CHAPTER 4. CARMEN’S STORY

Talking to activists of the early years of the movement in one of the places studied, I often heard the name of Carmen. She was one of the activists of those early years, and she had continued being active until recently. Her story illustrates what the movement looked like in poor barrios in the early days and what it could mean to a woman from the most unfortunate sector of society. The story is representative of many aspects of this experience. It is almost ideal-typical – but it is true.

Carmen lived in an apartment in one of the barrios built for workers during Franco times. In other words, a very small apartment, originally of bad quality, in a barrio of a non-elegant but not marginal kind. The inhabitants had made lots of improvements through the years, and the area was now well ordered and almost beautiful. Carmen's apartment looked like most working class apartments in Spain. I was shown into the salón, which looked as if it was seldom used. There was a couch and two armchairs in shiny artificial leather; several small tables with embroidered doilies, one of them full of family photos in frames; a book-case with an encyclopedia and glass doors showing coffee cups. The curtains were closed against the mid-morning sun, leaving the room in nicely cool penumbra.

Carmen was in her mid-fifties, round of figure and face, exuding amiability. Her husband, who opened the door for me but then retired discretely to another room, was also small and round and friendly. Carmen wanted to make coffee, but I had already had coffee twice that morning, I was thirsty and wanted only water. So she served me a glass of water in as nice a way as possible, placing the glass on a plate and the plate on a small tray together with a stiffly ironed embroidered napkin.

Her story will be presented in the first person and more or less as she told it herself, only minimally edited, mainly to eliminate repetitions. I have indicated the places where I have abbreviated it or left out details that might reveal her identity. Where her words are quoted exactly, there are quotation marks, but the rest is close to verbatim, too. I did not have to ask very many questions. Some of them can be inferred, where Carmen begins a phrase saying yes or no. Others are included, marked by a dash. Words in parentheses are my explanations to the reader. The interview lasted for just over two hours. The name is a pseudonym, chosen by her.

I want to stay close to Carmen's own style, because it carries information about her background, her personality and her cultural suppositions. Much would be lost if her story was to be adapted to conventional Anglo-Saxon ways of speaking. Yet, of course, the non-adaptation may make some of her comments difficult to contextualize correctly. This is a common problem for anthropologists, but unlike the case of very exotic material, I believe the information contained in Carmen's style can be reasonably well captured by the average Western reader. It is European, after all. Where her expressions were not easy to translate into idiomatic English but still comprehensible in almost-literal translation, I have preferred the latter. The reader should bear in mind that this may make her sound more eccentric than she was. But she was no ordinary woman. Her language was not rich in nuances, but it was emotional, personal, expressive, creating a very honest impression. She left most sentences unfinished, but her meaning was always clear and often succinct. She said she was shy, but she gave a far from shy impression. I do believe she had been the fighter she made herself out to be, and which other people in the town had told me she was, and I hope the reader can appreciate and read between the lines what it must have meant for her to "learn so much", as she phrased it.

The first part of the story may seem confusing, because Carmen tried to tell everything at once, without chronology. Her tale became more substantial as the initial nervousness wore off. The "young girls" she mentions were charity workers from a Catholic organization. I met a couple of them, too. They had middle class backgrounds and their motives were more religious than
political, but they were marxists and worked hard not just to teach people in marginal barrios to read and write but to make them see that they were oppressed and that they were able to do something about it.

Carmen's words

I lived in a very marginal barrio. A very normal life. But when my first daughter was born, I wanted to know. Because you know, children, they are going to demand... No, I had never been to school. In order to get my driver's license, one of my daughters taught me how to read, or well, read... well, a few things. Because I did know a few things.

Yes, we had had courses in the barrio. There were those young girls who came to the houses commenting, and I saw that we would be able to do a lot of things in the barrio. People were growing a little conscious, beginning to move.

Things were very bad, we had to struggle a lot, go to a lot of places, go outside the barrio...

No, I did not know anything about politics nor did I think about it, not at all. I had something inside me, so then later... I always wanted more, but I did not know what, and later when these people came, I saw how it could become reality. That life was not only just work. Those girls who came, they saw us, they gave us books... I remember one book that made a very strong impression on me, I don't remember now the name of it, but that was where I discovered class-consciousness.

I come from a rather harsh childhood. Always separated from my parents. I was always very, as if, wanting to give something, but with a lot of sadness inside, since I had not had... obviously... I have always thought that I was nothing, that I have not had... I mean... I just vegetated. The wish to know came when my daughters were born. Then I wanted to learn a lot, I wanted to learn in order to help them. I did not want them to have to go through what I had gone through. I wanted them to study and such things. All the time I wanted to know more and more. We lived in a barrio without electric light, there was no running water, there were no sewers... there was no school... So then we had to go around to many places, to find the first chairs... The first chairs we got for the association were from an old movie theater; they had thrown them out on the square. In those years, it was very beautiful, because the barrio got electricity, a school... and later there were more associations... and then we started the coordinadoras... What I mean is that it was a beautiful movement. Until this thing came that came later.

– Was it beautiful not just for the barrio but for you personally?

Yes. For me as a person, because little by little I learned to see things in other ways. I wanted to discover more things... I read... And we also joined this HOAC organization.¹

But the problem was this defect I have had of not knowing how to read or write very much... Because of that I was always shy. I have not been courageous, because actually, just as I have done other things, I could have learned, because there was a time when they could have taught me and so on. But I did not have much free time. And my head, well, it did not...

– I can see that, what with two daughters and working outside your home, and the association, and running a home, having to fetch water...

All of that, of course, and everything was far away, to shop for food we had to carry everything from very far away ()... it was hard work. We had to go out to wash... even to throw out used water, there was nothing in the house, we had to carry the water to throw it away... Later we obtained water, but there were still no sewers, we had to take the water out. But you see, since I was so eager to learn things, and I wanted so much for at least our daughters for when they got older, for things to be different then, and that this would be just like other barrios... "So at least we made a better barrio, happier, for our daughters. The things that happen... We were among the last to leave the barrio."

– But there are still people living there?

There are people there, but of all the people who were there at that time, struggling, no one is left. No, because it became impossible... We were among the last to leave, because what with the

¹ HOAC, Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica, cf. note 13, chapter 2.
gypsies... And not just gypsies but problems with drugs and so on, and even while we were still there we saw how they kept introducing drugs. All the pushers there are there today, they introduced it from nowhere, just to... And we were really sorry, you understand, because we lived there for over twenty years.

(Together, we figured out that her family must have lived in that barrio from the late 1960s until the mid 1980s.)

And we were really sorry to leave, because we had built our house. Well, built one part of it, and one part was a cave. My husband saw that it could be done, and we dug out to make more space in it, and we had a wonderful little garden, and we loved that house, because we had made it ourselves. And we wanted the girls to have everything, so we had made a bathroom... and everything... the same as here, no more than here. And well, with a lot of sacrifice and love we had made it ourselves. But then what happened, happened... that my oldest little girl got pregnant real early. (She lowered her voice in sadness.) And that hurt us a lot. I had to go off to work, and the two of them were left alone, and twice someone tried to enter the house. They did break in once. Sure, it was dangerous, I had to go to work and when the girls came home from school they were alone. And with them inside, they tried to break in, they broke off the iron window bars... That was when it was at its worst. It is bad now, too, you know, but that was when the thing with the drug trade began. Later they got smart and went to other places (to steal), but at that time they began with the barrio.

– Were you afraid, too, when the girls walked to school and back?

Yes. We put in the telephone, and they would call from wherever they were, and we would go to meet them, because for a while it was just impossible to live there. We were lucky to be able to come here, because we sold the house for a good price. (Details about how they took the decision, related to the daughter's pregnancy.) But naturally I missed... because over there we were all so close, and united, and so many years of struggle and everything...

– Did you all know each other in the barrio?

Yes, it was wonderful, that barrio... (happy voice). We worked a lot, but it was something... for example, for Valentine's Day\(^2\) we organized dinners there, in the association. We worked very hard, because we had to do it all between only three or four of us, but it was wonderful. Then the barrio fiesta, that too was something, madre mia, the barrio festivities, they were... We had such a good time... No one else came, it was only for us, and we stayed up all night until daylight. It was great, all of that.

– But you say people left little by little...

Yes, all of this happened when we were all living in the barrio. () And then later PSOE came in, well, all the political parties, and the change and all of that, and then that was... It took a very bad turn, because with everything we had struggled for, we were always going to Town Hall and such things. And then what happened? Just like that, they wanted you to put everything in writing; they did not want all of us to go together... You see, we had for example a committee for some theme, electricity or whatever. So then we would all go to talk to the councilor, and then for something else to some other councilor, whoever was in charge. We would all go and we would all speak. But later they wanted us to take it to them in writing, and only one member could go. They did not want to see people any more. So we began to cool off. Because it was no longer so beautiful. Because, obviously, before, we were revolutionaries (laughter) and so on, but they told us, no, no, no, you come here with papers and with one representative to bring it here, that is enough, and so on...

– So you had to change your methods?

Yes, right.

– And you had been used to working in that other way.

In that way, yes, from below, everything. And later they wanted to force us to, and then it was no longer... They also tried to... That thing (the association) began to go to pieces, and they also tried to place one of their boys...

\(^2\) The Spanish name is el dia de los enamorados, the day of the ones who are in love. Its celebration is a rather recent import.
– From the party?
Yes, from the party and so on. And they told him, you get in there and see to it that it goes to pieces, because that was not right...
– Had there been party people there before, from the PCE or MC or...?
Yes, in those times we were all in the association. All of us! No, there were not many from the PSOE. But... that thing has meant so much, we had to struggle so much...
(She commented on how strong her association had been in the early years.) Uy, if I had had a bit more of will-power and if I had learnt a bit more, I could have... because I was always shy because of this. "But I was not scared of going to... uff! To ask for things for others... well, I would do that just like that... We would go there and raise hell, but with good words, telling of all the things that happened in our barrio, and the truth is that we managed to obtain a lot of things. Because we could see... For example, when people complained and said we did not know how to do things, I said, if this was asphalted, if there were gardens, if this place had everything it should have, we don't know just what these people would be able to do. Because there is nothing there now..."
– So you were not so shy...
No, that's what I mean, not shy when it came to talking. If I had had the same strength in order to learn how to read and write and all of that, then... Besides, since it was something we lived with, that is what it is all about, don't you think, to live things, right? And then you go and tell what it is you are experiencing.
– And struggle.
Yes, oh yes! To the first demonstration about (the reason for it), we went some one hundred persons, there, when it was still underground, that was a miracle.
(Shewent on to tell her version of a local strike during the transition.)
And there we were, all of us, absolutely everyone. It was a conjunction of everyone, because when it came to struggling, my barrio was... Everyone supported us, the PC, the MC, all the living forces, because they saw that there was an eagerness there to do things.
– Were you in a labor union, too?
(Shetold a story of problems in her very low prestige occupation, and of how she organized union activities, especially when a few of her workmates were threatened by lay-off. But other workmates did not understand. They wanted the union to obtain higher pay, that was all. Carmen was very hurt by what she saw as her colleagues' lack of solidarity. So she stopped being an activist.)

Then I left the union, for the same reason. Well, I go on paying the dues, but... (more details on the main conflict) People screamed at us, saying that... And then I was really, really disappointed, because we had seen it as something good. But in that company the people had really low culture, that is why they could not understand, and I was so disappointed I did not want to be elected any more. (Sad voice.) I did not even want to sign up for anything at all. I left it all for a while, because I felt bad, because that is what happens, you have to do everything...
– It is always easy to criticize...
"You see, people don't... The first thing you have to have to be in a place like that, is to have a... one... this thing with class, you have to know who is the one who oppresses you, they are always the same ones, the capital, the businessmen. And since people have so little culture, they don't worry about obtaining that consciousness, so then they confuse, or in other words... you end up feeling bad."

(Shetalked some more on the union problem.) There comes a moment when you can't continue just by yourself. People have to open their eyes. "I don't even... not knowing, I don't even know... well, I do know how to read a little and I can sign my name. But: 'not me!' (She meant to describe a common attitude: people expect things to be done for them by others. "Not me" means "you do it, I agree with what you are doing, but I won't do anything myself." Carmen's "not me!" was an abbreviation of "a lot of people have the 'not me' attitude.") People think that you, but not me... In the same way as I have learnt – I have learnt all of this little by little – you can learn, too!"
– But I imagine it was different in the barrio association during the early years, you say there was solidarity there, and...
But you see, there we had the same interests, all of us, because all of us who lived there wanted to know. And that is very important. Because people are so lazy. Not then, not now, not ever, unless you sacrifice a little... you have to sacrifice. We sacrificed a lot, we wanted to know and we wanted to learn, and... We struggled and at the same time we were discovering all the injustices there were. There were some injustices! So then, this gave us this spirit, to learn how things work, how to use things. "These persons (she refers to the activists from HOAC who came to her barrio) helped us to know who our enemies were. That is the most important of all. In order to know where you are going..."

(Here her grandchild came into the room. We joked a bit with him. Then I asked if she gave up all her political activities when she moved to the new barrio.)

No, no, once we had moved in here, the same thing. I saw that... this was a very comfortable barrio, the women did not go out.

– But it is a working class barrio, isn't it?

"Yes, but the thing is there is an image here, sort of, like, well... People are in their homes, and when they go into the street they are nicely dressed. They work a lot, but... When I came here, well, there was, I saw a lot of well-dressed persons, and I asked myself, what are these people? And then I realized that the women, all morning (would be working). And then later you would see them...(gesture meaning: you would see them looking elegant and leisurely, as if they were not ordinary working people.) And little by little, finding out, you ask yourself, how is it possible that this girl can dress the way she dresses when (she works so hard)."

I did not like it. Because the other barrio was a happy place. And I was afraid that coming here, I would not be able to communicate, because I saw people so shut up in themselves... So then we suggested, we got together a few people... "So actually I almost provoked the association. Almost me, along with a few more... I got it off the ground. I talked to a few people: Listen, why don't we make an association, even if it is only for having a fiesta, because Town Hall will give some money for that, and by then there were associations almost everywhere. And I went into the hairdresser's and did the same thing, I talked with one woman, I talked with another, and by then I knew the one in the hairdresser's, and I talked, and then, well, I know a lot of people... And then (I said): Listen, why don't we make an association, because this is an old barrio already and it needs a lot of things..." We went out, we talked to people. There is an old garden... have you seen it? ...

– Yes.

... very small but very pretty, but it was walled in by walls all the way up, and I said, don't you feel sorry about that garden, we have it right there but can't use it. The first thing an association could do is to ask Town Hall to get rid of those walls, so that we can sit there, we could have the fiesta there, now it is right in the middle of everything and that is not nice, and every day... And people started stirring, and we constituted the association. And I did not want to join, because I wanted to be more sort of on the outside, to go on stimulating people. But in the end I joined, I got into it.

– Why did you want to be on the outside?

To cheer people on, so they would go... I mean, I did not want to have a position or anything, just be there, be sort of a little...

– Was it because you were a bit burnt out? Or was that later?

"Yes, oh yes, I was already a bit burnt out from the other place, because of all of that, and the union thing and everything... But at the same time... Obviously, since I want to do things, well... That's all there is to it... I get in and then... we began working." And what happens then is just that, as I said, the first thing we obtained was that thing with the garden, they took out the walls and made others, smaller. And the sidewalks were very bad, and since that is something that motivates people, and also the streetlights, they were very bad, too... I said, let's begin here... "But naturally, since there was no group, because what we would have needed here was a group which more or less had had a goal."

– People united by something.

"Or people who... who could see the problem we have in this barrio, that women don't go out, or don't participate in anything, and then to be sort of coordinated, in that association or in any other way, and then start from there. Not just giving service. To stimulate people, let us do the
service thing, but then to have a group there, to start doing cultural things, this thing with women or... That was what I was looking for then."

Yes, that is what I thought of doing, first to capture people, with things like the streetlights, a little like beginning almost from scratch, the same as in the other place. But at the same time I thought someone would join, so that we could have some coordination a little bit with this, do this and that, a few lectures on women or... But after a while I saw there were no possibilities. Because people... Although there are people in the parish and all of that, but there is no vision there...

– People have told me that the parish in this barrio is very active.

Oh yes.

– And that it is a bit leftist, like the HOAC, isn't that so?

"Yes, yes... but the parish here looks more towards the outside, outside of the barrio. They are scared of everyone, of all the forces there are here, they are scared of them, because there is a carelessness among people here, who don't have... That is what I say, they don't have class-consciousness. They are workers, exploited maximally, and without... but when it comes to doing something, when it comes to expressing themselves, they don't...."

– Why is that so special in this barrio?

Well, because this barrio, the first initiative came from the bank people. Who are workers. They are like foremen in the factories. There was some doctor, too. Nurses... People from all over.

– People a bit better off...

Then there was a bit of consciousness, too, but, they felt more like this barrio was among the best... you see them walk around in style, but then they have to work like everyone else.

– They try to show off...

"Yes, and they don't have a class consciousness. Really, that is what I notice, that they don't have any class-consciousness. Like one girl said to me (laughter), when I was going around talking to everyone. Because in the beginning I talked an awful lot. One girl who is a factory worker – and her husband is a doorman and he used to be a foreman – and she said to me, that here in this barrio we are sort of upper middle class." (Grand laughter.)

Comments

From there on, the conversation veered towards more personal things. The story of Carmen's bitter childhood would also be worth telling, for its intrinsic human interest, and because it probably explains some of the sources of her energy and her feeling of personal limitations. But there is no room for that here.

From a more analytical point of view, the story illustrates several things. First of all it is an example of the deep feelings of regret many people have about what they construe as ignorance, as "vegetating" or "living like animals". This feeling is usually stronger, the more cultural change there has been in a person's life. I have encountered it especially in people who started life as illiterate rural workers and later found literacy, urban life with its complex social relationships, a sense of personal worth and a sense of individual agency. The macro processes of social and cultural change are understood as improvements that changed one's life in a very deep way and that made it possible to hope for a completely different kind of life for one's children. This experience is most common for the generation of Spaniards who were children during the harsh 1940s and came to adulthood in the 1960s. The changes are usually seen as coming from the outside. Even people who, like Carmen, highlight their own strength and capacity, also underline the time factor as an agent of change in itself and often tell about some special event or some special persons who created turning points.

In Carmen's case, the decisive turning point was the arrival to her barrio of a couple of young middle class Christian women, sent by the HOAC. Several missionary organizations were allowed and encouraged during the dictatorship. They were seen by the regime as safe, because controlled by the Church, and positive, because it was thought that one reason the working classes were unruly was that they were not Christian enough. These missions often did have conservative purposes, as the regime surmised, and the HOAC itself was not always as revolutionary as Carmen described it (cf. López García 1995), but whatever the intentions, the actual effects of the work of
the missionaries were often subversive. They did give poor, uneducated people intellectual and sometimes political tools to interpret their situation in new ways, and inspiration to do something about it.

It is thus no coincidence that Carmen keeps coming back to "learning" as a key symbol. This is very representative. Most people in the movement do, both women and men.

But people like Carmen were not just poor and uneducated. They were limited in their actions by harsh material circumstances. Most of the shantytowns growing up around the big cities during the 1950s and 1960s had deplorable conditions of a kind usually associated with the so-called Third World. Carmen's description of lack of running water, long distances to shops and workplaces, and so on, is not at all unusual. These circumstances have by now almost disappeared, and many young Spaniards do not even know very much about them. People who lived through such changes as Carmen, for example from having to go into the fields to defecate to have their own bathrooms with running hot and cold water and probably an automatic washer, in a matter of a decade or so, understandably feel that they have moved up in the world. It is no wonder, then, that a factory worker can see herself as "upper middle class". Others, like Carmen, interpret such views as expressions of false consciousness and instead emphasize the significance of material improvement for their feelings of self-worth and widening possibilities.

People who participated in the early years of the neighborhood movement, often remember it in retrospect as "beautiful". There was much hard work. There were disappointments, even with comrades in the struggle. There were risks, there were people who had to pay fines, who lost their jobs, and even a few who were sent to prison, not to mention the common experience of having to run from police attacks. But most of the time the struggle felt epic. The enemies were huge and powerful and easy to recognize: harsh economic exploitation, a repressive political regime, old-fashioned (from the point of view one learned in the movement) worldviews in the surrounding society. But things were getting better, visibly, palpably. In the long run victory was guaranteed, people felt. And democracy did come.

After a few years of struggle, many activists experienced the feeling of disappointment Carmen described. The movement had to change, because circumstances changed, but this was not always comprehensible or emotionally acceptable for the activists.

The movement had to change, and it is still searching for a new identity. That is my interpretation as well as that of most activists today. But I agree with those who think its greatest strength continues to be its grass roots character. When the political parties try to instrumentalize the movement, they destroy its most valuable asset. Carmen's comments are typical. She felt the PSOE "placed one of their boys" on purpose to destroy the association. She did not speculate about why the party might want to do such a thing. The usual explanation people give is that political parties want power, practically by definition, so they want to dominate the movement, too. This is one reason so many people in the movement strongly dislike "politics". The opinion that it is morally wrong to try to take over "our" associations is near unanimous.

As to her own participation as a woman, Carmen is atypical in that she has nothing special to say about it. Her husband was apparently not very active in the movement, but he did not oppose her activism, so she did not have to win a struggle on the family front before being able to go on to the larger struggle. In her barrio, it seems that most of the activists were women. This may have been a consequence of the fact that it was two women from HOAC who started it all. The men may have felt that the association was a thing for women only, and when/if they joined later, the women had already created an uncontested space for themselves in it.

3 "Third World" (tercer mundo) and the derived adjective tercermundista were common ways in Spain of referring to and describing such circumstances in the 1960s and 1970s. They are still used to describe conditions one wants to label intolerable for a developed European country, even though the conditions referred to now are subtler, such as administrative corruption or inefficiency. The words can certainly be used in prejudiced and insulting ways, implying, "the world outside Europe is inferior". But usually the intent is critical and refers only to Spain, meaning "Spain used to be underdeveloped and it still is; all the talk of us now belonging to Europe and having improved so much is political propaganda; we must refuse to be content, we must not accept things as they are, because this is not a dignified life. We still suffer from tercermundista conditions."

4 Later there were disappointments with the kind of democracy that came, but that is another story.
It may also have been due to its being a marginal barrio, where the gendered distinction of public and private spheres was not so clear as in the barrio to which she later moved. In the original barrio all women worked for money in one way or another, and many household chores had to be done outdoors. The material conditions meant that the barrio people knew a lot about each other. In the new barrio there were also social and economic problems, but it was better off in that the needs were not so pressing and they were less visible. It was possible for people to fence off their privacy. But Carmen interpreted it (as do I) as being only in part a difference in economic level and more of a difference in visibility. The first thing she said about it was that "people were in the homes" and that they marked the dividing line between indoors and outdoors by dressing up when leaving their private dwelling. This also meant that the public sphere was more clearly gendered. It had become possible for women to move closer to the ideal of the homebound housewife, which was a culturally strong ideal for most Spaniards. But for Carmen it was a new thing, she had never known it, and she did not like what she saw. She felt the women put on airs, and that that was stupid, since they had to work "like everyone else."

Carmen mentions gypsies and drugs as things that made "everyone" leave the old barrio. This is a common story lately. As the Spanish working class has improved their conditions, they have left the shantytowns, the caves and the very low quality apartment buildings from early Franco times. In many cases the old dwellings have just been torn down or fallen apart. In other cases, however, they have been taken over by a category of people who are in general even worse off – gypsies. As to drugs, this is not the place to write the history of the international drug trade; suffice it to say that this trade has made Spain into one of its major shipping and exchange areas, and in combination with sociocultural instability, glaring economic injustices even in the midst of overall improvement, and the long-lasting high unemployment rates, this has meant that the working classes of urban Spain have been very hard hit. The experiences of Malvarrosa (chapter 7) were unique in their degree of violence, but many barrios have suffered similar processes.

The neighborhood movement has organized festivities in almost all barrios.5 This has been an efficient way of creating social networks, barrio solidarity and loyalty with the neighborhood association itself. In many places, today, where the neighborhood associations are losing energy, the main activity, the main reason for existence even, is now to organize the annual fiesta. This means that a new kind of activist is attracted and that some of the old-timers are frustrated (cf. chapter 3). Carmen, however, saw no contradiction between reivindicación and fiesta. For her they supported each other.

In the early years, there were no permitted channels for protest, so the activists had to resort to demonstrations and delegations of people insisting on seeing politicians. This was a style that fitted well with the habitus of illiterate people with manual occupations. When later, with democracy, regular channels for citizens' actions were established, such people did not always interpret this as an improvement. They were not used to seeing a piece of writing as forceful action. From their point of view, face-to-face meetings are the only trustworthy ways of reaching lasting agreements. When politicians insisted on more bureaucratic methods, people like Carmen felt that they were undemocratic, because "they did not want to see people any more." And to accuse someone of not enjoying meeting people is harsh criticism, indeed, in this culture with its strong emphasis on sociability and communication (Cucó 1995, Cucó and Pujadas 1990, Fant 1989, Thurén 1988).

Carmen's interpretation of bureaucratization and rationalization throws light on the tensions within the movement between the revolutionaries and the reformists and between PSOE people and independents. To "struggle" was for her to "talk to people", and to move, to walk, to get around, to search for needed objects like chairs, and for solutions to problems, for innovative methods, and so on. The movement should not just be "giving service", she said, referring to the present tendencies to turn it in the direction of volunteer-work. For Carmen that meant giving up on solidarity among equals, and besides it was boring, conformist. She was also concerned that the movement should be

5 The main exception are barrios where there were already well-established traditional festivities, i.e. usually barrios in central areas of towns and cities.
something different from traditional charity. It must be connected to an awareness of exploitation and a wish to struggle against oppression.

Carmen's story also illustrates the feelings of vulnerability, abuse and ignorance suffered typically by an illiterate person with irregular family circumstances in Franco's Spain, and how getting a glimpse of new ideas could fuel her energy for years. It illustrates the common experience of let-down and disappointment when non-activists do not appreciate your efforts. And it illustrates the feelings connected with a move from the lowest margins of society into a stable working class context.

Her story was not very specific. She talked more of feelings than concrete issues. Precisely for this reason it can be read as close to an ideal type. To safeguard her anonymity, I have eliminated many details. If they had been left in, her story would have been less abstract, of course, but she did tell it in a rather abstract manner. She wanted to generalize, in order to make me understand what her barrio had been like and what experiences people like her had had of the movement.

**Epilogue**

When in 2002 I asked Carmen her permission to publish this story, she gave it without hesitation. And with some pride. "I did not realize my story was that important." But she wanted me to correct a few details.

It is true that her parents did not take care of her, she said, so she had to work for other people from a very young age, and that was very difficult, but she understands and has forgiven her parents. "Those times were even harder than mine."

Her husband did oppose her activism. "I probably did not want to tell you that then, if he was in the other room and might hear. But oh yes! We had terrible crises. He did not understand, I had to fight a lot with him. Men just don't understand. But it got better after a while."

In the association in the first barrio there were not only women. "We were probably about half and half."

Since then, things have truly changed. The barrios of the 1990s had very different problems from the ones Carmen described. We will see examples in a moment, but first we must take a general view of what part women have played in the movement and what the movement has meant for women.