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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
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**An Inadvertent Redefinition of "Feminity" : The Argentinian Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias
en Lucha**

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**An Inadvertent Redefinition of “Femininity”: The Argentinian Movimiento de
Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha¹**

by Leticia Anabel Paulos

**Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the
University of Ottawa**

**In partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for the Master’s Program in
Sociology with specialization in Women’s Studies**

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¹ Agricultural Women in Struggle Movement



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Abstract

The main objective of the thesis is to investigate the complex and, sometimes, contradictory relationship between women's activism, feminism and the deployment of feminine identities. I did so by examining the actions, strategies, and discourses of an innovative rural women's movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid nineties: the Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML). This thesis looks at the changes and transformations that participation in the MML caused in MML women's lives. First, I seek to understand how, and to what extent, the participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives. Secondly, I examine the effects of women's participation in the MML on the socially constructed representations of "feminine roles" and on the social relations of gender in rural Argentina. Lastly, I focus on how it would be appropriate to position the MML, a women's movement, *vis-à-vis* feminism.

By analyzing secondary data and ten in-depth interviews with leaders of the MML, I conclude that their participation in the MML has politicized MML women's everyday lives; it has challenged and, to some extent, changed their socially constructed representations of feminine roles (as being solely those of mothers or wives) and social relations of gender (that exclude women from public policy making). While MML leaders rejected any connection with feminism, they highlighted that, by participating in the MML women understood many issues related to gender, and said that the MML is fully integrated with the Argentinian women's movement. In light of these findings I suggest that in order to be able to capture the ambiguities of the relationship between women's movements of this type, and feminism, we need to adopt an approach that recognizes the dynamic nature of this relationship.

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Introduction

Gender has been recognized in the social movements' literature as an important dimension of collective action, even when such action is not gender sensitive (Einwohner et al. 1994; Ferree 1998, 2006; Kaplan 1982, 1997; McAdam, 1992; Molyneaux, 1986; Naples, 1998; Neuhauser, 1998; Taylor, 1990). In recent decades, Latin American women have participated in social movements more than men. It seems that, while fulfilling their socially ascribed roles as wives, mothers and nurturers of family and community, Latin American women have participated in and led diverse social movements, demanding, for example better urban services, health care and education for their children, but also protesting against the rising cost of living, torture, the disappearance of people and other forms of political oppression. This political activism challenges, in part, the "traditional" gendered association of men with the public sphere and of women with the private one (Caldeira, 1990; Feijoo, 1998; Feijoo and Gogna, 1990; Jaquette, 1994; Perelli, 1994).

The main objective of the thesis is to investigate the relationship between women's activism, feminism and the deployment of feminine identities. I will do so by examining the actions, strategies, and discourses of an innovative rural women's movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid nineties, as a response to the economic crisis but also as a way of "resisting" the neo-liberal model promoted and implemented during the nineties: the Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML).

The MML is an agrarian movement entirely constituted of and led by agrarian women. This is a group made up mainly of wives, widows or daughters of highly indebted farmers - although some women are farmers themselves - who, because of hyperinflation and “unfair” interest rates, were at risk of losing their land following loan foreclosures¹. And a few women belonged through solidarity. The MML developed and implemented very original strategies of civil disobedience² to avoid foreclosures on their lands, such as singing the national anthem, praying during the auctions, and planting Argentinian flags on lands owned by multinational companies (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 38). They succeeded in preventing hundreds of foreclosures and attracted the attention and sympathy of the media and of the Argentinian population.

These women, mainly housewives with no previous political or employment experience, by assuming the standpoint of “mothers, wives, and housekeepers”, created the first national movement of rural women. Today the MML is a leading actor in the opposition to governmental public policies in the agricultural sector, has proposed new political measures for the sector, and established links with other rural groups, emerging as a permanent and legitimate voice of the Argentinian agrarian sector, which has been traditionally a male realm³ (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 143).

¹ In simple terms, a foreclosure is the legal term used when a lender (a bank in this case) takes a property (that was used as collateral for a loan) away from the owner (i.e. by the involuntary sale of the property, it transfers the title of the real property as a means of paying off the debt) because the owner- borrower defaulted on payments.

² The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines civil disobedience as “a public, non-violent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies. On this account, the persons who practice civil disobedience are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions, as this shows their fidelity to the rule of law. Civil disobedience, given its place at the boundary of fidelity to law, is said to fall between legal protest, on the one hand, and conscientious refusal, revolutionary action, militant protest and organised forcible resistance, on the other hand” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/> 2007).

³ The MML is a key social actor in the rural areas of many provinces, mainly in the Pampean region. However it is important to highlight that despite the relatively high visibility of the movement in national mainstream media, the movement cannot be considered to be highly representative of what the national mobilization trends are.

The choice of this particular women's movement to investigate the relationship between women's movements, feminism and femininity comes from the fact that this is a social movement of rural women who reject any connection with feminism, and at the same their actions seemed to challenge certain gendered discourses and practices. In particular, MML women, by participating in the MML, challenged those discourses that tend to relegate women to the private sphere and to limit their participation in the public one. MML women seemed to stress their "feminine" qualities as mothers and housewives, and, to some extent, to use the respectability that is granted to "mothers" in order to achieve their goals, and to pay lower prices for participating.

This thesis will look at the changes and transformations that participation in the MML has caused in MML women's lives. First, I seek to understand how, and to what extent, the participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives. Secondly, I examine the effects of women's participation in the MML on the socially constructed representations of feminine roles and on the social relations of gender in rural Argentina. And, lastly, I focus on how it would be appropriate to position the MML, a women's movement, *vis-à-vis* feminism.

I conducted a feminist qualitative content analysis to analyze the written material, including local and national newspaper articles (in mainly *La Arena* and *Clarín*) and available copies of the journal of the MML (*Folleto del MML*), MML press releases and advertisements. I also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with MML leaders, predominantly in the provinces where the movement was strongest - La Pampa, Santa Fé, and Buenos Aires. Interviews focused on how the involvement in the MML had impacted MML women's lives. I asked questions such

as: explain your entry into the movement, why only women, what strategies did MML women use to express dissent, what type of movement is the MML, what are the personal and public outcomes of your activism, etc (See Appendix 5 for the interview guide).

This research is important first of all because it seeks to fill in the gaps in the available literature on the MML and, by analyzing the actions, strategies, and discourses of the MML and its leaders, it will contribute to the understanding of the relationship between feminism and women's movements that deploy "feminine identities".

Chapter 1 outlines the components of the debate about women's movements and feminism, and focuses on the contributions to theorizations of the relationship between feminism and women's movements. The chapter also contextualizes the reality of women's movements in Argentina from the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) until the present. It ends with an overview of rural women's experiences of activism. In chapter 2 a discussion of the methodology is presented. Chapter 3 provides a socio-economic contextualization of the nineties and analyzes the effects of neoliberal policies on the agriculture sector. Chapter 4 is a description of the MML and a presentation of the participants who were interviewed. Chapter 5 examines the politicization of MML women's lives. Chapter 6 analyzes the impact of women's participation in MML on the socially constructed representations of feminine roles as being solely those of mothers or wives, and the social relations of gender that tend to exclude women from public policy making, relegating them to a "privileged" role exclusively in the domestic arena. Chapter 7 is a discussion about how to position the MML vis-à-vis feminism. I conclude this thesis by explaining why I think that the relationship between the MML, a women's movement that

deploys “feminine” identities, and feminism has to be understood as a “dynamic” one (Ferree, 2006).

Chapter 1: Activism, feminism and femininity: a 'dynamic' relationship

In this chapter I review some of the critical concepts, theories and ideas that are central to the understanding of the relationship between women's movements, feminism and femininity and therefore central to my thesis. It should be noted that there is great diversity of feminist perspectives on women's movements and that, despite a growing literature and empirical research on women's activism, a systematic theory of gender and social movements has not been brought together yet. My analysis of the problem is primarily based on the insights of feminist debates and analysis of women's movements in Latin America, and specifically in Argentina. I thus acknowledge that I examine only a small subset of the literature. Part of the feminist literature considers "un-feminist" and generally ineffectual in their political dissent social movements of women deploying "traditional" gender roles, such as those of "mothers" or "wives", arguing that "traditional" and "emotional", thus un-feminist, women's movements do not challenge social relations of gender and that only women's movements that explicitly challenge patriarchy can be considered as "modern" and "rational". This part of the feminist literature reproduces old debates and dichotomizations.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part outlines the components of this debate about the relationship between women's movements and feminism, a debate that might be contextualized within a larger debate related to the many challenges to the Western, white, middle class, heterosexual, and modern definitional components of feminism. Also, this part focuses on the contributions to theorizations of the relationship between feminism and women's movements. The second part contextualizes the reality of women's movements in Argentina

from the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) until the present. It ends with an overview of rural women's experiences of activism.

1. 1 Preliminary definitions

1.1.1 Feminism and its discontents

The literature on feminism is extensive and to feminism have been attributed diverse meanings. The *Women's Studies Encyclopedia* defines feminism as “a belief in and commitment to equal rights and opportunities for women” and it argues that “there are differing theoretical perspectives about the causes and foundations of patriarchy as well as about the methods to be pursued and the nature and extent of the changes that must be made” (2000: 139). This “classical” definition introduces some elements that are going to be central to this analysis while omitting others. Among the issues it introduces, the first is the assumption that feminism has to be committed to equal rights and opportunities. It does not specify, however, whether this has to be done explicitly or may be accomplished implicitly. Secondly, it admits that there are a variety of theoretical explanatory frameworks both for patriarchy and for women's activism, and it defines the nature and extent of needed changes in broad terms, opening up a theoretical space for women's activism based on other than white, liberal, Western, middle-class, heterosexual identities. It also mentions patriarchy as the oppressive system to be subverted, but it says nothing about all the other systems of inequality that exist, including class, race, and sexual orientation.

Similarly, Ferree defines feminism as “activism for the purpose of challenging and changing women's subordination to men... feminism is a goal, a target of social change – reducing gender

inequality – rather than a constituency” (Ferree, 2006: 6). This quite restrictive definition of feminism introduces an element that is very important in this study, the idea of feminism as a target for social change rather than a constituency. This distinction will be very useful when discussing the relationship between women’s movements, whose constituency is entirely female, and feminism, with its objective of social change that challenges gender inequality.

Feminism has been accused of having a Western bias that has led feminists to reject and/or exclude from their struggles, demands based on *feminine* identities (Chakravty, 2002). Critiques within feminism have pointed out that the essentializing dichotomy - women, family and nature on one side; men, society and politics on the other - is often reproduced in debates among feminists themselves. Many feminist studies, for example, do not recognize as being feminist, women’s movements that do not challenge patriarchy explicitly. Adoption of these types of dichotomies has contributed to the invisibilization of centuries of women’s political activism that has been classified as “traditional, un-modern, and un-feminist” (Chakravty, 2002: 13).

Black feminist and Latin American scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldua (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (1991), bell hooks (1989), have challenged definitions of feminism that exclude ethnic, racial and class identity. Feminists have challenged the conceptions of the political arguing that those conceptions had been built on what men do. Similarly Black and Latin American women criticize feminists because the “conceptions of feminism” have been built only on the experiences of European and North American women (Pardo, 1990: 357). Exclusionary definitions of feminism marginalize other women’s struggles that are “outside” its conceptual frameworks. In summary, our starting point, when discussing feminism, seems to be the

acceptance of the existence of a plurality of feminisms rather than a single ideological or conceptual framework (Pardo, 1990).

Many efforts have been made by feminists all over the world to develop inclusive definitions of feminism. Much of this effort has focused on developing “the most inclusive” definition of feminism. There are, however, many problematic issues that are associated with all-encompassing definitions of feminism, as well as with restrictive ones. Which goals, political views, religions, ideas, if any, can be claimed to be feminist and which ones cannot be considered as such? Who is going to make these decisions? Can we arbitrarily label as “feminist” a group of women who refuse that term? What are the differences between groups of women who self-identify as feminist and groups of women who actively reject feminism? (Hawkesworth, 2006: 27). The real pluralization of feminism does not appear to be achieved by imposing restrictive labels or definitions but, perhaps, by expanding the ideological contents of what feminism is, in order to include radically different experiences of being woman.

Thus, defining feminism is not an easy task; and the term is highly controversial even among women who are committed to improving women’s conditions. The experience of women as women can be so radically diverse that it would be hard, if not impossible, to have an all-encompassing definition of feminism. Furthermore, how can we avoid the “race to innocence” that had led feminist women to think that they are not implicated in the subordination of other women, and how can we accommodate those “competing marginalities” among women according to which our own claims are the most urgent ones? (Fellows and Razack, 1998: 335-339). In order to accomplish the overall objective of this thesis, that is to illuminate some of the

dimensions of the relationship of feminism and women's movements, it is necessary to put aside the idea of developing the perfectly inclusive definition of feminism. It seems that such a definition does not exist.

1.1.2 Attempting a definition of women's activism

In this thesis, I define activism⁴ very broadly, as any action motivated by a goal of social change at an individual, community, or broader level. Ferree and Subramaniam argue that "activism refers to political actions, the boundaries of what counts as political cannot be narrowly drawn, because, in a feminist view, the personal is also political" (2000: 10). This definition of activism includes any sort of collective action whose goal is to challenge and change power relations at any level, from the family to the global level. It is important, though, to understand what is distinctive about women's movements. Ferree argues that the main components of women's movements are the constituency that is organized, namely "women", and the organizational strategy and politics that focus on "women's concerns" (2006: 7). How we understand and define "women's concerns" can, however, be problematic as well as essentializing.

Women's activism, like feminism, is often interpreted by social scientists as political action even when these women deny any connection with politics. To avoid situating women's experiences in all-encompassing, essentialist categories of identity, a first step would be to reconceptualise women's activism as having many different dimensions that will influence women's interpretation and experience of political, social, and cultural events. People *do* act collectively

⁴ While I will sometimes use the terms women's activism and women's movements interchangeably, activism appears to be a more inclusive term since many forms of women's collective struggles do not achieve the level of a social movement as formal organization.

on the basis of a practically shared experience or perspective and exposure to a variety of human rights and feminist ideologies and organizations. They participate in many sets of social relations, including those based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc.

The strategy and politics of women's movements could be and sometimes are "non-gender-directed" and only "later develop an interest in changing gender relations" (Ferree, 2006: 6). While this "temporal" distinction makes a point that is very important for understanding the relationship between women's movements and feminism, I think that when attempting a definition of women's movements, it is important to note that such a definition cannot assume the existence of an empirical group of women with a common "essence", identity and interests. Nor does it necessarily have to articulate explicitly the will to challenge patriarchy: in many circumstances, places, societies, countries this is not possible or it is very difficult. Furthermore, the motivation for social change can lead indirectly to a challenge of "oppressive" social structures, including those oppressions with reference to gender. This is why it is important to conceive a broad definition of women's movements that reflects an awareness of the many forms of women's activism that work all over the world to change unequal gender and social relations, and that allows the inclusion of those movements concerned with the family and the home, that have been historically considered as traditional and "un-feminist" (Antrobus, 2004).

1.1.3 Femininity: politics and marianismo

Lavrin (1998) argues that "in femininity, feminism had a challenge from within the Southern Cone". Femininity can be understood as the qualities that constitute the essence of being a

woman. These qualities are socially defined, and they are also socially connected with the biological functions associated with womanhood and motherhood. Feminine women are “charming, genteel, delicate, and selfless”, and womanhood is strongly related to motherhood (Lavrin, 1998: 33). According to Stevens, “there is near universal agreement on what a ‘real’ woman is like and how she should act”. Among the characteristics of this ideal-type are “semi-divinity, moral superiority, and spiritual strength. This spiritual strength engenders abnegation, capacity for humility, sacrifice, patience, submissiveness to the demands of the men: husbands, sons, fathers, brothers” (Stevens, 1973: 95). These stereotypes that in Latin America have been and, to some extent, are still pervasive, are part of a “Ibero-Mediterranean heritage” that has been reinforced over the centuries by the Roman Catholic Church (Lavrin, 1998: 33).

Some feminists have considered femininity “as an imposed ideological category and thus tended to cast women as passive victims of oppression” (Mills, 1997: 86). This approach to femininity as an ideology to which women are subjected appears rather problematic. It does not consider how femininity, like many other “structures”, affects different “categories” of women in radically diverse ways. Also, the interpretation of femininity as an oppressive structure created by men and for men does not take into account that some women, far from being “passive recipients” [read: victims], are “actively engaged in maintaining these discourses in place as well as trying to dismantle elements of them and replacing them with other more productive elements” (Mills, 1997: 86-87). On the one hand the “ideal” woman seems to be the victim in a repressive and machista society; on the other hand, many women contribute to the perpetuation of those myths. It seems that rather than being victimized by the structures women can make

decisions about their own life-styles “sometimes because and sometimes in spite of the requirements of the system” (Stevens, 1973: 91).

In Argentina, some scholars (Bouvard, 2004; Jelin, 1990; Lavrin, 1998; Schmidt-Cruz, 2006, Vazquez-Rial, 2006) have highlighted an “exacerbated maternal sentiment particular to Argentina”. Vazquez-Rial observes that this might be due to the strong influence there of two of the most “maternalistic” cultures: the Italian and the Jewish (as cited in Schmidt-Cruz, 2006: 33). Schmidt-Cruz mentions also “mothering campaigns for new immigrants, tango lyrics and the phenomenon of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo” among the factors that might have influenced “the sense of maternal duty” and “the emotional charge that is attached to the concept of motherhood” (Schmidt-Cruz, 2006: 33).

Some feminist scholars have used the concept of marianismo⁵ to explain the projection of the home, motherhood, and women’s special sensitivity into politics (Jaquette, 1994; Stevens, 1973). It seems that femininity could be and has been used as a safe and powerful cultural image to “carve a niche in politics”, a strategy for making a case for participating in public life as a socially acceptable female activity, that works particularly well in very maternalistic contexts.

⁵ Stevens defines marianismo as “the cult of feminine spiritual superiority which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men” (Stevens, 1973: 91).

1.2 Theorizing the relationship between women's movements and feminism (and femininity) in Latin America

The following is a discussion of two explanatory frameworks for women's activism in Latin America and in Argentina which have largely influenced the way Latin American women's movements and feminist movements have been understood: the approaches of "female consciousness" and "practical gender interests". I will then review selected contributions to the theorization of the relationship between feminism and women's activism.

1.2.1 Female consciousness and practical gender interests

Kaplan (1982, 1997) elaborates a theory of "female consciousness"⁶ based on her field work in Spain and Latin American countries. The main assumption of the theory is that when women, who have subscribed to their socially prescribed roles as mothers, wives and housewives, are not able to fulfill their duties "within the private sphere", they will be motivated to participate in the public sphere in order to carry out their social roles as females. What therefore explains women's activism is, according to Kaplan, the "female consciousness". Kaplan explains that "certain women, emphasizing roles they accept as wives and mothers, also demand the freedom to act as they think their obligations entail" (1997: 6). The author explains that women, from a wide variety of societies and historical periods, learn that they are responsible, as mothers, for providing "food, housing, healthcare for their families", and when in their communities, people risk being expelled from their homes, "certain women will take action, according to 'female

⁶ The *Women's Studies Encyclopedia* defines female consciousness as "awareness that the individual woman is part of a larger social group and that her personal problems, as a woman, are problems that affect all women, and hence are political problems-that the personal is political" (Tierney, 2000: 134).

consciousness', confronting authorities to preserve life" (1997: 6-7). Kaplan later specifies that this is not related to any biological given rather to "cultural experiences" related to the very survival of their communities and families (1997: 6-7). According to Kaplan, this type of feminine mobilization does not question women's place in society, and it does not raise the level of "feminist consciousness", which is, instead, concerned with challenging and changing women's subordination to men. Feminist consciousness is a concept that can be assimilated to Molyneux's strategic gender interests, that will be discussed in the following section.

Molyneux (1986) theorized the distinction between "practical gender interests" and "strategic gender interests". Practical gender interests emerge from the internalization of "cultural gender roles⁷ and the assertion of rights based on these roles". These interests are determined by the concrete experience women share, as women, and, according to Molyneux, those do not directly challenge gender subordination (Molyneux, 1986: 284). In contrast, strategic gender interests focus on objectives "explicitly related to overcoming women's subordination to men, such as a redefinition of tasks in the house, alleviation of the burden of childcare on women, women's control of reproduction" (Molyneux, 1986: 328). The transformation and politicization of practical gender interests into strategic interests is the central purpose of feminism. Women's movements with strategic gender interests are the ones that would let women to break into public life and to gain access to arenas previously designated for men.

⁷ In the *Women's Studies Encyclopedia* gender is defined as "a cultural construct: the distinction in roles, behavior, and mental and emotional characteristics between females and males developed by a society and gender roles as "the behavior and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of being born either female or male. Whereas sex is a biological term based on an individual reproductive organs and genes, gender is a psychological and cultural term" (Tierney, 2000: 156).

1.2.2 Moving beyond dichotomizations

Many feminist scholars have seen as problematic women's mobilizations whose interests are "practical" or that are based on "female consciousness" (Feijoo 1998; Feijoo and Gogna 1990; Feijoo and Nari 1994; Perelli 1994). They highlight problematic conceptual issues related to women's movements that mobilize according to "female consciousness" or that focus only on "practical gender interests". A first element that emerges is that such a type of mobilization could reinforce the placing of women in the domestic/private side of society. Also, women who participate as mothers and not as citizens could indirectly reinforce traditional gender roles. The risk is that women's access to politics would be accepted only because women take care of "typically female areas of interest" (Jaquette, 1994: 232). In addition, these types of activism can reinforce the positions of conservative institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church (for example the fact that women are more moral than men). Another concern is related to the fact that some movements that assume political stances based on absolute moral principles could ultimately be anti-political (Jaquette, 1994: 224).

Some other analyses of women's political participation question the utility of the 'female consciousness/practical gender interests' versus 'feminist consciousness/strategic gender interests' dichotomy. They argue that this dichotomy has reinforced the idea that there are "strategic" feminist interests and goals that, if met, would necessarily improve the condition of all women. Ferree and Martin (1995), in a study of women's organizations, challenged this assumption, by discussing some of the tensions that can arise from the multidimensionality of feminist politics. In fact, they argue, "the feminist movement... is a multifaceted one that has

taken different forms at different times, in different areas of the country, in different socio-economic and political contexts, and among women of diverse racial, ethnic, class, and age groups (Ferree and Martin, 1995: 7). Other analyses have concluded that this dichotomy does not capture the varied degrees of participation between the two extremes and the “unlikelihood that a woman is completely immersed in the private” (Craske, 1993). Also, it does not take into consideration the political and power-related aspects of “basic needs” or “survival” kinds of women’s activism and tends to maintain certain distinctions such as the public/private and personal/political ones that many feminists think should be deconstructed. In addition, this dichotomy assumes a rather problematic linear conception of “progress” from “female consciousness” or “practical gender interests” to “feminist” or “strategic gender interests” (Westwood and Radcliffe, 1993).

1.2.3 Feminism and women’s activism: a dialectical-dynamic relationship

In this section, I discuss some of the attempts to reconcile and incorporate within the frameworks of feminism some of the “ambiguities” of women’s participation, by bringing together and understanding the experiences of women who have heterogeneous strategic and practical interests, that change over time, and that they themselves do not see as being distinct.

Among the many theoretical efforts that have been made to overcome problematic dichotomizations and exclusionary approaches, an important contribution comes from Chicana feminists (Anzaldúa 1987; Saldívar-Hull 1991) who have questioned the exclusion of “feminine” women’s movements, typically concerned with “practical” issues, and argued that this fact can

only be understood within a Western-biased tendency of feminism not to properly value other women's struggles and identities. This is the reason why Chicana feminists consider themselves to be at the borders of feminist conceptual frameworks. Saldívar-Hull defines "feminism on the border" as the feminism that also includes women's movements that do not challenge patriarchy explicitly or in a "properly feminist" manner (Saldívar-Hull, 1991: 358). According to Chicana feminists, it is necessary to rethink and broaden feminist conceptual frameworks and political agendas to include other bases of oppression. They highlight how some women, who might not self-identify as feminists, are inclined to identify themselves as Chicanas, who in practical terms have goals that are compatible with feminist politics (Anzaldúa 1987; Saldívar-Hull 1991).

Bouvard's study on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina raises important questions about the relationship between theory and practical activism and calls for a re-conceptualization of the political roles of mothers. She contends that "the Mothers have redefined maternity into political action and practical anarchism" (Bouvard, 1994: 244). By emphasizing how the Mothers have been criticized by feminists, she argues that "when events contradict the theoretical bases of a movement, the theory must be, at least, reconsidered". According to Bouvard, feminists need to recognize the concrete evidence of the power of motherhood as a political force or "are feminists so entrenched in theory that [they] are unable to conceive the power of motherhood as a political force even when there is concrete evidence?" (Bouvard, 1994: 243).

Martin introduces the notion of certain women's participation outcomes as being "implicitly feminist". The author argues that it is necessary to direct attention to the ideological claims and actions of women's organizations. She suggests that the dichotomy of practical versus strategic gender goals does not capture the idea that "an organization that may not identify with feminist

ideology may have feminist values, goals, or outcomes”. “[F]eminist outcomes” refer to transformation by participating in the organization and “may include improved self-esteem or empowerment and political awareness”. The notion of implicitly feminist outcomes suggests that women’s movements that do not explicitly have feminism among their goals may have feminist outcomes (as cited in Pardo, 1990: 358).

Participation by women has often been explained as an extension of the dimensions that have traditionally been part of the female universe: their reproductive role and the domestic sphere. In contrast, some feminist authors (Bouvard 1994; Chaney 1970; Jaquette 1994; Lavrin 1998; Stevens 1973) have identified an ambiguity in participation by women. According to them, this ambiguity refers to the fact that women’s participation, even when it is carried out in the name of their most traditional roles, “involves going out and leaving precisely that sphere that is used as a means for legitimization” (Feijoo and Gogna, 1990: 64).

The reality, in fact, is complex and many factors can lead to participation. These factors may differ from the arguments given publicly to justify a struggle, and the varied meanings that these women confer to their experience of activism. Furthermore, “the rhetoric of political motherhood represents a collective action frame that avoids confrontation with traditional values and at the same time, leaves considerable room to manoeuvre in the public sphere”. Motherhood comes to be one of available roles “through which women can become active citizens” (Jaquette, 1994: 228-233).

Jaquette argues that practical and strategic gender interests are linked together. When women join women's movements, they are "radicalized" in, at least, two ways. First, they are in a better position to see the interrelations "between their immediate concerns and broader political issues". Second, women are "forced" to experience themselves some of the "sex role biases that have long impeded women's entry into the public and political spheres". The author, explains that many of the activities women perform as activists, including coordinating other people, organizing events, travelling, dealing with other movements, can themselves be empowering (Jaquette, 1994: 232).

By distinguishing between feminism and women's movement and by focusing on the empirical differences between the two concepts, Ferree defines the relationship between women's movements and feminism as "processes of flux": One process involves the transformation of the movement's goals: "feminism may be becoming an issue for them, and therefore one among their goals". The other process concerns feminism itself: its "circulating in different places and spaces may generate new social movements, including women's movements, which are not explicitly feminist" (Ferree, 2006: 7). Finally, the author conceptualizes a dynamic relationship between women's movements and feminism, arguing that "gender-based mobilizations of women regardless of their goals... are likely to bring their constituents to more explicitly political activities, empower women to challenge limitations on their roles and lives, and create networks among women that enhance their ability to recognize existing gender (and class, and race) relations as being oppressive and in need of change" (Ferree, 2006: 8).

In the next section I will contextualize the reality of women's movements in Argentina from the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) until present.

1.3 Women and social change in Latin America: the case of Argentina

The “wave of democratization” that took place in Latin America during the nineteen eighties stimulated the study of the types of transitions, the actors, the dynamics and the outcomes (Feijoo, 1998). In this section I will provide an overview of some of the works that focus on the role of women's movements during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, and the subsequent transition and post-transition periods in Argentina. This literature is particularly relevant because it focuses on women's participation during exceptional historical periods, such as “dictatorships” or democratic transitions and illuminates some of the ambiguities of such participation as well as the process of expansion of women's spaces and, to some extent, rights that made possible the massive female participation that occurred in Argentina during the nineteen nineties and after the 2001 crisis.

1.3.1 Women's and feminist activism during the military dictatorship (1979-1983)

In March 1976, a military regime took over in Argentina. The Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) ⁸ model was abandoned and the “hegemony of financial activities over productive ones” emerged (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 66). The military Junta implemented a government program called Proceso de Reorganización Nacional that favored pro-market

⁸ “ISI refers to a trade and economic policy that is based on the idea that regions or countries, should attempt to produce locally industrial goods or services that were previously imported. This form of economic protectionism was adopted in Argentina in the period 1930-1976” (Stutz, 1998: 16).

reforms and deregulated the economy to attract foreign investments (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 32). In addition to these economic policies, they dissolved the Congress and suspended political and union activity, imposing an authoritarian social order. Almost all society, solidarity-based and women's organizations were dissolved by the military, and the state policy soon became "state terrorism" (Feijoo and Nari, 1994). People's standards of living declined abruptly, which was a special concern for women, considered to be both "naturally" and socially responsible for reproductive roles and family welfare. During this period, according to the military, the only legitimate dimensions for women's action were the Argentinian version of the German three K's: Kinder, Kuche, and Kirche⁹ (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 111).

Three kinds of women's mobilizations which organized during the military dictatorship would later contribute to the transition to and consolidation of democracy in Argentina (Feijoo 1998; Feijoo and Nari 1994; Feijoo and Gogna 1990). Women's mobilization during this period was a sort of "unintended consequence" of military policies which stimulated the emergence of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo¹⁰ and the re-organization of women's groups that had been active before the military coup, such as the Liga de amas de casa (the Housewives' League), and, to a certain extent, some feminist groups. These women did not try to find a space within political parties, but called for "a new social consensus on themes that united women of different political sectors and social classes" (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 112).

⁹ Children, Home, and Church.

¹⁰ Although the Mothers movement is the most well known, there were also other groups that were organized and worked in the human rights area including: The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the Asamblea permanente para los derechos humanos (APDH), Las familias de los detenidos y desaparecidos, El servicio de Paz y Justicia (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 112).

Between 1976 and 1982 thirty thousand Argentinians disappeared. The mothers of those who had disappeared organized a group that would march in the Plaza de Mayo wearing white scarves and demanding their sons and daughters to be returned, alive. The Madres transformed “private pain” into a “public issue” and, by defending “life itself” and their “right to love”, created a new space for women’s participation based on and legitimized by the respect for motherhood (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 112). According to Feijoo and Nari, the Madres, “without trying to change patriarchal ideology or abandon their ‘femininity’, produced a transformation of the traditional feminine self-awareness and its political role (1994: 113).

In 1982 the country got involved into the Falklands-Malvinas war. As a consequence of the increased cost of living and the worsened economic situation, many urban protests (vecinazos), actively involving women, spread in many cities. The Housewives’ League, for example, brought together women very active at the neighborhood level but who had little experience with politics. The movement emerged as a new political actor and clearly stated that they were not a movement of women “who have extra time for charitable activities”. The league was criticized by Argentinian feminists, because the housewives never challenged their roles as wives and mothers (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 114).

The vast majority of feminist groups that have emerged before 1976 were dismantled by the military junta¹¹, many other groups, such as the Movimiento para la Liberación Femenina - MLF, ceased their activities, even if only temporarily, while a few others continued to exist or even

¹¹ Including the *Union Feminista Argentina* and the *Asociación para la liberación feminista* (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 114).

emerged over these years¹². Between 1978 and 1979 some very active feminist groups were organized. The Asociación Juana Manso (based in Cordoba), the Unión de Mujeres Socialistas (whose president was socialist Alicia Moreau de Justo) and the MLF were reorganized under the name Organización Feminista Argentina (OFA). All these women's and feminist movements later became important actors in the political scene. Their roles were even more important when the transition and consolidation of democracy started (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 114).

The positive images of women's activism during the military regime and the perception in politics of the "potential voting power of women" made politicians aware of the necessity of incorporating women and their demands into the democratization process. For example, issues such as the divorce law were mentioned several times by the candidates, contributing to new visibility for women's issues (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 116). Raúl Alfonsín (of the Unión Cívica radical-UCR party), in his successful presidential campaign, developed an electoral strategy "based on the expectations and hopes of the female electorate", such as openly criticizing machismo in his campaign or adopting slogans that would, more or less explicitly, recall concepts used by the Madres (such as "We are Life") (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 117). Unfortunately, democratic leaders were not able to meet the expectations created during the electoral campaign: Argentina's social map was not modified to include women as "legitimate protagonists of political life" (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 117).

The Madres wanted their children to be returned alive and the guilty punished. The housewives were more concerned with meeting family needs, thus with redistributive and price issues. The

¹² Including Centro de Estudios de la Mujer Argentina (CESMA)¹². Another group of women formed during these years was the Asociación de Mujeres Argentinas (AMA), later *Asociación de Mujeres Alfonsina Storni* (AMAS) (Feijoo and Nari, 1994: 115).

feminists expected that a new family custody law would be passed and the UN CEDAW convention would be ratified. Alfonsín responded to women's demands in various ways. Alfonsín created the National Women's Agency in the Ministry of Social Action, and a number of other agencies and secretariats dealing with women's issues both at the national and provincial levels. He contributed to moving many themes from the private to the public sphere, such as women's rights to control their bodies and to make reproductive decisions, and he also addressed the theme of violence against women. Even if these topics were not in the political agenda they became less taboo.

In December 1983 Alfonsín created the CONADEP (Comité Nacional para los Desaparecidos)¹³ which was charged with investigating the disappearance of thousands of Argentinians under the military junta. Their mandate was not to punish the guilty but to gather information and evidence about these events and, in cases where crimes were identified, to pass the information to the national courts (Feijoo, 1998: 39). The Madres wanted their sons and daughters to be returned alive, and the Committee could not meet the expectations of the Madres (Feijoo, 1998: 39). Furthermore, the approval by Alfonsín's administration of the Ley de Punto Final and Ley de Obediencia Debida, which ruled that no charges would be faced by military officers responsible for carrying out policies of torture and kidnapping, "caused a political climate of confrontation with the Madres and with many sectors of the society". Many Argentinians felt that Alfonsín's government was moving toward "pardon and oblivion" and thus felt betrayed by democratic institutions. This contributed to the defeat of Alfonsín at 1989 elections (Feijoo, 1998: 39).

¹³ The National Commission on the Disappeared. The Madres, as social movement, with the exception of one individual member, Graciela Fernandez Meijide, decided not to take part in the committee (Feijoo, 1998: 39).

The post-transition period started in 1989, when Carlos Saúl Menem of the Partido Peronista was elected president. The country was experiencing major economic difficulties, with hyperinflation that forced Alfonsín to leave office five months before the end of his mandate. In 1990 Menem's government approved a highly controversial decree of amnesty (Decree 2741-90) for military officers "who had been tried, found guilty and sentenced for kidnapping, torturing, murdering thirty thousand people" (Feijoo, 1998: 39). Many national and international human rights activists and other Argentinians protested against the decree, but Menem ignored the protests: his highest priority was the economic situation of the country (Feijoo, 1998: 39).

In reaction to Menem's human rights' policy, women re-appeared in the public arena, as human rights activists, feminists and representatives of grassroots organizations. The ongoing economic crisis also stimulated other types of women's participation. To cope with the economic crisis many lower class women were forced to enter the labor market or to get involved in other types of "survival activities such as community kitchens or neighborhood food programs" (Feijoo, 1998: 40). The feminist movement was fragmented, but during this period it continued lobbying to include women's issues on the political agenda.

Many new institutional places for women were created both during and after the transition to democracy. The existing family law was modified so that family decision-making would be shared between husband and wife, and issues of women's reproductive rights and violence against women began to be addressed. The most tangible achievement for feminists and other Argentinian women was the Ley de Cupo (Quota Law) that was passed in 1991. This law set a

minimum 30 percent threshold for women in the upper-levels of the candidate lists. It had the effect of increasing women's representation in congress from 5.5 percent in 1991 to 12.8 in 1993 and has resulted in a progressive increase of women in both houses over the years, opening up new career possibilities for women (Feijoo, 1998: 42). The presence of women in parliament rarely resulted in "gender sensitive" laws but it stimulated debates on delicate issues such as reproductive rights or violence against women, and women's presence in the Congress was crucial to "the way in which issues were debated and decided" (Feijoo, 1998: 42).

1.3.2 The 2001 economic downturn and the "feminization of protest"

Neoliberal "structural adjustment" policies enacted by president Carlos Menem (1989-1999) and basically continued by UCR president Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001) drastically reduced social expenditures. When the economy of Argentina collapsed in December 2001, citizens demonstrated by going to the streets and banging on pots and pans to demand social change "Que se vayan todos"¹⁴. Hauser suggests that women represented 75 percent of the members of the most important social movements which demonstrated at this time (Hauser as cited in Stutton, 2007: 701).

Recent research has suggested a variety of possible interpretative frameworks for the wave of protest and the emergence of new forms of "contentious" activism in Argentina. Some have examined activism in the context of the economic crisis focusing on the impact of neoliberal policies and the perception of their "exclusion" by large sectors of the society (Chejter, 2003, 2005; Giarracca, 2000; Giarracca and Teubal, 2001; Lattuada, 2000). Others have examined

¹⁴ They all must go!

possible political explanations focusing on the “crisis of representation” and the crisis of the party system (Galafassi, 2003), the role of culture, national “myths” and the “quest for recognition” during this period (Armony and Armony, 2005; Auyero, 2003), and on how participation in piquetes and cacerolazos transformed protesters’ identities (Bidaseca, 2006).

During the past decade, and particularly in the period during and after the crisis, many groups of women have emerged as legitimate political subjects (Auyero, 2003); women participated in street protests and in a wide range of groups, including the piqueteros/piqueteras, popular assemblies, and bartering clubs (Chejter, 2003). Women formed groups such as the Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML), which will be analyzed in this thesis, as well as other groups within mixed organizations such as the piquetero/piquetera movements.

Despite this “feminization of resistance”, the gendered dimensions of protest in Argentina have been under-studied. Thus, I build on a relatively small body of literature to highlight rural women’s activism as part of a longer tradition of women’s movement participation.

1.3.3 A space for rural women

All the experiences I have documented above refer to urban women and the majority of those experiences took place in the province of Buenos Aires. However many other voices that had never before been heard in Argentina found place and space during and after those years of economic and social difficulties. The erosion of state boundaries and of other sorts of cultural constraints allowed the emergence of many “marginalized” groups. For the purpose of this thesis

I will focus on rural women's activism to contextualize the emergence of the MML. Due to limited documentation on experiences of activism of rural women, I have had to rely on very few sources to do so.

With the advent of capitalism and European colonization in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a change in the "agrarian discourse". It became centered on the new (European) immigrants (colonos) and focused on certain values such as "technical progress", "moral austerity" and "dedication to work in the household". The home became the place for rural women who were formerly active companions of the gaucho on the prairies (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 143). Later, during the twentieth century rural women conquered access to spaces that had, since the advent of capitalism, been for men only, mainly in rural cooperatives. Since the nineteen eighties women occupied some positions in farm workers' unions (in sectors where women's participation was important). However, as Giarracca and Teubal explain, the involvement and participation of farmers in agrarian associations and institutions, without exception, had been reserved to men until 1995 when the *Movimiento de mujeres agropecuarias en lucha* (MML), was created (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 143-144). Several previous episodes had, however, contributed to the development of the identity of the MML as a collective actor of rural women, and they will now be highlighted.

On June 25, 1912 the Grito de Alcorta was the first strike promoted and implemented by immigrants who worked as agricultural workers. The immigrants opposed the proposed modification of the terms of the rent contracts that they had signed with land owners, while at the same time being tired of being exploited by them (Galafassi, 2002: 57). The Grito de Alcorta set

an important example for rural workers, who were mainly men, and for women. Even though women were not directly involved in the strike, they played an important role in encouraging their husbands to fight against the exploitative land-owning oligarchy and to fight for a better life for their families. The night before the strike, there was much uncertainty about whether to go on strike or not, and it was a woman, María Robotti de Bulzani, who expressed the necessity of going on strike by saying: “No sé ustedes, pero yo ya comienzo la huelga no cocino ni cebo más mates”¹⁵ (Mujeres Federadas Argentinas, 2006).

The Federación Agraria Argentina (FAA), which remains the organization that promotes and represents the interests of small-medium farmers, was created a few months after the strike. Its statute specified equal conditions of access and participation in the association for both men and women, but women never got very involved nor were they elected as representatives in agrarian institutions such as the FAA.

In the thirties the Clubes de la Juventud (Youth Clubs) were created, with the aim of promoting training and recreational activities for young rural people. For women there were mainly workshops on sewing, decoration and other domestic activities as well as folkloric dances. These workshops still exist today in many parts of the country but their scope - including for women - has been expanded to include such topics as informatics, business management, cooperativism and fiscal management. Concerning institutional precedents, the first woman to be elected as officer of the FAA, had had extensive participation experience in the Youth clubs, and was elected in 1986/87.

¹⁵ I do not know you, but I go on strike now. I stop cooking and serving mate now.

In 1995 in response to the difficult economic situation for rural areas and the risk of losing the family property, the MML was established.

1.4 Objectives and research questions

The main objective of the thesis is to investigate the relationship between women's activism, feminism and the deployment of feminine identities. I will do so by examining the actions, strategies, and discourses of an innovative rural women's movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid nineties, as a response to the economic crisis but also as a way of "resisting" the neo-liberal model promoted and implemented during the nineties: the Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML).

This thesis will look at the changes and transformations that participation in the MML has caused in MML women's lives. This study will address three research questions in order to reach the overall objective of this thesis. The first research question that will be analyzed is: how, and to what extent, the participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives. This research question will be analyzed in chapter 5. The second research question is: what are the effects of women's participation in the MML on the socially constructed representations of feminine roles and on the social relations of gender in rural Argentina. This question will be addressed in chapter 6. The third of the research questions is: how it is appropriate to position the MML, a "feminine" type of women's movement, *vis-à-vis* feminism. This research question will be addressed in chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This thesis gathers and analyzes qualitative data on an Argentinian social movement of rural women, the movimiento de mujeres agropecuarias en lucha (MML). In this chapter I will first describe the type of data that was collected, and elaborate on the choice of semi-structured telephone interviews as the main method of gathering data about the movement. I will then discuss the recruitment and sampling processes, as well as elaborating on some ethical considerations. Next, I will explain the choice of qualitative content analysis as the main methodology for the analysis of the gathered data. I will then elaborate on the coding process, and also on issues related to the reliability of the process, and on the strategy for managing the data gathered. Lastly I will present some of the limitations and strengths of the data gathering and analytical processes.

2.1 Data collection

2.1.1 Documentary material on the MML

The written material I have collected consists of scholarly publications (articles and books) that were written between 1995 and 2007 about the MML, newspaper articles including some articles in local and national newspapers (*Clarín*, *La Nación*, *Rosario 12* and *Página 12*), and publications by the movement. The written material produced by the MML includes one booklet (MML, 2005) containing articles and other types of information (interviews, images) on and by the MML that was published by the MML in 2005 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the

movement. The document was sent to me¹⁶ by one of the leaders I interviewed (Sara Coll), together with thirteen other documents prepared by the MML including: MML press releases, communications and advertisements related to International Women's Day, the recent agrarian protest, and legal documentation about the trial of some MML leaders.

2.1.2 Individual semi-structured telephone interviews

In the fall 2008 I conducted ten individual semi-structured interviews by telephone with MML leaders in three provinces in the Pampean Region, where the movement was and is still very strong - La Pampa, Santa Fé, and Buenos Aires. Semi-structured interviewing starts with general predetermined questions or topics and has a more fluid structure than questionnaires. Berg argues that while the questions in semi-structured interviewing are usually asked in a "systematic and consistent order... the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress... are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared questions" (Berg, 2001: 79). In fact, relevant topics and probes had initially been prepared ahead of time and only rarely questions were created during the interview.

Telephone interviews tend to be a neglected interview technique in qualitative research and, when it is discussed at all in the literature, it is often depicted as a less attractive alternative to face-to-face interviewing. Certainly in most cases face-to-face is preferable to telephone interviewing, mainly because of the loss of visual contextual and nonverbal data that could compromise probing and the interpretation of responses. This is particularly important when conducting feminist research, where issues of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee

¹⁶ The documents were sent to my cousin in Buenos Aires and she sent them to me.

are central for having a positive interviewing experience. However, telephones may, when other alternative options are not available, constitute a valuable option. In addition, Novick argues that telephone interviewing could allow respondents to “feel relaxed and able to disclose sensitive information, and evidence is lacking that they produce lower quality data” (Novick, 2007: 391). Also, over the last years, people are getting more used to certain types of technology, such as telephones, cell phones, and computers.

The participants were interviewed individually and the interviews were conducted in Spanish¹⁷, via telephone. I conducted the interviews by using the Skype software as a telephone, and most of my respondents used their cell-phones¹⁸. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and coded in order to facilitate the analysis. The participants were asked about their personal experiences, and also about their perception of the experiences of other MML women. In the chapters that follow, when I say ‘MML leaders’ I refer to what my respondents said about themselves, when I say ‘MML women’ I refer to what they said about other women.

As most of the research that has been conducted on the MML does not address gender issues, my objective was to develop an interview format would help in the understanding of the relationship between the MML as a women’s movement and feminism. After reading and carefully analyzing the main theoretical components of the debate, as well as a number of relevant empirical studies, I identified relevant concepts, their dimensions, and then possible variables or indicators to

¹⁷ Spanish being the language of the participants.

¹⁸ In Argentina, the cell-phone user does not pay for incoming calls.

operationalize them (see appendix 4 for the operationalization tables)¹⁹. The interview guide thus focused on the following four broad themes (see Appendix 5 for the interview schedule). The first related to the movement and the participants' experience in the MML, and included questions such as: why did you (and other MML members) get involved? There were also questions about the MML, its organizational structure, and the nature of MML meetings. In this section, the respondents were also asked to position the MML vis-à-vis feminism and to give their own definition of feminism. The second theme targeted issues related to the impact of the involvement in the movement on MML women's personal and "public" lives, and included some questions related to "gender" issues such as why *women* decided to do something about their difficult economic situation, or questions related to the organization of their everyday life after joining in the MML. The third theme was about the contacts the MML had with other movements, organizations or political parties, including questions and probes specifically about the contacts with other women's and feminist movements or networks. The last section asked socio-demographic questions about the respondents and their families. It also included questions and probes about the crops they cultivated as well as about land ownership. The interview schedule also included an opportunity for the respondents to introduce additional topics which they thought were relevant for the study, or other information they wanted to share with me.

¹⁹ The material I gathered from the interviews was different from what I expected. I decided not to ask some questions, other questions were not answered or the answers were not very informative. This is why the "coding scheme" that was applied at the analytical level (described in detail in section 2.3.1) does not reflect closely the original operationalization of main concepts described in appendix 4.

2.1.3 Sampling and recruitment

The non-random sampling technique of snowball sampling was used to select participants. The following selection criteria were applied in the recruitment of participants: they needed to be members of the MML, and considered to be key actors of the movement by the media and/or by other MML members. I contacted some NGOs and organizations (EnRedando, Indymedia Argentina) that had posted information or publications about the MML and asked them if they could give me the contact information for the MML leaders²⁰. I obtained three emails and telephone numbers. I sent these women emails inviting them to take part to the study, and attaching an information sheet about the project (see Appendixes 2 and 3 to see the information sheet and the recruitment letter). I called them one week later, as specified in the email, and they all agreed to be interviewed. Informed consent was obtained via telephone by reviewing together the information contained in the information sheet at the beginning of each interview. At the time of the interview, I asked each of them the name and contact information of another MML leader, who had agreed to have her name and contact information passed on to me. Eight participants agreed that their real names could appear in the thesis (and any other reports of the research). For the two women who did not wish to have their real names used, pseudonyms have been used. The project had already been approved by the one of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards (REB) (see appendix 1 to see the approval). In total, I conducted ten interviews.

²⁰ Leaders were chosen because they were easily identifiable, many of the questions I asked referred not only to themselves but also to the other women of the MML. The interviewees were, to some extent, “used” as key informants, individuals knowledgeable about the MML and the experiences of activism of its members.

2.2 Qualitative content analysis

Content analysis describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from “impressionistic, intuitive, interpretative analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses” (Rosengren, as cited in Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1277). The choice of the specific type of content analysis that is adopted by the researcher varies with the topic being studied and the interests of the researcher. Content analysis is an “intellectual process”, that involves a categorization of a wide range of recorded textual data, such as “interview transcripts, observations, narratives, responses to open-ended questionnaire items, speeches, postings to listservs, and media such as drawings, photographs, and video”, into conceptual categories (Julien, 2008). The objective of “categorization” is to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes.

Content analysis as a method for analyzing text data is intrinsically flexible and it is not strictly associated with a specific theoretical framework (Marying, 2000: 2). Its development has tended to be associated more with quantitative than with qualitative research methods. However, following some critiques of “quantitative approaches to qualitative data”, a separate qualitative methodology for content analysis was developed (Marying, 2000: 2). Qualitative content analysis seems to be a more “holistic” type of methodology than its quantitative counterpart (Julien, 2008): it implies “working intensively with rich data... reading, reflecting, coding, annotating, memoing, discussing, linking, visualizing” with the intent of getting to know the data. The process is particularly fruitful when the activities cited above are carried out in an integrated manner (Bazeley, 2007: 59).

Qualitative content analysis “goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meaning” (Weber, as cited in Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). The purpose of qualitative content analysis is to create a “rule guided qualitative text analysis” which preserves [some of] the advantages of quantitative content analysis and which widens them “to a concept of qualitative procedure” (Mayring, 2000: 1).

For the purpose of this study, and due to the nature of the data - both the documentary material and the transcripts of the interviews - that was gathered, it seemed appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach to content analysis.

While it is convenient to discuss the steps of qualitative content analysis (coding, data management, categorization, identification of patterns, etc.) as if they were an easily identifiable sequence of events, like “steps in a process”, in practice this rarely happens. All these “steps” occur throughout the project and it is extremely difficult to identify the point where coding becomes analysis (Ayres, 2008). Keeping in mind how difficult it is to establish this boundary, I will now discuss the steps to follow when conducting a content analysis.

Before starting the analytic process, many decisions have to be made in relation to the coding process. A code is “an abstract representation of an object or phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 66), it is “a mnemonic device used to identify themes in a text (Ryan and Bernard, as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 66). First of all it is necessary to decide whether to code for “single words” or for “sets of words or phrases”, then how many concepts to code for (pre-

defined or interactive set) and how much flexibility will be allowed during the coding process (inductive or deductive), whether to code for “existence” or “frequency” , which rules will be followed to distinguish among concepts (if concepts are going to be coded exactly as they appear or if they are going to be recorded as the same even if they appear in different form), develop a set of rules for coding the text (to ensure consistency throughout the text), and finally to decide what to do with irrelevant information (Carley, 1992, as cited in Busch et al., 2005).

Raw data reflect “the undigested complexity of reality” (Patton, as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 66). Coding is often the first step in the analytic process and is an attempt to make sense of the various pieces of information gathered from the literature, in the field or by conducting the interviews (Chenail, 2008). Categories are “seldom static and never inviolate, as they are subject throughout the analysis to the search for alternative interpretations or disconfirming evidence” (Tesch, 2008). This process of “recontextualization of the data assists the researcher to move from document analysis to theorizing” (Tesch 1990, as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 66). The second step of the process is to identify relations between or among the codes. The analytic process continues by focusing on the patterns that are discovered within the system of categories (Chenail, 2008), attempting to draw conclusions and generalizations.

2.2.1 Validity and reliability: establishing categorization integrity

Validity and reliability are very important for sound content analysis. More specifically, qualitative content analysts aim for “trustworthiness and credibility” by conducting “iterative analyses, seeking negative or contradictory examples, seeking confirmatory data through

methodological triangulation, and providing supporting examples for conclusions drawn”. Julien (2008) argues that it is important to remember that meaning heavily depends on context and it is subjective, a single phrase is open to different qualitative interpretations by different researchers, she warns: “researchers must always be mindful of the perspectives they bring to their analytic work as well as of the context for the text being analyzed”. Furthermore, she recommends ensuring that there is ‘comprehensiveness’ among the categories (all relevant data are categorized), and that the definitions of the categories do not overlap. It is important to identify what is missing in the text that is being analyzed and constantly compare and contrast different segments of text with other segments (Julien, 2008).

2.3 How the analysis was carried out

In this section I will introduce the tools used in coding, the coding scheme that was used, and finally the operationalization of the main concepts.

2.3.1 Managing the Data

Content analysis can be carried out by using very “low-tech” materials such as a pencil and paper. Historically, content analysis was a time consuming process and the analysis was done manually, human error and time constraints made this method unfeasible for large texts. While for small amounts of text, a pencil and paper can be adequate, when large quantities of data are involved; carrying out the analysis manually might be extremely difficult. Several useful software packages, such as NVivo, are however very helpful tools for managing larger quantities

of data (Bazeley, 2007: 2). The main reason why I used NVivo8, despite the relatively small number of interviews, was that NVivo is a helpful tool for managing the data and the coding process. In my analysis, the coding system was changed and refined with categories being merged and separated several times. NVivo was a valuable aid in this first step of the analysis, especially in organizing the “intellectual work” quickly and in bringing identified categories of data together for easy comparison. Also, some other components of NVivo came to be very useful such as the annotations, where I wrote the translations of selected quotes, and memos, where I annotated with references, comments, ideas about the coding categories or the texts that I was coding. Because memos are separate from the actual data, “the independence and integrity of data are maintained by ensuring against contamination from the researcher's perspective” (Smyth, 2008). Also, the “book case”, a feature of NVivo, allowed me to easily compare yes-no answers and socio-demographic data among my respondents. Tracking the data analysis was invaluable too. “Using qualitative analysis software did not reduce the need for intellectual effort, but doing so certainly provided help in recording and organizing the results of that effort” (Smyth, 2008). I used tree nodes to hierarchically organize the categories, which facilitated the categories’ merging and segmenting processes.

The second stage of the analytical process, that implied “making connections” between the categories, was carried out with less technological assistance. Tentative theorizing about relationships was carried out manually; it was hard to run consistent and reliable queries mainly due to linguistic factors.

2.3.2 Coding decisions

Before starting the analytic process, I made some decisions about the coding process. The selected code unit was a 'set of phrases'. As mentioned earlier, the way the analytical process for this study was carried out implied a certain degree of flexibility: categories derived from data (inductive category development) and from theory (deductive category development), before and during the coding process allowing a high level of flexibility to inductively develop as many codes as necessary.

I started the analysis with a list of categories anticipated to be found in the data, which mainly came from the review of the literature. I had theoretically based definitions of categories and sub-categories. Concepts related to those categories had been explicitly included in data collection as questions or probes in the interview guide. Some other categories "emerged" from the transcripts of the interviews. Coding, in fact, facilitated the development of new categories. I coded both for 'existence' and 'frequency', although this specific aspect is of higher concern for quantitative types of study. In any case, existence was important for pre-determined codes while the recurrence of certain themes was important for the creation of new coding categories. Set of phrases, did not have to be identical to be coded into the same category. The concept/s expressed had to be related to the category (as examples, cause-effect, etc.) and this varied among the different categories (different operationalizations). Irrelevant data was not coded and was disregarded.

People tend to repeat ideas that are relevant for them (Ryan and Bernard, as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 77). I used repetitions of concepts as the main basis for developing nodes. In order to develop useful generalizations from coding, categories must be synthesized. The process of categorization continued until saturation, which means that “no further categories are discovered or constructed based on examination of new generated data” (Firmin, 2008).

2.3.3 Operationalization of main concepts

In terms of the operationalization of the main concepts, I will briefly describe the way I proceeded. By reading the literature on women’s movements and feminism I had identified (especially Ferree, 2006; Jaquette, 1994; and Pardo, 1990), some broad concepts²¹ that I wanted to explore in relation to the MML as possible dimensions in the study of the relationship between “feminine” women’s movements and feminism. I initially identified some relevant broad themes from the literature. It does not mean, however, that the data was only interrogated with reference to these concepts. As specified in this chapter, I allowed myself a certain degree of “flexibility”: new concepts emerged from the data and some concepts were excluded from the analysis. The broad concepts retained for discussion in this thesis were: the politicization of everyday life; challenges to limitations of women’s roles and lives; feminism, femininity and the MML; networks and awareness; and the MML and its members.

²¹ Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Bazeley, 2007: 81) describe the term concept as “an abstract representation of an event, object, or action/interaction that the researcher identified as being relevant in the data”. The terms concept, theme and category are used inconsistently in the social science literature. In this thesis I will use the terms concept and category interchangeably when referring to the “products of coding” as Bazeley (2007: 81) suggests, yet, attributing to the term concept a higher level of abstraction than to category and to category a closer relation to phenomena.

Concerning the politicization of everyday life, the analysis was carried out with the following coding scheme, intended just as a *guide* for the analysis, which emerged from the literature and documentary material on the MML and the interview transcripts. After merging and separating many times previous free nodes²², the following were developed in the form of tree node²³: political competence, political awareness, political participation, relation to politics, changes in the objectives of the MML, and changes in the motivations for participating. All later became sections of chapter 5. Some of them were explored by asking specific questions. For example, the changes in the objectives of the MML were assessed in terms of “what were the objectives of the MML at the beginning” and “what are the objectives of the MML today” (Q2a). Others, like political competence or awareness, were evaluated by looking at the general level of political understanding and technical competence when discussing political issues.

Concerning challenging limitations on women’s roles and lives, the following guidelines were followed, in the form of the tree node to be used for chapter 6: going out of the domestic space and deconstructing femininity. The first one was explored by looking at a wide variety of aspects including: attending meetings (in and/or outside their province), frequency of attendance, the nature (topics) of meetings, (no) compliance with domestic roles, external help with household, changes in a “typical week”. The second, about deconstructing femininity, explored in particular: women’s roles (are, should be), men and crises/ women and crises, perception of appropriateness of MML activities for women, rewards for participation (self confidence, social recognition), recognizing oppressive gender/social relations. Some questions (Q3a-f) such as “have you ever

²² Free nodes are a device in NVivo, used “to store your coding”, and do not presume any relationship with concepts (Bazeley, 2007: 83).

²³ “Hierarchical, branching structures in which parent nodes (in this case, politicization of everyday life) serve as connecting points for subcategories or types of concepts” (Bazeley, 2007: 83).

given public speeches”, meant to assess the “challenges to women’s roles”, were asked only to the first two participants, because it became quite obvious that all MML leaders had done those things.

The third concept was about networks and awareness. I intended to look at the MML network (La red solidaria) and at the contacts they had with national and international organizations and networks. I asked some questions about this (Q14-18), and later decided not to include the information gathered in the analysis as a separate chapter, but instead to spread the gathered information among different chapters. The main reason was that some women were not able to answer those questions, and the ones who replied gave answers that lead me to conclude that the MML has not developed long lasting international and/or political alliances or networks. I did not gather sufficient information on this topic to develop a separate chapter.

Then I looked at feminism, femininity and the MML. I looked in particular at feminine strategies: definition and ideas about feminism and contacts with feminists. In this section I also address issues related to the “problematic issues” associated to participation. The main dimensions that I analyzed were: tensions within the family and feelings of overextension, which I had identified through the literature and the (non) recognition of the MML among agrarian organizations, a concept that emerged from the interviews (Q13).

Initially I had a tree node related to background about the MML and its leaders and members where I explored more “background information”: MML structure, objectives, meetings,

strategies, definition, relation to politics, and funding. I also created a casebook²⁴ to enter all the socio-demographic information about the participants and some yes/no answer to facilitate comparison.

2.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the data gathering and analytical processes

Analysis of qualitative research is more than assembling quotations from interviews to substantiate ideas. In this case I think it involved more than what was stated during interviews. I had to understand that the goal was not just to gather as much information as possible, but to gather the information with the goal of answering the research questions. Content analysis research is particularly sensitive to the challengeable nature of the conclusions reached by its procedures. For example, it is hard to understand where the conclusions come from. Do they come from the data or could they be explained by other factors? Furthermore, the extent of generalizability of the conclusions reached is dependent on how the categories have been developed and on how reliable they are. This is why it is important to develop rules that would allow other researchers to code the same data in the same way over a period of time (stability) and would ensure the reproducibility of the study, its categories and methods (Busch et al., 2005).

A description of the context of the MML was included to allow for a better understanding of why MML leaders and women decide to get involved, but also to offer all the information that context provides. The context also was important because it defines the parameters within which this

²⁴ A casebook is an NVivo feature that is very similar to an excel file, but it is considered to be part of “your project” and facilitates comparisons among the different cases (interviews) and the management of the information.

case is transferable to other locations. A description of the process of doing the analysis allows readers of the study to assess the rigor of the study. An emphasis was on maintaining a 'chain of evidence' as recommended by Yin (1994). It is hoped that this study is 'replicable' in the same location to assess its reliability and in other locations also, for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the findings across multiple sites.

I repeatedly tried challenging myself to identify my own biases. The sampling technique chosen for this study, unavoidably lead to a sort of "elite bias"²⁵. This is because I decided to interview the leaders of the MML and not its 'rank and file' members. I did so for the reasons that were specified in the section about sampling. I am aware that this constitutes a limit in a study that is about MML women. I tried to remind myself of Becker's (1998) admonition to "doubt everything anyone in power tells you" and tried to look for other sources of information (for example (re) reading the literature, or newspapers), to both confirm and challenge what had been stated in the interviews or that I had read.

This remains, however, one of the most problematic issues. The leaders were easily identifiable, and the information they shared about "other MML women's experiences of activism" was extremely valuable, but, probably, talking to MML members would have given us a more comprehensive perspective about the movement itself. Interviewing MML husbands and the representatives of main agrarian institutions would have been very important to understand the impact of MML women' politicization on changes in the social relations.

²⁵ Elite bias is defined by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Bazeley, 2007) as "giving too much emphasis to the input of high-status participants and less emphasis to the input of perceived lower-status participants".

Furthermore I was not able to gather sufficient material to problematize certain elements that are present in the literature about the movement. All my respondents replied to the question about their engagement in the MML, in, more or less, the same way and similarly to their responses reported by other interviewers. It was as if they were simply repeating the same discourses about the movement. One of the most problematic issues, in my view refers to the self-victimization of MML women and the fact that part of the literature still presents the movement as one of the victims of neo-liberalism without raising issues of their responsibility, accountability or, even, futility (in the sense of maintaining ostentatiously high life-styles at all costs, even at the risk of losing one's property). The reality of the MML leaders and MML women in general is more complex than this. A one hour telephone interview was not sufficient to go beyond certain discourses.

When conducting the analysis I had to negotiate two locations as researcher. Because of the fact that I was born and lived fourteen years of my life in Argentina I would be considered an insider within my research community. On the other hand, I would question, to some extent, my insider status. Let me explain why. Despite the fact that I go back to Argentina quite often, I am not an insider (which, in this case, I do not think it is something necessarily bad). The years I have spent outside Argentina have created a sort of barrier to my being perceived as Argentinian. I feel as though I am outside and inside at the same time. I think that what best describes my position is Patricia Hill Collins "outsider-within" concept that expresses a sense of a dual (or plural) identity developed through engagement with positioning within some kind of community, as well as being excluded, to some, extent from a community (Collins, 1998: 5).

I do not think that, had I not been from Argentina, I would have got radically different information. I felt that the interviews went very well: I never felt embarrassed, nor did my respondents, I hope. The women I interviewed were leaders of a fairly popular social movement, who were used to having conference calls via telephone, talking with the media and, most of them, had already been interviewed by other researchers. They were aware of what they were doing and seemed to be happy to be doing it. In this case, more than my closeness (in terms of my origins) to them, I think what helped most in having a positive interviewing process, was my being far from them. Firstly, they liked the idea of being interviewed by someone from “Canada” (somewhat). I think they perceived this as giving them and the movement international attention and liked the idea of the MML being known in Canada. Two of them explicitly said they hoped they would be invited one day to Ottawa. Secondly, they knew I was from Argentina but that I had left the country in the early nineties, and this made them feel free to say things they would have never said to someone who is considered to be “too involved” in local politics or with some interest related to the very controversial agrarian crisis, that will be discussed in the following chapter. Lastly, using the telephone to conduct the interviews contributed to creating a sense of distance that helped in the discussion of delicate topics, especially problematizing family relations or simply describing other personal events.

Other factors that might have contributed to the smooth and positive interviewing process are the common language and the fact I was able to understand many words or expressions that are typical of Argentina (i.e. *no tengo un mango*), and that I was familiar with some historical facts or names, or other “typically” Argentinian situations such as hyper-inflation.

The main basis of distance was marked by the possibility of my being a feminist. Whenever I started an interview I was asked, more or less explicitly, to clarify my position in relation to feminism. Sometimes I was asked explicitly if I was a feminist, at other times I was asked questions about my personal life or about the feminist nature of the study. I noted my respondents were a bit “defensive” about the term and some wanted to clarify, before starting the interview that the MML had nothing to do with feminism. I must say that this questioning was particularly evident when I was conducting the first interviews. I think that after I gained some sort of trust from my participants, the others, who had been referred by them, possibly, felt less challenged. The fact that I was working on a sort of more inclusive definition of feminism helped in establishing the basis for informative interviews.

Sandra Harding argues that feminist researchers have an “obligation” to disclose a brief personal “biography” explaining the reasons why they have chosen the topic they are researching, the “vantage point” from which they approach the research and the way they will collect, analyze and report about what they have produced. Before the interviews I provided information about the project and its topic to my participants, and during the interviews I allowed them to ask me personal questions at any time. I acknowledge that this might have “biased” some of the answers I got (I did not self-identify as feminist to avoid my participants being “defensive” about that and I used the word feminism only when it was necessary).

Chapter 3: Socio-economic context of Argentina: from menemismo to present

In this chapter I review the most salient characteristics of the political, economic and social processes that have occurred in Argentina's agriculture sector during the nineties and in recent years. I will first review the most important socio-historical facts to provide a contextualization for the social and economic transformations that Argentina's agriculture sector went through during that period. My main focus will be on the period from the years of menemismo (1989-1999), to the economic crisis of 2001. Secondly, I will analyze the effects of the market-oriented model on the agriculture sector and I will briefly elaborate on the recent (2008) "agrarian crisis".

3.1 The nineties: the years of menemismo

3.1.1 Neoliberalism as economic strategy²⁶

In 1989 Carlos Saul Menem²⁷ took office as president of Argentina and began to enact a series of reforms designed to prepare Argentina for entrance into the world market. Menem opened the economy to foreign capital, and this period marked the beginning of an era of good relations with international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank

²⁶ The main focus of the chapter will be on Menem's economic strategy, mainly because the leaders of the movement that is analyzed in this thesis, argue that it was in reaction to Menem's economic model that the MML emerged. However, I acknowledge that I examine only one aspect of Menem's government.

²⁷ Menem has been considered one "paradigmatic case of 'neoliberal populism'" (Armony, 2001: 64). The traditional populism that used to be "essentially collectivist, corporatist, nationalist, and redistributionist" resurges with him, "paradoxically", in a neo-liberal context, and assumes what has been called a neo-populist character. In this new context, populism can be considered a "'superstructure' that facilitates the application and reduces societal resistance to costly market-oriented reforms" (Armony, 2001: 64). Rather than being considered as "philosophically opposed", the combination of neo-liberalism and this new form of populism, has to be considered as a political and economic strategy that exploits the gap between the aspirations of greatness of the country and its reality of "the country's failure to attain the prominence to which many believe it was predestined" (Armony, 2001: 73).

(WB). According to Teubal and Rodriguez (2001: 57), with Menem, the second era of neo-liberalism began, the first having been the one that took place during the years of the military junta (1976-1983). At the end of 1989 Menem's government passed two laws, known as the Economic Emergency Law and the State Reform Law, both of which allowed the government to deregulate the economy and to begin the privatization process of public-owned enterprises (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 56). On a macro level, the convertibility plan of 1991 and structural reforms such as privatization, deregulation (especially regarding labor), and the opening of markets to foreign trade and investment constituted the central axis of the governmental plan promoted by Minister of Finance Domingo Cavallo. The convertibility plan fixed by law the exchange rate of one Argentinian peso to one US dollar and decreed its full convertibility (no costs were associated with the exchange of dollars with pesos). It contributed to price stabilization, but also excluded the possibility of using devaluation as an element of economic policy and established strong limitations on national monetary policy.

The "achievement" of price stability created the conditions for the implementation of a harsh structural adjustment program, applied, according to Menem, "without anesthesia or a parachute" (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 42). Under his leadership Argentina implemented the most extensive economic reforms in the country's history. Some scholars have highlighted the radical rupture between Menem's policies and those of Peron's first mandate (1946-1952) when a pervasive welfare state was put in place; others have argued that during the nineties there was only an "exacerbation" of neoliberal policies and practices rather than a rupture with the accumulation model that had been implemented during the years of the military junta 1976-1983 (Armony, 2004; Diaz-Ronner, 2005; Giarracca and Teubal, 2001; Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001)

when the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model was abandoned and the “hegemony of financial activities over productive ones emerged” (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 66).

As a result of the Menem government’s economic policies and laws, Argentina’s external debt began to rise, and inequality and poverty rates increased. Argentina was also struggling with high rates of unemployment. The foreign control of major companies, technology, and market information created an economic structure in which small and medium-sized companies would have limited access to these economic tools, thereby making their competitiveness and participation in Argentina’s new market economy extremely difficult. In addition, Argentina did not implement welfare programs to protect its citizens from the distributional effects of economic reforms. Despite the support that such reforms enjoyed among the Argentinian elite, the poor and rural population began to protest the effects of these changes.

Argentina’s constitution allows, under exceptional circumstances, for the possibility of the executive power passing decrees, which have the status of laws, without the approval of the Congress. Many scholars have noted the unprecedented use of executive power to enact many of the economic reforms that allowed Menem’s administration to make decisions. While the previous (Alfonsín) administration used only eight “necessity and urgency” decrees, Menem passed over 398 decrees of “necessity and urgency” between 1989 and 1996 (Armony, 2004: 99). These executive and urgent decrees were used to enact the core of Menem’s economic reforms, leading many citizens to feel excluded from the decision-making process and from the benefits of those reforms (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001).

3.2 Socio-economic transformations in rural Argentina during the nineties

The agricultural sector has played an important role in Argentina's political, social, and economic history. In 2001 about 60 percent of exports were agricultural products (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001). Some scholars have highlighted a process of land concentration affecting the agriculture sector. According to Teubal and Rodriguez, between the 1969 and the 1988 censuses the number of farms of 200 hectares or less declined from 428,000 to 282,000, suggesting the disappearance of 146,000 small farms²⁸. In the 1988 census, although farms of more than one thousand hectares represented only 7.1 percent of all farms, they accounted for more than 75 percent of Argentina's cultivable land while farms of less than 200 hectares represented 7.7 percent of the cultivable land (2001: 95). The Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos – INDEC (National Statistics and Census Institute) estimated that between 1988 and 2002 in the Pampean region almost 60 thousand farms disappeared, that is 30 percent of the farms that had existed in 1988 (cited in Isla, 2003: 9). In some provinces, such as the province of Buenos Aires, the decline in the number of farms was even greater; in fact between 1988 and 2002, 33 percent of the farms disappeared.

The technological modernization of Argentinian agriculture was initiated by the first Peronist government (1946-55), and, since then it continued through the nineties. In these periods, in order to favor a rapid mechanization of the different sectors of agriculture and to increase agricultural productivity, loans at favorable interest rates were offered. The gradual improvement of agricultural technology favored a gradual specialization on specific crops such as cotton, sunflower, and from the late seventies to the present, soya. The introduction of new technology, from small tractors with limited working capacity to big tractors and harvesting

²⁸ I will use the expression small-medium farmer to include small and medium (less than 200-500 hectares, depending on the geographic area) producers, farm workers, agrarian producers (chacarero, productor agropecuario).

machines, drastically reduced the demand for labor. After a few years, surplus labor became a major problem since, to be economically viable, many farmers had to eliminate or drastically reduce the surplus of labor. This resulted in massive rural-urban migrations (Stolen 1996).

It is important to acknowledge the enormous socio-economic and geographical differences that exist among Argentina's regions and provinces. Traditionally, a distinction is made between the Pampean region, the fertile plain made up of the provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Cordoba, Entre Rios and La Pampa on the one hand, and the regional economies (Cuyo, the Northwest, the Northeast, Patagonia, etc.) on the other. The Pampean region produces 70 percent of the country's agricultural production and almost all of the wheat, soya and corn of the country are produced here (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001). The regional economies produce mostly industrial crops²⁹ including sugar cane, tobacco, yerba mate³⁰, cotton, wool, wine, fruits (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001; Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001). The technological modernization and transformations that occurred in the agriculture sector during the nineties had a different impact in different regions, and the impact also varied between producers and workers. The Pampean region was particularly "advantaged" (even if not homogeneously) by the increase of production of "commodities"³¹ such as grains, soya and other cereals that are almost entirely produced in this region (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 58). The two areas are differentiated not only by the type of production they engage in but also by the characteristics of the farms. While in the Pampean

29 Industrial crops are those crops that are cultivated to produce goods (other than food for consumption) to be used in industrial production.

30 Mate is an infusion that is made up with the dry leaves of a type of plant called yerba mate. Mate is traditionally drunk in many South American countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia.

31 The *Encyclopedia Britannica* online (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/128095/commodity-trade>), defines commodities (trade) as "raw or partly refined materials whose value mainly reflects the costs of finding, gathering, or harvesting them; they are traded for processing or incorporation into final goods. Examples include crude oil, cotton, rubber, grains, and metals and other minerals".

region, the farms tend to be larger and mechanized, in the regional economies the farms are more labor-intensive and sometimes characterized by low or zero capitalization (Diaz-Ronner, 2005; Giarracca and Teubal, 2001).

For the purpose of this study, given that the MML had been strongest in provinces located in the Pampean region, I will focus my attention mainly on this region, while acknowledging that there are important differences among regions and provinces, even within the Pampean region itself. The traditional organizational structure of agriculture in the Pampean region since the last decades of the nineteenth century is the *agricultura familiar capitalizada* (capitalized family agriculture). Ferro describes the main characteristics of this type of structure as follows: it produces both extensively and intensively; it is highly mechanized; it is sustained by and oriented to foreign markets; it is managed at the family level even though it contracts other temporary workers; the families usually have the status of owners; it is characterized by a rural middle class (such as farmers) who are mainly descendants of the European immigrants who have arrived in Argentina since the nineteenth century (Ferro, 2007: 8). In comparison with other Latin American countries, peasants in Argentina are less numerous and primarily located in some of the regional economies (for example in sugar cane production in Tucuman, cotton production in the Chaco, and Santiago de Estero), while the rural middle class of farmers that is present in the Pampean region is relatively more influential and numerous³².

³² However Archetti and Stolen suggest, this class of farmers, “does not have the same importance as it does in other ‘lands of recent settlement’ (Australia, Canada) or in highly industrialized ones” (as cited in Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 78).

Menem was elected to the presidency on a platform based on a “production and wage revolution”, and he promised that this platform would provide Argentina’s small and medium farmers with the economic support and policies needed to modernize their outdated technology and increase their efficiency. Menem, as Armony and Armony (2005: 99) suggest, was not the “the populist leader who distracts the masses with emotional rhetoric so as they do not ‘see’ the full extent and the consequences of his neo-liberal economic policies”. He constantly refers to those policies and uses discourses and ideas that emphasize the necessity of being “open”, “productive”, “competitive” to enhance a “revolución productiva” for Argentina to “take off” and “meet its destiny”. In this case the national myth of “Great Argentina”, of a country that is “exceptional” and that is destined to be a great country, a discourse that is “deeply rooted in the collective mind”, has represented the necessary ideological link to make Argentinians accept and pay the social costs associated with neo-liberalism as economic policy.

The majority of Argentina’s small and medium farms, even those in the fertile Pampean region, lacked the capital needed to modernize their systems of production. Given the availability of loans for the agriculture sector during the nineties, many small and medium farmers decided to enhance the competitiveness of their family enterprises, and by taking out loans from provincial and national banks, to modernize their farms. In most cases the farmers bought new tractors or mechanical planters. The change in the economic and political context during the nineties and a negative international conjuncture (the prices of exported agriculture goods in international markets fell) made it difficult for farmers to pay back their debts and, given that in many cases land had been used as collateral to obtain those loans, this put many farmers in a vulnerable financial position.

3.2.1 The impact of neoliberal policies on the agriculture sector

The October 1991 economic deregulation decree (n. 2284) mainly affected three sectors: domestic industry, external trade and capital markets (Isla, 2007). This decree established a number of measures that affected the agricultural sector. This reform resulted, in fact, in the deregulation of the economy as well as in the dismantling of the institutions that had regulated the sector for decades (such as agro-regulatory mechanisms and a restructuring of research institutes on agriculture) (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001). The main liberalizing measures³³ undertaken by the Menem administration that affected the agriculture sector included:

1. The convertibility plan
2. Elimination of most taxes and quota restrictions on exports and imports and the fiscal reform
3. Increased costs of production
4. Elimination of the agencies that historically had defended the interests of farmers and producers

The convertibility plan established a currency board³⁴ with a legal fixed exchange rate with the U.S. dollar (one peso-one dollar). According to this new policy any change in the exchange rate could be enacted only with new legislation, and the Argentinian *Banco Nación* could not issue any peso without full backing in US dollars. Moreover, the U.S. dollar was freely and fully

³³ It is important to acknowledge that these measures did not have a homogeneous impact on the different social classes and groups. Azcuy Amenghino argues that the Pampean region's socio-economic structure is highly "differentiated, contradictory and heterogeneous" (as cited in Isla, 2003: 3).

³⁴ A currency board is a monetary authority which is required to maintain a fixed exchange rate with a foreign currency.

convertible and after few months it became legal tender within Argentina (Isla, 2003: 3). A combination of this new monetary policy with the structural adjustment measures significantly affected the agricultural sector; the effects were particularly negative for small and medium farmers. In addition, during the first few years of the convertibility plan, the international price of wheat and other grains remained very low. At the end of the nineties the decline of prices intensified, and the growing over valuation of the peso negatively affected the profitability of the sector (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 75). On the one hand the plan favored the adoption of advanced imported technology (foreign transgenic seeds, fertilizers and machinery) which resulted in an increase in the production per hectare. On the other hand it negatively affected the local production of machinery and of agriculture products destined to internal markets, as Argentinian goods became relatively more expensive and less profitable than foreign goods. It became relatively more profitable for Argentinians to import some goods than to produce them in Argentina, even goods that were traditionally and easily produced in Argentina. According to the Confederación Intercooperativa Agropecuaria Limitada – CONINAGRO (Inter-cooperative agrarian confederation³⁵) the costs associated to the convertibility law could be compared to those of a tax on production of 40 percent (as cited by Isla, 2003: 4).

With regard to **the elimination of most taxes and quota restrictions** on exports and imports, it is important to highlight that the taxes on agriculture exports, called retenciones agropecuarias were eliminated during the nineties by the Menem administration, and this was perceived by farmers as having a positive effect. Isla explains that these taxes had always encountered resistance among producers, especially big ones, and that they were removed because it appeared to be against the basic principles of the market-oriented economy which Menem wanted to

³⁵ The federation of agrarian cooperatives.

establish in Argentina. By removing export taxes Menem expected to gain some support among agriculture producers and to favor international trade exchanges (Isla, 2003: 5). The overall effect of reducing regulatory mechanisms such as the above was the reduction of government's capacity to exert any sort of control or regulatory power (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001).

However **the national fiscal reform** seemed to go in the opposite direction. It introduced new direct (such as the minimum income tax) and indirect (such the 21 percent VAT) taxes. Although most taxes and quota restrictions on exports and imports (which mainly benefited large farmers) had been eliminated, the increase in other taxes, some of them even applied retroactively, had a particularly negative effect on the category of small and medium farmers. The value-added tax, introduced in 1990, increased progressively to its current level of 21 percent (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001). Eliminating the tax exemptions on low levels of profits also seriously affected small and medium farmers and an increase in some municipal taxes represented an additional burden for them (Isla, 2007).

At the same time, **the costs of production increased**, especially for small and medium farmers, largely as a result of the increase in the prices for public services that had been privatized during the decade, and in the costs of inputs. Both factors negatively affected the profitability of agricultural production and the rural family's quality of life (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 75). For example, many reforms related to the transportation sector. The privatization of the national oil company, Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales (YPF) caused a significant increase in the price of oil. In addition the management of main highways was also privatized and these private companies imposed high transit fees – previously there were no tolls on the highway. Both types

of privatization generated additional costs for users and contributed to the increase in transportation costs (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001; Isla, 2007).

Menem **dissolved a large number of agencies**, many of them created in the thirties, which had traditionally defended the interests of farmers: the National Meat Board, the National Grain Board, the National Sugar Board, and the Yerba Mate Board (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 74). The government also implemented budget cuts that affected a number of public institutions, in particular the National Institute of Agricultural Technology. The elimination of the National Grain Board, and of price supports and alternative channels for the marketing of cereals, left small and medium farmers unprotected towards large producers (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001; Isla, 2007).

These measures transformed the Argentinian agricultural sector into one of the world's most deregulated and open ones, thus rendering it extremely vulnerable to the cycles of the world economy (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 74). While the various strata of producers in each region and sectors of production were affected differently, in general small and medium farmers suffered the most. In conclusion, an over valued national currency associated with a negative international conjuncture, many new direct and indirect taxes that were introduced with the national fiscal reform, an increment of the costs of production, and the elimination of some of the most important regulatory agencies significantly reduced the profitability of the agricultural sector.

3.2.2 New credit policies: the issue of the debt and of interest rates

The relative stability in the general price level achieved by the convertibility plan favored the granting of bank loans to the agricultural sector. During the nineties there was an increase in credit availability for all productive sectors, including agriculture. The increase in credit availability resulted in a huge increase in the total debt of the sector. As Giarracca and Teubal affirm, “the siren song of modernization bewitched many producers into debt to purchase a tractor or replace agricultural machinery” (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001).

Teubal and Rodriguez maintain that the sector's debt was 1.9 billion pesos (equivalent to the same amount in dollars) in 1990 and 7.1 billion pesos in 1994. In 1996 the total debt for the agricultural sector amounted to 10 billion pesos. And the real interest rates for the post-hyperinflationary period (1989-1991) exceeded 20 percent annually, which were, on average, much higher interest rates than those available internationally (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 103-104). In addition, there were many other, more or less transparent, costs associated with bank loans such as those related to the commissions and service charges. As a result, Teubal and Rodriguez argue, financing became more profitable for the banks, but this situation was disadvantageous for those receiving credit. Small and medium farmers were, at this respect, in a weaker and more disadvantaged position, since the conditions that were applied to them were much worse than those applied to large farmers and land owners whose collateral was more solid. Another interesting aspect of this loan policy is that overdrawn accounts, notably the most

expensive form of debt, became one of the most important mechanisms for dispensing credit (Teubal and Rodriguez, 2001: 107).

CONINAGRO estimated a deficit of 2.95 billion in 1998-1999 for the agricultural sector. To this debt must be added the mortgages held by national and provincial banks. It is estimated that out of the approximately 26 million hectares planted between 1997 and 1998, about 12 million were mortgaged, the majority with the Banco Nación. The small and medium farmers were left totally unprotected by government policies and could not pay back the extremely high interest rates. According to Giarracca and Teubal, in December 1999 one in every four farmers was considered to be a “delinquent client” (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001).

3.2.3 Argentina and Soya: a new monoculture model, new conflicts

The most important technological innovation that has occurred in Argentina’s agriculture system since the beginning of the nineties was the adoption of transgenic or genetically modified varieties of seeds. The first important crop that was introduced was the glyphosate³⁶- resistant soybean, known as RR soybean. The advantages of this technological package are that it is relatively simple and it allows landowners to manage big amounts of land with only one herbicide and fewer land workers. These are the reasons why soya rapidly became one of the most important crops (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 72), mainly in the Pampean region. In 2005 Argentina was the world’s third largest soya producer after the US and Brazil, and the world’s second

³⁶ Glyphosate is an herbicide, used to kill weeds. Glyphosate was first sold by Monsanto with the trade name Roundup Ready (RR). Some crops, such as soy have been genetically modified to be resistant to it.

largest producer of transgenic crops. In 2005 Argentina produced more than 47 million tons of soya. More than 90 percent of Argentina's soya is exported (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 73).

Soil erosion and pollution, caused by pesticides and fertilizers, are among the side effects of the soya plantations, which have expanded exponentially. The situation is so severe that National Agro Tech Institute Studies predict that in 10 years 70 percent of Argentina's land will become desert. Economists worry that mono-crop production like soya for plant-based fuels and for food consumption will cause large increases in food prices and has the potential of leading to a food crisis. Argentinians do not eat soya, and the continuing decline in the production of meat, milk and vegetables makes Argentina highly dependent on international markets and vulnerable relative to the international price of soya³⁷.

3.2.4 Recent developments: the agrarian conflict

At the end of the nineties, when Menem's decade was over, Argentina faced one of the most severe crises in history. In December 2001 its economy collapsed, the then president de la Rúa resigned (1999-2001) and the country faced a period of high political instability, changing president five times in 2 weeks. In the period 1998-2002 the GDP had fallen almost twice as much as the decline experienced by the US in the thirties' Great Depression (IMF 2002, as cited in Armony and Armony, 2005: 46). When President Duhalde's government (2002-2003) publicly admitted that Argentina was in default and decided to devalue the Argentinian peso

³⁷ According to the 2002 census, 46 percent of soya is produced in farms of more than 1000 hectares, 41 percent in farms between 200 and 1000 hectares and only 6 percent in farms of less than 200 hectares. In contrast, the province of Santa Fe, very relevant for my study, the production of soya is mainly done by farmers who own less than 200 hectares and in the South of the province (Diaz-Ronner, 2005: 75).

relative to the US dollar, the inflation and popular discontent got even worst. According to the 2002 census, in that year more than half of the country was living below the poverty line.

Many farmers had contracted debts in dollars, and the devaluation meant an enormous increase of their debts in pesos. Soya contributed, however, to the rapid pay off of farmers' debts. International demand for soya had increased enormously and the prices for soya too. Since 2001 the profits generated by soya and other grains were so high that in 2002 president Duhalde re-introduced an export tax on agriculture products of 20 percent (Clarín, 30/03/2008) and in 2003 the then president Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007), increased the export tax to 35 percent as an “emergency measure” to revive the economy after the 2001 crisis.

The debate over soya has represented a major challenge also for president Cristina Fernandez³⁸ (2007-present), the first woman elected president of Argentina in 2007. The government proposed, and imposed by a presidential decree, the controversial “Resolución 125” that introduced the concept of “retenciones móviles”, a new sliding-scale taxation system for agricultural exports, based on international prices of agriculture products. When president Fernandez announced the proposed measure, the international price of soya would have caused an increase in levies on soya exports to 44 percent from 35 percent. Farmers became angry and went on strike demanding that the president's decision to increase the export tax on soya be removed. For more than 120 days the national farmers' strike blocked main commercial routes and managed to paralyze food deliveries. The aim of the Fernandez' administration was to use the “commodity boom” to redistribute wealth by raising funds for social investments: they wanted to reduce domestic prices by limiting (controlling) the production of export crops like

³⁸ Partido Peronista, wife of former president Nestor Kirchner.

soya and encouraging the production of wheat and corn. Fernandez also raised concerns over the environmental effects of soya and the dangers and sustainability of mono-crop agriculture. While the congress approved the proposal, the senate rejected it and the government was forced to revoke the Resolución 125.

Against this backdrop, I will now turn to my case study of the MML, which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The emergence of the Movimiento Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha - MML

In this chapter I will first describe the context for the emergence of the MML, the organizational structure it developed, the goals, political view, strategy and future perspectives for the movement. I will then provide the profiles of the ten MML leaders who participated to this study³⁹.

The MML is an agrarian movement entirely constituted of and led by agrarian women. This is a group made up mainly of wives, widows or daughters of highly indebted farmers, although some women are farmers themselves, who, because of hyperinflation and “unfair” interest rates, were at risk of losing their land following loan foreclosures⁴⁰. A few women belonged through solidarity. The MML developed and implemented very original strategies of civil disobedience to avoid foreclosures on their lands, such as singing the national anthem, praying during the auctions, and planting Argentinian flags on lands owned by multinational companies (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 38). They succeeded in preventing hundreds of foreclosures and attracted the attention and sympathy of the media and of people. By assuming the standpoint of “mothers, wives, and housekeepers”, these women, mainly housewives with no previous political or employment experience, created the first national movement of rural women. Today the MML is

³⁹ All the translations from Spanish to English, in this and subsequent chapters, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

⁴⁰ In simple terms, a foreclosure is the legal term used when a lender or other lien holder (a bank in this case) takes a property (that was used as pledged collateral/security for a debt) away from the owner (i.e. by the involuntary sale of the property, it transfers the title of the real property as a means of paying off the debt) because the owner-borrower defaulted on payments. Bank's legal ability to do this varies, it's either a judicial or non judicial, and they can do it because those provisions are in the security/loan agreement that the owner-borrower signed (<http://thesaurus.reference.com/search?q=foreclose>).

a leading actor in the opposition to governmental public policies in the agricultural sector, has proposed new political measures for the sector, and established links with other rural groups, emerging as a permanent and legitimate voice of the Argentinian agrarian sector, which has been traditionally a male realm (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 143).

Since their first action in September 1995, MML women have contributed to bringing public, media and political attention to key issues for small and medium farmers but also for the agriculture sector as a whole. Among the MML core topics are the issue of the debt and, what they consider to be its fair re-calculation and re-financing; land concentration issues and the potential disappearance of Argentina's small and medium size farmers; the "foreignization" of lands and national sovereignty (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 144). Most recently they have started debating about new policies for the agriculture sector, such as an increase of price subsidies to agricultural products or new environmental regulations.

All the ten MML leaders who participated in the interviews had a long family history related to farming and agriculture, their grandparents having settled in Argentina after immigrating from Europe (Italy, Spain, France, and Germany) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their grandparents overcame many difficulties in order to acquire the lands to farm, and this represents one of the main components in MML "collective identity". A very recurrent theme in MML leaders' narratives about the formation of the movement was the "symbolic" reference to the immigration experience and their families' struggles to obtain ownership of land.

Most MML leaders joined in the movement in the mid nineties when most of them were in their forties. Today most of the MML leaders I interviewed (and MML women in general) are in their fifties and sixties. Nine of them have children. Each of these women's families owns less than 200 hectares and self-identifies as being "middle class". Some of the leaders had previous experiences of participation (in university-based movements, political parties, Church associations) but confirmed that for the majority of the women who participated in the MML, their participation was their first experience in the public and political arena, and that most women participated in it as mothers and housewives in order to protect their property and their "way of living" from the dangers represented by the auctions.

Even though some MML leaders had completed post-secondary education and had professional careers, the interviewees said that the majority of MML members had only completed elementary or secondary school. Formal education is considered to be an instrument for social mobility and it is highly valued by middle class farmers and producers of European origin in the small cities and villages within rural areas (Giarracca and Teubal, 2001: 157). The majority of the sons and daughters of MML leaders had, in fact, gone to university, and only a few of them had jobs related to agriculture. The main occupation of most MML leaders was housewife, with a variety of degrees of involvement in farming activities, as well as in the nature of the tasks they performed in the farm (accounting tasks, planting or harvesting). Therefore, many of these women did not have much knowledge about political or economic issues before joining in the movement. The difficult economic situation they were experiencing and the participation in the movement itself forced many of them to learn about issues related to politics and the economy.

4.1 The Structure of the movement

The MML is a nation-wide social movement which plays an important role in many of Argentina's provinces, such as Santa Fé, La Pampa, and Buenos Aires. There was consensus among the women interviewed in this study that the MML is a "democratic, horizontal and pluralist" movement, deeply "political" but independent from political parties. Democratic and horizontal refer to the fact that all women are considered to be equal within the movement: they can all participate and all are invited to express their views. It is pluralist because it is composed of women with very heterogeneous backgrounds in terms of political party affiliation or educational background. At the same time, it is a political movement because its main goal is a redefinition of the policies that interest the agriculture sector.

The structure of the MML as a social movement is very simple. The MML has a national president and executive committee composed of representatives from every community or area where the movement exists⁴¹. The MML organizes meetings at the national, provincial, and community level but it does not have a rigid meeting schedule. The members meet frequently when getting together is critical to the goals of the movement. For example they used to meet at least weekly during the nineties and after the 2001 crisis when property auctions occurred on a regular basis. More recently, in March 2008 when one part of the movement participated in the agrarian conflict with the Fernandez's government about the Resolución 125, MML women met on a daily basis because the lock out (road blockades) lasted 129 days and every day there were

⁴¹ In 2001 there were sixty six communities in the twelve provinces where the MML existed (Pineiro, 2004: 3). Unfortunately, I do not have more recent information on this issue.

several meetings and many debates about the strike. Today there are very few auctions in the Pampean region and MML members meet every two or three months. However MML leaders are regularly in contact with each other via telephone, and discuss every decision the MML needs to take. The MML has never received any sort of public or private funding as a social movement. MML activities are funded by their members, with occasional contributions from universities or other associations.

The movement does not have headquarters. The current president of the MML describes the MML as an “artisanal” type of movement and admits that this is something MML women need to improve if they want to grow (Interview with Ana Galmarini). MML women communicate among themselves via telephone but having a physical space, an office, would be important to coordinate activities, to keep documentation and files, or simply to have their own space to get together.

The movement does not have formal ties with other agrarian organizations such as FAA, with political leaders such as members of Argentina’s Congress, or with Argentina’s political parties. The MML believes that during the nineties and the 2001 crisis, the FAA did not protect small and medium farmers, and that political parties failed to realize their platform promises once they were elected to office. For example, although the main goal of the FAA was to “develop sustainable agricultural practices”, the organization did not get involved in the debt controversy, nor did it assist farmers to avoid the foreclosures on their lands, which threatened the very survival of many small and medium farmers. Furthermore, even though many of the husbands of women involved in the MML were members of FAA and had close ties with that organization,

for women there was not much space to participate within the FAA. While the MML was not tied in any way to the FAA, at times MML women worked with Chacareros Federados, which is an internal oppositional group within FAA that addresses the issue of the debt and its fairness.

MML women believe that, although many candidates campaign on platforms promising policy changes and new ideas to improve life in rural areas, after the elections these promises are never realized. Despite the many attempts by political parties to attract the support of small and medium farmers and of the MML, MML women have decided to work outside established political parties because, in their opinion, there is no political party which represents the interests of small and medium farmers. When the MML first began, it had some connection with the FREPASO (Frente País Solidario) and ARI (Argentina para una Republica de Iguales) parties. However, the relationship between the MML and these political parties was short-lived because many women left the MML because of these political affiliations. MML women think that the movement has to be independent of political parties, because MML women can make politics “from the movement” rather than from any particular political party.

The MML at the community, provincial, and national levels has developed many different types of networks and contacts. At the national level, they are in contact with human rights organizations such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and other women’s organizations, with associations of unemployed such as the Piquetero Movement and the Autoconvocados (self-assembled), and with academic institutions or research groups such as the Instituto Gino Germani or the Universidad de Rosario, etc. MML leaders had participated to international meetings in a variety of contexts and countries (Ecuador, Germany, Italy). The MML also has

been in contact with other national or international networks of associations which have had experience with acts of civil disobedience: at the national level there is the Chacareros Federados association and, outside Argentina they have contacts with the Mexican Barzón, an association of debtors, and with the Brazilian Movimento Sem Terra (Landless Workers' Movement, MST) (Giarraca and Teubal, 2001: 51).

The interviews with the leaders suggested a picture that does not allow me to elaborate much on this aspect. It seems that there has not been much follow-up with these networks, in part because of the lack of resources that has limited MML travel or investment in other means of communications, but also because of other issues. Bidaseca (2004) for example suggests that the “encounters” between movements of people who want to keep their lands and those who are struggling for the right on it, are problematic because of the conflicts that arise between these two radically different standpoints.

MML leaders did mention in the interviews that they had gone to Mexico and that Barzón's members from Mexico had travelled to Argentina, but after those specific encounters, they did not meet again, nor have they developed a common agenda. It seems that networking has not gone beyond this travelling to specific places for ad hoc events such as conferences or seminars. It also seems that the most fruitful networks MML women have developed have been those with academia and the media, which could in part explain the attention the MML has received.

4.2 The Goals and political position of the MML

4.2.1 Stop the auctions, re-financing and re-calculation of debts: Pan, trabajo, remates al carajo⁴²!

“En el 1995 surgimos como expresión concreta de confrontación con la política vigente y la consumación final de la misma, que es el remate de la tierra de los pequeños chacareros”⁴³ (MML, 2005: 2). When the movement was formed, the first objective of MML women was to avoid foreclosures on the lands of the families of MML women and to assist the families whose lands were at risk. From the initial demand for the stopping of foreclosures, the political content of MML demands has increased over the years, and the issue of the debt has become a political and ethical one (Piñeiro, 2004: 5). According to MML leaders the main causes of the auctions were the debts and the high interest rates many families were asked to pay. MML women recognize the existence of those debts and at the same time, they question the fairness of them, asking for a re-calculation of the interest, a modification in the terms of the mortgage contract (i.e. by extending the number of years of the mortgage) and a grace period to pay off the debts for small and medium farmers.

4.2.2 Fighting against land concentration: Para un millón de chacras⁴⁴

⁴² Bread, work, auctions to hell!

⁴³ “In 1995 we emerged in opposition to the policy of the government whose final goal is to make the small farmers disappear”.

⁴⁴ For a million of small farms.

Another goal of the MML is to prevent the purchase of land by foreigners and its concentration in general. The MML argues that the presence of large, wealthy foreign landowners makes it difficult for small and medium farmers to compete. In 1992, Sub Secretary of the Agricultural Policy Ingaramo publicly affirmed that there were 200 thousand small-medium farmers that had to disappear because they were not compatible with the government's economic model (MML, 2005: 2). The 2002 Argentinian Agriculture Census revealed that 105 thousand small-medium farms had disappeared since 1988 and that more than fifty percent of Argentinian territory (52.8%) was owned by five to six thousand large land owners (MML, 2005: 3). The women of the MML think that government policies, from the 1976 military regime to the Kirchner government, have favored the interests of large land owners, most of whom are foreign multinational companies (MML, 2005: 2-4). The fact that Argentinian land is owned by foreign investors raises many issues about national sovereignty. In addition, from a local perspective, since these investors do not live in the area, they do not invest in local infrastructure, nor do they participate in the local cultural development. Furthermore, competition between large land owners, and medium and small farmers is unfair, with many small and medium farmers being forced to either sell their land or rent it to large national and multinational companies or consortia. MML women think that a law limiting the number of hectares that can be owned by foreign investors and large land owners would be a critical step towards making competition fairer for the small and medium farmers.

4.2.3 New goals: policies for the agriculture sector

In recent years, the economic situation has improved somewhat in many rural areas, particularly in the Pampean region, especially because the international prices for exported soya was very high during the period from 2003 to 2008. Also, the number of auctions has decreased⁴⁵. They said, however, that the situation in the regional economies was radically different: in some provinces 70 percent of the farmers still had debts which threatened their properties. MML women in the Pampean region took the end of the auctions as an opportunity to “see what more they could do” and the MML is currently working on other issues such as education and health care in Argentina’s rural areas. In addition, they have become more involved in getting new policies adopted for the agriculture sector: they are asking for agricultural subsidies and lobbying for price supports for small and medium farmers.

The women argue that they know what the sector needs in order to maintain a structure of small-medium farms. They ask for agricultural subsidies and price supports for small-medium farmers, arguing that the European Union, the United States, and Japan invest millions of dollars each year to “protect and sustain their farmers and livestock owners”. More recently, the MML Santa Fé, in opposition to the current Fernandez government, has expressed the opposition of the MML to the fluctuation in the tax rate on exports of agriculture goods depending on the level of international prices (Resolución 125) which was proposed by the current government in March 2008. Lucy de Cornelis was “invited” by the MML in May 2008 “to take a leave” from the presidency because she was working for the government and the majority of MML women oppose the policies the current government is implementing in the agriculture sector. The main issue they contest is that the Resolución 125, which was discussed in chapter 3, does not differentiate among farmers of different sizes (nor among different levels of production). The

⁴⁵ The last auction MML leaders could recall took place in 2004.

MML leaders argue that producing 300 tons of soya is qualitatively different from producing 30 thousand tons of soya.

4.3 Repertoire of collective action of the MML

The MML developed a number of creative forms of collective action, the most important being the presence of “as many women as possible” when auctions were occurring. MML women organized their participation at the actions, through a telephone network which they call Red Solidaria (Solidarity Network). What happens basically is that when a notice of foreclosure is delivered, “one woman calls another, and she calls another” and so on, trying to notify as many members as possible. They have used the telephone since the movement’s inception, and are very adept at using this communication medium.

The MML is characterized by its practices of civil disobedience, which do not include the use of violence or weapons (except for some knitting needles). During the early stages of the movement, women would pray but, as the movement grew, they realized that praying was not an inclusive practice, since some MML women had either other religious beliefs or more secular views. They therefore decided to start singing the national anthem, since that “includes all Argentinians”. When this strategy would not work they would take pictures of “potential buyers” to inhibit them (Pineiro, 2004: 4). They also tried helping farmers who were having financial problems to avoid foreclosure by offering legal counsel (by volunteer lawyers, such as Ana María Riveiro, one of the leaders who was interviewed for this study) and by collecting supporting information. Other strategies included bringing petitions to the national parliament or

discussing specific cases with agrarian institutions, politicians, and/or banks to see what they could do to help the farmers.

MML women used to attract media and scholarly attention by organizing symbolic events or marches. They, in fact, participated in marches and protests in many places; and, their participation in the march on International Women's Day in 1996 attracted a lot of attention: roughly eight hundred MML and other women marched from the Congress to the *Casa Rosada*, Argentina's presidential palace, to bring a petition presenting their demands to the then president Menem. The MML organized many symbolic events to raise consciousness about the issue of the debt and the potential elimination of many small and medium farmers and producers. The "hugging" at the Banco Nación⁴⁶ in 1998 to protest against the proposed privatization of the bank, was one of these events. Concretely, the privatization of the Banco Nación would have meant the loss of any possibility of re-calculating and re-financing the debts, and thus a potential loss of the twelve million hectares which were mortgaged through the bank. According to MML leaders, those lands would have been sold to foreign investors at very low prices. That eventuality highlighted the importance of having Argentina's financial institutions under Argentinian control, because foreign investors are only interested in making profits and would not act in the best interests of the citizens. Another activity organized by MML members was the planting of Argentina's flags on lands owned by foreigners as a symbol of protest against the foreignization of Argentinian land.

The media has also been used by the MML to promote its goals. Radio stations, newspapers both large and small, and television news outlets are examples of media outlets that the women

⁴⁶ MML and other women and men literally (by using their own bodies) hugged the National Bank building.

contact in their effort to draw attention to the movement and its present activities. Publicity through these communication outlets provides the MML with the opportunity to raise awareness about the movement both within and outside of Argentina. Lucy de Cornelis “founded” the MML by using a radio station. Since then, every time they plan to demonstrate at a foreclosure, they try to send out a radio message, using the many radio stations that are available to the movement free of charge, mostly at the local level. Despite the small zone and audiences reached by each of these radio stations, they remain important to the MML because they facilitate the growth of a network of solidarity between the MML and the small farmers in the countryside of Argentina.

More recently one part of the MML joined the “agrarian protest”. As already noted, many MML women from all over the country, but mainly from the Pampean region, participated in the pickets and road blockades against the Resolución 125.

4.4 Moving forward

Although the MML has become an influential political actor within Argentinian agrarian institutions, many factors could undermine the sustainability and visibility of the movement, including the MML’s loose structure, its limited financial resources, and the large distances between and within provinces (with the concomitant financial burden this represents for MML women).

Financial resources remain a critical issue when discussing the movement's future. Devising ways in which they can generate the funds needed to travel to the movement's events remains an important challenge for its members. Demographics of MML membership are also a concern. When the movement began, the average age of its participants was 45 years; however, many of the women are now approaching 60 years of age. Attracting young women to the movement is difficult because many of them leave the rural areas to pursue a university education or a career in Argentina's urban areas. These trends represent a problem for the movement's future.

Changes in Argentina's economy have also altered the economic situation in rural areas, as well as the goals of the MML. For example, small and medium farmers who export soya are no longer in the precarious position they were during the nineties when the MML emerged. "The soya boom was one of the pillars of the national economy's recovery" (Bianchi, as cited by Chejter 2005: 12). From 2002 to 2003, small Argentinian farmers produced 70 million tons of agricultural products, 35 million of which were soya goods, amounting to roughly half of all the crops harvested (Bianchi, as cited by Chejter, 2005: 10). Despite the role that soya has played in boosting Argentina's economic growth, particularly in rural areas, the MML declares being critical of the soya boom, but most of its leaders argue that, unfortunately, soya is the only economically viable alternative for small-medium farmers.

In March 2008 the MML split, because Lucy de Cornelis, then president and founder of the MML, had started working for the Fernandez government and one large part of the MML was in strong opposition to the government. Lucy decided to leave the presidency of the MML and Ana

Galmarini, who seemed to better represent the “new” goals of the MML, was elected national president.

In the next section I will provide a brief introduction to each participant to this thesis in order to provide a better picture of each interviewee.

4.5 Participant profiles⁴⁷

Sara Coll is a fifty seven year old woman from Casilda, in the province of Santa Fé, who joined the MML in 1997 because her family’s farm business was experiencing many difficulties due to the debts and the interest rates. Her family had worked on and later owned those lands for three generations. Her grandparents moved to Argentina from Spain and Croatia in 1920. She and her husband (who wrote a book about the depression of men during the crisis) are both psychiatrists who worked and lived in the city of Rosario. In 1997 they moved back to the farm. At that point her husband joined FAA and she joined the MML. She has three daughters. All went to university, and after they graduated, they left home. None of them have jobs related to agriculture, and Sara lives in the farm with only her husband. Her family is a middle class one that owns 100 hectares, has livestock and cultivates commodities, mainly soya. Her family has the most up to date technology. During the last years (2003-2008) they managed to pay off all their debts. Sara already had some experience of participation mainly at the university during the 1976 military regime. Today Sara remains highly committed to the movement. She is the representative for her community and promotes new policies for the agriculture sector and also other issues such as health and education in rural areas, and dedicates efforts to eradicating violence against women.

⁴⁷ Participants appear in the order they were interviewed.

Norma de Astorquia is a fifty seven year old woman who joined the MML in 1995 because she was “encouraged” to do so by other members of her community, Mafiel, in the province of Santa Fé. She had always been a very active member of the community. Although her family had debts at the time, they had never been at risk of losing the farm or house. Her family has Italian and Spanish origins. Although her husband has the main responsibility for the farm, she plays a quite active role on it (takes care of livestock, planting and harvesting). In fact she says she performs almost the same activities her husband does. She completed elementary school and has always worked as a housewife. In 2002 she was admitted to a school program and finished secondary school in three years rather than five. She plans to go to university as soon as she can; she would like to take political science. Norma has three daughters and one son. Three of them have already completed their university studies, and one is still enrolled at university. None of them work the land. Norma says they are a “normal” middle class family. They own 60 hectares of land, one small part of which they rent out, and on the rest they have livestock and soya. They rent the technology they need because they cannot afford to buy it for the small amount of land they own. Before joining the MML Norma had participated on the boards of her children’s school, and when she was young, she had participated in the Clubes A. Norma continues to be very active as a representative of the MML for her community. Norma is convinced that the MML needs to fight for a new agriculture policy for the sector. She was very actively involved, as MML representative, in the agrarian conflict against the government in 2008.

Emma Martin is fifty six years old and joined the movement in 1995 “to defend the family patrimony”. They had many debts and did not know what to do. Her family has German, Italian

and Spanish origins. She completed secondary studies and always worked as a housewife. Her husband is the one who takes care of the farm. She has two sons and one daughter. One son has a degree in business administration and used to work in the farm, taking care of the commercialization of products, but he had to find another job since the business was not profitable enough to support all of them (parents and son's family). The daughter is a housewife and the youngest son is a mechanic. Emma defines her family as middle class "*venida a menos*". They own 20 hectares in the "green belt" of Rosario and cultivate fruits and vegetables. Before joining the MML Emma had participated in school boards and Church-related activities. Emma is the treasurer of the movement in the province of Santa Fé and is highly committed to the agrarian opposition to the government. She is also involved in other solidarity activities that are not strictly linked to the MML such as the creation of a blood donors' database to raise consciousness about the importance of donating blood.

Ana Galmarini is a fifty nine year old woman who joined the MML at its inception in 1995 because her family's debts were putting them at risk of foreclosure, and because she has a family history of agrarian activism (mainly in FAA) and active participation in the socialist party. During the nineties they rented the land to a consortium in order to pay off the debts, and thus successfully avoided foreclosure. Her family has French, Italian and Spanish origins. Ana used to work as teacher and on the farm, her husband is veterinarian and they have three grown up sons. Her husband used to take care of the farm, but due to his health problems, now the sons do. Ana says they are a middle class family. They own 200 hectares and they cultivate soya and rent the technology they need. Ana has had many roles in the MML: vice-president and president in the province of Santa Fé, vice-president at the national level and in 2008, after the "split" of the

movement, she was elected president. In this role she is leading the MML opposition to the government.

Lucy de Cornelis is a sixty three year old woman from Winifreda, in the province of La Pampa. She founded the MML in 1995 to save her property from foreclosure. Her family had taken out a loan in order to buy a new tractor and, within one month they owed the bank the value of ten tractors. That same year her husband died, but they managed to avoid foreclosure on the land. Lucy had completed elementary school and always worked as a housewife and as an administrative assistant. She does not work the land; instead she finds someone else to plant and do the harvest, and she only takes a percentage. Her family has Italian, French, Spanish and Arabic origins. She has four daughters and six grandchildren. Lucy lives in the farm with one of her grandsons who is studying agronomy at university. She says they are middle class and own 200 hectares⁴⁸. She usually plants wheat but not soya since she believes that soya is destroying Argentinian soil⁴⁹. She was first elected president of La Pampa and then became national president of the MML, a position that she held until May 2008 when internal dissention due to her employment with the government led her to “voluntarily” and “temporarily” withdraw from the national presidency of the MML. She did not have any previous experience of participation before founding the MML. Today Lucy is still working for the government, trying to contribute to the development of new policies for the sector. She has recently created a social movement with young agronomists and veterinarians to promote healthy organic food, in order to ensure basic needs are met and to raise awareness about food security issues.

⁴⁸ She explains that the value of the land in La Pampa is much lower than in other provinces.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the only leader who has not been able to pay off the debts, is also the only one who does not cultivate soya.

Gladis Morriconi is a fifty nine year old woman who joined the MML in 1996 because her family was highly indebted. They had debts both with the *Banco Nación* and the provincial bank. Her family is of Italian background and has a long tradition in agriculture. Gladis was a housewife until 2001 when her husband died. Since then she has been taking care of the management of the farm and the administrative aspects of their agriculture business. Gladis completed elementary school. Both her daughters have already finished university and live in other provinces, while her one son is still studying and lives with her. None of them have work related to agriculture. Gladis says they are a middle class family. They own 53 hectares and cultivate commodities: corn, wheat and soya. They do not own any sort of technology because the farm is too small, but are members of a consortium of thirteen farmers and producers that rents tractors and other technology when its members need it. The only previous experience of participation she had was on the board of her children's school. Gladis is one of the two MML representatives of the community of Totorá. Highly committed to the MML and its new goals, she supports the position one part of the MML has recently taken relative to the agrarian conflict against the Fernandez government.

Irma Fernandez has been a member of the MML since its inception. She joined the MML because of her family's debts and also because she had always participated in what she thought was important. Her family has Italian and Spanish origins. She was a nurse and housewife. Her husband was an agronomist and had assisted a professor of rural sociology at university. Since her husband died in 2001, her main occupation had been to maintain and administer what is left of her husband's land. She has four children, all of whom went to university. Only one of them started a career related to agriculture, agronomy, but then he left his studies; he is the only one

who is still living with her. She thinks they are a middle class family. They own 95 hectares. While Irma does take care of the management of the farm business, the land is rented out. Those who rent the land cultivate soya and corn, and have dairy farm. She had had some previous political experience, mainly in the socialist party, and she had also participated in other social movements before she joined in the MML. Today she has put aside all the other political activities and concentrates on her activities in the MML as representative of the community of Totorá. Irma is very committed to the MML, fully supportive of the positions of the MML against the Fernández government. While she does not work as nurse anymore, she works in the area of health and education, mainly giving seminars on sexual education in schools.

Ana María Riveiro is a sixty year old woman from Rosario, in the province of Santa Fé, who joined the MML in 1995 because her family had a long history in agriculture and, being a lawyer, also offered legal counsel to MML women and farmers who were at risk of losing lands or houses. One part of her family never got to own land and the other part had lost everything because of debt-related complications in the sixties. Thus she grew up being exposed to and experiencing the difficulties of farmers, “first to own a piece of land and later to keep it during military regimes, hyper-inflation and lastly neo-liberalism”. She is not married and does not have children. Hers is both a personal and political battle. She has played many roles within the movement: secretary both at the provincial and national levels, lawyer of the movement. Today she is still one of the main representatives for the city of Rosario and remains highly committed against the Resolución 125. In recent years, Ana María has also joined other social movements and networks such as those that are working to raise awareness about national sovereignty issues,

and she is proud that she was on the picket line against the government for one hundred and twenty seven days.

Olga is a fifty eight year old woman from Santa Rosa, in the province of La Pampa, who joined the MML in 1995 in solidarity with farmers. The family does not own land, they are agriculture contractors, who rent out top level farm equipment and sell farming work and services. Although they had debts, their house and machinery were never at risk. She was always a housewife and she never got a job due to having a physical disability. Only the husband works in agriculture. They have one daughter and one son. The daughter moved to another province while the son lives in a separate house in the family property. She had no previous experience of participation. A key MML representative, she remains very close to Lucy.

Sandra is a forty seven year old woman from Olavarría, in the province of Buenos Aires, who joined the MML in 1998 because of debt-related problems. She is a housewife. Her family has a farm and her husband works the land and hires extra labor and technology when needed. They have two sons, both still in university. They help their father occasionally, especially during harvest period. The family has 200 hectares and cultivates soya, corn and wheat. They are a middle class family. Sandra's family never supported her activities in the MML. Before joining in the MML she did not have any other experience of participation. She left the MML in 2004, but re-joined it again in 2008 because of the agrarian conflict and became one of the most active members against the Resolución 125.

Chapter 5: The Politicization of MML women's everyday lives

In this chapter I will address the first research question of this study: to understand how, and to what extent, participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives.

The politicization of everyday life refers to the practices that have contributed to breaking down the boundary between public and private. This division has historically relegated women's practices to the sphere of the private, and therefore of nature, and has obscured the social nature of private spaces, denying women's roles as political subjects. In this chapter I will explore how and under what circumstances, MML women's lives got politicized, I will look in particular at MML leaders' political competence, political awareness, politicization of the private, political participation and relation to politics, changes in the objectives in the MML, and changes in the motivations for participating.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore MML women's activism and begin to identify any sort of change concerning MML women's relationship with and position *vis-à-vis* politics. Freire defines conscientization or critical consciousness⁵⁰ as "an awakening of consciousness involving an accurate awareness of one's place in nature, time, and society" (Freire, 1970: 34).

The emphasis in Freire's definition is on the "process" of transformation that involves reflection and awareness that is critical of the power relations of society, and also on action that seeks to

⁵⁰ I prefer using the term awareness, because to me it seems to have a less individualistic connotation than conscientization, but in essence I use them inter-changeably.

achieve social transformation and social justice. By exploring the concepts mentioned above, as a narrative guide for this part of the analysis I will use Freire's definition of conscientization. According to him, the process of conscientization involves three different stages: first a person starts posing questions about issues, dimensions or structures of her life that are perceived as unequal, secondly there is a stage of problematizing those issues (in this case, the realization that what they are doing is related to politics, and that the MML is a political movement, that the policies for the agriculture sector need to be changed), and lastly, when necessary, the person decides to transform or do something about those inequalities (I will look at the changes in MML leaders' motivations to participate and in the definition of MML objectives) (Freire, 1970: 34).

5.1 The personal that becomes political

The idea that there are political dimensions to private spheres such as marriage, the kitchen, and the bedroom is not new. In the case of MML women, the issue of debts, with their associated responsibilities, including the "necessity" of "defending the family patrimony" ceased to be a personal issue, a situation to be solved "in silence", and became a political one. Over the years the political content of these rural women's lives increased enormously opening up a space for change. From perceiving politics as alien they come to frame the public sphere as a positive place where their experiences as women acquire larger meaning, and they possibly became active political subjects.

5.2 Posing questions about issues, dimensions or structures that are perceived as unequal

As already noted, many feminist analyses of popular, grassroots and rural women's movements highlight how the political dimension has often been considered to be "on the other side" and that what is important to women is their private, family life.

The nature of gender relations in rural Argentina tends to confine women to the home. The participants said that the majority of MML women, before their involvement to the MML, were unfamiliar with economic and political issues. They also explained to me that, prior to their involvement in the movement, many women were not involved in the decision-making processes in the family, and that many were even uninformed about the financial situation of their families. In this sense, the movement represented an opportunity to start forming an understanding about economic and political issues and to conquer a new space in the house and the family, a sort of appropriation of what would become a legitimate space.

All the leaders I interviewed had very similar family histories. They all said they were daughters or granddaughters of those immigrants who arrived to Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century, who rented a small piece of land for many years and who, after many sacrifices and much hard work, managed themselves to become owners of the lands (mainly during the 1940-1950 decades of Peron's presidency).

...nuestros campos vienen de varias generaciones, sobretodo de inmigrantes que vinieron [en el] 1920, mi marido en el 1860 de Urquiza. En esos momentos nuestros abuelos, vinieron de Europa, Galicia, Croazia, se instalaron como colonos trabajadores agrarios y despues de ser colonos por mucho tiempo pudieron comprarse la tierra, la tierra tiene un peso muy importante, sobretodo en la parte masculina (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵¹.

⁵¹ Our lands have been ours for many generations; they come especially from immigrants who came [in] 1920, for my husband in 1860, from Urquiza. Then our grandparents arrived from Europe, Galicia, Croatia, as agrarian

Most of the participants argued that what made them get involved in the MML was that they were at risk losing of the family's land, house, or agricultural machinery. They symbolically connected those lands to their parents' and grandparents' efforts and hard work (even though the lands they were at risk losing were their husbands' lands, since women, especially this generation of women, had access to the land mainly through marriage and not through inheritance⁵²). What had happened was that most families took out a loan to buy technology, mainly imported, such as latest generation of tractors, but also to increase the number of livestock. They did so to be competitive and efficient, but as small-medium farmers doing so made them vulnerable. Credit was easily available to farmers and producers, even to those with a poor credit history, providing they used their property as collateral. It was not uncommon to use a property whose value was 700 thousand dollars as collateral for a loan of less than 100 thousand dollars. The result was that in the mid-nineties most farmers had debts with both national and provincial banks and because of the high interest rates they were being charged, they could not pay them back. At that point, when it became impossible to re-finance the debts, they risked losing everything. Sara explains very eloquently what was the situation in the prairies:

La situación concreta del campo es la siguiente... Que pasa en los 90? Hay una consigna que nuestros países emergentes: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, los pequeños y medianos productores tienen que ser más eficientes, sacamos créditos al principio, nosotros compramos 400 vacas, 100 mil dólares, bajaron los precios

workers, and after being agrarian workers for a long time, they managed to buy the land. The land is very important, especially for men.

⁵² Argentinian law gives daughters the same inheritance rights as sons, and by law the father and the mother, if they are married, have joint property. The law does not specify in detail how inheritance should be distributed. In practice, however, women have historically been excluded from inheritance of land. During the first decades of the 20th century mechanisms like sales from father to sons were used to evade the law (Stolen 1996, 2004).

internacionales, resulto difícil pagarlos y los intereses eran bastante altos, teníamos un interés de 12-13% (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵³.

Many women first got to know about the family's vulnerable financial situation when auctioneers showed up at their houses to "check" the condition of the house and also to prepare a list of the goods they could eventually confiscate, as Lucy narrates:

On May 27, 1995 the auctioneer came to my house to see its condition... I knew that things were going bad even though my husband hid the problem, because he would work, work, and each day he would make more effort, and we did not know anything about it. When the auctioneer left, I began to pack my daughter's paintings, the lamps. I wanted to keep what belonged to the family, its history. When my husband came home I did not tell him about it, and that night I was alone, alone, alone and I asked myself: What should I do? (Fernandez, 2003).

The first question these women asked themselves was if and what they could do to "save the farms". Saving the farms meant saving their house, their work and, saving "the family and its history". Lucy gave a religious explanation of this and argued that it was God who told her what she was supposed to do. For other women, it was a more secular argument that convinced them that they could do something: Lucy's radio appeal. That night Lucy decided to go the local radio station and make an appeal to all those women who were in her situation, to help her. The outcome of the appeal was a surprise for her; she would have never imagined that so many people were having financial problems because of the credit-interest-debt trap. The idea of not being alone, of being able to share with others not just their experiences but also the risks that are associated with any type of action of resistance seems to be one of the key factors that explained the fast spread of the movement all over Argentina. One of the respondents said this:

⁵³ The concrete situation in the prairies is the following... What happens in the nineties? There is the instruction that in our emerging countries - Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia - small-medium farmers have to be more efficient. At the beginning we took out loans, we bought 400 cows, 100 thousand dollars, international prices decreased, it was difficult to pay them back, and interest rates were quite high, we had interest rates of 12-13%.

...uno se va avivando digamos... y vos fijate y lo que pasa allá... lo que pasa acá... Realmente viste el contacto con otra gente que está pasando por la misma situación te da un montón de perspectivas y además yo creo que te da también la mirada de que bueno como no soy la única o el único a la que me pasa, alguna solución tiene que haber para esto (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵⁴.

The concrete possibility of having their lands auctioned because of their debts was their first experience about how much the political could be personal. They realized that politics was not something remote and abstract, but something having a tangible, immediate and personal effect. All the women I interviewed pointed to the fact that initially they did not realize that they were at risk of losing their lands because of “political issues”. They were not aware that politics could have such an impact on their lives. As the following quote explains, they were convinced that their bad economic situation was due to their inability to produce, to be efficient.

Estábamos viviendo una situación muy crítica, un modelo político económico que nos iba absorbiendo, al cual nosotros no teníamos la interpretación de que esa era una cosa creada políticamente y donde creíamos que era nuestra incapacidad de producir que nos llevaba a esta situación económica tan crítica (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁵⁵.

They had started perceiving their situation as being unjust. Many felt it was not fair to lose the work of entire generations, simply because they wanted to improve the technology of their farms.

La situación era angustiante, no alcanzaba para vivir, teníamos una renta de 600 pesos por mes... no alcanzaba, no se podían cubrir los gastos sobretodo los gastos

⁵⁴ ...and you start waking up...look what is happening there... what is happening here. Really the contact with other people who are experiencing the same situation as yours, gives you many new perspectives, also you think: since I am not the only one in this situation, there has to be a solution to this problem.

⁵⁵ We were experiencing a very difficult situation, a political model that was absorbing us, and we were not interpreting it as something that had been created politically. We thought that it was our inability to produce that was putting us in that difficult economic situation.

del prestamo, lo que nos llevo a las mujeres a armar el movimiento fue el endeudamiento, y nosotras nos dimos cuentas que los maridos estaban equivocados y que no habia forma de pagarlo, y que los intereses que estabamos pagando eran imposibles (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵⁶.

5.3 Problematizing those issues

All the women I interviewed talked about the role and responsibility of “the neoliberal model” for their economic situation. The MML was created when the effects of the neoliberal model were becoming tangible for many women; the MML represented an opportunity to debate and problematize issues that were outside of the topic-areas to which these women usually related. By participating in the MML, many women became aware of the context of their situation and marginalization within the neo-liberal framework that was being implemented in Argentina during the nineties.

At one point, the MML was in contact with a Mexican organization of debtors called El Barzón, another movement of “victims” of neo-liberalism. MML women were invited to Mexico, and representatives from El Barzón travelled to La Pampa to meet them and work together (Giarracca, 2000: 146). It is difficult to understand what the real impact of those encounters was. When I asked about the MML’s contacts, many of my respondents recalled the name and the slogan of the movement: “Debo, no niego, pago lo justo”⁵⁷. While El Barzón was always mentioned in the interviews, my respondents did not elaborate much about the impact of this connection. Like the El Barzón slogan, MML women said they recognize that debts have to be

56 The situation was depressing, it was not enough to live, we had an income of 600 pesos a month. It was not enough; we could not even cover the expenses of the mortgage. What made us get involved were the debts. We [women] realized that our husbands were wrong and that there was no way to pay them back, and that the interests we were paying were impossible.

57 “I owe, I do not deny it, I will pay what is fair”.

repaid, what they question is the amount they are asked to pay, and this is what they think it is unjust. The following quote makes a point that is very interesting in relation to this:

debemos, deber no es una verguena, porque por ahi es una verguena lo que nos estan cobrando (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵⁸.

Many Argentinians seem to have a sort of hate-love relationship with debts. On the one hand, to have debts is considered to be a shame, a tangible proof that you do not know how to manage your affairs. On the other hand, it is culturally accepted (and very common) to use credit as a way to consume more and, in periods of economic downturn, it becomes a powerful instrument to maintain life style at the pre-crisis level. Many women mentioned that a very difficult aspect of the crisis was that they could not have the same standard of living they used to have before of the crisis.

Por el endeudamiento empezamos a tener dificultades, no se podía pagar el crédito, hubo que bajar el nivel de vida, hubo que... viste se ponía difícil, entonces se produjo un cimbronazo familiar, entonces bueno se dividió la sociedad familiar y con mi marido decidimos que para salvar el campo había que irse a vivir al campo, entonces ahí nos pusimos en contacto con la federación agraria mi marido y yo con las mujeres en lucha (Interview with Sara Coll)⁵⁹.

By participating in the MML, they started to make connections between their immediate problems and broader political issues. All of them talked about state policy being against them. They perceived a political conspiracy whose aim was to make small and medium farmers

⁵⁸ We owe, to owe is not a shame, and perhaps the shame are the interest they are charging us.

⁵⁹ Because of the debts we started having difficulties, we could not pay them back, we had to lower our life style... Things were getting difficult, so there was a family crisis, the family business was divided. We decided that if we wanted to save the farm, we had to move to live there, and there we got in contact with the FAA, my husband, and with the MML, I.

disappear in order to benefit foreign multinational companies or large Argentinian land owners, very interested in buying or renting rich and fertile lands on which to cultivate soya. This perception of reality is somewhat typical of Argentinians, it is not uncommon for them “to blame” politicians, politics, the economic model (itself somewhat connected to politics), and the political class for the situations Argentinians are experiencing. It is not uncommon to blame abstract categories of public enemies including at different historical periods “the military, the financial oligarchy, the ‘political class’” (Armony and Armony, 2004: 44).

lo que pasa es que a traves de reconocer el endeudameinto que era una cosa que estaba afuera de nuestras posibilidades, que habia sido algo injusto, que realmente los intereses habian sido subalios, lo que aparece es una politica de estado que nos queria hacer desaparecer, de eso nos dimos y nos dabamos cuenta, en todo este trayecto. Desde el 1995 en adelante, nosotras estabamos tomando consciencia que no era una casualidad lo del endeudamiento de los pequenos y medianos productores (Interview with Sara Coll)⁶⁰.

MML leaders rarely seemed to problematize their own involvement, when they criticize the issue of debt and easy access to credit; they never discuss their own responsibility for taking out loans. The most they acknowledge is that they have to pay but they want to pay a “fair” amount and only when they can. Many of my respondents, whose middle class families lived in the Pampean region, can be considered among those who benefitted from the convertibility model, and who “thanks to the dollar-to-peso parity, consumed imported goods, and obtained improved services...” (Armony and Armony, 2004: 37). However, MML leaders never talked about their own possible implication in the economic downturn, or about issues related to the responsibility of Argentinians for Argentina’s decline.

⁶⁰What happens is that by recognizing the debts, that we could not cope with them, that they were unfair, that the interest rates were absurd, what emerges is a state policy that wanted to make us disappear. All along this trajectory we became more and more aware of that. Since 1995 we realized that it could not be a coincidence the issue of the small-medium farmers’ debts.

The two quotes below express how these women framed their problems and the responsibility for them very well. The first woman elaborates on the fact that what is right for people and society, sometimes can be wrong for justice, or for the “rule of law” that would give rise to foreclosure on the lands. MML women, in this sense, were “claiming a pre-eminence for legitimacy over legality when, in their view, the bond of trust between the citizenry and those who hold power had been broken” (Armony, 2004). This issue of questioning the legitimacy of justice gives an idea of the paradoxical situation they were experiencing.

... estábamos sabiendo que lo que ellas habían hecho era una cosa que si bien para la justicia podía ser legal era ilegal para la sociedad... pero no es justo que una persona que recibió un campo por herencia de su abuelo, de su bisabuelo que vino con lo puesto al país, después por un modelo económico trasgresor y indecente, tenga que perder su propiedad, esas son vivencias, se entienden porque uno las lleva adentro (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁶¹.

Similarly, Ana Galmarini elaborates on the issue of responsibility for the situation. She explains that while men had a hard time understanding that they were not personally responsible for what was happening; women understood more rapidly that it was a political issue.

Les costó mucho entender que no era un problema de ellos [hombres] sino que era un problema político, y creo que esto lo entendimos más rápido las mujeres, entendíamos que lo que nos estaba pasando no era porque nuestros maridos eran unos inútiles... sino que había una política que bien bien delimitada (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁶².

⁶¹ We realized that what they had done was something that could be legal for the judicial system, but it was not legal for society... It is not fair that a person who has inherited a piece of land from the grandfather, who had come with nothing to our country, is at risk of losing it because of an economic model that is dishonest and offensive. These are lived experiences, you can understand them only if you have them inside you.

⁶² It was hard for them [men] to understand that it was not because of them, but that it was a political problem, and I think that women understood it faster, we understood that what was happening to us it was not because our husbands' incapacity... but it was because there was a well defined state policy.

All the participants to the study expressed negativity toward a perceived common enemy, the “political class”, and in a broader perspective, the “ruling class”, which also includes business leaders and other “privileged groups”. When it came to explaining the responsibility for the bad economic situation, they all agreed that it was the politicians' fault, not a particular leader or specific party or ideology. The political parties, the main agrarian institutions, and, particularly, the politicians, were perceived as having failed to respond to rural people’s needs and demands.

All the participants had an immediate negative response to the word ‘politics’ and they rarely categorized themselves as members of a particular class, political group, or ideological tendency. All the leaders I interviewed, however, defined the MML a political movement. While they all said that the MML was a-partidico (a-party), in the sense that the movement does not have any formal connection with political parties, they seemed to be aware of the fact that what they are doing falls in the domain of politics. One group within the MML, which includes the majority of MML members, is, in fact, presently (2008-2009) opposing the central government because they want a new policy for the agriculture sector.

Evidentemente que nos hemos cultivado políticamente todas. Porque este no es un movimiento de partidos políticos pero indudablemente es un movimiento político, porque indudablemente que hacemos política no partidaria. Y claro, porque desde que uno este dice la política agropecuaria de este gobierno está en contra del pequeño y mediano productor y lo que hace es facilitar y favorecer la concentración de la tierra, porque la gente que tiene una pequeña cantidad de tierra no puede sobrevivir, estamos haciendo política... estamos opinando y diciendo que tiene que haber otra forma de hacer política, tiene que haber otras normativas para que esto cambie (Interview with Sara Coll)⁶³.

⁶³ Obviously we all have grown politically. Because this is not a movement of political parties, but without any doubt this is a political movement, because without any doubt we do politics, although not the politics of political parties. Of course, when we say that the agrarian policy of the government is against small-medium farmers and it favors land concentration, because people who own a small piece of land cannot survive, we are doing politics... we are saying our opinion and we are saying that there has to be a different way of doing politics, there have to be other regulations if we want things to change.

As was mentioned earlier, many participants recalled negative experiences that the MML, as movement, had with the political parties FREPASO (Frente País Solidario) and ARI (Argentina para una Republica de Iguales). They argued that, after that experience, they preferred to keep political parties outside the movement. Only a few MML women are members of political parties, because most think they can be more politically effective from the movement than by being part of a political party. They also pointed to the fact that political parties wanted to have them in their lists in order to benefit from the legitimacy and respectability of the MML.

Y después si obviamente cuando vos ya tenes una participación gremial es como que todo el mundo te quiere, todo el mundo te necesita, bueno por ahí ese es uno de los cuidados que uno tiene que tener para no involucrar al movimiento en las cuestiones que no se merece no es cierto, porque creo que el movimiento políticamente debe tener una posición y una ubicación por lo que es, no para mejorar la rentabilidad de un partido político (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁶⁴.

The relationship between women's movements and the political system has been seen in the literature primarily as an issue of autonomy from political parties, from the state, and from other agrarian institutions. Autonomy is costly, in the sense that independent women's groups will be less likely to receive funding or financial aid from political parties or other agrarian institutions. For MML women the issue of autonomy has to do also with the issue of freedom. This was very well articulated in the next quote:

Nos cuesta mucho hacer, nos cuesta mucho la iniciación por falta de fondos, por supuesto nosotros no tenemos nada que nos ayude, sino que todo lo tenemos que hacer por nuestros propios medios y yo siempre digo que nuestra organización es bastante artesanal... no estamos bien organizadas, eso no, realmente es un

⁶⁴ And after, when you already have an experience of participation in agrarian institutions, everybody wants you, everybody needs you, you have to be careful not to involve the movement in things that are not worth it. I think the movement has to have a political position for what it is and not to favor any political party.

movimiento que se mantiene por los principios de las mujeres, nos falta un poco mas de organicidad pero también a la vez eso nos ha dado mucha libertad de no tener dependencia económica de nadie (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁶⁵.

However, autonomy alone seems to be a weak strategy and may result in the MML not getting the resources it needs to implement its political agenda. Furthermore, autonomy may conflict with some of the needs of democracy, which for instance requires a party system in order to have both representation and accountability.

5.4 Doing something about those inequalities

In this section, I will focus on the changes that occurred in the motivations for participation of MML leaders and in the objectives of the movement. I am particularly interested in how these women “mapped their political terrain”, but also in the changes that occurred in terms of their being stimulated to develop ideas with a more explicit political content. Both the objectives and motivations for participating have changed over the years; they are now more politically explicit. An important shift has occurred from immediate and personal demands concerning the potential foreclosure on their lands to more explicitly political content such as demanding new policies for the agriculture sector. The situation for many debtors seems to have improved; many owners, from this particular geographical area, have managed to either re-finance or pay off their debts, fixing most land-related problems. Some MML leaders think that the situation for small and medium farmers has improved because of the changed government policies.

⁶⁵ It is very hard for us to take the initiative because of the lack of funds, we do not have anything to help us financially, all we do, we have to do it with our own means, I always say that ours is an artisanal organization... we are not very well organized, the movement is sustained by the principles of the women, but, at the same time, not being economically dependent from anyone has given us a lot of freedom.

The majority, however, think that auctions have only been stopped by the government in order to gain political support (Interview with Sara Coll). They do not think there has been any change in policies for the sector. They argue that they have only been making good profits because of the favourable economic conjuncture, which has been characterized by high prices for commodities such as soya.

Los que producimos para la exportación, tuvimos años de buena rentabilidad, pero no por cambio una política agraria del gobierno nacional, eso no cambió absolutamente nada, fue solo una cuestión coyuntural, los buenos precios internacionales, hicieron que nuestros campos, lo que nosotros producimos, que es trigo, maíz, soja eran rentables (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁶⁶.

All respondents pointed to the fact that they started participating because they were at risk of losing their lands but, after years of being involved in the movement, they now want many other things.

Discutimos permanentemente la línea para... un millón de chacras, precio mínimo y sostén, queremos créditos, queremos esta una reforma agraria. Es decir porque ahora ya no estamos con el paro de los remates, ahora queremos toda una serie de cosas, no es cierto, queremos tierra para los jóvenes, queremos tierra para los originarios, y eso no lo podemos conseguir nosotros por nuestra voluntad, tiene que ser a través de una política (Interview with Sara Coll)⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Those among us who produce for export, have had years of good profits, but not because of any changes in the agrarian policy of the national government, which did not change at all. It was mainly due to a conjuncture: good international prices meant that our lands, what we produce, that is wheat, corn, and soya were profitable.

⁶⁷ We are always discussing the strategy... for one million small farms, agriculture subsidies and price supports, we want credits, we want an agrarian reform; now we no longer try to avoid foreclosure, now we want a number of things, we want land for young people, we want land for First Nations, and we cannot obtain these things only with our will, it has to be through a policy.

The quote above expresses two interesting points. First we learn that MML women no longer only want to avoid foreclosure, stop auctions, or re-finance their debts. They also want land for young people, and for First Nations' communities. Thus their objectives have broadened and relate to others beyond their immediate family. The second interesting point is the articulation that things do not change only because of our will but also as a result of changes in policies. The women seem to have understood that the solutions they seek will never occur at the individual level; they need, instead, to fight for collective solutions.

Another objective of the MML is to prevent the concentration of land ownership and the purchase of land by foreigners. Concerning the issue of the concentration of the land, the main argument that emerged was that the presence of large farms makes it difficult for small-medium farmers to be competitive.

En esa época empieza la concentración de la tierra... para ese nuevo modelo neoliberal en la Argentina, el campo era rentable solamente para los que tenían, los que trabajaban en gran escala... para los pequeños y medianos productores, era imposible tener rentabilidad para el pedacito de campo que teníamos (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁶⁸.

As a result, small-medium farmers are often “forced” to sell or rent their lands to foreign multinational companies or pools de siembra (ad hoc planting and harvesting consortia), causing an increase in the land that is controlled by large land owners or foreign multinational

⁶⁸ At the time the concentration of land started, according to the Argentinian neo-liberal model, land was profitable only for those who had a lot of it, for those who worked the land at large scale... for small-medium farmers, it was impossible to make profits from the small piece of land we had.

companies. All the respondents mentioned the disappearance of 105,000 small and medium farmers who did not fit into the large scale farm model.

En esa epoca desaparecieron mas de 100 mil productores chicos, ellos habian dicho que habian 200 mil que tenian que desaparecer, gracias a las luchas 100 mil productores chicos quedamos en las chacras, alquilando nuestros campos, a lo mejor dejamos de ser productores porque teniamos que darle los campos a los pools de siembra (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁶⁹.

Concerning the purchase of lands by foreigners, the problem seems to be that, since they do not live in the small rural communities, all the benefits of the investments go elsewhere. One of the interviewees explained that *latifundia* are not compatible with the prosperity of the local community.

... donde está concentrado, donde hay latifundio en el norte de Santa Fé, donde hay campos que tiene 12 mil, 13 mil, 14 mil, 15 mil hectáreas, no se gasta la plata en la zona, porque vienen y son dueños de otro lado, y la mayoría de las veces son extranjeros, entonces no se gasta la plata en la zona. La prosperidad esta únicamente cuando la gente pertenece a las pequeñas comunidades... por ejemplo mejorando las casas, mejorando los colegios” (Interview with Sara Coll)⁷⁰.

This is why MML women favor “un millón de chacras”⁷¹ instead of few thousand large farms, and hope for policies that would limit the concentration of land and the possibility for foreigners to buy land and other natural resources in Argentina. To promote awareness on this issue, in 2003 MML women organized another symbolic event, a symbolic “take over” of a foreign

⁶⁹ At that time more than 100,000 small farmers disappeared. They had said that 200,000 had to disappear, but thanks to our struggle 100,000 small farmers remained on our farms. Even if to do so we had to rent out our lands, we had to stop producing ourselves and give the lands to ad hoc planting and harvesting consortia.

⁷⁰ ... where there is latifundia, in the North of Santa Fé, where there are farms of 12, 13, 14, 15 thousand hectares, money is not spent in the area, because the owners come from other places, and most of them are foreigners, so money is not spent the area. There is prosperity only when owners are from the small communities... for example improving the houses, improving the schools...

⁷¹ One million small farms.

latifundio in Pergamino (MML, 2005: 5). MML women are convinced that national sovereignty is involved here too.

La defensa de nuestras chacras se transformo rápidamente en la defensa de nuestra tierra [Argentina] toda, entendiendo que la patria grande se levanta sobre la base de la soberanía nacional... (MML, 2005)⁷².

The impression I had when talking to these women was that they were well informed about their situation, problems and the possible solutions to those problems. MML leaders are now also very concerned with international politics, and tend to connect their perception of women's unequal positions in society to other social inequalities. They appear to be very knowledgeable about a wide range of topics, from food security to the environment. As one of them said:

Ya no podemos mirar el horizonte únicamente desde el punto de vista de las mujeres agropecuarias en lucha, entramos en la mirada de lo que está pasando en la sociedad... una cosa te va llevando a la otra, y uno ha perdido la inocencia, Anabel, una de las cosas que pasan cuando vos te integras en el movimiento es que vos perdés la inocencia... porque yo creo que mirar más allá de tu ombligo, te hace crecer (Interview with Sara Coll)⁷³.

Other issues that the MML has been debating more recently include a "fair" federalism for Argentina and the abolition of VAT tax for basic consumption goods. Most of these women live and produce in one of the most fertile regions of Argentina. The demand for bio-combustibles has increased enormously over recent years, and most of the soya that is produced in Argentina

⁷² The defense of our farms rapidly became the defense of all our [Argentinian] soil, by assuming that the strong nation is built on national sovereignty.

⁷³ We can no longer look at the horizon, only from the point of view of the women of the MML, we have assumed the perspective of what is going on in the society... one thing leads you to the other, and one starts losing the innocence, Anabel, one of the things that happen when you join in the movement, is that you lose innocence... because I think that looking beyond your expectations makes you grow.

(the third most important producer of soya worldwide) is produced in this region. The fiscal contribution of the region to the central government is important. MML leaders think the main problem is that it is not fair that resources which are managed by the central government in Buenos Aires never return to them but are spent elsewhere, in poorer provinces. MML leaders think this is not fair because the resources should return to the areas where they have been produced. In their opinion, richer provinces, which contribute more to the GDP, should receive higher compensations from the central government than poorer ones, which contribute less. Also, they question the fact that luxury goods are taxed the same way as essential goods, such as milk or flour.

Otro tema del que estamos hablando que es el federalismo... o sea los recursos tienen que volver a las zonas de donde se producen. El estado nacional tiene que darle a las zonas donde no se produce riqueza le tiene que dar lo que corresponde (Interview with Sara Coll)⁷⁴.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the politicization of MML women's everyday life. I focused on the changes that occurred over fourteen years of activism in the relationship between MML women and politics. After more than fourteen years of activism in the MML, the lives of its leaders have been transformed in at least three ways: first, the respondents said that before joining the movement they were not aware of the connections between politics and their personal lives. By participating they began to see the connections between their immediate concerns and broader political issues. As a result, they seem now to be in a better position to see

⁷⁴ Another theme we have been debating is federalism... that is that the resources have to go back to the areas where they have been produced. The national state has to compensate those areas that do not produce wealth; the state should give them what is appropriate.

and understand the connections that exist between their personal and immediate interests and objectives, and complex political issues related, for example, to globalization. All of them were politically competent and able to elaborate, for instance, on the implications for small and medium farmers of adopting and implementing neo-liberal economic policies. Second, today they are well aware that what they are doing is politics. They all defined the MML as a political movement, but make a distinction between politics and political parties, and stress the importance of the autonomy of the movement. Lastly, the objectives and motivations for participating have changed over the years: they are more politically explicit now.

MML leaders' experience of activism has opened a space for the redefinition of women's political engagement and participation, making it possible for women to assume leadership roles and social responsibilities. Over the years, the political content of these women's lives has increased enormously, opening up a space for change.

Chapter 6: Challenging constraints on women's roles and lives

In this chapter I will address the second research question of this thesis: what are the effects of women's participation in the MML on the socially constructed representations of gender roles and on the social relations of gender in the Pampean region. We know that an increase in participation does not necessarily represent a challenge to traditional or "typically" feminine or masculine gender roles (Feijoo and Gogna 1990, Feijoo and Nari 1994). In assessing the effects of the increase in women's participation in the public sphere, I pay attention to MML women's discourses, strategies, motivations and roles.

In this analysis gender refers to "the behavior and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of being born either female or male. Whereas sex is a biological term based on one's individual reproductive organs and genes, gender is a psychological and cultural term" (Thiernen, 2000: 156). According to Stolen, the notions of gender and of gender relations do not "simply reflect or elaborate upon biological 'givens'", but they are largely explained by social and cultural processes (Stolen, 1991: 162). It is useful, for the purpose of this study, to distinguish between two main components of the notion of gender. The first one refers to men's and women's active roles in society; to what women and men do and how they behave. The second is related to ideas about maleness and femaleness, to the cultural ideas and interpretations of gender differences (Stolen, 1991: 162).

Prior to the analysis, however, I will review some of the main aspects of gender relations in rural Argentina. Then the first part of the analysis, “Going out of the domestic space”, will focus on the ways MML women challenged certain constraints on their roles and lives (what women and men do and how they behave). By analyzing what they do and how they behave, it is possible to see how they challenged some of the expectations of their husbands and families, and succeeded to create a new women’s space. The second part of the analysis, “Deconstructing femininity”, focuses on what MML women (and their husbands) are or should be, that is to say, on the cultural ideas and interpretations of gender differences.

6.1 Gender relations in rural Argentina

There are few studies about gender relations in this particular geographic area, but the scholars who have worked on it seem to agree on the highly gendered nature of the Pampean farm. This alludes to the fact that men and women in this region have historically had different access to and control over material resources such as land, technology, and income, and to differences in terms of time, decision-making and responsibilities (Felitti, 1999; Stolen, 1991, 1996). Also, culturally, men and women are believed to have different skills and knowledge, with labor largely divided into male and female tasks. Gender differences are overall supported by a set of values and ideas based on the association of men with public domains and of women with domestic domains (Stolen, 1996: 391).

Most farms in this region are run by a nuclear family with work organized along gender lines. In the “typical farm” it is the husband’s duty to ensure the material well-being of his family. The husband is considered to be the head of his household (*cabeza de familia*). This is why “he is the

one who has access to the land, who cultivates it, and generally sells harvest's products". Domestic work and child care are women's responsibilities; the role of women in agriculture is usually considered as secondary and only rarely it is women's main responsibility. Stolen summarizes as follows the way her informants, in a small village in the Argentinian prairies, described marital relations: "Atender y ser mantenida/mantener y ser atendido" (To attend and be maintained/to maintain and be attended). This system of relations is supported by a shared set of values and ideas based on the association of men with public domains and of women with domestic domains (Stolen, 1991: 163).

Stolen argues that, even if the household is headed by the husband who "makes all the decisions related to agricultural activities, marketing of products and the use of incomes" (Stolen, 1991: 163), women's role in the family and community is important, in particular "through the raising of children, which is their exclusive responsibility, through religious activities, women being the most devoted Catholics, and through gossip, which is a major mechanism of social control at the community level". She notes also that overall both men and women agree on the content of this division of roles (Stolen, 1996:390).

One of the most important qualities for the ideal woman in the Pampean region, is the quality of *Ser casera* (to be of the home) (Stolen 1996, 2004). According to Stolen, this notion has various connotations and for the purpose of this study it is important to review them here. *Ser casera* but also *ser familiara* (to be of the family) refers to a woman's ability as a mother, wife, and housewife, which are seen as the principal attributes of womanhood. The reason why women tend to stay home is that a woman who takes care of the family properly will not have the time to

leave the house and do other things. In addition, Stolen maintains that staying home is something that also has to do with the moral qualities of a woman. If a woman stays home she will not be “exposed to carnal temptations threatening her virginity or chastity, which are also pivotal female qualities” (Stolen, 1996: 392).

6.2 Going out of the domestic space

In order to understand what it meant for MML women to leave the domestic space, it is important to understand that before these women joined the MML, for many of them the domestic space was the only legitimate space for women. The association of women with the domestic sphere is related to the very conceptualization of womanhood and it is shared by both women and men (Cloquell, 2007; Stolen, 1996, 2004). Women, in fact, are essentially associated to mothering, child rearing, and domestic work. Stolen explains that those women who frequently leave the farm are gossiped about in the community because they are considered bad mothers and housewives. Their sexual morality may also be at stake (Stolen, 1996: 398).

Stolen’s studies were conducted mainly during the nineties in the Northern area of the province of Santa Fé. The gender system of relations MML women lived in can be considered to be similar to the one Stolen describes. The quote below describes rural women as seen by the president of the movement.

la mujer del campo es muy sumisa, muy de estar en la cocina y no participar en las decisiones de como llevar adelante una chacra, una familia, esto es el hombre. En el campo es muy atrasada la situación, es terrible. Yo me acuerdo cuando empezamos en el movimiento, que habia compañeras que vivian en el campo, que

tenian 4 hijos, que tenian tambo, que tenian que repartir la leche y no tenian lavaropa, por ejemplo, y no es que no tenian para comprar un lavaropa, porque el marido, a lo mejor, se cambiaba el auto a fin de año... si habia un peso se destinaba para algo de la producción de la chacra, pero nunca pensando que esa mujer tenia que lavar a mano para 6 personas... (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁷⁵.

Another thing that emerged when I was interviewing MML leaders was that it was very difficult for them even to leave their home to attend meetings or auctions. Most, however, described their condition as leaders of the movement as somewhat different from the situation of the majority of MML women. Some of the leaders, in fact, have had previous experiences of activism, especially the two women who had completed university. Others claimed to have “unusually” cooperative or “special” families and husbands. All of them agreed that most women had difficulties with their families, especially at the beginning, when “everything was still very confused” (Emma Martin) or when it was necessary to leave the house in the middle of the night and travel to other provinces to stop an auction or to speak to authorities in Buenos Aires.

... a muchas compañeras, con estructuras a lo mejor más patriarcales de familia, les ha costado y les sigue costando mucho la participación (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)⁷⁶.

yo si quieres tengo mas participación gremial porque mi marido, mis hijos estan en las organizaciones gremiales del campo, pero muchas mujeres no tenian idea de lo que era participar en la toma de decisiones de este tipo de luchas, como decir, estamos por perder la chacra, ¿Qué hacemos? Vamos a parar los remates, por que es que así empezó la lucha nuestra parando los remates (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁷⁷.

⁷⁵ Rural women are very passive, they tend to stay in the kitchen, and not to be involved in the decision-making process related to the farm or the family, that is something men take care of. In the countryside the situation is very behind the times. When we first started the movement, I remember that there were members who lived in a farm, had four children, had a dairy farm, had to deliver the milk, and did not have a washing machine. Maybe the husband would change his car at the end of the year... if there was any money, it was used for the farm without thinking that the woman had to hand wash clothes for six people.

⁷⁶ Participating has been, and still is very hard for many MML women who have more patriarchal family structures.

⁷⁷ I have more experience of participation in agrarian institutions because my husband and my sons are involved in the agrarian organizations of the countryside, but many women had no idea about what it was to take part in the decision-making process of this type of struggle. How to explain it: we are about to lose our farm, so what do we do? Let's go to stop the auctions, because this is the way our struggle to stop the auctions started.

yo contaba con el apoyo de mi marido y hemos tenido otras compañeras que no, que cuando tenían que ir al remate se habían peleado con el marido... (Interview with Sara Coll)⁷⁸.

Distances in Argentina are such that to go to a meeting, one leaves the house for many hours, or even the whole day, making it difficult to do everyday activities such as picking up children at school, preparing the meals or working on the farm. At the same time, the fact that most MML women were housewives and did not have a paid job made it easier for them to participate; it would have been even more difficult to combine rigid work schedules with participation in the movement. For example, many MML women took part in the agrarian strike against the taxes on exports of agricultural goods in March 2008: the strike and picketing lasted 129 days.

It is important to acknowledge also that the women who were more actively involved in the MML and have become its leaders were probably those with fewer material constraints: they were older, with adolescent children and the availability of money to travel and sometimes to pay for other women to travel too. This last aspect I think is very important; MML leaders explained to me that they never received funding from any source. The women who travelled were those who could afford to pay for it. For them to leave the house also implied a good organization of their schedules and finding somebody to do those things they were not able to do. Sons and daughters might substitute them in their farm activities, while daughters might help in the organization of the meetings, or phone calls, and neighbors might pick up children at school.

⁷⁸ I had the support of my husband and we have colleagues who did not have it, who had to fight with their husband in order to go to the auction...

Bueno un despelote realmente, sobretodo los primeros años, yo te puedo decir que conte con el 100% de apoyo de mi familia y de mi marido sobretodo... colaboraron muchísimo... fue muy agitada la vida... Pero si, fue de no cocinar, te llamaban a la noche y te decían: mirá nos tenemos que juntar porque hay un remate mañana (Interview with Sara Coll)⁷⁹.

Today most MML leaders live alone with their husbands or are widows. The adolescent children of fourteen years ago have now grown up and formed their own families. Today, solutions for their absence are somewhat different. For example, one participant told me that when her husband comes back home and he can see from outside that lights are turned off in the house, he would know she had left with Lucy, and goes directly to the restaurant for his dinner.

The MML helped these women fight for their space, develop new strategies in order to be taken into account and become actively involved in the decision-making process. They started to appreciate the value of what they were doing and what their role in the house and family was.

lo del movimiento a las mujeres las ayudó mucho a pelear más por su lugar, esta bien el marido se va a trabajar el campo pero ella se queda en la casa, tiene que administrar la miseria que había en esa época, ver la depresión y la rabia del marido... y encima no era tenida en cuenta para nada (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸⁰.

The struggles about leaving the house and their home-related responsibilities ended, to some extent, when MML women started achieving some concrete results, when there was a tangible “proof” that what they were doing outside their houses was not something bad, and was for the benefit of the family. When the husbands saw that the MML women were stopping many

⁷⁹ Well, really it was chaotic, especially during the first years. I can say I could count on the total support of my family, of my husband in particular... They helped a lot... But it was about not preparing meals, about being called during the night because there was an auction the next day.

⁸⁰ The movement helped women to fight for their space. OK, the husband goes out to work the land, but she stays in the house to administer the scarce resources that were available in those times, to see the depression and frustration of the husband... and yet, despite her contribution, she was not taken into account at all.

auctions, and had managed to have many debts refinanced, they started agreeing to and, in some cases, even encouraging their wives' participation. Some of the participants also noticed a change in their neighbors' attitudes towards them: while initially the neighbors seemed to question what MML women were doing, later they would commend it.

Era tan grande la crisis que los maridos empezaron a apoyar de a poco que las mujeres participen. Cuando veían que había logros, que hemos parado muchos remates, que habíamos logrado refinanciar deudas con el Banco Nación, ok bueno vayan participen ustedes también (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸¹

There have been important changes in the everyday lives of these women. They became able to leave their houses for new legitimate reasons; they created new spaces for themselves personally and also for themselves as women. The quote below describes what the participation in the MML meant for one of its leaders.

Yo siempre digo que para mi el movimiento fue como mi lugar en el mundo, es un lugar desde donde te identificas, desde donde yo soy esto, de donde un poco le das sentido a la vida, tenés afectos, cariños, gente, recuerdos... tiñe toda mi vida el movimiento, es como parir un hijo (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)⁸².

The president of the MML explains in the quote below some of the challenges of being a member of the MML. They are getting involved by taking part in many different discussions. And this represents a huge change of life style for them.

⁸¹ The crisis was so great that, little by little, the husbands started to support women's participation. When they saw that there were achievements, which we had stopped many auctions, that we had managed to re-finance debts with the Banco Nación [they said] OK, you can participate too.

⁸² I always say that the movement was my place in the world, a space by which you identify yourself, by which I am this, by which you attribute meaning to life; you have your dear ones, people, memories... The movement colors all my life, it is like giving birth to a child.

Yo soy la presidenta del movimiento aca en Argentina y requiere muchísimo tiempo, y me ha cambiado, he conocido cosas hermosísimas, es una, me cambia totalmente la vida. Cuando vos ves que son más y más las mujeres que pueden liberarse de esa opresión familiar, diríamos, como que la mujer nada podía hacer y que ahora este participando y se vaya incorporando, y empiece a formar parte de distintas charlas es un cambio de vida muy grande (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸³.

Many of the women interviewed explained to me that their lives have changed less than those of other MML women, because of their previous experiences or because their families supported what they were doing. They explained that while life changed enormously for them, the changes were much greater for those women whose main role had been to stay in the house.

para ellas ha sido siempre más duro que para mí, yo si quieres he tenido el apoyo familiar para hacer lo que hago, pero otras mujeres no... y lo mismo se han dado su lugar, y han salido... quizás lo puedan reflejar mejor que yo el cambio de vida que han tenido. Ha cambiado para mí que tengo una familia que me apoya y que son todos militantes agrarios, imagínate para alguien, que el rol puro y exclusivo era el de su hogar, el de su casa... (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸⁴.

Other women said that the movement represented their first opportunity to meet many people, including those from a wide variety of social backgrounds. The quote below explains how the movement helped these women to value what they and other people had, and to see the realities of others, not just their own realities. The experience of this woman is very interesting because she was never at risk of losing her property. Although she had debts, as she says, they always managed to find a solution by going to the banks. She joined the movement to help others who were in more difficult situations than hers. In the quote below she explains what the MML

⁸³ I am president of the movement here in Argentina, and it requires a lot of time but it has changed me, I have had the opportunity to get to know wonderful things, and my life has changed enormously. When you see that more and more women are freeing themselves from the oppression of their families, we can say, that women who formerly could not do anything are now participating. This represents a huge change in life style.

⁸⁴ For them it has always been harder than for me, if you want, I have had the support of my family for what I am doing, other women do not... but anyway they have created their space, and have gone out... maybe they could express better the change in life style. It has changed for me who have a family that supports me and where all are agrarian activists, imagine the difference for someone whose only role had been to stay in the house.

represented for her.

Conocer mucha, muchísima gente, como ser, personas de todo el nivel... pero [el endeudamiento] no era mi realidad, era la realidad de los demás, a ver los problemas de los demás a saber que hay que darle una mano, que uno necesita dar, ayudar al otro, la vivencia del otro para mí fue la experiencia más grande del movimiento (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁸⁵.

MML women felt it was necessary to have an independent movement because they wanted to have their own identity as women. The quote below articulates very well why they felt it was necessary to keep their separate identity as a women's group and why they decided not to join any major mixed or male agrarian institution.

pero las mujeres tenemos nuestra propia organización, nuestra propia identidad, porque sino sabes que? Te transformas en la mujer que va y hace la comida y lava los platos en los piquetes y en la lucha vamos detras de los hombres y las mujeres comprendieron que somos capaces de hacer mucho mas que que eso, podemos tomar decisions (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸⁶.

For these women, the meetings of the MML represented a way to meet other people in the same situation as themselves. The meetings offered a space where they could share the difficulties they were experiencing and discuss possible solutions to their problems. As discussed earlier in this study, it is not always easy to admit to having debts. The meetings of the MML represented a sort of protected space where nobody was going to judge them, because they were all in the same, or almost the same, situation.

⁸⁵ To know many, many people, people of any level... indebtedness was not my situation, it was the situation of the others. I learned to see the problems of others and to try to help them, which we need to give, to help the other. Getting to know other people's experiences was the most important experience for me from participating in the movement.

⁸⁶ We women have our own organization, our own identity, because otherwise you know what happens... You end up cooking or washing the dishes on the pickets, and following men in the protests. Women understood that we are capable of more than that: we can make decisions.

Mira son reuniones, a ver como decirte, nos juntamos las mujeres, tomamos mate, hay la parte donde cada una explica, cuenta los problemas, las dificultades que tienen tambien para moverse, no es fácil para las mujeres dejar la casa irse a una reunion, faltar todo el día, se discute mucho viste todo el tema de la mujer (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁸⁷.

The meetings are also a good occasion to discuss larger problems that concern the agriculture sector, by inviting experts, intellectuals, and scholars to help them to improve their knowledge about certain issues of great relevance for the movement. For example, the quote below describes a recent meeting that was held in the province of Santa Fé.

En la ultima reunion invitamos a un economista de la universidad de Buenos Aires ... generalmente hay un tema que llevamos, ese tema fue el momento economico, este, se hablo de, este, nos informaron de la situacion economica, se informo, de cuales eran las diferencias de gastos entre los grandes y pequenos productores, y ahí se saco la conclusion que los grandes productores tenían la posibilidad de adquirir los insumos a un 25-30 % menos que nosotros (Interview with Sara Coll)⁸⁸.

The atmosphere of the meetings changed over the years. Today the small meetings that are held at the community level tend to be a way to see friends. Since most MML women have known each other for a long time now, when they meet it is like getting together with friends. They drink mate and discuss the problems of the sector but also their problems as women. Most respondents pointed to the fact that the meetings had a very personal approach and content. It is, especially in small meetings, where they discuss their personal problems, including more delicate

⁸⁷ Look, they are meetings where women get together, we drink mate, each of us explains, talks about her problems, the mobility difficulties women experience, it is not easy for women to leave to go to a meeting, to be absent all day, we discuss a lot about all sorts of women's issues.

⁸⁸ At our last meeting we invited an economist from the University of Buenos Aires... generally there is a topic for discussion, that day the topic was the economic situation. He explained to us what were the differences in terms of costs between large and small producers, and the conclusion was that large producers can buy supplies at 25-30 percent less than us.

issues such as birth control, abortion and family violence, all themes that are very difficult to address in other contexts.

hemos tocado, muchísimo, el tema de anticoncepción, de aborto, de violencia familiar... porque además en las reuniones se habla mucho de lo que le pasa a cada una, tienen un perfil muy personal las reuniones, es decir contamos nuestras cosas personales en las reuniones, sobre todo las pequeñas reuniones: los maridos, los hijos, los embarazos, los embarazos no deseados, lo que paso con nuestras posiciones frente a la pobreza, frente a ... viste hay muchas cosas que se conversan (Interview with Sara Coll)⁸⁹.

Women participating in MML meetings and assemblies started talking to each other, sharing their experiences, problems and possible solutions. This “common space” enabled the development of a sense of solidarity among them and allowed the creation of new women’s spaces, where they talked about delicate issues. Participation to these activities has led women to challenge or at least problematize gender inequalities within the family and the society in general.

Auyero explains that one of the outcomes of “revolts” is that “they change the lives of people, or, at least, the way in which they understand themselves” (Auyero: 2003: 191). He explains the desire to talk of his interviewees, with a quote from Bourdieu “even the way she looks at you, shows her fervent desire to be listened to and, for once, to be heard, and, at the same time shows her pleasure of having someone to talk to, someone to whom she can justify herself, or better yet, with who she can feel justified and accepted” (Bourdieu, as cited in Auyero, 2003: 196). Auyero thinks that the need to be heard is also part of a search for recognition. Although his

⁸⁹ We have addressed the issues of contraception, abortion, family violence a lot... also because in the meetings we talked a lot of what happens to each of us, the profile of the meetings is very personal, that means that we tell our personal things, especially in small meetings: the husbands, the children, pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies, our positions in relation to poverty... we talk about many things.

ethnographic approach by no means can be compared to this study, it is possible to argue that MML leaders wanted to talk, to share experiences in order to make them visible.

It is widely known that women's work in their houses as well as their reproductive roles have been underestimated and invisibilized in many ways. Women's association with the domestic sphere and men's association with the public one has implied a lack of social recognition of women's work. The social recognition and respectability that the MML gained appear to be the most important "reward" (the incentives to pay the costs involved with participation) from participation for MML leaders. The former president of the MML had a very difficult experience of activism because her husband died after a stroke paralyzed him fifteen days before the auction of their property. Despite all the difficulties she faced, she said she would never, ever exchange the life she has today for the life she used to have before joining in the MML. Others feel the same way.

Lo que si cambio mucho es el reconocimiento en la sociedad, yo hoy voy a mi pueblo y bueno los que en principio, cuando hace 10 - 12 anos atras empezamos con el movimiento, y bueno todo el mundo decia: y mira la loca que anda bereteandose por ahi... porque en principio la gente lo decia y me lo decian en la cara, y bueno y hoy mas de uno dice gracias a Norma hoy tenemos la propiedad, me entiendes y eso y eso reconforta, da fuerza (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁹⁰.

...que destacados profesionales, y que los periodistas mas destacados de Rosario hayan escrito pero muchas paginas hablando del MML, exaltando el MML, es un orgullo muy grande (Interview with Emma Martin)⁹¹.

⁹⁰ What it really changed was social recognition. Today I go to my town, and all those who at the beginning, when we started with the movement, used to say to me: look at those crazy women who go around... because people used to tell me these things, in my face, and today more than one says thanks to Norma we managed to keep the property, you understand, and that comforts.

⁹¹ That distinguished professionals, and that the most prominent journalists of Rosario had written many many pages talking about the MML, praising the MML, makes me really proud.

Social recognition is not the only type of “reward” MML leaders and women gained by participating: the quotes below indicate other specific things that women say they have learned by getting involved in the MML.

Aprendí el respeto por la divergencia, el que no piensa igual a mi es digno de ser escuchado de ser tenido en cuenta, la paciencia, el no ser atropellada y esperar los tiempos y a manejar los tiempos políticos y los tiempos gremiales y los tiempos de los otros (Interview with Ana Maria)⁹².

... después de parir tres hijos, haber asistido a mis padres cuando me necesitaban, el orgullo mas grande que tengo es el de pertenecer a este movimiento, porque yo creo que ensena mucho en la familia el ser solidario y el comprometerse, y estar en una organización como en la que estoy (Interview with Emma Martin)⁹³.

6.3 Challenging gendered social roles: deconstructing masculinity and femininity

Archetti observed two competing discourses related to gender relations in the Argentinian prairies. The first one “rooted in Catholic gender ideology according to which men should be family oriented, protective in relation to women and male inferiors, and sexually controlled” and the other one depicted “real” men as being “physically strong, potent, and sexually aggressive in relation to women as well as to other men” (Archetti as cited in Stolen, 1996: 388). The common element of these two discourses, according to Archetti, is that both assume a “dominance of men over women and ‘feminine’ men”. Connell calls this dominance “hegemonic masculinity” (Archetti as cited in Stolen, 1996: 388). Concerning femininity, some gender systems are characterized by different degrees of “compliance and subordination oriented to

⁹² I learned to respect difference, I learned that those who do not think the same way I do, deserve to be heard and taken into account. I learned to be patient, not to be hasty, and to wait for the the right time, to manage political times and the time of other people too.

⁹³ After giving birth to three children and having assisted my parents when they needed me, the thing I am most proud of is being a member of the movement. Because I think that it teaches a lot to the family to be supportive (solidal) and to become involved.

accommodating interests and desires of men” but also by the “strategies of resistance and of non-compliance are contemplated” (Stolen, 1996: 388). Connell calls “emphasized femininity the systems where no explicit forms of resistance and non-compliance can be found” (Connell as cited in Stolen, 1996: 388). Archetti argues that gender relations in Argentina’s prairies are characterized by a combination of “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity” (Archetti as cited in Stolen, 1996: 388).

The most interesting and consistent discourse among the MML leaders was the one through which they framed the condition of men and women in periods of crises. The discourse relates to the social construction of gender, while at the same time, appearing to be focused on biological givens. The adoption of this discourse has represented a successful strategy to legitimize MML women’s participation while simultaneously questioning existing gender relations, opening up a space for a redefinition of both male and female social roles and for a legitimization of new roles for women (and men).

All of the ten participants framed and, to some extent, legitimized women’s involvement in the MML by saying that it was because “men were depressed” that the women got involved. According to their narratives, men were “devastated” by the idea of losing the lands their families had been accumulating for generations. They felt “useless” and “inefficient” and had been convinced (not clear by whom, sometimes “by the model”, and other times “by the government”) that if they were in such a difficult economic situation, it was simply their fault because they had been incapable of adapting to the new globalized economy.

Los hombres en esa época no salieron, no salieron porque los habían convencido que nada era posible, que el único modelo posible era ese, que habían fracasado, que no se supieron adaptar a esa nueva situación de globalización que vivía el mundo, entonces lo vivieron como con vergüenza (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁹⁴.

They also felt ashamed and “useless” because they could not live up to the model of men as the support and the breadwinners of the family, as the quote below indicates.

el hombre estaba abatido, estaba vencido por un modelo que le imponía ser el sostén y a parte del sosten el proveedor, y que si no lograba todas esas cosas era un inútil que no servía para nada... (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)⁹⁵.

Another important aspect of this discourse is related to the fact that, according to the participants, many men became ill because of the difficult economic situation they were experiencing. In the interviews, MML leaders reported that men suffered from strokes, cancer, ulcers; or even committed suicide. They told me some anecdotes about men who killed themselves with a gun or in “suspicious” car accidents. This aspect is very interesting because it seems that the respondents tried to “justify” the fact that men were not doing what they are “supposed to” or “should” do. Depression and suicide were treated as conditions more linked to circumstances for which the individual is somehow not responsible. Since they were ill, they could not do anything, so their failure was not their responsibility, after all. It was quite common for women to justify men’s behaviour or even treat them as if they were children who could not control themselves in certain situations. In contrast, women were always seen as capable of fulfilling their duties despite everything.

⁹⁴ Men did not go out in those times, they did not go out because they had been persuaded that nothing was possible, that the only possible model was that one, that they have failed, that they did not know how to adapt to that new situation of globalization the world was experiencing, so they live it with shame.

⁹⁵ Men were depressed, they felt oppressed by a role model according to which men were the ones supposed to be not only the support but the breadwinners of the family also. If they did not accomplish all those things they were considered to be useless...

...aquí hubo épocas, en el año 97/98 de mucho, muchos suicidios de hombres que se suicidaban al sentirse fracasados... porque así se sentían, se sentían que habían fracasado y se habían fundido y perdías esa chacra que con tanto esfuerzo nuestros abuelitos, bajados de los barcos con la valijita de cartón, habían logrado obtener (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁹⁶.

The husband of one of my respondents, who is a psychiatrist, wrote a book about the relationship between men's depression and debts in the nineties. Some of the women I interviewed even suggested that sociologists, anthropologists, and other scholars should analyze this aspect. According to them, this aspect is important because there are many differences between men and women's behaviour in relation to debts. The quote below illustrates why it is men, and not women, who tend to become depressed when experiencing difficult economic conditions due to debts.

Vos no sabes la cantidad de varones que se enfermaron, que tuvieron infartos, que tuvieron canceres, es muy importante, muy importante porque el hombre tiene ligada su autoestima mucho mas al trabajo y al papel social que desempeña que la mujer (Interview with Sara Coll)⁹⁷.

In the interviews, many participants argued that the reason why men got ill and women reacted by joining or creating a social movement has to do with both "society" and "nature". Men's self-esteem is strictly linked to their economic success and to their capacity to provide for the family. Their masculinity is socially judged on this basis. They would feel guilty and ashamed because it was impossible to pay those debts. The quote below articulates well the reasons why men felt so guilty.

⁹⁶ In 1997 and 1998 there were many, many suicides committed by men who felt they were unsuccessful... Because this is how they felt, they felt they had failed, and that they were losing the small farm that their grandparents, who arrived here with a cardboard suitcase, had with much effort managed to obtain.

⁹⁷ You cannot imagine how many men got ill, had heart attacks, cancer, this is very important, very important also because males' self-esteem is much more linked to work and to the social functions they carry out than females'.

un hombre que tiene el peso de sostener a su familia, de sostener su explotación, que llega a su casa y ve las necesidades y no las puede cumplir, que llegaba al banco, que gastaba sus zapatillas llendo al banco pidiendo refinanciación y no encontraba nada, llegaba un momento que la desmoralización era grande, era importante (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)⁹⁸.

There were many participants who believe that women, mainly as mothers, are “naturally” focused on “other things” than debts. According to these participants, women first think about how to feed the family, and then how to pay debts. These women think that a mother’s instinct is to feed her children. She would feed her family rather than paying debts, possibly because women’s “honour” depends less on the payment of debts than men’s “honour”.

The next quote elaborates on the issue of motherhood and of why women tend to seek solutions in certain difficult situations, while men do not.

porque las madres, cuando en la década de la dictadura militar porque los hijos tenían madre y padre y porque salieron las madres a reclamar por la desaparición de sus hijos? Como las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, en este caso, porque las mujeres? porque? Y no se, mira, será que tenemos algo interior que cuando vemos que está la familia en peligro... que vamos a perder eso a lo que te aferras tanto porque no sabes hacer otra cosa, y entras a comprender que es una cosa injusta... la fuerza que tenemos para parir un hijo también la empleamos para defender lo que consideramos justo (Interview with Ana Galmarini)⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ A man who has the obligation to sustain his family, to sustain his farm, who arrives home and sees these necessities and he cannot comply with them, who goes to the bank to ask to re-finance his debts and he does not obtain anything, at some point he would feel very depressed, very depressed.

⁹⁹ Why women? During the decade of the military dictatorship, those who disappeared had mothers and fathers, and why was it the mothers who went out to protest against the disappearance of their children? Like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, in this case, why women? Why? I do not know, it might be that women have something inside, when we see that the family is in danger... That we are going to lose something we really care about, because you do not know how to do anything else, and you start to understand that it is something unfair... the same strength they have to give birth to their children, that they use for other things such as to defend what they think it is just or fair.

Similarly, Sara explained that women tend to evaluate things differently from men because they prioritized other things. In this particular case, women do not think they need to pay their debts first but they think they have to save the family, feed the children, and pay the debts only when it is possible.

las mujeres hacemos una evaluacion diferente de las de los hombres. No decimos primero hay que pagar las deudas, esa es la diferencia, nosotras primero decimos hay que salvar la familia, darle de comer a los hijos, y despues se pagara. En cambio, la situacion masculina es yo como voy a dejar de pagar las deudas, estamos hablando de honorabilidad no es cierto, (es una pos dif) es una posicion desde la maternidad, desde la casa, yo creo que uno ve, tiene una vista objetiva puesta en otro lado, yo no iba a dejar de que mis hijas no siguieran estudiando (Interview with Sara Coll)¹⁰⁰.

Emma adds that every time it is necessary to go out and fight, women do that, despite their marginal roles in the family.

... si bien tuvimos siempre un lugar mas relegado, la mujer del campo, mas avocada a las tareas de la casa, de la familia, de los hijos, y demás bueno, la mujer siempre cuando hay que salir a luchar y pelear, yo creo que salimos al frente no? (Interview with Emma Martin)¹⁰¹.

According to Ana Maria, it was very unusual that a group of women, in their forties to sixties, decided to question and challenge the whole banking system, including the unfair interest rates. This was especially unexpected since these were women who had never even questioned what their husbands said or decided. Initially the husbands could not understand what was going on.

¹⁰⁰ Women do a different type of assessment of situations from men. We do not say that we need to pay debts first, that is the difference. We say we need to save the family, feed our children first, and only after we will pay debts. On the contrary, the masculine situation is: I have to pay the debts because honor is at stake here. It is a different standpoint. It is a maternal and home-centered standpoint, we see different things, I was not going to accept that my daughters quit school.

¹⁰¹ We always had a marginalized position, rural women, more concerned with the duties of the home, family, and children, and the rest, women, when they have to go out of the house to fight. I think they do that. Don't they?

En un primer momento era asombro, íbamos a parar los remates y los tipos se quedaban solitos abajo de las plantas, como si fuera que se yo, una cosa rara, no entendían nada (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)¹⁰².

The next quote elaborates on the fact that the men did not understand what the women had understood, that what was happening was not an individual responsibility, but that it was a political problem.

...entendíamos que lo que nos estaba pasando no era porque nuestros maridos eran unos inútiles sino que había una política bien bien delimitada... (Interview with Ana Galmarini)¹⁰³.

Norma commented that women are more inclined to fight for their property than men because women are more capable of facing problems than men. Every time there are difficulties, women fight because they think of their children, of their future, and of the future of the family.

y en ese las mujeres fuimos mas aguerridas. Las mujeres nos caemos, nos tropezamos, nos rompemos la rodilla y la frente contra el piso, pero volvemos a levantar, y volvemos a luchar porque pensamos en nuestros hijos, a nuestro futuro, en el futuro de la familia, y siempre fuimos mas aguerridas, en mi concepto la mujer es mas... sobrelleva mas facil la carga de los problemas que el hombre (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)¹⁰⁴.

6.4 Conclusion

According to my informants the culturally defined “ideal” division of roles was conceived of as “natural” or “normal”, something that nobody questioned despite divergent practices. It

¹⁰² At the beginning, it was surprising, we would go to the auctions, and men would stay outside, hiding behind the plants, as if it was a strange thing, they could not understand anything.

¹⁰³ We understood that what was happening to us, it was not because our husbands had been inefficient but that there was a pre-determined policy.

¹⁰⁴ In that moment women were stronger than men. Women fall, bump, we “injure” our knees and forehead on the floor, but we stand up again, and we go back to fight because we think of our children, of their future, and of the future of the family, we were always more hardened than men, I think women face problems more easily than men.

seems that the inconsistencies that emerged between the “ideal” division of roles – women associated with the private and men with the public spheres - and the practice – women being actively involved in “male” spaces - has been resolved by using two discourses to legitimize women’s participation in the MML. The first was the narrative of men’s depression and the second was the definition of women's intrusion in the male domain, not in political terms (citizens’ rights), but in biological terms related to natural, instinctual reactions of women and mothers. Both discourses refer to types of behaviour that are considered to be inevitable and for which the individual is, again, only partially responsible. We learn two things from the MML leaders’ experience: the “concrete” response of men to crises is depression and the “natural” response of women is getting involved in a social movement. Through their involvement in the MML, women managed to go out of the strictly domestic space and to legitimize their invasion of “male” domains. This “temporary” inconsistency between ideals and practices did not lead to an explicit questioning of male authority and dominance, but it certainly opened up a space to rediscuss certain issues (Jaquette, 1990: 175).

My analysis illustrated a process of change that contained two elements: the desire for continuity (maintaining gender relations in the same hierarchical order) and the desire to achieve new gender values. Changing the system of gender values is not an easy task, certain ideas tend to be resistant to change, especially those ideas that appear to be “natural” and self-evident to all social actors. These ideas usually are not made explicit, and consequently, they are not questioned. However, this aspiration did not seem to challenge the essential conceptions of gender differences regarding the division of labor or the continuing association of men and women with public and domestic domains respectively, which, according to MML leaders, are still to a large

extent associated with biological differences. MML leaders' resistance, however, seemed to be pervasive, but did not seem to be directed at subverting the existing gender order. In this sense, the changes occurring in the nature of gender relations did not appear to be "revolutionary" but "reformist" (Stolen 1996, 2004).

MML women's discourses challenged the gender division of roles and spaces in the public sphere. A challenge, however, does not automatically imply a redefinition of roles and tasks. Changes do not occur overnight: for women to be activists, it is necessary that being an activist is something that is conceivable, acceptable and legitimate for a woman and/or mother. MML women's discourses and activism did open up that space for change.

Chapter 7: The MML and feminism

In this chapter I will address the last research question of this study: how to position the MML *vis-à-vis* feminism. The first step will be to understand how MML leaders position the movement in relation to feminism and feminists and what ideas they have about feminism; what is the relationship between the MML and feminist organizations and networks; and how MML leaders frame their “gendered” strategy of action. In the last part of the chapter I will also address some of the problematic issues that emerged from the study.

7.1 The MML, a feminist movement?

All the participants in the study said that the MML is not a feminist movement and they all shared a negative perception of feminism and feminists. The motivations for considering the MML a non feminist movement and the definitions of feminism they gave are quite varied, but the idea of feminism as being a discriminatory (against men) practice was very recurrent. The quote below expresses the rejection of feminism by the participants in the construction of the identity of the MML and of MML women. While all the women I interviewed rejected the connection with feminism, they all connected the MML with the fact they were *agrarian women*, women who were related to agriculture, or who live on a farm, own a farm, or have a family history related to the agriculture world.

No, no, no [no es feminista], es un movimiento de mujeres agrarias, mujeres que tienen que ver con el campo, o que viven en el campo o que tienen campo o que la

mayoría ha tenido algo, su historia relacionada con el movimiento (Interview with Sara Coll)¹⁰⁵.

Similarly, the quote below illustrates the idea that the MML is not a feminist movement because, as Norma said, the movement has never discriminated against men, and men have always been welcome to attend MML meetings, marches, or speeches. The MML women have always tried to listen to men, to include them.

No, [no es feminista] porque en nuestras reuniones y en nuestras marchas y en nuestros proclamas, el hombre ha estado siempre presente, jamás lo hemos discriminado, al contrario hemos tratado de escucharlo y de que nos acompañe (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)¹⁰⁶.

In the quote below we can see a space, however, that suggests some sort of gender consciousness that was quite recurrent. On the one hand, the MML is not considered to be a feminist movement, and is in no way related to feminism. While MML women do participate as women, they do not fight for gender equality but, rather, to keep their “chacrita”, to keep that piece of land that for them is extremely important since it represents their “way of living”. However, on the other hand, participating to the MML has brought women to understand many issues related to gender: before joining the movement they did not know much about gender, or even what it was. The movement, in fact, offered a good opportunity to be exposed to some types of inequalities. The quote below mentions the “double oppression” women experience, but says that MML women never felt they had experienced this, and it was hard to them to accept it. As small-

¹⁰⁵ No, no, no (it is not feminist), this is a movement of agrarian women, women who are connected to the countryside, they live in the countryside, or they have a farm, the majority of us, has its history related to that of the movement.

¹⁰⁶ No, because in our meetings, marches, and proclamations, men have always been present, we have never discriminated against them, on the contrary we have always tried to listen to them, to get them to join us.

medium farmers, rather than questioning gender relations in the family or in the society, they were always focused on the political aspect of the auctions, the state policy that had been put in place to exclude them.

... y nuestra lucha no es la lucha de las feministas de la igualdad de género, sino que ... esto nos ha llevado también a entender también un montón todo el tema de género, nosotras cuando empezamos nos hablaban de género y no sabíamos de que se trataba, te digo la verdad, parecíamos unas ignorantes... Después fuimos comprendiendo que las mujer efectivamente sufre la doble opresión, pero todo esto nos costó un montón entenderlo porque no era, no lo veíamos desde la mujer, era una cosa que nos estaba pasando desde una política de un gobierno (Interview with Ana Galmarini) ¹⁰⁷.

Again, the quote below shows a certain degree of change in terms of a gender awareness that developed after they joined the MML. As they were participating they incorporated in their vocabulary a number of new ideas such as gender equality or reproductive rights, and learned a lot about women's oppression. The quote recounts what women needed to do when they had to go to a meeting, such as leaving meals ready, and the house clean. It contrasts these obligations with the more "privileged condition" of men who, when they needed to do something, they simply left to do it.

... hemos aprendido un montón, porque efectivamente las mujeres somos oprimidas. Yo me acuerdo cuando las mujeres teníamos que salir... para parar un remate y las mujeres que nos contaban todo lo que tuvieron que hacer para poder venir a esa reunión o a para ese remate: dejar la comida preparada, dejar la casa ordenada. Cosa que el hombre que hace, tiene que salir a hacer algo, y que hace? se va y punto. Esas cosas fuimos viendo (Interview with Ana Galmarini)¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁷ Our struggle is not the one of the feminists for gender equality, but it has led us to understand a lot about the issue of gender. Initially when they talked us about gender we had no idea what it was about, to tell you the truth, we looked like ignorant... Only after we started to understand that women actually suffer from the double oppression, but it was very hard for us to understand all this, because we never saw it from the point of view of gender, for us it was all about a government policy...

¹⁰⁸ ... we have learned a lot, because, in fact, as women we are oppressed. I remember that when we had to go out to stop an auction, and women would tell us all the things that they had to do in order to be able to go to that meeting or to stop the auction: to leave meals ready, and the house clean. What does a man do? If he has to go out to do something, he just goes.

Again, another participant argues that the MML is not a feminist movement because, despite the entirely female constituency of the MML, and despite the entirely female leadership, its goal is not feminist. However, the MML has a gender stance.

MML feminista? No, porque el planteo nuestro no es feminista... la resolución no es por un problema de género, pero es un planteo donde tomamos reivindicaciones de género, donde peleamos por la situaciones de las compañeras que tienen dificultades porque tienen familias opresivas o maridos atrasados o todo eso, que las ayudamos y tratamos de tener reuniones con ellas (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)¹⁰⁹.

Some of their ideas about feminism being a discriminatory practice against men were well articulated when MML leaders had to define feminism. The perception of feminism as being something that was not based on their own realities and problems was quite recurrent among the participants to the interviews. An interesting element that emerged was that feminist groups in Argentina mainly articulate the perspectives of Western Europe that have no relation to the MML cause. The quote below explains why, according to MML leaders, feminism is something secondary or non relevant for their lives.

Estamos demasiado ocupadas con la cuestión técnica con el tema del paro, entonces nos invitan a los congresos también vamos, participamos de todo pero nosotras no participamos de un debate del feminismo porque no lo somos, es muy específico lo nuestro... mas vale conocer mas la historia del latifundio en Argentina y afianzar todas esas pautas que no tienen que ver con el feminismo (Interview with Ana Maria Riveiro)¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁹ The MML feminist? No, because our ideas are not feminist... The solution does not depend on gender; however we have taken up some gender causes: we fight for the members of the MML who have difficulties because they have oppressive families, or conservative husbands, and all that sort of things. We try to help these members by having separate meetings with them.

¹¹⁰ We are too busy with the technical aspects of the agrarian strike, so they (feminists) invite us to feminist congresses, and we try to go and to participate. However, the MML is not part of the feminist debate because MML women are not feminists, what we stand for is something very specific... It would be better to know more about the

The idea that feminism is related to women who want to be “superior to” men came up many times in the interviews. The quote below illustrates that point.

Nos siempre dijimos que no estábamos ni adelante ni detrás del hombre, siempre estuvimos a la par... si bien somos todas mujeres, pero no se si feministas... Sabes que pasa, yo desde el momento que, no se si por mi manera de ser o que, no me siento discriminada, entonces al feminismo lo tengo así un poco, si bien se que mundialmente la mujer pierde en todo sentido porque lo leo, porque lo veo, a mi no me paso (Interview with Gladys Morriconi)¹¹¹.

Similarly, Emma commented about the MML not being a feminist movement:

No, no, no, para nada en lo que es el feminismo, la esencia de lo que es el feminismo es que la mujer se súper abastece sola en todo... si partimos desde la base de que una familia debe estar compuesta por un hombre y una mujer, si bien no discrimino eh... ni homosexuales, ni a las feministas tampoco las discrimino, pero bueno cada cual con su idea... (Interview with Emma Martin)¹¹².

Another participant argued that there is no intent to exclude or devalue men. The MML has nothing to do with feminism. On the other hand, women, according to the participant, are better equipped than men to see the reality and this is why the MML is a movement of women and not men.

Feminista en el sentido de que no pueden participar los hombres, de que hay alguna cuestión de desprestigio, no yo creo que, desde el punto de vista de lo que yo creo estamos mejor dotadas las mujeres, mejor dotadas para ver o estuvimos mejor dotadas para ver la realidad las mujeres, yo creo que estamos mejor dotadas en general, no? ...

history of latifundia in Argentina and to consolidate that knowledge rather than about issues that are more explicitly related to feminism.

¹¹¹ We always said that women are neither above nor below men, we have always been equal. Even if we are all women, I don't know if we are feminists... You know what? Since I never personally felt discriminated against, I never paid much attention to feminism. I know that worldwide women lose in every way because I read and see that, but it has never been my own experience.

¹¹² No, no, not at all, the essence of feminism is the assumption that women are self-sufficient and autonomous in everything, and I think that the normal family is made of a man and a woman, the father and the mother... but I do not discriminate against homosexuals or feminists; everyone is free to think what she/he wants.

Yo creo que evidentemente que nuestra posición como mujeres nos ha permitido estar en mejores condiciones para la lucha... (Interview with Sara Coll)¹¹³.

7.2 The MML and the feminists

Although the MML is not a feminist movement, MML leaders said that it is fully integrated with the women's movement. MML women do participate to the national meetings of women that have been held annually for the last twenty years in different provinces of the country. It is the most important meeting where women's issues are debated and discussed in Argentina. MML women have their own workshop: La mujer rural.

No, no, no, no... No es un movimiento feminista, este no es un movimiento feminista pero fijate que tiene una gran inserción entre los movimientos de mujeres, nosotras vamos a los encuentros nacionales de mujeres que se hacen acá todos los años en Argentina, donde participan, 15 mil, 20 mil mujeres, este donde hay talleres de todos los temas relacionados con el tema de la mujer: mujer y violencia,... mujer y educación, mujer y salud... nosotros participamos de esos encuentros como mujeres, como un movimiento de mujeres campesinas (Interview with Irma Fernandez)¹¹⁴.

Gladis, explains that MML's primary objective is to defend the farms, but "occasionally" they cooperate with other women's groups on specific issues such as the fight for a law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina, which is one of the most controversial topics in the Argentinian legislation that concerns women. The influence and power of the Catholic Church within political institutions remains pervasive. The fact that a social movement of rural women

¹¹³ Feminist in the sense that men cannot participate, that there is the intent of discrediting men, I don't think so, from my point of view women are better equipped, we are or were better equipped to see reality, women are better equipped than men in general, aren't we?... I think that women are in a better position for the struggle.

¹¹⁴ No, no, no, no... This is not a feminist movement, this is not a feminist movement but it is fully integrated within the women's movement in Argentina, we go to the national meetings of women that are held here in Argentina, and every year between fifteen and twenty thousand Argentinian women participate. There are workshops about a wide variety of themes that interest women: women and violence, women and education, women and health. MML women participate as women, as a movement of agrarian (peasant) women.

joins this struggle reflects an important political position of the movement in regard to “strategic” women’s issues.

Estamos siempre defendiendo lo del campo, por ahí nos unimos con grupos de mujeres, que se yo, por lo de la ley del aborto, pero el objetivo sigue siendo estar siempre defendiendo el campo (Interview with Gladis Morriconi)¹¹⁵.

However, it seems that despite occasional cooperation and annual meetings with feminist and other women’s groups, the MML has not developed a network of contacts with these types of associations. The participants mentioned MML contacts with the Red Informativa de Mujeres de Argentina (RIMA-Argentine Women's Information Network), a virtual network of Argentinian and international women and NGOs; with groups of professional women in Latin America and with the women’s movement of the FAA. They explained that occasionally RIMA members had participated in MML meetings, and have circulated information both there and via email. MML women received the support of many women’s associations from Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, and Ecuador when they were on trial because of their actions trying to stop an auction. The relationship with the women of FAA is marginal because “they have other priorities”: they are interested in water-related issues, in environmental issues... This is not to deny MML women’s interest in those issues, but rather to point to the different focus that the MML women have.

¹¹⁵. We are always standing up for the countryside. Occasionally we cooperate with other women’s groups, on issues such as a law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina, but our main focus is on rural issues.

7.3 MML women and gendered strategies

All the women I interviewed said that the fact that they were women helped them in their struggles. They admitted that deploying womanhood and motherhood was the safest strategy of action. The quote below explains how being women worked at MML women's advantage. Sara argues that women appear less challenging than men. Some women explained that the fact itself that they were women, and that their strategies were peaceful ones, was very helpful when negotiating or when they were trying to stop an auction. These two factors almost always resulted in their being treated respectfully.

Nos ha ayudado, nos ha ayudado, porque nosotras, por ejemplo, frente a una movilización, nosotras hemos tenido en general, salvo excepciones... cuando nos metieron presas, un trato respetuoso, por el hecho de ser mujeres. Yo creo que, además, no decimos malas palabras, no nos violentamos, este... de una manera así, no nos extra limitamos, mejor dicho, entonces yo creo que nos ha servido el ser mujeres (Interview with Irma Fernandez)¹¹⁶.

For example, when MML women were trying to stop an auction, the police would treat them more gently than they would have treated men.

...porque el hecho de que la policía fuera y nos quisiera atropellar, ya el hecho de ser mujeres por ahí era como de que paraba un poco la mano, no es cierto... (Interview with Norma Astorquia)¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁶ [being women] it has helped us, it has helped, us because just by being women, we have been generally treated with respect, except in a few cases, when we were imprisoned. I also think that we do not use swear words, we are not violent, we usually don't go too far (push the limits), so I think that being women helped.

¹¹⁷ ...because the fact that the police would run there and want to knock us down, the fact that we were women made them be more gentle...

Also, as Sara argued, nobody expected that women would try stopping an auction and explains that this sort of “surprise effect” worked in favor of MML women and contributed to the success of their actions.

... ha sorprendido, al principio producía una sorpresa enorme que nosotros nos pusiéramos ahí adelante y quisiéramos parar el remates y cuestionáramos las deudas y cuestionáramos la legalidad de ciertas cosas (Interview with Sara Coll)¹¹⁸.

In addition the fact that women were exposing themselves so much was an important incentive to action for their partners and husbands. They set an example to men who came to see that it was necessary to react and do something about their situation.

... y además le sirvió después a nuestros compañeros, porque, yo creo que ellos vieron que había que meterle, había que meterle y después bueno entonces se vinieron con nosotros también (Interview with Gladis)¹¹⁹.

7.4 Problematic issues and limitations

The participation in the MML has challenged and, to some extent, changed the socially constructed representations of feminine roles as being solely those of mothers or wives, and the social relations of gender that tend to relegate women to a “privileged” role exclusively in the domestic arena. However, there are some problematic issues. First, even if the MML has

¹¹⁸...it was a surprise, initially it was a big surprise that we could stand there and wanted to stop the auctions, question the debts and the legitimacy of certain things.

¹¹⁹ ... It also helped our partners, because I think that when they saw that something had to be done, they would then come with us.

acquired a legitimate space alongside the other agrarian institutions, the MML, as a rural women's movement, does not have the same public space or decision making power as traditional men's agrarian institutions. Secondly, even if activism has been described as a "positive" development in MML leaders' lives, it has caused some tensions within the family and has made these women feel overwhelmed because of the new responsibilities they have assumed.

7.4.1 The MML and traditional agrarian institutions

First of all, women performed a fundamental role of giving visibility to key issues related to the agriculture sector by organizing meetings, marches, protests, and pickets, by their networking with other rural associations, agriculture institutions, academics, media and, to some extent, political parties. This fact is not equally reflected in the leadership positions MML women have since assumed within traditional agrarian institutions, especially at a national level. In those strategic positions women are under-represented. It is important to acknowledge that MML women seem to be influential at the community level, but less so at the provincial and national levels. In fact, the local space of the community appears to have been more "suitable" for this type of women's action.

It seems, however, that when women do participate in local organizations such as school boards, or Church committees or at public events, they tend to carry out tasks that are normally an extension of their domestic activities. Women, in most of the cases, do the "background" tasks, such as decoration, cooking, cleaning, and serving, while men occupy the key positions (Stolen 1996, 2004).

MML women have, to some extent, broken with women's prevailing public roles. For example, they felt it was necessary to be an independent movement because they wanted to have their own identity as women. The women who were elected leaders of the movement or who are considered representatives of the MML had had to endure the gossip and the criticism that their activism provoked in the community. Stolen explains, that “women who participate ‘too actively’ in public contexts are often referred to as “‘machonas’ or ‘marymachos’ (female machos)” (Stolen, 1996: 396). Many participants gave me examples of the type of problems they had faced at this respect. In the quote below, Emma explains how the participation changed her life and told me her children were repeatedly exposed to mockery in their schools.

Si, si cambio pero yo creo que para bien, me enriqueció en un montón de cosas, este a mi familia creo que también, cuando lograron entenderlo, porque al principio era todo bastante confuso... y a mis hijos les hacían bromas en el colegio, “a tu vieja la meten presa” (Interview with Emma Martin)¹²⁰.

Another problematic issue my participants mentioned was that while the MML is usually recognized as an important actor in the rural sector, it is not considered to be as important as male agrarian institutions. The MML emerged because traditional agrarian organizations had left an empty space in the nineties. Today, since main agrarian organizations are doing a good job in representing the interests of small and medium farmers, the MML would never emerge.

Tenemos mucha relación con FAA... claro en la década del noventa, con la dirección que tenía en ese momento FAA, dejó un vacío muy grande, que por eso

¹²⁰ Yes it changed, and I think it was a good change, it was an enriching experience from many points of view, and I think that it was good for my family too, when they finally got to understand it, because initially everything was so confused... and at school they used to tell my children bad things, such as my children were told that I was going to be imprisoned because of what I was doing.

dio lugar a que se forme este movimiento, porque yo creo que hoy no surgiría el MML (Interview with Ana Galmarini)¹²¹.

...en aquel momento FAA dio la espalda al productor, nosotras crecimos también ante la ausencia de las entidades del agro, también por eso crecimos más (Interview with Emma Martin)¹²².

Some MML leaders told me that when the governor of the city (Rosario) meets the four main agrarian organizations, MML is usually not invited because it is not considered to be one of them. They also pointed out that it is extremely difficult for women to gain a political space. Despite the fact that MML women are usually mentioned in the speeches by male politicians, the MML has never been invited to join the table of negotiations, where, they think, the MML had the “moral obligation” to be. As Sara commented, they (the MML women) are not considered to be “agrarian entities”, they are something else.

... nosotros, el MML, no nos consideran como una entidad agropecuaria, viste que esta la FAA, la Sociedad Rural, y nosotras somos otra cosa. Digamos somos un movimiento pero digamos no nos incluyen como parte de las decisiones (Interview with Sara Coll)¹²³.

In the following quote, Norma explains why for women it is very hard to get a political space. In Norma’s opinion the main reason why it is so difficult for women to have a political space is that in the Argentinian society all the representations that count are based on what men are and do. She expresses her view very clearly in the following quote:

¹²¹ We have a good relationship with FAA... in the nineties, with the leadership it had at the time, it left an empty space, and this permitted this movement (MML) to be formed, today I don’t think it would emerge.

¹²² At that time FAA turned its back on producers. We also grew because of the absence of the agrarian entities, and because of that we grew more.

¹²³ ... we, the MML, are not considered an agrarian entity, there is the FAA, the Sociedad Rural, and we are something else. Let’s say that we are a movement, but we are not taken into account in the decision-making process.

Mira, yo creo que no que no tenemos diferencias [entre hombres y mujeres], o sea que deberíamos ser exactamente iguales, obviamente que en una sociedad y en un mundo machista, donde las grandes representaciones son de varones, son de hombres, nosotras debemos enfrentarnos mucho para poder lograr un espacio bien definido y bien representativo (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)¹²⁴.

In the next quote she explains that, in her opinion, the traditional agrarian institutions felt MML women were infringing their space, because

... con esto de parar los remates y de defender los productores, le quitamos a ellos una estancia que no supieron ellos llevar adelante, porque a ellos jamás se le hubiesen ocurrido de ir a cantar el himno en un juzgado... Agarramos un espacio que para nosotras es muy importante porque si cualquiera de las entidades que nos representan hubiesen tenido esa iniciativa, hubiese sido un gol de media cancha (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)¹²⁵.

7.4.2 Tensions within the family and feelings of being overwhelmed by the new responsibilities

Another important problem women faced were the tensions within the family and the feelings of being overwhelmed that were associated to the responsibilities of the various roles they were supposed to assume: tasks associated with the domestic sphere (family responsibilities of mother, wife and daughter), combined with the additional roles in the public sphere. These tensions often limited women's degree of commitment to the movement.

¹²⁴ Look, I think that there are no differences [between men and women], that is to say that we should all be exactly equal, but obviously in a machista society and world where all the representations that count are based on men's experiences and lives, women have to fight hard to get a space that is well defined and representative.

¹²⁵ by stopping the auctions and by protecting producers, we took away from them a situation they did not know how to deal with, because they would have never thought of singing the national anthem in a court... they could have stopped the auctions... We took a space that for us is very important because if any of the agrarian entities had taken that initiative it would have been a 'a real coup' (literally a goal scored through a shot from the half-way line, something quite spectacular).

Many participants pointed to the difficulties they faced when they started to participate and tried to be mothers, grandmothers and members of the movement. Ana explains how she seems to be crazy because she tries to do it all.

... prácticamente, a pesar de que yo ya soy abuela, soy familiara, trato también, me mato, ando siempre tipo loca porque trato de resolver todo yo, y trato de poder ser madre, abuela, y miembro del movimiento, yo soy la presidenta del movimiento acá en Argentina y requiere muchísimo tiempo (Interview with Ana Galmarini)¹²⁶.

Similarly Emma explained the many difficulties she faces by living in the countryside:

... vivir en el campo y tener hijos que llevar al colegio, y hacer dos turnos porque yo tenía chicos que iban a la mañana y a la tarde, y bueno a veces tenía que... yo me ocupe siempre de llevar mis chicos al colegio, entonces había obligaciones que a veces tenía que delegar en otras personas, que alguien los vaya a buscar, le he complicado bastante a mi marido también... levantarte mucho más temprano y dejar la comida preparada (Interview with Emma Martin)¹²⁷.

Norma added an interesting point, when she said that her life has changed but in the house there is not much that has changed, because “la casa sigue siendo la misma” (the house is always the same).

Cada vez que tengo que ir a una marcha o una reunión, tengo que correr todo el día a la mañana a la tarde antes para dejar todas mis cosas ordenadas y como para

¹²⁶ ...practically, even if I am already grandmother, I am of the family, I also try, I kill myself, I look crazy because I try to solve everything myself, and I tried to be a mother, a grandmother, and a member of the movement, I am the national president of the movement, and it requires a lot of time.

¹²⁷ ...living in the countryside and having to take children to school twice a day, because I had children who went to school in the morning and in the afternoon, I always took care of taking my kids to school, so I had to rely on other people for these obligations, I had to find someone to pick them up at school and I also made my husbands' life much more complicated...I had to get up much earlier and prepare the meals in advance.

que al otro día no se note la ausencia no es cierto (Interview with Norma de Astorquia)¹²⁸.

On the other hand, many participants told me that they had the support of their families, that there were no conflicts related to the new activities MML membership entailed. Two of my ten participants explained to me that their personal situation was special and that I needed to talk to women who have had many conflicts with their families, because their families did not support them and their new activities. When I interviewed those women, they did not mention any sort of friction or conflict, and said their families supported them. One of them, when I asked if anyone in the family complained because she was not cooking or ironing, said that “there is always someone who is unhappy; there is nothing we can do about that”. In the quote below, Sara talks about some MML women who have more “problematic” families.

... hemos tenido otras compañeras que cuando tenían que ir al remate se habían peleado con el marido... Yo me acuerdo de haber ido a llevar a compañeras más a la casa y el marido con bronca bárbara: ya vinieron estas locas de miércoles, che déjense de jorobar... (Interview with Sara Coll)¹²⁹.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we learned that all the participants in the study agreed that the MML is not a feminist movement. MML leaders denied any connection with feminism, and all highlighted the *agrarian* nature of the movement. MML’s primary objective is to defend the farms. All my

¹²⁸ When I need to leave to go to a march or to attend a meeting, I run the whole day before, morning and afternoon, in order to leave all my things in order so that my absence will not be noticed.

¹²⁹ We had other colleagues who, when they had to go to a meeting, they had fought with the husband... I remember times, when I was driving other women back home, having been verbally abused by the husband, who would said furiously: here they are the crazy women, come on stop disturbing...

participants shared, to differing degrees, a negative perception of feminism and feminists. Feminism was perceived and defined by the participants as “a discriminatory (against men) practice”, as being something unnecessary because not based on MML women’s realities and problems (MML women are too busy with the auctions, the debts, and the agrarian strike, to be interested in feminist issues), as if the latter was something secondary or non relevant for their lives. Feminists are women who want to be “self-sufficient and autonomous in everything”, they want to be “superior to” men. MML women do not have any problems with men.

However, some of them said, that by participating in the MML women came to understand many issues related to gender: before joining the movement they did not know much about gender, or even what it was. The movement, in fact, offered a good opportunity to be exposed to some types of inequalities. As they were participating they incorporated in their vocabulary a number of new terms, and learned a lot about women’s condition versus the more “privileged condition” of men. They help other MML members who had “oppressive families, or conservative husbands”. The MML is perceived as being fully integrated with the women’s movement and “occasionally” cooperates with other women’s groups on specific issues such as the fight for a law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina. However, it seems that despite occasional cooperation and annual meetings with feminist and other women’s groups, the MML has not developed a network of contacts with these types of associations. “Worldwide, women lose in every way” but this is not their own experience, this is why they are not concerned with feminism or unequal gender relations.

All the women I interviewed said that the fact that they were women helped them in their struggles. Women appear less threatening than men, the fact itself that they were women, and that their strategies were peaceful ones, was very helpful when negotiating or when trying to stop an auction. They were always treated respectfully. Also, nobody expected that women would try stopping an auction and that women would question debts and their legitimacy. This sort of surprise effect worked to MML women's advantage. In addition the fact that women were exposing themselves so much was an important incentive to action for their partners and husbands. They set an example to men who came to see that it was necessary to react and do something about their situation.

It is possible to argue that MML leaders have become aware of some power dynamics in their personal lives, and developed the ability to gain some reasonable control over their ways of living (Freytes Frey, 2005). However, it is also important to highlight some of the limitations of these experiences. First of all, MML women performed a fundamental role in giving visibility to key issues related to the agriculture sector by organizing meetings, marches, protests, and pickets, by their networking with other rural associations, agriculture institutions, academics, media and, to some extent, political parties. This fact is not equally reflected in the leadership positions MML women have since assumed within traditional agrarian institutions, especially at a national level. In those strategic positions, MML women are under-represented. Both at the local and national levels those who occupy all the influential positions in the agrarian institutions and organizations are men who "arrange things in such a way that it is difficult for women to gain access to resources or control over important decisions" (Stolen, 1996: 388). It seems that men's dominant position on the farm extends to the wider context. In some rural institutions women were formerly explicitly excluded, now women are included in theory but would rarely

be elected¹³⁰. The most problematic issue my participants mentioned was that while the MML is usually recognized as an important actor in the rural sector, it is not considered to be as important as male agrarian organizations.

Another important problem women faced were the tensions within the family and feelings of being overwhelmed that were associated to the responsibilities of the various roles they were supposed to assume: tasks associated with the domestic sphere (family responsibilities of mother, wife and daughter), combined with the additional roles in the public sphere. These tensions often limited women's degree of commitment to the movement. A cultural image that assigns the woman the exclusive responsibility for the reproductive labor within the household seems to persist. As Freytes Frey et al. affirm, "political participation and the community tasks appear as new activities that simply come to join the traditional female functions, generating among the directors and representatives an overwhelming feeling of overload and overextension (Freytes Frey et al., 2005)".

¹³⁰ For example the first female executive member of the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* (SRA), the oldest and most "conservative" organization that represents the interest of large land-owners, was elected in 2005 (*impulsebaires*, 30 July, 2005).

Conclusion: The MML and Feminism, a dynamic relationship?

The main objective of the thesis was to investigate the relationship between women's activism, feminism and the deployment of feminine identities. I did so by examining the actions, strategies, and discourses of an innovative rural women's movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid nineties: the Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML). This thesis looked at the changes and transformations that participation in the MML has caused in MML women's lives. First, I sought to understand how, and to what extent, the participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives (Chapter 5). Secondly, I examined the effects of women's participation in the MML on the socially constructed representations of "feminine roles" and on the social relations of gender in Argentina's Pampean region (Chapter 6). And, lastly, I focused on how it would be appropriate to position the MML, a women's movement, *vis-à-vis* feminism (Chapter 7).

The starting point was that part of the feminist literature considers "un-feminist" and generally ineffectual in their political dissent social movements of women deploying "traditional" gender roles, such as those of "mothers" or "wives", arguing that those women's movements do not challenge social relations of gender and that only women's movements that explicitly challenge patriarchy can be considered as being feminist. Many efforts have been made by feminists all over the world to develop inclusive definitions of both feminism and women's activism. Much of this effort has focused on developing "the most inclusive" definitions or expanding the ideological contents of what feminism is, in order to include radically different experiences of being woman.

The analysis of this case study has shown that the adoption of inclusive definitions of both feminism and women's movements is a first step. However, it also shows that the real pluralization of feminism is not achieved by simply imposing constricting labels. The strategy and politics of women's movements could be and sometimes are "non-gender-directed" and only "later develop an interest in changing gender relations" (Ferree, 2006: 6), while other women's movements will never explicitly develop such interest or will use "feminine" roles to achieve their goals which may not be related to gender.

In chapter 5, I addressed the first research question of this study: how, and to what extent, participation in the movement politicized MML women's everyday lives. I focused on the changes that occurred over fourteen years of activism in the relationship between MML women and politics. Specifically I was interested in the process through which MML women acquired political awareness and political competence.

After more than fourteen years of activism in the MML, the lives of its leaders seemed to have been transformed in at least three ways. First, the respondents said that before joining the movement they were not aware of those connections between politics and their personal lives. By participating, they began to see them and they seem now to be in a better position to see and understand the connections that exist between their personal interests and complex political issues (related, for example, to globalization). All my respondents were politically competent and able to elaborate, for instance, on the implications for small and medium farmers of adopting and implementing neo-liberal economic policies. Second, today they seem to be aware that what they are doing is politics. They all defined the MML as a political movement, but made a

distinction between politics and political parties, and stressed the importance of the autonomy of the movement. They seemed to be able to see the links between their private lives, their activism and the political outcomes of their behaviour. They are aware of the impact that politics has on their lives. Lastly, both the objectives and the motivations for participating have changed over the years and are now more politically explicit. In particular, the issue of debts, taken in conjunction with their associated responsibilities, including the “necessity” of “defending the family patrimony”, ceased to be a personal issue and became a political one.

We can argue, now, that MML women’s practical and strategic gender interests are linked together. Rather than being separated they can be understood as a continuum. First, we saw that MML leaders began to see the connection between their immediate concerns and broader political issues, and were better positioned “to see and understand connections that exist between their personal and immediate objectives and more complex political issues” (Jaquette, 1994: 230). Secondly, MML women were “forced to experience themselves some of the sex role biases that have long impeded women’s entry into the public and political spheres” (Jaquette, 1994: 232). This was particularly evident when MML leaders realized that the MML was not considered to be as important as other agrarian organizations.

In chapter 6, I addressed the second research question of this thesis: what are the effects of women’s participation in the MML on their socially constructed representations of gender roles and on the social relations of gender in rural Argentina? The first part of the chapter, “Going out of the domestic space”, focused on the ways MML women challenged certain constraints on their roles and lives. By analyzing what they do and how they behave, it is possible to see how they challenged some of the expectations of their husbands and families, and succeeded in

creating a new women's space. The second part, "Deconstructing femininity", focused on what MML women (and their husbands) are or should be, that is to say, on the cultural ideas and interpretations of gender differences.

By using two discourses to legitimize women's participation in the MML (the narrative of men's depression, and the definition of women's intrusion in the male domain, not in political terms but in biological terms, as women and mothers), the leaders of the movement solved the discrepancy between the "ideal" system of gender relations and their practice of activism. MML women's discourses and practices challenged the gender division of roles and spaces in the public sphere and opened up a space to debate certain issues.

My analysis illustrated a process of change that contained two elements: the desire for continuity (maintaining gender relations in the same hierarchical order) and the desire to achieve new gender values. Changing the system of gender values is not an easy task: certain ideas tend to be resistant to change, especially those ideas that appear to be "natural" and self-evident to all social actors. In MML leaders' discourses and practices, it is possible to perceive certain critical ideas in relation to gender and the aspiration to do things in a different way. However, this aspiration did not seem to challenge the essential conceptions of gender differences regarding the division of labor or the continuing association of men and women with public and domestic domains respectively, which, according to MML leaders, are still to a large extent associated with biological differences. MML leaders appeared to be critical of some aspects of the system of gender relations, especially those aspects that related to the legitimate possibility for them to leave the domestic sphere, but, at the same time, they did not want to change it completely,

risking the loss of some of the “benefits” of that same system (for example the “respect” MML leaders received because of the fact that they were women).

The question this raises is: why MML women want to maintain, to some degree, gender relations as they are, instead of wanting to change them “radically”. Some of the concepts that were discussed in the first chapter are useful to understanding this “ambiguity” in relation to changing or, even, subverting social relations of gender. Part of the problem relates to the fact that we, as feminists, have tended to interpret femininity, and subsequently the deployment of feminine identities, as an oppressive structure created by men and for men. Some scholars have highlighted that this interpretation does not take into account that some women are not simply passive victims of this repressive system; rather they can be, and sometimes are, “actively engaged in maintaining these discourses in place. The reason why some women actively work to maintain or simply accept this “unequal” system of gender relations might be rationally explained by the benefits that women can get from this status quo. We can recognize that certain relations are socially constructed, and we can agree that certain unequal social relations need to be deconstructed in order to have a better society. The problem lies in what has to be deconstructed: should we deconstruct only the aspects of those relations that we perceive as being unequal in a negative way, or also the privileges that are socially associated to them? the “status that certain ideas grant to women.

For instance, the social emphasis on maternal sentiment that is particular of certain types of culture, such as the Argentinian one (Bouvard, 2004; Jelin, 1990; Lavrin, 1998; Schmidt-Cruz, 2006, Vazquez-Rial, 2006) can lead to a sort of “cult of feminine spiritual superiority which

teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men” (Stevens, 1973: 91). Marianismo and the rhetoric of political motherhood are both conceptual frames that “avoid confrontation with traditional values” and at the same time, “leave considerable room to manoeuvre in the public sphere” (Jaquette, 1994: 228-233). It seems that femininity could be and has been used as a safe and powerful cultural image to “carve a niche in politics”, a strategy for making a case for participating in public life as a socially acceptable female activity, that works particularly well in very maternalistic contexts.

In chapter 7, I addressed the last research question of this study: how to position the MML vis-à-vis feminism. The first step was to understand how MML leaders position the movement in relation to feminism and feminists, what ideas they have about feminism, and what the relationship between the MML and feminist organizations and networks is. In the last part of the chapter I also addressed some problematic issues in relation to the conclusions drawn by this thesis.

In this chapter we learned that all the participants in the study agreed that the MML is not a feminist movement. While MML leaders denied any connection with feminism, they all highlighted the *agrarian* nature of the movement. However, some of them said that by participating in the MML women understood many issues related to gender: before joining the movement they did not know much about gender, nor even what it was. The movement, in fact, offered a good opportunity to be exposed to some types of inequalities. As they were participating, they learned a lot about women’s condition versus the more “privileged condition” of men. They helped other MML members who had “oppressive families, or conservative

husbands”. My respondents also argued that the MML is fully integrated with the women’s movement but that only “occasionally” do they cooperate with other women’s groups on specific issues, such as the fight for a law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina. However, it seems that despite occasional cooperation and annual meetings with feminist and other women’s groups, the MML has not developed a network of contacts with these types of associations.

While it seemed that MML leaders have become aware of some power dynamics in their personal lives, and gained some control over their ways of living, we first noted that the fundamental role MML women performed, of giving visibility to key issues related to the agriculture sector, has not been properly recognized. Both at the local and national levels those who occupy all the influential positions in the agrarian organizations are men. While the MML is usually recognized as an important actor in the rural sector, it is not considered to be as important as male agrarian organizations. Secondly, we highlighted the tensions within the family and feelings of being overwhelmed that were associated to their new responsibilities as MML leaders (and members) as they combined tasks associated with the domestic sphere (family responsibilities of mother, wife and daughter), combined with the additional roles in the public sphere. These tensions often limited women’s degree of commitment to the movement.

The case explored in this thesis, the MML, allows us to capture some of the most problematic aspects regarding the idea of developing “inclusive” definitions of feminism. Much of the literature on women’s movements and feminism propose to expand the boundaries of feminism in order to include the experiences of activism of women, such as MML women, who do not fit into “properly” feminist theoretical frameworks. This would result, in many cases, in the

imposition of the label “feminist” on movements of women who actively refuse that label. As I have showed in chapter 7, all MML women rejected the idea of being connected with feminism. This is why I think that it would be really problematic to impose the label “feminist” on MML women. In addition, I do not see how the imposition of labels on “social experiences” could contribute to bridging the gap between the feminist literature and the literature on social (and women’s) movements, nor to our understanding of the relationship between feminism and women’s movements.

The first step to understanding how feminism is related to women’s movements is to abandon the “illusion” of developing the most “inclusive” definition of feminism that would unavoidably result in applying constricting labels or in excluding someone or something. The next and, in my opinion, more relevant question is how and why certain types of women’s activism are or could be relevant for feminism.

In this thesis I argue that women’s movements that deploy feminine identities, such as the MML, are relevant for feminism. As discussed in chapter 1, the literature on Latin American women’s movements has tended to differentiate between “female consciousness/practical gender interests” and “feminist consciousness/strategic gender interests”. This thesis questions the utility of such dichotomization and it attempts to bring together certain theoretical components of the debate. It does so by examining the experiences of a group of women who deploy “feminine” identities (MML women present themselves as mothers, wives, and housewives), whose participation is based on the rejection of any connection with feminism, who seem to have “multiple” interests, that may change over time.

In this study I have also shown that expanding the boundaries of feminism and women's movements is not enough when trying to understand the relationships between feminism and women's movements. The relationship between this type of activism and feminism as an ideology appears certainly to be less contradictory than the one that would emerge by adopting restrictive and exclusionary definitions of feminism and of women's activism. There remains, however, a problem of epistemology, of who is entitled to make the decisions about who and what to include among feminist women's movements and what goals can be considered to be coherent with feminism. Many debates of this nature are still going on among feminists (such as the debates about veiling, prostitution, or genital mutilation), and are far from being resolved.

The relationship between women's movements and feminism has, as Ferree suggests, to be approached as "processes of flux": on the one hand, women's movements are in a process through which feminism may be becoming an issue for them, one among their goals. On the other, feminism "circulating" in different places and spaces, may generate new social movements, including women's movements which are not explicitly feminist (Ferree, 2006: 7). MML women, by being in contact with other women's and feminist movements and organizations, by experiencing themselves certain gender inequalities, or by comparing their situations to those of their husbands (who, when they have to go somewhere, simply leave), changed the way these women understood gender relations. By breaking into the traditionally male sphere of public power, women's movements are seen to challenge oppressive gender hierarchies and create a new place for women – regardless of whether this is done to respond to or to challenge what have been women's traditional obligations within the private sphere. I do

not think feminism, as understood by MML leaders, is becoming an issue for them, yet, “feminism” and “feminist ideas” are “circulating” in MML’s leaders lives, challenging, to some extent their own understanding of feminism and of feminists (Ferree, 2006: 7). Even if its members often assumed essentializing standpoints such as those of mothers, wives, and housekeepers, and reproduced many gendered social and cultural codes in their discourses, the actions and strategies of the movement seem to have challenged and, to some extent, changed women’s subordination to men on at least two different levels: the private and the political.

In Ferree’s words, regardless of MML’s (rather material) goals, participation in the movement brought MML women “to more explicitly political activities” (Ferree, 2006: 8). It empowered MML women “to challenge limitations on their roles and lives” (Ferree, 2006: 8): by changing the cultural images that are associated to women, and men, MML women challenged and, to some extent, changed social relations of gender in their families and communities. They created long-term networks among women (even if not necessarily with feminists) “that enhanced their ability to recognize existing gender (and class, and race) relations as being oppressive and in need of change” (Ferree, 2006: 8).

What is the significance of this for other women in the Pampean region (and maybe elsewhere)? The MML represents an interesting case study of a women’s movement that does not challenge patriarchy explicitly. We learn from it that an advancement in terms of “feminist outcomes” or “strategic gender interests”, in short, a challenge to patriarchy, may result, in certain contexts, even while deploying identities and strategies that would be defined, by some feminists, as

“traditional” or conservative. Participation in the MML was activated by a “female (and not feminist) consciousness” and it was based on rather practical gender interests.

Externalities or spillovers are defined in economics as “an impact on a party that is not directly involved in the transaction” (Friedman calls them “neighborhood effects”) (Varian, 1992: 433). Examples of externalities are “pollution” which is a negative spillover effect upon people; or “beauty of a garden” which is a positive spillover upon residents of a neighborhood. In this case, we can understand women who decided to participate as having beneficial effects not only on their own lives, but on third parties also. By entering for example into male-only domains or by going out of the domestic space, they are creating new possibilities for other women (who are not necessarily MML members) who want to get involved in agrarian politics or who want to pursue a career outside the house.

It is possible that MML women did not try to manipulate gender, but as “rational” actors they chose the strategies they expected to be successful within this specific context. MML’s composition, tactics, identity, and interests appear to be parts of a gendered strategy deployed by MML women. I am referring here to the ideology of marianismo, and to the rhetoric of motherhood. This is a strategy whose main goal was not focused on gender, but that had the unintended consequence of transforming MML leaders (and women) in ways that they themselves may not have realized.

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Appendix 1: Ethics approval



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

www.uottawa.ca/communications/ottawa_en The information is in French for info

August 19, 2008

RE: An Inadvertent Redefinition of 'Feminist': The Argentinean Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (# 06-08-48)

Dear Professor Denis and Ms. Prules,

You will find enclosed the Social Sciences and Humanities REB ethical clearance for the above-mentioned study.

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms may not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must also promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

This certificate of ethical clearance is valid until August 19, 2009. Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer in August 2009 to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:

http://web89.uottawa.ca/sovhoc/bureau/ethics/applications_dhuma.asp

A copy of this approval will be sent to research services, if necessary.

If you have any questions, you may contact the undersigned at the number (613) 562-5387.

Sincerely yours,

Germain Zenge
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Dr. Peter Beyer, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Office of the Protocol Officer
Office des protocoles éthiques et de la recherche en éthique
145, rue Jean Jacques, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
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Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa
Université, université, universitat, universidade, universidat, universitad, universitatis, universitates

HEALTH SCIENCES AND SCIENCE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical approval of the research project entitled *An Inadvertent Redefinition of 'Femininity': The Argentinean Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (# 06-03-48)* submitted by Pr. Ann Denis of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Ottawa and her master's student Ms. Leticia Anabel Pndos.

The Board found that this research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave it a Category 1a (approval). This certification is valid one year from the date indicated below.

Germain Zongo
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Dr. Peter Bayer, Chair of the
Health Sciences and Science REB

August 29, 2008
Date

Appendix 2: Copy of recruitment script

Dear (name and last name),

My name is Leticia Anabel Paulos, I am an Argentinian student in Sociology/Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa in Canada. I am doing my Master's thesis on the *Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha* (MML).

I think it would be extremely important to talk to some of the members of the movement in order to understand what you really think about very important issues related the movement. I am inviting some of the leaders or coordinators of the MML from the provinces where the MML was strongest to participate in this study. I would like to discuss with you the impact the MML has had on the private and public lives of MML members. That is why it is important to talk with you, so you can tell me your experiences and what you think about these things.

I would like to arrange an interview with you. You would talk with me over the telephone and I would ask you questions about yourself and your experience in the movement, and also about the experiences of other women that you may want to share. You would also chat about the activities of the movement, and about the contacts of the MML with other social movements. The interview will be tape recorded; it can take about one hour. We will talk in Spanish and no one else will be listening.

Of course, your name will not appear anywhere. All you say will remain with me and Professor Ann Denis who is supervising the study. Besides, you can refuse to answer any question and you can call off the interview anytime you want without any negative repercussion.

If you agree to participate you can contact me- perhaps via e-mail- at the address provided in the information sheet which accompanies this letter. In any case, I will call you in a week or so to make sure you have received this letter and to discuss the possibility of your participation in the study.

Also, I would like to ask you if you could think of another MML leader or coordinator who, in your opinion, I could and/or should contact. Before giving me any contact details, you will have to obtain the permission of that person. When I will call you in a week or so, I will remind you of this, and you can give me her contact information on the day we carry out the interview.

Best Regards,

Anabel Paulos

Appendix 3: Copy of information sheet

Title of the study: An Inadvertent Redefinition of 'Femininity': The Argentinian Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (MML)

Researcher: Leticia Anabel Paulos, MA student in Sociology/Women's Studies, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, Canada.

Pavillon Desmarais
55 Laurier Est, Office 8159
University of Ottawa

Supervisor: Professor Ann Denis, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, Canada.

Pavillon Desmarais
55 Laurier Est, office 8105
University of Ottawa
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5

You are invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Leticia Anabel Paulos under the supervision of Prof. Ann Denis.

This study seeks to show what the women of the MML movement have done to improve women's condition and what impact the MML has had on the private and public lives of MML members. This is why it is so important for us to talk with MML women so they can tell us their experiences and what they think about these issues.

Your participation will consist essentially of one individual interview over the telephone with the researcher. The conversation will take about one hour and it will be in Spanish. No one else will be listening. The interview will be recorded and only the person who chats with you and her supervisor will listen to what is taped or read the written transcript of the conversation.

The information you may share will remain strictly confidential. Your answers may be used in the analysis and, therefore, quoted anonymously, in a Master's thesis and eventually in other publications based on it.

All personally identifying information will be removed or altered in the written transcript to ensure anonymity. If necessary, pseudonyms or code names will be used.

The data collected, both the recordings and the transcripts of interviews, will be kept in a secure manner. Data will be stored in the supervisor's office, and only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to it. The data will be kept for five years, after which the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

If you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered up to the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

If you wish I can send you a summary of research results after the thesis is completed.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5841

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Appendix 4: Operationalization of main concepts

Concepts	Dimensions	Variables/Indicators	Questions
Resistance to Feminine Representations and Social Roles	Private Strategies	No compliance with family obligations/expectations	Q.8. Q.8.a. Q.9. Q.9 b.iii.
		Talk about private lives at MML meetings	Q.5. Q.5.c.
		Leave the children/elderly	Q.9.b.iii.
	Public Strategies	Gender and other resources	Q.2.b Q.2.d. Q.7.c. Q.7.b.
		Voice (voicing of personal opinions and views in public; raising issues of concern with authorities)	Q.3.a. Q.3.b. Q.3.c. Q.3.d. Q.3.e. Q.3.f.
		Demonstrated legally (how many times) Protested illegally (how many times)	Q.4.a. Q.4.b.
		Confrontation	Q.2.b.

Concepts	Dimensions	Variables/Indicators	Questions
Participation In the MML	Motivational interests		Q.1. Q.2.1.a. Q.1. b.
	Mobility	Attend meetings in own province	Q.4.c.
		Travel to Attend MML meetings	Q.4.c
		Frequency of Attendance	Q.2.c.
Voice (see above)		Q.3.a-f.	
	Participation in decision making		Q.2.e.
Participation in other associations	Political	Relations with party	Q.10.b. Q.10. i.
		Political turnout	Q.10.c.
	Other		Q.10. a-e
Family Resources	Principal income generator		Q.19.
	Occupation		Q.20.
	Family size		Q.21.
	Social class		Q.22. Q.22. a. Q.23. Q.23.a-d

Concepts	Dimensions	Variables/Indicators	Questions
Gender inequality/factual changes		Role in the house	Q.9. Q.9.b. Q.9.d. Q.9.d.i. Q.9.d.ii.
		Family complaints	Q.9. a.
		Help with housework	Q.9.b. Q.9.b.i. Q.9.b.ii.
		Help with child/elderly care	Q.9.b.iii.
Other inequalities /factual changes		identifying inequalities	Q.15 Q.16
		Understanding of politics	Q.17 Q.18
Perception of inequalities		Private	Q.9.c. Q.9.a. Q.9.b.
		Other	Q.12

Concepts	Dimensions	Variables/Indicators	Questions
Self confidence and identity		Reaction of family	Q.9.a. Q.9.b.
		Perception of gender appropriateness	Q.4. e. Q.4. f. Q.7.a.
		Self-esteem	Q.7. b. Q.5. e. Q.10. f. Q.10. g. Q.5.b. Q.11. Q.11.a.
		Sense of connection	Q.5.d. Q.5. b.
Networks and contacts		Contacts	Q.14.
		Contacts with feminist organizations/networks	Q.14. a. Q.14.a.i.
		Impact of networks	Q.14.c. Q.14. d. Q.14. e.

Appendix 5: Interview guide

Name of Interviewee:
Assigned number/code:

To start I would like to talk with you about the MML and your experience in the MML

1. I am interested in why women started participating in the MML.

- a. What made you get involved?
- b. What do you think made other women get involved?
- c. When did you join the MML?

2. Now I would like to ask you some questions about the organization, goals, and strategies of the MML.

- a. What were the objectives of the MML at the beginning? What are the objectives of the MML today?
- b. What did you do to stop the auctions of your lands? What do you do today to achieve your new goals, if any?
- c. Do you think that the fact that you were women helped you or it made negotiating more difficult? Why?
- d. How often do you meet in your province and at the national level? Probes:
 - i. Who can attend the meetings?
 - ii. Are men allowed to participate?

3. I am interested in you telling me a bit about each of the following things which you have done:

- a. Given public speeches about the MML
- b. Been interviewed about the MML
- c. Written articles about the MML
- d. Expressed your opinions in MML meetings
- e. Negotiated with politicians or other institutions
- f. Had you done any of these things before joining the MML?

4. What kind of activities have you taken part as a member of the MML? Probes:

- a. Have you demonstrated for the MML (i.e. March of women, etc)? How often?

- b. Have you taken part in road blockades and in national strikes? How often?
 - c. Have you gone to MML meetings in your province? Have you gone to MML meetings in other provinces?
5. Do you share your personal experiences and problems with other MML women during the meetings?
6. Would you define the MML as a feminist movement? Why? Why not? Probes:
- a. If not feminist, what type of movement is the MML? (rural, women, political)
 - b. Do you think other women would have been reluctant to join in the movement, if the MML had been called a feminist movement? Why?
 - c. How would you define feminism?

Now I would like to talk with you about the impact of your participation in the MML on your private and public life

7. Why do you think that women decided to go out and act when the crisis originally started? Probes:
- a. Do you think that reacting in periods of crisis is something women are good at? Why?
 - c. Do you think that men would have managed to stop the auctions? Why? Why not?
8. How did you organize your everyday life after joining the movement? Can you describe your typical day or week to me? Probes:
- a. How is this different from your typical day or week before joining in the MML?
9. Do you think your role in your house changed after you joined the movement?
- a. If you have the main responsibility for housekeeping and caring for the children and elderly in your family, I would like to know:
 - i. Who's helping you most?
 - ii. Is anyone refusing to help?
 - iiii. Who takes care of the children or elderly members of your family when you are not home (have gone to a meeting)?

iiii. Did anybody in the family complain because there were things that you used to do that you were not doing anymore?

b. What do you think the family responsibilities of men and women are? What they should be? Why? Probe:

c. What can you tell me about other women of the movement that you know? Probes:

i. How has their everyday life changed?

ii. How have their families reacted?

10. After joining the MML, have you joined other organizations, movements or political parties?

a. If yes, what type of organizations?

11. How have you felt about being a woman and a member of a social movement with so many responsibilities?

a. When you started participating, did you think that what you were doing was appropriate for a woman? Why? Probe:

i. And today, what do you think?

ii. Do you think you were taking men's places? Why?

12. Do you think you are a different woman today because of your experience in the MML? Probe:

a. What do you think about the other members of the movement? How are they different now? How?

13. What have you learned from participating in the MML?

14. Do you think that women and men have equal access to public spaces (i.e. at conferences or protests)? Why? What has been your experience? Probes:

Now I would like to talk with you about the networks the MML has joined

15. Does the MML have contacts with other associations or networks in Argentina and internationally?

a. What type of associations or networks? Probes:

i. Any feminist association or network?

- b. What type of contacts?
- c. Do you think these contacts are positive for the movement?
- d. What have you learned from them?
- e. Which association or network has influenced you most?

Before concluding the interview I would like to ask you some questions about yourself and your family.

- 17. Who are the principal income generators in your household?
- 18. What is your main occupation? Has this changed since you joined the MML?
- 19. Your family is composed of how many members? Probes:
 - a. Who lives with you?
 - b. Who works the land?
- 20. How would you define your family in terms of social status? (i.e. middle class family, working class)
 - a. What about the other women of the movement?
- 21. How many hectares of land do you have? Probe:
 - a. Is it cultivated?
 - i. What type of crops?
 - b. Whose name is the land in? (yours, husband's, joint)
 - c. How much is mortgaged?
 - d. Do you have animals, tractors or other machinery to work the land?
- 22. What is your background (Spanish, Italian, ...)?
- 23. How many years of formal education do you have?
- 24. What is your year of birth?

To conclude the interview...

- 1. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about the MML, the role of women in the MML or about the contacts of the MML with other organizations?
- 2. Is there anything that you want to mention about a topic we haven't discussed?

3. Have you thought about the name/names of other MML women that, in your opinion, I could and/or should contact? Have you asked their permission to give me their contact details? Can you give me their contact details?

Thank you very much for your time. If later on you have any questions concerning this study, you can contact me or my supervisor. Would you like to receive a summary of the research results? If so, please give me the address where you would like sent.