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## Treball Fi de Màster

*Female consciousness and social activism: a gender análisis of the Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca de Barcelona*

*Paola Vasconcelos*

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MASTER THESIS

FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS AND  
SOCIAL ACTIVISM: A gender  
analysis of the *Plataforma de los  
Afectados por la Hipoteca de  
Barcelona*

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The names of some interviewees in this work were changed for privacy reasons, so I used the names of the 7 women who had most inspired me: my mother and my aunts. In this world where we have to be mothers, professionals, wives - and beautiful- they were my first examples. I feel very honored to have had them as a mirror and now I feel very lucky to expand this set of examples with the women from the PAH Barcelona. After these months of research, I met so many inspiring women who are mothers, wives, activists and whatever else they want, and I feel relieved to know that we live in a world where there is so much solidarity as one can find in the PAH.

And to the memory of Marielle Franco, human rights activist assassinated in Rio de Janeiro during the elaboration of this work, I dedicate this thesis. MARIELLE, PRESENTE!

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of women in the *Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca de Barcelona* (PAH BCN), a movement fighting for the right to housing. While the female presence in the PAH BCN has been noticed mostly in the media, there is still a need to understand from a gender perspective their participation going beyond the question of representation and paying attention to the voices of these women, their experiences, and daily routines in the movement in order to contextualize the PAH with previous women's and urban movements in Barcelona during the early democratic period. The research explores how the presence of women in the PAH BCN contributes (or not) to existing discussions about the influence of women's movements in proposing new visions (and transformations) of the city. In order to analyze the specific role of women in the PAH, this research relies in a literature that discusses how women have been appropriating and transforming urban spaces through political engagement and by doing that, these women become political actors motivated by a female consciousness at the same time that they build a collective identity in order to self organize around the discussion of gender needs. In order to understand the specific experience of women in this gender mixed social movement the research adopts a qualitative approach based in primary methods to collect data: in-depth semi-structured interviews and systematic observation. The results will show the important role women are playing in the PAH BCN, even if it is a mixed gender movement.

## **Key words**

Female Consciousness; PAH BCN; Women; Gender; Urban Social Movements; Barcelona

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## 1. Introduction

*“The Democratic Women of Barcelona proclaimed themselves as defenders of all the rights that we as women have and assumed the task of uniting all the democratic women of Barcelona to fight against fascism.”*

Manifesto of the Democratic Women of Barcelona  
Barcelona, 1974<sup>1</sup>

In Catalonia, the period of expansion of political rights after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 provided a propitious scenario for social movements to become formally organized (Ferré Baldrich, 2014; Nash, 1994). In relation to the women’s movement, the specific characteristics propitiating their rise were (1) the fact that a decrease in the rigidity of the social system had a direct relation to the raise of their visibility and demands (Lamelas, 2016); (2) and the worldwide trend in the 1970s defined as the “second wave feminism”. This second factor fostered women to urge for the need of a social change that would make existing social structures and patriarchal realities untenable. As Daphne Spain reminds us, the 1970s women’s movement “waged an intense campaign for women’s rights that had spatial consequences for the city. Like women (suffragists) at the turn of the twentieth century demonstrating for the vote, second-wave feminists took to the streets to demonstrate for equal pay and reproductive rights.” (Spain, 2014: 590). This vision of social transformation had consequently a spatial expression, with women participating in and leading popular protests around a wide variety of issues related to urbanization, employment, and the provision of basic services. The United Nations’ Decade for Women (1976–85) contributed to set this worldwide scenario, highlighting the important but often invisible role of women in the social and economic development of countries and communities. During this decade a shift happened on the way scholars and policy makers were approaching the topic as they started to move away from the concern about the reproductive role of women towards an understanding of the complexities of women’s productive activities (Moser, 1993: 2).

In the midst of the 1970’s social mobilizations, one of the main social movements rising in Spain were the neighborhood associations. In the book *The City and the Grassroots*, Manuel Castells (1983) analyses this movement and states that the analysis of the neighborhood mobilization in Spain in the 1970s allows us to understand how a civil society that had suffered from a dictatorial system overcame this situation by developing a solid social tissue to confront the retrograde characteristics of the political institutions, in close connection to democratic values. Though women were not at the focus of Castells’ analysis, it could be argued that inside

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.amparomorenosarda.es/es/node/82> Accessed in 16th April, 2018.

those organizations in Barcelona they found a safe space to organize themselves to express awareness of their struggles, creating the *vocalías de mujeres*<sup>2</sup> (Lamelas, 2016).

In different periods scenarios of crisis have fostered social mobilizations in urban contexts; this research examines the *Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca de Barcelona*<sup>3</sup> that emerged right after the 2008 financial crisis. The visibility and level of politicization of women in the PAH BCN was the main factor that influenced this option as a case study: while the female presence in the movement has been noticed mostly in the media<sup>4</sup>, there is still a need to understand their presence from a complex gender perspective that goes beyond the question of representation and pays attention to their voices and experiences in the daily routine of the movement, in order to contextualize it with previous women's movements in Catalonia during the early democratic period and predict possible ways these women can take nowadays in transforming the urban space through social mobilization.

Since the PAH creation in 2009, we have seen that its female participants have become political actors in a non-institutional level and some of them even reached the institutional level of politics, with Ada Colau, actual mayor of Barcelona and one of the PAH's founding members, being one example of this phenomena. This is not a surprise, as Corcoran-Nantes states: "many women, through their political development in non-institutional politics, have gone on to extend their participation to political parties and trade unions as well as strategic gender protests along with women's organizations and feminist groups" (1993: 123). The interest here is not to focus on the main protagonists that became visible formal politicians but to adopt a gender lens to analyze the PAH BCN and contextualize it in a larger body of literature that examines both the participation of women in collective political action and the role of women transforming cities. That is, taking into consideration that the PAH is a mixed social movement, this thesis aims to explore the uniqueness of women's experience in it by paying attention to the following specific objectives:

- (1) Understand the motivation of women to join and participate in the PAH BCN: does it emerges from what has been considered an existing gendered place, that is women acting to defend their families and communities in a way that this is different from men's motivations?

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<sup>2</sup> Committees formed by women specifically directed to women issues inside the neighborhood associations.

<sup>3</sup> Translation from Spanish: Movement of the victims of mortgage in Barcelona. To be identified as PAH BCN throughout this work.

<sup>4</sup> For example: "The deputy Lucía Martín, PAH activist, new spokesperson of Barcelona en Comú in the Congress" Available in <http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20180118/44104464382/la-diputada-lucia-martin-activista-de-la-pah-nueva-portavoz-de-en-comu-en-el-congreso-en-lugar-de-domenech.html>; Accessed in April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018.



- (2) Analyze the transformations experienced by women when they become involved in the movement;
- (3) Explore the internal dynamics of the movement, paying attention to how gender roles and identities shape the political practices of the female activists;
- (4) Explore if the substantial presence of women in the PAH BCN can bring new light to understand the intersection between feminist agendas and urban agendas, based on the Barcelona experiences from the past.

By developing answers to these objectives, this thesis aims to contribute to a scholarship that explores whether women who become involved in urban movements, even if they are not overtly or consciously feminists in their discourses and actions, are in fact envisioning or proposing a new understanding of a non sexist and therefore more just city<sup>5</sup>. While several scholars have examined urban social movements in Barcelona from a sociological perspective, as it will be seen in the conceptual framework, less attention has been paid to the point of view of the gender-specific dimension in the urban space. This research emerges from Eva Lamelas' work about the *Vocalías y grupos de Mujeres* (2016) who situates them within an existing, though several times invisible, tradition of women's political action in Spanish history. And yet, this research aims to add a new twist to this understanding by adding a spatial and urban dimension discussed by urban planning scholars.

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Fainstein argues for the concept of just city: "we can list a set of values necessary for the just city and require that each reach a minimum level. These are democracy, equity, diversity, growth, and sustainability." (Fainstein, 2005: 14).

## 2. Conceptual framework

*“I have ridden in your cart, driver,  
waved my nude arms at villages going by,  
learning the last bright routes, survivor  
where your flames still bite my thigh  
and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.  
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.  
I have been her kind.”*

(Her Kind, poem by Anne Sexton)

A priority for the feminist scholarship is to acknowledge the genealogy of women’s movements that have been silenced through history. In this sense, several authors have examined the role of women in collective action with the aim to “right the record” and make visible women’s role in recent Spanish history (Ackelsberg, 1985; Amelang and Nash, 1990; del Moral Vargas, 2008; Lamelas, 2016; Kaplan, 1982; Nash, 1994; Radcliff, 2002; Threlfall, 2009). The conceptual framework of this research relies in a literature about how women have been appropriating urban spaces through political engagement, using Barcelona post-dictatorship period as the space and time frame. This is not meant to be comprehensive of all existing literature, but is rather meant to highlight key points to show that women, among all the social roles they play, can become political actors by building a collective identity in social mobilization.

### 2.1. Female consciousness, gender needs and women’s visibility

To understand the implication of women in political movements with an urban dimension, historian Temma Kaplan (1982) proposed the idea of “female consciousness”. Though she examined the role of women during the first decades of the twentieth century, her contributions to understand women’s role in collective action have been crucial for later periods. She argued that “those with female consciousness accept the gender system of their society; such consciousness emerges from the division of labor by sex, which assigns women the responsibility of preserving life” (Kaplan, 1982: 545). She continues, “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” (Kaplan, 1982: 545).

Considering that women play other roles besides the ones related to reproduction, Kaplan’s claims about female consciousness as a key factor for collective identity are slightly slippery. After all, our society is based on an universalist citizenship model that goes along with the

patriarchal system<sup>6</sup> rules and from this parameter, if the condition of wives and mothers is the only factor that will allow women to be recognized in the political space, any other women's demands that escape this social mandate model can be set aside, and therefore become invisible. Likewise, Radcliff explains: "the category of female citizen has always been problematic, torn between the universal language of citizenship and the "difference" associated with women as wives and mothers" (2002: 77). Along these lines, Lamelas states that "when citizenship is defined from the ideal of a western, adult human male, heterosexual, and with full capabilities, adding the fact that this is developed from a universalist discourse of Human Rights, women, regarding their gender categorization, are outside the guarantee of rights." (2016: 77).

As a rule, women that demand as individual beings, or citizens, will have their demands considered as made from the private space, and therefore apolitical and this sense, Kaplan's argument of female consciousness is important. However, one must have in mind that there are also other factors and motivators, as we will see further ahead in this chapter, that make women's mobilization visible and furthermore, foster women politicization process in a way that it raises their awareness for their struggles while being citizens, besides being wives and mothers.

In regards the urban space they occupy as citizens, women's movements have always imagined more just societies, however, they can easily go unnoticed if they do not have this main factor of female consciousness that will label them as apolitical (Lamelas, 2016). In this sense, Kaplan adds and argues that exploring women's actions requires a reorientation of political theory that "places human need above other social and political requirements (and roles) and human life above property, profit, and even individual rights" (1982: 546). For that reason, it is imperative that women engage in social movements to claim for their rights and therefore change laws and transform the urban space towards gender equity (Lamelas, 2016; Kaplan, 1982; Spain, 2014).

In the specific case of Barcelona, to overcome this problem of invisibility, the women's movement found a way to address their issues bringing it to the scale of the neighborhood, inside neighborhood associations. Discussing neighborhood problems that directly affected them was a way of being heard in a safe space where they could also have an active voice (Lamelas, 2016: 189). In this sense, Lamelas analysis proposed looking to the problem of invisibility in two steps: first, women needed to claim solutions for their struggles motivated by

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<sup>6</sup> According to the book "50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies", "since the early twentieth century, feminist writers have used the concept to refer to the social system of masculine domination over women" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:93). In the same book, authors state that radical feminists also call it 'patriarchal ideology' which stands for "the means by which, both economically and structurally, the state operated first and foremost in the interests of men." (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:116).

Kaplan's concept of female consciousness and then, from this position, claim for public equipment and services in the city that will fulfil everyone's needs, but especially theirs.

In other words, adopting the terms conceptualized by Maxine Molyneux (1985), what Lamelas proposes in her work is to look to the case by first addressing practical gender interests to further address strategic gender interests. This might have been a solution for overcoming the problem of invisibility in this historical example, however we must have in mind that if the aim is to achieve lasting and sustainable impact and mainstream gender equity, there is a consensus that strategic gender interests need to be addressed first (Molyneux, 1985; Corcoran-Nantes, 1993; Moser, 1993). Speaking of that and following Moser (1993), to use the word *interests* in this case is important for theories of gender analysis, whereas for gender planning, what is important is the differentiation between practical and strategic gender *needs*. The first relates to the responsibilities and tasks associated with women's socially accepted gender roles in the society or immediate perceived necessity (female consciousness). Whereas strategic gender needs are the ones women identify because of their subordinate position to men in the society, regarding the gender divisions of labor. These are directly related to the achievement of gender equity and are the only type of gender needs that can change existing roles and women's subordinate position in society (Moser, 1993: 39-40).

When analyzing the women's movement in Barcelona between 1974 e 1990, besides addressing practical needs first, Lamelas (2016) also argues that it was necessary for them to construct a collective identity in order to be noticed, which according to Kaplan (1982) will only happen when women develop their female consciousness. This was a starting point for them, that further ahead have had other factors related to their conditions as citizens added to their agenda. As time passed, Barcelona's historical women's movements are a precedent of this collective identity construction that achieved to developed politicization to reach to the public sphere. This evolution process of the *vocalías de mujeres* in Barcelona shows how the motivation for engagement by addressing practical gender needs can transform into a discussion around strategic gender needs, a process which Molyneux (1985) claims to be the essence of the feminist practice.

This discussion about gender needs and visibility is especially meaningful when situated at the urban arena. That is, considering that the main bases of citizenship are the individual - State relations plus the universalist concept of this citizenship, women have always been excluded from the public space (Rubio Castro, 1997). For this reason, the spatial dimensions of these movements need to be understood in order to contextualize in what kind of environment they were created.

## 2.2. Spatial Dimensions of women's movements in Barcelona

Women's movements in Catalonia in the early democratic period can be traced from three origins: the vecinal (neighborhood) movement, the obreras (workers) movement and the feminist movement (Lamelas, 2016). Through Lamelas' work (2016) it was possible to identify that one common characteristic among all of them is that they are strongly connected and related to what she calls *territorialidad*<sup>7</sup>.

In similar lines, Radcliff argues that "feminist scholars have noted that women are more often found in informal social movements organized around household, neighborhood or human rights issues than in political parties and associations that are recognized as 'political' actors in conventional models" (2002: 78). Previously, Kaplan (1982) had already noticed that the spatial dimension of women's collective actions generally emerged from shared routines that bind women to one another within their class and within their neighborhoods.

In the previous section, we saw that the women's movement in Barcelona organized around gender needs in order to build a collective identity. This was seen as a facilitator to reach a non-institutional political space, and a watershed event in this context was the organization of the Jornades Catalanes de La Dona<sup>8</sup>. The politicization of women in social movements in Barcelona in the transition period did not occur inside political parties, as it was the forecast by that time. Indeed, Lamelas (2016) argues that there was a danger that the left-wing parties could exploit the struggle of women, because whether they wanted or not, they still considered women's struggles as subaltern to the worker's class struggle. The risk of invisibility created by the cause of others made them to decide to keep their spatial domain in the neighborhoods, through the associations, and with the inspiration brought by the feminist ideas. Their awareness raised by these feminist ideas made them start to address their practical and strategic needs in an exclusive place for this purpose, creating gender specific committees inside the neighborhood associations, the *vocalías de mujeres* (Lamelas, 2016).

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<sup>7</sup> The word *territorialidad* in Spanish is translated as territoriality in English. It has the same sense as "domain of a territory", but as it is a so specific term used by Lamelas (2016), it will be kept as the original source.

<sup>8</sup> The first great event of women's movement in Catalonia was the Jornades Catalanes de La Dona, (Catalan Women's Days) in 1976. This event allowed the elaboration and collective validation of the political program of feminism in Catalonia and the creation of a unitary organization of women. (Lamelas, 2016: 163)



**Figure 1: Demonstrations of *Vocalías de Mujeres* in Barcelona in the 1970s.**

Source: The Barcelona City Hall website<sup>9</sup> and Pilar Aymerich

Along with this idea of the feminist agenda as a motivator for women engagement in social movements in Barcelona, from a planning theory point of view, Spain (2014) argues that the second wave of feminism, that came in this period of the 1970s, was an important shift in the agenda because it brought women's struggles beyond the reproductive role. According to her, it contributed to considerable changes in the urban space, related mostly to women's personal security while seeking for autonomy. In that sense, her arguments reinforce the idea that the feminist agenda was an important factor in the process of politicization of women. In the specific case of Catalonia, according to Ten, López and Ruiz, "it is possible to claim that without feminism, the history of democratization would have been different: simply Spanish democracy would have been more traditional and less liberal." (2009: 46). Besides that, these authors argue that nowadays we see that a good part of the women active in current Spanish politics are leaders who initially developed their public activities in the movement of solidarity and political action that had the feminist agenda as one of the main guides (Ten, Lopéz and Ruiz, 2009: 206).

### 2.3. Gender and the city

While the previous discussion provides us with an insightful understanding of the spatial position of women in social movements in Barcelona, the literature on gender and the city brings to the table a better understanding of how specific perspectives brought by women in social movements can change the urban environment they occupy. For example, some scholars stress that is important to apply a gender lens in urban planning practices and especially in relation to discussions about the right to the city<sup>10</sup>. These take into consideration questions

<sup>9</sup> Available at [https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/es/el-movimiento-feminista-de-gracia-cumple-40-anos\\_192971.html](https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/es/el-movimiento-feminista-de-gracia-cumple-40-anos_192971.html) Accessed in May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>10</sup> According to Lefebvre, Kofman and Lebas (1996): the right to not exclude urban society from the qualities and benefits of urban life. Moreover, according to David Harvey: "the right to the city is much more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is the right to change themselves by changing the city. It is, above all, a collective rather than an individual right, for this transformation inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective

strictly related to women's possibilities towards autonomy, such as the right to universal childcare or transportation solutions that ease the burden of commuting from suburbs to workplaces. In a smaller scale, these scholars argue that housing design is also an issue that needs attention since it makes it easier for families – and specially wives and mothers - to do all that they need to do in a day (Chant and McIlwayne, 2013; Fainstein and Servon, 2005).

Along these lines, Hayden (1980) point to the gendered aspects of the right to the city already existing in the 1970s<sup>11</sup>. Housing demands can thus be seen as part of a larger questioning of the life in the suburbs that fostered the dependence on the car a symbol of the patriarchal system. Other manifestations of patriarchy in the urban scenario were the separation between residential and commercial areas, that left women secluded to certain parts of the city; the need to have private security while walking in the streets or the lack of public equipment and services in the residential neighborhoods (Hayden, 1980; Spain, 2014).

For example, Parker (2011) claims that an analysis of women's social movements in cities need to be understood from a feminist perspective that pays attention to how these movements were not only addressing issues that concern “domestic” issues but are also fighting for social justice in the city, enabling women to occupy public spaces. The feminist agenda then not only served as an organizing factor for women's movement to build a collective identity, but together with other ideals of social justice, strengthened the movement towards a rupture in the model of separation between the domestic and the public sphere. And yet, there is a need of more studies on gendered urban research that addresses three important issues as the right to housing, health, and urban politics, what Parker calls as a materialist feminism framework. She argues that "the city was an extension of the home and drawing upon their material subjectivities, women legitimated their presence as activists and agents of change in the public sphere." (2011: 433). This new perspective, I would argue, helps us to examine the role of women's social movements in Barcelona that will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4. Women's social movements transforming the city of Barcelona**

As mentioned earlier, the question of *territorialidad* was pointed as a unique characteristic of women's social movements in Barcelona. Along these lines, other authors also argued that even though social movements are different in each country, they all have in common “that the expression of the citizenry's will be involved in the creation and construction of their own urban

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power to reshape the urbanization process. The right to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, as I would argue, one of the most precious and yet most neglected of our human rights.” (Harvey, 2008: 23)

<sup>11</sup> Moment where women's social movements started to demand the right to the city (Hayden, 1980).

space.” (Domingo-Bonet, 1996 in Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009: 1). For them, the city has always been a space of meeting and communication among citizens, something that was erased by the contradictions of capitalism and the modernist way of thinking about urban planning<sup>12</sup> (Figure 2). For this reason, Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez (2009) argue that the emergence of the neighborhood associations and other social movements in Spain came from the need that citizens felt of demanding new directions on urban planning. Therefore, they started to organize themselves to get back their sense of belonging in their urban territories.



**Figure 2: Daily life of women in the neighborhoods of Barcelona.**

Source: *Vindicación Feminista* Magazine, N. 22

We have seen in section 2.1 that one way the Barcelona women’s movement found to overcome invisibility was to define their spatial dimension in the scale of the neighborhood. It could be argued that similar to other cities, this movement responded to poor planning solutions that affected their daily lives and organized themselves to demand better actions not only for them as individuals, but also for the spaces they occupied as citizens (Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009). That is, naturally with the motivation of being wives and mothers, women’s fight was also to reach more just cities. A major argument brought by Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez is that “the urban space is not neutral and affects women differently” (2009: 11), and this is an important reason that women’s movement in Barcelona will also claim for changes in the urban space.

Women’s transformation and politicization process while fighting against authority, when seen from a planning theory perspective, also includes a transformation in the way they perceive the urban space, after being subjected for a long time to the confinement of the private (domestic)

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<sup>12</sup> For Magro and Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez (2009), the modernist way of thinking urban planning considered cities as places to be totally reconstructed, erasing traces of the city as a space for people. The result of these poor planning solutions we can see still nowadays in large scale cities that had a planning design favoring cars instead of citizens, as discussed by Jane Jacobs in her book “Death and Life of Great American Cities” (1961).



space (Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009). This affirmation brings us to Lefebvre's important argument on the production of space: he states that the space is produced through the conflictual unity of a spatial triad: the perceived, the conceived and the lived (Lefebvre, 1991). So to speak, women when collectively organized demanding issues related to their nature and to the city, transform their identities (and perceptions), become political actors, and move towards experiencing the public sphere. As the urban space is not neutral and will often excludes minority, the lived space, perceived in a different manner from this politicized perspective, will be a continuing factor giving reasons for social mobilization around urban matters. This argument applies for the example of the *vocalías de mujeres* in the 1970s, that had demands leading to transformation of the urban space and to the right to the city, and also to more recent movements as the PAH BCN, that will be seen in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

We have seen that for a long time women have been inmates to the domestic realm, playing the reproductive role, but yet achieving step by step their space in the public sphere. To talk about the case of Barcelona, this move towards autonomy and occupation of the public sphere was possible when women, in the scale of the neighborhood, started to demand issues related to their nature that would have an effect also in the urban space. The first demands related to the right to the city from the women's movements in Barcelona were for public equipment in the neighborhoods, especially kindergartens (Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009).



**Figure 3 and 4: Demonstrations of children and women demanding public kindergartens.**

Source: Triunfo Magazine, N. 698<sup>13</sup>

However, housing is often a critical issue addressed by the women's movement as it serves as a key resource in their social, psychological and economic well-being and security (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013), apart from being synonym to one of the first practical gender needs, that is shelter. In this sense, the house has a different meaning for men and women as it represents a

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<sup>13</sup> Available at: <http://www.triunfodigital.com/mostradorn.php?a%Fl0=XXX&num=698&imagen=19&fecha=1976-06-12> Accessed in May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018.

space of security and stability for women, whereas it means a source of capital for men (Verschuur, 2011 in Levy, Latendresse, & Carle-Marsan, 2013).

One of the most important fight for the right to housing in Barcelona happened in 1977 when women from the Besós neighborhood complained about the quality of the social housing being delivered by the government. Other examples are the women from the neighborhood association in Baró de Viver de Sant Andreu that started to fight in the late 1970s to demand for affordable and decent housing, and to participate in the design of the public space of their neighborhood. What women wanted by this time was that urban projects were done in a bottom-up approach, considering community participation (Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009).

This discussion has offered perspectives from different authors in an attempt to identify what made women's movements in Barcelona unique, legitimate and political in the period called as transition in order to later contextualize the women of the PAH. We have seen how gender and city are related and the importance of the social mobilization as a tool for women to move towards their autonomy and occupation of the public space. In general, the presence of women in history is seen as scarce or marginal, and this is expressed in the fact that it seems that its participation in political movements also seems to be marginal. Plus, as the urban space is not neutral, women tend to experience it in a process of constant conflict, that seems to foster social mobilization around urban matters. This discussion provides a framework to analyze the experiences of women in the PAH and to examine the dynamics inside the movement that even though was not created by or for women, has the right to decent housing as its main objective.

### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this research is to adopt a gender lens to analyze the PAH BCN in order to understand the uniqueness of women's experience in this social movement. In this sense, this thesis explores how the movement contributes (or not) to existing discussions about the influence of women's movements in proposing new visions (and transformations) of the city, and it also explores the gender dynamics taking place within this social movement. Taking into account these objectives, I adopted a qualitative approach based in primary methods to collect data: in-depth semi-structured interviews and systematic observation.

#### **3.1. Interviews**

The aim of the interviews was to focus in two aspects considered essential to understand the origin and impact of the women mobilization in the PAH BCN: to understand the motivations of women to engage in the movement and their process of self transformation inside of it.

The researcher conducted 10 semi-structured interviews between April 2018 and May 2018 with informants from the PAH BCN selected based on their active participation in the movement (noticed from the observations held), and the diversity of their trajectories. Some informants participate since the first days of the movement and others joined it less than 1 year ago. Their reasons for involvement are very diverse, from the need to solve a personal problem with mortgages or rents to the will to follow or reactivate a weakened activism. The informants resulted in a diverse group regarding age and time of participation in the movement. A list of the people interviewed and more details about them are given in Annex 2.

The script of the interview (Annex 1) addressed the personal and political trajectory of the participant, as well as their fellows in the movement, and tried to understand from their point of view the learning and self changes related to their activism. The interviews were conducted taking a set of questions as base, but freely evolving according to the direction guided by the answers. Each interview was registered by the researcher and the resulting compiled reports were further coded, matched for the identification of main variables that would relate to the main objectives of this research, and later analyzed from the perspectives seen in the conceptual framework.

In addition, 2 interviews with experts in the history of social movements in Barcelona were conducted and recorded. In these interviews there were no question pre determined, as this was more thought to be a talk, or the interviewed expressing their vision about the PAH BCN. These

interviews were important to understand the origins of the PAH BCN and contextualize it with previous movements, besides knowing how to approach the informants for the analyses of the PAH dynamics. The specialists' information is listed in the following table:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Connection with PAH BCN</b>
16/04/18	Lucía Delgado	PAH BCN Spokesperson and founding member.
19/04/18	João França	Journalist, author of the book <i>Habitar la trinxera: Històries del moviment pel dret a l'habitatge a Barcelona</i> (Living in the trench: Histories of the movement for the right to housing in Barcelona), that includes the history of the PAH BCN.

**Table 1: Specialists interviewed**

Source: Elaborated by the author

### 3.2. Systematic Observation

The systematic observations were held in three scenarios: PAH BCN public audiences (*asambleas de bienvenida*), street campaigns to stop evictions (#Stopdesahucios<sup>14</sup>) and other activities related to right to housing (conferences or political forums – see Annex III). I attended 4 events to collect information and understand how the PAH BCN position themselves in public, besides establishing contact with the activists and other people related to it.

The observations were intended to examine firstly the gender dynamics occurring inside the PAH BCN and moments of actions; and secondly to evaluate if the demands of the movement in public and political forums had any sign of visualizing urban transformations from a feminist perspective, that is, I aimed to explore if the urban and the feminist agenda were conceived together in their speech.

In order to analyze and the gender dynamics within the roles women play in the PAH BCN, a scheme of observation was adapted from the study about women engagement in the Plataforma en Defensa de l'Ebre, a mixed social movement (Alfama, Miró & Giménez, 2005). This scheme is centered in two axes: (1) the nature of the tasks performed by women in the PAH BCN, differentiating between leadership tasks and daily tasks that are more related to the normal functioning of the movement; and (2) the visibility of the tasks: visible are the ones performed in the public space, such as representing the movement in the media or when addressing to the

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<sup>14</sup> One of the PAH main campaigns where a group of activists go to the location of an imminent eviction to talk to authorities and fight for the household's rights.

authorities. Invisible would be tasks performed in the background, many times often related to caring tasks and done in the private space of the movement.

<b>Tasks typologies - PAH BCN</b>	
<b>Leadership tasks</b>	<b>Daily tasks</b>
<b>Visible tasks</b>  Formal representation  Participation in public debates	Participation in the #Stopdesahucios  Participation in the actions in Banks or other institutions
<b>Invisible tasks</b>  Engagement and activities in the commissions  Representation and informal diffusion (street spokespeople)	Cleaning and maintenance tasks in the PAH headquarters  Logistics, support to commissions activities, preparing campaigns material

**Table 2: PAH BCN’s most important activities selected in the process of observation.**  
 Source: Authors’ adaptation from Alfama, Miró & Giménez, 2005.

Identifying the journey of the militants by the four spaces that are constituted by the crossing of these two axes helps to understand where do women play more roles in the movement, as well as to visualize the implicit gender hierarchies existing, although the PAH has as its principle to be a horizontal organization with no formal hierarchy. Broadly speaking, from this analysis it will be possible to see if in the organization and development of the collective action of the PAH, a sexual division of labor does occur and which could be the factor leading to it. Moreover, this scheme helps to understand how visible is the role of women in the PAH.

### 3.2.1. *Asambleas*

For this research, 7 public audiences were attended between April and May 2018.

The public audiences<sup>15</sup> take place once a week in the PAH BCN headquarters in the district of Hostafrancs, and are intended to serve as a safe space for people to speak up about their housing problems<sup>16</sup>. From these audiences where anyone can participate, I was able to collect two types of data:

- The internal organization for tasks related to the audience and other activities;
- The dates of imminent evictions<sup>17</sup>.

### 3.2.2. #StopDesahucios

The #StopDesahucios campaigns are one of the most important expressions of civil disobedience in the PAH, and a direct action to stop evictions by calling on its members to gather at the door of the homes of people who have been served with eviction notices. These actions aims to prevent law enforcement officers from entering and carrying out the evictions. For this research, 4 #StopDesahucios campaigns were attended between April and May 2018. According to the PAH BCN website, only in April there were 18 campaigns. For this high amount of evictions, one limitation on following these campaigns was that many times they occur in the same time, generally early in the morning, and in different locations of the city. This is a challenge for the activists, and their criterion to divide themselves when this happens is the factor of proximity to the spot.

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<sup>15</sup> The document on the PAH BCN website called “*Manual de dinamización de asambleas*” explains exactly all the stages of a public audience and how to conduct it, including what to do in cases of conflicts. Available at: [http://issuu.com/lapah/docs/manual\\_dinamizacion](http://issuu.com/lapah/docs/manual_dinamizacion) Accessed in April 16th, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> At first these problems are discussed in the same moment as exposed and the person receives the orientation from older members present in the audience. The leader of the audience will be the one addressing the case. If it needs further assistance, a second person will collect the affected person’s problem details and redirect internally with the experts for further clarification.

<sup>17</sup> These dates were included on a chalk board schedule that further would be broadcasted in different social media channels, to foster members participation on the #StopDesahucios actions.

## 4. Case Study

### 4.1. The origin of the PAH and the female presence

The *Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca* was set up in Barcelona in 2009 after the financial crisis that triggered the still unresolved housing problem in Spain. As it was mentioned in the Introduction, this crisis built a perfect scenario for people to become political actors, specially women. According to Lucía Delgado, one of the PAH spokesperson, the movement drinks from three sources: the Spanish *okupa* movement from the 1990s<sup>18</sup>, the neighborhood associations, and the *centros sociales*<sup>19</sup> that had a very strong presence in the 2000s and are still meaningful in Barcelona social scenario.

To write about the PAH is inseparable of naming people such as Ada Colau, one of its founding members and prominent female leader of the movement. In 2015 she became mayor of Barcelona after consolidating a platform (Barcelona en Comú) that had the housing matter in the city as one of the major targets. The goal of this thesis is not to evaluate the success or failure of the housing policies undertaken in Barcelona during the last three years, however the election of Ada Colau as the first woman to occupy the position of mayor in Barcelona and the fact that she came from a social movement that put at the center of politics the question of housing rights is a unique and unprecedented way to understand politics. Indeed, it has been argued that the arrival of Ada Colau to the city council meant a feminization of politics, not only because she is a woman, but also because she has claimed that there is a need to locate life at the center of politics<sup>20</sup>. The current feminization of politics in Barcelona will not be the center of the analysis but it gives the context where this research was conducted and enables to view critically how gender is conceived, visible or invisible in present and past fights for the right of the city.

In an interview in 2013, Ada Colau by the time a PAH activist, said that women are stronger in a situation of eviction and economic helplessness. For her there is a clear female prominence in the movement. She states that “women are the majority in the public audiences of the movement and assume all kinds of roles, tasks and commitments traditionally assumed by men:

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<sup>18</sup> According to the 15Mpedia, “the squat movement is a social movement, mainly urban, based on the liberation of spaces in order to question the property and traditional forms of social participation, as well as to put those spaces at the service of the needs of the people.” Available at [https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Okupa#A.C3.B1os\\_1990](https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Okupa#A.C3.B1os_1990) accessed in April, 20<sup>th</sup> 2018.

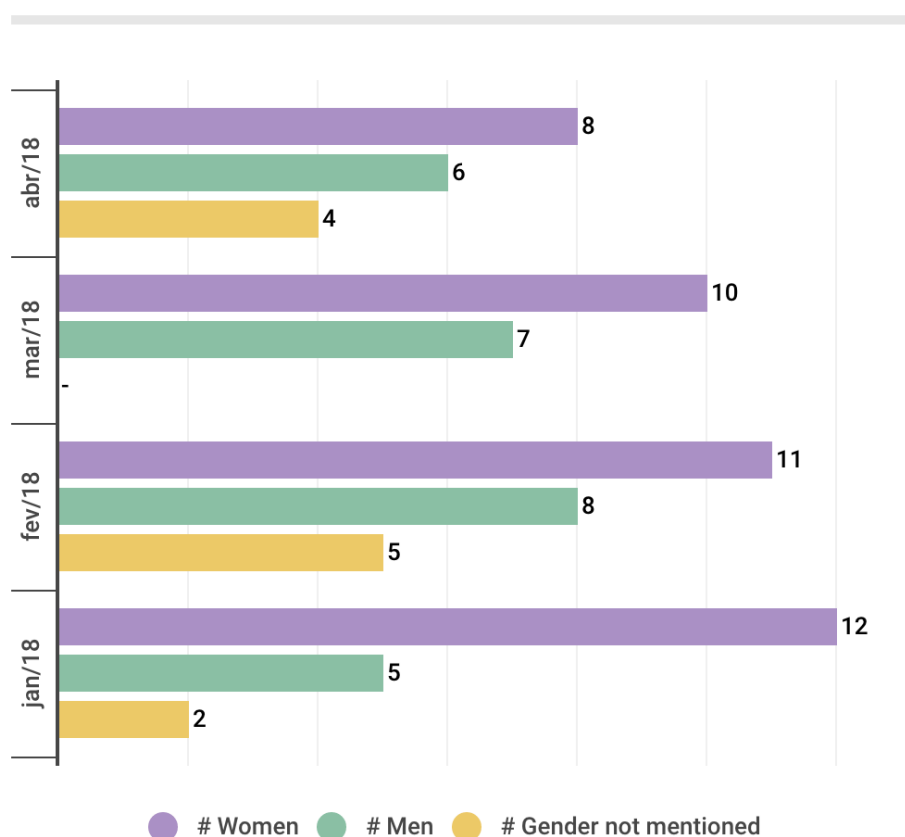
<sup>19</sup> *Centros Sociales*: Social Centers. According to the 15Mpedia, “a social center is a social and entertainment information institution based in the community.” Available in [https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Centro\\_social](https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Centro_social) accessed in April 20<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Available at <http://fearlesscities.com/es/plenario-de-apertura-el-municipalismo-y-la-feminizacion-de-la-politica/> accessed in April 20<sup>th</sup> 2018.

spokesperson, dialogue with authorities, and coordination of actions of civil disobedience”<sup>21</sup>. In an interview with the actual PAH BCN spokesperson Lucía Delgado, who is one of the founding members of the movement, she also argued that the majority of the activists in the movement is women.

The PAH BCN website shows that the majority of #StopDesahucios campaigns actions performed between January and April 2018, was to help single female headed households, as we can see in Table 2. Also, even if the eminence of police repression in these actions is high, and in a patriarchal society one could say that is not a task for women, in spite of that and proving to not be the second sex, women were also the majority of the activists working in the actions attended for this research.

**Quantity of #StopDesahucios campaigns by household leader gender**



**Table 3: Gender of household supported by #StopDesahucios campaigns by PAH BCN between January and April 2018**

Source: Elaborated by the author with data from the PAH website<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Interview available at <http://feminicidio.net/articulo/ada-colau-%E2%80%9C-la-pah-hay-claro-protagonismo-las-mujeres%E2%80%9D> Accessed in May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Available at <https://pahbarcelona.org/es/tag/stop-desahucios/> Accessed in May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018.



Ada Colau has stated in the same interview previously mentioned that the mortgages are a big issue that can foster gender based violence. According to her, generally in a process of divorce, women stay with the property by judicial sentence, but most of the times she will be alone to pay for what before was paid by two, if the husband leaves. In other words, if the woman of the family is in risk of gender violence by her partner, divorcing and having a mortgage or a rent to afford is a delicate matter. In this sense, is the PAH helping women to break the division domestic/public sphere, while helping to secure women's homes and giving them stability that enables these women to have jobs, for example? In which ways the PAH help women in being autonomous? Some answers to these questions will be developed on the next section.

## **5. Analysis of results**

This chapter presents the main results of the analysis of the interviews and systematic observations by focusing in 5 aspects: a) the reasons to engage in the movement; b) the process of empowerment and self transformation; c) the perception women have about their role in the movement; d) the networks they have with other social movements, and e) the gendered tasks and roles existing in the PAH BCN.

### **5.1. Reasons for engagement**

To analyze women's trajectories in the PAH I want to return to Kaplan's fundamental arguments and her claim that women act politically according to the accepted gender roles of a particular context, and in doing so they act collectively to confront existing authority, which in turns allows a transformation of their identity into political actors (Kaplan, 2008). The analysis shows that neither feminism nor female consciousness plays a definite role as motivators for some of the women engagement in the PAH BCN. Indeed, women who enter the PAH can be depicted as women who since the beginning fight for social-urban justice or as women who even if they join the movement as "defenders" of their homes, in a moment of housing crisis, they become later interested in fighting for larger issues of social justice. For example, in the interview conducted with Lucía Delgado, a spokesperson of the movement, she said: "I engaged in the movement because I wanted to do something that would serve for a real change. I believe in making politics in a bottom-up way." Similarly, an informant, Sandra, stated: "I engaged in the PAH because I want to be an agent of change. The PAH BCN specifically showed me that it was the right place to become an activist by that moment."

By another hand, the majority of women interviewed had lost their houses because of the crisis and this was their first motivation to enter the movement, in order to protect their families. For example, Solange says that she was the one in her family that made the decision to join the PAH, that is, she was the agent of change in her family and decided that instead of just feeling sorry about their situation they had to transform it through activism: "In 2011 me and my family had problems to pay the mortgage. We had a company, we lost it and we thought that everything was lost. I saw on the television about the PAH BCN and decided to look for it."

Another person that discovered the PAH in TV was Catia and she said: "I had taken a loan to renew my house and I was not able to pay for it. Then, I was not able to afford the mortgage and I lost my house." Catia also stressed the power of seeing other women in the movement: "I saw

Ada Colau representing the movement on the television and I felt her strength. That is when I decided to look for the PAH.”

Analyzing the interviews in this section, we could argue that the main motivation comes first from a desire to fight for their houses, in order to protect their families and probably in this sense, some women would conform to what Kaplan called female consciousness, but the result is larger and women themselves see their presence in the PAH as a great process of learning, self transformation and gain of confidence while acting with other fellows, which in turn leads to create a network of solidarity, motivating women to stay on it and help new members. This network of solidarity characterizes a movement and its internal dynamics, and as Fernando remembered when asked if he was an affected or an activist: “Well, I believe that in here we all are affected people (by the housing crisis).”

Going further with the analysis and following the distinction between practical and strategic gender needs discussed earlier, it could be also argued that practical gender needs are the basis of women’s political participation in the PAH BCN, and in the process of becoming political actors, these practical gender needs can be transformed into strategic gender needs, a process that will constitute the central aspect of the feminist practice (Corcoran-Nantes, 1993: 125; Moser, 1993: 41).

## **5.2. Women’s self-transformation**

A central consequence that joining the PAH has for women has to do with the process of empowerment, that is, the awareness of a capacity for individual and collective action to transform social reality (Castells, 1983). Beyond the diversity of activist’s profiles, trajectories and reasons to be involved, the PAH is a field of political experience for the people who have been involved in it. As discussed in the conceptual framework, participants in social movements change their perception and practice of politics (Kaplan 1989, 2008) by invoking general principles that govern a society (such as justice) (Fainstein, 2005; Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez, 2009) and by recognizing divisions on the subject in question, when they are actively and continuously involved in a collective action (Kaplan, 2008).

In this sense, Lucía Delgado mentioned that in the PAH “one aspect that you have as individual transforms into a collective demand. Because of the empowerment, and the way of doing politics, many people come to solve your troubles and keep working or reach higher levels to make politics, as Ada Colau, Gala Pin, Lucía Martín, Carme Porta.” She also said that “the process of personal transformation in the PAH is very fast. When someone enters in a group

meeting for the first time, you see that she enters with fear, with an attitude of shame and guilt. After they start talking about their problems in front of others you can see the huge transformation they suffer, they lose fear and feel empowered.”

The majority of women interviewed agree that their self transformation and empowerment happened very fast, through a process of learning from others and transforming feelings of guilt, shame or fear. For example, Solange said: “it took me 3 months to speak up since I first came in,” and she explains: “before I had fear of speaking for audiences and now I am one of the leaders of the public audiences. In the first ones my voice would be trembling, I would think that I was not capable of doing that.” Moreover, she sees this process of self-transformation as a collective one that goes beyond an individual gain: “the movement helped me so much, that if I have to give them something back, I am going to do it here helping others.” In this sense, another illuminating narrative was that of Soledad who said,

“Since I arrived in the PAH, what most called my attention was the *asamblea de bienvenida*. Because people arrive with fear, thinking that they have done something wrong because they have not been able to pay. In this sense I felt guilty (for her debt) and there (in the audiences) I lost my fear, I understood that I was not guilty. That there is a political and economic system that handles a series of things in which you enter but you are not to be blamed. There I freed myself and this was a very big turning point for me because it gave me strength, it helped me and now I have always been here (in the audiences).”

Soledad continued commenting on the general process of transformation in the PAH: “you start being an activist of one thing and end up as an activist of many others issues. From migration problems to war problems, and the financial crises on the mortgages. You arrive here knowing nothing. But the PAH is a great school.”

In this empowerment process, Silvia also mentioned losing shame by learning things in the movement: “We learn things in the PAH that before we did not know, at least me. I feel myself more free, everyday. I lost feelings of shame of going to the official offices to manage all my problems. Now I feel more confident to go to these places.”

From this self-transformation process and the learning in the collective struggle, Lucía Delgado mentioned: “people in the PAH learn how to read juridical documents and advice others, for example.” Catia had a similar answer: “the PAH BCN is very encouraging. it's not a movement that stays stagnant. For this reason, I was going to the banks with other colleagues to negotiate

my debt, and I learned a lot about legal issues and how to speak with experts, enough so that now I can help others.” For her, “it is easier to help other people than to deal with your own case.” In this sense, the fact that the PAH have a strong prominence of women gives motivation for more women to seek for help and join the movement in a collective struggle where participants give support to each other. From this point, one can say that the PAH BCN can help women to break the domestic/public sphere dichotomy, foster their autonomy and serves as a platform for their self political transformation and urban space change.

### **5.3. Perceptions about the role of women in the movement**

It was noticed a trend on women reporting that they are often the responsible for care tasks in the background of the movement. For example, when asked about her perception about other women in the PAH, Solange said: “there is a natural movement that makes women to lead everything in the movement.” She continues, “when a family comes in here, the one who almost always speaks is the women. I don’t know why but it is the way it is. I think that woman has this gift of being a mother and therefore the willingness of defending her family. Women are natural fighters.”

Generally, the interviewees mentioned the fact of women being mothers and wives as a factor of giving them great sense of accountability and being “natural fighters”. In this sense, Catia said: “I see more anger in the participation of a woman than a man. It is not a matter of differences, but it is because these problems here affect us more, being a woman, seeing a mother to suffer, there are some mixed feelings that I can not explain. A man helps, supports, but the woman suffers more because she puts herself in a place of a mother, has more empathy.” Along these lines, Cristiane said: “we women support ourselves better among us. We scream more, help more, whereas men don’t do it so much.”

From a different perspective, Fernando shared his perceptions on the role of the women in the PAH: “the role of the women in the PAH allows it, allows that everything is more collaborative, less egocentric, without fight for power and with willingness to collaborate.” And he continues: “the role of the women allows that opinions are heard. The PAH would not be what it is if it had not been managed and had active profiles of women in it.” He stressed: “one of the things I learned is that as a man, we do not know, but there are a lot of small *machismos*. We bring with us a patriarchal conception and you realize that your way of expressing ideas or thinking many times is reproducing this standard. So this is a space where women are teaching everything, with a very transforming spirit.”

From the narratives obtained, it is possible to argue that these women understand their strength when positioning themselves as wives and mothers. Returning to Lamelas work on the *vocalías de mujeres* de Barcelona in the 1790s, by that time, there was a need that women placed themselves as wives and women to be heard. In the case of the PAH this is not entirely necessary, because the movement target is focused only in the issue of housing., however, inside of each woman, the concept of female consciousness advocated by Kaplan is present in a very strong way, which can be a factor to boost the political consciousness of these women and in a near future, they will be addressing strategic gender needs inside of the movement, as to say, making proposals for law changes that will give more control over real estate properties to women in a case of divorce, for example. In this sense, the women in the PAH BCN are in a propitious environment to feed discussions around their gender needs that will have impact in the urban space. The PAH already changes the urban space for its achievements, but this analysis shows that they have the base to incorporate a gender perspective on it.

#### **5.4. External connections and social movements network**

According to the spokesperson Lucía Delgado, the PAH has connections with other collectives and people often meet in public conferences or in street campaigns. She said that “For me what is a good thing in the PAH is that this is the only space that you meet people that you will never find in your life, in another place.”

Often, a great part of the interviewees knows other collectives and have contact with them in punctual meetings in public actions held together by different collectives (as the case of the #StopDesahucios, where other collectives as neighborhood associations also perform). For example, Soledad said “I know a lot of other collectives very well, and I have more contact with the neighborhood association in Sants, where I live. We also have contact with organizations like the *Observatori DESC*.” Also from the observations in conferences, it was observed that the PAH members were very well connected with other social movements as the *Alianza contra la Pobreza Energetica*, that deal with the abusive management of electric, gas and water bills by private providers in Barcelona.

#### **5.5. Gendered tasks and roles**

In this section, the results mainly come from the analysis based on the scheme of observation centered in the two axes to categorize tasks performed in the movement, to identify if any gender division of labor was present, as explained in section 3.2. It is important to mention that

from the interviews, the majority of people mentioned that they do not think that there is a distinction between tasks performed by women or by men. However, some of them mentioned that women have more accountability and for that reason, they perform tasks that they identify as pending without nobody telling them to do. In this sense, Sandra said: “I am waiting for the day I will be allowed to put on my CV skills such as coordination and care tasks that I do in the movement without nobody noticing it”.

From the observations, it was possible to identify that the invisible space of the movement, the internal organization, that is, "the private", is carried to a greater degree by women, while the visible face, action and political enunciation, "the public", is carried out by both women and men. Therefore, although the subjects that issue the public discourse are women and men, the knowledge and the force that they are transmitting come from a process carried out mostly by women that act and lead the public audiences of the movement. The following sub-sections were created according to Table 2 (See section 3.2).

#### **The visible and leadership tasks: representation of the movement**

In regards to the formal representation of the movement, during my presence in the audiences it was observed that the spokespersons of the movement, who officially represent the PAH in front of society and the media and that develop a good part of the work of political interlocution, are one men and one women. They do a very representative job, sharing the PAH agenda. They are the most visible faces of the movement.

Regarding participation in the debates of the movement in the public audiences, as previously mentioned, the leaders of this task were women. This was comforting to new members, very often arriving with feelings of fear and shame. Solange said in the interview:

“We have always paid for everything and I felt very ashamed for having a debt. I gave my house to the bank to solve the debt but continued in the movement. A female colleague said that I had the profile to be an activist, and I stayed, first doing minor things. I am not a not an activist like the others. I have a work; I have to take care of my family. But I made a commitment of at least coming all Mondays to lead the public audience and advise people that need help on their cases.”

On the other hand, in the coordination audiences, as mentioned earlier, a man and a woman shared the leadership. In this case, the audience is formed by older members of the movement that have been present for at least 6 months.

The profile of the women performing visible and leadership tasks is similar: they are for at least 6 months in the movement, have a great dedication of time to the movement, had a fast learning process due to an intense previous participatory trajectory, and frequently feel confident to help other members.

### **The visible and daily tasks: attendance in street campaigns**

In the #StopDesahucios, there was no formal leadership detected. But women were the one doing more noise and leading in a greater number with authorities in place. It is very remarkable the presence of women of all social conditions and ages, with a significant activism on the part of housewives and retired women.

### **The invisible and leadership tasks: organization and informal diffusion**

The tasks of this type are mostly led by women. For example, in the coordination audiences they discuss external campaigns to raise funds and always women were responding to it giving ideas of campaign and taking the charge for the implementation of the action. However, when the leader of an audience asked people to accompany one affected person to an official institution (banks, city council), the first responses were from men, and only after that, women would raise their hand to accompany and give support to the affected person in a bank or municipality. This could be seen as showing that the presence of men is needed as security in these cases of official representation.

### **The invisible and daily tasks: logistics**

In this section, also the greater sense of accountability of women was noticed: in every audience, the leaders ask 3 people to apply for cleaning the headquarters. Generally, these candidates were women, often noticed that women that did not work and did not performed other leadership tasks in the movement, but were present in the audiences every week, quietly. Soledad expressed in few words what seems to be the trend in the labor scene in the PAH BCN: “The PAH is everybody, not only me, or one person. It is not important what I do alone, but what everybody does. I anonymously can be doing something that I want but the important is the whole movement.”



## 5.6. Summary of analysis

As discussed in the conceptual framework, we could make a parallel with the neighborhood associations in Barcelona and the *vocalías de mujeres* in the 1970s, which marked the beginning of mobilization for the right to the city in Barcelona (Lamelas, 2016). Although both experiences are motivated by different reasons, we can say that the PAH is a movement that also foster political development in the same models we have seen about the *vocalías de mujeres*. As argued in the conceptual framework, participants in social movements change their perception and practice of politics (Kaplan 1989, 2008), by invoking general principles that govern a society (such as justice) (Fainstein, 2005; Magro Huertas & Muxí-Martínez & Magro, 2009) and by recognizing divisions on the subject in question, when they are actively and continuously involved in a collective action (Kaplan, 2008). This was the case of the women participating in the *vocalías de mujeres* analyzed by Lamelas (2016) and from this perspective, the results of analyzing women in the PAH BCN show that they are breaking the limitations they suffer because of the strong separation between domestic/private space (usually considered female) and the public space (usually considered male).

According to the analysis, I would argue that the practices in the PAH BCN do not follow a those of feminist movements, however, it is possible to conclude that the women are recognizing their power to represent their own interests, in a fast political development in conjunction with other women, acknowledging their strength as social changers. In all public audiences I participated, the majority of the people attending and speaking up were women (Figure 5). Sometimes a male partner accompanied a woman, and though both were visibly affected by their situation of housing risk, women would be the ones speaking up. This fact was explicitly mentioned many times in the interviews held, always related to the fact that the PAH is a platform where people can enter and find a safe space to build self-confidence.



**Figure 5: Asamblea de bienvenida (welcome public audience).**

Source: Author's archive

From the observation of the #StopDesahucios campaigns, (Figure 6) it is possible to see that participants in the actions are men and women, but generally, in all actions attended, the majority in number was women.



**Figure 6: One of the PAH BCN #StopDesahucios campaign.**

Source: PAH BCN twitter profile<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Available at: [https://twitter.com/PAH\\_BC/status/991966539183263745](https://twitter.com/PAH_BC/status/991966539183263745) Accessed in April 16th 2018.

## 6. Conclusion

“13. We envisage cities and human settlements that:  
(c) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal rights in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision making (...)”

(The New Urban Agenda Habitat III - Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All, 2016)

While analyzing women’s involvement in urban political movements, it was argued that women engaged in the *vocalías de mujeres* in Barcelona in the 1970’s from a female consciousness perspective and that their process of self perception transformed women in a way that they can together build a collective identity to overcome barriers of invisibility. One aspect of these groups is that they were closely related to the neighborhood they come from, fostering claims that would bring urban space changes. In addition, the politicization of women’s social movements in Barcelona was not in the institutional way, despite the attempt of some political parties to do so. One explanation for that comes from what Roddenstein argued “women’s movements need to take shape in an autonomous space, outside political parties. Within this context, it is argued that, given the sexist structures of political parties, it is extremely difficult in practice to engage in double militancy.” (2003: 20)

Another aspect discussed was if participation in political parties would bring empowerment for the women involved in social movements. The consequence of this empowerment discourse through institutional politics is the tendency to eliminate or erase women’s natural agency capacity and for this reason, we can affirm that in the period of transition in Barcelona women did not achieve a political space organizing themselves in political parties. However, their political activity in a non-institutional level raised female consciousness in relation to their strategic gender needs, while fighting for their practical gender needs from a position of greater political strength brought by the feminist agenda. As a matter of fact, what can be also seen from the analysis of the PAH BCN is that despite of being a non-partisan movement, this is a fertile place for women to create their social and political capital to further emerge and represent their fellows in the institutional level. As examples we have the Barcelona mayor elected in 2015, Ada Colau, and the deputy Lucía Martín that entered the Spanish Congress in 2018, both women that emerged from the PAH BCN.

Taking a historical perspective, it is possible to affirm that one facilitator of women’s organization in previous social movements was the feminist agenda (Lamelas, 2016), enhancing the “female consciousness” defended by Kaplan (1982) and allowing women to make demands about the public space (urban) besides the private (domestic). This reflection concerning the nature of

political women's movements is similar to what planning scholar Susan Fainstein mentioned about the feminist movement impact in the city. She argued, "the feminist movement, which shined an intense light on the exploitative aspects of the domestic realm, began to question the separation of public and private" (Fainstein, 2005: 5). Regarding the analysis of the PAH BCN, it is very clear that the feminist agenda did not play the same role as in other urban movements in the past. This is not because feminism is not an issue nowadays<sup>24</sup> and in fact is clear from the observation of the PAH BCN dynamics and political discourses presented in public conferences, that this is implicit in their agenda. However, from the interviews made, it is possible to agree using Corcoran-Nantes' observations when analyzing women's participation in similar movements in Brazil:

"By looking at the various process involved in conscientization and politicization such as forms of consciousness raising, self-help groups, oral history, and the struggle for literacy, I will argue that the development of women's political consciousness is far more complex than present analyses demonstrate. (...) women have created a political role for themselves based on their social status as wives and mothers but through which they have struggled for recognition of their roles and rights as workers, residents and citizens." (Corcoran-Nantes, 1993: 124)

The attempts in social sciences to analyze mixed gender social movements as the PAH have tended to ignore the question of gender. Except of specific cases, in most cases social sciences and even urban planning are still stained with an androcentric perspective that has not paid attention to the unique interventions of women in social movements in the urban space. That is, the presence of women in the history of social movements that have successfully transformed the vision of cities is seen as marginal and usually made invisible under the generic term of urban theory. The PAH is a movement that addresses issues in the urban economy, that is related to everyone when addressing the specific issue of the right to housing. They are putting the question of "Who has the right to housing?" in the media, in the government discussions and calling the attention for the people affected in this housing crisis. From this perspective, this research showed that the majority of the affected people on this crisis are women. So why not address gender issues in this effective social mobilization? The common belief is that addressing gender issues in a mixed gender movement can blurry things, however, the *vocalías de mujeres* are an example that this is possible. It is possible to take advantage of the situation

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<sup>24</sup> One example of this visibility is from March 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 in Barcelona when more than 200,000 people, according to the Guardia Urbana, and 600,000, according to the organizers, participated in a march for the women's day following a women's general strike in Spain in the same day. The author was present in this manifestation and saw the majority of the participants being women, activists or not, including names such as Ada Colau and Gala Pin. Data available at <http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20180308/441352625696/dia-mujer-8m-huelga-feminista-barcelona-cortes-trafico-transporte-publico.html> Accessed in May 6th, 2018.



of crisis and address both, the urban crisis that put in risk peoples' right to housing and mainstream gender equity, where women have to have their rights guaranteed.

In the interviews done, women highlighted what they call a natural position as fighters, but in reality it is through their social role as wives and mothers that they are tackling urban issues and transforming the urban space. Even though it is true that they want to have a house because this is their family space, their security, what happens is that by doing that, they are addressing huge political issues and social justice. We do not know the future of these women in the PAH, as this is not a historical analysis. But from this research, it is possible to mention that from the strong process of self transformation they suffered, they would still carry on this activist profile anywhere they go, in or outside the PAH BCN, because they already changed their way of looking at injustices and moved beyond their position of looking at it from a private point of view, as a single individual. We need more studies on women engaging to transform their urban spaces, as for example works done by Alfama, Miró & Giménez (2005) and Magro Huertas (2009). As Corcoran-Nantes (1993) argues, more studies are needed to understand the complex and diverse ways that women engage in social movements and not rely on simplistic explanations that view women engaging in political participation either as wives-mothers or as fully conscious feminists. Indeed, as we have seen, a gender analysis of the PAH BCN shows the multiple and contradictory ways in which women participate in this movement.

The analysis shows that women engage in the PAH BCN first motivated by practical gender needs, that is, they defend their basic needs of shelter<sup>25</sup>. Secondly, we notice that while becoming active participants in the PAH, women strength their female consciousness in a process of empowerment and politicization. Although the PAH BCN is not a movement created by or for women, it helps to raise women's possibilities of leadership roles. When acting as leaders, these activists bring to the table issues of strategic gender needs, that concern the position of women in the gender division of labor, and addressing strategic gender needs enable women to achieve greater equity and to change existing gender roles and stereotypes.

Both motivations seen (practical / strategic gender needs) to engage in the movements are legitimate concerns. However, if we want to foster gender equity considerations in social mobilization, it is more likely to achieve sustained and lasting impact by addressing first strategic gender interests, and it is imperative to mainstream gender equity issues on all sorts of social mobilizations. Considering that the majority of people involved in the PAH are women and from that, assuming that the majority of the affected by the housing crisis in Spain are

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<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, even if they respond to practical needs that improve their quality of life they do not challenge gender divisions or women's and men's positions in the society.

women, changes in housing laws should be proposed in all levels, including the ones that will claim for more control by single women households over assets, resources and life options. Since the PAH is a place where women transform themselves in a huge process of empowerment, this social mobilization can be a critical tool to be used towards women's emancipation and gender equity.

From this research, it is possible to say that to move towards gender equity and transform the urban space, practical gender needs are not to be the only focus of women in social movements. In the same way, feminism is not to be the main motivator for the women's fight, if they want to achieve urban transformation, for a series of reasons that it would require another research only in this specific topic. However, what was seen in both examples, from the *vocalías de mujeres* and the women in the PAH, is that the practical gender needs and female consciousness can be a legitimate starting point where women will engage together transforming themselves into political actors, acquiring or not a feminist consciousness, to address issues in a higher level that will have effect for the entire society, transforming the urban space. Nowadays, the women in the PAH are demanding their right to housing from a point of view of being mothers and wives, that in the end will serve as a demand for the entire society. In this sense, feminism is not a starting point nor a way through, but we can say that is one consequence of this transformation process from a single individual to a political actor in social mobilization, in a movement that is not created *by* or *for* women.

## **Annex I**

### **Guiding questions for the interviews with the PAH BCN activists**

1. What is your name? Age? Nationality? Occupation?
2. How long have you been in the PAH? How did you get to know it? Why did you get in it?
3. How was your trajectory in the movement? Do you feel you changed/transformed personally since entering the movement? How does your family see your participation in the movement?
4. Do you have any specific job assigned to you in the movement? (Which tasks do you do in the movement?)
5. How do you see the role of the other female fellows in the PAH?
6. Did you know any movement before, or anyone in other movements? Do you have contact with other movements?
7. Besides the general assembly in the PAH, which other places do you do activism? (Neighborhood, schools, local markets?)

## Annex II

### List of the activists interviewed

Name	Gender	Age	Time at PAH BCN	Discovered PAH by	Occupation
Sandra	F	20-30	2y	Friends	Student
José	M	50-60	1y	Family	Painter
Solange	F	40-50	6y	Media	Insurance Broker
Catia	F	50-60	6y	Neighborhood Movement	Hairdresser
Silvia	F	50-60	2y	Friends	Hairdresser
Cristiane	F	30-40	1y	Friends	Housewife
Adriana	F	20-30	1y	Friends	Unemployed
Soledad	F	60-70	6y	Media	Unemployed
Fernando	M	30-40	6y	Friends	Entrepreneur
Lucía**	F	30-40	9y	Friends	Researcher

**Table 4: Interviewees' main information.**

Source: Elaborated by the author.

\* Names were modified to preserve the privacy of the informants;

\*\* Lucía Delgado, spokesperson of the PAH BCN allowed her name to be published.



## Annex III

### Summary of events attended

Date	Event	Description & Contribution to research
20/02/18	ARTiPART: Women in the Barrio of Sant Pere-Santa Caterina (tour)	<p>This event took place in one important neighborhood of the Old city of Barcelona, with the historian Isabel Segura explaining main points where women in the end of XIX century were selling their goods, in what she argued to be the first activities of women in Barcelona beyond the domestic realm. This walk finished with a gathering at La Bonne, Centre de Cultura de Dones Francesca Bonnemaison (Women's historical cultural center in Barcelona), to do a small briefing and debate about all the information discussed.</p> <p>The information from this event was important to set the time frame of the conceptual framework of this research.</p>
02/02/18	JORNADA LEY DE VIVIENDA DE LA PAH (debate)	<p>The event took place in the Can Batlló auditorium, with the presence of other collectives related to the issue of housing. The PAH had made a bill proposal for the Congress, with 5 points to address the housing crisis in Spain and the event was a debate about this document.</p> <p>Watching this event helped to understand how the representatives of the PAH behave outside their public audiences held in their headquarters, in regards to gender.</p>
01/03/18	Repensant els espais urbans en clau feminista (debate)	<p>Event done by the journalism collective Hemisfèria.cat, in Barcelona, with the attendance of a representative of the Collective Punto 6, a Barcelona cooperative of architects, sociologists and urban planners who work to rethink urban settings from a feminist perspective. The main points discussed on this event were: Are cities built for and for men? What space can women occupy? What gender roles are projected in their neighborhoods, buildings and places?</p> <p>The information from this debate was important to know what is the view over women activities in Barcelona, related to the occupation of the city. Moreover, it grounded this research analysis in the sense of showing how the urban space is not neutral and how it affects women in their everyday life.</p>
05/05/18	'Ciutats contra la Gentrificació' (conference)	<p>This event took place at the CCCB and consisted of a talk between Ada Colau and Saskia Sassen, moderated by Zaida Muxí, where they addressed topics related to gentrification and housing crisis in Barcelona. In this event, many of the PAH BCN were present, and its spokesperson Lucía Delgado was one of the people contributing to the debate in the end, representing the PAH BCN doubts in relation to actions in order to address the housing crisis and guarantee citizens rights.</p> <p>It was important to see the mayor of Barcelona, previously a PAH activist, speaking in public about main topics that was in the Barcelona Comú platform, mentioned in this research in the Chapter 4.</p>

**Table 5: Summary of events attended.**

Source: Elaborated by the author.

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