

JEFF'S PREFACE

When I brought my daughter to southern Brazil to study a women's movement, I knew we were stepping into the middle of a grand arc of social change. Across the vast country, ordinary Brazilians waged a grassroots battle against hunger, poverty, and violence. In the 1980s, they pressed a military dictatorship to accept democracy. In 2002, a nation that had become a laboratory for democracy elected a progressive union leader to the presidency. And in 2010, Brazilians chose Dilma Rousseff, a woman and former leftist guerrilla, as president.

From the beginning of this transformation, the activists in the rural women's movement brought issues of gender equality and women's rights into public spaces. In their *luta* (struggle), they fought for two kinds of rights simultaneously—big economic changes that needed to come from state legislatures and the national government in Brasilia, and daily freedoms that could be won only in local communities and at home.

As we did research together, Emma and I came to understand that this battle went beyond standing up to the police or facing multinational corporations head-on. Hearing rural women's stories, we saw how fighting to change the world and to live your life differently is fraught on the inside with conflict and loneliness, nostalgia and shame. We did not know going in how much it cost individual women—and a women's movement—to put into words the exclusions they suffered and make them into public demands.

We also never imagined how much our relationship as father and daughter would change as we saw firsthand the private pains and triumphs behind Brazil's political transformation. As we grappled to understand the women's enchantment with activism, Emma and I moved from being parent and child, writing in one improvised voice, to working as colleagues, writing in our own alternating voices chapter by chapter.

The women's movement takes shape in big demonstrations, where lines of farmwomen march forward in the face of armed police. It deepens in movement-run pharmacies in the back rooms of houses and union halls, where thick syrups and sweet-scented salves make space for conversation and healing. The political way forward is rarely clear, and re-forming gender roles

is so difficult that after years of struggle, you have to look hard to identify what you've achieved, though you know it's there.

In getting to these places, my unexpected research partner was my daughter. As we work to hammer out new forms of scholarship, and to understand our own world better, we are drawn in by the activism that keeps Brazilian women running for office and mobilizing in the streets for rights. In a world of silencing and violence, their bid to re-enchant democracy is a gamble we want to bet on.



Map of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Map by Bill Nelson.