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## **Bar Wars: The Changing Geographies of Gender in Spain**

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# Bar Wars: The Changing Geography of Gender in Spain

## Abstract

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This paper looks at gender segregation in rural Spain from an historical viewpoint. The subject is gender apartheid: female seclusion and male dominance in public places and the vicissitudes therein. The paper shows how a venerable pattern of female seclusion has been challenged and describes what the social consequences cultural are of this cultural upheaval. Working from the premise of “public/private” as ethnographically valid, the author describes how women in Andalusia have created a new institution specifically designed to breach the barriers of masculine space and attain public access.

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**Key Words:** machismo, drinking, modernization, Spain, segregation

**I**n Andalusia, as in many parts of the Mediterranean World, power and privilege are closely bound up with rules governing the use of public space, especially in rural villages. The public arena is where villagers meet and greet, do deals, usually in neighborhood coffee houses and taverns, open forums where most business is conducted face-to-face over a glass of sherry. Traditionally in Andalusia adult men are said to be *de la calle* (“outside” or “in the street”), and women are supposed to be *de la casa* (“private, sequestered, inside the house). “In the street” means lingering in a bar or tavern or other public locale, sometimes being literally in the streets, plazas and alleys of the village where men, seated in chairs, bring a drink from a nearby bar and sit for hours taking the evening breeze and chatting. In contrast, traditionally, Andalusian women never loitered and never entered bars unless unaccompanied by a male escort: this has only changed recently--for reasons to be addressed here.

Having witnessed such rules of segregation worldwide, French philosopher Foucault (1980, p. 46), wrote many years ago: "A whole history remains to be written of spaces--which would at the same time be the history of powers ... from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat." Since then, cultural anthropologists have been closely examining the micro-politics of habitat, discovering a metaphorical geography of gender and power. Anthropologists are now examining how cultural norms and taboos configure the landscape of a society, determining where men and women should be and measuring how these small geographies impact power hierarchies—both formal and informal. What might be called an “ecological” approach to gender has thus become a staple of feminist sociology and political science. The feminist sociologist Daphne Spain (1992, pp. 15-16) summarizes the prevailing position when she writes, “Spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power. By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced” (1992, pp. 15-16).

More and more aware of the importance of gender geography, anthropologists have taken up the challenge. In a recent paper, [George \(2005\)](#) writes about the separation of the sexes in an Indian immigrant community in an American city. Carefully detailing the use of space, she notes that the divide between men and women and the exclusion of women from symbols of authority is clearly manifested in the placement of men and women. This divide reaches its apex in the parish church during religious services. The “gender hierarchy,” she writes “is starkly delineated and enforced, as best exemplified by the physical separation of the congregation by sex” (2005, p. 125). Noting that certain key areas in the community are “off limits to all women and girls,” she argues convincingly that such proscriptions in the heart of the community’s spiritual consciousness reinforce the subaltern status of women (*ibid.*). Recent studies of Northern Ireland ([Reid, 2008](#)) and of Istanbul, Turkey ([Mills, 2007](#)) have likewise shown how powerfully spatial segregation influences the social and political status of women. Similar studies by other social scientists in other parts of the world show that “place discourse” ([Reid, 2008, p. 489](#)) articulates with identity issues, systems of sexual inequality and with patterns of social change ([Staeli and Kofman, 2004](#); [Andrews, 2009](#); [Krom, 2009](#)).

Cultures vary in the emphasis they put on gender segregation of course. Very strict rules of separation and female sequestering or exclusion are especially well known to students of the Middle East and the Mediterranean; in rural areas still there is still a residual opprobrium attached to women being out public spaces (see [Girodano, 2008 for a review](#)). This is, as we shall see, very true of southern Spain. Today it may be exaggerating to use the label sexual apartheid; nevertheless, in many rural villages in Mediterranean public locales, remain barred to women and girls. As a result, women’s access to the critical nodes of decision making, commerce and decision-making, is thus effectively limited (see [Herzfeld, 1991](#); [Taggart, 1991](#); [Mills, 2007](#)). Obviously such symbolic systems of segregation and of distancing have crucial consequences for gender relations relationships in general since they determine the literal parameters of “place.” Here, we will examine some recent developments in the distribution of power, sanctuary, privilege, and space in western Andalusia.

### **In place: public and private**

Long a foundation of ethnographic studies in the Mediterranean, the so-called public-private” dichotomy originated as a heuristic device in 1970s as a way of defining female seclusion and political disfranchisement. In the dual model, public means the places wherein lay the reins of power, governance, commerce, information exchange public discourse. The obverse, private means more than simply indoors: it connotes the domain of the family, of enclosed or hidden places, “marginalized” or “restricted” areas of life (see Reid, 2009, pp. 490-91). Although long an accepted staple in Mediterranean-area studies, the public(male)-private (female) scheme, like most conceptual dichotomies, has come in for much criticism in the past years<sup>1</sup>. Probably most important is the work of Janet Abu-Lughod’s (1998). She repudiates the dual model, arguing that like all global dichotomies, this model glosses over nuances and is another instance of “orientalism” (see Reid, 2009 for a review). Despite this salient critique, many feminists still would probably still agree that the public/private concept is relevant, if only as a starting point in measuring gender hierarchies and power dualisms (see Benhabib, 1998). Simply put, what most feminists object to is not the dichotomy itself, but “the gender hierarchy that gives men more power than women to draw the line between public and private.” Even in Middle Eastern studies the spatial dichotomy has been useful to delineate the fluidity of boundaries, their recent shifts and infiltrations due to nascent women’s movements (Cope, 2004; Nagar, 2004; Mills, 2007). Instead of regarding the division of space as a static “thing,” a processual approach seeks to enlighten how borders are negotiated, re-negotiated and diluted as an on-going process (Stachel & Kofman, 2004, p. 10; Gutmann, 1997).

Research on the subject has progressed rapidly. One example is a recent study of women factory workers in Fez, Morocco by Cairoli (2009). The author shows how these lower-class women previously confined to the home, have subverted the male-female spatial dichotomy by reformulating ideas about is public and what is private.

These women conceive the factories where they work as organic extension of their own domestic sphere; hence their relationships there with fellow women workers and with their entirely male employers have incorporated the familiar idiom of kinship: women workers are “sisters”; male employees are “brothers.” Male owners and floor bosses of the factory are “fathers.” Consequently, Cairloi argues, “Workers transform the public space of the factory into the private space of the home in an attempt to assuage the contradiction inherent in their presence inside the factory, outside the home” (2009, p. 542). Like Cairoli and others working in areas that have been historically sex segregated, I rely here upon the public/private split as a starting point in a discussion of gender spatialization and the current vicissitudes of machismo in Spain as a means of grasping contours of gender in a broader sense as a metaphor for “place.” This is not only because the public/private division is ethnographically and cognitively valid today, but also because, this very split between male and a female domains, in the minds of many women, has encouraged a unique form of feminist resistance. However, in a curious inversion of the Moroccan case reported by Cairloi, the women of Andalusia have inverted the classic public/private split not by transforming public into private but by doing the opposite. They have appropriated the public and turned it into private, thus reformulating the boundaries of sex within a moral order that long excluded and marginalized them.

### **Gender and territory in Adalusia**

Let us first describe the social and cultural setting of the study.<sup>2</sup> The largest geographical region of the country and the most populous, Andalusia is Spain’s deep south. In many ways parallel to America’s own deep south, the region is classically agrarian, hierarchical, culturally conservative and traditional. Andalusia is also well known for regional eccentricities from which others in Spain often disassociate themselves as being backward or “Moorish”—that is, not “European.” My fieldwork in Andalusia took place originally in the 1970s and 80s and then again a few years ago. In Seville Province, just off the main road

connecting Seville to Madrid, lies the symbolically-named pueblo of Fuentes de Andalucía. Hoping not to appear too symbol-minded, I use this term because the town of Fuentes exemplifies the agro-town prototype as is a "fount" or "source" of knowledge for the social scientist (Fuentes means both). Agro-towns are big conglomerations are farming folk living in nucleated settlements: common in southern Spain, Italy and Portugal—a Mediterranean phenomenon. Located in the middle of a typical latifundium area in the the Guadalquivir River Valley, Fuentes in the 1970s and 80s displayed all the well-known (and infamous) characteristics of traditional Andalusian rural society, i.e. poverty, class hatred and political strife. I did fieldwork in Fuentes intermittently between 1971 and 1986. It was home in that period to about 7,500 (there were 12,000 in 1950, the rapid decline due to labor out-migration). Today (2011) the population has recovered somewhat due to the return of many migrants. Typical for the region and throughout its history back to the Middle Ages, large landowners owned most of the arable land in the municipal territory. Fuentes was typical also in boasting a large and vibrant society of small "minifundistas" (smallholders) living cheek-and-jowl with the big plantation owners, farming scattered plots of sunflower, wheat, olive, and other Mediterranean staples. There were a few acres in irrigation, producing table vegetables, tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, and so on. A few people engaged in animal husbandry, mainly sedentary sheep and goat herding, although a few cattlemen made a relatively good living, supplying milk. Many families kept a few pigs and chickens if they had space in their backyards.

We must first recognize historical customs of female seclusion and confinement in communities such as the one I introduce above. Certain areas of the built environment in the Andalusian pueblos are defined implicitly as either female or male territory, male territory being outdoors, female indoors. These frontier-lines are strictly drawn; trespass is considered a moral transgression of a particularly egregious kind. These strict ground rules of course affect both sexes, touching men too, because there are places in which men must not set foot (e.g. the marketplace, the hairdresser). But the rules of place impact on women more onerously by denying them access to the "important" domains of

civic and social control. That is, women's appearances in places like parks and plazas, government offices, bars and taverns and public spaces, are still strictly limited by a fault line of convention, exiling the female from public life, enacting a kind of cultural house arrest. Severe sanctions come into play against women who are "out of place."<sup>3</sup> In Andalusia women who venture out have historically maintained a stance of what Herzfeld (1991, p. 80), writing about Greece calls "submission and silence." Their bodies and voices take on a veiled or "muted" covering, a quietude. I am not speaking here even by allusion of the Islamic practice of veiling but rather the distinct but analogous practice of deference, muteness, concealment. Men and boys literally rule the streets. Women and girls can be and are punished for being "out of place," that is loitering outdoors unaccompanied by a male relative, fiancé, or husband.

I can think one dramatic vignette from personal observation will demonstrate this. I was out walking in my village at dusk with a few local friends. We came upon a group of about twelve boys, 13 or 14 years old, milling about in one of the central squares of the pueblo. These youth packs are called *pandillas* (cliques or gangs). While nothing unusual in that male *pandillas* are often seen lurking outdoors at any time of day or night, my ethnographic alarm bell went off and told me this group was poised for some mischief which might be of interest. So I made inquiry to my companions. They told me the following. What I was witnessing was the first stage of a traditional adolescent activity called the "abuchear," a word I later found translated loosely as shouting, jeering, or hooting. My informants immediately understood what was going on because they had participated in such rituals themselves in their teens. The boys were in fact lying in wait for some unsuspecting and, more importantly, unaccompanied, young girl to pass by. When one did, they would rush after her, hollering obscenities, jeering and grasping at her clothing, driving her crying to her home, at which point they would relent and reorganize to repeat the process with another victim. The boys did not physically molest the girls (physical abuse being against the rules), but their victims were usually shaken up and frightened. In one famous case of *abuchear*, I was told, a girl ran



home in tears, her clothes in tatters, and told her father that she recognized the persecutors. Angry and insulted, her father then went to the boy's house to extract an apology from the boy's father; some words were exchanged. But the response of the hooting boy's father remains a classic piece of folklore in the pueblo. Rather than being chagrined or apologetic, the father coolly replied, "Why thank you for telling about this: that means my boy must be a real macho." He took it as a compliment.

When women and girls do appear "legitimately" outside the home in Andalusian pueblos, for example in the agricultural work gangs during the olive harvest, which they do often because of a shortage of male laborers at this the time, the women must be garbed from head to toe in layers of covering not normally seen. Their hair, normally exposed during evening walks and on other festive occasions, is ritually covered in the presence of strange men during the harvests. This is a "liminal" or interstitial time when the more general rules governing sexual segregation are relaxed temporarily (see Brandes, 1980; Taggart, 1991). Men and women mingle together in olive-harvesting squads. The covering of the females however is complete and from a visual and sartorial perspective bizarre, even to the women themselves. The women wear two layers of exterior clothing: skirts worn over full-length trousers, sweaters over shirts and the hair covered by both a cloth and a hat, all this resulting in a visual negation of the body, a burqa-like transformation of person into shapeless bundle. Many complained privately that they felt "curious" or "strange" (*curiosa*) wearing such thick swaddling, nevertheless given the social pressure, they all succumbed. One might conclude that some dangers inherent in the female body and normally under control, were unleashed in this promiscuous mixing of the sexes, so the women's bodies and hair have to be concealed, effectively neutralized<sup>4</sup>.

Men were also punished—if less severely-- being out of place, in their case for the observe sin: staying at home and avoiding the bars. Any man resisted nightly visits to the bars or who simply spent "too much time" indoors avoiding male society, was condemned not only as a "homebody" and "shameless" but also as unmanly, disgustingly

effeminate—the worst insult one could hurl at a man at that time in Spain. One unhappy example will demonstrate this connection between place, space and public contumely. The anecdote dates to the late 1980s.

There lived an odd duck in Fuentes named Ildefonso Masot, a commercial broker. Of middle age. I got to know him rather well, since he lived on my street, but he was scorned by my other friends as a recluse and a miser (the foreign-sounding name did not help). What made him really repugnant was his avoidance of the bars and of men's activities in general. Ildefonso was that rarity in Andalusia: an uxorious homebody, an Alice-sit-by-the-fire. In consequence he was a virtually friendless man. Although aware of men's expectations, he resisted them, because, as he confided to me, such goings-on were not only a waste of time, but also expensive: he watched his pennies and hated the profligacy of the barroom. So he preferred staying at home with his family—wife and two adolescent daughters—reading books, watching television, or going over his accounts. I should add that he was a relatively successful businessman, indeed quite affluent by local standards, and therefore all the more susceptible to demands and expectations for generosity (see Gilmore, 1990).

Walking past his house one day with a coterie of my friends, I was treated to a rare tirade that intensified into a crescendo of abuse. "What kind of man is he anyway," said one, nodding at his sealed and cloistered home, "Spending very second at home like that?" The others took up the cue, savaging the loner for his defects, likening him to a "brooding hen" and to a "mother cow" and other female animals. They insinuated a number of character flaws, most egregiously stinginess and furtiveness, misanthropy and avarice; but beyond these surface defects they alluded to something worse: a failure at man-acting. Intensifying the character assassination, my friends left the domain of the observable and ventured into speculation, which is common when a man is judged. We proceeded up the street and the men offered their suspicions about this pathetic scapegoat. It all boiled down, they said, to his failure to be a man. This was demonstrated by his shadowy introversion, his hermit-like, withdrawn lifestyle. When I asked if his self-removal could be attributable to business requirements, I was hooted down with denuncia-

tions of “a guy who will not invite, who never goes to the bars!” Others seconded this and began scurrilous speculations as to the deviant’s sexual preferences, some insinuating homosexuality or some sordid perversion which might explain his evasion of manliness. In all this, Masot was paying the price for his withdrawal from the man’s world. Being “closed,” he must also be self-protective, introverted, guarded—traits associated with women, who must protect their chastity by social withdrawal and evasion; hence the comparison to female animals. Naturally, one may appreciate the sexual symbolism here of anatomical open/closed metaphors without being too Freudian.

Bad enough, cruel gossip is much worsened by the enforced sequestering of women which becomes an everyday burden --a lifelong sentence of indoor confinement. Let me illustrate this by retelling a curious anecdote from my fieldwork: this is the case of Filomena, a woman in her early fifties and during my fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s, my next-door neighbor. Her husband, Alfonso, was a hard-working peasant, typically absent all the time either at work or in the neighborhood tavern, where he met his cronies every night. For the usual tittle and game of dominoes. Having only four grown sons, also out-of-doors types, and no daughters to keep her company, Filomena kept a lonely and desolate existence. Because of this isolation and the paucity of female neighbors on the small narrow street she lived on, was basically restricted to her house home and, on Sundays, to all-day services in the parish church where she lingered. Everyone pitied her because she was so isolated, and people called her a "pobrecita," poor thing, a sad sack.

Having some ingenuity and having put up with this all her married life, Filomena found an ingenious way to overcome her seclusion. One day, I found her leaning rather theatrically outside her front door with the back of her hand pressed dramatically against her forehead, looking anxious and distraught. Breathing deeply and clutching her heart, she breathlessly told me and my wife, who was, as Filomena, a medical doctor, that she had developed "an allergy" to her own house. Not a part of the house, she said, but the "whole damned thing." She could not abide remaining inside for another minute and had to "take the air" or die.

Filomena suspected her illness had something to do with the nasty chemicals her husband used his farming and then brought into the house, traces of insecticide maybe, she wasn't sure. But the local doctors could find nothing wrong with her and her husband scoffed. So she asked for some corroborating support from my wife, so that her husband might bow to foreign medical authority and let her take the air on occasion just to counteract the allergy to the house. We promised to speak to her husband, which we did shortly afterwards. A gentle, tolerant man, he smiled indulgently, nodded knowingly, but said nothing. Afterwards, Filomena began to take restorative walks around the block which I believe did her much good. But what stuck in my mind was that our neighbor needed medical justification to get out of her own house for a few minutes a day. Other women with more rigid husbands, or stronger superegos, were less fortunate.

This form of female "house arrest" is corroborated by legions of ethnographic reports from southern Europe (for a review, see Cole, 1991). As such it must be accepted as a fragment of reality as personally experienced by every person every day. My own experience in Andalusia suggests the depth of commitment to sexual segregation leading to an occasional incongruities between reality and the senses. Things that were visibly there were elided or openly denied. For example, men would tell me emphatically, with a great deal of satisfaction, that women would never venture outside their houses except to go to the village market. But not more than fifty feet away from where we were talking, one could plainly see of women picking cotton or weeding sunflowers, more women in fact than men, since most of the male laborers were then in Germany or Switzerland. When alerted to this fact, the men would simply dismiss it as a sort of statistical deviation by assuring me that what I was witnessing was anomalous, unusual, rare, out of the ordinary, perhaps a mirage, or due to special circumstances never clearly explained. But it was clear to me that this discrepancy between what I saw and men's idealization about the "place of women" represented an example of wishful thinking."

Punishments imposed by the community upon women out of place were usually gossip and community-wide censure, resulting in a ruined

reputation as a puta (slut). “What is she doing walking alone the streets?” women will say. For a man to be called *callero* (street cornerguy, hail-fellow-well-met) is almost a compliment, but for a woman to be called a *callejera* is the same as calling her “streetwalker,” which has the same connotation as in English. This kind of a slander could then contaminate not only a woman’s personal reputation, but also that of her family, tarring not only her female relatives but also the men, who become *hijos de puta*, (sons of a whore); so compliance with the rules was routinely insured by public opinion and abusive gossip.

### **Power nodes: Public house**

As stated previously, social life in the rural Mediterranean World centers on the village café or other public establishment, usually a watering hole of some sort. As the main theater for male camaraderie interaction in small villages, this central place may be a coffee-shop or teahouse as in the Muslim Middle East, or a bar or casino as in Europe (see Dietler, 2006). Providing not only comestibles, but also entertainment, meeting rooms, and electronic services, these places serve as men's clubs where regulars meet every day, eat, imbibe, play cards, chat, and more germane to our interests here, conduct business. In Europe these institutions are functionally equivalent to "men's houses" in other cultures where men congregate in avoidance of females, as Vale de Almeida (1966, p.7) notes in his book on masculine culture in neighboring Portugal.

Probably the best summary of this pattern of public-house sex segregation is that of French ethnologist Germaine Tillion (1983, p.167), who writes:

On the Christian shores of the Mediterranean, one may follow the zigzag path of an invisible frontier. On the inner side of this frontier, men walk the street alone; they go alone to the bars; and a woman's presence in a café--even in the company of a near relative--to this day appears as unusual as it would in Baghdad.

First, simply as recreational and social locales, Spanish drinking establishments provide a context for making friends and for accomplishing of expedient goals, especially in wheeling-and-dealing, business and commerce. Edward Hansen (1976) shows important this strategic function was in Catalonia under Franco, because other associations and forms of assembly were forbidden by law, an observation that holds true for other parts of the country. In the south, Driessen (1983) shows that bars also serve as an arena for the maintenance of male dominance and the building up of "macho" identity. Since Andalusian men must stay out of their homes to preserve their manly self-image, they use the bar as a kind of exclusive men's club. Having this home-away-from-home enhances their ability to evade their wives, to exclude women from business and back-room politicking, and to manage symbols of masculine superiority (see Gilmore 1991 for more on the masculinity-enhancing role of the bar).

We can see from all this that public houses like bars and taverns function as more than as simply contexts, because they reify and concretize the conceptual and moral boundaries of sex. Long ago Pierre Bourdieu (1971, 1977) proposed the concept of habitus, a generative principle of collective representations used to reproduce symbolic codes and existing structures as homologous systems. But for Driessen (1983, p. 131) Andalusian bars not only represented a defended repository for a threatened masculinity, but also help to "keep women in a subordinate position." Kept out of the bars, women are denied access to power nodes and networks ensure naturally in public places where ritualized exchange takes place. What Driessen says for Andalusia, however, seems equally relevant for other parts of Spain including Castile (Brandes, 1979). For in the north, too, the sexes are socially segregated, to a greater or lesser degree, and men congregate in single-sex bars to enact rituals of masculinity and to run things.

Corroborating this observation, much of the ethnography of public houses in the Mediterranean shares a conception of the central public place as a micropolitical nexus or arena; that is, a critical time/place where strategic goals are pursued by men manipulating the political fields that constitute what is essentially the economically active

population of a village. Noting this, Vale de Almeida (1996, p. 88) says in his work on hegemonic masculinity in southern Portugal: "In Mediterranean societies, the bar or café is a focal institution in public life. It is the main stage of masculine sociability; it is the male gender that is associated with public life." Thus the public house is by definition the local expression of the male occupation of the public space that contextualized political life. But an invisible frontier that lasted from who knows when to just a few years ago has been challenged, assaulted and indeed overthrown through the ingenuity of village women informed by the growing power of feminist unity, and abetted by a particular form of modernization that has been underplayed in the literature on social change of the region: American TV shows and movies.

### **Public: private: female: male?**

Throughout rural Andalusia, dramatic change has transformed the gendering of public space in villages and small towns. It is well known that Spanish women now comfortably inhabit public spaces, hold elective office, linger brazenly about the streets and plazas, boldly linger in the parks where no woman has gone before, and have all the privileges that men enjoy. Men have generally acceded to this change in habit and cognitive geography. Yet one place remains a male holdout and is still to a certain extent "off limits" to women, and that is the neighborhood bar or tavern. Recently Andalusian women have taken major steps to infiltrate and indeed take command of this remaining bastion of male domination. How they did so presents an interesting tale of spontaneous social change in Andalusia, and also perhaps a lesson to woman in all such gendered social landscapes.



As in most pueblos, the public houses in Fuentes are of four kinds, based on government registration, taxation, licensing, history and culture. First and the oldest are the traditional neighborhood tabernas, dim gin-mills which hark back to the Franco era and beyond; serving wine, spirits and beer, they are patronized by older men of the lower classes. Second are the slightly more upscale “bars” which arose in the boom years of the 1960s and cater to a younger, hipper modern crowd, having modern accommodations and serving fancy liquors. Third is the new-style “pub” (pronounced “poof”), dating to the early 1980s and modeled after an idealized version of the English public house. Patronized by more sophisticated village youth, they are elegantly furnished and stylish turned out with cushioned sofas, colored lighting and a fancy range of imported beers and expensive whiskeys. Last are the still more fashionable discotecas, dating to the late 1980s, which feature live rock music, karaoke, dancing, and resemble an American or French night club (I am not counting the stuffy casinos, or private clubs here, which are mainly patronized by the elite and the elderly). The latter two establishments, the stylish pubs and youthful discotecas, are known specifically to welcome and to accommodate women and girls on weekends, and many unmarried young women attend on Saturday nights, always, however, in groups—it is still rare to see a single woman in a public house of any sort. The more forward-looking bars also welcome females, but usually get them only on weekend nights either in sizable groups or accompanied by male companions. But the smoky tabernas---especially the old-fashioned and louche working-class dives--remain strictly sex segregated. Women are still reluctant to enter such a manly world of tobacco, card-playing, televised sports, heavy drink and testosterone-driven male camaraderie. Indeed women in Fuentes still complain about a sense of alienation when it comes to the traditional public houses. “Why should women be made to feel like prostitutes for going where men go all the time?” is an often-heard complaint. For many women, being denied entrance into any of the public establishments in the village, even the hole-in-the-wall dives, represented a last frontier of sex discrimination, a galling challenge that



sooner or later would have to be broached as per don Quixote and the windmills. So some banded together and enacted a very dramatic remedy to turn the situation around. Before describing these recent developments, I must digress to explain the operative cultural principle of ambiente.

### **Ambiente**

Literally the word ambiente might be glossed as “ambience” or “atmosphere,” but it means much more in colloquial Spanish. Perhaps “gaiety” or “gregariousness” would be better translations. When queried about the meaning of ambiente, people in Fuentes will say that it contains the very key to pleasure of life and represents the source of emotional fulfillment for people of both sexes, for young and for old, the Royal Road to happiness. Connoting both “atmosphere” and “joy,” ambiente emanates primarily from crowding, from the presence of many engaged people in small spaces--from togetherness, social velocity, conversation and camaraderie. Propinquity creates social contact, providing the pleasures of sociability that are so keenly felt in isolated small towns. Without experiencing ambiente, a person is said to be “sad” (triste) and lonely (solo) and is pitied as a probrecito(a). For example, as we have seen, a man without a neighborhood bar to go to every night or a man without dozens cronies is considered a “sad one” and a “lost soul” or, in the case of Masot, not a real man. People who live in isolated farmsteads outside the town are always said to be unhappy, lonely and desperate. Men who inhabit the bars nightly for rounds of drink, cards and other sorts of manly fun are “happy” and “lucky.” Many people say simply that ambiente is “life,” and life without ambiente is not only depressing but also not fully human. So people in Andalusia say that the worst fate to befall a person is not poverty or poor health, but loneliness. There is also a verb form, ambientar, to make merry, to socialize, engage. When you go to a public place to meet friends or when you arrive at a festival or enter a crowded bar, people will say it’s time to “ambientar,” time to make happy. Probably the closest terms in colloquial English would be “get loose” or “start partying.”

It should be obvious from the above, that *ambiente* is less accessible for women than for men, because any man can simply visit his local tavern and achieve some modicum of *ambiente* (there are always crowds, albeit all-male). But for many women, who are still confined to the home, *ambiente* is difficult to achieve. If a woman has many daughters, sisters and other living kinswomen within reach, she can socialize indoors and be fulfilled. But many women are bereft of such company, and for them a state of loneliness is common. Having put up with this sexist exclusion from a treasured part of life, and motivated by the women's movement in the 1980s, the *pueblo* women finally got fed up with this state of affairs and decided to do something about it. The result is the banding together and the creation of the revolutionary concept of the "private festival," on the face of it a contradiction in terms.

### **To go boldly where no woman has gone before**

In Castilian *fiesta* means festival, feast, holiday--whether religious or secular. A *fiesta* in Andalusia is by definition a public event, and access unrestricted. Spanish secular *fiestas*, such as Carnival and the summer fair, and even religious holidays such as Holy Week, are times when everyone is outdoors celebrating and cavorting. *Fiestas* are periods of broad de-repression and latitude, when pack the bars, carouse and flirt, the moral rules being temporarily overthrown. Women are ungoverned during *fiestas*: they can visit the bars, drink and indulge themselves like men without much criticism (aside from some tongue-clicking among conservative people). Pre-determined by the ritual or liturgical calendar, *fiestas* are leaderless and no one person or group of people is ever in charge. Nobody has the power to limit access. However, a sea-change has occurred in Andalusia regarding the concept of *fiesta*. On recent fieldtrips (2002, 2006), I was told that women in the *pueblos* had devised a way to challenge the male control over the public places. Their strategy is to imitate a custom they have witnessed on American TV shows: this is to throw a private party in a bar or tavern or discoteque. They call this new invention a *fiesta particular*. Previous to about 1990, such a thing was unheard of in Andalusia.

Before elaborating, one must note that the word "particular" in Spanish differs slightly the synonym "privado." The latter, as in English, is a legalistic term meaning private property or ownership. Analogous but not isomorphic, particular carries the sense of something controlled by a person or persons for the specific purpose of keeping undesirables out: thus connoting exclusivity in *jus* rather than private, in *rem*. Thus a *fiesta particular* (perhaps the English "exclusive affair" is a fairgloss), has the self-contradictory sense of a public but restricted festivity or event—a totally alien idea in Spain up to the present. By the 1990s, young women in the rural villages had conceived the notion to pool their finances and rent out public venues for an evening. This radical innovation has permitted them to seize temporary control of male-only spaces. Having thus established a beachhead in "enemy terrain" as it were, the girls invite like-minded females and liberated men (whom they call non-machista, or unmacho) to join them. They then post a sentry at the door to ward off undesirables, all with the support of the barkeeps and tavern owners, who see a good thing in terms of a full-house. When anyone approaches who contravenes the spirit of gender-bending, the sentry sternly announces "fiesta particular!" turning the intruder away. Thus an unprecedented custom has entered the world of the village, potentially an upheaval in gender and usage rules. Few social scientists have examined the implications of such a spontaneous challenge to prevailing orthodoxies. Are women using the "fiesta particular" to network, to "do deals," advance careers? We must remember that such trivia are, in aggregate, the stuff of "social change": tiny first steps in the long journey of cultural transformation. It happened in the following way.

Looking back for inspiration at the past, a number of young women came up with a novel idea for entertaining themselves on weekends. Constituting an informal tertulia, or friendship society, a common form of female gathering in the late 19th century, four women aged between 22 and 25, unmarried, without serious novios, or boyfriends, they found themselves bored and unable to abide by the rigid rules of female housebound imprisonment that their mothers and grandmothers rigidly followed. Of course they had all been to the bars with men, and had

been accustomed to going in large groups of single girls to the discotecas on Saturday nights for drinking and dancing. But they felt something was missing in their liberated lives, something to do with control over the environment. Having watched American TV shows in which public halls were rented by women for parties, they conceived the idea of doing the same thing in the local bars. So when one mentioned her bright idea of going en masse to a local bar and paying the owner in advance for drinks, asking his wife to prepare tapas, or snacks, and to decorate the bar with bunting. They had seen similar preparations in American movies and on the TV Teledramas made in Spain that imitate what they like to call the "California life style," that is, modern hedonistic self-expression. Essentially, the intention of the young women here was threefold: first to give vent to the need for female for control over entertainment, and second, to demonstrate their newfound assertiveness and defiance of male dominance, and third, just to have fun.

On the face of it, the contradiction in terms among public, private, particular, exclusive and the implicit the overthrow of male dominion, was not an issue to the first rank of organizers, the "revolutionaries," as they joking began to refer to themselves. The girls were more intent upon making a social success and establishing a precedent, thereby getting men and older women accustomed to seeing crowds of unaccompanied females gallivanting in the streets and drinking and socializing in public houses. Upon hearing of this, my first reaction was to query people in the older generations to see what kind of response the girls might have encountered. The older men's reactions were perhaps most interesting. I spoke to a few "regulars" of a bar that had been usurped by women for an evening in 1999, men in their 50s and 60s. In discussing the events, I found a surprising degree of acceptance and even grudging approval. One man said simply that women ruled inside the house and did most things formerly reserved for men, and so why should they not also rule in the public houses? Another older gent, less sanguine, argued that the bar was the "last refuge" for older males, a sanctuary and escape from the female-dominated world of the indoors, a kind of masculine oasis or

sanctuary. Still, this man smiled, adding sheepishly that despite all his misgivings and the wrench of seeing a tradition toppled, he was delighted to have the female company (they let him in that night out of equal motivations of pity and amusement). Chuckling heartily at the sudden apparition of feminine pulchritude heretofore hidden, he added that just to be able to look at all the women was a “vision” and a “feast for the eyes,” as he decorously confided. I detected more a note of moral resignation but also a certain understated elation at the turn of events.

Equally bemused, many older men responded to my questioning with the same ironical acquiescence, revealing a broader avenue of sentiments. For example, one gruff middle-aged farmer chuckled that seeing so many unattached women in bars is a treat he had awaited for 40 years, ever since the Civil War stopped female emancipation in the 1930s, and was more than pleased about the development. He added that he only wished they would come in more often while the regulars were assembled and not just on their own nights at these newfangled private festivals; the girls were a “tonic for tired old eyes,” he said, smirking and tapping his temple alongside the eyebrow as men in Andalusia do to indicate something visually memorable. “It’s not us old dogs who keep them locked away; it’s their mothers,” he commented. Out of about twenty preliminary chats with the older men, I got the impression more of relief than of anything else, as though an ageless battle, bravely but uselessly fought for decades, had been honorably concluded with little real damage to either side. In the spirit of sexual ecumenicalism (a favorite expression among young women), the men acknowledged the long-overdue rights of women and indeed expressed a measure of approval and satisfaction with their own sisters and daughters: a surrender to modernization, but an elated, happy one. The “old ways,” many men said, are not only a thing of the antiquated past, the “Franco Spain,” but also something they associated with the Franco dictatorship (which ended after the dictator died in late 1975); consequently one may say that any moral liberalization has the added attraction of political freedom, sexual liberation included.

In counterpoint, as might be expected, many older women had mixed reactions, which were most often skeptical, disapproving, or merely

envious. They evinced the usual criticism of the old generation who have suffered some injustice or deprivation and want their successors also to suffer in like manner. However, some elderly women felt proud and supportive, although of course they vigorously denied that they themselves would ever think of entering a bar without their husbands or drinking at all. And so, with only minor disapproval and little active opposition, the young girls of Andalusia have found the key to *ambiente* and at the same time a means of undermining the vestiges of patriarchy in public places. The solid wall of sexual bias has crumbled under their gentle assault, guised in the form of innocent entertainment. More than anything, the recognized symbolism of the female-dominated “private party” represents a revolution in both the moral structure of space in the village and in the contours of sex as cognitive constructs. And with *ambiente* come deeper satisfactions: the exhilaration of gregarious exchange, promiscuous mixing of the sexes, new experiences, excitement, and the possibility of social networking, career advancement, commerce, and of course on a psychological plane for women, unity, sisterhood and personal liberation.

### **Summary and conclusions**

Having explored the subject at length, we return to the question of why women have always been excluded from the male-owned spaces, the bar being the fons et origo of patriarchal territoriality. Based on observations about how bars are used by men to create a society of equals, we can make a few interpretations, which, although none are singly valid, in aggregate they explain much. First, the public house is the place where informal exchange of commodities and contracts takes place. Such exchanges are a kind of village shadow economy. If we point out that women are excluded from this world of power-brokering it is only to state the obvious; but the question still remains as to why this should be so: what is preventing women from simply tearing down the walls of convention?. Exclusion here readily translates to subordinate and oppression, which is recognized as such. What about the use of alcohol as a prime factor in sexual divisions? Drinking is of course associated with loss of control and with sexuality in many pre-industrial

cultures (Dietler, 2006). Alcohol works as an inhibitor to the moral sense, so that drinking often facilitates sex; therefore it must be denied women, another of women's disfranchisement. Yet the fact that alcohol is served in the café does not seem an adequate explanation for women's exclusion by itself. As in other part of Spain (Brandes, 1979), men will sit for hours over a coffee or soft drink in bars and some regulars do not even drink at all, simply smoke and play cards--although this is unusual. For instance, I knew a man in Spain who spent most of his waking hours in the local tavern without ever drinking anything stronger than chamomile tea. Freely given without even prompting, his excuse was "doctor's orders" (he had a blood-sugar level problem).

But in southern Europe, alcohol, like most narcotics in most cultures, perhaps even more so, is a masculine privilege. But all this take us back to the sexual double standard which saves all the fun for the men. But which comes first: chicken or egg, sex or drink? Women's entry into the world of the public house in Andalusia, of course also means an equality of tipping and the privilege to indulge in the most public of all activities, no small matter here. So the symbols of women's empowerment begin to pile up within the context of the private party: equality of place, freedom of movement, equality in commerce, equality in public access, moral equality, and last but not least equality of being inebriated. What all this shows, beyond the power of innovative (and certainly not passive) manipulation of rules, is the validity of what we have called a processual approach to public/private dichotomies, as proposed by feminists. If we return for a moment to the initial literature cited, we see that the dichotomy remains useful methodologically as well as a persistent "social fact" that must be taken into account in understanding change. As Reid astutely puts it in relation to Northern Ireland (2008, p. 500) the negotiation of public space and the integration of personhood and self-identity are inextricably mixed with the use of "territory." Her subject of course is sectarian politics and religious divisions in the context of The Troubles. Here in southern Spain, territoriality means something superficially different, not "named" factional cleavages so much, but rather venerable gender barriers that



access--the morphic language of patriarchy. As Mills writes, "...visions of what it means to be a woman continue to be articulated in relation to the spaces of collective memory and of everyday life" (2007, p. 351). The ideology and the idiom of space should not be seen a passive backdrops, but as primary discriminators of social relations, no matter who the actors (Reid, 2008, p. 500). This dynamic or processual approach to gender/territoriality espoused by Mills and other social geographers have taken promotes "the imagining of space as already ramified in its meanings and uses" in everyday life, as Fincher (2004) calls it: seeing "multiplicities" rather than "dualisms" in the frontiers of territory and gender.

In conclusion, I would make a plea—a cliché perhaps, but here meant sincerely—for follow-up cross-disciplinary research. Cultural anthropologists have already done good work in southern Europe, especially rural Greece (Herzfeld, 1991) on the subject of sex, public houses, power and social change. However, parochial as usual, anthropologists working in the area have lagged in communicating with our sister disciplines. For example, the human geographer Edward Soja many years ago deplored the lack of research "on the spatial dimension of societal organization on a level equivalent to the extensive examination of kinship and contract relations" (1979, p. 8). Here he is addressing the lack of inter-disciplinary fertilization in geographic sociology. Some ethnographers have heeded this plaint; for example there is the first-rate, but now dated work of Herzfeld (1991), Low (1996), Lawrence (1996), Gilmore (1996), George (2005) and many others. More recently the call has been heard by other social scientists. But it is truly astounding that in her book on gender and space in which she provides a whistle-stop overview of sexual segregation from the Paleolithic to the post-industrial age, *Daphne Spain* (1992) never mentions the Mediterranean once or alludes to its vast area literature on sexual apartheid, except for a brief mention of the Turkish harem/selamlık household division. In making the case I have made here, I hope to ignite a dialogue among social scientists working in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa, where all the changes



I describe here are not only widespread, but accelerating. Although it may now being an anachronism, sexual segregation needs just as much attention as do ethnic and social-class separation and for the same reasons--both scientific and humanitarian. What we are seeing now is the upsurge of new human geographies, tectonic shifts in the space/time/gender continuum and a new landscape with new rules in birth.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a re-examination of Mediterranean dualisms see Narotzky (2010)

<sup>2</sup> Between 1972 and 2010, I spent time in the following pueblos, or "agro-towns": Fuentes de Andalucía, Campillos, Carmona, Ecija, Osuna, and Utrera. My field trips to Spain were supported by generous grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the HF Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Joint Committee of US Universities and Spain's Ministry of Culture, the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), the JS Guggenheim Foundation, the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Braquette Williams (1996) uses this phrase as the title of a book.

<sup>4</sup> Brandes (1992) provides superb description of spatial stratification in Spanish culture, especially of children's games and adult puns, riddles, and folklore.

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