnings, the phases of growth and crisis, its methods of organization, influence and protest. Chapter 3 looks closer at the cultural aspects of this; it summarizes some of the main debates inside the movement and explores the meanings of its key terms.

Chapter 4 is the story of one woman who participated in the early days of the movement, when it was unusual for women to be active in it. She represents the pioneers. She also represents one extreme on the social scale of the movement, the poorest and in every way least privileged people. My purpose in choosing her story is for the reader to get a feeling for the origins of the movement and the social circumstances from which most of the early participants came and what such a woman thinks about later developments. The movement today is very different from what she describes, but one must know about these beginnings in order to understand its ideologies and symbols.

Chapter 5 describes the participation of women: who participates, why, obstacles and facilitating factors, different modes of participation. Examples of women's trajectories into, inside and out of the movement are given in chapter 6. This is followed by another illustrative chapter, number 7, which is a collective story about some unusually dramatic events in one barrio. The events were unusual, but the way the women concerned tell about them illustrates many themes in the movement as it was in the 1990s. Chapter 8 is also an illustration but this time of a group of women who organized as a separate association inside the neighborhood association of their barrio, when word went out that this was a good idea. This separatism inside the neighborhood movement has been much discussed and criticized from various quarters. It is one special way in which women can participate in the movement.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 are town portraits. To describe the neighborhood movement it is necessary to describe urban space, local administration and barrio everyday life – because those are the things the movement is all about. To understand what women do, it is necessary to know something about their conditions in general: labor market, freedom of movement, schooling, etc. All of these things condition each other and vary locally. Also, the characteristics of the neighborhood movement in general, in each locality, are always related to the characteristics of the locality: local history, economics, political constellations, etc. and not least the characteristics of urban space. Mountains and rivers influence climate and economics and scenery as well as communications; ports and railways constitute infrastructure of communication but also barriers in the urban landscape which set rigid limits to the traffic of persons and vehicles; demographics and social stratification leave their mark on residential areas and on the lines of communication between them and between each one and the central area; local history invests all sorts of big and small features with local meaning. And so on.

These chapters, then, are pocket histories of the four small and medium towns I worked in. They will show variations in the neighborhood movement (strength, type of issues, strategies and
methods of struggle), and in the gender order (what the women do and do not), in each place, as well as in the background factors.

What should be noted when reading the town portraits is that the movement has many faces, but also that there are certain themes that recur throughout the movement. It is in these similarities, in the midst of variation, that we can expect to find the clues to the overall meaning of women's participation in a movement of these characteristics and thus to make the Spanish experience relevant for women in other countries and for feminist theory.

The last two chapters discuss the empirical findings in the light of relevant theories. Here we return to a general level. Chapter 13 analyses the characteristics of the neighborhood movement and their significance for gender change with the aid of theories on social movements, on gender and organization and on cultural negotiations. It also discusses relevant recent changes in the movement. Chapter 14, finally, endeavors to draw conclusions about the relationship between gender, the neighborhood movement, politics and change.