CHAPTER 5. WOMEN IN THE MOVEMENT: HISTORY, REASONS, INTERACTIONS

This chapter discusses women's participation in the neighborhood movement from five angles. First we will take a quick look at the history of this participation and place it within the context of Spanish feminism. Second, the various ways women can participate in the neighborhood movement is described, with some special attention to the ambivalently feminist women's structure. Third, we will look at some reasons why women's participation is (relatively) easy in the neighborhood movement, as compared to other political activities. The fourth angle is what the women themselves explain about their reasons, motives and difficulties. Finally, I will offer an analysis of continuities and discontinuities in women's dispositions as a preview of the conclusions.

Women have joined the movement in ever larger numbers since the late 1970s. This is evident, in spite of the difficulties of calculating the numbers of members or activists. At the time of this study, there were about even numbers of women and men among all activists in Spain as a whole. But the proportions varied.

My impressions as to numbers can be summed up as follows: Women and men were present in approximately equal numbers and doing similar tasks in most associations I visited in the two big cities of Madrid and Valencia, but there were local variations within these cities, depending on type of barrio and the history of each association. Women were very much present in Elda and Vigo, including some prominent leaders, but in both places they were mostly sociables and men did most of the political work. In Linares and Cordoba the women had to struggle against severe obstacles to participate. There was resistance to their presence inside some associations, but this was not quite legitimate and movement leaders denied it. The major difficulties had to do with people outside the movement: jealous or non-cooperative husbands, suspicious neighbors, uncomprehending kin and women friends, etc.1

According to the hegemonic discourse in the movement, it is considered "completely normal" for women to participate. This is something especially male leaders will underline emphatically. Indeed, it is quite common for women to be presidents of barrio associations, and this is usually not even commented upon, at least not publicly. It would not be considered polite, since the general discourse of the movement is committed to gender equality, so women leaders should be considered such a normal phenomenon that comments are superfluous.

Female leaders differ among themselves. Some adopt the same discourse as the male leaders, insisting that women's activism should be normal, women are as much persons as men, no differentiation should be made. Others stress the fact that differentiations exist, like it or not, and discuss how to combat the obstacles. Others again stress "education", thus putting the blame on the women themselves: they have not been educated to be interested in anything but their own families, they have a hard time learning basic meeting behavior such as waiting for their turn to speak, etc. Speaking of obstacles for women, some women leaders describe men's resistance to women's presence, others adopt a discourse closer to academic feminism, talking about social structures that define the world outside the family as something only men are interested in and competent to act in.

There is much confusion in these comments. Everyone is concerned to give an impression of being anti-patriarchal, progressive, not machista.2 It is very common for people to tell anecdotes from their own life to show how they have been forced to face their "mental contradictions" and "realize" that some of the ideas they had on what is "natural" for women and for men did not fit

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1 The variations will be described in more detail in chapters 9–12.
2 The word macho in Spanish means an animal of male sex. But it can be used about human males in a colloquial or joking way, among other things denoting a high grade of masculinity or virility. The derived words machista and machismo have become international expressions for patriarchal attitudes.
reality, or were not compatible with democratic attitudes, so they had to make an effort to re-think them. To put it cruelly: people are very clear about what they are not supposed to think and say, but unsure of what the right thing might be.

To get the discussion on this theme off the ground, I sometimes told an anecdote from the 1970s, from my barrio in Madrid. When our association had been legalized, after a year and a half of semi-clandestine work, we organized our first general assembly and asked for volunteers to be elected to the board of directors. A few men volunteered, but there was hesitation in the room, the dictatorship was still in place, the whole idea of secular associationism was new to most people and frightening to some. So the leaders of the organization committee had to make little speeches of persuasion. After a while, when a few more volunteers were still needed and none seemed to be forthcoming, a woman spoke up very timidly: "I'd like to... I mean, perhaps... if it is not... I mean... I mean: Could a woman, too, sit on the board?" When I told this in 1994–5, the common reaction was that no woman would have such doubts today, and was I sure, did that really happen, were women so backward even then? Not all women were, of course, but this really did happen. It could happen today, too, I think, at least in some places. But the hegemonic discourse of the movement as a whole would judge it as old-fashioned, reactionary, retrasado (behind the times).

It may be easy to see what is wrong, but an effort has to be made to find out what is right from the point of view of present progressive discourses, and then it takes even more effort to live up to it.

That effort is being made, and I interpret it as honest most of the time, and in this I differ from most middle class Spanish feminists who are deeply skeptical about the capacity of "most people" to "liberate" themselves from patriarchal mentality. They and other progressives constantly accuse people from all walks of life of being hypocrites. It is certainly true that a lot of people, perhaps a majority, say one thing and do another, and switch discourses from one context to the next. But this is, firstly, a rather common human phenomenon, and secondly, it emerges more generally as a response to uncertainty in a culturally demanding historical phase. That which has been seen as most typically feminine really does not work very well with political activity as it has usually been organized. To reinterpret and reorganize both the gender order and the political order, and radically so, can hardly be done in one step. As a feminist researcher I apply a method of suspicion to discourses that fit easily with hegemonic ideas. But my data do tell me that something is happening to the gender order in Spain, including working class contexts.

This is certainly due to several social and cultural processes that intensified during the special period of the Transition. One factor is feminism, of course.

Feminist debates on gender and politics

There has been organized political and academic feminism in Spain since at least the late 19th century. The 1920s and 1930s were vibrant radical years for women artists and writers. There were women philosophers and women politicians. The vote for women was won in 1931 and the Second Republic (1931–1936/1939) produced some of the most radical legislation in Europe on such matters as birth control and divorce. But two factors limited the influence of these developments: they concerned mainly an elite, and the whole thing was stopped short by the advent of the civil war and the ensuing dictatorship (Capel Martínez 1986, di Febo 1979, Folguera 1988, Gallego Méndez 1983, Garrido et al 1997, Mangini 2001, Scanlon 1976).

Much of the personal continuity and the knowledge gained was lost, due to repression, censorship, exile of practically all vanguard women, and the new laws and educational systems of the dictatorship. When the resistance started to reorganize, in the late 1950s, feminism was not on the agenda. However, there were some women who managed to write and publish in a feminist spirit, even in the darkest years (Nielfa Cristóbal 2003), women lawyers and women university professors managed to obtain some minor reforms (Borreguero 1986), and the women of the leftist parties got an underground women's network going in the 1960s (MDM, cf. below). Mostly, however, the
feminism of the 1970s was, and was experienced as, a new start. One read imported literature, especially from Italy and France. Groups were formed all over the country, and in the general climate of change and questioning, they were met with respect and practical support to some degree, in spite of their radical propositions. In many towns and cities, they were given premises, for example. The first feminist congress was held in Madrid, in 1975, still underground; several more followed quickly. The first women's studies centers were set up around 1980.

Very early on, certain basic debates took center stage, and they continue to divide the movement. The most important one has been about simple or double militancy. Just like the tension between "party people" and "independents" in the neighborhood movement, it refers to the issue of whether a person in a social movement should also be an activist in a political party, for the sake of political efficacy, or if a social movement must distrust activists with double loyalties. In the feminist movement this issue has led to angry confrontations and tears, political dilemmas, academic subtleties and personal anguish (Augustín Puerta 2000, Escario et al 1996, Sundman 1999). And for good reasons. This was no abstract matter. At the time political parties were legalized, in 1977, social movements had much better contacts with grass roots than the parties. But political parties were recognized, by the population in general as well as by the new constitution, as basic elements of democratic procedure, in a way the movements were not. So the parties needed the movements, but also had power over them, could demand that they express the views of the parties. Not all of the movements, not the whole movements and definitely not all of the time. But many of the most active in the movements were also party activists and considered it necessary for the parties to grow stronger in order for Spanish democracy to be consolidated. So they did accede to work along party lines inside the movements and try to see to it that the movements spoke with the voice of the party, without seeming to do so, when they addressed the public. This phenomenon had an everyday name: correa de transmisión (transmission belt).

Naturally, the movements saw dangers in this, so conflicts were served. In feminist groups, this combined with general skepticism of the "male tendency to tell us what to do", or, in more sophisticated language, "the difficulty to use organizations created under patriarchy for feminist purposes". This criticism was directed at other social movements, too, including the neighborhood movement. Feminist groups had to defend their autonomy.

There was also a hot, and not at all resolved, debate on difference versus equality. In Spanish feminist circles, just like in international contexts, equality has usually been construed as similarity, while difference has usually been understood as revalorization of femininity.

In the cultural climate of the 1970s, when Enlightenment values were seen to be finally emerging from the underground in Spain, equality between women and men came to appear as an

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3 One of the pioneers of the feminist movement in Madrid, Justa Montero, expresses this succinctly in a short overview article: "The movement that appears in the final period of the dictatorship begins practically from zero and only later is there an emotional rediscovery of that part of our history, a recuperation that proves fundamental in order to establish a women's genealogy, and rendering thus tribute to the precursors (feminine form) of the present (feminist) movement of Spain." (2002:26, my translation)

4 See e.g. Beltrán et al 2001, Campillo 1997, Camps 1998, Debats 2002, Escario et al 1996, Folguera 1988, Scanlon 1976, Subirats 1998, Valcárcel 1994 and 1997. There are many names for this dilemma, which is echoed in most Western countries. Humanist feminism, according to Young's terminology (Young 1990a:73–91), is that which builds on Western Enlightenment values. Its clearest expression is liberal feminism, but other strands, notably socialist feminism, also subscribe to it. The fundamental idea is that patriarchal society oppresses women because it hinders them from developing their potential as human beings. Men are not so hindered. The goal is a society where gender differences would not count. This is a widely accepted idea in Spain today. Even people who declare themselves anti-feminist subscribe to it, at least verbally. A leading equality feminist is philosopher Celia Amorós (1996). 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 and weak and the Other. They have contributed to civilization, they have resisted oppression, they have enjoyed their bodies, they have cultivated the values of care, nurture and communication, and so on. One leading Spanish spokeswoman is María Milagros Rivera (1997). A common reference among Spanish feminists of this strand is also the Italian group known in Spanish as Librería de Mujeres de Milán (1991, 1996), the Women's Bookstore of Milan. Difference feminism is stronger, or more visibly opposed to equality feminism, in Spain than in the international debates. My own opinion is that the debate is confused because it places several oppositions in a false parallel (Thurén 2003). A very clear argument for the need of transcending this type of dichotomies is Fraser 1996. See also Fraser 1992 for arguments about how the analysis of discursive struggles can illuminate the cultural aspects of political engagement.
unquestionable goal. But at the same time, there were doxic ideas that women and men are different, that there is a natural residue that must not be obfuscated. Such ideas were so deeply doxic that they were difficult to transfer into the universe of discourse even for committed feminists. Catholic thinking usually has it that there are two kinds of human beings, women and men, because there are two versions of humanity and no general human essence beyond them (Mariás 1990, Rivera 1997). There are old popular ideas of complementarity, closely adapted to traditional modes of division of labor. So for most people it feels natural, even if you become a feminist, to try to build on the idea that women are a special kind of human being, who have something specific to contribute to general well-being and development. This is of course not unique for Spain; similar ideas have been influential in other countries, too, especially in the early stages of suffragism, when major arguments for women's entering politics had it that they were more moral, or had other knowledge, or could contribute to peace and solidarity. The Spanish term became feminism of difference, feminismo de la diferencia.

But the discourse of Enlightenment has penetrated the general population in such a way that there is a strong conviction that all categorizations of human beings are "old-fashioned" and "unfair". This goes for gender, too. For many feminists it was crucial to be suspicious of what was seen as old thinking about given, natural gender differences, which seemed to coincide exactly with what was necessary to combat from the perspective of Enlightenment values. This thinking led to a strong emphasis on equality in order to free women from specific gender definitions of what they are and can be (Amorós 1985 and 1996, Campillo 1997, Valcárcel 1997). The term became feminism of equality, feminismo de la igualdad.

The Transition was thus a historical moment when a strong need was felt to deconstruct all arguments that might legitimate the old gender order and other old social structures. At the same time, it was a moment of confusingly rapid and deep change, so there was a great need of convincing explanations, and consequently there was a search for secure things that would not change but could be used as solid ground in the search for new values. So one logical reference was Nature. Others were solidarity, affection, lasting ties built on warmth, love and joy. All of which seemed to be on offer in the traditional feminine personal world and not at all in the harsh "male" world of struggle (Augustín Puerta 2000, Camps 1998, En Pie De Paz nr 50 1999, Rivera 1997).

In a sense, the neighborhood movement was and is an arena where the tensions between different Spanish ideologies of change in the gender order are played out in a practical way. For instance, we will see various examples of tensions between barrio women and feminists, and in the chapter on Vigo (chapter 11), we will see how the debates on women in the movement centered on tensions between a feminist wish for radical change versus an idea of solidarity with actually existing women.

**Feminism and women in the neighborhood movement**

Women in the neighborhood movement do not usually consider themselves feminists, many even deny it vehemently. But many of them struggle for issues that confessed and organized feminists would define as feminist issues, and practically all of them have had some encounter with the issue of women's participation in non-domestic activities. The neighborhood movement may be relatively woman-friendly, but hardly any women have found it as easy and "completely normal" to participate as the dominant movement discourse states that it should be.

In most towns and cities, in Spain, there are groups that call themselves feminists and they usually have little contact with the neighborhood movement.

In the early years, however, contacts were frequent and sometimes intense. In the 1960s, when the underground communist party began to build or infiltrate the neighborhood movement, the party women's structure, the MDM (Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres) did the same. It worked with housewives' organizations and with women in the neighborhood movement, concentrating on making women discover their oppression and realize that they should join the men in the general political struggle for a democratic state. Many of the first women's committees in the neighborhood movement were born as a result of the efforts of party women.
Vicenta Verdugo, who has studied women's associations in Valencia during the Transition, argues that many individual women participated in both movements, and that feminist activities, such as running family planning centers and distributing information on sexuality and contraceptives, were sometimes carried out with the help of the women's committees (Verdugo 2002 unpublished).

My own experience has been rather that feminist discourses were usually rejected as too middle class or too paternalist in the neighborhood movement, and that feminists, for their part, were wary of trying to teach others about what they themselves were just beginning to explore. Around 1980, a common feeling was that "bringing feminism to the barrios" had not been successful because "we need to learn first, ourselves, before we can teach anything to others." Naturally there were exceptions, groups that organized courses in feminism (see e.g. Sundman 1999). But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was usually a barrier between feminist groups and women in barrio groups. In part, it was a matter of social distance; organized feminists tended to be middle class and have higher formal education, on the average. It was also a matter of strategy: most feminist groups preferred to work only with feminist issues, often considering everything else a waste of time and/or a risk of being manipulated by male interests; women in the neighborhood movement were mainly interested in barrio issues. Barrio women were often under the erroneous impression that feminists hate men and despise housewives. Feminists were often under the erroneous impression that barrio women do not criticize the hegemonic gender order at all. Barrio women were sometimes feminists but thought they would be more politically effective if they did not confess that; feminists sometimes thought they ought to work with barrio women to elevate their consciousness, but more commonly they felt ambivalent about the ethics of that and thought that their feminist duty was to be more avant-garde.

But I agree with Verdugo that fruitful collaborations could happen, in some places, and that individual feminists often tried hard to build bridges.

Verdugo uses Temma Kaplan's concept "female consciousness" (as distinguished from feminist consciousness) to describe most barrio women's perspective (Kaplan 1995). They were caregivers, they had to struggle for certain rights and resources in order to be able to carry out the tasks that the gender order assigned to them. "In that sense, the actions taken to obtain a dignified life in the barrios (street lighting, schools, health services, transportation, high prices, etc.) sometimes implied a subversion of the established order, which led to battles with the police and conflicts with the authorities." (Verdugo 2002 unpublished, my translation.) These actions connected everyday life with the sphere of politics, according to Verdugo, and so the women actually broke with their assigned gender roles. In the women's committees, specific barrio problems were seen to have gender repercussions and vice versa. In this way women discovered their specific marginalization. In Valencia, the women's committees of the neighborhood movement set up a coordinating committee for the whole city, which worked with the feminist movement on some issues and for a while published its own bulletin, "Dones" (Women).

In the early years, there were feminist goals that all "progressives" shared, especially the elimination of Franco regime laws that directly limited women's agency, such as the husband's signature required for a woman to sign a contract, take a job, get a passport or open a bank account. Most neighborhood activists would find such changes desirable but perhaps too abstract for their type of activism. Around 1980, the legalization of contraceptives and the debate on divorce were slightly more controversial on the barrio level, but they were understandable, they concerned many individuals personally, so at least in the big cities some women's committees worked with them. The great abortion debate that began in 1983 was deeply divisive and neighborhood associations avoided taking a stand. Later and more radical feminist work, especially on sexuality, has been rejected as unsavory and/or incomprehensible by most neighborhood associations, so the feminists active in them have had to be careful and diplomatic, but there have been exceptions as we will see in chapter 12, on Cordova. During the 1990s, homosexuality was much debated in all sorts of contexts in Spain, and to support gay liberation became the accepted "progressive" position. That included the neighborhood movement, but again, it was more of a theoretically accepted discourse than a practical issue to work with, and it was seldom even discussed. To my knowledge, there have been no gay groups organized within the neighborhood movement.
The Women's Structure

Around 1990, some women activists in the movement began to feel a need for a separate organization for women. Women's issues were everywhere hard to place on the agenda. Some women felt that men never listened to them, whatever the issue. In some parts of Spain, it was difficult for women to be admitted onto association boards. Most associations had women's committees, but what they worked with varied greatly, most did not know what other women's committees were doing, and some felt they did not get support for their work from male board members. At least some of these problems could be alleviated if women in the movement could meet and cooperate independently from the men. Special programs for women could be organized, for instance legal counseling, courses to prepare women for participation in the labor market, care for elderly women, contacts with trade unions around women's issues, etc.

Two preparatory statewide meetings for women were held in Madrid, in January and December 1991, to discuss the setting up of a women's structure within CAVE and to prepare for a larger assembly in Tenerife in May 1992. In February 1992 the statewide CAVE assembly approved the idea.

The meeting in Tenerife was the real birth of the women's structure. A large number of statements on women's problems were presented by women from all parts of the country, the discussions were lively. I was there, and I remember an intense atmosphere of excitement, solidarity, contact making, some women crying of happiness or frustration while speaking... Cf. Nuria's story in chapter 6 for a personal memory that coincides with my impressions of what the meeting meant to the participants.

Among the formal agreements reached were: to create women's committees in all associations; to monitor the government equality plans for 1991–1995; to set up a plan for women to be able to take on more responsibility in the boards of the associations; to pressure the federations to organize leadership courses especially for women. The women's committees should especially struggle against women's timidity, among other things by informing them of their rights and organizing special cultural and leisure activities for women and offer special services from lawyers, psychologists, etc.

At the next national meeting, in Toledo in 1993, the women's structure was formalized and the idea of independent women's associations within the movement (asociaciones de mujeres vecinales) was launched.

The general recommendation was for the women's committees (vocalías) of the neighborhood associations to make themselves independent. This recommendation was interpreted in different ways. Some thought it was a PSOE consigna and consequently rejected it. Others thought it a good idea: if women should not be subordinate to men, why should the women's organizations inside the movement be subordinated to the neighborhood associations? A third interpretation opposed the first, finding it too negative and conspiratorial, and also opposed the second interpretation, thinking it took for granted that the rest of the neighborhood association was for men only. This third interpretation would lead to a commitment to work inside the neighborhood association but choose the form (committee or association) depending on local circumstances. The second interpretation appealed mostly to rather tradition-minded women who did see the neighborhood association as a mostly male endeavor, where women did not fit (whether by nature, education or because of men's opposition or men's choice of issues and interactional styles).

In October 1994 I interviewed the head of the women's structure, a PSOE woman. It was very difficult to find a time when she could see me, and when we finally met, she was extremely

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5 I presented the suggestion for this study and the assembly approved it. Cf. Appendix 1. I have not been able to find confirmation of the number of participants, but my memory tells me there were at least a couple of hundred.
6 Among other themes discussed were: the creation of health centers in all barrios with special units for women's needs; the demand for non-sexist education in the schools and the need to work for "accepting it ourselves"; drug prevention campaigns; the creation of women's councils in the municipalities. A logotype was adopted, picturing a stylized running woman with flying hair, soon dubbed jokingly "La Pelos", Hair-Woman.
evasive in her answers. Most of my non-PSOE friends in the movement had a ready explanation: She has been placed in the position by her party, she is under party orders, she knows nothing about women's issues, so of course she is afraid of being interviewed, she is afraid of being put on the spot. I thought it might also have to do with the fact that work on the statewide level had barely begun as yet.

Be that as it may, later interviews with her successor and other women with knowledge of the statewide structure produced some information. I have not myself participated at this level.

The main purpose was said to be to legitimate women's participation and for women to be allowed to elect their own representatives. It was also considered important to have separate statutes, "so that women can have direct access to administrations." In other words, to be able to apply for subsidies without going through the mixed gender boards of their associations. That was actually the main purpose, openly declared at the Toledo meeting. The leaders underlined that it is important for women to decide their own issues, so that the comrades who sit on the local association boards do not get the last word about what women should do. This leadership discourse was rather separatist in emotional tone but hardly ever expressed in terms of separatist feminism. This contrasted with the discourses of most other women I met in the movement, at all levels; they usually emphasized equality more, as a goal, even when they described the obstacles.

In fact most activists, both women and men, were somewhat wary of the independent women's associations. In many barrio associations and in many federations, the issue was divisive, and as far as I can tell it was more common to have women's committees than independent women's associations. Some leaders of the women's structure told me that there was continuity in the organization of women, first as committees (vocalías), then as independent organizations. The nationwide structure included both kinds, "because not all women's committees have been able to constitute themselves as independent." These women leaders saw it as natural for women to have a structure of their own inside the neighborhood movement, "since women are the base of society."

The statewide structure was not a federation (technically it was an association), but it functioned as if it were a federation, the members of which could be any local coordinating entities formed of women's committees or of associations of neighborhood women.

The degree of independence of the women's structure from (the rest of) CAVE was a matter of dispute and interpretation. The women were members of their respective barrio associations and federations, of course, but the women's structure was set up as separate from the general organizational pyramid. Not completely separate, however. There had been tensions from the start around money, because CAVE had insisted that it must have the last word about how the women's structure used its money. One leader in the women's structure said, "It is just like when I was young, I worked for a salary, but my father put out his hand and took it, he thought it was his. Until I opened a bank account of my own. The CAVE president says the same thing my father used to say, that what we all earn belongs to all of us."

As to activities, the ambitions were to cover all the usual movement areas – education, urban planning, housing, etc. – but from women's point of view. By 2002, the women's structure had set up projects to work with the 4th Equality Plan of the European Union; there had been campaigns against gendered violence, and a contract had been negotiated with the Spanish Women's Institute to educate neighborhood women to assist women of their barrio in cases of violence; there had been a program of courses for unemployed women and courses to aid women to start their own business. The women's structure as such had never had any employees, but some of the projects did.

In 2002, about 15 federations or confederations participated in the women's structure, and some 40 women representatives usually came to the general assemblies for all of Spain.

For a view of the women's structure as it looked at the barrio level, see chapter 8.

But most women participated in the movement as regular members, working with all sorts of issues and not in the women's structure.

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8 This tension was exacerbated when CAVE suffered a serious financial crisis in 2002. This crisis had nothing to do directly with the women's structure, but the women's money, too, was affected.
Four models for women's participation

The most common manner for women to work in the movement was the same as for men. That is, they joined as individuals, for one reason or another, they would usually come to weekly meetings for a while, showing their interest and learning about the movement and about meeting techniques, and some time later they would be elected to the board and take on some specific responsibility, which might or might not have to do with women's issues.

There were also women who had reached feminist convictions in other contexts and who decided that the neighborhood movement was a good place to work for their ideas. In a sense, they were similar to party people who used the movement as a resource, as a place to propagate their political convictions and strengthen the social and political base for it. The difference was that feminist organizations never gave their members instructions (consignas) about how to work. They did not even teach them strategies for working in other contexts than the feminist organizations, often rather seeing outside work as close to treason, since it meant siphoning off time and energy that were needed inside the feminist movement itself. And the individual feminists who joined the neighborhood movement did not usually see that as a strategic move for the good of feminism, but more like one more effort they personally wanted to make in the general struggle for a better world. That is, they did not envision a hierarchy, where the neighborhood movement was put at the service of the feminist movement, nor vice versa, but rather a parallel figure of two equally important movements, with different but not contradictory causes, both of which the individual wanted to serve.

Most of these feminists worked like the women of the first category, with any kind of movement tasks. But some of them concentrated on specific women's issues along with other women who did not call themselves feminists. Most neighborhood associations had special women's committees (vocalías de la mujer). This was the third way, then, for women to work in the movement. If there were dedicated and knowledgeable feminists in an association, its women's committee would probably work with such issues as street safety, women's employment, and women's health issues. They would organize lectures and courses, e.g. on the problems of menopause, family planning, and in recent years the very popular issue of self-esteem (autoestima). By 2003 the issue of gender violence stood out as a major problem that vocalías worked with, and specific plataformas or coordinating committees were sometimes created for stronger impact. But very often the vocalías addressed their activities mostly to what they judged to be the common interests and preferences of the average women of their barrio, and that meant that they often ended up doing mainly service work, especially organizing courses in handicraft of all sorts. Literacy courses had also been popular; the illiteracy rates have always been higher for women than for men in Spain; today, however, the problem is moving upwards in the age groups and is not far from disappearing. All kinds of social activities were popular: picnics, dinners, short trips, visits to local entities such as the fire department or a newspaper. There was a sliding scale between the merely social and what can be labeled cultural, where most activists would like to organize more cultural things, such as visits to museums, while other barrio women were attracted more by the merely social activities.

When the women's structure had been organized, a fourth way for women of working in the movement emerged: participation in the independent associations of neighborhood women. That meant for some that they were not members of the regular neighborhood association, only the one for women, while others were members of both. In practice, however, there was usually little difference between working in an association of neighborhood women and working in a women's committee; the day-to-day activities were similar, and both kinds were represented in the women's structure on the state level.

But I insist: most activist women in the neighborhood movement did not work with women's issues or in the women's committees. They participated in the same general manner as the men. As far as possible.
The barrio and the women

Let us now look at some factors that contribute to women's possibilities of participating and of being effective in the movement.

The division of labor according to gender created many obstacles for women who wanted to break out of the domestic domain, but it also offered special niches for them. The barrio was one of these. Most women knew a lot more about their barrio than most men. They spent much more time there than the men did, and they probably felt more strongly about it, since they were more confined to it than men, who had their places of work to go to, and these were usually not situated inside the home barrio. Also, according to the division of labor, women were in charge of children, and children play in the barrio.

During the daytime, there are many more women than men in the streets of Spanish barrios. Almost all adult men and some adult women (but more and more) leave the barrio to go to work. Left in the barrio are the pensioners, the children, some jobless women and men, and the housewives, plus a few people who work in the barrio, notably in the shops. The housewives are a majority in the daytime barrio population, and they are also the ones who move around on errands, filling the streets. They take the younger children to school, pick them up at lunch, take them back after lunch and pick them up again in the afternoon. They wait for the children outside the school, talking to one another. They go shopping for food, practically every day, and most of them prefer to shop between 11 AM and 1 PM (after cleaning house but in time to cook the main midday meal), so there are long lines and plenty of chances to exchange information with other women in the stores. Women with pre-school children will spend some time every day in a park or playground, to let the children play outdoors, and they usually try to go to the same place at about the same time every day in order to meet women they know, who do the same thing, so that they can sit and chat while watching the kids.

To say that women are of the home and men are of the street is then not literally true. Women are in the home, more than in the street, and the street is a masculine space at night, but during the daytime the women spend a lot of time in barrio streets, and the streets become a female space, in practice if not conceptually. The many small shops that enliven barrio cityscapes are mostly defined as feminine spaces, since they cater to the needs of homemakers: food, medicine, clothing, home decoration, toys, gifts. This is especially clear in peripheral working class barrios.

There are also bars, and they are masculine spaces. There are people in them during the daytime, especially retired or unemployed men, but most men go there in the evening. Some bars are defined as bodegas, that is shops that sell wine and vinegar, which means that women can legitimately visit them during the day, but men gather there, too.

So the barrio streets during daytime become something not quite public. Nor quite private, of course. The barrio is a mediator, permitting playful variations on the old figure of thought.

The barrio is the world of streets, parks, shops, schools that surround the private dwelling. A woman leaving her house is careful to dress nicely, comb her hair, put on good shoes and make up, and preferably ear rings and perfume. If asked she will say that she does all of this in order to look good; she does not want to be ugly and she does not want to acquire a reputation of being slovenly, since this might reflect on her morals. In other words, she will say that she does it for herself, not for others. But saying this, she is also confirming that the moment she steps over her threshold, she will be in the public eye. Not at home, not hidden away, not protected in the private sphere, where she belongs according to the key analogy. She goes out because she has an errand; she does not belong in the street, she goes to it, and she will return from it as soon as her errand has been carried.

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9 I have written more on this in two earlier books based on data from Valencia and Madrid. See especially Thurén 1988, chapter 7 and 9. This pattern is now changing as supermarkets and morning TV shows become popular. The pattern also varies according to type of city or town, distances, climate, etcetera. But as a general daily rhythm it still held true in 2003.

10 She might also see this effort as part of her self-modernization. Thirty years ago, it was common for housewives to run early morning errands, especially to the bread stores, in slippers and housecoats. Today that would make a woman look either careless or very much behind her times, or both. However, I have never heard a woman make this comparison in time explicit. As we saw in chapter 4, Carmen experienced the change as a contrast between barrios of different economic standing.
out. She walks purposefully, she does not stroll. In many ways, her body language shows that she is in a foreign sphere.\textsuperscript{11}

On the other hand, we have seen that the barrio is a place where one feels at home, where one feels safe. It is a moral space, a dimension of solidarity. People in one's own barrio are considered friendlier than those in other barrios. One knows one's way around, one knows what to expect, one has memories related to places. Walking down the street in her own barrio, a woman will encounter other women and perhaps some men she knows, she will say hello to them, perhaps stop to chat with them. Coming from another barrio or from the downtown area, both women and men will say they are now "at home", when they come into their own barrio. The barrios have rather clear, commonly recognized borders. Beyond the borders lies another world, much more foreign. Much more public.

As a figure of thought, private and public are opposites, but in practice they have degrees, they can overlap, they change shape.\textsuperscript{12}

Most people will feel strange when walking through a barrio not their own. In old, stable barrios, the feeling is mutual. The people who belong there may well recognize a person who is not one of their neighbors. They may interrupt their conversations as such a person passes by. They may stare. There is no hostility, not even much surprise; one just takes note of something that does not belong. Such behavior was much less likely in the huge new barrios, while the big cities were growing explosively, in the 1960s and 1970s. But as things now settle down, perhaps it is returning. The probability that one knows one's neighbors at least visually is growing again.

On the other hand, there is more mobility in space than there used to be. And barrios are bigger, at least in big cities. And the youngest generation is much less dependent on direct visual contact in physical space for their social life. Young Spaniards today move over wider distances, physically and socially, and they use modern media intensely. They may still feel emotional attachment to their barrio, as compared to the next-door one, but they have traveled abroad. They have inherited the habit and enjoyment of face-to-face conversations during long evenings in the bar, but they also spend much time in virtual chat rooms and or mobile phone texting. This will probably affect the future of barrio-based activities.

Many women I interviewed, when asked to explain why they were active in an association, said they liked to "estar en el ajo" (literally: to be in the garlic), to be in the midst of things, where things happen, where one becomes well informed and socially well connected. This comes close to a definition of public space. But what the women want to be in the midst of is not any abstract public activity, but the social networks of their barrio, the events of their barrio, the things that concern them because they are, in some sense, theirs, i.e. private.

Summing up about women and barrios: women, especially housewives, use barrio space freely during the daytime, and all in all they use it much more than most men. So they know it well, and this gives them authority and legitimate knowledge which can be used in the neighborhood association. The barrio is a mediator that partially undermines, partially just makes flexible, the key analogy of women:home::men:street.

**Interaction in the association**

Another factor that lowers barriers for women is the interactional style of the movement. It is generally relaxed and down-to-earth, humorous and ironic. As the movement becomes more institu-

\textsuperscript{11} At least this is so as long as she is alone. If she meets a friend, she will feel free to stop for a chat, and these chats can sometimes become lengthy, but the conversation will be punctuated with phrases about being in a hurry, having to get back home to see to the washer or get the stew going for lunch... (Thurén 1988). An intelligent description of how this works in a small Andalusian village is found in Sánchez Pérez 1990.

\textsuperscript{12} One example of that is the so-called corrales, corralas or casas de vecinos, i.e. the communal housing units that used to be the common urban working class housing. They consisted of a common courtyard around which the one-room dwellings were grouped. Each family had one room. The courtyard was public in that it was a shared space. Yet much of everyday life took place there: cooking, washing, personal hygiene, sociability, etc. Carloni Franca (1990) has made a suggestive study of such courtyards in Seville as mediations between private (the rooms) and public (the street outside the courtyard doorway).
tionalized, styles of work and talk are changing towards more formality, at least in some places. Nevertheless, they were still, during my fieldwork, quite flexible.

At least in comparison to political parties and labor unions. Many women (and some men) said they felt out of place in such organizations, because they had to learn pre-established ways of speaking and acting. In other words, they experienced the move from one class or gender context to another as a move from "naturalness" to rigid norms.

It is a common observation in Western feminist political studies and also in many other parts of the world that women feel uncomfortable with formal meeting procedures. This is of course largely due to lack of experience, but it is also related to gender-specific patterns of socialization and relation. Most Spanish women active in parties and labor unions that I have met are proud of the fact that they have learnt new ways. They often dub them "more efficient". But since women have been socialized to be more sensitive to particular individuals and their particular characteristics, they usually feel more at home with non-hierarchical, non-formal styles of interaction. As to class, the reasons are different but the results similar. Participation in the neighborhood movement requires little stretching of habituses. One can come as one is.

The movement lent itself well to innovation, because it was relatively new itself (in comparison to trade unions and political parties), because it had always experimented with styles and methods, and because of its loose forms and grassroots characteristics.

The pragmatic, friendly style was related, of course, to the fact that many of the activists knew each other in more roles than one and that most of them had overlapping networks. The style also fit the issues as they were culturally perceived: "small" "everyday" things like street lighting and bread prices; "family" issues like health care and schooling; even "dirty" issues like drugs, rats and garbage collection. Nothing elegant, nothing momentous about it.

And obviously such everyday things, family issues and struggle with "dirt" belong more on the "home" than the "street" side of the old metaphor. So women felt knowledgeable about them, competent to work with them.

Most of the activists did not have much schooling beyond primary education, if that. Those with more had to adapt to those with less, or the association would not function well. This added to the democratic and informal air of the interaction.

So meeting procedures had to be informal, and because they were, the atmosphere was usually friendly. For the very same reason, differences of opinion could easily explode into aggressive exchanges. That happened often, but after everyone had had a chance to vent their anger, a stable reasonableness normally returned, which was logical, given the common purposes and given the fact that the participants were neighbors; they had to continue living together, so they tried to stop short of becoming enemies.

The assignment of tasks was more practical than formal, too: whoever had the time or felt like it volunteered (or "was volunteered") when something had to be done. Gender could not legitimately be asserted as a factor; lack of experience could. Most associations had annual meetings that elected a board, but to be elected was not a very important criterion for being active; usually whoever came to the meetings with some regularity was considered active and was listened to. Voting was extremely rare. Minutes were seldom kept.

Experience counted, to be sure, veterans were listened to, but reference to personal experience in the movement as a ground for prestige was avoided, and the same went for education and income. Formal signs of hierarchy were even more scrupulously avoided. Presidents tried not to invoke their authority to keep order. (Cf. the association meeting described in chapter 1.) Everyone

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13 The expressions and degrees of this vary, of course, between countries as well as within them. But international feminist research has shown it to be generally true in Europe, at least. In Spain, the Franco regime made it a major goal of education and ideology. See e.g. Enders and Radcliff 1999, Gallego Méndez 1983, Imbert 1982, Scanlon 1976.

14 One informant in Cordova explained that there was no division of tasks according to gender with the phrase, "If Pepe can't go, Pili will." (Pepe is a common man's name, Pili a common woman's name.) This is quite an exact formulation, more exact than he perhaps intended. If a man cannot do a certain task, a woman is thought to do the job just as well. But usually the first choice is still a man. It would have sounded strange to say, "If Pili can't go, Pepe will."
addressed everyone else by their first names and with the informal pronoun "tú", irrespective of age, gender or other statuses.  

There were certainly often strong tensions under the surface because of the differences in background and ideology and sometimes because of controversial issues. Conflicts could not always be solved, and they could be bitter. It could happen that an association split in two or that a group of activists resigned. But most of the time, the informal interactional style and most activists' dispositions to react strongly but forget and forgive easily helped soothe things so that work could continue after a while. Since individual preferences and opinions were well known to all, conflicts could also be averted, circumvented or joked about, as the situations demanded.

Much of the joking was sexual. But the women were used to this, it was a common feature of other gender-mixed contexts in which they moved, too, and it was seldom directly denigrating. There was some playful flirtation, but very little serious flirtation, since most activists were married and involved in dense local networks, which would carry gossip instantaneously.

All in all, the style of work and interaction was adapted to the cultural and social circumstances in which both women and men felt secure and competent.

Now, of course gender was relevant for styles of interaction in the movement, like everywhere else in the surrounding society. There were gendered styles of verbal and body language. At association meetings, men tended to take up more space in every sense than women. They spoke more and louder, interrupted more often, dominated the turn-taking decisions and spread arms, legs, jackets and note paper wider around themselves. This was invisible for most members, because it was taken for granted. Women's behavior was not very but relatively deferential and circumspect. But countervailing these tendencies was the fact that women knew more about barrio life, and that lent them authority in debating the issues. They did not keep quiet.

The men conceded authority and space to women. They did so, first because of women's knowledge of barrio circumstances, which was recognized. Second, because association activists were usually radical enough to question all social structures, including the gender order; when asked, they invariably insisted that women should have the same right to speak and act as men. Such statements and/or convictions did not always translate to actual behavior, but when it came to barrio issues they often did, because the women's knowledge was legitimate knowledge even according to the traditional separation of domains. They had obtained it in their daily work as mothers and housewives and they displayed it for the purpose of improving the lives of their families. It was knowledge recognized not only as fact, but as valuable and legitimate.

To be sure, the men often complained that the women talked too much and about the wrong things. Women "gossip", the men said. Or they joked about "a hundred hens and so much cackling you can't hear yourself think". These comments were denigrating, but so common in barrio life that neither men nor women experienced them as very insulting.

From the perspective of political parties, much of the style of the movement seemed inefficient; party activists (and many intellectuals) looked down on it, and party people inside the movement usually tried to change it.

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15 I have encountered very few exceptions to this among regular activists. Sometimes, younger activists address elderly non-activist members by the formal pronoun "usted". (Just one generation ago it was common for young people to address all elderly persons, including kin, including sometimes even parents, as usted.) Sometimes during fieldwork I was addressed as "usted" and even by the prestige-laden title of "profesora" (teacher). At such occasions, however, I always said that I was a member of the movement, so I preferred to be addressed as "tú", "like everyone else," and this was then always accepted with approval. Usually I was addressed as "tú" as a matter of course.

16 I am not saying that this should not be criticized from a feminist point of view. It should. But I am saying that it did not chafe with the habituses of the women involved.

17 Amorous liaisons did occur, I heard of some, but they must be rare or there would be a lot more trouble. Women were also aware of the collective danger they run if the association should become known as a place of sexual opportunities.

18 I have written a booklet in Spanish, published by CAVE in its series of popular texts for movement activists, with the title (in translation) "Women who talk too much" where I argue that a category of people not expected to speak at all in public will easily be seen to talk too much as soon as they say anything at all (Thurén 1997b).
However, it is a safe hypothesis that these grassroots characteristics, taken together, create a woman-friendly context. And that was one of the things that the women themselves underlined when they answered my questions about their motives for participation.

**Emic questions about women's participation**

So far I have reasoned from my own questions about participation. The main one, and the starting point for the whole project, was: how come there are so many women in this movement? Compared, that is, to other political organizations and compared also to the neighborhood movement in its early days.

From the point of view of the movement itself, the central question was the opposite one: how come there are not more activists, men and women? And especially women. "Women are as able as men to work outside the home, to study, etc., and of course also to do politics. So if they do not, something is stopping them. What is that?" was the main gender question inside the movement.

For most activists, it was not important to have an opinion on what the "real" differences between women and men might be. What was important was to resolve certain gender-related problems for practical reasons, for the good of the movement as a whole. But debates on "women's issues" were inevitable, because they were very much on the general cultural agenda, and they were also prompted by the CAVE initiatives, and by the opportunities for special subsidies for women's groups.

In these debates, four things were usually taken for granted: Women should participate in public life much more than they do; the neighborhood movement would be a good place for them to start; the movement would benefit, too; but the problem is that most women are "still" "limited" to a life centered on their home and family.

The men in the movement were often critical of both women's and men's non-participation. They thought everyone ought to be more solidary, they thought most people were lazy or selfish. They aimed the same criticism at women and men, except that they often added that women could no longer claim discrimination or lack of education as an excuse. "Nowadays everything has changed, no one is hindering them any longer, so there must be some other reason." Some men found such reasons in social structures or in cultural inertia. But it was easy to slip into thinking in terms of innate differences between women and men. If everything that is changeable has already changed, whatever differences in behavior remain must be unchangeable. The conclusion would then be that women in general suffer from innate shortcomings when it comes to public life and that women who do participate are exceptional. There were comments about women's weak sense of social responsibility, women's gossiping that causes conflicts, women's lack of determination and lack of knowledge of how society works, women's preference for purely social activities, etc.

The women in the movement were more understanding. They knew the obstacles first hand, so they believed in their existence. "Everything has not changed," they would say, or, "Everything has not changed." On the other hand they felt they had overcome the obstacles, so why could not other women do the same? And they often drew sharp contrasts between themselves and non-active women, depicting the latter with similar phrases as the men used.

In other words, women and men in the movement spoke of women outside the movement with similar but not identical distance.

The questions commonly discussed were:

- Are separate women's groups necessary? If so, why? Are they desirable, or should we rather try to overcome whatever it is that makes them necessary?
- Are separate groups for women the only way to attract women to the movement? What else can we do to "get women out of their homes"? Will they come to special women's groups? If not, why not? Don't they dare, who is stopping them, are they too ignorant, or do they just not want to?

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19 Many feminist analyses of obstacles for women's participation in ordinary Western political contexts focus on such things as hierarchy, formality, imbalance in proportions between women and men in a given context, traditional definition of issues, etc. Cf. e.g. Astelarra 1990, Bystydzienski 1992, Gustafsson-Larsson et al 2007, Feijoó and Herzer 1991, Jones and Jonasdóttir 1988, Women's Studies International Forum 1994.
What are women interested in? What can we "offer" them? Why do they sometimes resist even when we offer what they say they want? Is the main obstacle "the traditional roles"? Or is it mainly men's resistance? Why do men resist the idea of women's participation so much? (This last question worried women more, but I heard it from some men, as well.)

How can we improve women's self-esteem? Is it a good thing to have a statewide women's structure? Or will that only lead to manipulation of women? In whose interest? Especially political party interests? Will it undermine women's own initiatives?

Why should people be sorted into women and men, anyway? Isn't that just an old prejudice? Isn't it better to decide to be just "persons", all of us, one kind only, participating in the same associations, on the same conditions, with the same activities? After all, what we are working and struggling for is a better society for everyone!

On the other hand, isn't it a fact that most women lead lives that are very different from the lives of most men? Doesn't that mean that they have different interests, different capacities, want to work with different issues? Shouldn't the movement make room for that, just as it makes special room for youth and the elderly?

If we set up women's committees, what should they do? Do they have to be feminist? Or can they be for "ordinary women" and if so, won't they end up as just clubs for gossip?

On the other hand, if the neighborhood association has a feminist women's committee, won't that scare away all ordinary barrio people, men and women?

These were practical questions, directed towards action. But beneath them lay the old issue of difference versus similarity and also a confusion of similarity and equality.

Stories about participation

What did the participants themselves say about why they did what they did? What were their motives for joining, how did it happen, what were their goals and purposes?

There were certain recurring differences between the stories of men and the stories of women. Interestingly, this pattern was similar across regions, in spite of all the variations in other circumstances.

Motives and reasons are not necessarily the same thing. But whereas "real" motives are always a matter of speculation, reasons given form part of the ethnographic data. The women themselves proffered suggestions about why they participated: how they had first decided to join an association, and why they continued, what it had meant to them and what it had meant to people around them, and what they hoped to accomplish in the long run.

Some people, both women and men, had a clear ideological commitment. For some of them, "I am a Christian" and for others "I am a communist" or "I have a working class consciousness" was more than sufficient explanation. Some admitted that they had reached this conviction through work in the association, i.e. they had originally joined for some other reason; others had had the conviction first and the reasons for joining had been the same as the reasons for continuing.

In the case of nuns, there was the added facility of not having a family -- no time-consuming domestic duties, no hurt husbandly feelings, no risks for the children.

Whatever the details of these stories, they had in common the idea that social injustice was prevalent and that it ought to and could be opposed. This overrode all other considerations. Having this insight, there were no good excuses for not acting on it. It even made established gender ideas

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20 Carmen's story is one example of a commitment based on such a conviction.
21 Direct encounters with violence (police or other) was not a common problem in the neighborhood movement, since it was always at least semi-legal, but it was nevertheless an important consideration for politically active women during the dictatorship and an idea that survived the dictatorship in the shape of vague fears for some people. These fears were hardly ever expressed aloud in movement contexts -- they would have made the speaker look cowardly -- but they were sometimes admitted to, as if in passing, in more private contexts: that the children would suffer if parents suffer repression, that the children might be pointed out as different in school, by classmates and perhaps by teachers, that if a father risks repression or is just absent from home a lot because of political activities, at least the mother should make sure that the children are well cared for, and so on.
pale in comparison, so that references to "femininity" or "a woman's duties" were considered irrelevant, even insulting. Even so, many men and women, of this type as well as others, confessed "contradictions" in their "mentality" when it came to gender. It was not easy to fit ideological convictions and socialized habits into a working whole.

For most of the active women, however, ideology was not important. It was present, probably, but not clearly elaborated or not emphasized, and usually not even mentioned as a major motive. Their reasons had more to do with sociability and individual needs. But never individual ambitions. No woman I met said she was tempted into political activity because she coveted influence over important decisions. The main motive was usually expressed in vague terms as "doing something for others", "having a feeling one ought to do something" and/ or "getting out of the house", "knowing what is going on", or similar phrases indicating a "feminine" (according to the dominant gender order) concern for the well-being of others in combination with a critical attitude towards the confinement of women to the "home" and the consequent lack of mobility and information.

References to the key symbol of inquietud were ubiquitous in both women's and men's motivations, it was almost always a central factor, described as a driving force, but as we saw in chapter 3, it can have various meanings, and the slippage between psychological and ideological references often seemed rhetorically convenient.

A very common explanation of what it was that directly made a woman decide to join the movement at a given moment was that some individual influenced her. She happened to know someone active in the movement, and she admired this person, for her activities and especially for her personal qualities. Women usually described this person as someone who "did so much for others without thinking of herself" and someone "who could be trusted always to help you if you needed it" and often the explanation would include some concrete examples of help. The person was usually also described as gregarious, "nice to be with," someone who would "always stop to greet you in the street" and remember to ask you about your personal problems.

Sometimes the initiative to join came from the joiner herself. She would approach the already-active one and ask her about her activities and ask if she, too, "could help". Or the activist would approach her and ask if she did not want to "help", saying she would be an asset. At this point, the informant would usually include in her story some reference to her own "ignorance" or lack of experience. "Ignorance" could mean either lack of formal schooling or lack of previous knowledge of the movement or of anything related to politics, or all of these. She would need to be persuaded and convinced that her "ignorance" was not an absolute obstacle, that there were tasks that she could help with, that she would not be the only one without experience, and that most people learned as they went and were appreciated for that.

Men, too, told stories of personal contacts, but they talked more about the process of personal "evolution" they had gone through, how they had reached the conviction that it was a good idea to become active in the movement. Especially the leaders talked in political terms of the need for participatory democracy or similar. Non-leaders usually spoke more of the deficiencies (caren-cias) of their barrio, which they, being intelligent, had noticed, and, having a sense of justice and responsibility, felt they had to struggle to correct. If a barrio does not struggle, they said, ordinary politicians would do nothing. One common phrase was: "Only babies who cry get fed." (Quien no llora no mama.) Men were more likely than women to see a connection between barrio matters and wider social and political structures.

We can feel sure that most of the men, too, entered the movement through some personal contact, since that is how things usually work in Spain, in all sorts of contexts. Personal contacts are the normal channels and more or less necessary lubrication of all action. The helping hand was im-

22 Of course, some women might have felt such a thing but deemed it illegitimate to admit. To want power was not a very acceptable thing in the movement for anyone, but I did hear some men express such feelings. Outside the movement, in political parties and labor unions, I also met some women who did. So I am inclined to believe that most movement women really were not motivated by any wish for formal power. I would even affirm that most were not aware of the real, albeit limited, power they did exercise. All of this may change with time; cf. Mary Luz's story in chapter 6.

23 Similar motives for joining associations – of any kind – are quoted in a study on women's organizations in Madrid (Maquieira 1995).
portant for men as well as for women, but it was easier for women to talk about it, since it is part of the image of male gender that men be independent and need no help. However, if asked, most men would also tell about individuals who introduced them to association work.

The main difference according to gender was not the presence or not of the helping hand but the characteristics of that hand. For men it was someone with knowledge and preferably a position, someone who explained the purposes of the activity. It seemed easier for men to mention help if it came from persons of high prestige. It could then be described as proof that the speaker was socially well connected. The help was needed in order to overcome lack of information, mainly, and sometimes, to catapult the joiner into some interesting position. To be able to get the required help was proof of a man's worth, to start with. For women the facilitating contact needed was someone who could convince them that they, too, could be useful. Like the men, they found it normal and logical to follow the channels of personal contacts, and they too needed to overcome their lack of information, but even more their lack of self-assurance. That lack was both individual ("I don't think I am good at that kind of thing") and gendered ("women are not usually good at that kind of thing") and often a combination ("women are not usually good at that kind of thing, and I don't know if I am an exception, and to act as if I were will make me look ridiculous").

One woman said, "I said to her, I can't go in there, what if I have to talk, but she said I wouldn't have to if I didn't want to." Another said, "I thought they would make me read something, or whatever, I don't know what I thought, but then I saw that the others were neighbors like me." The help, then, came in the shape of friendly persuasion, so the description stressed closeness in the relationship, even when it came from a well-placed woman. In that case a slight touch of pride could be added: "She is the president of the association, you know! She has met the mayor and everything. But she is a wonderful person." The "but" here would be an "and" if the tale came from a man talking about a man.

For both men and women, the helping hand almost always belonged to someone of their own gender. One woman, for example, told me she wanted to become active. Her husband did not oppose the idea, and her children were old enough, she had the time. She also knew some of the activists, and she had a fairly good idea about what the association was all about. Still, she found it difficult to take the step, because there were no other women active in the association of her barrio. I thought that she did not want to be the only one, and that was part of the reason, she said, but it was not the decisive part, because it would only be temporary. She thought many women of her barrio might become active very soon, if there was only one to start with. What stopped her was rather a circle that needed breaking. No women were active now because there were no active women now. She thought a woman always needs the example, company and support of another woman in order to enter a male space like politics. She would not mind so much being the only woman once inside (and for a short time), but she did not know how to approach the men in order to enter.

One solution was for a group of women to join collectively. An example of this is found in chapter 7, and similar groups of women friends sometimes became active for much less dramatic reasons.

The men, then, stressed the problems and the purposes. Sometimes they expressed it in terms originating in some political party discourse. The women seldom did so (except the very ideologically conscious ones). On the contrary, it was common for them to deny that what they were doing was politics at all. They said they wanted above all "to contribute". To what was it they wanted to contribute? Solving the problems of their barrio, of course. In other words, their motives were actually similar to those of the men, but whereas the men expressed them in political terms and referring to power and to their own capacity, the women preferred practical and moral terms.

They were the practical and moral terms of the deferent housewife and the good mother, if you like: One has to do what has to be done, and it has to be done in order for everyone to survive and live a good life, and a good person is one who thinks about what others might need and sacrifices her own comfort for the sake of others, i.e. a discourse of care. In a way, women took the gen-

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24 The channels of personal contacts are usually gender-specific in Spain, whatever the purpose. The exception is when kinship plays a role, but it seldom did in the neighborhood movement.
dered figure home: street with them, as they moved into the "street". They were in the "street" but with "home"-legitimations and "home"-attitudes.

Metaphors often behave in this way, subdividing as needs arise, lending their already established explanatory or ideological power to less clear contexts, in order to define them. But of course, the metaphor itself changes when it is transferred to a new context. If stretched too far, it will collapse. If we are to believe the progressive Spanish discourse on gender, the women-home-relationship may still have echoes of meaning, but they are not very audible in the total concert of new meanings that crowd the debate on gender in urban Spain today. Women have left the home, is the dominating progressive proposition. And that means that the reality of barrio women is somewhat uncomfortable for such discourses. That reality is changing, too, certainly, and it is not at all homogeneous. But it is still far from having left the old key metaphor totally behind.

**Continuity and discontinuity in habits and roles**

In later chapters we will see many examples of how women learn and change. The data on this were plentiful and clear. It is my main argument about the effect of the neighborhood movement on the gender order that it makes personal change possible for women who have little access to other arenas for learning things that do not fit established gender norms.

But it must also be recognized that there is a parallel between what most women do in the movement and the traditional feminine role. Many women enjoyed being in the movement because they felt competent and at home there, in a similar way that they felt competent and at home in family life: they were doing something important and legitimate that they knew how to do well, and they were well adapted to an institution (family or association) that defended the Good Life.

We could say that instead of dedicating themselves to their children and other family members, they now dedicated themselves to their neighbors, and that the solidarity with the family was just extended slightly to become solidarity with the barrio, or at least with an association. In a sense this is no small matter, because it does destabilize the old metaphor (women:home::men:street). But there are also clear continuities in dispositions. The women can continue to be the same kind of strong, imaginative individuals in charge of human relations and reproduction of everyday life, that their education has taught them to be in family life. They can and do learn something new, but without abandoning – indeed thanks to – their skills in interpreting other people's needs and their enjoyment of doing something for others, even sacrificing their own comfort for the sake of others. In bourdieuan terms, they can apply their habitus to a new field with little loss of symbolic, social or psychological capital.

This gives them satisfaction and it gives the movement strength. But it also implies certain limitations for what women can do or want to do in the movement.

Unless their dispositions change, of course. And they probably will, because of the logic of reproduction of dispositions. But it will take some time. In the meantime, those of us who would like to see major changes in the gender order have to arm ourselves with patience. And we have to be vigilant, since backsliding is always possible. On a theoretical level it is necessary to study processes of cultural change, focusing especially on contradictions, avoiding either-or-positions concerning the possibilities of improvement.

The old habitus does place obstacles in the path from the old to the new. Women's socialization for personal relations does not prepare them well for abstract political analyses or impersonal ideological conflicts. It requires an effort just to reach a feeling of mental comfort in the physical premises of an association. Movement women liked to contrast themselves (who had

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25 It can be expressed thus: comparing A to B, you can then extend it to comparing a subtype of A to a subtype of B in a similar way: Aa:Bb. But you can also compare two subtypes of either A or B to each other: Aa : Ab and Ba : Bb, and later also Ca : Cb... And all of these comparisons can be made to illuminate each other, because the terms of the comparison are similar. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Sacks 1980, Thurén 1981)

26 According to practice theory, social reproduction is never perfect. Practice changes practice, and since dispositions are shaped by practice, they will change, too. But it may take a while longer. So at any given moment there are probably some dispositions that do not fit well with current practice. They are survivals of former practice. But they will disappear, as whatever shaped them in the first place recedes on the time horizon. Cf. Bourdieu 1977.
overcome the obstacles) with women who were still caught in old habits and norms. This could be reassuring (reminding them of their own relative strength) and disturbing (casting shadows of doubt on what they had done and who they were now in the eyes of women who were very much like them). To compare became a necessary reflective exercise.

If it were not for some degree of continuity, most women would not have been able to do what they were doing. They did not have access to the resources that facilitate associational activities for middle class women: higher education, habits of reading, access to critical media, someone to take care of the children while you go downtown to an evening class or a political meeting. Movement women stayed close to home in their political activities, but they did it in such a way as to connect their problems and worries to wider issues.

And this had much to do with pleasure. Both men and women enjoyed being visible, knowledgeable, known by their neighbors, able to offer favors and information, and association activities offered such opportunities to both men and women. But for many women it was more surprising. The men pursued these things as conscious goals, but most women could not imagine, beforehand, what this aspect of participation would mean to them. And most of them strongly underlined the personal discontinuity this had produced. They often expressed a feeling of strangeness about the change they had experienced: "I have become a person. I am no longer the same. I don't understand how I could stand it, living like I used to, closed up in my little world."

When they spoke like this, the implicit metaphor was still the traditional one, but in an exaggerated form; they described the "home" almost as a prison, a small and dark place, and what had happened to them was that they had discovered a door they had not suspected existed, and suddenly they had been delivered into the light, now they moved in a large, open, prestigious space. They drew a contrast between oppression and freedom, even though they did not use those words.

Women who spoke in such a way would not appreciate my pointing out continuities. And they were right in stressing the discontinuities, since they were what constituted their immediate experience and gave them energy. My analysis is academic; theirs was personal and perhaps strategic.

If a set of life circumstances produces a certain habitus securely and with little change over time, that habitus becomes taken for granted and the basic ideas associated with it take on a highly doxic quality (Bourdieu 1977). If the "home" is such a set of circumstances, it can indeed be interpreted as a dark place without a view. When you are "inside", you cannot see the outside, so it is not easy to decide to take the step towards it. It is not even easy to want to, because it means losing the security of doxa, and actually it requires having already lost some of it. And when you want to and do decide, it is not easy to take the step in practice. There are resistances, sometimes from your husband, sometimes inside yourself, and from known and unknown others; you know or suspect that your habits and knowledge will not be valid in that new world, or so you fear. "You may have to talk..." The continuities help, they give tools and courage. But once the step has been taken, legitimation for it comes from the discontinuities, the new perspectives.

In view of this, it becomes interesting to look at the movement within the movement – how women move into it, through it and sometimes out of it. That will be chapter 6.

To sum up this chapter: On the basis of my data on women in the neighborhood movement I argue (a) that this movement is a plural political space where different interpretations of effective strategies to challenge the powers-that-be manage to work together, not without conflict and not always with great efficacy, but with creativity; (b) that women participate in likewise plural ways; (c) that the plurality extends also to the field of feminist issues; (d) that the neighborhood movement is a space where difference feminism and equality feminism communicate with each other, in less abstract, more practical ways than inside the feminist movement; (e) that it is a space where women from all walks of life find inspiration and knowledge to change their everyday conditions; (f) that this means that some of the thorny theoretical issues are resolved in practice; (g) most concretely, it means that women who could never be persuaded that feminism or gender equality are attractive or realist as personal goals nevertheless find that their lives change and their horizons widen, and since they enjoy this greatly, they continue working in that direction.

Such profound social processes work slowly. The results are not always visible, and when they are, they may look suspiciously complex, hard to grasp, therefore hard to believe. But what
happens slowly and at grass roots level has as good a chance as there can be of shaping a secure ba-
sis for further questioning of the gender order.