



Mariella Franco

(1979–2018)

Marielle Franco, 38, a Brazilian Councilwoman, was killed instantly on 14th March 2018 when her car was pummelled by drive-by shooters. Her driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes, was also killed.

Franco died after leaving an event for “Young Black Women Who Are Changing Power Structures”. Police believed she was monitored by her killers from the time she left the building.

Franco’s killing shook Brazil to its core at a time when the country was reeling from a massive corruption scandal, a seemingly endless political crisis, a years-long economic recession, and an epidemic of spiralling violence.

One of Brazil’s most promising, charismatic and beloved political figures, what was most notable, and most devastating, about Franco’s murder was how improbable and unique her trajectory was to the public stage. A black LGBT+ woman in a country notoriously dominated by racism, sexism and traditional religious dogma, she was raised in one of Rio’s largest, poorest and most violent slums, the Maré complex.

A single mother aged 19, yet obtained a Masters in Sociology, then became one of the city’s most effective human rights activists, leading dangerous campaigns against police violence, corruption and extra-judicial murders that targeted the city’s poor, black residents with whom she grew up.

Franco joined the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), and became one of its stars.

In 2016, she ran for office for the first time as a candidate for Rio’s city council and was elected with a massive vote. The results stunned the city’s political class: as a first-time candidate, a black woman from Maré became the fifth most-voted candidate in the city.

That success solidified Franco’s status not only as a new political force to be reckoned with, but as a repository of hope for Brazil’s traditionally voiceless and excluded groups: its favela residents, its black and poor people, and women.

Upon assuming office Franco immediately used her new platform to focus on what had become her life’s work: investigating, denouncing, and organising against police violence inflicted on the city’s poor, black residents.

Days before her assassination, she went to Acari, a sprawling Rio slum, to protest recent murders by one of the city’s most notoriously violent and lawless police battalions. What made it difficult to determine exactly who killed Franco was precisely her bravery: she was a threat to so many violent, corrupt, and powerful factions that the list of possible suspects, with motives to want her dead, was a long one.

The black feminist LGBT activist was due to marry her fiancée Mônica Benício next year. “I don’t question at all that it was a political crime,” said Benício, “She was our only black female councillor – a black, lesbian woman from the favelas occupying a position of power ... predominantly reserved for the white men who make up this ‘Brazilian elite’.”

“I’m waiting for her to come back,” Benício admitted, “any time now.” Following the attack, thousands took to the streets outside of Rio de Janeiro’s council chamber to protest against the growing violence in Brazil.

Sources - The Independent, Pink News

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