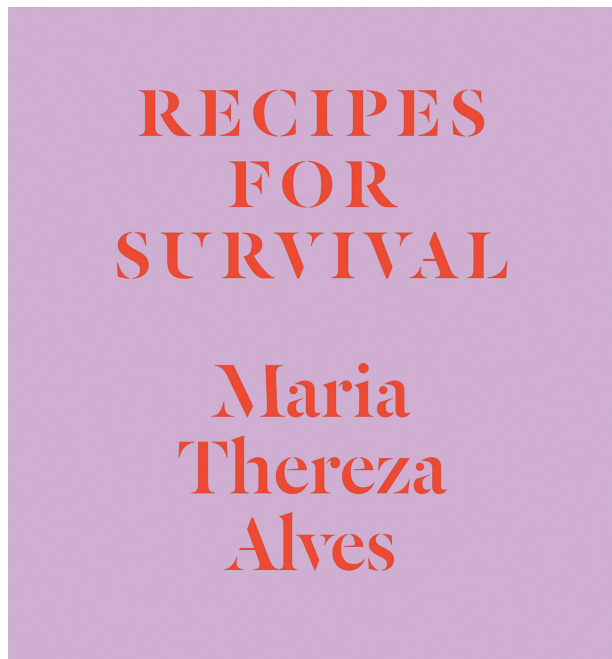


Maria Thereza Alves's *Recipes for Survival*

Nicola Gray



When I returned home for this project and asked, ‘What do we want the world to know about us?’, the people whose stories are in this book generously responded. They told me their stories, suggested people to talk to and photographs to take, and gave me constant physical and mental support. My gratitude is deeply felt and my respect is immense.

Maria Thereza Alves, *Recipes for Survival*, postscript, p 247

Applying the modern term ‘practice’ to the work of Maria Thereza Alves can seem an inappropriate one. The artist would not object, I am sure, to being called a practitioner, in the widest sense, but a primary focus on the making of objects or images, their formal concerns and their market value or critical reception has never been a preoccupation. Alves’s processes and output resist sliding easily into any of the categories or disciplines within the contemporary currency of ‘practice’, although Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics and its ‘set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context’ perhaps provides the nearest ideological home – if there is any need for one.¹ Jean Fisher, in a 2013 catalogue essay, comes close to conveying some of the essential aspects of this mercurial practitioner’s activities, actions and engagements:

With Alves’ work we have to ask different questions about art’s purpose; we therefore have to abandon the notion of aesthetic objects and look to the productive effects of imagination, process and social or inter-subjective relations... such an art practice is bound to the political insofar as it is deeply implicated in the conditions of life... listening and seeing beyond the surface appearance of things... this is an *art engagé* in which

¹ See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copeland, trans, les presses du réel, 1998, p 113

participation, both at the point of initiation of a project and during its execution, has been a central aspect...²

Maria Thereza Alves has engaged with the conditions of many lives, in various and wide-ranging forms too diverse, and complex, to bend to easy description. Settling on the term ‘engagements’ for now, these have often involved long-term and ongoing research and collaboration with communities, and individuals in those communities, through multiple levels of co-operation and collaboration. Her direct binding ‘to the political’ is evident throughout her work, and can be traced back to the seventeen-year-old Alves, then living in New York, writing an official presentation as a member of the International Indian Treaty Council to the 35th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights appealing for the protection of the rights of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and particularly in her native Brazil – to being one of the cofounders of the Brazilian Green Party in 1986, soon after the ending of over twenty years of military dictatorship in the country. Later projects have included collaborating with indigenous and community groups in Mexico and Brazil, as well as exhibiting as an artist in many of the global biennales and major contemporary art venues. Her work has involved publications, exhibitions, workshops, documentation, photography, film, recordings, writing, websites, conversations, performances, and the making of books, objects, drawings and gardens, sometimes simultaneously. Shared collaboration, in its truest sense, and exploring the many different forms in which that collaboration may take place with equal value and attention, and always with a profound respect for her collaborative partners, has been a key element of Alves’s practice.

In this ongoing and expanding digital era, the printed book has stubbornly refused to disappear, and the production of books has been important to Alves, if not always featuring prominently in any exhibition format of her work. Her books are not mere documentations or catalogues, as might usually be produced in the career trajectory of an artist, and even when published coterminously with an exhibition project these are books that exist and stand independently. The audiences for exhibitions are usually pre-defined and to some extent predictable, and an exhibition is generally temporary in nature. Books, however, can circulate, be shared and publicly available, their content remaining there to be discovered, perhaps in a bookstore, a gallery, a library or someone’s home. In 2012, Alves’s *Regreso de un lago/ The Return of a Lake* was published by Walther König in connection with the artist’s contribution to Documenta 13. Featuring images, and texts in Spanish, English, German and French, the book gave printed form to a collaboration between the artist and a Community Museum in Chalco, outside Mexico City, and their joint research on the history of the area and the impact of the profound damage inflicted by the Spanish colonisers on the Indigenous people and the ecology of the land. The ‘return’ refers to the returning waters of the original Lake Chalco, drained by the colonial masters in their attempts to impose European-style farming and agriculture, with their disregard of the Indigenous methods that had been successful for hundreds of years in the unique geography of the area. These attempts, alongside the socio-political impact of

² Jean Fisher, ‘The Importance of Words and Actions’, in *Maria Thereza Alves*, exhibition catalogue, Beaux-arts Nantes, 2013, pp 7–15, pp 7–8

other colonial occupation practices, have led over the centuries to many ongoing environmental and social problems. The ‘return’ also refers to the indigenous residents of the region in publicly claiming knowledge and ownership of the history of their land for themselves and their communities, and to have a stake in what happens. This project has continued, albeit in an unplanned-for way, with the upcoming publication (2020) of *Thieves and Murderers in Naples: A Brief History on Families, Colonization, Immense Wealth, Land Theft, Art and the Valle de Xico Community Museum in Mexico*, a book-work the artist has produced after discovering the Villa Pignatelli Cortes in Naples and its links and connections across centuries between the Italian city and its aristocratic families, and Hernan Cortes and the Spanish colonisation of central/north America, and the outcomes for contemporary communities in modern Mexico.

Recipes for Survival, however, is a little different. Thirty-five years in being realised in this published form, it is not an outcome or companion to any exhibition, residency or biennial, or an invitation from a cultural organisation or gallery. The artist herself has referred to it as her first major work and it is perhaps her most personal one, although she is not an artist who allows personal biography or history to take precedence or assume importance. On first glance, the book has the look of a photographic essay in the form of one of those large, expensive ‘coffee-table books’ of documentary-style photography by a well-known photographer, perhaps a member of the Magnum co-operative; maybe the work of a photographer who took themselves out of their known parameters to some distant part of the world and recorded the plight of its people. But that is not what *Recipes for Survival* is. It does potentially raise, however, some of those different questions Jean Fisher suggested should be asked in relation to Alves’s work about ‘art’s purpose’. It is a book of photographs, of people at work and at home – and clearly people doing hard work and living hard lives – with notes and the names and stories of those people in its second section. But it is more than that. *Recipes for Survival* is the outcome of deep engagement and participation; it deploys photography, but it does so in tandem with an attentive listening and in conversation with its subjects. It began with the personal journey in 1983 of a young student of photography living in New York, just into her twenties, to visit the area where her family came from in Brazil and the people living there, but it represents a seeing and listening beyond surface appearances and is a unique specular engagement with the conditions of other lives.

Published by the University of Texas Press, *Recipes for Survival* is prefaced with an introduction by the distinguished voice of Michael Taussig, who writes that it ‘says so much about the world in so few words’ and shows an ‘integrity aroused by a shockingly level-headed confrontation with life’. For Taussig, the book brings to mind James Agee and Walker Evans’s classic *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*³ and John Berger’s work with the photographer Jean Mohr.⁴ And there are definitely

³ See James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, first published by Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1941

⁴ Jean Mohr took up photography after working with Palestinian refugees for the International Red Cross in Jordan and the West Bank following the Palestinian *Nakba* of 1949 and the creation of the state of Israel. He later collaborated with Edward Said on *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (Columbia University Press, 1986). His work with John Berger includes *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor* (1967/2015), their understated collaboration on the work of a dedicated medical practitioner in the National Health Service in rural Britain), and *A Seventh Man* (1975), which looked at the life of migrant workers in an early version of the European Union (then the European Economic Community or EEC).

resonances with and echoes of Evans's photographs of tenant farmers in the post-Depression deep south in the US – and just as equally with other images produced by the group of photographers who also worked, like Evans, for the Farm Security Administration's New Deal program in the 1930s and 1940s, photographers such as Jack Delano, Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, Gordon Parks and Marion Post Walcott, among others. As a student of documentary photography at Cooper Union in New York, Alves was undoubtedly familiar with this important part of the twentieth century's photographic legacy and history, and particularly within the American continent and its histories, both north and south. The unconscious sense of remembered photographic images can be an under considered aspect of visual memory, and in the photographs that make up the first two thirds of the book I also see echoes of the black and white body of work of the photographer and optical lens maker, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, all of which was made around his hometown of Lexington, Kentucky in the period before his early death in 1972 at the age of 47. Although not records of other lives in the same sense that Alves's photographs are, Meatyard's enigmatic, and sometimes emotionally chilling, images of his wife and children and close friends, in the natural environments and dilapidated wooden buildings around his home area, could only have been taken by a photographer intimately connected to and immersed in his immediate environment and not one observing the conditions and difference of 'others' in other places. 'It is the integrity of an encounter, the purpose and being of which insists on an empathy yet also on a critical distance that allows unalloyed truth to emerge sharp as a knife', Taussig writes in the Introduction. Meatyard and Alves share this integrity, empathy and, at the same time, critical distance, and even though their subjects are in different times, geographies and circumstances, there is a profound humanity in both their approaches, frequently absent from much so-called documentary photography.



The black and white photographs in the initial two-thirds of the book, all from 1983, are uncaptioned and hence avoid any distractive attention from, or labelled categorisation of, the actualities they show. These are stark yet intimate images of people at work or in their homes, roughly made wooden structures with some very basic utilities for living. Faces of indeterminate age evidence tough lives, limited diets and hard physical labour (and sometimes hard drinking). There are images that demonstrate the solace of religion and ritual: faded pictures of the Pope, or the sacred heart of the Virgin Mary. There are images of lean bodies of sinew and muscle, from long hours of strenuous work in sugar cane or banana fields; clothing showing years of continuous wear, patched and unlikely to be replaced with anything new; children in torn and dirty, hand-me-downs; basic technologies: a simple wooden boat, rough wooden chopping boards, photos torn out of magazines as decoration on the walls. No frivolous extras are in evidence.

Taussig also writes of Alves's 'eye ever alert to political economy... an eye geared to moral codes and the cunning of their subversion', and the images in the first two thirds of this book say much along these lines. They also clearly show the photographer shared an intimacy with and had the trust of the people she was photographing. But it is the stories and accounts Alves wrote up at the time from her observations, notes and conversations that are in the second section of the book that



maybe say more. Or at least speak differently to the images. These stories and accounts appear to perform a trick almost, of being the voices of the people in the photographs telling their own anecdotes about their lives and relationships, their thoughts about family, neighbours, employers and different scenarios. These words in the form of stories and short accounts and comments are not a narrating of 'other lives' but by those who live those lives themselves, and they speak, through the young artist's collecting and writing of them, of daily hardships and problems but also of the pleasures and the humour they find in them. Alves has herself written that '*Recipes for Survival* is an attempt to document as active agents those who are critically engaged with history... I asked people who or what they would like to have photographed or written about... I asked people how they would like to be

photographed... I asked them what I should write about... So an attempt began to define ourselves and to make our history.’⁵

These ‘other lives’ were being lived in the Brazilian state of Paraná, in the village Alves’s father came from, and in the small town where her mother grew up in the state of São Paulo. This was 1983, and the people of Brazil, following a coup d’état in 1964 that deposed a democratically elected government, had been suffering under a military dictatorship for over twenty years which did not come to an end until 1985. Alves’s family had escaped to New York,⁶ but as with all immigrant families the pull of home was not forgotten and the twenty-one-year-old Cooper Union student returned with her camera and notebooks to the places her family came from and the people they had known. Documenting these people’s homes, work, daily life and events, the young student was thus not just a dispassionate, foreign eye on the hard lives and poverty of others. The narratives in the latter third of the book document some of the stories and details of these lives, often relaying them as the speakers had relayed them to her, and taking leads from their own suggestions. In her own comments about asking the people to tell her what she should write about: ‘Julio urged me to articulate the need of subsistence peasants to keep their land. Francisco asked me to write down the story of the oldest person he knew. Jose Antonio feared being made into a slave (a not uncommon practice in Brazil) by working in a plantation far from home; he asked me to go there so I would know where he was and he wanted the plantation overseer to see me writing about it.’⁷ The young student became temporarily part of their lives, staying with the families and experiencing the physical hardship, earning their trust, and they gave her their own accounts of personal joy and tragedy, of hard work and ill-health, of failed crops, of disproportionate debt, of struggles with family, exploitative employers, racism, discrimination, and the corruptions, failings, lies and impositions of the state bodies and their representatives.

The stories, the short notes, the lists of local words for animals and plants, the



⁵ See the artist’s website: <http://www.mariatherezaalves.org/works/recipes-for-survival-1983?c=20>

⁶ The artist’s mother moved to New York as a live-in maid, and her own family were able to follow when she had saved enough funds to be the guarantor for them for immigration purposes. Her father then found work in construction.

⁷ See the artist’s website: <http://www.mariatherezaalves.org/works/recipes-for-survival-1983?c=20s>

recipes for basic foods to make with what is available, or affordable, are presented without comment. The three sections – ‘A Village in the Backlands of Southern Brazil’, ‘A Village on the Coast of Southern Brazil’ and ‘A Coastal Town in Southern Brazil’ – record, quote, and give factual details, although the names and exact locators of these places are not given, deliberately, as such names are more than likely colonial over-namings. Events, scenes, meals and comments are recounted, and the words for things written down matter-of-factly as the language in use:

A young woman died... I asked, why did she die? How did she die? She was in her teens. Only during my last week there, someone said that they thought that the young woman was killed by her father... She glanced at a young man passing by on a horse. They say that her father saw her looking at the boy. (p 187)

Supper is usually *azul marinho*, a fish, banana, and manioc stew served with the liver and intestines of the fish. (p 199)

The living room is two by four paces. It has room for one armchair that Evandro made from chicken wire and that hangs from the ceiling and swings. Each room has a bare lightbulb. (p 227)

It's Sunday, the radio is on, and a preacher announced that we need to work well for the employers and exhorted listeners not to join the union or political parties other than the government party because all the other parties were communist. (p 238)

Here are the tough stories of the descendants of African slaves, European immigrants and the region's Indigenous people; of Maria and José Antonio and their twenty chickens, a pig and a goat; Dorival, the hated store owner who people are indebted to and who cheats the illiterate farmers out of their change; Cenilda, her unfaithful husband Ramão and their large family, and Ramão's brother Rui who was bitten by the venomous snake, the *jaracuçu*; Leticia and her two sisters and their travails with boyfriends and husbands; orphaned fifteen-year-old Aurélio and his grandparents who raised him but whom he beats and steals money from; Lygia, married at thirteen to Denilson with his taste for young girls; Wladislau, the bachelor Pole who has lived alone for sixty years; the widower Senhor Vítor and his nineteen children; of Lourdes and Edmundo and their more 'comfortable' house, with its separate rooms, a sofa, two armchairs and even beds, seventeen cows and a car, but no electricity or running water. All could be described as living in similar conditions of hard poverty, but there are still fractious discriminations, levels of hierarchy and an insidious awareness of race. The 'unalloyed truth', as Taussig says, 'emerge[s] sharp as a knife'. In 'Maria and José Antonio':

Ana [José Antonio's mother] does not like Maria, José Antonio's wife, because she is dark... Ana calls her 'Aquela Negra' (that Black woman). In Ana's sitting room, a framed photo hangs. It is of a Black woman, her husband's mother, while her husband himself was a *Bugre*, of indigenous descent. Ana's first mention to me of Maria was 'the woman that José Antonio married. She's Black, but she washes clothes really clean.' Maria is indigenous, but Ana would not dare insult her that much by referring to it. (p 143)



Around the stories of marriages, children, failed crops, hard labour and debts are also woven stories of the ecology of the Mata Atlântica (Atlantic Forest), and the commercial activities contributing to its destruction. The later Alves's interest as an artist in the links between environmental damage and colonial histories may well have some of its origins here. In 'The Timber Company' (p 154), José Antonio, rather than having to buy groceries on credit to feed his family, goes to work as a labourer for this timber company, about two hours away from his village. The company had logged out all the native Araucária pine trees and replaced them with non-native eucalyptus and North American pine through the government reforestation subsidies programmes. These acidic trees had killed all other native vegetation and created what were known locally as 'Forests of Silence' as the snakes, insects and birds were unable to live in them.

'Paloma and Evandro' live and work on a sugar cane plantation where 'The rain forest had not long ago been cut down to make the *sertão*',⁸ and where 'The houses of the poor try not to slip down the mountain sides' (p 226).

Recipes for Survival is an early example of the commitment evident in Alves's works, and maybe one of its sources, to creating a space for the hearing and recognition of the indigenous voices and knowledges subsumed under the powerful noises of the modern neoliberal capitalist world and the longstanding and brutally damaging aftermaths of colonising processes. Many of these works have been shown in international galleries and museums and written about in art journals, although this is not *de facto* always so (see, for example, the 2018 collaborative project with Indigenous students, DECOLONIZING BRAZIL / DESCOLONIZANDO O BRASIL).⁹ *Recipes for Survival* reflects specifically the history of Brazil with the European (Portuguese) colonisation and its continuing processes, the legacies of slavery, the disrespect shown to and the suppression of Indigenous cultures, the environmental destruction. The disjunctures and slippages that result from the state's impact on

⁸ *Sertão* has no precise equivalent in any other language, but roughly means 'outback', 'backcountry' or 'hinterland'. It was originally used by the Portuguese colonisers to indicate the low uplands away from their coastal settlements.

⁹ The DECOLONIZING BRAZIL / DESCOLONIZANDO O BRASIL project in 2018 grew out of workshops with Indigenous students at the Sorocaba campus of the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar Sorocaba) in Brazil. This resulted in a book, some magazines in seven different indigenous languages, and a website, as well as more ephemeral outcomes such as live actions and performances; see www.descolonizandobrasil.com.br/

the lives of the people caught up in these processes are prosaically given. In 'The Teacher', the one teacher in a village school with its twelve children uses examples, and the government-provided aids, that have no connections to the children's lives or environment. For example, in their so-called art lessons, the children 'color in clowns, but they have never been to a circus' and 'connect the dots of a drawing of a car, but there are no roads and cars never come here'. In the classroom, they learn to read aloud using words for things they do not know (*seda*/silk, *tiba*/'a place for the accumulation of things'), and the visual teaching aids are often completely disconnected from the children's realities:

On the bulletin board of the school there is a poster of a boy taking a shower. Not one family in this village has a shower. (p 207)

On a string that crosses the classroom hang two magazine cut-outs. One of them shows flamingos sunning themselves on a well-groomed lawn. The other shows a chubby blond, blue-eyed boy with a puppy. Not a child in this school is blue-eyed or white. There are no lawns or flamingos here. Only the teacher is blond with blue eyes. (p 208)

Falsely dichotomous rights and wrongs as part of the pedagogy are highlighted in the example of a multiple-choice exam paper: one of the questions, 'Where does our food come from?', has two possible answers, 'town' or 'country', and for the teacher the correct answer is 'town'. But this would probably not be the answer the children would choose, as they know that for many of their families growing their own manioc, corn, beans and coffee, if they have some land to do so, is central to their lives, and they are often far from being able to 'shop in town' for what they need, and maybe have never even been 'to town'. Problems compound and multiply when this land is lost, either through intense pressure to sell or forcibly give up their land for ranches or plantations, or the land gets handed over to the banks after it becomes too difficult to keep up payments on loans (interest rates at this time could be 45%, and even rose to 70%). This loss of land then has knock-on effects, with families no longer able to grow enough to feed themselves and parents being forced to



find work elsewhere, frequently on plantations or ranches that could be some distance away, or in the towns. Only then, maybe, is town where some food might come from.

The book demonstrates the importance of words, and what can be hidden and contained in them. The short lists of local names of fish, snakes, birds, trees, plants and animals are an insertion of a reality check, direct links to life as experienced daily and practically in close proximity with the natural world, a world in which it can be crucial for survival to know about the *cascavel* (rattlesnake) or the *jaracuçú* and to be able to communicate about them to children and to others in the community. The stories, lists and recipes show how terminologies acquire currency, what they mean at different times and in different contexts, and something of their origins. The term *bugres* and whether someone is *bugre-pura* or *bugre-puro*, we learn (p 156), is commonly used to refer to the native peoples in the region, regardless of specific tribe names, but originates in the term ‘bogeys’, or bogeyman, meaning frightening ‘monsters’. People in the area of ‘A Village on the Coast of Southern Brazil’ are called *Caiçaras*, even though the dictionary defines this as meaning ‘vagabond, tramp, scoundrel, or brutish person of the backlands’. *Caiçaras* is the name of the indigenous people that used to live in this coastal area. Alves adds a 2013 postscript to this: that the term has come to refer to European descendants who live on the coast, commenting how ‘the identity of “the other” has so successfully been taken over that in the new public imagery of Brazil, a Caiçara is most often portrayed as a Brazilian of European descent and no longer as an indigenous person’ (p 200). An incidence of the consequences of illiteracy is recounted by Beatriz in her story about a friend who went to work as a maid in town, but who, when asked to make some mayonnaise, made the mistake of using bleach as an ingredient as she wasn’t able to read the label on the bottle (the friend duly lost her job).

Many of Alves’s projects are connected with others over time and geographies, like boxes that open from the top or the bottom or the sides and reveal their contents, containers of records of actions and experiences and interactions. ‘Recipes for survival’ is one of these ‘containers’, and a part of others, with links to later collaborations and projects. On the artist’s website, there is a long alphabetical list (not chronological, which, I suspect, is deliberate on the part of the artist) of about forty projects under a general heading ‘Recipes for Survival’, from this first one in 1983 to others, from short poems and statements to more involved, research-based works (the ongoing *Seeds of Change*, for example).¹⁰ Few are literal recipes, but in the notes and stories in the pages of the second section of the book, there are short, actual recipes for food, which have an innocent-seeming incidental quality to them:

Pinhão com Carne (Pine Nuts with Meat)

Cook *pinhão* with dried meat, pepper and coconut and then mash (p 151)

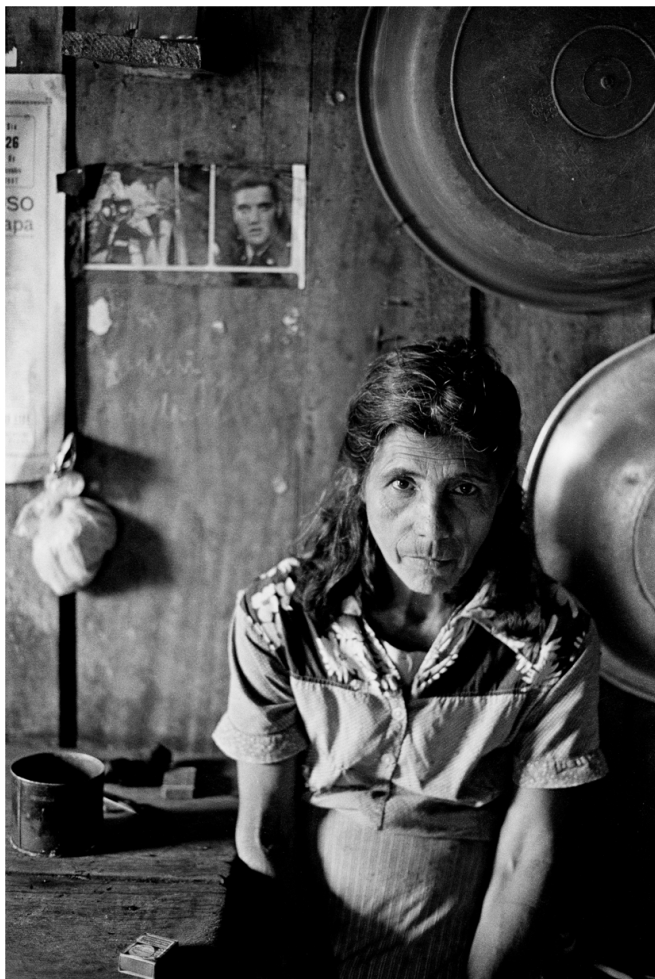
Doce de Banana (Banana Dessert)

Cook banana with sugar (p 153)

¹⁰ See <http://www.mariatherezaalves.org/container/recipes-for-survival/>

These recipes are not, however, incidental at all; their inclusion is very deliberate. They *are* real guides of ingredients for meals for feeding families with what might be available, yet in the context of the book they also have another aspect. They not only represent proscriptive instructions, sometimes with precise weights and measures of ingredients, but potential possibilities and explorations of other forms of being – transformations of raw, unprocessed, and tough, sometimes unpalatable material; a revitalising, a change into a new and different form, a form of survivance in spite of the forces working on the side of extinguishment. The *pinhão*, for example, grow on the native pine trees, the Araucária – which it is relevant to know; the *banana* is grown in the plantations many of the people labour on, or as a cash-producing crop to sell, but the recipe says to cook it with sugar to soften and sweeten it more for the family to eat. In all of Alves's 'Recipes for Survival', and in the works nested in them, there are instances of revival and survival, of words, of customs, in a countering of disappearance and invisibility. They contain the voices and stories of those not in places or spaces of enabled and perpetuated privilege, of those who are subjected to erasure and precarious conditionalities.

Running throughout Maria Thereza Alves's work – and here like a powerful undercurrent, yet unhighlighted, in the images and words in *Recipes for Survival* – are the references to Indigenous

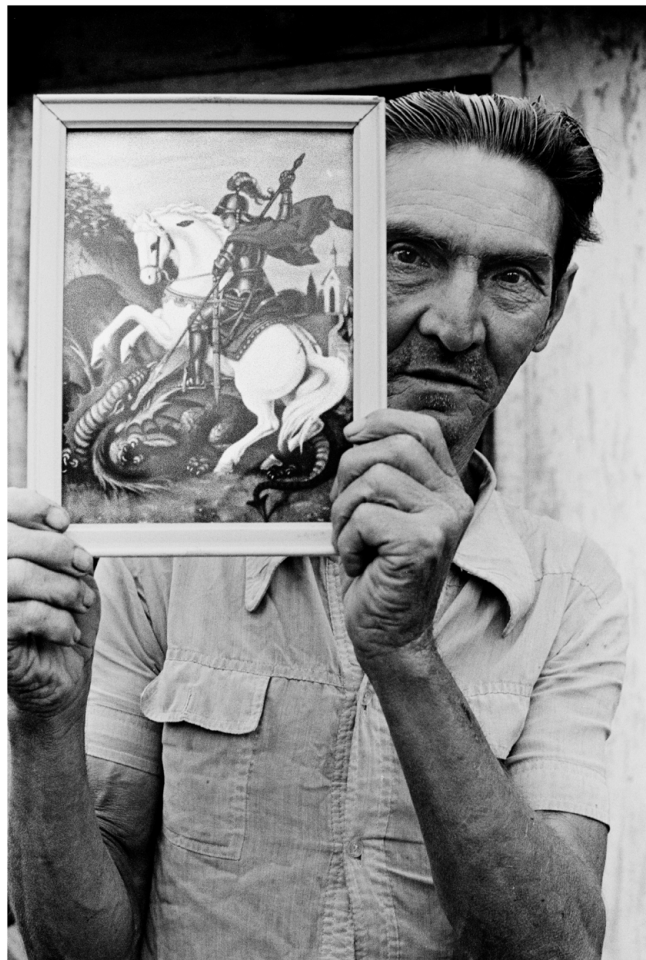


identities and histories and the devastation wreaked upon them by several hundred years of European colonisation. In the poem 'Calídno Ramalho', written about his funeral, Calídno had died suddenly of a heart condition, only in his thirties. He was not from the area but from a settlement for displaced Indigenous people some distance away, and had no family present to grieve his loss: 'You were too much alive to die... There was no one whom you loved at your funeral / There is no one who knows your history... You lost your history' (pp 184–186). An integral aspect of the colonial history is also the millions of lives lost and transplanted through the processes of slavery, which did not legally end in Brazil until 1888. The book shows, particularly in its words, the insidious internalisation of the prejudices by the descendants subjected

to these forces, as in the comments by Ana, Maria's mother-in-law:

Ana and I were going through her photo album. Every time there is someone in the family who is blond and fair, she says how pretty or handsome they are. When it is someone who looks indigenous or black she says how ugly they are except for her husband. He too was of indigenous (and African) descent. (p 158)

The photographs and stories in *Recipes for Survival* are a testament to the human dignity of the individuals in them, men and women who were facing many challenges; to the children who will be – or who now are – experiencing the future; to the older people, who could have heard the living remembrances of slavery, and who are now, writing this in 2020, presumably gone. There are no clear and distinct recipes for survival here. Recipes cannot unmake what is already made. But they can be guides and plans and lists of ingredients for future sustenance. In the almost forty years since this analogue camera's shutter clicked, a lot has happened, yet at the same time much has remained the same and is probably worse. The poverty and the life stories in the favelas in modern Brazil's urban areas, and in the same rural places where Maria Thereza Alves photographed in 1983, will be of a different order than the situations evidenced in those images, as the contemporary 'now' is complicated by many other factors. But the problems of living with poverty and inequality, and political failure, remain. And the Indigenous people continue to experience discrimination, theft of land and erasure of languages and cultures, although with new technologies there may now be platforms for information to be more widely available and for more global solidarity and support mechanisms which potentially hold some possibility for change. The great Amazon rainforest is being cut down at a rapid rate, clearing land for ranching and large- as well as small-scale agriculture, with the environmental impact now felt far beyond Brazil. Those in power are still the instruments of ongoing colonising processes; the politics are still corrupt; the Indigenous is still being written over; the forces of global neoliberal capitalism are even more monolithic and destructive.



This sensitive, yet searing, documenting and recording of individuals and the details of their lives in a particular place at a particular time by the young Maria Thereza Alves is notable for its portrayals of people who were, it has to be said, the victims of significant forces it would be hard to overcome. But to succumb to and internalise victimhood is the endgame, and that is not really what *Recipes for Survival* shows. The book is a testament to the destructive power of colonial legacies, a record in photographs and words of people subjected to, and a destined part of, those legacies. What can be taken away from it more than anything, though, and from both the images and the words, are the vivid images of the wives, the husbands, the mothers, the fathers, the children, the brothers and sisters, the lone individuals – all trying to find ways to live with those legacies and in a particular environment, without having the privilege that most of the book's readers will probably be able to have of standing outside and seeing this from afar (in all ways). These individuals' tenacity and energetic spirits, in a particular moment and place in time in 1983, are given voice by a young photography student who is an insider and, at the same time, an outsider. There is a great generosity in her channelling of this presence and energy in this book-form, in another trick that the artist has accomplished in this unique part of her ongoing work.

*I'm going to have to rent out my house to keep up with the bank payments
and the bank manager splashes me with mud on the road with his Volkswagen.
I pay the bank for him to ride in a car that throws mud at me.*

Alfredo (pp 190–191)

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