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Alba Zaluar: A Posthumous Tribute

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The following lines are insufficient to describe the full importance of Alba Zaluar's legacy in the Social Sciences in Brazil and around the world. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1942, Alba Zaluar fought bravely in recent years against cancer in the peritoneum and pancreas, a disease that conquered her on December 19, 2019. Alba's vast work provided us with an accurate look at contemporary social issues. Her pioneering research on urban violence in Brazil has become a reference in studies on crime in urban contexts, citizenship, public security policies, urban poverty, sociability and religiosity.

Recognized as an expert in Urban Anthropology and Urban Sociology, Alba was tireless in her research, developing analyses that combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies with tremendous scientific rigor, rich ethnographic detail, always taking tough positions and exhibiting the courage that is the hallmark of thought of great social scientists. Relentless in her arguments, Alba did not ignore the major debates taking place, and continued in this vein until the end of her life. In such a delicate moment, as the current Brazilian political conjuncture, where conservatism advances in society and intellectuality is condemned by the federal government which seeks to diminish academic spaces, Alba was brave and not intimidated in the discussions, always bringing deep contributions marked by her ability to link theory and practice in analysis of social issues.

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From an early age, Alba showed an interest in dialogues involving politics, culture, and society. This was how she approached the National Student Union (UNE) in the 1960s and when she began her studies in the Social Sciences course at the National Faculty of Philosophy, the prestigious FNFfi. It was during her studies there that Alba participated in the intense student movement and was part of the Popular Center for Culture, also acting in the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). With the 1964 Military Coup, many students were pursued by the military, and Alba was one of them. After her graduation in 1965, Alba had to leave Brazil, like many students who were in the delicate situation of persecution and interrogation due to the Military Police Inquiry of the FNFfi. As a young woman, she settled in England and started graduate school at the University of Manchester. It was during her stay abroad that Alba deepened her anthropological studies, learning new theories and methodological contributions, as part of a community of social scientists from the group of Max Gluckman, a very influential anthropologist in this period.

Alba completed her master's degree on her return to Brazil in 1974 at the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Her study sought to analyze the religious dimension in the feasts and saints located in Brazilian popular Catholicism, a sphere still little studied in the country. The purpose was to identify the meanings that religion had within the popular strata, in community social life. Her dissertation was published with the book *Os Homens de Deus* (The Men of God).

In 1979, Alba continued her studies through her doctorate in the Social Anthropology Program of the University of São Paulo (USP). Her research on the City of God, neighborhood of the city of Rio de Janeiro, considered one of the most dangerous regions of the municipal area, got international prominence. The thesis defended in 1984 sought to portray the social context in a region marked by urban violence. The research was published through the book [*A Máquina e a Revolta*](#) (The Machine and the Uprising), a work that brings with it all the analytical richness, a deep ethnographic analysis of the beginnings of organizations dealing with drug trafficking and the manifestations of communities exposed to structural poverty. It was also in the 70s that Alba began her work as a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Campinas, in São Paulo, where in the 90s, she defended Free Teaching through the thesis [*Cidadãos não vão ao Paraíso*](#) (Citizens do not go to Paradise). With her retirement at Unicamp, Alba decided to return to Rio de Janeiro and began teaching at State University of Rio de Janeiro, becoming a full professor in 1995.

As a teacher, Alba showed great sensitivity and treated the students with great affection. The classes were not just a simple exposition of content. Her words and gestures were riddled with feelings. It was so during the various occasions when Alba recalled her trajectory in her youth, her accounts of the period of persecution during the military dictatorship, her study experience in England, the stories told about her family, the adventures with her grandchildren, and field research in the City of God. Stories told in rich detail, not concentrated on the four walls of the classrooms. Alba liked to go out and dine with her students, drink a draft beer, among other gestures loaded with kindness and friendship that are rare in the academic environment. Alba made any subject more pleasurable, with her serenity in speech, her attention, and affection. Her students felt free and always remained attentive to their reports. All of this made the meetings always more enjoyable.

In the academic setting, Alba never slowed her investigations. With a vast amount of publications from several research projects, Alba's contributions dealt with themes such as urban violence, citizenship and criminality, in works always full of an abundance of empirical material that contributed to the formation of different public policies in the field of security. Their methodological rigor, care for empirical data, as well as their contributions to sociological and anthropological analyses can be verified by the constant presence of her works cited in dozens of books and didactic materials used in the disciplines of Human Sciences in schools and universities throughout Brazil.

Alba also gained prominence on the international scene with her research. In 2002 she was a full professor at Stanford University, where she was a Joaquim Nabuco Visiting Professor in Brazilian Studies at the Center of Latin American Studies. In 2003 she was a Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. During this period abroad she taught subjects that focused on social and economic perspectives on urban violence in Latin America. Alba was also tireless in attending overseas events, as a speaker or presenter at congresses, meetings and conferences, such as her last attendance at the 2017 European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Conference in the city of Oslo.

Due to her legacy in the field of Social Sciences, her life long history of engagement in the social causes of youth, her dedication to empirical work, her care for theoretical and methodological issues, the Brazilian sociological and anthropological communities lose a warrior woman, who never ignored a discussion, no matter how adventurous, and who never stopped working although wracked by illness. In her last days of life, Alba expressed her concern about contributing her analyses in this scientific journal, always attentive to comments and suggestions.

Alba Zaluar was 77 years old and leaves two children and grandchildren.

