CrimethInc.
Brazil: Rivers of Blood
Peace Is War, Security Is Hazardous, and Citizens Are the Targets of the State
April 6, 2018

Retrieved on 16th June 2021 from crimethinc.com

theanarchistlibrary.org

Brazil: Rivers of Blood

Peace Is War, Security Is Hazardous, and Citizens Are the Targets of the State

CrimethInc.

April 6, 2018

Contents

This is the only path forward out of securitized democracy. It is also the only way to properly honor all the people who have died at the hands of the police and the military over the years. As the artist Rogério Duarte said, describing his experience of torture during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985) when he faced the *Grande Porta do Medo* (Great Door of Fear): there may be a beginning and an end to the stories, but what really matters is the river of blood that runs in the middle.

definitively rejecting the violence of the state in every form it can assume.

In 2018, we will see elections for executive and legislative positions throughout Brazil, including president and governors. It is the first election year after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. It will be an electoral process fraught with fear, suspicion, and danger—posing serious risks of legal and constitutional insecurity, as jurists like to say. This was already true before the execution of Mareille Franco.

It would not be surprising for social movements to show interest in this electoral contest. Indeed, *it is precisely when democracy fails people the most that they most want to rehabilitate it.* However, looking closer at all the parties contending to take the reins, we can see that whoever comes to power will not put a stop to the bloodshed. The police and the army are the primary agents of the violence that government officials claim to be fighting, and they are essential to the system. Neither Lula da Silva nor Dilma Rousseff did anything to rein in the security forces when they were in power before. Nor will any of their successors—unless *governing itself* becomes impossible.

We do not seek seats at the negotiating table of legislative power. We have to take to the streets, as so many people did after Mareille Franco was executed. We have to make the streets our arena and make ungovernable revolt our instrument of struggle. The alternations between parties in the government have gotten us nowhere. If the state is the space of modern politics where all seek recognition, we need something that is unrecognizable on that terrain—that does not depend on the assembling of majorities or the preservation of a lethal security.

To begin this process, it does not matter if a thousand people take the street or a hundred thousand. It does not matter if the movement receives a hundred "likes" on social media or a million. What causes the annoyance to our rulers—and has the power to expose the scandal of the truth—is *the courage to be a minority.*

In 2016, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was impeached in a legal coup d'état. On March 14, 2018, City Council member Marielle Franco was murdered in downtown Rio de Janeiro, likely by the police or their colleagues in the paramilitary cartels. Yesterday, a judge ordered the imprisonment of Lula da Silva, the most popular candidate in the upcoming presidential election. Rather than understanding these as interruptions of Brazilian democracy, we have to recognize them as the functioning of a system in which the forces that purport to provide security are themselves the greatest source of danger.

The Execution of Marielle Franco

On March 14, City Council member Marielle Franco and driver Anderson Gomes were shot and killed in downtown Rio de Janeiro as they were leaving a gathering of black women from a variety of social movements. The attack bears all the hallmarks of an execution. Nothing was stolen; she was shot in the head from behind and the driver was shot in the back. Both died on the spot. Days before, Marielle had used social media to denounce police brutality in the neighborhood of Acari, where the military police battalion responsible for the region has been carrying out executions and threatening residents.[1]

Marielle had dedicated her work to recording and denouncing the occupation of the favelas in Rio by the Pacification Police Units (UPP), which began in 2008. Recently, she had been one of the preeminent voices against the Federal Intervention undertaken by President Michel Temer. The Federal Government, in accordance with the State Government, took over the

[1] In Brazil, we have three different kinds of police. The Civil Police investigate crimes on the state level; the Federal Police investigate crimes on the national level; and the military police patrol the streets. The military police are the ones who will profile you for your color or beat you when a riot breaks out.

Public Security Secretary, putting in charge an Army General, with deployment of Army troops. This was an unprecedented measure, deemed by many unconstitutional, reflecting the tactics of a government determined to remake the law.

Many anarchist collectives and groups joined the protests denouncing the murder of Marielle. She was a black lesbian woman, a longtime grassroots militant in feminist movements and black resistance in the favelas. Her work at the biggest university in Rio de Janeiro was dedicated to exposing the previous military occupations. She was a comrade to all who fight against oppression, state violence, and patriarchy.

Dozens of other prominent participants in social movements have been killed in Brazil over the past few years; at least seven have already been murdered in 2018. Despite being a known member of a political party, she was shot and killed in the middle of the street. This shows that not even a public position of power can protect you in the situation of pervasive, constant and systematic violence that is now normal for many in Brazil.

The corporate media is trying to whitewhash and conceal the radical aspects of Marielle's activism, suggesting that she was just fighting for a vague notion of human rights. Worse, they are using the murder to justify the military occupation, as if she was murdered because there were not enough police on the streets.

On the contrary, Marielle Franco was murdered **because of** the police, and quite possibly by them.

What is driving the militarization and repression in Brazil? How has it escalated since the uprising of 2013, the World Cup, and the subsequent reaction? What can it teach us about the future of democracy?

Some have speculated that Marielle's assassination was motivated by the pursuit of electoral power. This is partly true, but that narrative is most useful to white experts looking to fill the airtime of their innocuous televised debates. Marielle Franco was not executed as part of an isolated plot to undermine democracy. She was executed by the state for the same reason that thousands of other black, poor, queer, and female people are executed.

Whenever people mobilize autonomously—for example, against the tariff in 2013, or against the extermination of black people and poor people by the police—the police intensify their violence. Any police action, no matter how violent, can be justified in the name of maintaining order, the sanctity of property, and even the security of the demonstrators themselves. That includes the extrajudicial murders of untold thousands.

Who will police the police? This is one of the fundamental problems with state democracy. There is no democratic principle, no civil or human right, that could stop the security forces from mobilizing against the population. The question of the legitimacy of specific instances of police violence, so dear to liberals and defenders of constitutional rights, has no bearing on the systemic function that the police serve through the countless acts of violence that are never documented. To this day, from Ferguson to Rio de Janeiro, the relationship between police violence and legality is the insoluble problem of administrative law. And yet it is the police that enforce the law; they are the precondition for its enforcement.

This is why we argue that we are witnessing the consolidation of democratic *securitization,* rather than a permanent state of exception or a slide towards a dictatorship like the ones that governed so much of the world during the 20th century, especially in *nuestra América.* And we have to fight it accordingly—not by demanding the return of democracy to the state, but by

isonomy (self-rule and equality under the law) that supposedly qualified Brazil as a modern democracy.

Crises do not necessarily cause moments of rupture. Instead, they can offer new opportunities to impose government. In a society in perpetual crisis, it is not surprising that the subjects want more and more security—even though the ones promising security are also the ones generating the crises. Here we arrive at what we can call the *securitization* of democracy, in which the citizen to be protected and the threat to be eliminated merge into a single subject, with the criminal justice system and the armed forces playing central roles.

This explains, on the one hand, the militarizing of the police and, on the other, the use of armies as police. Criminal justice is expanded and "democratized," becoming the locus of political decisions in all spheres from local to international. At the same time, the armed forces have redefined their functions and adapted to the constitutional rules and protocols of international organizations, acting in new spaces and according to new strategic objectives. These developments give a grim subtext to the maxim "we must defend society."

The result is the transformation of urban zones into theaters of war and the vertiginous increase of state murders. In Brazil, this translates into something like 60,000 corpses stacked up every year, almost all black and poor. If in the 1990s it was said that Haiti is here in Brazil, today the number of deaths surpasses the accumulation of corpses in the Syrian conflict.

The Courage to Be a Minority

With the military intervention, it was clear that we had reached a low point, but the well has no bottom. The execution of PSOL councillor Marielle Franco exceeds the routinely deadly violence of securitized democracy. It confronts each of us with the necessity of taking sides in this stupid war.

Escalating Militarization and Policing

It is difficult to arrive at an understanding of Brazil's political and social situation today when the political and analytical categories one would previously have used to do so are totally exhausted. Classical concepts such as "citizenship," "sovereignty," "representation," "constitutional guarantees," and all the other terms that derive from them have become plastic; they have melted in the heat of the conflicts taking place across the globe since the end of the 20th century. One has the impression that not even those who utter these words are able to believe in them. Today, everything has become its own opposite: peace is war, security is hazardous, and citizens are the targets of the same state agencies tasked with protecting them.

The constitutional and militarized intervention in the public security of Rio de Janeiro, instituted by presidential decree and captained by a general of the Brazilian Armed Forces, exposes these contradictions. It is so absurd that it provokes paralysis, waiting, polite requests for explanation.

Though such a governmental decision is unprecedented, when we look at the various interventions in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro that have taken place over the last several decades, we can see that it is part of a stream of events that has been flowing for a long time. One landmark was the GLO (Guarantee of Law and Order) of 1992,[2] used to impose the ECO-92 on the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Starting from Operation Rio (1994–1995), the use of the armed forces, especially the army, through the GLO ceased to be exceptional. In view of recent events, such as the paci-

[2] The GLOs are carried out exclusively by order of the Presidency of the Brazilian Republic to arrange for the intervention of the armed forces in situations in which the public security forces are not able to ensure order (see Art. CF 1988). In early 2014, during the administration of Dilma Rousseff, civilian and military advisers produced a "GLO Manual" that standardizes the prescribed activities of the forces deployed in this type of activity.

fication of favelas in Rio de Janeiro and the so-called "public security crises" in the north of the country, Espírito Santo and Goiás, we can conclude that the relationship between the military and the police has been inverted. Whereas once, the Military Police designated auxiliary reserve forces to serve the Army of Brazil in the event of a external conflict, today the military itself has become a sort of auxiliary police force answering to the state governors.

So the militarization of Brazilian society was already in progress well before 2013. The National Security Force, for example, was created in 2006 under the Lula administration. Yet the uprising of June 2013 marked an inflection point.

Paulo Arantes wrote, "After June, peace will be total." Five years later, his prediction is confirmed—provided we understand democratic social peace as identical with this militarized war on the population.

The conservative reaction intensified with the so-called mega-events, the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, both of which took place in Rio. All of these offered the state the opportunity to implement institutional adjustments in the field of security. The police received new equipment and special training from the military, in partnership with police from the UK and France; new special battalions of police were created; GLOs have been issued regularly; and a new anti-terrorism law has been introduced (No. 13,260 of March 16, 2016). In addition, police are focusing more on video recording operations and monitoring social media.

After June 2013, the ghostly figure of a diffuse and faceless (or masked) enemy took on more discernible contours. The case of Amarildo de Souza, who was tortured and murdered by a UPP (Pacifying Police Unit) and reported missing, was a warning about the escalation of policing that found no echo. The case of Rafael Braga Vieira, arrested in June 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, exemplifies the expansion of the power of security

forces over the civilian population. All these were forewarnings of the murder of Marielle Franco.

Today, it is possible to justify almost anything in the name of security. Daily life is full of little humiliations that supposedly preserve our safety. These are still aimed chiefly at black people, the poor, women, rebels, and others who are marginalized; Marielle Franco was all of these. Because anyone can be understood as a potential terrorist, anyone can become a target of state terrorism. Those who object to this are themselves targeted for additional scrutiny from law enforcement or subjected to monitoring devices.

Safety and danger are imposed by the same institutions. They have become inextricably entangled, indistinguishable.

Not Securing Democracy, but *Securitizing* It

All of these developments confirm the authoritarian tendencies that have already been consolidating in the world's democracies for decades now. At the same time, they hint at the steps that are coming next.

The fact that all this is coming to pass under democracy rather than a military dictatorship seems to contradict the old-fashioned understanding of the state of exception as the suspension of the law. In Brazil, we are witnessing this intensification of violence, repression, and electronic surveillance not as an interruption of the rule of law, but as an extension of its logic. Today this is called the "austerity policy"—the similarities with Greece are evident, especially in Rio de Janeiro. These austerity measures are only the latest reallocation of resources in a centuries-ongoing series of colonial robberies channeling resources from the public purse into the pockets of the powerful, a process that precedes democracy yet has been stabilized by it. What is disappearing now is the illusory promise of