

“PACIFICATION” FOR WHOM?

Marielle Franco

MARIELLE PRESENT!

Marielle Franco, aged 38, a Rio de Janeiro city councilor elected with 46,502 votes in 2016, was shot dead in an ambush on 14 March 2018. As a black woman, a lesbian and a mother who grew up in the Maré favela, Marielle turned to human rights activism when she was 19 years old and routinely had to contend with machismo, racism and LGBTphobia in her work.

Nothing changed when she served as city councilor: shortly after taking office, Marielle was made chair of the Rio de Janeiro City Council Women’s Commission – a job whose results were released three months after her murder.¹ Five of the bills she submitted were approved: Bill 17/2017 – Espaço Coruja (“Night Owl”): crèches for parents who work or study at night; Bill 103/2017 – Dia de Thereza de Benguela no Dia da Mulher Negra: a homage to the 18th century black leader Thereza de Benguela to be celebrated on the same date as Black Woman’s Day; Bill 417/2017 – Assédio não é passageiro: a campaign to raise awareness and combat sexual assault and harassment; Bill 515/2017 – Efetivação das Medidas Socioeducativas em Meio Aberto: to guarantee social and educational measures for young offenders; Bill 555/2017 – Dossiê Mulher Carioca: compilation of an annual report with statistics on violence against women.

As a long-time vocal opponent of the militarisation of life, her political and academic output demonstrate the strength of someone who knew, from an early age, the devastation caused by institutional violence. Marielle graduated in sociology from the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) and earned a Masters in Public Administration from the Postgraduate Programme in Administration at the Faculty of Administration, Accounting Sciences and Tourism

“PACIFICATION” FOR WHOM?

at Rio de Janeiro’s Fluminense Federal University, where she wrote the thesis “UPP – The Decline of the Favela in Three Letters: an analysis of public security policy in the state of Rio de Janeiro”. Drawing on the findings presented in her thesis, this as yet unpublished text featured in this issue of Sur Journal was written for an oral presentation given at the Latin American Sociology Association Conference in 2017. With this publication, we add our name to struggle for her voice not to be silenced and for her ideas to continue to be amplified.

Juliana Farias and Silvia Aguião

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EDITORIAL NOTE

It is an honour for us at Sur Journal to publish the words of Marielle Franco, a tireless human rights defender in Brazil. Marielle was brutally murdered but her voice has not been silenced and it continues to resonate. We are grateful to Juliana Farias and Silvia Aguião for entering into contact with us and for the dialogue with Marielle’s family that resulted in this publication. The links referred to in the original were updated to the time when the text was reviewed (June 2018). However, no changes were made to the content or language of the text itself.

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First of all, out with Temer! It is impossible to start an academic presentation in the field of Social Sciences without first taking a look at the current political situation in Brazil. An illegitimate government, mired in corruption allegations that have gone uninvestigated, has been implementing measures that successively eliminate our rights, namely: the labour reform and the pension reform.

The ideas laid out in this presentation are taken from my masters research (entitled “UPP – The Decline of the Favela in Three Letters: an analysis of public security policy in the state of Rio de Janeiro”),² the work developed by our mandate in the Rio de Janeiro City Council and the engagement with the work of Pâmella Passos on the cultural impacts of the installation of UPPs (Police Pacification Units).³

Launched in 2008 in the Santa Marta favela, the pacification policy established by the Rio de Janeiro state government has been confined almost exclusively within the limits of the Wonderful City – of the 38 UPPs that exist today, only one is located outside the state capital: the Mangueirinha UPP, the last one to be set up, is located in the city of Duque de Caxias.

Neither are the UPPs intended for the occupation of militia territories, as only the Batan UPP fits this description. The geographic distribution of the “Peace Police”, as they are called by the public authorities, begs the question: if the militias are also a public security problem, why were the militia regions not considered a priority on the “pacification” map?

A comparison of this map with data from the Rio de Janeiro State Public Security Institute,⁴ which shows that the highest murder rates are found in the west side of the capital and in the *Baixada Fluminense* region of the state, both currently controlled predominantly by militias, suggests that the goal of “taking back the territories” announced on the UPP’s official website did not take these indicators into account. What we can see from the map is the alignment of the course taken by the UPP with the interests of national and international big business in the areas of investment in tourism and mega-events: Rio+20 (2012), Confederations Cup (2013), World Cup (2014) and Olympics (2016).

In this context of “pacification”, young people, although not only them, have been deprived of their cultural activities as well as their freedom of movement. Curfews, constant searches at gun point, recurring mistreatment during police stops and abuse of authority are trademarks of the project, as shown in an article in the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper on 2 September 2013, under the headline “Denúncia contra PMs atinge 76% das UPPs” (76% of all UPPs have complaints filed against police officers).⁵

In the survey conducted for Pâmella Passos’ doctoral thesis,⁶ data from the Public Security Institute revealed that, of the 33 units existing at the time, there were complaints in 25

of them against the actions of the officers. These complaints bring to mind an important analysis by Loïc Wacquant on the penal issue in neoliberal capitalism:

[...] Sweeping measures of penal expansion (BONELLI, 2008): Intensified policing centered on low-income districts, youth night curfews, enlarged recourse to incarceration for street crimes (in sharp contrast to the depenalisation of corporate crime), plea bargaining and accelerated judicial processing for low-level delinquents, mandatory minimum sentences for youth recidivists.⁷

This already presents a critical assessment of the UPPs in Rio de Janeiro, however, the assessment becomes substantially worse after the staging of the Olympic Games in 2016, the last in the series of mega-events hosted by the city. If the dysfunctionality of the project was already apparent in the preceding period, then the end of the cycle of mega-events conclusively demonstrates the complete breakdown of the UPPs.

The first evidence of this was the incorporation of the project into the administrative structure of the Military Police. When the project was first introduced, the units were separate from the other operating bodies of the Military Police and placed under the command of the Police Pacification Coordination Office. In mid-2017, the UPPs became subordinate to the battalions responsible for each area. This change were not merely administrative – the autonomy of the UPPs was justified as a way to create a new culture and manner of policing, in which new police officers would not be guided by the same rationale of confrontation historically employed by the Military Police battalions. The joining of the structures also signifies the joining of policing practices and the complete abandonment of any attempt at distinguishing forms of policing – even though this had only been superficial and with limited evidence of success.

In this context of the complete breakdown of the UPPs, the “big white skull” has emerged as the main symbol of their failure. The term “big skull” refers to the armored vehicle used by the Special Police Operations Battalion (or BOPE as it is known in its acronym in Portuguese) of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro. It looks like a security van that has been adapted for conflict, complete with visors and gun ports for high-caliber weapons on the sides and the top of the vehicle. The symbol of the BOPE, painted in black on the bodywork, gave rise to the nickname: a skull with a dagger buried in it from the top down. These days, “big skulls” are also being used by other military police battalions and even by the civil police.

These vehicles have long been condemned by favela residents, social movements and human rights organisations as instruments of death. When they are used in the UPP areas, the vehicles are modified in a manner as cynical as it is sordid: the bodywork is painted white. Shootings and violent police incursions have become an unacceptable routine in the favelas with UPPs. In the Alemão favela complex, police officers occupied rooftops in February to set up improvised military bases, even going so far as to remove some residents from their

homes. In Jacarezinho and Mangueiras, a massive police operation involving 200 officers took place in August and lasted for 12 whole days. Seven people were killed.

In the Rocinha favela, which has its own Police Pacification Unit, the operations have taken on a new dimension by involving, in a perverted and inappropriate manner, the use of a thousand troops from the army, navy and air force. A Presidential Decree for the Guarantee Law and Order is currently in place in Rio de Janeiro that authorises the use of the armed forces. The establishment of this type of measure has been described by organisations and researchers as unconstitutional and it is escalating the process of militarisation of the city, particularly the favelas and the urban fringes. The use of tanks and soldiers in the favelas exacerbates and exposes the racism and the criminalisation of poverty that are characteristic of the public security policy currently in place in the city. At least 25 complaints have been formally submitted to the Public Defender's Office by residents of Rocinha involving cases of torture, aggression and even sexual violence.

These are just three recent examples demonstrating the failure of the UPPs – a failure that is brutally felt in the daily lives of the residents of the favelas. The rationale of confrontation finds no distinction between supposedly pacified or non-pacified favelas, but is justified by the historic narrative of the “war on drugs”. It is a genocidal policy that systematically violates the rights of the residents of the favelas and primarily victimises black youth. The persistence of this type of policy is related to issues that run much deeper than merely the “culture of policing” that is so often claimed to be new about the UPP project. While the approach to public security is structurally associated with the profitable black market in arms and drugs and to the corruption of state agents, any pretense of “pacification” will have no more meaning than an armored vehicle painted white.

NOTES

1 • Available at: “Relatório da Comissão de Defesa da Mulher (2017-2018),” Rio de Janeiro Municipal Legislature, 2018, last accessed on June 20, 2018, <https://www.mariellefranco.com.br/relatorio-comissao-da-mulher>.

2 • Thesis for her Master's in Public Administration from the Postgraduate Program in Administration at the Faculty of Administration, Accounting Sciences and Tourism (UFF), between 2012 and 2014.

3 • Project developed by Pâmella Passos during

her post-doctoral fellowship in the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology of the National Museum (PPGAS/UFRJ), entitled “Cultura Pacificada? Uma análise dos impactos culturais da instalação das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs)”.

4 • Data available at the Public Security Institute, Homepage, 2018, accessed June 12, 2018, <http://www.isp.rj.gov.br>.

5 • Marco Antonio Martins, “Em 76% das UPPs no Rio Há Denúncia Contra Algum Policial.” Folha de S.Paulo, September 2, 2013, accessed

"PACIFICATION" FOR WHOM?

June 20, 2018, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2013/09/1335523-em-76-das-upps-no-rio-ha-denuncia-contra-algum-policia.shtml>, reprinted at <http://www.adepolrj.com.br/Portal2/Noticias.asp?id=14317>.

6 • Pâmella Passos, "Cultura Pacificada? Uma Análise dos Impactos Culturais da Instalação das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs)" (post-

doctoral fellowship in the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology of the National Museum - PPGAS/UFRJ, 2013).

7 • Loïc Wacquant, "Forjando o Estado Neoliberal: Trabalho Social, Regime Prisional e Insegurança Social," in Loïc Wacquant e a *Questão Penal no Capitalismo Neoliberal*, org. Vera Malaguti Batista (Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2012).



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