CHAPTER 11. VIGO: WOMEN POURING OUT OF THE HOME

The city of Vigo

The north-western corner of Spain is quite separate from the rest of the country in many ways. Its language, Galician, is closer to Portuguese than to Castilian. The landscape is a luscious green, since the climate is mild and humid. The power of large landholders was curtailed over a hundred years ago, when the Galician peasants won property rights to their land. The fertile land, the riches of the sea, the many natural ports and the geographical situation that made international commerce a natural activity, in combination with difficult communications with the rest of Spain, have made Galicia look more to the sea and what lies beyond it than to the rest of the country it belongs to. The lack of interest has been mutual. Even though Francisco Franco was from Galicia, his regime did little to improve communications with the region or to improve the lot of its people.

There are cultural barriers, too. Popular stereotypes about Galicians circulate in the rest of Spain, and Spanish anthropology has a predilection for studying Galicia. It is a national "other". In spite of the natural riches, Galicians have always been poor. Land is scarce, and since inheritance is often bilateral it is fragmented in each generation, and redistribution is culturally close to impossible. Galician peasants are renowned for their tenacious clinging to minuscule pieces of land. Generation after generation, landless Galicians have migrated across the sea. In Argentina and Uruguay, all Spanish immigrants are called Galicians, because so many of them are.

Galicia consists of four provinces, each named after its capital. Lugo, Orense and La Coruña are the biggest towns of their respective provinces. Pontevedra, however, is a weak second in its province, where Vigo with its close to 300.000 inhabitants dominates. Vigo is the largest city of all of Galicia.

Vigo is a spacious city. It is spread out in a way that is unusual in Southern Europe. The reasons have to do with recent history (migrations), topography (hills, rivers and an irregular coastline) and local culture (Galician peasant traditions). Or so I was told and could read in what little has been written about the city.\(^1\)

The name comes from Latin "vicus", place. The area was inhabited long before Roman times. No wonder. The natural advantages of Galicia are especially evident along the long narrow bay on which Vigo lies. A small group of islands just at the mouth of the bay keeps the fishing rich and the harbors safe. The landscape is hilly, so there are several natural ports, but there are also flatter river valleys, apt for agriculture, just a few hundred meters inland. Rainfall is generous. A microclimate makes winters even milder in Vigo than in the rest of Galicia; palm-trees grow in the city parks alongside huge pines. All sorts of plants grow wild along the roadsides and in the cracks of the sidewalks or building facades. Some roofs are covered with greenery, too.

Fishing and agriculture are thus the bases of the economy. The cultivation of shellfish is an important industry, too. The shiny waters of the bay are dotted with little constructions for clam production.

Local small-scale manufacturing developed into large scale industry gradually, starting around 1880. By the 1920s the canneries and shipyards employed more labor than Vigo itself could supply. So immigration began. The city grew. The people who came were mostly

\(^1\) Most of the background information on Vigo comes from Souto González 19904. Méndez 1988 offers useful ethnography on rural Galician women.
Galicians. Some of the many Galicians who had to leave their home villages, as they had done for generations, could now go to Vigo instead of Buenos Aires. For people of other parts of Spain, there seemed to be little reason to migrate to Galicia, so far away, culturally so different and famous for not being able to feed its own. In other words, even though Vigo was a city of immigrants, it was not culturally plural, like Valencia or Madrid.

The new workers who came were of peasant background. And since salaries were low and the land fertile, it was natural for them to supplement their incomes growing some of their own food. So they looked for houses with some land around them. There were plenty of small villages dotting the inland valleys, close to the coast. The migrants settled in them. These villages grew as quickly as the city itself. Little by little they were incorporated into the city, which was logical, since their economy depended on the city and most of the inhabitants worked in the city. Roads and street car lines were built. This meant that it became possible to live even further out, finding cheaper land to grow food on and yet be within commuting distance. Vigo grew in an irregular star shape, along its lines of communications.

This meant that urban infrastructure was difficult to implement. This was not considered outrageous until very recently, since the working class did not have running water or sewage disposal in the downtown areas either, workers never used banks, and few could afford schooling or medical care. In the 1960s and 1970s Vigo grew again, and this time there were some housing projects for workers, but again most of the people who came were peasants and preferred to live in the surrounding villages, as long as there were commuting facilities. Now, however, they began to see urban amenities as necessary and experience the lack of them as injustice.

One woman told me of her childhood in the 1950s in the hillside village of Candeán. As a small girl, she lived in a downtown working class district, which was certainly poor, but there was running water, and she had attended a nuns' school where the girls wore school uniforms. Then her father died and her mother had to migrate to factory work in Germany. The ten-year-old girl was sent to Candeán to live with an aunt. The move was only a few kilometers, but she experienced acute culture shock. There was no running water, so it was complicated to wash oneself and one's clothes. And one did become dirty, since there were no asphalted roads and the school had only a dirt floor. Yes, there was a school, a state school, with only one teacher for all ages, and little else. The schoolhouse was an old barn without windows, so the door had to be left open even when it rained. There was no electricity in the village. The aunt found it impossible to keep the girl's long hair tidy, so she cut it short. The girl mourned her curls almost as much as the loss of her mother and father. She had to help her aunt and uncle both inside the house and in the fields. Her hands bled, she was afraid of the pig and of the neighborhood children, she fell on the slippery mud roads and was scolded for that... she felt miserable for years. But worst of all was the lack of facilities for defecating. Not even latrines. One just went into the fields.

When the people of these villages/barrios began organizing in the early 1970s, asphalted roads and piped water stood at the top of their lists. Then came schools and doctors and buses (the street cars had been discontinued). Most of these things had been procured by the 1990s, but sewage and garbage disposal were still problematic in many areas. Municipal politicians explained to me, patiently, probably in the same words they used to the village/barrio people: Because Vigo is so spread out, these amenities are very expensive to install. The irregular topography adds to the complications. But we are at it. It will be finished in a few years.

The location of industries did not help much either. The old town of Vigo is situated on a small round hill next to the central harbor, squeezed in between the water and the castle hill. There was no room for industries there, so they grew along the coast, close to the water, where there were rows of little fishing ports, from which transportation of finished goods was feasible. When the railway arrived, it was built along the coast, too. By 1994, one half of downtown Vigo was cut off from the other half by a set of communication lines: the railway, the old coastal road and a new freeway. A fringe of land only 800 meters wide between the bay and the hills accommodated most of the lifelines between Vigo and the outside.

Next to the old town, a small piece of the commercial harbor had been sliced off and dedicated to pleasure boats. There was a Club Náutico (marina) with a couple of restaurants. This narrow piece of land with restricted access was the only part of central Vigo where the Vigueses
could come close to the water. For the rest, it was certainly true, as a newspaper column said, "Vigo's northern border is not the bay but the Port Authority." So the paradox was that this city that lived off the water lived its daily life away from the water.

The Viguéses explained many of the problems of their city saying that it was not really their city. Over and over again I heard this explanation: Vigo is a town of immigrants. Especially in the last few decades lots of people have moved in. And they are all Galicians. That means two things: that they love their home villages, where they own some land, and that their home villages are not very far away. So they continue to live in them, mentally. Vigo is just the place where they work. On Friday evenings there is a traffic jam, because all the migrants are going home for the weekend. And on Sunday evenings they return with their cars loaded down with potatoes and other products of the home village.

There was of course a capitalist class in Vigo, a bourgeoisie that had built the industries and the trade companies. But part of it was of Catalan origin, I was told, and/or spoke Castilian. In other words, they were not "real" Galicians and did not love the city either.

According to these tales, then, Vigo was an exploited orphan. Its beauty did not make it loved. Only its productive capacity attracted people to it. That can hardly be the whole truth for such an old city with such economic vigor and at least some cultural amenities. But perhaps it explains the riddle partially.

In the 1970s major changes came. One was the arrival of the transnational car manufacturer Citroën, which attracted many new migrants. However, other industries closed down. By the 1990s there were only a few canneries left, and what shipyards there were made only small fishing boats. The fish that used to be handled in Vigo – bought and sold, canned, shipped – was now mostly frozen aboard industrial fishing vessels and handled by transnational companies. Small scale coastal fishing was hardly profitable.

Like the rest of Spain, then, Vigo suffered from unemployment. Working class women in Vigo had been used to working (in the canneries, especially); now they had no work, and they complained about it. The work they did find was seldom regular employment. The most common kind was domestic service.

There was a major middle class and upper middle class sector of Vigo that prospered and middle class one-family houses along the beaches.

The administrative territory of the city was divided into two parts according to a folk classification that echoed in all discourses, from local gossip to printed political speeches: "the urban" and "the rural" (el urbano, el rural). The urban part was that which looked like a normal Spanish city, with more or less continuous high-rise buildings, asphalted streets and not much green space. People who lived there lived in apartments. The rural part was too crowded to be really rural, but there was some open land between one village/barrio and the next, the streets looked more like roads except here and there where the buildings stood closer together, and most of the dwellings were one-family houses with yards, a few chicken and perhaps a pig, and a couple of minute fields where maize, potatoes or grapes grew. The "villagers" worked in the city, but they worked on the land, too. They formed cooperatives to graze cows on communal land. Farm work was mostly women's responsibility. It was defined as an extension of other domestic duties. The children went to elementary school in the barrio/villages but to high school in the city. There were churches and stores and health centers in the barrio/villages, but people, especially the young, would go into the city at night for an evening out. The women went into the city to shop and perhaps have coffee with friends.

In some of the barrio/villages, there were industries, too.

And in all of them there were neighborhood associations. And they were splendid associations! They were socially more central than those of any of the other places I visited, and most of them had impressive buildings. They housed not just the usual meeting rooms, but

---

2 Villages all over Spain used to own some land collectively for grazing, firewood, etc. Most of this land was sold to private owners during the 19th century (with increasing economic stratification in the villages as both cause and effect), but I was told that in Galicia this had not happened, or to a much smaller extent. Instead the state had expropriated the communal land. But it was now being returned, people said.
libraries (not very well equipped and never with paid librarians, but libraries after all), TV rooms, class rooms, auditoriums, offices, music rooms, almost always a football field and some other sports installations, and always the inevitable bar, sometimes with a separate room for table games and / or newspaper reading. They were in some ways similar to the "sports clubs" that many middle class urban Spaniards belong to (cf. Thurén 1998, 2003 unpublished, and forthcoming).

**History of movement**

The neighborhood movement came to Galicia in the same way it came to other places, through some spontaneous organization, through Christian organizations, and above all through the underground leftist parties. Especially the communist party, but in Galicia also left-nationalist parties.3

Neighborhood associations began to grow up during the early 1970s, especially in the industrial towns and cities. Several of the association presidents I spoke to claimed that theirs was one of the first associations in Vigo, so we can assume that many came into being at about the same time. Two attempts to build a federation failed, but in 1994 there was one and it gave a stable impression; the statutes had been operative for about six years. (And indeed it was still functioning in 2003.) There seemed to be a rather strong PSOE influence, but the left-nationalist Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) was also present, and the independents seemed to dominate. The federation had a series of projects negotiated with Town Hall. It received no general subsidies, "but they give us money in exchange for concrete things we do." For example the movement had been paid for collaborating in the preparation of a new general urban plan. The associations were buying computers, and courses were held for activists to learn to use them. A youth camp was being planned. "Social economy" was a key concept: the federation was setting up a housing cooperative and a cooperative cattle business. "Since there is no work, we have to create some."

There were demonstrations and *reivindicaciones*, too, naturally. I took part in a "concentration" around a bridge across a small river (Lagares) that was to be channeled in what the movement considered an anti-ecological manner. About fifty persons, most of whom were from the federation board and barrio association boards, plus one municipal councilor and five or six journalists gathered around the bridge. The journalists took pictures but asked no questions. No speeches were made, no other action was taken. After about half an hour and a short walk along the river, we dispersed. This was quite typical of reivindicative actions in the 1990s, in Vigo as elsewhere: not a lot of people, no real action, the important thing was to get the attention of some politician and of the press.

Recent *reivindicaciones* in various barrios had concerned a garbage plant, drug problems in subsidized housing, failed negotiations to obtain a street car line and also failed attempts to get a better agreement with the bus company, the need to clean up the river Lagares and to alter its course due to a traffic problem. There had been a conflict between the federation and two associations that had been excluded. And as always there were local land problems, cultural activities, courses, youth activities, sports, some neighbor that needed legal help, and so on.

Women activists emphasized above all communications and the asphalting of streets. "The men drive their cars, they don't have to use the buses, so they don't realize how bad they are, nor do they do the shopping, so they don't get dirty on slippery mud roads."

---

3 For the non-Spanish reader the connection between nationalism and leftist politics may seem strange, but it was very common in anti-Franco underground organization during the dictatorship, and therefore also in political life after the transition. The Franco regime was nationalist in the usual European manner, insisting on inviolate state borders, patriotic myths and symbols, etc. all of which referred to the country as a whole. In Spain, however, there was no cultural unity behind this ideology. Many regions spoke other languages than Castilian and had other symbols and myths. This was a breeding ground for opposition against the regime for cultural reasons. It could be called regionalism, but in these regions it was called nationalism, since its defenders considered their people "nations" or "nationalities", while Spain, in their view, was not, it was just a state, by which was meant an administrative unit as opposed to a cultural one. And since the regime they opposed was conservative, the regional nationalisms often combined with leftist politics. Cf also note 7, chapter 8.
Several activists underlined the importance of the Galician tradition of village autonomy. Historically, even parts of villages, usually defined as parishes, have had some self-government. I have chosen to call the areas of peripheral Vigo barrio/villages, since they were both and neither; the Vigueses themselves said parishes (parroquias). For the movement, the parroquia-traditions had both good and bad effects. They made it easily understandable and positive for most people that there should be a local organization to whom they could turn for most of their contacts with the world beyond family and work. There ought to be someone nearby, personally known, to turn to, as an intermediary in contacts with authorities of different kinds. The traditional figure used to be the cacique, the local informal leader (cf. Glossary). Many movement leaders complained that they were seen as the new version of cacique, and that some people were deferent to them for this reason, and they were afraid that this could undermine the democratic ethos of the movement. City authorities sometimes asked local associations to be intermediaries between them and the local population. For example, an association could be asked to distribute information on municipal regulations and even to set aside a room or two in its building for municipal services. This increased the legitimacy of the associations in the minds of the local population, but it also increased the resemblance to old cacique ways, social stratification, dependency. And, complained the leaders, it was difficult to get people to see the need for becoming active, since they saw leaders as different and separate from themselves.

Women's participation in the movement

Galician women had been used to taking their own decisions, because of the frequent and long-term absences of their men (fishermen, sailors, emigrants). But the key metaphor, that women are of the home, men of the street, is known and valid in Galicia, too. It could be rephrased to say that women stay in the village, or at least in Galicia, while men travel. The basic idea is still a separation of spheres, where women have more say than men in the female sphere, but the male sphere encompasses the female one. A woman who encroaches on the male sphere damages the self-esteem and social prestige of both her husband and herself.

Galician working class women used not to take part in political life at all. They had too much to do: the house, the family, the garden plot and the animals, and on top of that many of them had salaried jobs. Middle class women of Vigo did not participate much in politics, either, but they had lots of activities of their own and freedom of movement. Many of the limitations women experienced in other parts of Spain were absent here. Women could be seen everywhere in the "street," moving around with confidence. The men did not remark on their presence. There were women in restaurants and cafeterias; they were usually in groups, but it was not uncomfortable for me to eat alone in restaurants, as it was in Andalusia.

I felt the difference in my own body. Reacting subconsciously to the signals from the environment, I felt my face relax, my steps lengthen, my whole body posture expressing more security than in the other towns and cities, including Madrid where I have lived for many years and feel safe and at home. Still, in Vigo I felt more "normal", less at risk of having my presence in the street questioned by looks, comments or assault. I did not feel I had to calculate the wisdom of walking down any street each time I came to a new corner.

There is an old debate in Spain, among historians and anthropologists as well as popular versions, on whether Galicia is a matriarchy. I do not think it is. If we limit ourselves to the neighborhood movement, it is clear that women's participation there was hardly of the kind that would indicate female power. There were lots of women in and around the movement, but they were seldom in visible positions. Most of them were mere participants in courses. And among

4 The Galician patriarchy could rather be analyzed as of a different kind than that of other parts of Spain, or of Europe for that matter. It is more clearly complementary; social life is more clearly demarcated into gender-marked spheres, where women certainly have final say in theirs, but men have final say in theirs, and the male spheres set the conditions for what can happen in the female spheres much more than vice versa. My description here offers some empirical ground for such an argument. Cf also below on the discussion in one association. See Méndez 1988 for more data and arguments. There is a similar debate on Basque women, and similar arguments against the idea of a Basque matriarchy have been offered by Basque feminists and anthropologists. See e.g. del Valle 1985.
those that were active participants – members of associational boards, some presidents of associations and representatives to the federation – there were few veterans. Most such women were new to the movement and new to any kind of associational activity. As always, of course, there were exceptions.

One woman told me, for example, that she had been more or less connected to the neighborhood movement for over twenty years. She joined when some women friends asked her to participate in a Christmas show. She accepted, and then she stayed. She was interested in working with health issues, since she had worked in a hospital and felt she mastered such issues. But she did not know anything at all about the neighborhood movement before she joined, she said. "I just knew that some new people were joining right then, and they were young and dynamic and they were known to be leftists. They had an ambition, that was a challenge. That was why I joined, but my friends and I, we mostly listened. I was attracted by people who had the same ideas as I did, even though I did not belong to any political party. Nor do I now. But I like the life style of people on the left. I knew they were struggling to defend workers in the companies where they worked. I was not married then, nor did I work, I had just lost my job in a company where I had worked for over a year without social security. There was no trade union or anything there." In 1972 there was a big strike in Vigo, and she saw workers being ferociously clubbed by police in the street, while her boss said the striking workers were the bad ones. That awakened her political consciousness. "My father did not understand why I said Franco was bad. And actually neither did I!" It was mainly a gut feeling, she said, but during the "listening" period in the neighborhood association, she learnt to analyze more. Through the years she became more active, little by little, until she had become president of her association.

The movement in Vigo had been dominated by men since its inception, and it still was, but in the early 1990s women were coming onto the scene fast. This was a new fact, it was noticed and commented, and it was conceptualized in terms of gender (not, for instance, in terms of beginners versus veterans).

The men felt somewhat disturbed. They expressed these feelings cautiously, in mandatory "progressive" terms: they talked about how women "need to learn", how the men "are trying to help" but are very careful "not to meddle", how the women "should be grateful for everything we are giving them" and so on. But they also joked a lot about how women's meetings were a pain in the neck, there was so much chatter that one could not enter such a room without getting a headache, there were never any clear decisions, the women made many mistakes that the men then had to help them correct and cover up for, and so on. And phrases like "women just don't know how to do things right", "women don't understand formalities" and "women don't know what they want" were sometimes pronounced in less polite ways, with irritated voices and mien. I never heard any man in Vigo (as I did in other places) de-generalize such comments, referring for example to able women as exceptions. If they mentioned exceptional women, it was more often to declare that women "too" can be manipulative, power-hungry, etc. They said they were not machistas, meaning they did not want to restrain women to traditional roles. But women have to learn more before they can be given ordinary association responsibilities, they said, "and so far they seem to prefer lace-making."

I am not saying that there was a general climate of irritation with women among the men, nor do I want to accuse the men of unusual levels of prejudice. I just want to state that they were notably disturbed, and that this was to be expected in view of recent and substantial changes in the gender composition of the movement.

What was it, then, that all of these new women were doing in connection with the movement, and how had it suddenly become possible?

The most common answer I got to this question consisted of just a name: Ana Gandón.⁵ Ana Gandón was a prominent member of the BNG. This party entered a tripartite coalition government of the city in 1991. She also had a background in the feminist movement of the city. As a town councilor she was given charge of "women". She surrounded herself with

⁵ Unfortunately, I was not able to meet her in 1994. But in 2003 I interviewed her and she gave me permission to use her name. The interview confirmed that what my informants had told me about her intentions corresponded to her own views.
feminists and launched an ambitious program to "get women out of the home". Not just middle class and intellectual women, but all sorts of women, most especially the kind of women that were a majority in Vigo: married women with children, wholly in charge of domestic tasks and often working outside the home, too, but who took no part whatsoever in public matters and usually knew little about what was going on in society beyond their own family. How does one get such women to reflect on their own situation and try to change it?

One cannot reach them through feminist organizations. Nor through written campaigns of any kind. One can reach them through the Church or through traditional village politics, but obviously not then with any anti-traditional messages.

Ana Gandón thought of the neighborhood movement. She met with the few women activists there were in it and began stimulating the setting up of women's committees, *vocalías*, in the local associations.

In the words of one of her associates, "We thought like this: Since we don't know what those women are doing, let's see what ideas they have, what they want to be. They need a place to meet, to exchange experiences, and some stability, that is to say money." Health was important. There had been a sociological survey that showed there was a lot of depression among working class women in Vigo. "They complained about feeling lonely. Some were perhaps already in an association, but just working, without being able to decide anything. We had to do something different. Courses were a good idea, because they all said they wanted to learn. So we thought, let's get them together, then they will know what to do. And if you go to a course, you start changing essentials, because you distribute your time differently, drastically, and you make friends. Part of the plan was also to do other things for the ones who want to continue growing. In the long-term perspective, that is. They will create something that nobody will be able to take away from them. We have some leaders already. Some have come from traditional associations, such as parish work, sure, but the interesting thing is that there are many who have never done anything before. They, too, can formulate *reivindicaciones* for the women of their barrios, we are beginning to see some of that."

In 1994, then, most of the women's committees were only two or three years old; they had been stimulated from the beginning by the department of women's affairs of Town Hall with such things as money, administrative help, courses for leaders. The women's committees were also indirectly helped by the general policy of the new municipal government to support the neighborhood movement (or at least not undermine, split and block it, as I was told the previous municipal government had done). For example, since many local associations had big premises, paid for by Town Hall, it was not difficult for the women's committees to obtain rooms of their own.

So they could do things. What to do, then? That was also suggested from the department of Ana Gandón: "Work for getting women out of the home. Don't content yourself with being just a few of you. Most women of your barrio probably do not want to be active in the association itself, but let them at least know that the association exists and if possible understand what it is about. Make them come to the premises. One way to make them come is to give them things they like." The women's department made lists of courses it would subsidize. Each committee chose courses and got subsidies in proportion to the number of members. If they wanted to organize more courses than the subsidies allotted allowed for, they were given advice and lists of teachers but had to cover the costs in other ways, usually higher course fees.

Unsurprisingly, the women chose the kind of things Spanish women have traditionally been good at: embroidery, porcelain painting, woodwork, lacework... The courses subsidized by the women's department were not open to men, and this caused some irritation, even though everyone recognized that no man would want to make lace anyway.

Among the course participants there were some protests because they had to sign up as members of the association to take the courses, and some movement activists also felt hesitant about such "forced" recruiting.

---

6 The quote is not literal, of course, since I was not there at the time. It is a composite from interviews in the women's department of the city council and in the movement.
Several women's committees found that the women also wanted courses that would help them get jobs. Especially dressmaking. Ana Gandón's position on this was that to learn dressmaking was negative, it would only continue to enclose women in traditional low-paid jobs. Other labor market courses could be subsidized for women, but not dressmaking, cooking, nursing and similar. This position was not understood in the barrios; both women and men were upset by it.

The courses had been enormous successes. In some places only a few women came the first year, either because they were suspicious of anything organized by the neighborhood association, or because they could just not be reached by the information. In other places they were reached and came in large numbers from the start. From the second year the numbers were overwhelming in all barrios, because the women told each other about the courses. Women are most effectively reached by their own networks, that was more than proven.

By 1994 there were women's committees in practically every barrio.

There was no feminist proselytizing during the courses. That would have scared the women away. Nor did the neighborhood associations give them any political messages. But the women came to the premises. They saw the posters on the walls, the tables with pamphlets, and the bulletin boards with announcements. New people started showing up for evenings of theater, music or debates. Not only women, but also their families, i.e. men and children, are reached effectively through women's personal networks, some associations concluded.

The hopes of Ana Gandón and her associates were that the feminist message would percolate somehow; that the women in the courses would start talking among themselves about their problems and find that they had a lot in common; something akin to the consciousness raising groups in the feminist movement. That had not happened, according to near-unanimous accounts. There were hypotheses about the reasons. Perhaps it was just too soon to tell. Perhaps the Galician temper made Galicians more reticent than other Spaniards to talk about their own lives in a context such as a handicraft course. Perhaps the women who came to the courses were not receptive to any criticism of their way of life.

Perhaps the courses even reinforced the traditional image of women as good with their hands, happy and content to do what they have always done, and if they are to leave their homes for a while, it must be to go to women-only contexts and do something totally harmless.

Was "real politics" still a male sphere? Was the movement creating spaces for women only to turn them into something like the Franco regime women's organization? Was this just one more in the growing number of attempts to neutralize the movement, diverting its energies from "real politics" or undermining its revolutionary potential?

Women in the feminist movement or in parties and trade unions in Vigo were very skeptic about the Gandón program. So were neighborhood movement activists, men and women, in other federations where the Vigo experiment was discussed. The common reasoning went: Sure, a lot of women have come out of their homes, women whose whole lives used to be only their family, and these women are now having a very good time, that is evident, and they are spreading the word, attracting ever more of their kind to the associations. But they do not understand what the neighborhood movement is all about! Nor are their lives really changed. They continue doing "feminine" things. OK, they get together – but they can do that just as well in Church! What has changed? Nothing!

The counterargument went: You cannot tell women what to do, that is not democratic. And if we want to change the gender order, the first step is to get women out of their homes, because that is where their self-esteem is undermined, their knowledge of the world curtailed and the present gender order reproduced. They must have freedom of movement, first of all. Once they start moving around, meeting people outside their own family, they will learn. Already many women dare to insist that they want to go out when their husbands want to stop them. Soon

---

7 During the dictatorship, there was a statewide women's organization called the Feminine Section (Sección Femenina), i.e. the women's section of the only permitted political party, the Falange. It organized courses in "feminine" skills such as cooking, childcare and sewing. It organized associations for housewives and young women, with rigid top-down control. It was in charge of the so-called social service, an equivalent of the military service for women. See for example Gallego Méndez 1983, Sánchez López 1990.
they may start discussing barrio issues while they sit there with their handicraft work. Besides, the most popular courses are actually the literacy ones! Women are learning new things! And this is the only way to do it. It may be slow, but it will change things.

My interpretation is that both sides were right, but both had partial views.

The women did start moving around, that much was beyond doubt. And they had fun because they were given a place to do work they liked, which had to do with what they already knew, but they were learning more about it, and they were given space and time of their own to do it. The fringe benefits were very appetizing, too: getting out of the house with a safe excuse, meeting many other women, forming friendships. Most courses organized lunches or dinners, so soon groups of women in bars and restaurants were a common feature of barrio life. Public space was being de-gendered to a certain extent. A closed circle of obstacles was being partially opened.

A warm atmosphere of pleasure reigned in the courses I visited and was visible in a videotaped documentary of the courses (also subsidized by the women's department). There were also the stories told by the participating women themselves. Phrases like "I used to sit in the house being bored, but now I have a place to go to and meet friends," and "It is easier for women to leave the house if they come back with an object they have made, something for the house, because then the husband will not be so suspicious" speak of something beyond the traditional pleasure of women's crafts. They speak of small rebellions, small changes, small new ideas. Too small to satisfy intellectual feminists or radical politicians, but small enough to be viable in the context of barrio women's lives.

Association leaders said that at first women's going out for dinner together and returning home late at night had "almost caused a divorce epidemic" but was now totally accepted. They also said that there were always one or two women in each course who asked if they could help in organizing more courses. The leaders interpreted this as a sign that some of these new members were taking the step from "just having fun" to "wanting to contribute".

**A literacy class**

I visited several courses in Vigo. As an illustration, let us look at what some women told me about why they had chosen to participate in a literacy class. Fifteen women were seated around two rectangular tables; most of them looked over 60 years of age. For each question I asked there were many answers and many examples and anecdotes. Finally, they said, although late in life, they were "learning". The verb "learn" seemed to stand for a host of meanings.

The general gist of the answers to my questions was as follows:

BMT: Are you members of the association?
– Oh yes, we are, all of us!

BMT: Are there no men in the course?
– Yes, there is one. He comes all the way from (another barrio), poor thing, imagine, it is a long walk, but there was nothing closer and he wanted very much to learn. There are many men in the pensioners' club, they play cards and that sort of thing, but they don't seem interested in learning.

BMT: Did you know each other before coming to class?
– Yes, because we are neighbors.

BMT: Did you sign up as members of the association in order to come to class?
– No, we were members already.

When I asked what they thought of the association, their comments were hesitant.
– There used to be reivindicaciones, things like sewers...
– The president has done a lot for the barrio.
– The association is like a home, where you can go and meet people. A little like the parish.
– You can play cards, too, if you want to.

The course ran for two hours a day, five days a week. They all wanted to take another course, if there were to be one, "to learn more".
BMT: Did you have any problems with being able to leave the house to come to class? Lack of time or...

– No, most of us are old.

BMT: But women do not retire like men, you continue doing housework, don't you?

– (Laughter). That's true, there is always housework, of course. There are always things that need to be done. Lots of things...

Then I asked, "What do your husbands say about your going to class?" I did not intend it, but the word "say" was interpreted to mean opposition.

– Nothing, I am a widow.
– My husband says nothing.
– My husband has learnt from our son-in-law, who does whatever my daughter says.
– No, here in Vigo women can participate in things nowadays without any problem.

The youngest woman, who did not look much older than 40, explained why she had not learned to read earlier, "We are six brothers and sisters, I am the oldest one. So I had to work from the age of eleven, taking care of my siblings, while my mother went out to work. So I could not go to school. What little I learned was in a course in the HOAC for one year, for workers. And until now, I could never learn more. I got married, I had children, I had to take care of them."

A dignified lady of many kilos and worn clothing, who said she was 70 years old, said, "My case is that we were eight brothers and sisters. All of them know how to read except me and a younger sister. That was because we had to work. First I had to take care of the others, and then, at twelve, I went to work in a factory. Before that I went for a while to a nuns' school, but I don't know, I did not pay attention, or... for whatever reason, I did not learn. Then at twenty I got married and had eleven children. And I had to work, too. Life was like that, a sailor did not earn much. (How come you decided to learn now? Was it a big decision?) No, I don't know, it was not like a decision... (The others filled in: No, it is not hard to decide, you just feel like it, you come to class because you want to, so very much...) Yes, because I wanted very much to read. More than to write. I would like to be able to grab a piece of paper and know what it says... Even if I don't learn how to write, I would like to know how to read, I always wanted to know that. And to calculate, but I do know a little of that, I don't know how come, because I have never learned, but I do it somehow in my own way – and nobody can cheat me, eh!"

It was clear that these women were learning, indeed, and improving their quality of life. I was moved by their happiness and determination. But one might of course doubt the appropriateness of the neighborhood movement taking on responsibilities where the Spanish state and school system had failed. The women were members of the association, but they did not know much about it, and the probability that the association would recruit any of them as activists was small. So the connection between the class and the association seemed tenuous. Then again, the purpose of the neighborhood movement is to improve daily life for its members. Illiteracy is certainly a serious carencia that must be fought. It has especially been an obstacle for women.

**Another point of view**

Since I tend to approve of the Gandón program, if with some hesitation, it seems necessary to insert another point of view here. Let us listen to the story and the arguments of a woman who was a political long distance runner, very experienced, and who thought that specific activities for women were a step backwards. In this she included the women's committees in the neighborhood movement as well as radical feminist groups and everything in between.

Inés was against "all those courses and all of that manual work. I think it's disastrous."

She was against feminism, too. She was for equality and for women's integration in all social spheres, but she did not think that was feminism.
The interview took the shape of a friendly debate between the two of us. Inés said that she had always struggled for truth and for equality, but she thought women commit a mistake forming groups of women. That only hinders integration. "I know that some of the women in the Gandón program have higher goals," she said, "but most are just happy and content staying inside women's groups. In my union we have never had any need of forming special groups for women. Most of the members are women anyway. That is how women should enter political work, from the top, that is the only way."

The presidents are always men, she said, and women are marginalized, that is true. "But women are smarter than men. They know how to conquer things little by little."

To illustrate how things should not be done, she told how once for an election some feminists had come to her union to insist that at least some women be elected. "And they said I did not count! 'Inés is not a woman!' Can you believe that! No, I am not a feminist, but I defend women's rights."

I supposed those feminists were of the difference tendency, and that they considered women like Inés, who reach leadership positions in male-dominated organizations, must by definition have abandoned all solidarity with other women as well as traditionally feminine ways. To Inés such separatist feminists represented all feminism, so she felt under attack and rejected all gendered organization.

What can be done, then? It might have been a good idea in the 1960s to have consciousness raising groups, said Inés, "but today they are no use. You have to teach women to relate to men as equals. If women want to make the effort, they can have power." She knew that many women complained of pressure from husbands, but she thought that was just an individual issue. "Some activist men have problems with their wives, too, you know, they are never home, they come home late, so the wives pressure them to quit."

It is hard for women with small children to be active, she conceded, but in her union some mothers were. "The fathers babysit. Fathers in Vigo shop for food, too, I see them doing it. More and more."

Inés did not think women had to get together as women, then, but she did think they should realize there were gender differences and use them to their advantage. "Men are cowards. If a woman is really determined, the men can't resist her. Because women are harder than men, as fighters. Men give in sooner." Women should learn to be more solidarity with each other and realize, too, that a woman can win an argument with a man. "And that is not feminism! No, they have to learn how to do that in mixed meetings."

According to Inés, then, integration is the goal and it cannot be reached by way of separate organization, even though gender difference is a basic fact that can and should be used strategically. I think most feminists, in all countries, can recognize her as a representative of the kind of woman who has fought a long and hard, lonely battle which in the end has given her a position, and that experience has convinced her that the way forward for women is individual improvement. Some call that liberal feminism, but Inés would have objected strongly if I had used that word to her face, since she was a committed leftist.

There was a touch of misogyny in her opinions that is interesting to compare with the views expressed by some traditional women in the Vigo movement. At first sight, Inés and the women usually called traditional were opposites, but at a deeper level their views were similar: they saw gender differences as inevitable and thought women should use them to their advantage, not wage a fight against that which cannot be changed, since it is given by nature; such a strategy will accomplish nothing except alienating men.

A third point of view – Galician matriarchy?

Most people in the neighborhood movement emphatically rejected the idea of a Galician matriarchy, just like feminist scholars do (cf. note 4). A couple of Vigo sociologists I spoke to

---

8 The interview was taped but not completely transcribed. The quotes have been abbreviated in order to get the main points across without making the text too long. Inés was a talker and proffered many good illustrations that I cannot repeat without revealing her identity.
said that Galician women may have – or have had – a lot of power inside the family, but as soon as they go out, for instance to solve some problem with the authorities, they have to deal with unrelated men, and that places them at a disadvantage. And the power they have inside the family is very relative, since it has been unthinkable to ask for a divorce, even in case of violence. The traditional story is all about "aguantar", to endure, to stand it, to take it. "What the women want is a 'quiet' (tranquilo) husband, who will work hard and not make too much trouble." One of these sociologists pointed out that what power the women had had because the husbands were seldom at home was now dissipating, because emigration had diminished and a much smaller proportion of men were fishermen or sailors. He quoted figures on the distribution of incomes, properties, work loads and time budgets, and concluded, "It is absolutely false that there is a matriarchy! Women are very much oppressed in Galicia."

In one association, known to be run by "traditional" women, I found a strong conviction to the contrary. One of the leading women, whom I will call Marina, was convinced that women had more power and more personal strength than men and that for that very reason they should not hold formal positions of power. She told me that there had "always" been many very active women in that association, but men held all the formal positions. And the reason was that women cannot get along with each other. A woman president would be a disaster, she would want to take all the decisions on her own, and other women would not allow a woman to rule over them.

As we argued about this, a couple of younger women came into the room. As it turned out, they were both on the board of the association. Marina then admitted that that was possible, nowadays, but a woman president was not possible. And the two younger women agreed with Marina that there certainly was a matriarchy in Galicia. Women take all the decisions in their homes, inside the family, and outside, too. And women are as capable as men of doing anything, they said. Marina agreed. "I am not saying that we are not able, but if there is a woman president there will always be lots of fights among the women. And it is not right for a woman to order a man around." One of the younger women protested that Marina herself did that all the time.

Marina laughed, "No, I don't! I get my way, but I don't give orders." What she was hinting at was at what is sometimes called left hand in Spain, mano izquierda (Thurén 1988): the talent to get the upper hand by indirect means. It is of course a limited form of power, but an invaluable method of self-defense for people without formal means of power. And it is logical to think that people, in this case women, who have had to depend almost totally on indirect means, have developed them and become very good at using them. It must look very dangerous, then, to even imagine the possibility of giving them up. It may even be objectively risky to give up a form of power you know you have, however limited, when alternative forms are far from secure.

At a later occasion when I discussed this with Marina, a man also participated; let us call him Arturo. He said that the association functioned almost like a women's association, there were many more women than men active in it and it was mostly women who did all the practical work. But the men occupied the formal positions. Social workers and experts from Town Hall had tried to introduce women "from above", and many of the men on the board also wanted the women to come in, according to Arturo, but the resistance came from the women themselves. Marina agreed. "I always refuse, yes. It won't work if women give orders. Because women want to give orders, much more than men. Like at home. Especially women married to sailors, like me, I will not let a man rule over me."

Arturo said, "Yes, that is the way it is, there is complete matriarchy in the home."

I began to say that it might be so when the men are not at home... Marina protested again, "But when they are at home, it is still the same thing, eh. I have always made sure my husband is comfortable. I have taught the children not to ask me for anything when he is at home, but ask him. So that he won't feel out of place in his own home. It is the same thing whether he is at home one day a month or if he is away for many months."

Arturo said that it was exactly the same in his home.

These comments may seem contradictory, but they make sense from the "traditional" perspective. Obviously neither Marina nor Arturo equated deference with submissiveness. Obviously both of them took it for granted that men have a psychological need to be
symbolically placed above women. Any reshuffling of formal or symbolic power would upset a precarious balance that actually maintains a sort of equality in practice. But both of them also thought that women are prone to fighting among themselves in a way men are not. Therefore, to maintain the peace, it is necessary for men to have the last word, in practice as well as symbolically.

Inés would not agree to this last point, and her view of women centered more on women’s strength than on women’s inability to work harmoniously together. But she, too, underlined the bad atmosphere that she felt would inevitably be created in women-only groups, and she, too, felt that women would have to learn to be more solidary with each other, and also to work with men, because even though "all the presidents are men", women can get their way if they do not insist on "feminism". Instead, they should use their feminine strengths. If they do, women win, so in fact men do not have the upper hand. And she, too, saw gendered differences as given. Neither Inés nor the traditional women believed in separate spheres. They agreed that women should have their say in society, and that they should work together with men. Unlike the traditional women, however, Inés wanted women to strive for formal equality, even "enter from the top". To get what you want by indirect manipulative means seemed smart and right to Marina, undignified and inefficient to Inés.

Marina and Arturo also said that young people nowadays, "function the other way around. That is another world! Young men come to our activities, but the young girls won't join, I try to make activities for them together, but they don't mix. Outside the association it is the same thing, the young people don't go around in mixed groups." I am not sure if they saw this as a sign of change, or just something that is always true for young people; in either case they found it strange. They believed in difference and complementarity, not segregation. And because their views were strongly doxic, it was difficult for them to reflect on changes or strategies. Things were the way they were because they had to be. Inés, too, believed in difference and complementarity, and she struggled fiercely against segregation; her views were far from doxic in so far as strategies and politics go, but she, too, took gender differences as given and expressed them in terms of women's shortcomings.

Transcending equality/separatism

The situation in Vigo can be seen as a practical experiment with what Young calls gynocentric feminism, and the debates about it can be seen as a local expression of the tensions between gynocentric and humanist feminism (Young 1990a:73–91), or as a practical version of the general feminist debate on difference versus equality.9

Humanist feminism, in Young's terminology, is that which builds on Western Enlightenment values. The fundamental idea is that patriarchal society oppresses women because it hinders them from developing their potential as human beings. The goal is a society where gender differences do not count. These ideas are reflected in the so-called progressive discourse on gender in Spain (Thurén 1988 and forthcoming).

Gynocentric feminism, on the other hand, defines women's oppression as the devaluation and repression of women's experience by a masculinist culture that exalts violence and individualism. Women are not just passive, weak, the Other. They have contributed to civilization, they have resisted oppression, they have enjoyed their bodies, they have cultivated the values of care and nurture and communication. This position has been called "the feminism of difference" in Spain and usually criticized for being essentialist.

This chapter shows how these positions must be modified in relation to complex social reality and local conditions.

A gynocentric feminist would be happy with what happened in Vigo. Here was an ambitious political program with evident practical results based on the idea that women can change their lives without imitating men. The program celebrated women's products instead of devaluing

---

9 The literature on which is huge. For an appetizer see e.g. Evans 1995, Nicholson 1997, Squires 1999, Thurén 2003, and for Spanish versions, see e.g. Amorós 1996, Beltrán et al 2001, Escario et al 1996.
them. It liberated women's energies and fueled their self-confidence. As many women in Vigo expressed it: "This is what women like!" – pronounced not in resignation but with pride. The program proved to the women that what they were good at doing was valuable, worth showing off in large exhibitions, worth writing about, reviewing in media. It got women out of the home, but not in order to work with men, under men, but in order to do their things. Much the same thing could be said, on a less ambitious level, of Amparo's association (chapter 8) or the activities of La Esperanza in Linares (chapter 10).

Now, of course, this does maintain the established gender categorization and related division of labor, responsibilities, etc. And therefore also of power. A socialist feminist (like Inés in Vigo or like Mati in chapter 6) would argue that it is dangerous and counterproductive, probably even paternalistic, to keep women happy in their present limitations. The hopes of the feminists on the city council were that emancipatory messages would percolate somehow. (Which was why Marina and Arturo were ambivalent about it.) But that was a hidden agenda, and it was not happening. (Which was why most feminists in Vigo were against it.) Many of the women who organized the courses were themselves skeptical about what they were doing. How can one distinguish "what women like" from "what keeps women in their place"? they wondered. Furthermore, the agenda had to be well hidden. Most of the participating women might have shunned the courses if they had been aware of it. So it was not clear how or when any emancipatory messages could be injected into the situation, in case they did not rise out of it of their own accord.

It is probably the case that both gynocentric and humanist feminism challenge present power structures, but from a strategic point of view it is necessary to assess them in terms of results. One way of doing that is to look at what present powers find most threatening (Young 1990a:89). In Vigo, a woman president of a neighborhood association was a threat, especially if she was also a feminist, to judge from the comments of the men in the movement. A woman town councilor with a feminist program was even more of a threat. Such women were not many but even so sneered at by both women and men in the anti-feminist camp and regarded with skepticism even by activist women with a "traditional" outlook. Hundreds or even thousands of women attending handicraft courses, on the other hand, were considered a somewhat unusual but still charming and inoffensive phenomenon. In October 1994, there was a big exposition of the products the women had made in the courses. Town Hall financed it, including posters all over town; local press covered it generously, using adjectives like charming, beautiful, worthwhile, etc.

This must be seen against the background of, on the one hand the majority feminist position, inspired by Enlightenment ideas, that equality is both the means and the end, and on the other hand the strength of local traditions of complementarity, interpreted and believed in as "matriarchy". These two positions were seen as opposites and seemed to define the whole field of the debate on gender in Vigo. There was a choice between only two positions, neither of which seemed workable in the Galician context from a reformist political point of view, like that which dominated in the neighborhood movement.

It would seem then as if the Vigo experiment would be easily contained by the powers that be.

But, if these women were truly doing something new that would lead them on to other activities, thoughts and values, then the dichotomy separatism / equality might be transcended. The separate activities gave women a chance they had not had before of doing new things, like going out together in groups, and to do this in a new context, but doing it as women. One could say that the Vigo program was separatism in the short run, as a means, and integration in the long run, as a goal. There was no biologist essentialism in it, nor any philosophical essentialism of the kind found in separatist feminism. Women are different because of their experiences, the organizers reasoned, so we must build on that difference, but if they are given a chance to have other experiences, womanhood will be reinterpreted and many aspects of life will be degendered.

The streets of Vigo had never been very gendered, but both the political and the pleasurable aspects of the public sphere had been gendered strongly male. It was now being degendered, especially the pleasure part, but also, more slowly, the political part.
The role the neighborhood movement played in this process was logical, seeing its anti-essentialist, leftist and egalitarian ethos. But the movement itself had been strongly gendered in Vigo. No wonder the new situation caused confusion, some irritation and many contradictions.

Epilogue

When I returned to Vigo in January 2003, the recent oil catastrophe was on everyone's mind and took up most of the energy of all quarters of civil society. There was an atmosphere of anger and impotence. Vigo was covered with blackened Galician flags with the words "nunca máis" = never again. As in other places, one of the issues much discussed in the neighborhood movement was now that of generational renovation, and as usual it was said that young people nowadays are passive and uninterested in political activity. But in Vigo such arguments were always rebutted with comments about how young people from all over Spain were pouring in to help scrub the Galician coasts. "There is a lot of solidarity among the young."

As to the course program for women, it continued and it was still debated. Ana Gandón and her associates as well as many of the activist women all said that it had been a great success.

One Town Hall employee said (not literal quote), "Yes, we hit on the right thing there, I remember it with such pleasure, it was one of those things when you start something and you don't know how it is going to turn out, but then you realize you were completely right, that your initiative fits the structures of the moment. The women really did come out of their homes and they have continued forwards, they have not stopped there, this thing has its own dynamics now."

Ana Gandón explained that "we have given them (the movement women) complete freedom to do what they thought best." The one thing she had had second thoughts about was her insistence that the courses for women should not include traditional women's work, like dressmaking and cooking. "It is true, that was the rule then, and now I am not sure it was correct. What we say now is that the important thing is that it be something for women, and that the same course cannot be repeated the next year. Many women learn things they can earn money with. But the courses should not be exactly about domestic tasks."

Some movement women said that the courses had changed the attitudes towards women's work outside the home. "Before, they worked to earn some money as an addition to the main income, which was that of the husband. But now the women go to courses and learn something they can earn real money with. So now they think an income gives them independence."

The course program of 2002–03 was called O Nosoi Tempo = Our Time. I asked if that had to do with women's lack of time, the double or triple working day. No, it referred to the need to have time of one's own, to do things for your own benefit and enjoyment, i.e. to women's right to leisure and pleasure, a "room of their own" outside family duties.

There were now 32 women's committees and seven neighborhood women's associations in Vigo. There were women presidents in seven of the barrio associations, and there was at least one woman on the board in every one, even though the overwhelming majority of board members were still men. The courses continued to be the main activity for the women's committees in the barrios. The women's committee of the federation had a permanent work group that met every week, and once a month there was a larger meeting with a representative from each barrio. Three things were organized at federation level each year: a women's congress, an exposition of handicraft objects from the courses, and a trip to the Cíes islands.

The congress was open to anyone interested. Usually some 500 women participated, and there was ample press coverage, because it was one of the largest congresses of any kind celebrated in Vigo each year. The debates had usually centered on sexuality and the body.

---

10 In November 2002, the oil tanker Prestige sprang a leak outside the Galician coast. Instead of being taken to port, to be repaired, it was towed out to high sea, where it broke and sank, whereupon huge amounts of oil floated in to the coast, not just of Galicia but also of all of northern Spain and some parts of the French coast. Volunteers and soldiers as well as experts worked for months with the cleaning operations, which were very difficult on the rocky and jagged Galician coast. Fishing and shellfish cultivation were hard hit, and also secondary industries, such as ice, canning and tourism.
"Women ask for things about the body. It is remarkable, how we do not get along with our own bodies." In 2002 the tenth congress was held.

During one whole day each spring, there were only women on the islands at the mouth of the bay, Islas Cíes. It was a women's holiday. Movement women told me that the first few times the women took their own lunches, but now they ordered lunch at the restaurants on the islands. And it was a wonderful special day, "even women who have never dared to get into a swim suit, that day they do, and they may even take it off, because there are no men around..." Ana Gandón laughed, "It's quite a sight, when the boats return in the evening, all the husbands waiting in the harbor, checking their watches..." Her voice was cordial, not sarcastic. Local press covered the event every year, with headlines and photos.

All women's associations of Vigo were represented in the municipal women's council. To have such a women's council in the town hall was a reivindicación in many other towns.

Had the course initiative really had an effect on the gender order in Vigo then?

The discussions centered on whether the "second step" had been taken or not. The women had come out of their homes, that was the absolutely necessary first step, and it had happened, everyone agreed on that. But the second step, thought some, was for women to become aware of their oppression, and that had not happened. To others, the second step would be for women to understand what the neighborhood movement was all about, and to become active in it. Some divided that into a second step of knowledge, which had been achieved, and a third step of actual commitment, which a few but not very many had taken.

Many women who had come out of the courses were now active in the women's committees, some said, but what was still not happening was for women from the courses to dare be on the association boards. Perhaps that would be a fourth step.

It seemed that what used to be the excuse for going to courses, to make objects, was no longer decisive, so there were now many more courses with an educational content (de formación), which was another kind of second step, and there were also courses to prepare women for leadership positions, e.g. such things as how to write letters, how to relate to mass media, relaxation, health... but the third step, to raise women's political awareness, still lay ahead.

A couple of the women who had been movement novices in 1994 now said they had a lot of experience, they were no longer afraid of speaking in public, "not even in front of a TV camera". They were still a very small minority, but ten years earlier there were hardly any women like them at all in the Vigo working class.

The greatest thing that had happened, everyone agreed, was that women were no longer afraid of going to bars or cafeterias on their own. "In my association, eight years ago, there were two women who sometimes went into the association cafeteria, and that was commented on as a bad thing. Now all women use the cafeteria. After each course, all the women come out from class and go into the cafeteria to have a snack. And nobody says anything about it. It's not news."

Several women also said that an important improvement was that the male activists in the movement had accepted the presence of women. "They resisted for a while, but now they realize that without the women, the movement would die." That is so, for one thing, because more and more women do become activists, they said. Secondly, thanks to the courses there is always something going on in the premises, "the lights are on." Thirdly, thanks to the course subsidies about half of the associations now have an employee who can answer the telephone and give information.

Some movement women were less optimistic; they said that most women still have to put up a tremendous fight to convince their husbands to let them do things on their own, and that is why it is so important to offer things women really like, "they won't take such a fight with the husband unless it is for something they really want to do."

Some informants said that "feminism" was no longer a dirty word in the neighborhood movement in Vigo. The women's committees had a monthly coordinating meeting with the feminist groups of the city. Recently the two movements had collaborated on the creation of a network to combat domestic violence and assist battered women.
As in all the towns and cities I visited, the federation organized a meeting to discuss my study. Some of the comments\textsuperscript{11} in Vigo were:

– What you say about men's resistance to women's activism in Andalusia would be quite applicable to Vigo, too.

– The men here, too, have problems with women sitting on the board. They don't want to be second in importance to a woman.

– Lots of things are changing, but it is mostly because the women are changing, the men are not, and that is a problem. And in many barrios it is still not acceptable for a woman to come home from a meeting late at night. Especially in the rural barrios.

– But the change will continue, because women have much more experience now compared to eight years ago, they know better what they want.

– The institutionalization of the movement has gone very far. Lots of people confuse it with Town Hall and criticize activists for what Town Hall does.

– There are many different reasons for women to come to the courses. But women no longer get a bad conscience if they do not make something. They are more interested in learning things. "The result is in the head."

– "Some men are envious. They don't have time to go to courses."

– "When I come into a room full of men, I feel uncomfortable."

– Today it is normal for women to go to courses. But if a woman wants to do more than that, she has to fight men's resistance. Or at the very least be careful with her looks. "You have to dress very well and look very beautiful or they won't notice you."

– But a nice-looking woman who knows how to speak well, yes, the men will listen to her nowadays.

– There are leadership courses for men, too, but mostly men are not interested. "They think they are born knowing everything."

I can see the similarities between Vigo and Linares that the women read into my presentation, but I would stress the differences more. Vigo is a much easier place for a woman to live in, in the sense that women take a certain amount of autonomy, agency and freedom of movement for granted, for historical reasons. And the neighborhood movement is a much more welcoming place for Vigo women than for women in either Linares or Elda in that both activists and other women have a recognized space in it.

That does not mean Galicia is a matriarchy. The historical social and cultural structures, and the habits and doxas rooted in them, do not give women more power than men, and to the extent that they have been less questioned than in other places, these "traditional" roots of the gender order curtail Vigo women's possibilities for action more, not less, than in places where the gender order is in more of a flux. Vigo women had to fight the remnants of age-old poverty and institutionalized ignorance as well as strongly doxic ideas about gender complementarity. A few of them were doing so with much creativity, even though also with lots of disagreement among themselves. Many more were breaking up the genderization of the street-home dichotomy, perhaps without realizing it, but learning and definitely enjoying it.

Going to a barrio bar to have coffee can mean so much. In Linares and Vigo, in similar ways. In Elda it was taken for granted, just like in the big cities.

In both Vigo, Linares and Elda, the neighborhood movement was shaped by the local gender order, and the women in the neighborhood movement addressed the gender order in paradigmatic ways, "starting from where the women are."

Let us now take a look at Cordova, a city of the same size as Vigo but situated in Andalusia like Linares.

\textsuperscript{11} The wording within quotation marks is exact (as translated); the rest is approximate, abbreviated.