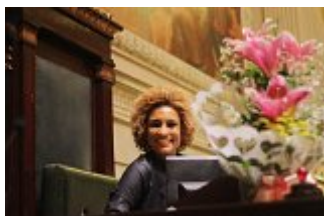


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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A DEFIANT VOICE

Brazil: The last moments of Marielle Franco, the socialist city councilor executed in the streets of a Rio de Janeiro under military control

Sunday 18 March 2018, by [DE TOLEDO José Roberto](#) (Date first published: 15 March 2018).



The bars across Rio's South Zone were packed with fans watching Flamengo defeat Ecuadorian team Emelec. The Rio football team was surging on social media as well, leading Brazil's trending topics on Twitter on Wednesday night. Amidst thousands of tweets about the players who turned the game around, a name which had nothing to do with the match began climbing the list of trends: Marielle Franco. Slowly, the drama on the field gave way to an emblematic tragedy.

A leader in one of Rio's largest impoverished communities - Maré, a group of 16 favelas cramped between two highways, home to 130,000 people - Franco received the fifth-most votes of the 51 candidates elected to City Council in 2016. She was elected with over 46,000 votes; it was her first time standing for office. She used her tenure to denounce police violence and to defend the interests and concerns of Black women like herself. A representative of the Socialism and Liberty Party, or PSOL, and a sociologist with a master's in public administration, she had just been asked to serve as rapporteur on the City Council commission formed to monitor the military intervention into Rio's security apparatus. She never got the chance to fulfill her mission.

At around 9:30 p.m., as Flamengo took to the field in Ecuador, the white Chevrolet Agile that carried Marielle Franco was overtaken by another vehicle at the corner of Rua Joaquim Palhares and Rua João Paulo I, not far from Rio's downtown. There were at least nine shots. Eight projectiles pierced the rear passenger window, just where Franco was sitting. The ninth went into the bodywork. Four hit the councilor in the head. Marielle Franco died at age 38. She would have turned 39 in July.

The bullets went through the Agile on a diagonal, and three wound up fatally hitting the driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes. Their trajectory suggests that the shooter was behind the Agile on the right. If we imagine a clock face with Franco at the center, her assassin was between four and five o'clock. That is not the position of a person announcing a robbery; it may be that of a person planning an execution. Nothing was stolen. The angle and precision of the shots spared the press officer traveling in the passenger seat, in front of Franco.

Before television broadcasts began announcing the attempt on the councilwoman and her companions' lives, thumbs were busy spreading news of the crime over WhatsApp. From there, the news snowballed across Twitter and Facebook. By half-past midnight, "marielle franco vereadora" (Marielle Franco city councilor) was leading Google Trends in Rio de Janeiro. By then, nothing was the focus of more interest for Rio users than the death of a Black woman from a favela who had gone from a Catholic militant teenager to an elected official serving a socialist party.

Franco, who became a mother at age 19, told Revista Subjetiva ten months ago that she had to stop studying to take care of her daughter. She had graduated from a public high school, Colégio Estadual Professor Clóvis Monteiro, and planned to attend college, having enrolled in a preparatory course. The unexpected pregnancy changed her plans. It was 1997, and she had taken to "skipping church to go dance" - as she put it in the interview. Then came the pregnancy. Supported by her mother, but not by the father of the child, Franco tried to dedicate herself to her daughter. She was only able to resume her studies years later, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio, where she received a full scholarship to study social sciences in 2002.

By the early hours of this Thursday, Franco's death had gone from social media to the international press. Foreign correspondents based in Rio published stories on the crime in English, Spanish, and other languages. The death became a news item in The New York Times. Acts in her honor and in protest of her murder were scheduled online for later that day.

With the murder monopolizing the news cycle and threatening the popularity of the military intervention in Rio, politicians and authorities were quick to lament Franco's death, declare official mourning, and promise a response to the crime. The circumstances indicate a premeditated killing: the shooter knew exactly where to aim to hit the councilor, although the car's windows were rolled up and covered in tinted film. This suggests that the car carrying the shooter may have followed the councilor's from Lapa, the neighborhood where she had just taken part in an event with other Black female activists.

However, there is no indication that Franco had been receiving threats. Her fellow party members repeated this insistently in interviews over the course of the night, arguing that if she had been threatened, PSOL would have filed reports and sought to protect her. What drove the murder, then? At present we have no answers, only speculation. Four days before being killed, Franco had denounced the murder of two young men in Acari, an impoverished neighborhood in Rio's North Zone. In a Facebook post, she wrote that the military police battalion active in the region is known as the "battalion of death." This may be a clue, but it's not proof.

Denouncing the violent death of her peers was what led Marielle Franco into politics. In 2005, a friend of hers fell victim to a "stray bullet" during a shootout between police and drug traffickers in Maré. Her engagement in campaigns against police violence in favelas brought her closer to a man who'd been her history teacher in college prep classes, and who she supported in his 2006 campaign for state representative. Once in office, Marcelo Freixo brought his former student onto his advisory team.

After ten years of work as an advisor in Rio's state assembly, Marielle Franco was elected in 2016 to her first and last term in office. Her immediate success bespoke a long career. Four bullets wiped out that future. But not her legacy: 14 months as a city councilor, 19 years as a mother, and nearly four decades as a defiant voice against the violence that surrounded her.

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P.S.

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<http://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/the-life-and-death-of-defiant-voice/>

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