

Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–1918

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Female Consciousness and Collective Action

Female consciousness, recognition of what a particular class, culture, and historical period expect from women, creates a sense of rights and obligations that provides motive force for actions different from those Marxist or feminist theory generally try to explain. Female consciousness centers upon the rights of gender, on social concerns, on survival. Those with female consciousness accept the gender system of their society; indeed, such consciousness emerges from the division of labor by sex, which assigns women the responsibility of preserving life. But, accepting this task, women with female consciousness demand the rights that their obligations entail. The collective drive to secure those rights that result from the division of labor sometimes has revolutionary consequences insofar as it politicizes the networks of everyday life.

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EDITORS' NOTE: *By looking from a historical perspective at definitions of gender and class consciousness, Temma Kaplan's essay brings forward aspects of consciousness raising that may be added to those set forth by Catharine MacKinnon. Women, Kaplan maintains, do have a unique consciousness; it is not precisely the kind of gender consciousness that we tend to consider feminist, but centered as it is on the maintenance of life, it may have more truly radical implications than any other revolutionary ideology.*

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As part of being female, women learn to nurture, a task with social as well as psychological effects.¹ Women of the popular classes perform work associated with the obligation to preserve life; such jobs range from shopping for necessities to securing fuel and to guarding their neighbors, children, and mates against danger. The lives of women in the lower classes revolve around their work as gatherers and distributors of social resources in the community, whether or not they also work for wages outside their households. Women who have money simply hire other women to do for them the work of sustaining life that they do not want to do themselves. (Thus before refrigeration and running water, urban women went to fountains and markets every day, while those who could afford servants sent them.) But all classes of women understand what their society's division of labor by sex requires of them: the bedrock of women's consciousness is the need to preserve life. Now as in the past, women judge themselves and one another on how well they do work associated with being female.

Recognition of the existence of female consciousness necessitates reorientation of political theory: by placing human need above other social and political requirements and human life above property, profit, and even individual rights, female consciousness creates the vision of a society that has not yet appeared. Social cohesion rises above individual rights and quality of life over access to institutional power. Thus female consciousness has political implications, as women's collective actions have shown, although women themselves along with historians of their movements have remained ignorant about the motivations for female mass action.

Theories of consciousness attempt to explain causality in history. Modern theories of consciousness began with G. W. F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, which analysts such as Karl Marx attempted to rescue from abstraction. Whereas Hegel viewed consciousness as the effect of transcendent Reason operating inexorably through history, Marx restored human consciousness and intentional action as central objects of inquiry.² Feminist consciousness, understood from this Marxist perspec-

1. Nancy Chodorow explores the psychological dimensions of the fact that women nurture and men do not in her book, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978). Although she does not stress the social requirements for women to nurture, Dolores Hayden examines women's work and describes the efforts of a group she calls "materialist feminists" to transform physical space by collectivizing laundries and kitchens, thereby making women's work more efficient. See Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

2. Even the leading early twentieth-century work on consciousness, George Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), dwells on ideas rather than movements.

tive, is about power relationships and access to institutions. Feminism attempts to win for women full rights and powers both in the context of class and in the dominant political system. There may be differences among feminists by virtue of the priorities they give to different forms of oppression: radical feminists oppose the gender system solidified in the division of labor by sex; socialist feminists oppose gender and class systems and all power relations based on sexual differences or forms of work.³ However, all feminists attack the division of labor by sex because roles limit freedom, and to mark distinctions is to imply superiority and inferiority.

The study of female mass movements calls attention to female consciousness. It is possible to examine a range of motivation in the everyday lives of women that might lead them to act collectively in pursuit of goals they could not attain as individuals. Women's movements follow common patterns; they focus on consumer and peace issues and they oppose outside aggressors. Accepting and enforcing the division of labor by sex, therefore, can bring women into conflict with authorities. Women may even attack their rulers when food prices rise too high for suspicious reasons, when sexual harassment brings women's dignity into question, or when the community of women appears to be under attack.

A sense of community that emerges from shared routines binds women to one another within their class and within their neighborhoods. The degree to which women carry out their work in community settings that bring them into contact with each other also influences what and how they think. Physical proximity—such as occurs in plazas, wash houses, markets, church entries, beauty parlors, and even female jails—contributes to the power of female community. These loose networks facilitate the tight bonds that exhibit their strength in times of collective action.

Female solidarity, a manifestation of consciousness, clearly changes in relationship to improvements in women's household working conditions. Thus middle-class women who work for a wage and who pay another woman to perform their housekeeping tasks do not have to go to public laundries or markets. Unlike women in the popular classes, middle-class women have more time for other activities. But they see fewer women on a daily basis. The sense of shared work as women that contributes to female communal consciousness is diminished. The com-

3. Most recent attention to the class implications of the division of labor can be found in feminist work about the impoverishment of welfare systems under late capitalism. It considers how the work women and minority men do in the public sector resembles the service work women do in their households and communities. See Laura Balbo, "The Servicing Work of Women and the Welfare State," mimeographed (Milan: University of Milan, Department of Sociology, 1980); and Temma Kaplan, "A Marxist Analysis of Women and Capitalism," in *Women and Politics*, ed. Jane Jaquette (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), pp. 257-66.

munal work women do influences the way they think, especially about government obligation to regulate necessary resources.

Gossip exchanged during shared work, for example, provides an opportunity for women to think out loud.⁴ It may be the means by which women enforce the division of labor upon one another, but it is also the means by which they explore their obligation to sustain life in the midst of difficult conditions. Through gossip, women both express and find reinforcement for their thoughts, which then influence what they do.

When social disorder breaks or endangers daily routines, women of the popular classes sometimes work to reestablish them, even by attempting to seize power themselves. But it is impossible to prove their motivations, as they seldom leave evidence in their own words about the reasons for their actions. This paucity of evidence has caused many who study crowd behavior to focus on acts rather than thoughts. It has led others to associate irrationality and spontaneity with collective action. In the case of female collective action, the thesis that women of the popular classes fight to preserve the sexual division of labor invites a reductionist view that what women do determines what they think. But women reflect upon their lives; they do not act mechanistically.⁵

Still other views of consciousness, those that stress strikes and the development of unions, either leave women out or focus on female worker militance without considering the ways in which women of the popular classes either supported or rejected such efforts.⁶ The advantage of relating rise in consciousness with propensity to unionize is that such analysis stresses the importance of self-generating organizations developed by the working class. But these analyses imply that unions alone are the agencies of the working class; they ignore other forms of associational life in the family, the church, workers' circles, cooperatives, and women's groups. Mass support, particularly from women, comes precisely from such organizations. Preserving the networks that connect their associations galvanizes women to act in mining and textile strikes when community survival is at stake.

4. Susan Harding studies the relationship between gossip and female gender identity in "Women and Words in a Spanish Village," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter [Rapp] (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 283–308.

5. There is no totally convincing explanation of the relationship between consciousness and action. In *The German Ideology of 1844*, Karl Marx presented three contradictory notions of consciousness. The first was that "as individuals express their life, so they are. What they are therefore coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce." He amplified this argument when he said that "consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process." Yet he also claimed that humans develop "ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process." See Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), pp. 7, 14.

6. Among the best treatments of strikes are Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève: France 1871–1890*, 2 vols. (Paris: Mouton, 1974); and Rolande Trempé, *Les Mineurs de Carmaux, 1848–1914*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Ouvriers, 1971).

The problem associated with viewing female consciousness from the perspective of women's participation in strikes is that it does not explain why men dominate even textile strikes, though the majority of textile workers are women; and why women strike less frequently than men when the issues emphasize working conditions rather than communal survival. Such a perspective cannot explain why so many strikes in which women engage expand into mass strikes that absorb people from the larger community. Even when exploitation at work and drives for unionization precipitate struggles in which women engage, female participants broaden demands to include social reforms.

Another approach considers political parties to be the measure of political consciousness and uses the number of women in leadership positions as an index of women's consciousness. According to this view, great women in male-dominated parties contribute to the general effort and thereby demonstrate class consciousness. Leaders instill consciousness into the popular class and direct its struggles for state power. Women who do not participate in such parties but act according to female consciousness often pursue the same goals as the parties that act in their names. They simply do not follow the dictates of leaders or a previously established program. The teleological view that consciousness exists only if it leads to the seizure of power telescopes all other forms of collective action and associational life into a single "prepolitical" stage, which cannot reveal the changes that arise out of developing consciousness. Most women appear as unconscious auxiliaries who act without thought even when they do precipitate movements such as the Russian Revolution of February 1917.⁷

By viewing consciousness as the creation of party leaders, who are seldom women with female consciousness, this party-centered view underestimates mass organization and self-generating class struggle.⁸ It overlooks the contributions made by militants and others who are not party members but who, like women, struggle in the larger community around social issues of food supply, health, and pacifism. The party-centered view brands all nonparty political organization—neighborhood committees, for example—as prepolitical. It cannot explain how women's consciousness develops in the course of struggle; consciousness is seen as a quantum of matter rather than a process.

There are approaches, however, that view consciousness as just another word for women's culture as it extends itself through networks. Thus far, most studies of women's culture have focused upon middle-

7. Paolo Spriano takes consciousness to be nearly synonymous with party formation. See Spriano, *Socialismo e classe operaia a Torino dal 1892 al 1913* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), and *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, 4 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1967-76).

8. For a preliminary study of communalism and its political expression, see Temma Kaplan, "Class Consciousness and Community in Nineteenth-Century Andalusia," *Political Power and Social Theory* 2 (1981): 21-57.

class women because they have left evidence of their activity in letters and in contributions to printed literature.⁹ But cultural traditions, with their own networks and institutions, also enable women of the popular classes to mobilize against oppressors and work toward an alternative society, the conception of which is well articulated and widely shared. Consciousness appears as the expression of communal traditions altered in response to economic developments and political conflict. Culture, in this case, emerges as solidarity built around networks—a form of solidarity that carries out the division of labor by sex. Communal rituals, regularized processions, songs, and stories passed on through oral tradition constitute a cultural world for women of the popular classes. Consciousness emerges as women reflect upon culture and work—two aspects of the division of labor.

During periods of social mobilization, as in the mass strikes that occurred throughout the world from the 1880s through the 1920s, women's neighborhood networks galvanized into political action groups. Women participated in public meetings and began to organize their own. They demonstrated with men and without them. They transformed their physical neighborhoods, particularly the public squares, in political ways. They moved beyond their neighborhoods, where they carried out women's work, to the seats of power in other sections of the city. They took a message they had developed schematically, a message that assumed even deeper meaning as they continued to make their demands. Thus, a historically rooted analysis that moves from action to thought must work inductively and examine a variety of movements in which women participated.¹⁰

This paper is a study of one such movement. It describes three kinds

9. See the general debate, "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 26–64, in which Ellen DuBois, Mari Jo Buhle, Temma Kaplan, Gerda Lerner, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg refine arguments about women's culture.

10. Charles Tilly uses the phrase "collective action" to describe social movements at incipient stages, long before anyone would consider them revolutionary. See Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1978). The new social history has examined group behavior, radical ideology, religious commitments, and popular culture, among other topics. Its leading practitioners and their pivotal works are Natalie Z. Davis, *Culture and Society in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1959), and *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, 3d ed. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966); and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963). The best argument for the use of inductive reasoning appears in the work of the Italian cultural historian, Carlo Ginzburg. See Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), "Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm," *Theory and Society* 7 (1979): 273–88, and "Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Methods," trans. Anna Davin, *History Workshop* 9 (Spring 1980): 5–36. This branch of social history attempts to explain motivation and discover the causes of collective action.

of female mobilization in Barcelona between 1910 and 1918. The events that occurred there show that women's defense of the rights accorded them by the sexual division of labor, although fundamentally conservative, had revolutionary consequences. Conscious that their government was not aiding them to fulfill their role as nurturers, women in Barcelona and elsewhere confronted the state to demand their rights as mothers and potential mothers.

Mass strikes (actually locally rooted, popular insurrections) engaged tens of thousands of women in Spain and elsewhere until the 1920s. Following waves of strikes and rebellions that began with the Barcelona General Strike of 1902, the women's networks in the popular quarters acquired a political character. Networks devoted to preserving life by providing food, clothing, and medical care to households became instruments used to transform social life. Examination of female collective action in 1910 following a case of child molestation, in the 1913 Constanca textile strike, and in the 1918 Barcelona women's war demonstrates how women's consciousness of broader political issues emerged in their defense of rights due them according to the division of labor.

Collective Action: Barcelona, 1910

Community solidarity forms in opposition to a ruling class whose power is supported by army and police. Common antagonism, even more than shared values, welds people together, and consciousness among women that they constitute a community often appears when they share outrage. When they perceive some violation of the norms they uphold according to the sexual division of labor, they gain consciousness of themselves as a community.

Against the background of a long metallurgist and machinist strike, a scandal gripped Barcelona's female working-class community in October 1910. Male workers were fighting for the nine-hour day and against forced layoffs and unemployment. These were obviously matters of concern for their female relatives and for the few females who shared their particular trades. But there seems to have been a sexual division of concern. Male workers preoccupied themselves with the labor situation. Women were outraged by child molestation.¹¹

The widow of a police inspector and mother of six children who were all ill in some way had placed the two youngest girls, aged seven and four, in a convent orphanage. On October 10, 1910, she received a letter from the Mother Superior telling her that her seven-year-old was ill and should return home. The child suffered excruciating pain in her

11. Information about this incident appeared in Barcelona's republican newspaper, *El diluvio* (October 18, 1910), pp. 8-9 (morning ed.).

genital area due to internal and external lesions. The nuns said she had a contagious disease. After some delay, the physicians from the clinic admitted that she had venereal disease, the result of rape by a strange man who had promised to bathe her.

The female community of Barcelona took the victim as their own. On October 17, a local festival on the vigil before Saint Luke's Day, large numbers of humble women, described as "mujeres del pueblo," and market women from the Borne and Barceloneta markets of the old city gathered in front of the little girl's house. They bypassed the church; few of them engaged in the anticlerical demonstrations that the men organized. What seems to have been at issue for the women was solidarity with the mother and her sick child rather than rancor at the church. Throughout the marketplaces women talked of nothing else. The female neighbors lamented with the mother as it gradually dawned on all of them that the child had been sexually molested. When the police put pressure on the mother and child, the neighbors carried on a vigil and acted as chorus. The police tried to persuade the mother that her child engaged in immoral acts outside the convent school, but the women became as outraged as the mother, who proclaimed her child's innocence. Despite the far-flung publicity and talk, however, women did not participate in demonstrations beyond the confines of their neighborhood, the physical embodiment of their communal consciousness. They did not leave their neighborhood to attack the convent as the men did. They solidified their bonds as women, as mothers, and as neighbors through talk, support, and small financial contributions to the impoverished family of the victim.

Only when the case went to court for an official inquiry, thereby moving out of the neighborhood into the public realm, did the women act politically. They planned demonstrations at the Plaza of Bishop Urquinaona (a square just down from the central Plaza of Catalonia) and at a big park in the victim's neighborhood. When the women attempted to unite as women, they alarmed authorities, and the governor banned the meeting.¹² An increasing consciousness that officials, not they, would determine how the victim and her family were treated outraged the women. The officials' response amounted to a violation of women's rights to protect children and other women. For, apart from the violence itself, sexual harassment indeed challenges women's authority over other women and over their collective sexuality, the norms of which they enforce through gossip. The use of force against any woman brings into focus contradictions between the rights women believe are theirs according to the division of labor and their inability to enforce those rights against male encroachment.

12. Ibid. (October 30, 1910), p. 15 (morning ed.).

Collective Action: Barcelona, 1913

Political consciousness among women sometimes emerges from female consciousness, as it did in 1913 in Barcelona during the Constanca textile strike. In that action women of the popular classes took their grievances to the governor rather than to their bosses. The fortunes of the textile industry and working conditions in it affected almost all the women in Barcelona's working class. In 1913, 16-18 percent of all women over fourteen in and immediately around Barcelona labored in textile factories and related industries. These figures do not include women who did garment work, embroidery, and whitework in cottage industries. The spinning and weaving factories were often workshops, and they generally employed fewer than forty women. The women worked an eleven- or twelve-hour day, although male laborers usually worked only ten hours. In 1913, the average male wage in textiles was between 3 pesetas and 3 pesetas 75 céntimos a day; the average female wage was between 1 peseta 75 céntimos and 2 pesetas 50 céntimos. Few women, however, earned more than 2 pesetas a day. A shirtmaker, who worked at home, earned about 2 pesetas 50 céntimos for a dozen men's shirts, which took her twelve hours to complete.

For many of the anonymous women who did work at home manufacturing corsets, paper boxes, artificial flowers, shoes, and garments, only a community-wide strike offered the opportunity to attack their oppressors—the jobbers who provided them with piecework. Women organized by neighborhood, not by trade. In their neighborhoods they experienced the power of networks created through years of shared tasks.¹³ There was a good reason for female factory workers and women in the community, most of whom earned a living in cottage industry at some time in their life, to unite as they did in 1913.¹⁴

Many of these women who were mothers watched their children die in the first part of the twentieth century in Barcelona. Dead fetuses and foundlings near starvation were left on the streets of the working-class districts almost every day in the winter and spring of 1913. During that year a family of four, eating three meals a day, consumed coffee and bread in the morning, salt cod and rice at midday dinner, and potatoes and salt pork at night. On the average, this cost 1 peseta 54 céntimos a day, of which 76 céntimos went for bread alone. (The rising cost of

13. A provocative treatment of urban space and consciousness appears in Henri Lefèvre, *La Production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974).

14. The only detailed description of the Constanca strike of 1913 and its social background appears in Albert Balcells, "La mujer obrera en la industria catalana durante el primer cuarto del siglo XX," *Trabajo industrial y organización obrera en la Cataluña contemporánea (1900-1936)* (Barcelona: Editorial Laia, 1974), pp. 9-121. José Elías Molins, *La obrera en Cataluña, en la ciudad y en el campo. Orientaciones sociales* (Barcelona: Imprenta Barcelonesa, 1915), reported on the oppression of women from a Catholic perspective.

living, due to the intensification of Spain's war against Moroccan guerillas and to bad grain harvests throughout the world between 1904 and 1912, contributed to high bread prices.) With the immigration of peasants to the city following the wine blight, rent in the poorest working-class districts of Barcelona had skyrocketed. The cost of an apartment in these districts was 50 céntimos a day or 14 pesetas a month. In 1910, clothing, blankets, and soap came to 25 céntimos a day, and fuel came to another 20 céntimos.¹⁵ Women helped nurse one another's children, thereby forming tight bonds. When the government raised hopes for cheap housing, working-class women demonstrated in favor of such projects, but few new apartments were built.

In Spain, as elsewhere, housewives had sometimes organized sections of strong political parties in their villages or districts. Female anarchists did the same throughout Spain.¹⁶ Male leftists had long recognized that women—through neighborhood organization of laundries, clinics, and food kitchens—supported men during strikes. But little had been done to win better wages for female workers. In October 1912, the Constancy Union was formed to organize unskilled men, women, and children in the textile industry. Organizers called a general meeting of Constancy on February 17, 1913, and two thousand people, mostly women, showed up. Only one woman spoke, a textile worker and socialist from Madrid named María García. Those who shared the platform and chaired the meeting were generally union activists. Speakers from the floor included anarcho-syndicalists and some socialists from a variety of trades. Few were women. The speakers discussed the need to end the unbearable workdays women suffered in factories, but they never discussed cottage industry or life in the neighborhoods; the Constancy Union, while leading the strike in the name of female workers, was as slow as contemporary historians to recognize the noneconomic

15. Molins, p. 23; and "Sucessos," *La publicidad* (Barcelona) (January 28–30, February 5, and April 21, 1913), gave just a few examples of how many foundlings and dead fetuses appeared in the streets of working-class neighborhoods. The labor situation was covered in "Vida sindicalista," *La voz del pueblo* (Tarràsa) (February 22, 1913); "La vida obrera en Barcelona," *El socialista* (Madrid) (April 18, 1913); and "Contra el trabajo nocturno," *El socialista* (July 19, 1913). A. López Baeza, "Acción social: El trabajo en Barcelona," *El socialista* (November 25, 1913), discussed the statistical unreliability of *Anuari d'estadística social de Catalunya*, edited by the Museo Social de Barcelona. Most Spanish statistics should be regarded as approximations. The prices come from the report of a seamstress who testified before the Bishop of Barcelona. Dolors Moncerdá de Macià, a leading Catalan Catholic feminist, reported on conditions in the garment trades on March 16, 1910, in an address to a Catholic group called Popular Social Action. It was reprinted as a pamphlet, "Conferencia sobre L'Acció Catòlica social femenina" (Barcelona: L'Acció Catòlica, 1910), pp. 13–14.

16. See Temma Kaplan, "Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation," *Journal of Contemporary History* 7, no. 2 (1971): 101–10, and "Women and Spanish Anarchism," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), pp. 400–421.

aspects of the strike. The organizers agreed to boycott the biggest companies in the districts of Sans, San Andrés, San Martín, Pueblo Nuevo, and Clot, new working-class suburbs immediately contiguous to the factories and to the old city.

There is no way to document how the women's networks grew out of female consciousness and helped intensify that consciousness as the situation deteriorated during the spring of 1913, but the networks had just that effect. Women carried on support work and established food kitchens for female strikers in the silk industry, who were striking against piece rates and fines. The local dairies, where women bought milk or simply congregated, served as information centers. Neighborhood women in Clot and San Andrés and San Martín targeted the company of Fàbregas y Jordá, which conveniently had factories in all three districts. They carried on demonstrations in the main squares of each of those neighborhoods to publicize their demands.

The summer of 1913 approached, and prices continued their steady rise. Women, whether they worked outside the home or not, found it difficult to put food on the table. Despite widespread unemployment in the region—an estimated eighty thousand people were out of work—women pushed for a strike in the textile industry.¹⁷ Apart from demands for a nine-hour day and an eight-hour night shift, Constancy called for a 40 percent increase in piece rates and a 25 percent hike in day wages. From the beginning, the governor sought one group among the owners to bargain with workers, but he was unsuccessful. The workers gave employers one month to decide.

In the meantime, women activated their networks in the working-class community. In a general meeting in San Martín, under the auspices of Constancy, women from throughout the city discussed strategies to spread their demands and to organize the strike they knew would come. They decided to send representatives to all the major food markets to talk with women who gathered there daily. Many of the people at this meeting had undoubtedly been involved in the anti-Moroccan War demonstrations of mid-June 1913, which had led to the arrest of socialist leaders.

On the night of July 27, people from throughout the popular neighborhoods of Barcelona and the surrounding textile towns gathered at the Socialist House of the People, on Aragon Street in the Clot district of Barcelona, to discuss the employers' failure to act on their demands. More than a thousand women attended the meeting. By all accounts, they led the demand to strike. On July 30, almost twenty thousand workers in Barcelona, of whom thirteen thousand were women and children, went out on strike. Countless others, including garment work-

17. "Las huelgas," *El socialista* (July 26, 1913); "De la Vaga textil. El Seny," *La campana de Gracia* (Barcelona) (August 9, 1913).

ers, seem to have joined them in street demonstrations. As a liberal journalist explained, "The spirit of women has spoken with enough eloquence to launch the entire working population and, as in other campaigns for social justice, the women excite the exaltation. It will be necessary to negotiate with them, because they will never accept a settlement short of their goals."¹⁸ The goals had emerged in the course of struggle; action promoted new levels of consciousness among ordinary women.

Mass activity centered in the Sans area on the southwest edge of the old city, and in the San Martín, San Andrés, Clot, and Pueblo Nuevo areas throughout the industrialized northern sections. The women of these neighborhoods were particularly suited to lead the struggle. Sans, a village absorbed into Barcelona along with San Martín and San Andrés at the end of the nineteenth century, had its own distinct plazas and daily markets. All the "new" districts were linked to the downtown area by coach and trolley lines. By the time they officially joined Barcelona, they had become popular districts of the old city. But women generally went at least once a week to one of the old markets. When the open street market of the Plaza of Padró, near the first cotton mills of the old city, moved to the covered iron-work market of San Antonio in 1879, the women of Sans and of District V of the old town met there either daily or weekly. The Plaza of Padró was contiguous to the streets where the first steam-driven factories were established in 1835. Many of the new spinning mills grew up just twenty blocks away in Sans. The young women and children of old Barcelona and Sans provided the labor power for these mills into the twentieth century. These first mills grew up in the old, settled working-class districts whose squares became rallying places during subsequent demonstrations.¹⁹

The women of the Sans factories began the strike by demanding that a 1900 law about night work be enforced. Their employers had locked them out. With their female neighbors, the workers began to frequent the leftist centers, but they preferred the Plaza of Catalonia, the city's civic center. Four or five hundred met in groups at the large plaza. Not all the women were factory workers, an issue that later caused much controversy among authorities. On August 5, they began what was to become a daily female community ritual. Instead of gathering at the San José market along the Ramblas, the promenade to the sea, they marched from the Plaza of Catalonia, down the Ramblas, across Columbus Way,

18. "Las huelgas de Barcelona," *El imparcial* (Madrid) (July 30 and August 1, 1913); "El conflicto del Arte Fabril en Cataluña," *El socialista* (July 31, 1913); "Contra la violencia," *El imparcial* (August 2, 1913).

19. Tomás Cabellé y Clos, *Costumbres y usos de Barcelona. Narraciones populares* (Barcelona: Casa Editorial Seguí, 1947), p. 416; Jacques Valdour, *La Vie ouvrière. L'ouvrière espagnol. Observations vécues par Jacques Valdour, vol. 1, Catalogne* (Paris: Arthur Roussea, 1919), pp. 21-22.

and on to the governor's office at the Plaza of the Palace.²⁰ It is significant that the female community went to the governor rather than to their employers to voice their general grievances and that they did not attempt to build the strength of the Constancy Union. They seem to have been conscious more of communal than of trade union goals.²¹

For four days, the women carried on the same procession, which took about fifteen minutes. They marched at three o'clock in the afternoon, just as the normal crowds swelled the Ramblas after the dinner break. It was hard to distinguish these women from other poor women who frequented the Ramblas. There was a comic element to the scene as the number of undercover police increased; the government was growing nervous about street agitation. On August 8, as the women began their daily march, police stopped them and ordered them to disperse. The women sent the men, who sometimes accompanied them, away to avoid violence. They tried to outsmart the police by regrouping along the predetermined path. Approximately two hundred women reached the governor's office, but the police prevented them from entering. The governor sent word that he had already presented their union representatives with proposals to end the strike. The committee had one day to consider the plan.²²

Constancy called an assembly to discuss the proposals, scheduling the meeting for seven o'clock at a downtown theater the next evening, August 10. The women, instead of meeting in the Plaza of Catalonia, gathered at the theater at three o'clock that afternoon. Their assembly included women from throughout the city, not just textile workers. They remained until the night meeting began. Luis Serra, who acted as chair, announced that the meeting was an assembly of the community rather than a union meeting; all were welcome and could speak as equals. Debate about the accords ensued, but the assembly voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike. Railroad workers were among those who attended, and they agreed to discuss calling a sympathy strike. Foundry workers in the city had been agitating since mid-July, and they continued their strike. By the night of the tenth, the general strike had begun.²³

20. "Huelga en el Arte Fabril," *Diario de Barcelona* (Barcelona) (August 5, 1913), pp. 10, 603 (night ed.).

21. "Gobierno Civil. Cuestiones obreras," *La publicidad* (April 12, 1913); "Las operarias en seda. En Barcelona. Las batallas del proletariado. Ecos de la lucha," *El socialista* (April 10, 1913); and "Las obreras triunfan," *ibid.* (April 11, 1913).

22. "De la Vaga textil. El Seny," *La campana de Gracia* (August 9, 1913); *Diario de Barcelona* (August 4, 1913), pp. 10, 532-34; (August 7, 1913), pp. 10, 653; (August 8, 1913), pp. 10, 712; (August 9, 1913), pp. 10, 796.

23. T. Herros, "Feminismo en actividad," *Almanaque de "Tierra y Libertad" para 1914* (Barcelona: Imprenta 'Germinal,' 1913), pp. 98-99; *Diario de Barcelona* (August 11, 1913), pp. 10, 837-38 (morning ed.); (August 12, 1913), pp. 10, 873 (morning ed.).

Through street demonstrations, women activated female consciousness about the relationship between social life and economic reforms. Some male leaders of Constancy begged them to stop their street action, but the women answered with catcalls. On the afternoon of August 11, a massive demonstration of about fifteen hundred women and eight hundred men gathered in the Plaza of Catalonia and marched down the Ramblas and Columbus Way to the governor's offices. As they approached the Plaza of the Palace, they sent a sixteen-woman committee ahead to meet the governor and explain that they would not return to work. They retraced their steps up Columbus Way. As they reached the Gate of Peace, below the statue of Columbus at the mouth of the Ramblas, the police charged and tried to disperse them. Some strikers broke through to the Ramblas of Santa Mónica and regrouped. Others fought the police. They all reassembled at the Plaza of Catalonia.²⁴

On August 12, the women began their march from the Plaza of Catalonia an hour earlier than usual, at two o'clock. But police clearly had orders to stop them without using direct force. The women retreated through the neighboring streets to Pelayo, to the Plaza of Bishop Urquinaona, and to the Plaza of the University in order to approach the Ramblas by the back streets. Most headed down toward the Royal Plaza where mounted police drove them off. The police, with some experience in riot control, blocked all streets that opened onto the Ramblas, and drove them to the nearest back streets. The women and police spent the afternoon battling for control of the Ramblas. Meanwhile the railroad workers, who met nearby, voted three to one to join the battle and extend the general strike.²⁵

Throughout the rest of the strike—which was not completely over until September 15—the women continued to hold their demonstrations on the Ramblas. They also held daily meetings throughout the streets and markets of the old city, especially those of Sans, San Andrés, San Martín, Pueblo Nuevo, and Clot. The main focus shifted to the Plaza of Spain, where the old city meets Sans. The women and the new strike committee that had been elected at the August 10 assembly were not cordial. Even the militant labor leaders disapproved of the unruly women's demonstrations. They opposed the tactics women used against female scabs—cutting their hair to mark them as traitors. Female strikers warned the scabs to think of their beauty rather than their stomachs next time. They suggested selling the hair to wigmakers to raise money for the food kitchens. Constancy denounced the women as a mob, and tried to persuade them to stop demonstrating. The women assembled at the Plaza of Spain on August 20 and attempted to march from there down

24. *Diario de Barcelona* (August 12, 1913), pp. 10, 904 (night ed.).

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 905.

the Paralelo, the main street leading from the Plaza of Spain to the harbor where the governor's offices were, to explain that they would not abide by agreements made by the strike committee. The police persuaded them not to march. The women then went to the strike committee offices on Vista Alegre 12, in the heart of District V. They insisted that it was they and not the strike leadership who spoke for the community, and that they would not agree to end the strike.²⁶

The governor published the Royal Decree early. It included the sixty-hour week, or a maximum of three thousand hours of work per year in the textile industry. Women could arrange their work day, so long as they managed to work sixty hours a week. The flexibility was meant to permit them a half-day of five hours on Saturdays, so that they could catch up with their housework.²⁷ In the end, the Royal Decree accomplished nothing for the strikers. Employers refused to abide by a law that interfered with their right to run their factories as they chose.

Nevertheless, the strike had important positive consequences for the women of the city. The street demonstration, especially that which proceeded down the Ramblas to the governor's office, gave physical evidence of their political consciousness; it amounted to a political theory in motion. As the critic John Berger has written: "A mass demonstration can be interpreted as the symbolic capturing of a capital. . . . The demonstrators interrupt the regular life of the streets they march through or of the open spaces they fill. They 'cut off' these areas, and, not yet having the power to occupy them permanently, they transform them into a temporary stage on which they dramatise the power they still lack."²⁸

Mass strikes are more than labor struggles over wages and working conditions. What distinguishes them from other strikes is that they carry struggle over into the normal activity of society. They demonstrate the power of those who produce goods and services over those who manage them. During such struggles, daily life becomes a problem that the entire community must solve. Feeding people becomes more than the responsibility of individual women. Providing medical care for wounded strikers becomes a political act. General strikes close down cafes and restaurants where unmarried male workers congregate. The Barcelona community in struggle in 1913 had to create alternative places for them. All mass strikes invariably affect living conditions because privatized "women's work" becomes a public responsibility. Women become increasingly aware of the essential though invisible services they perform. But they also learn that the power they allegedly wield in their own sphere requires struggle if it is to become theirs in practice.

26. Ibid. (August 20, 1913), pp. 11, 238 (night ed.).

27. Ibid. (August 21, 1913), pp. 11, 245 (morning ed.).

28. John Berger, "The Nature of Mass Demonstrations," *New Society* (May 23, 1968), pp. 754-55.

Collective Action: Barcelona, 1918

The effect of subsistence issues upon the development of female consciousness became only too obvious during World War I when Spain was a nonbelligerent. Inflation and war shortages afflicted civilian populations in Barcelona in 1917 and 1918 and exacerbated the normal difficulties working-class women experienced in providing food, fuel, and shelter for their communities. The inability of Spanish authorities to regulate necessities caused women to use direct action in placing social need above political order. A government that fails to guarantee women their right to provide for their communities according to the sexual division of labor cannot claim their loyalty. Experiencing reciprocity among themselves and competence in preserving life instills women with a sense of their collective right to administer everyday life, even if they must confront authority to do so.

Under normal circumstances, women's networks allocate resources ranging from goods and fuel to consciousness and culture. During wartime, food and fuel are removed from women's control to become matters of state concern. So long as authorities regulate supplies, housing, and fuel when they are in short supply or when prices rise above the limitations of normal budgets, women will accept reduced provisions and governmental regulation, as they did in England during World War I. In other situations they may oppose authority, as they did between 1917 and 1923 in Russia, Italy, and Mexico.

The women's insurrection in Barcelona began in early January 1918, during one of the coldest winters on record. Lack of gas and electric power due to coal shortages had forced more than ten thousand workers out of the factories. Bread prices had been inching upward since October 1917. Rumors circulated in early January that they would rise another 5 céntimos. The city established a price board to investigate fuel and food prices. Bakers complained that they needed price hikes to break even, and coal merchants complained that they could not stay in business if they sold coal at prices the board suggested. The shortage and high price of coal used to heat houses triggered the Barcelona movement. By January 9, more than five hundred women began to attack coal trucks throughout the five major districts of Barcelona. About a thousand women attacked a big coal retailer on Parliament Street in the old downtown section of the city and auctioned off the coal at the lowest stipulated price.²⁹

The second phase of the growing movement began on January 10,

29. Here, as in the coverage of the 1913 Constancy strike, I have attempted to include accounts from as many different newspapers as possible in order to accumulate detailed evidence about the events. *La Veu de Catalunya* (Barcelona) (January 2-12, 1918); *Diario de Barcelona* (January 10, 1918), p. 459 (night ed.).

when a crowd of about two hundred housewives from the old working-class districts of Barceloneta circulated through the city to the textile factories, where the work force was largely female. They called women workers out. They carried signs that read: "Down with the high cost of living. Throw out the speculators. Women into the streets to defend ourselves against hunger! Right the wrongs! In the name of humanity, all women take to the streets." Have women the right to speak for humanity? These women believed they did, so long as they acted to preserve the division of labor, to do what women do—that is, to act female.

Gathering their forces, housewives and female workers marched down to the governor's offices at the Plaza of the Palace. As the crowd shouted, "Long live this" and "Down with that," a delegation of six young women, led by Amalia Alegre and Amparo Montoliu, climbed the stairs to present the women's grievances to the governor. They asked that coal prices be regulated along with the prices of bread, olive oil, meat, and potatoes.³⁰ Elsewhere in the city, women continued to attack coal yards, and the mayor dispatched police to guard coal transports. In Gracia, with its well-developed radical political culture, women marched on the slaughterhouse and tried to auction meat. Near Tetuan Plaza, where new metallurgical factories had gone up, women urged men to go on strike.³¹

In an apparent effort to reduce fuel consumption, women from the harbor districts marched on the music halls. The splendor of these palaces of leisure attracted attention throughout Europe; Barcelona had become known as the "Paris of the South." Up and down the streets of pleasure, in from the avenue of the Marquis of Duero, popularly known as the Paralelo, women with sticks broke down doors, smashed mirrors, and sometimes succeeded in persuading bar girls and cabaret dancers to join them. When necessary, as in the Eden Palace, women and owners engaged in physical fights over women's assumed right to control the use of electricity in the music halls.

Women's consciousness became apparent in the patterns of mobilization they chose and the way they defined their movement. They wandered from coal yard to coal yard to gather supporters. Throughout the six-week-long mobilization, women revealed a female urban network. They began with the lines in front of coal dealers and moved later to the San José, Santa Catalina, San Antonio, Sans, Gracia, and Clot markets. Processions and consciousness of community were closely associated in Catholic life. The secular networks of women adopted this old connection, but the markets substituted for shrines and churches along the processional route.

30. *Diario de Barcelona* (January 11, 1918), pp. 467–68 (night ed.); *El diluvio* (January 11, 1918), p. 7 (morning ed.), and (January 11, 1918), p. 2 (afternoon ed.); *La Veu de Catalunya* (January 12, 1918).

31. *Diario de Barcelona* (January 12, 1918), p. 505 (night ed.).

Naming things, including oneself, promotes consciousness. The meaning of the term “vecindaria” was transformed in the course of the uprising. The masculine “vecino” simultaneously means “inhabitant,” “head of household,” and “citizen.” But the feminine correlate is “hembra,” or simply, “female.” “Vecindaria” is a village term, which denotes a member of a tightly knit community. It is as close to a kinship term as the contemporary language could muster for a civic relationship. It roughly translates as “female comrade” or “sister.” The term did not transcend the period of the uprising, but its use during the uprising indicates a sense of female self-awareness and solidarity that grew throughout January and February of 1918. On January 10, in the harbor section, a woman affixed a wall poster that called upon the “vecindaria” to protest the increased cost of living.

Female neighborhood commissions sent informal delegates to one another. On January 12, two separate women’s delegations visited the exasperated governor. The group, which seems to have been dominated by younger women, told the governor that they hoped “to stop all work of women in Barcelona until the authorities rolled back prices on all primary necessities.”³² Women excluded men from their daily activities, including visits to the governor.

The delegation that approached him on January 14 demanded that no food or fuel leave the province. By six o’clock that evening, another women’s delegation called for a rollback on all prices to pre-World War I levels. Moderate women demurred, visited the governor’s office at midnight, and claimed they would be satisfied with more reductions of food and fuel costs.³³ The governor complained that with all the visits from women’s delegations, he could not get any work done. A crowd of about a thousand women had gathered at the Plaza of Catalonia and had marched to the governor’s office with the regular delegation of women at their head. When the women heard the governor’s exasperated comment, they grew angry. They attempted to surge up the stairs, but the police cut them off, panicked, and shot nineteen women.³⁴

Female consciousness, which may lack predetermined doctrine and structure, develops rather quickly when rulers resort to force. The shooting on the stairwell seems to have marked the governor’s decision to repress rather than receive delegations of women. When women attempted to hold a demonstration on the afternoon of January 15 in the Plaza of Catalonia, the police dissolved the meeting. They shot into the air as women congregated in the nearby Ramblas. They cordoned off the Royal Plaza, another public area that had become a regular gather-

32. *El diluvio* (January 13, 1918) (night ed.).

33. *Diario de Barcelona* (January 14, 1918), p. 516 (morning ed.), and p. 573 (night ed.).

34. *Ibid.* (January 14, 1918), pp. 573–74 (night ed.), (January 15, 1918), p. 586 (morning ed.), and pp. 621–22 (night ed.); *El diluvio* (January 15, 1918), p. 7 (morning ed.); *La hormiga de oro: Ilustración católica* (Barcelona) (January 19, 1918), p. 31.

ing place for female dissidents. The women grew angry and began to whistle and jeer. A journalist remarked that "repressive action of the police exacerbated the women's rebellious spirit."³⁵

Female consciousness united housewives in the working-class districts with female factory workers. From January 15 on, most of the female workers went on strike and forced shops to close, while about seventeen hundred male laborers also refused to work.³⁶ Women of the popular classes continued to interrupt daily routines. They marched on El Siglo, Barcelona's first department store, where they called saleswomen to join their demonstration. By mobilizing around the sexual division of labor and the common female obligation to distribute resources through their networks, women of the popular class were united, whether or not they worked for a wage.

Women's networks had assumed leadership of a social struggle they pursued in the name of the entire female community. Their attacks on food stores throughout the city increased, as did periodic attempts by police to repress them through armed force. They adopted a committee structure, not unlike the soviets developed in Russia in 1917, to regulate attacks on grocery stores. In the process of solidifying their networks, they formulated new programs for action. These in turn brought the women to new levels of political consciousness about their rights to act according to the division of labor by sex.

Despite official opposition, thousands of Barcelona's women gathered at the Globe Theater for a public meeting. A female weaver presided. The women called for rollbacks on prices of all basic commodities to pre-World War I levels. They demanded rent reductions and lower railroad costs, which they believed were a major element in the general increase in the cost of living, and they demanded that six thousand male railroad workers be rehired. Large numbers of women participated in the general discussion.³⁷

Officials in Madrid, though unfamiliar with female networks, were always wary about social strife in Barcelona. Irregular food supplies and fuel shortages, the causes of the struggle, promoted lockouts at those factories that still remained open. The governor tried to reestablish order by calling workers back to their jobs, but he lacked the cooperation of employers. Women sought to air their grievances at the governor's offices on January 21, but they were intercepted by the police.

Fearing civil war, authorities in Madrid recalled the governor. Women continued to attack commercial property in an effort to win control over food distribution. On January 25, the new military governor declared a state of siege and suspended civil rights. Nevertheless, strikes in the textile industry continued until February. Despite military

35. *El diluvio* (January 16, 1918), pp. 7-8 (morning ed.).

36. *Diario de Barcelona* (January 18, 1918), p. 769 (morning ed.).

37. *El diluvio* (January 18, 1918), p. 9 (morning ed.).

repression, women refused to acquiesce to the greed of speculators and the irregularities of the market. As late as February 15, price increases for salted cod at the Gracia market led to political mobilizations.³⁸

Conclusion

The 1918 women's war reveals how closely social welfare and female consciousness are linked. The insurrection was a revolution of direct democracy in which everyday life became a political process, and through that process women's awareness grew. Disorders of war brought into view networks responsible for daily distribution of social resources. Breaks in routine raised questions about the quality of life women achieved through the networks they had formed to carry out the division of labor by sex. Women recreated these networks in political ways when merchants, governors, and states impeded their efforts to provide for their community. Women's growing familiarity with government offices, where they went to present proposals, brought them to physical spaces in the city where working-class women had seldom previously appeared. Their own movement through space, from the popular neighborhoods where housewives worked to the buildings where the men of power ruled, represented a flight in consciousness that revealed how the sexual division of labor fit into a larger political schema.

The capacity of local female networks to transcend the purposes for which they were originally formed appeared as women moved further and further away from their own neighborhoods and into the spaces occupied by the government and commercial groups. In 1910, women made forays out of their neighborhoods only at the time of the inquest to show their outrage about the molested child. Otherwise they remained in their own neighborhoods. By 1913, what appeared to be a labor struggle became a ritualized battle over social policy between the popular community, led by women, and the authorities. The street became the stage for this conflict, proof that female consciousness moves women to take radical action in defense of the division of labor.

The logic of female collective action in early twentieth-century Barcelona demonstrates an implicit language of social rights that emerges from commitment to the sexual division of labor. In defending the notion of separate rights based on separate work, women violated the self-same notion. They beseeched and then confronted government officials in the urban plazas and offices that were symbolic of the political and commercial power men wield. Ideas about how daily life and social stability dovetail propelled women to collective action to preserve their routines. They disrupted what was left of orderly life in their neigh-

38. *El sol* (Madrid) (January 9–February 2, 1918); *Almanaque de el Diario de Barcelona para el año 1919* (Barcelona: Imprenta de Diario de Barcelona, 1918), pp. 24–25.

borhoods and, in the course of movement, shocked police and authorities. Dramatization of their place in society wakened female consciousness as well as government fears.

By taking action, women of the popular classes promoted further thought. Shared sensibilities about rights and obligations took political shape in large assemblies of women, in processions, and in visits to the governor's offices. These shared goals, largely unformed until the experience of collective action created understanding, entailed supplying social need in spite of the requirements of war and statecraft. Networks defined themselves more sharply when solidarity found expression in words like "vecindaria" and in physical contact outside familiar neighborhood centers in new physical spaces. Consciousness about the syncoption between power and social need dawned upon female activists because it reproduced in the political arena the division of labor that governed female consciousness in the community. Welfare and inflation shattered social order even in nonbelligerent countries. Preoccupied with providing for themselves and their neighbors, women assumed revolutionary positions in order to defend everyday life and the female rights they needed in order to carry out their obligations.

To understand female consciousness in the popular classes one must comprehend the degree to which working-class women uphold the sexual division of labor because it defines what women do and therefore provides a sense of who they are in society and culture. The women incorporate social expectations with their particular notions of femininity. Their attempts to act according to notions held by their class and in their historical period about what women do sometimes leads them to a reactionary stance, as in the French Vendée and in Salvador Allende's Chile. But whether they act to serve the left or the right, women's disruptive behavior in the public arena appears incompatible with stereotypes of women as docile victims. The common social thread is their consistent defense of their right to feed and protect their communities either with the support of government or without it. Their conviction grows from their acceptance of the sexual division of labor as a means of survival.

Insofar as some feminist theory stresses the need to transform society so that men as well as women attribute high value to nurturance, such theory incorporates female consciousness into feminism. The degree to which women in political parties tend to find themselves channeled toward areas of health, education, and welfare also represents unconscious recognition that women have special prerogatives and socialized skills in these areas. But the insights of female consciousness, which place life above all other political goals, have never found expression in a major state or even a political party. Consider the implications of this for political programs, especially feminism: women's most conservative self-image could potentially convince them to demand that states place life above other goals.

Although the content of the division of labor varies enormously, the process of marking the differences it entails has cultural as well as material and psychological implications. In the course of struggling to do what women in their society and class were expected to do, women in Barcelona became outlaws. To fulfill women's obligations, they rebelled against the state. Their double duty as defenders of community rights and as law-abiding citizens became a double bind, which they forcibly ruptured through direct action.

Female consciousness, though conservative, promotes a social vision embodying profoundly radical political implications that feminist theorists have scarcely recognized. To do the work society assigns them, women have pursued social rather than narrowly political goals. When it appears that the survival of the community is at stake, women activate their networks to fight anyone—left or right, male or female—whom they think interferes with their ability to preserve life as they know it.

The nature of the sexual division of labor into which women are socialized predisposes them to political arguments about social issues. Reactionary political groups have often appealed to women on these grounds. Feminists, who value women's work, seldom argue that a just society would allocate its major spiritual and material resources to the tasks all women have learned to do. Pessimistic in the face of legislation like the Family Protection Act, which threatens the rights women have won in the past decade, feminists may abandon discussion of feminism's social vision to focus on more limited political defense of past gains that are now in jeopardy. That would be a mistake. Incorporating female consciousness into feminist arguments about programs for future economic and social democracy may be the only way to keep the content and spirit of what we have won and could promote a more broadly based social movement than any feminists have previously achieved.

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