

---

Special issue: *Life history and cultures of militancy in Latin America's Cold War*

Research article

# 'The whole process of gender': a feminist culture of militancy in southern Brazil

Jeffrey W. Rubin<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, History Department, Boston University, USA

\* Correspondence: [jwr@bu.edu](mailto:jwr@bu.edu)

Submission date: 24 August 2022; Acceptance date: 10 April 2023; Publication date:  
12 October 2023

## How to cite

Rubin, J. W. "'The whole process of gender": a feminist culture of militancy in southern Brazil'. *Radical Americas* 8, 1 (2023): 6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2023.v8.1.006>.

## Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

## Copyright

2023, Jeffrey W. Rubin. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2023.v8.1.006>.

## Open access

*Radical Americas* is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

---

## Abstract

Women in the Movement of Rural Women Workers (*Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais* or MMTR) in southern Brazil envisioned a social movement that represented their interests both as women and as small farmers and agricultural workers, while also allowing for a plurality of voices and strategies. This article describes the feminist and democratic culture of militancy that these women sought, from the 1980s through to the 2000s, and shows how difficult it was to establish and sustain such a culture. These women not only confronted the deep, ongoing difficulties of challenging gendered social relations, but also the pain, shame and silencing that intertwined with gains in voice and equality. They also confronted larger social movements whose leaders understood power differently to the way these women did. For the women described in this article, women's activism requires a deep form of democracy where all voices are heard. Paradoxically, in the context of rural Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil and the panorama of movements that are active there, the rootedness in the everyday lived

experience that made the movement relevant to women who advocated for this form of democracy also kept them from taking on powerholders within the movement who chose to ally with larger, more hierarchical movements, sacrificing significant forms of autonomy and voice in the process.

**Keywords** women's movement; social movement; feminism; gender; lesbian; Brazil; seeing and not seeing; liberation theology; vanguardism; autonomy; multiplicity

## Introduction: 'For the calm that you most need, that you can only find if you don't try to fit everything together'

At the beginning of our visit with Andréia Fornato in 2002,<sup>1</sup> my daughter Emma and I chatted with Andréia and her family, as her sons set out snacks. When it came time to turn to the formal video interview we'd arranged for that afternoon, on the history of Andréia's activism in the Movement of Rural Women Workers (*Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais* or MMTR),<sup>2</sup> we asked Andréia where she'd like to conduct the interview. She took us out to her yard and stood squarely in the middle of it as we set up our tripod, camera and microphone. When the interview began, she proceeded to show us the trees in her family's small orchard:

We have some trees that are symbols of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. One of them that I'd like to present is the pine tree, or the *araucária*, which is native and is this huge tree here. The tallest one. Also we have fruit trees for this season, which for us is winter. We have bergamota and orange, which are also native. Then we have a bergamota tree with the fruit still on the branch. That small one.

After describing the trees, Andréia took us back to the 1980s and 1990s when she worked, together with other young women, in her town of Maronata and the surrounding countryside to form the MMTR, in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Andréia began her narrative with her parents, describing her father's efforts to create a responsive farmers' union, along with his insistence that mornings spent at school be followed by farm work at home. She also described her mother's activities running the domestic sphere of the household. Andréia explained that her mother rarely expressed opinions and had no say in the economic affairs of the household or disciplining of the children. She told us, in her characteristically matter-of-fact way, 'That didn't sit well in my head', and went on to describe years of grassroots organising in the women's movement to change the economic exclusion and social isolation of women in the countryside. Andréia also told us about her work in the farmers' union and the challenges she had faced to become the first woman president of the local union in her town.

An hour later, after the conclusion of the interview, Andréia took us to a different part of her garden and set about showing us the full contours of a cassava plant, which involved pulling the large root vegetable out of the ground. Declining help from Emma, Andréia tugged and tugged until the cassava emerged, smiling broadly as she displayed it to us. In framing our interview between the trees in the orchard and the cassava in the vegetable garden, I think that Andréia meant to evoke her own rootedness, and that of her political militancy, in the ground on which she herself had grown up and the family of which she constituted an integral – and equal – part. Indeed, in the course of the interview, Andréia referenced the floorboards in her house and the way new planks intermingled with wood from the original house, which had belonged to her husband's parents. The fact that Andréia's sons served us snacks, taking on a role conventionally reserved for women and girls, represented a striking result of her efforts to build differently on that intergenerational floor.

In the course of two decades of activism, Andréia used her early life experiences and the sensibility that emerged from them to develop a vision of radical politics and activism focused on re-forming the economic and social relations around her – in her family, community and region. Andréia's personal history, which included the union and church leaders who had ignited her activism, led her to base this vision of economic and social change on notions of subjecthood and dialogue. This occurred amid what an early colleague in the MMTR – Anisia Santos, the first woman president of the farmers' union in another

town – characterised as ‘the whole process of gender’, which, in Anisia’s view, involved interlocking issues of land, agricultural work, family relations, community activity and finance. Andréia and Anisia applied the lessons of their pasts to both their family life and political activism by developing the capacity to recognise and balance multiple experiences and understandings simultaneously.

Isabel Toneli, another founding member of the MMTR, who was raised in Maronata but spent much of her adult life in Andalinas,<sup>3</sup> reached similar conclusions about holding multiplicity. For Isabel, this developed in the course of years of organising work for the MMTR, talking to women in their homes, at church and at movement meetings. In presenting a gendered analysis of women’s economic and social subordination in their families and communities, Isabel gained supporters for the women’s movement. But she also came up against commitments and refusals that led women to hesitate to join the movement or attend its events. As she enumerated these constraints, I asked Isabel if fighting for new understandings and practices of gender and agriculture became harder as she became aware of the complexity of women’s lives and of women’s ambivalence towards changing long-standing relationships and practices. Isabel answered directly and in an uncharacteristically personal fashion. She was drawing, she said, on her reading of the Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire. ‘Each person is different, each conversation,’ Isabel explained. Therefore, she said, in order to transform the world, you have to reach inside yourself ‘for the calm that you most need, that you can only find if you don’t try to fit everything together’.

In acknowledging the multiplicity of their commitment to subjecthood and dialogue, Andréia and Isabel envisioned and articulated a democratic form of building a movement and exercising power. This article constitutes my effort to discern, amid complex emotions, activism and conflicts in the MMTR, what I understand as a feminist and democratic vision in the way that they and other activists conceptualised both subjecthood and power. This feminist and democratic culture of militancy, forged by women who opted to stay in the towns where they grew up, was radical in its twin identifications of gender and class as systems of domination that needed to be fought with grassroots activism and visions of an alternative future. It was rooted in the daily life and practices of small rural towns, and it grew out of a deep sense of subjecthood instilled by the liberation theology church, and a growing conviction on the part of the young women that they were full human beings with dignity, that they had rights and that they were protagonists in their own lives. This conviction about being a person – expressed as *ser gente* in Portuguese – took shape in MMTR meetings, training courses, marches and demonstrations over the years, in large lecture halls and small group discussions.

The conceptualisation of a feminist and democratic culture of militancy described in this article emerged, in the course of 15 years of research visits, through multiple processes of seeing – of patterns glimpsed, principles enacted or spoken, interactions performed or reflected upon. This article asks how this impulse was expressed and what ramifications it had. Militancy as both feminist and democratic – in part in comparison to other cultures of militancy described in this volume – was articulated in dialogue, as various MMTR leaders, Emma and I returned repeatedly to the topics we had been discussing over the years. It also became visible when Emma and I brought back writing, videos and curricular materials based on interviews from previous visits and presented them for discussion in MMTR meeting spaces, or when Emma met with women individually to go over materials for accuracy, a process that spurred further reflection. What I present as a *culture of militancy* appeared as one thing amid many, delineated most explicitly in splits within the MMTR itself and, later, in reflections on those splits.

To describe the feminist and democratic sensibility that developed among MMTR activists in Maronata and Andalinas, I am revisiting interviews conducted in those towns between 1997 and 2018.<sup>4</sup> This revisitation is informed by the Cultures of Militancy workshops out of which this special issue of *Radical Americas* has emerged and the issues that our discussions raised regarding vanguardism, hierarchy, discipline and gender on the left since the 1960s. Many of the movements described in this special issue insisted on unanimity in analysis and strategy among their members, and many of those members accepted those pressures through self-fashioning and self-surveillance.<sup>5</sup> At times, too, those profiled in this special issue resisted such pressures and ultimately broke with revolutionary organisations.<sup>6</sup> These pressures to conform to one particular radical vision were heightened by contexts of military government and repression, with the concomitant separation of militants from the society around them, particularly in clandestine moments or exile.<sup>7</sup> In the early years of the MMTR, when Brazil’s dictatorship was ending and a new constitution was being written and implemented, the movement’s leaders and supporters also faced state and police repression, as they would at other key moments going forward. Yet for the most part, and in contrast to the experiences of others in this special issue,

the activism of these women coincided with a period of expanding democratic government in Brazil that included significant, if limited and uneven, rights to free assembly and speech.

In the context of a leftist past of male vanguardism in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, and in the face of hierarchical authority and unified strategies in other social movements, MMTR leaders puzzled over how to foster subjecthood and, correspondingly, how much to try to fit everything together in confronting a world riven by class and gender. Practices from a more democratic and feminist position, one open to multiple voices and forms of analysis, have become more common among leftist movements in the 2000s than they were when the MMTR formed in the 1980s, for example in the Argentine piquetero movement, Indigenous mobilisations in Bolivia, Occupy Wall Street, the Chilean student movement and Estallido Social and the Movement for Black Lives. At the same time, the adoption of hierarchy and of unified goals and strategies, and the reanimation of masculinist forms of vanguardism in the name of effectiveness, continued in the last years of the Cold War and into the twenty-first century. Indeed, in the late 1990s, a group of MMTR leaders opted to ally the women's movement with the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* or MST), and in so doing, they tailored the MMTR's priorities and strategies to what they experienced as the MST's more disciplined analysis and authority structure.<sup>8</sup> It is in the context of this shift that Andréia and others most directly articulated the democratic and feminist character of their militancy.

In relating life histories to cultures of militancy, I combine a collective biography approach with a focus on particular, critical experiences and tensions at the centre of individual women's activism and lives.<sup>9</sup> Through the interviews that Emma and I did together, we looked closely at the lives of six women who were leaders of, or activists in, the women's movement and explored in depth key tensions they carry with them.<sup>10</sup> These tensions express the women's capacity to hold, permit and examine – consciously and unconsciously – complex realities and interpersonal relationships at the heart of their culture of militancy.

In the next sections of this article, I first set out the seeing and not seeing sensibility that enabled Emma and me to discern the multiple, simultaneous experiences at play in the lives of MMTR activists and, correspondingly, their capacity to hold this multiplicity. In order to place the MMTR's culture of militancy in the context of broader challenges and changes on the left before and during this period, I will then present a brief outline of shifts on the left away from vanguardism to a recognition of difference and multiplicity in Brazil and Mexico, where I have also done ethnographic research. In the final two sections of the article, I will present the history of the MMTR and explore the mixture of autonomy and commitment to dialogue that developed and deepened among some of the MMTR activists as they envisioned a women's movement able to hold and foster multiple viewpoints, strategies and emotions.

## Seeing and not seeing

Individual lives and social movements take shape, know and sustain themselves, interact and make impacts by holding multiplicity. Consequently, a sensibility of seeing and simultaneity facilitates our understanding of cultures of militancy. What I call *seeing and not seeing* means looking squarely at – but also beyond and through – the big things people habitually see and are primed to see, such as institutions, democracies, movements, economies, viruses or borders. By resisting habitual moves to coherence and making boundaries, a seeing and not seeing sensibility works to both see and not see these phenomena so as to identify the multiple processes, forces and representations that occur in, through and around them, out of which they are constituted and amid which they act.<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein evoked such a sensibility with his suggestion of foregoing the construction of clearly delineated comparative categories, with the advice that the observer '[not] think, but look'. In so doing, one 'notices an aspect', a pattern or starting point they have not seen before.<sup>12</sup>

Psychoanalyst Leston Havens observes that 'the consistency, regularity, almost homogeneity we think we see in people is a product of our need to have one person before us, a whole, habitual creature, when in fact so-called multiple personalities are really only the sharply etched version of what occurs in everyone'.<sup>13</sup> Havens goes on to describe the approach of the analyst – like that of Wittgenstein's philosopher or social scientist – as they seek to perceive patterns out of complexity. 'An evenly suspended attention', he writes, 'permits opposites to coexist in the mind . . . I believe it is this unforced mingling that allows fresh combinations to appear and shed their light.'<sup>14</sup>

In the course of participant observation and interviews with MMTR activists in Maronata and Andalinas over 15 years, Emma and I sought to 'suspend attention evenly', listening and absorbing

information as we asked questions, bringing back transcriptions and video material from previous visits and finding stories shifting and deepening through reflection on our renderings of them and on our new questions. Out of this 'unforced mingling', we began to perceive paradoxes and tensions that represented key aspects of women's experiences in the MMTR. These experiences constituted parts of women's lives; aspects of their biographies that they and we came upon in dialogue.

## Six women's interior experiences of activism

In 2001, Emma and I were present at the state-wide convention where Helena Toneli was asked to continue in a leadership position in the MMTR, but chose instead to accept the position of Secretary of Health in her small town of Andalinas. Helena was a powerhouse, a key and respected leader of the women's movement who could galvanise hundreds of women with her cry of '*mulheres!*' (women!). However, the other leaders of the MMTR would not accept her decision to work in government to improve health services as part of a centre-left coalition, and they gradually isolated Helena from being involved in strategising. As a result, Helena felt acutely that she had 'two hearts' in tension with one another – one in the streets with the women's movement and the other in the institutions.

In contrast to Helena's public and institutional roles, Sandra Lorina spent long days producing milk and cheese on her family farm, holding the paradox as she envisioned a new world through her participation in the women's movement, while firmly tethered to this one. In our interviews, Sandra constantly toggled back and forth between describing her daily life as it was and setting out convictions and visions completely at odds with ongoing family gender relations. When we talked to Sandra in her kitchen, with her family around her, she told us that she was looking forward to a time when her daughter, Edite, was older and would be able to help her more. 'It doesn't need to be girls who help,' she went on to say. 'Boys can help too.' But her boys only listen to their father's demands for help on the farm, not to their mother's requests in the house. 'My husband is tired when he comes home from work,' Sandra added. 'He likes to sit on the couch and watch TV. That's his place.' She motioned to her husband, who was leaning back, legs crossed and arms slung over the back of the couch. He cocked his head at us, grinned, raised an eyebrow and nodded in agreement.

A different mindset, a relatively egalitarian marriage and greater economic resources enabled Andréia Fornato, the farmers' union president, to foster more congruence between her political and social vision and her daily life. Consequently, Andréia left the women's movement when it adopted hierarchical decision-making practices and allied formally with the MST and its international ally, *Via Campesina*. But Andréia mourned the loss of the movement as a source of inspiration and guidance – a fountain she needed – as she struggled with the meanings of power and of gender in family life and radical politics. Andréia wanted to be a steward of power, rather than a leader who divides up power and uses it as their own. Power, Andréia said, 'has to be understood as a space to speak and grow for a whole movement, not for me as an individual'.

When Cristiele Morolla went door to door in her tiny rural community to convince women to join the women's movement, she encountered numerous obstacles, from religious convictions, to faith in pop psychology, to the men's refusals to reconsider the safety of pesticides or to use condoms in the face of evidence of chemical toxicity and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. In this, her organising experiences paralleled those of Isabel Toneli. Cristiele dealt with the slowness of her organising work and the resistance she faced from women by gradually recognising how much there is working against women in the movement and confusing and complicating what they see to be true, and she takes this recognition as her guide. 'We know the world, and we read the world,' Cristiele told me, 'and things go on from there.'

Isabel Toneli and Nara Saroni were emboldened to live publicly as a lesbian couple and move in together in their small Catholic town because of their immersion in the women's movement and the support for voice and autonomy – for subjecthood – it fostered. Years later however, they found that there was no place – in the movement they had co-created with others to form a space for women's speech – for them to talk about their relationship and they left the movement. It was difficult to discuss their relationship in their family and town too, although they continued to live in the small house next door to Isabel's sister and her family, participating in a robust collective life as they experienced the paradox of silence amid speech.

The intimate experiences of these six activists suggest new categories for scholarly analysis and leftist practice in the final years of the Cold War and in the twenty-first century. To understand what these women negotiate as activists, and to support women in those processes, means recognising that choosing activist strategies may engage multiple hearts and involve holding paradoxes on a daily basis and may include suffering in silence in spaces dedicated to breaking silence or, as Isabel described it, finding some kinds of speech closed down at the moment that others open up. Activists may seek power as a space to be shared, rather than as a resource to be gathered and wielded, and they may read the world as they go, literally and metaphorically door to door, reaching only provisional analyses as they proceed. Andréia perhaps illustrated this provisionality when she struggled to show us the cassava, which grows contingently, taking unpredictable forms, subject to context and conditions. What might a left that acknowledges and builds on the sentiments expressed by these six women and the underlying pressures to which their emotions give voice look like? Through what processes and in what locations has such a left taken shape or been glimpsed?

## Encounters: from vanguardism to multiplicity

Historians of the 1960s Jeffrey Gould<sup>15</sup> and Eric Zolov<sup>16</sup> observe that both the Communist Party left of the early and mid-twentieth century and the Che-inspired New Left of the 1960s based their organising on male vanguards tasked with discerning and pursuing the most effective revolutionary strategies. Literary critics María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo<sup>17</sup> and Diane Sorensen<sup>18</sup> find that the masculine and vanguardist underpinnings of such approaches wrote out difference, first incorporating and then purging feminine identities and practices. In Saldaña-Portillo's words:

Guevara's representation of revolutionary transformation 'leaves behind' a previously immature, complicit consciousness for a fully formed, collective one, resembling a model of development that 'leaves behind' premodern forms of subjectivity and agency for thoroughly modern ones. Both models invariably 'leave behind' the ethnic particularity of indigenous or peasant subjectivity, while carrying forward a racialized and masculinist understanding of fully modern, revolutionary agency.<sup>19</sup>

In Sorensen's analysis, this occurred in the context of a sexualising of power that made revolutionary leaders 'not only the repository of superior male humanness, but also capable of inspiring intensity of feeling that reverberates through the body politic'.<sup>20</sup>

Sorensen discerns a different vision of political activism in the reportage of Mexican journalist and novelist Elena Poniatowska on the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco.<sup>21</sup> In Poniatowska's representation of one of the paradigmatic repressions of the 1960s and early 1970s, which led directly to the formation of Mexico's *foco*-driven, clandestine left, Sorensen finds:

a deliberate attempt to explode unity and to relinquish a totalizing vision while ushering in a disparate group of witnesses whose testimony configures a mosaic of splintered pieces. By allowing different voices to speak, she [observer/author Poniatowska] constructs ... a decentered representation of community anchored in plurality.<sup>22</sup>

The reader of Poniatowska's text, which she produced by piecing together tape-recorded interviews, 'is immersed in the microstories of the everyday experience of '68, as if through fragmentation and polyphony it became possible to reconstruct the meanings of politics in everyday life'.<sup>23</sup>

Poniatowska's text anticipated a sea change in the politics of the radical left in Latin America, one apparent two decades later in the culture of militancy of some members of the MMTR, with their emphasis on subjecthood and dialogue.<sup>24</sup> Poniatowska perceived and recognised multiple voices in an event that could have been told monolithically as one of the founding repressions of 1968 and the ensuing decade.<sup>25</sup> Andréia, too, created her political vision from a 'mosaic of splintered pieces', including family and community experiences, the provocations of liberation theology priests and nuns, a ferment of social-movement activism in the final years of military dictatorship and feminist insights circulating between urban sites and the countryside. And Andréia, like Poniatowska herself, did not reduce these experiences to a totalising vision; rather, she infused radicalism with agency and emotion. Drawing on these approaches, I hope to produce something similar in this article: a mosaic of splintered pieces, from a disparate group of witnesses, to represent a community anchored in plurality.

While the 1970s is widely perceived as a decade of military repression and the literal 'disappearance' of the left,<sup>26</sup> the origins of a more plural, and indeed more democratic, practice of leftist politics can also be located in the experiences and innovations of grassroots encounters during the same and subsequent decades – among radical priests, Indigenous people, feminists and workers – in the jungles and shantytowns of Mexico and Brazil, as well as numerous other locations. The visions and practices developed in these encounters prefigured, indeed hammered out, new forms of leftist subjecthood and practice in the Americas. It is through this lens that I view the organising and meetings of the MMTR, and I will recount some of those experiences of encounter and innovation here.

This innovation developed, for example, with the turn to ethnicity and elections that occurred in the 1970s in the southern Mexican city of Juchitán, where radical Zapotec students encountered their own *pueblo* (people) and past to produce a visionary politics that diverged sharply from the rest of the Latin American left.<sup>27</sup> Rather than reject Indigeneity as *premodern*, to be replaced with the identity of *campesino* (peasant), as much of the Latin American left was doing at the time, the Juchiteco students fused the Zapotec cultural practices among which they lived, long shaped in part by Zapotec elites, with a class-based movement of *Indios* (Indigenous people). And they furthered that Indigenous movement by competing in elections for municipal and then state-wide office, a practice rejected by virtually all of the Mexican grassroots Left at the time,<sup>28</sup> but reflective of electoral competition locally as it had evolved in the course of the twentieth century. In that way, they saw beyond the prevalent class-based analysis of their time to envision, as the MMTR leaders did, new forms of subjecthood and political practice.

Pivotal moments in the development of a religiously infused subjecthood, as well as the rejection of vanguardism, occurred among Mayan Indians in the Lacandón jungle of Chiapas and among residents of the shantytowns of São Paulo, Brazil. In the new settlements of the 1970s in the Lacandón jungle, priests influenced by liberation theology came together with Indigenous Maya setting up new communities and with clandestine leftists who had left Mexico City after the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco (described by Poniatowska) to start a revolution in the countryside.<sup>29</sup> The Zapatistas, in their theories and in the fierce contestation that occurred among different Mayan groups on the ground before and after the 1994 rebellion,<sup>30</sup> navigated a world of both pluralism and fragmentation, and struggled to develop and implement a politics that balanced dialogue and unanimity in productive ways. At much the same time, MMTR activists grappled with how to navigate disagreement, some of them choosing hierarchy and unanimity, others reaching for dialogue and multiplicity.

In the 1970s in São Paulo, liberation theology priests encountered women in mother's clubs on the urban periphery as well as metalworkers in the city's steel and automobile industries. Members of each of these groups began to play multiple roles, as priests ejected the 'charity ladies' and worked with women to create new kinds of mother's clubs, along with organisations to protest the cost of living, and members of Christian base communities ran for office in union elections.<sup>31</sup> The interactions of priests, workers and shantytown dwellers – again a diversity of groups – produced movements for economic rights, internally democratic industrial unions and ultimately the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT), which insisted 'on a different view of what democracy should mean in Brazil'.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the union leaders and the massive strike waves they led in 1978 and 1979 created a new, more equal relationship between workers and leftist intellectuals and politicians, as workers 'were no longer willing to leave the act of interpretation for others'.<sup>33</sup> The women of the MMTR distanced the movement from the Church when the very priests who had encouraged the women sought to limit the reach of their activism; they too were no longer willing to leave the act of interpretation to others.

During the same time, middle-class feminists encountered working-class women on the periphery of São Paulo<sup>34</sup> and subsequently in the hemisphere-wide *encuentros* (meetings) that shaped Latin American feminist movements.<sup>35</sup> These encounters also included women returning from exile, having interacted with European and US feminisms. In the new spaces created initially by the Church and the economic movements, poor and dark-skinned women on the urban periphery turned the expectations of largely white, middle-class feminists on their heads by speaking about gender relations in families, health and women's bodies, and sexuality, topics that middle-class feminists had thought would be taboo in poor neighbourhoods. 'Feminist political practice, then, gave rise to new, inductively derived, theoretical insights',<sup>36</sup> as women took new positions in the formation of the Workers' Party, the debate about the Brazilian constitution and government policies on daycare and women's health. In a similar way, MMTR activists played key roles in political party debates and electoral strategising, as well as in municipal government and the development of alternative, organic agricultural models.

Encounters among different individuals, groups and political theories, which occurred in jungles, shantytowns and union halls, thus transformed leftist analysis and practice from the 1970s to the 1990s. These encounters rethought the nature of Indigeneity in modernity and protest, assimilated elections as focal points for radicalism, built radicalism from lived religion and new religious theorising, repeatedly rejected vanguardism, stimulated a wide range of activists to try out different roles in fostering social change and challenged and revised leftist and feminist orthodoxies by heeding people's day-to-day experiences and convictions. As young women in southern Brazil encountered conduits of these ideas and experiences – in the form of liberation theology priests, Workers' Party activists and urban feminist advisers – they engaged with all of these ideas. Some of the women took them up with gusto.

## The history of the MMTR

### Background: the Church and the social movements

The MMTR<sup>37</sup> was formed in 1986 in a rural region of southern Brazil where women had few economic rights or official documents, did not hold public positions in the Church, unions or government and could not speak freely within their families or leave their houses without their husbands' or fathers' permission. The women who founded the MMTR came from poor, lower-middle-class and/or landless families whose livelihoods had been threatened, for almost two decades, by agri-business and the mechanisation of agriculture that characterised the rural development model promoted by Brazil's military government.<sup>38</sup> The women's political coming of age followed the formation of the Workers' Party and drew on their own and their parents' organising experiences in the Workers' Party and rural unions. The movement itself took shape during the tumultuous years of Brazil's transition to democracy in 1985 and the subsequent national process of writing and implementing a new constitution.

The political ground on which the MMTR founders strategised included the legacies of both military repression and the countervailing processes engendered by that repression in the context of Cold War fears of Communism. In the 1970s, Brazil's military government, fearing the explosive potential of class relations and poverty in rural areas, had established a legal framework for rural unions, expecting those unions to largely remain under official control.<sup>39</sup> These were the unions in which Andréia's father and others had fought, with some success, for accountability and responsiveness, and where Andréia first learned the tactics of political organising. In the same decade, motivated by military violence, rural poverty and attacks on the Church itself, the Catholic clergy in southern Brazil turned increasingly to liberation theology as a means of bringing religion to bear on pressing social issues.<sup>40</sup> Many of the women in the women's movement began their lives of activism in the Pastoral da Juventude (the Youth Pastoral), after priests or nuns came to their houses to convince their parents to let them be educated, and to be introduced to analysis of the socio-economic realities of the world by the priests and nuns themselves. When parents were reluctant, priests or nuns stayed for dinner, played cards and, if parents did not change their minds, came back the next week to make their pitch again. In interviews, women recounted the places to which the priests and nuns took them to see poverty and deprivation worse than their own. Women in their thirties remembered their travels through the countryside with activist nuns, who insisted on identifying and challenging the subservience of women and expressing their religious commitment to developing a deep notion of subjecthood and an ongoing practice of *luta* (struggle).

If the nuns taught the women about subjecthood – about being worthy of dignity and acting as protagonists in their own lives – what the young people learned about the tactics of activism came primarily from the social movements burgeoning around them, from the anti-dam movement fighting the destruction of towns by flooding to the MST's land occupations.<sup>41</sup> The young people, women and men alike, formed these movements and were formed by them, in an explosion of organising and making social connections, radical imaginings of structural economic change and mobilisations on the streets. However, many women activists saw women's rights and needs relegated to the sidelines in the growing land, anti-dam and union movements in the region. In response, women in Maronata, Andalinas and other towns in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul formed the MMTR, choosing to designate the movement as one of women *workers* – including women who worked on small family farms – to emphasise the economic identities and rights of rural women, as well as the challenge they mounted to the broader development model.

## Process: from home ground, a women's counterpublic

The MMTR activists were women who did not want to leave, and for the most part never left, their towns and families of origin. They sought, from their home ground, to re-form the personal, community and economic relationships amid which they had grown up and come of age, including making the land productive and farming practices ecological and sustainable. Even as the women speak of close relationships with their families as well as admiration for their fathers, many of whom were union activists in the 1970s, they clearly identify the control exercised by their fathers and the silence and subservience of their mothers. In a story repeated in one way or another by many of the women, Jussara Lambini, now with a master's degree in sociology, tells of her father's refusal to allow her to attend school or women's movement meetings and remembers what it felt like to go anyway: 'I did that walk crying in the dark, the cold, the rain. "Okay," I told myself. "I'm going because I want to go to that meeting, because it's important."' Today Jussara, who lives in the nearby city of Ralindo, where she works as a professor and consultant and co-parents with her husband, often visits her parents in the house in the nearby countryside where she grew up. These young women were fighting to re-form gender relations and economic structures not only in their societies, but also in their families of origin and their own nuclear families.

The movement formed by the young women during the last years of the Cold War provided an intense sense of belonging in a feminist culture of militancy in close proximity to daily rural life. 'It's in the movement that we feel valorised. It's there that we feel we can do something.' By creating a women's counterpublic,<sup>42</sup> manifested in demonstrations and, especially, in a wide range of meetings conducted over the course of 15 years, the women's movement transformed individual women and enabled them to simultaneously fight for new laws and change their own lives: 'It's like a light switched on.' The MMTR's early campaigns, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, involved mobilisations related to the writing of Brazil's 1988 constitution, including pensions and maternity leave for rural women and political organising and protest to bring about the implementation of that constitution's provisions. The activists secured pensions for rural women, frequently accompanying their mothers to the bank to claim a right that their parents' generation had considered unattainable, and maternity leave for themselves. And their experiences in the movement enabled the young women to develop more egalitarian relationships with male partners, to form same-sex relationships, to promote organic agriculture on their land and to assume prominent leadership positions in churches, agricultural cooperatives, unions and government offices in their communities. In the words of Cristiele Morolla, before the movement, 'We didn't know how to change our history.' With the movement active around them, they learned and they made changes.

In interviews about the MMTR, activists spoke repeatedly about the ways in which women experienced subordination and the reasons why this was unjust and needed to be changed. Like Jussara, each of them had to leave their father's home, in one way or another, to catch a bus to go to a movement meeting or to school. They fought to break the silence with dialogue in multiple spheres of their lives and acknowledged how difficult it was to initiate and sustain this, something for which they'd had no training at home, at work, in church or in other social movements. In meetings small and large, they presented and absorbed masses of information and initiated discussion. In the movement's second decade, they formed alternative women's pharmacies as locations of physical and psychological healing, based on dialogue. The goals of activism were simultaneously to change the rural economy and to enable women to *ser gente*, to truly be people, accorded dignity and capable of acting. Isabel and her partner Nara talked of moving in together as lesbians and building a house next door to Isabel's sister and brother-in-law and their two children. In so doing, the four adults forged a new kind of family, sharing meals and childcare. One of the leaders of the women's pharmacy in Andalinas said, 'I felt like a person, even more of a person [*mais gente ainda*].' As they came to understand themselves differently, the women chose whether and how to 'fit everything together' in one radical analysis and movement, or not fit everything together, in what I am calling their feminist culture of militancy.

## Meetings: cultures of militancy can be multiple

This culture of militancy developed in a variety of demonstrations and meetings, including workshops for alternative women's pharmacies, local and state-wide women's movement celebrations for International Women's Day, protests in the streets and assemblies and pilgrimages involving a range of rural social

movements. The beliefs and practices that constituted this counterpublic<sup>43</sup> involved an array of diverse and often contradictory activities, including analyses of Brazil's economy, presentations on rural health and environment, singing and ceremonies, frank discussion of the personal pain of depression and silence, planning for events and protests and self-help strategies. The meetings could suddenly change direction: from long histories of the effects of capitalism on Brazil to pageants of bare-chested men and pregnant women carrying pure seeds, evoking a Garden-of-Eden future; from detailed analyses of the effects of pesticides on local ecologies and health to exhortations, from a psychologist, that women learn to be better 'happiness managers' in their families; from physical exercise to relieve stress to frank accounts of rural isolation. Women took all of this in. Sometimes, they commented on gender in a direct, hard-hitting way: 'I was a slave to my husband for 30 years. Thank God he left; now when I want to leave the house, I leave.' Or, in a discussion about gender and sexuality, 'We're afraid that our husbands will love us less if we don't serve them properly. We're afraid of being useless and less loved. Some men, after 40 years of marriage, don't know where the towels are kept.'

The MMTR meetings demonstrate that cultures of militancy can be multiple; they are uneven and creative; they may reinscribe harms; they may open or shut down pathways or voice; *they are acts of simultaneous holding*. We cannot understand what cultures of militancy are or how they play into broader politics by seeing primarily what a movement says its culture or meaning is or what is most prominently performed or what we as researchers came to it to study. Using a seeing-and-not-seeing sensibility, we need to perceive multiple words and performances, from the ways in which women occupy space in the room to what makes them move forward in their organising. We need to not see the movement as a bounded and coherent entity so as to sense – and develop an ability to make sense of – the strands, forces and lives that run through it and out of which it is constituted.

## Decades: from unified campaigns for rights to disagreements over goals and strategies

In the first 10–12 years of its activism, the MMTR focused on securing economic rights for rural women in the context of a trenchant analysis of gender relations and gender-based inequality and subordination.<sup>44</sup> During these years, the movement attracted an expanding and diverse set of supporters of a variety of ages, young women and their mothers alike.<sup>45</sup> It changed the world in tangible personal, cultural and economic ways and offered compelling visions of an alternative future. Notably, the women's movement secured pensions, maternity rights, documentation and credit for rural women – these were revolutionary gains in a society where women had been economically marginalised, controlled by their husbands, unacknowledged by official documents and silenced.

In the movement's second stage, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the unity of purpose that had characterised the movement's early years frayed, as MMTR leaders struggled over what direction to take once the movement's first goals had been achieved. Should the MMTR form the women's component of a class-based radical project tied to the battle for land and to political strategies of direct action (and, in so doing, ally with the more hierarchical national MST and international *Vía Campesina*)? Should the rural women's movement focus on women and gender by addressing healthcare, family gender roles and sexuality, domestic violence and women's pharmacies (and, in so doing, ally with progressive actors in government institutions while taking on societal norms)? Or should it lead a democratic and community project based in unions and municipal government (and, in so doing, forge new political practices for Brazil's deepening democracy)?

In the end, the activists came to occupy a set of locations, of which the formal movement became only one part, in which women took on new roles in their communities in terms of jobs and politics and furthered their gender and class goals, as well as their personal trajectories, in different ways. However, they were not able to contain these different commitments and strategies in one movement or to envision a horizontal, networked set of movements and initiatives. Beginning in the late 1990s, a succession of MMTR leaders decided to leave or were pushed out of the movement, while those who remained in the movement headquarters in the provincial city of Ralindo fostered increasingly close ties with the MST. In this process of exclusion and withdrawal, the women whose culture of militancy I am describing left the movement. Control of leadership positions by the MST-affiliated group was achieved through formally democratic procedures, but without the robustness of democratic politics or a commitment to inclusion and difference.

## A feminist and democratic culture of militancy

The MMTR, like the innovative encounters in the last two decades of the Cold War described above, grew out of the unusual alliance of different political and social actors, such as nuns and priests, union reformers, radical leftists, feminists and young women, in union halls, church meeting rooms and marches and demonstrations in the countryside and in the state capital. The personal, interior experiences described in the section ‘Six women’s interior experiences of activism’ in this article, together with the meetings described above, shaped the culture of militancy of the women activists in Andalinas and Maronata in ways that make it both feminist and democratic. This section will examine this culture of militancy directly, through the ways in which women themselves understood and held their experiences. In their examinations of subjecthood, decision-making, power and the emotions and capabilities of being a movement, the activists in Maronata and Andalinas like Andréia, Vanessa, Isabel, Helena and Jussara help us to see issues and tensions that arose in earlier, clandestine movements of the Cold War period in a new light. They challenge masculinist and vanguardist approaches by asking, ‘How do you know and how do you decide?’ They problematise tensions between activism in the streets and the institutions by asking, ‘Where do you act?’ And they radically re-formed gender roles by asking, ‘Who acts and how?’ As this section will show, the life histories of particular women make visible the forms of tension and holding that constitute this culture of militancy.

In talking about their lives, these women combined understandings of selfhood and collective politics. Vanessa Saltara equated leaving home and entering the space of movement meetings as the beginning of thinking for herself. For Vanessa, the women’s movement was a place of education, like a university, and a pathway for women, both individually and collectively, to occupy new spaces in society. She and others credited the movement’s campaign to secure documents for rural women as a source of happiness in two senses: in having their existence recognised and as a basis for legal rights. At women’s movement meetings, information – plentiful, often unfiltered and contradictory, provided at times for hours on end – was presented and received. In our interviews, Andréia spoke of pleasure, of a right and desire to take pleasure in her life, of the fact that she was an activist, among other reasons, ‘*por gosto*’ (for the love of it). Andréia also recounted her combined determination and patience to achieve the position of first woman president of the Maronata farmers’ union, once accepting being pushed aside and biding her time, but then insisting on taking her turn the next time. When she talked about heading the union, which she characterised as a male space, she described doing it in a ‘woman’s way’. Isabel and Nara said that it was the space of voice and acceptance created by the women’s movement that led them to act on their attraction to each other and move in together. Cristiele explained how the movement functioned for her like the turning on of a light switch, leading her to return to the countryside to embrace sustainable agriculture and continue organising for the women’s movement. As she undertook this work, she shared household tasks with her husband, who for his part did not believe that men should be waited on by women.

These are all statements about selfhood *and* collective politics, the way one shapes the other. As Sorensen observed in her analysis of Poniatowska’s texts: ‘through fragmentation and polyphony it became possible to reconstruct the meanings of politics in everyday life’.<sup>46</sup> This sense of self-in-formation came out of the women’s family histories. The young women’s sense of themselves grew out of their fathers’ work to make local unions genuinely representative of farmers’ interests, rather than instruments of government control, even as they ran their households in an authoritarian fashion, and out of their mothers’ capacities to withstand silencing and later join their daughters in protest marches for women’s economic rights. It grew from having to fight to leave the house to attend meetings but leaving, nonetheless. In ways to which I gained access only indirectly, the women’s parents appear to have nurtured their daughters’ independence, albeit in constraining ways. At least, they raised daughters who could assume independence as the world changed around them and who could not only leave – walk down the road in the rain to attend a women’s movement meeting – but return. The Church deepened and made this subjecthood explicit by bringing individual young people into the youth pastoral work and taking them to see and then theorise the world around them, as they were taught to understand themselves as subjects. The liberation theology priests and nuns were teachers and advisers who accompanied the movements but did not generally seek to determine their paths, in a recognition of collective subjecthood. (When priests did seek to constrain MMTR actions, the women stuck to their own decisions.)

This rootedness of local politics in personal and collective biographies made the splits in the movement, which arose in the late 1990s and early 2000s, all the more confounding to MMTR activists. Between 2002 and 2004, after the women's movement headquarters had formally allied with the MST and *Via Campesina*, Andréia and Vanessa spoke to me about their uncertainty over whether and how to wage a battle within the women's movement to 'take it back', by which they meant bringing the movement back under the control of women committed to its autonomy and to holding multiple ideological and strategic positions within one movement. One of the early advisers to the movement, a priest and educator, worked with them to formulate pathways by which Vanessa, Andréia and other founding members of the women's movement might do this, either through dialogue and elections to leadership positions within the movement, or by negotiating an explicit space for women's activism within the farmers' union.<sup>47</sup>

It was in discussing the need to reclaim the movement – an effort that never took place – that Vanessa's and Andréia's democratic commitments became clearer. Each of them wanted more planning to occur at the municipal level, closer to women's day-to-day lives, rather than primarily in the state headquarters, which was linked in turn to national and international movements and subject to their priorities. Each of them wanted the women's movement to support *both* *Via Campesina*, the international peasant movement, and the less radical, locally rooted farmers' unions. Vanessa wanted 'mutual support', but the women's movement's current leaders, she observed, never supported the unions. Vanessa and her husband Alessandro's support for the unions grew out of their lives as farmers who needed to work the land and milk the cows daily and who had grown up in their small towns. Their affiliations and schedules differed from those of MST supporters, many of whom lived in *acampamentos* (encampments), pressuring and waiting for land expropriations to be carried out and to construct new communities on the redistributed land. 'The difference' – in the availability for and the tactics of protest – 'lies in the manner of working.' It was also the case that the difference lay in competing political theories and visions. Should moving forward collectively mean fighting for the reform of existing institutions – such as negotiations carried out by farmers' unions – or a radical break with these institutions – through actions like illegal land occupations? In practice, there were overlaps in these pathways, in commitments to organic agriculture, relations with government ministries and programmes and daily agricultural work. But activists did not find a way to use these commonalities to bridge the competing strategies and goals that divided them. Furthermore, as Alessandro said, '*Via Campesina* has a very authoritarian way of running things', which is how many local activists experienced the global movement.

Vanessa defined democracy for those who disagree in this way: 'Everyone has time and voice [*vez e voz*], to be able to decide together, to find an alternative.' The Portuguese '*vez e voz*' might also be translated as the opportunity to speak, although that does not capture the space and subjectivity Vanessa considers essential to democracy:

What is lacking for us is to sit down and converse. Because in truth, we are not being democratic, we need to sit at the table and put out there for everyone what is happening. They set out their problems and we ours, and we reach an agreement.

For Andréia, this would have meant making sure that the women's movement had its own goals and struggle. From that position:

depending on the strategies developing in particular moments, you ally with *Via Campesina*, or with [the unions]. I don't think the women's movement needs to be always with one or the other, but rather to decide, at particular moments, what would best serve the goals of the women in the movement.

The women who gained the upper hand in the women's movement leadership in the late 1990s and 2000s rejected this sort of autonomy in the interests of forging a unified, national leftist peasant movement whose central leaders could make strategic decisions that would be followed by affiliated organisations, both in moments of crisis and for the long haul. These leaders also rejected participating 'in the institutions', by which they meant the official political and administrative organisations of government, like political parties, elected offices, ministries and departments. Similarly, under 'institutions' they included the daily tasks and leadership roles of unions, because of the unions' reformism and their origins in government policy and in law, as well as their formal recognition by state authorities. The leaders of the women's movement rejected these forms of participation out of the conviction that positions in government would absorb and co-opt activists and weaken radical goals, a process that arguably

occurred in the course of the presidencies of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, each from the Workers' Party.

Exploring the implications of this view, in 2007 I pressed two leaders at the women's movement headquarters in Ralindo on the question of what Andréia calls 'autonomy' and Helena 'flexibility'. Elisabete, a nun, had long been involved with the women's movement and Janaína remembered taking notes for her mother at movement meetings when she was a child. Janaína had also studied political analysis and leadership at an MST school. My feeling that I could pose this question to them, and their offering of a frank answer, represented a level of trust that it had taken years to build with leaders in the women's movement headquarters. Just before this conversation, Emma and I had shared with Elisabete and Janaína video, photographs and text showing the curriculum we had developed for US classrooms on the MMTR, based on interviews we had done in 2004. We also talked about one of the early leaders of the movement whom Emma and I had interviewed and incorporated into the curriculum and who had recently passed away.

In posing my question about autonomy, I listed the many women we had interviewed who were no longer active in the state-wide movement, even though they continued to support movement initiatives and other women's campaigns in their towns. Each of these women, including Andréia, Vanessa, Helena and Jussara, had opted for the institutions in one way or another, taking leadership roles in unions or local governments, at the same time that the leaders of the women's movement had chosen to ally with the MST and *Via Campesina*, with their emphasis on protest in the streets and centralised decision-making.<sup>48</sup> More than once, Emma and I were shown photo albums filled with snapshots of many of the women we knew, all together at weddings, baptisms, graduations and protests. Now they gained news of one another from a distance and acknowledged this with nostalgia and a deep sense of loss.

Elisabete and Janaína explained that to believe in unions and local governments is a very different thing from believing in a project of radical social change. 'And if you understand that,' Janaína went on, 'then you understand that you have to make a choice.' In response, I said, 'It sounds like you were willing to lose key leaders so that you could join with a larger and more radical political project.' Janaína agreed: 'It's about what's fundamental, the character of the movement.' Janaína and Elisabete went on to acknowledge that women didn't just leave the MMTR for personal reasons owing to their life trajectories, as had often been claimed but were forced out in various ways and that the decision for the women's movement to join *Via Campesina* was a political one that had both benefits and real losses. In saying this, the two women put into words something that had long been understood by the women who had been pushed out but left largely unacknowledged.

The method of making decisions and exercising power that Janaína and Elisabete described reflects the stances of the older, vanguard left in Brazil and Latin America and the conviction on the part of past leftist militants that the leaders of a movement were those best suited to discern the pathways for radical change. While this might well involve ongoing communication with a movement's base, with shifts in strategy resulting from this communication, effective political struggle meant the leadership's discerning and enforcing a unified viewpoint and strategy. Furthermore, communication with the base could become increasingly difficult as activists faced repression, clandestinity and exile. Historian James Green, in his biography of the leftist militant Herbert Daniel and the clandestine left in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s, locates the origins of this position in the activism and theorising of Che Guevara and Régis Debray, which electrified young Brazilian activists in those decades and spurred them to 'overcome their social backgrounds' to advance a centralised struggle.<sup>49</sup>

Andréia, the union president who had introduced us to her garden, embraced and learned from her social background in a way that led her to understand power differently. She regretted having allowed herself to be pressured to leave the women's movement leadership. 'I don't know why I left, why I didn't fight back,' Andréia told me in the union hall. 'I didn't see what was coming, and I didn't know how to make the right arguments. So I opted to leave.' But despite her success in leading the farmers' union, Andréia saw how much women needed the space of a women's movement. 'So what will we do?' she wondered. 'We are the MMTR, so why do we have to create another women's movement? Why isn't this one ours?' Two years later, having experienced more of the successes of leading the union and the costs of no longer being part of a movement, Andréia went further: 'I should have fought back. Other women would have supported me. The movement is ours too.'

Andréia knows that political power, like women's power in their families, has to be understood and handled with care. In her personal life, she refused her mother's submissiveness and her father's linking of domination at home to progressive politics outside. Still, she stayed in her home town and fashioned a

different life for herself as an activist. Andréia's husband respected her political work and shared her goals, and they brought their sons up with a new openness about gender roles. In politics, Andréia insisted on the value of individual voices and democratic decision-making. She opposed the MST because of its rejection of institutional paths to political change and because, as she saw it, decisions were made by (male) leaders and then handed down to everyone else.

'What is power, and how do you exercise it?' Andréia wondered. In her view, the leaders of movements that are run from the centre want to divide up power and use it as their own, to command others. But she wanted to be a steward of power: 'I can't be in the same place forever. Other people are going to come to take my place. And power too, it has to be understood as a space to speak and grow for a whole movement, not for me as an individual.' This understanding of power reflects what was learned in the jungles and shantytowns in the 1970s and 1980s, then spread widely via liberation theology priests and nuns, academics and political advisers to social movements, urban feminist movements and non-governmental organisations and activists in new leftist political parties. All of these groups interacted with the activists in the women's movement from the mid-1980s onwards. These interactions fostered a fundamental shift in the militant cultures of Latin America's left, a shift that developed out of experiences of encounter and translation, as described in the section 'Encounters: from vanguardism to multiplicity' above.

Years after she broke with the state-level women's movement, Andréia expressed deep nostalgia for the way in which the movement had served as inspiration and guide. 'We women need a source for clear thinking, and for us the movement was that source,' she explained. 'And today we don't have that anymore.' Without the movement in her life, Andréia observed, she finds herself taking missteps or compromising when she should stand firm. 'Because the questions in our lives are so profound that you need constantly to be analysing and rethinking them, or in an instant you find yourself doing things that just a short while ago you wouldn't have done.'

There is both certainty and uncertainty in Andréia's conception of power. She knows what power should not be, in terms of centralised authority and the exclusion of voices. She knows as well that what power is, how it is held and what it is used for is worked out in process, on the ground. And she knows that power is shaped, in Anisia's words, by 'the whole process of gender'. These conceptualisations of power come out of occupying a place or position temporarily, making the very notion of position fluid and contested. To engage in this working out of power, one needs the openness and creativity of being a movement, which animated the early years of the MMTR. For Andréia, as for other women, the MMTR at that time was a source – a spring or fountain – that nourished them, provided them with ideas and guided them. It was this collective spring, the result of having forged collective action together, that provided ongoing nourishment, not a particular theory or reading of political circumstances alone.

Helena, too, expressed uncertainties at the core of activism, inherent in her two hearts. At an International Women's Day meeting in the state capital of Porto Alegre in 2002, women from several different rural social movements gathered – after the day-long lectures on the Brazilian economy, with women holding on to the microphone to tell their stories and the pageantry of socialism as a paradise of harmony with nature. Olívio Dutra, the governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul at the time, arrived to address the gathering in the enormous gym, ringed on the inside by the concrete bleachers where the women rested and slept, and on the outside by the tents where they cooked and ate and gossiped. At this moment, Helena introduced the governor simply: 'We need to move forward so that the state will fulfil its promises, so that social movements will achieve their place and know where power is, and so that gender will be taken seriously and be more than a discourse.' This eloquent introduction at the centre of a highly orchestrated meeting spoke of Helena's skill, the same skill she had used to impress priests with her diplomacy in the youth pastoral work many years before. She placed before the governor the essence of the women's movement's hopes and demands.

But when I thought about it later, I realised that these remarks struck a surprisingly open-ended note. What *is* the place of social movements, and where *is* power? Helena, like Andréia, knows how complicated and dangerous power can be. She knows that as a leader of the women's movement she supported the majority view and the ousting of others and that she, in turn, was marginalised by the movement's other leaders when she opted to run the health department and work within the institutions. Now Helena agrees with Andréia that there shouldn't only have to be one viewpoint in a movement, that there should be what she has come to call flexibility.

Andréia calls it autonomy and connects it to the sense of self the MMTR fought to develop in women since its inception, what she calls *o meu eu* (my I). Andréia left the women's movement the moment she

felt that self to be denigrated, though now she thinks she ought to have fought back to make a place for voice and dissent. By the mid-2000s, the possibility of one women's movement containing multiple women, projects, views and strategies was gone. But by then as well, many women could envision a flexible kind of movement, a movement of deeply connected yet autonomous individuals, some of them doing battle within the institutions of Brazil's democracy, in the health departments and schools, the city councils and town halls and the political parties and electoral commissions, and others outside of them, in the neighbourhoods, in the land occupations and the Pilgrimages for the Land, outside the doors of government offices, in the alternative pharmacies and on the streets. One women's movement holding and enabling different viewpoints, strategies and emotions.<sup>50</sup>

And what happens when gender moves beyond discourse, when challenging the practices resulting from gender inequalities moves to the centre of politics and daily life, as Helena suggested to the governor? Like Cristiele and Isabel and the women at the pharmacy, Helena knows how hard it is to go door to door, literally and figuratively, to try and convince women to see the world in a new way. She has seen over the years how hard it is to change men's attitudes and beliefs, their refusals and acts of violence. She also knows that at particular moments, dramatic public mobilisations can press legislators to turn women's economic needs into legal rights. Like Andréia, Helena knows that she's not sure what she means when she imagines a future without the constraints of gender – who would people be? – though she is sure that women should have a voice and the power to make decisions in every domain of their lives. And, like the women in the pharmacy, Helena knows the pain and hardship of women's daily lives, the intractability of gender roles inside women themselves and all around them, and the reality of hard-won change.

Helena and the women in the rural women's movement are fighting for more than rights in any conventional sense. Bringing gender to the centre of politics – embodying, seeing and not seeing, 'the whole process of gender' – means you have to grapple day in and day out with what it means to change – and fail to change – those you know and love. If you stay in your home town and fight for equality and a voice for women, you are fighting to redeem the past as much as to create the future, to reach what might have been and might yet be.<sup>51</sup> In her lifelong commitment to *luta*, Helena is fighting – in encounters in church basements and union halls, among local women interacting with outsiders – for a better way of living she can't define and a way of holding power she has not experienced.

In our interviews with them, conducted mostly in 2002, 2004 and 2007, but spanning the period from 1997 to 2018, the women's movement activists in Maronata and Andalinas expressed uncertainty about gender and power and wondered aloud about choices they'd made regarding the MMTR. Reflective about these choices, they recognised the ambiguities with which they grappled in choosing to form a movement as a path for radical change. Isabel and Nara, who had moved in together as a lesbian couple, identified these ambiguities in the silence of not only others in the movement, but also family members. While they lived together openly, their repeated efforts to get the movement's newsletter to discuss lesbianism brought no response. When they spoke about their experiences as a lesbian couple with family members, they were met with openness but found that silence closed in around them immediately afterwards. It was up to them to break the silence again if they wanted to continue the conversation.

In discussing the day-to-day process of organising, of speaking with women in their houses and workplaces about the weight and danger of gender inequality, Cristiele and Isabel were frank about the contradictions of gender and power they were up against, even as they could not quite understand them. They related, with both distress and humour, women's attachment to the prescriptions of a male god, so that they distanced themselves from Isabel, who did not hold these religious convictions. They described women who understood the dangers of pesticide use and who opposed the cultivation of genetically altered crops but then turned away from the women's movement when their husbands refused to budge on these issues. Cristiele and Isabel recognised the appeal of self-help experts who focused on using inner resources to foster happiness, even though for the two of them, the cause of many household difficulties came down to the price of milk.

When I first heard Cristiele and Isabel describe and laugh about these ambiguities and seem to mock women's acceptance of 'irrational' constraints and self-help strategies, I thought it demonstrated a lack of empathy and imagination. Over time, though, I realised that they knew exactly what they were up against; in Cristiele's words, 'We know the world, and we read the world, and things go on from there.' Furthermore, in reading the world, they simultaneously distanced and did not distance themselves from ordinary women in the movement and in their towns. Women's movement leaders in Maronata and Andalinas ran the health department, where they attended to individual women's needs

daily; they established a shop, right in the centre of town, where they sold organic fruit and vegetables and other products produced by the women themselves; they visited and talked with farm families for union campaigns; and they worked cleaning houses and in agricultural processing plants with other women to support themselves.

In their conversations with us, as in their closeness to women's daily lives, leaders of the MMTR recognised complex and knotty places of pain, oppression and shame and the way these experiences and emotions entered into activism. It wasn't just that these experiences constrained activism, but rather that they were the stuff of people's lives, of their subjecthood. And recognising and knowing this subjecthood – deeply, in its places of complexity and repetition – underscored, for these women, the necessity of a politics that was feminist and democratic. So that if Sandra could not unravel the gender constraints of her marriage and family – or leave her physically abusive husband – the movement would hold Sandra. Movement activists fostered her capacities as a leader and helped her to get her husband to AA rather than condemn or ostracise her for weakness or some sort of hypocrisy in not being able to put her past behind her. And in a meeting in Andalinas, the activists would not only grapple with what a feminist practice of self-care might look like, teaching and re-teaching 300 women about recognising stress and finding space in daily life for conversation; they would also create small groups in the larger room where women could attempt to put into words the abyss of silence, pain and death that they usually confronted alone on their farms and in their families.

In the end, the women's movement activists in Maronata and Andalinas focused on dialogue as a goal, not just a process. In a discussion that followed skits at a women's pharmacy workshop, many of the women said that there wasn't dialogue in their families today. 'Dialogue', Lisete observed, 'is when people make exchanges; I say what I think and you say what you think.' 'That can be a negative thing,' Fátima countered, 'if we disagree.' 'That's okay,' Lisete answered. 'Discussion isn't always calm, there can be arguments.' 'We have to experiment with dialogue in our own families,' another woman suggested, leading Terezinha, the facilitator, to add, 'It's not easy to know what dialogue is, you have to learn it as you get older.' Listening to these observations about dialogue, I realised that when women in the movement think about challenging submission and silencing, they envision not only equality or independence, but also dialogue.

To gain a voice and exercise that voice through dialogue, to work out what words to say to negotiate with your husband about leaving the house and to hammer out a common strategy in a women's movement filled with strong and principled disagreement, these were daunting tasks for women in the movement. In the women's pharmacies they pioneered, the activists spoke a language of radical analysis and compassionate care, articulated through herbs, massage and dialogue. In their discussions of autonomy and power, they recognised and grieved for their own inability to hold onto or reclaim their place in the formal movement. These women, indeed, read the world and acted, individually and collectively, in ways that were necessarily partial and uneven. The early years of women's movement organising took place during Brazil's transition to democracy, with the significant, if uneven, protections for assembly, speech and protest that afforded. The movement's big early successes .in securing pensions, documents and maternity leave gave way to multiple locations of activism in complex institutional and direct-action spaces. Political and movement relationships splintered and families and farms demanded attention and financial resources. In women's movement meetings and in their personal lives, activists experimented with dialogue, internally and with others, step by step over the years, uneasily grappling with gender-based inequality and harm.

These are the provisional positions of democracy and feminism. In this context, the women in Maronata and Andalinas, and other locations of women's movement activism in the region, developed a culture of militancy that came to involve taking stock, exercising power with an awareness of others and sharing it, drawing on a spring rather than a dogmatic political theory and building uncertainty, and self-awareness and irony, into their fervently held positions.<sup>52</sup> Their rootedness in place, with its connections to swirling currents of liberation theology and leftist organising, enabled the young women to create a movement that served in its early years as a space for experimentation, inspiration and guidance. Two decades later, the same grounding in daily life, even as it sensitised them to the ambiguities of existing social relations and emotions, rendered them too engaged in multiple arenas – from unions to health departments to women's pharmacies, from families to farms to schooling and jobs – to fight to take back the movement and make it autonomous. Yet their struggles and successes, along with their understanding of limits and alternative possibilities, remain supremely relevant to the present, in times of Covid-19 and resurgent authoritarianism in democracies, as activists and leftist governments

seek new ways to balance subjecthood and mobilisation and to engage with and transform the broader societies of which they are a part.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The names of all individuals and towns in this article are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup>The MMTR was colloquially known as the 'women's movement' and I will use these terms interchangeably in this article. In the early 2000s, the name of the MMTR, at that point a national movement, was changed to Movement of Peasant Women (*Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas* or MMC). Almost all of the women discussed in this article rejected the name change and continued to use MMTR to describe their local activities, as well as the movement as a whole. For this reason, I use MMTR throughout this article.

<sup>3</sup>At the time of these interviews, Maronata's population was approximately 14,000. Andalinas, about 38 miles away, had about 7,000 residents.

<sup>4</sup>I first interviewed activists from the MMTR in 1997 and at greater length in 2001–2. My research on the MMTR with my daughter Emma began in 2004 and continued through to the publication of our co-authored book about the movement, *Sustaining Activism*, in 2013. Our first joint research trip, which took place in 2004 when Emma was in high school, involved doing video interviews with MMTR activists for a curriculum on social movements in Brazil and the United States that we designed for middle and high school students and that Emma taught in her high school in 2005–6. We presented this curriculum to teachers in workshops at the Latin America centres of the universities of Harvard, Duke, California San Diego and Brown, as well as in other forums, in 2007–8. We brought written and video materials documenting our work back to the women in the MMTR in 2007 and during subsequent visits, presenting our work at movement meetings, to individual women in their homes and in the movement headquarters in Ralindo. While this article is based on this largely pre-2013 work, including interviews and the book, its analysis and writing grew out of my participation in the Cultures of Militancy workshops and were conceptualised and written by me.

<sup>5</sup>Pedemonte, 'Student *colectivos* in the USSR'.

<sup>6</sup>Rom, 'Martians in the favela'; Véliz Estrada, 'Radicalisation and political crisis'.

<sup>7</sup>Rayas, 'Clandestinity and militant culture'.

<sup>8</sup>For a sympathetic analysis of the MST that covers the movement's origins, strategies and successes, see Mançano Fernandes, *A Formação do MST no Brasil*. For a strong and controversial critique of the movement, including its internal practices, see Navarro, 'The Brazilian Landless Movement (MST)'. For the most ethnographically detailed and politically balanced work on the MST, see Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*. For background on Via Campesina, see Borrás, 'La Via Campesina'. Descriptions of the MST as centralised and/or authoritarian, which was the way the women discussed in this article characterised it, are lightning rods for debate in leftist activism and scholarship regarding Brazil. The several sources referenced here cover the range of evaluations of the MST fairly well. My characterisation of the MST as hierarchical and resistant to dissent does not claim to evaluate the movement as a whole, or even in Rio Grande do Sul. Rather, it pertains to the way the MST has been perceived, by the women we interviewed, to have acted towards the MMTR and towards MMTR activists in Rio Grande do Sul. The plausibility of this characterisation is well supported by Wolford's largely sympathetic account of the establishment and functioning of MST settlements in southern and northeast Brazil.

<sup>9</sup>Lomnitz, *Return of comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*.

<sup>10</sup>Rubin and Sokoloff-Rubin, *Sustaining Activism*.

<sup>11</sup>See Center for the Humanities, *Seeing & Not Seeing Manifesto* (<https://sites.bu.edu/sans/manifesto/>, 14 July 2023). The project draws on a wide range of sources for inspiration, including artist Stella, *Working Space*; literary critics Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty* and *The Argonauts* and Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island*; anthropologists Tsing, *The Mushroom* and de la Cadena, *Earth Beings*; ethnomusicologist Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*; and political theorist White, *Political Theory*. It also grew out of six years of conversations between seminar participants (<https://sites.bu.edu/sans/people/>, accessed 14 July 2023) and the 20 or so invited guests who have presented their work at the seminars (<https://sites.bu.edu/sans/seminar-guests/>, accessed 14 July 2023) since 2016.

<sup>12</sup>Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>13</sup>Havens, *Coming to Life*, 12–13.

<sup>14</sup>Havens, *Coming to Life*, 24.

<sup>15</sup>Gould, 'Solidarity under siege'.

<sup>16</sup>Zolov, 'Expanding our conceptual horizons'.

<sup>17</sup>Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*.

<sup>18</sup>Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade*.

<sup>19</sup>Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 89.

<sup>20</sup>Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade*, 10.

<sup>21</sup>Poniatowska, *La Noche de Tlatelolco*.

<sup>22</sup>Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade*, 67.

<sup>23</sup>Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade*, 70.

<sup>24</sup>For an exploration of Poniatowska's innovation and insight into the context of her life, see Stephen, *Stories that Make History*.

<sup>25</sup>See also Bolaño's novel *Amulet* for a critical and complex take on the gendered and ideological divisions of 1960s revolutionary activism in the Tlatelolco period.

<sup>26</sup>Hellema, *The Global 1970s*.

<sup>27</sup>Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*.

<sup>28</sup>Gould, 'Solidarity under siege', 367.

<sup>29</sup>Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas*.

<sup>30</sup>Leyva Solano, 'Regional, communal, and organizational transformations'; Hernández Castillo, *Histories and Stories from Chiapas*.

<sup>31</sup>Doimo, *A Vez e a Voz*; Sader, *Quando Novos Personagens Entraram em Cena*, Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup>Keck, *The Workers Party*, 35.

<sup>33</sup>Keck, *The Workers Party*, 60.

<sup>34</sup>Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy*.

<sup>35</sup>Sternbach et al., 'Feminisms in Latin America'.

<sup>36</sup>Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy*, 102.

<sup>37</sup>For more on the history of the MMTR, see Rubin and Sokoloff-Rubin, *Sustaining Activism*, Chapter 2. Van der Schaaf, *Jeito de Mulher Rural* offers a detailed account of the formation of the MMTR, its social context and its early activities. Stephen, *Women and Social Movements* provides a shorter analysis, as does Anita Brumer, 'Mobilization and the quest for recognition'. Thayer, *Making Transnational Feminism* provides comparative material, including a focus on contrasting cultures of activism in the women's movement and in a feminist non-governmental organisation in the northeastern state of Pernambuco.

<sup>38</sup>For an outline of the economy of the Rio Grande do Sul and how it has changed since the 1970s, see Schneider and Niederle, 'Resistance strategies' and Van der Schaaf, *Jeito de Mulher Rural*, 82–97.

<sup>39</sup>Navarro, 'Democracia'; Job Schmitt, 'A CUT dos colonos'; Houtazger, 'State and unions'; Lazaretti Picolotto, 'A formação de um sindicalismo'.

<sup>40</sup>Burdick, *Legacies of Liberation*, 1–5; Vazquez, *The Brazilian Popular Church*, Part 1.

<sup>41</sup>Navarro, 'Democracia'.

<sup>42</sup>Warner, *Publics*.

<sup>43</sup>Several authors have influenced our understanding of women's movement meetings and the ways in which they foster activist politics. These include, primarily, Warner, *Publics*; Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Shulman, *Dark Hope*; and Benjamin, *Illuminations*, who consider, respectively, the creation of alternative publics, the interrelationship of future and present, the loneliness and tenacity of protest in the streets and the role of redemption in visions of the future. Our analysis has also been shaped by work on the role of enchantment and affect in political engagement, including Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*; Kim, *Melancholic Freedom*; and Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

<sup>44</sup>Paludo and Daron, *Gênero*.

<sup>45</sup>Accurate data on state-wide MMTR membership is difficult to obtain. Our interviews, together with approximations by Van der Schaaf, *Jeito de Mulher Rural*, 154–7 and Stephen, *Women and Social Movements*, 219, suggest neighbourhood groups in small towns across the state involved perhaps 5,000 women in the MMTR's first decade, with many more women affected by the movement through friendship and family ties.

<sup>46</sup>Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade*, 70.

<sup>47</sup>In a long interview in 2004, this advisor offered an account that closely paralleled that of the women themselves.

<sup>48</sup>It could be argued that the MST itself, at this point (2023) in its nearly 40-year trajectory, is an institution, too, especially in light of its many routinised interactions with government agencies. However, this was

less the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the period about which I am writing. At that time, this perspective on the MST was not considered by either side in the 'streets versus institutions' debate, despite the fact that such a position might have contributed to alliances across the divide.

<sup>49</sup>Green, *Exile within Exiles*, 44–5.

<sup>50</sup>At this point, the women did not envision, or at least did not suggest to me, the possibility of multiple movements or organisations functioning in a horizontal network, which might have been another way to enable the multiplicity and holding of difference they sought.

<sup>51</sup>Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

<sup>52</sup>In these ways, the MMTR activists began to enact a political philosophy similar to that developed by the women leaders of the Movement for Black Lives two decades later. Woodly, 'Radical Black feminist pragmatism'.

## Funding

The research on which this article is based was carried out in periods of one to four weeks in 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2018 and was funded primarily by a MacArthur research and writing grant, a Fulbright fellowship, and a Sabbatical fellowship from the American Philosophical Society.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Timo Schaefer and Jake Blanc, the editors of this special issue, along with Ben Junge and Christine D'Auria, for their close readings of earlier versions of this article and their many insightful suggestions. I would also like to thank the members of the Seeing and Not Seeing Faculty Seminar at Boston University for their ongoing collaborative work in developing the seeing and not seeing sensibility on which this analysis is based.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

The author conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with ethnographic field research standards.

### Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos, and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication. The interviews from which the article draws most heavily took place in 2002 and 2004 in Maronata, Andalinas and Ralindo. Unless otherwise stated, quotes in the article come from these two sets of interviews, which were conducted jointly by my daughter Emma Sokoloff-Rubin and myself.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

## References

- Alvarez, Sonia. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Alvarez, Sonia, Jeffrey W. Rubin, Millie Thayer, Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Agustín Lao Montes. *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, participation, and protest in Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the postmodern perspective*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*. New York: Schocken, 1969.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, crossings, and ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Bolaño, Roberto. *Amulet*. New York: New Directions, 2006.
- Borras, Saturnino M., Jr. 'La Vía Campesina and its global campaign for agrarian reform'. In *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization*, edited by Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Marc Edelman and Cristóbal Kay, 91–121. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
- Brumer, Anita. 'Mobilization and the quest for recognition: The struggle of rural women in southern Brazil for access to welfare benefits'. In *Welfare, Poverty, and Development in Latin America*, edited by C. Abel and C. M. Lewis, 405–20. London: Macmillan, 1993.
- Burdick, John. *Legacies of Liberation: The progressive Catholic church in Brazil*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.
- Cadena, Marisol de la. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of practice across Andean worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Doimo, Ana María. *A Vez e a Voz do Popular: Movimentos sociais e participação política no Brasil Pós-70*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1995.
- Fox, Jonathan. 'Democratic rural development: Leadership accountability in regional peasant organizations'. *Development and Change* 23, no. 2 (1992): 1–36. [CrossRef]
- Gago, Veronica. *Feminist International: How to change everything*. London: Verso, 2020.
- Gould, Jeffrey. 'Solidarity under siege: The Latin American left, 1968'. *American Historical Review* 114, no. 2 (2009): 353–54. [CrossRef]
- Green, James. *Exile within Exiles: Herbert Daniel, gay Brazilian revolutionary*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Havens, Leston. *Coming to Life: Reflections on the art of psychotherapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Hellema, Duco. *The Global 1970s: Radicalism, reform, and crisis*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Hernández Castillo, Rosalva Aída. *Histories and Stories from Chiapas: Border identities in southern Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- Houtzager, Peter P. 'State and unions in the transformation of the Brazilian countryside, 1964–1979'. *Latin American Research Review* 33, no. 2 (1998): 103–42. [CrossRef]
- Job Schmitt, Claudia. 'A CUT dos colonos: histórias da construção de um novo sindicalismo no campo no Rio do Sul'. In *Política, Protesta e Cidadania no Campo: As Lutas Sociais dos Colonos e dos Trabalhadores Rurais no Rio Grande do Sul*, edited by Zander Navarro, 189–226. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade/UFRGS, 1996.
- Keck, Margaret E. *The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Kim, David Kyuman. *Melancholic Freedom: Agency and the spirit of politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Koselleck, Reinhard. *Futures Past: On the semantics of historical time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Lazaretti Picoletto, Everton. 'A formação de um sindicalismo de agricultores familiares no Sul do Brasil'. *Sociologias* 16 (2014): 204–36. [CrossRef]
- Leva Solano, Xóchitl. 'Regional, communal, and organizational transformations in Las Cañadas'. In *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista rebellion*, edited by Jan Rus, Aída Hernández Castillo and Shannon Mattiace, 161–84. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- Lomnitz, Claudio. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Mançano Fernandes, Bernardo. *A Formação do MST no Brasil*. Petropolis: Editora Vozes, 2000.
- Milkman, Ruth, Stephanie Luce and Penelope Lewis. *Changing the Subject: A bottom-up account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013.
- Navarro, Zander. 'Democracia, cidadania e representação: Os movimentos sociais rurais no estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil, 1978–1990'. In *Política, Protesta e Cidadania no Campo: As lutas sociais dos colonos e dos trabalhadores rurais no Rio Grande do Sul*, edited by Zander Navarro, 62–105. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade/UFRGS, 1996.

- Navarro, Zander. 'The Brazilian Landless Movement (MST): Critical times'. *REDES, Santa Cruz do Sul* 15, no. 1 (2010): 196–223.
- Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015.
- Nelson, Maggie. *The Art of Cruelty: A reckoning*. New York: Norton, 2011.
- Paludo, Conceição and Venderléia L. P. Daron. *Gênero, Classe e Projeto Popular: Compreender mais para lutar melhor*. Passo Fundo: Gráfica Batistel, 2001.
- Pedemonte, Rafael. 'Student colectivos in the USSR during the Cold War 1960s: Shaping Cuba's "New Man" from abroad'. *Radical Americas* 8, no. 1 (2023): 3. [CrossRef]
- Phillips, Adam. *Winnicott*. London: Penguin, 2007.
- Poniatowska, Elena. *La Noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral*. Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1971.
- Rayas, Lucia. 'Clandestinity and militant culture in Latin America's 1960s through the early 1980s: Epistemological and historical reflections and an agenda for research'. *Radical Americas* (forthcoming).
- Rom, Michael. 'Martians in the favela: Religion and revolution in Rio de Janeiro'. *Radical Americas* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1. [CrossRef]
- Rubin, Jeffrey W. 'Ambiguity and contradiction in a radical popular movement'. In *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture: Re-visioning Latin American social movements*, edited by Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar, 141–64. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.
- Rubin, Jeffrey W. *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, radicalism, and democracy in Juchitán, Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Rubin, Jeffrey W. and Emma Sokoloff-Rubin. *Sustaining Activism: A Brazilian women's movement and a father-daughter collaboration*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Sader, Emir. *Quando Novos Personagens Entraram em Cena*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988.
- Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina. *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Schneider, Sergio and Paulo André Niederle. 'Resistance strategies and diversification of rural livelihoods: The construction of autonomy among Brazilian family farmers'. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 379–405. [CrossRef]
- Shulman, David. *Dark Hope: Working for peace in Israel and Palestine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Sitrin, Marina. *Horizontalism: Voices of popular power in Argentina*. Oakland: AK Press, 2006.
- Sorensen, Diana. *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American sixties*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Steingo, Gavin. *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the aesthetics of freedom in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Stella, Frank. *Working Space*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Stephen, Lynn. *Stories that Make History: Mexico through Elena Poniatowska's crónicas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Stephen, Lynn. *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from below*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.
- Sternbach, Nancy Saporta, Marysa Navarro-Aranguren, Patricial Chuchryk and Sonia E. Alvarez. 'Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (1992): 393–434. [CrossRef]
- Thayer, Millie. *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural women, NGO activists, and northern donors in Brazil*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- van der Schaaf, Alice. *Jeito de Mulher Rural: A busca de direitos sociais e da igualdade de gênero no Rio Grande do Sul*. Passo Fundo: Editora Universidade de Passo Fundo, 2001.
- Vazquez, Manuel A. *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Véliz Estrada, Rodrigo. 'Radicalisation and political crisis: The personal transitions of a Guatemalan social Christian militant, 1942–1981'. *Radical Americas* 8, no. 1 (2023): 2. [CrossRef]
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.
- White, Stephen K. *Political Theory and Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Wolford, Wendy. *This Land Is Ours Now: Social mobilization and the meaning of land in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Womack, John, Jr. *Rebellion in Chiapas*. New York: The New Press, 1999.
- Woodly, Deva. 'Radical Black feminist pragmatism'. Paper presented at the Political Theory Workshop, Boston University, February 2020.
- Zolov, Eric. 'Expanding our conceptual horizons: The shift from an old to a new left in Latin America'. *A Contra Corriente* 5, no. 2 (2008): 47–73.