

Black, Feminist, Socialist Silenced

Brazil has been rocked over the recent political assassination of Marielle Franco

Marielle Franco was an elected councilor in the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro and having grown up in a favela neighborhood, the dense informal settlements of the poor and often marginalized that surround major cities in Brazil, she was seen as a prominent organizer and voice against the poverty and police violence directed against the largely Black residents.

She was highly involved in human rights struggles, mainly around women's rights (specifically abortion rights and against sexual violence) and Black struggles (against police brutality and black genocide). More recently, she was named the rapporteur of the Intervention Commission of the Municipal Councilor of Rio created to track the results of the federal intervention in the security of Rio de Janeiro. In her last days, she was actively taking part in the denunciation of police brutality in Favela de Acari, a favela that has been a target of violent police operations, often resulting in fatal victims, many months before the military intervention. She was very respected among Rio de Janeiro's militants, even by the ones that don't believe in electoral strategies, due to her story and combative practice.

Huge demonstrations happened all over the country for two days straight. Marielle was a member of a political organization, member and supporter of social movements and previously worked for several NGOs. So, very quickly a network of support was formed and demonstrations were organized, but they have been more mourning rallies than anything, protests to ask for the end of the military intervention and for investigation of the incident.

Marielle's murder has strong involvement of the police and is directly related to her denunciations of police brutality. The investigation has already revealed that the bullets used to kill her were from a batch sold for the federal police and which was already used in other crimes by the police like the slaughter of 18 people in São Paulo three years ago.

The government, along with corporate media, is trying to use the case as one more excuse for military intervention. Rio de Janeiro has a long story of military intervention since the 90s - after the end of the Military Regime (1964-1985) - especially in favelas. However, these interventions became more common after 2007, during the second government with Lula de Silva and during Dilma Rousseff's two administrations. In 2008, the Pacification Policy Units (UPP) project started to be implemented in several favelas of Rio. The objective was to occupy the favelas with police, expel drug traffickers and, according to them, bring along social improvements to the neighborhoods. However, this never happened and since the beginning the only thing that occurred was many reports of human rights infringements, people being murdered, disappearances, houses being invaded and occupied by the police force, while drug trafficking continued to take place, under the radar.

The Pacification Policy project was a clear preparation for receiving future big events, like the Olympics and the World Cup. During these events, military forces were used in favelas to transmit a sense of security to the population and tourists, while favela dwellers, formed mostly of Black people, kept suffering and dying. Rio went through other federal-military interventions, always focusing on operations in different favelas and this long-term intervention has not been different. Military forces occupied different favelas, are

cataloguing dwellers (by taking pictures of their ID and their faces) and human rights infringements are being documented. In January of 2018 alone, 66 people were murdered in Rio during police operations, almost all of them in favelas. The excuse of the "war on drugs" have been used for a long time as a blank check for the police forces to kill and jail black people in Brazil.

Marielle has always been an opponent of the militarization of city and acted firmly against police brutality in favelas and the periphery of Rio. Recently she has been denouncing cops from the 41st Police Unit, which conducts operations in Favela de Acari and is the most lethal police unit in Rio. Only in 2016, cops from this police unit killed 117 people. The killing of Marielle is a clear response to her actuation against the Black people genocide and being a Black woman herself, she was, as usual, the chosen target.

Here in Brazil, the Black movement is very connected to favela movements, as favelas' dwellers are mostly Black. So groups and collectives from favelas, even if they are not



completely formed by Black people, have connections to struggles for Black people's rights. Today we can see a few different kinds of groups that are active in favelas. Most favelas have a strong presence of NGOs and most of these are very limited in their objectives as they are funded by international capitalist organizations and are formed by professional activists. Also, there are several autonomous and independent groups that make community work in favelas focusing in police brutality and Black genocide. They work with families of victims of police brutality, with children, cultural activities and popular education helping people to get into college. There is still not a prominent Black national movement as Black Lives Matter there, but there are several groups and connections are being made.

Black people in Brazil have a long history of resistance, from the *quilombos* during the period of slavery to riots in the favelas when someone is killed by the police. US based movements and figures are certainly an inspiration for the organizations here, but Brazil's historical formation has very strong differences from the US and things can't be easily translated. Although in general the problems Black people suffer here are pretty similar to the ones there, there are lots of singularities that make organization different. For example, in 2016 in the US there were **913** (2.8 people per one million inhabitants) people murdered by the police while in Brazil there was

4200 (20.2 people per one million inhabitants). So, Black movements here in Brazil have a strong history of organizing long term struggles as everyday there are people dying, innocent people being jailed, and they must always react to something made by the state.

The narrative that violence, assaults, stealing, crime in general is on the rise has been fed by daily news stories in recent months about such violence. It is part of a unified campaign from the government and corporate media to give the population an alarmed feeling, especially during Carnival, when we have a lot of people and tourists in the streets. This excuse lead to the implementation of the federal/military intervention which started about a month before Marielle's death and, initially, is scheduled to last until the end of the year. We don't have any doubts that the intervention is a method of social control and that the main target, as always happens, is Black and poor people.

The capitalist white supremacist state will use any tools they have to ensure that their

neo-liberal plan will move along without problems. The intervention means a false sense of security for the middle and ruling class at the cost of more death, suffering and loss of the few rights that Black and poor people have in this country. Rio de Janeiro has always been a laboratory for the rest of the country, as we saw with UPP project which has been implemented in other states and with the recent neo-liberal reforms on public services. The intervention here is a clear test on whether it can be used in other places around the country.

The murder of Marielle seems to be a clear message to social movements because of it's clear connection with the state 'paramilitary' forces. It means an increase in the level of political repression and, although it's not something exclusive to the current administration, it is certainly connected to the ruling government. The killing of militants and social movement leaders is a consolidated practice in Brazil and is a very

common reality outside of the big cities suffered by peasants and indigenous movements. In 2017, 65 people were killed and 4 massacres were registered and in 2016 there were 61 killed. The work of collecting this data by different organizations, including the work conducted by Marielle, is very important. It helps social movements and people not only to have someone who can focus attention, giving a starting point to denounce all this violence, but also more effectively solicits support from the courts and the legal system.

The murder of Marielle can generate something bigger and massive, but it's still soon to say what will happen. However, it is extremely necessary that anti-racist and anti-capitalist groups, social movements and left political organizations answer this attack by organizing, mobilizing and taking the streets with combative direct actions, to fight back against the crimes committed by capitalism and the state on the body of the marginalized sectors of Brazilian population.

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