

# *Marielle Franco, whose murderer remains unpunished, confronted paramilitaries*

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By Roberto Morejón

As investigations into the 2018 murder of former city councilwoman and social rights activist Marielle Franco slowly advance, hypotheses about the role of paramilitaries in the repudiatory deed and other misdeeds take hold in Brazil.

Franco was a harsh critic of police killings in the favelas of her community and before taking office was involved in an investigation into the irregulars, the only high-profile one that resulted in arrests.

New revelations from some of those arrested for Franco's crime reaffirm that ex-cop Elcio Queiroz was driving the car from which the courageous social fighter and her driver, Anderson Gomez were riddled with bullets on March 14, 2018.

Another suspect, the ex-agent Ronnie Lesa would have been the material author of the crime, but the

family of the deceased and governmental media, now under the presidency of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, seek to know who gave the order to annihilate the councilwoman.

What is certain is that Lula's progressive government inherited an explosive situation in areas of the suburbs of the populous Rio de Janeiro.

Data from 2020 revealed that paramilitary gangs, or militias, as they are known in Brazil, controlled 22 percent of the neighborhoods of the tourist city and its periphery.

In the local press, allegations are surfacing about the criminals' relations with the family of former ultra-right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro.

The ex-cops are joined by military and firefighters, according to an investigation carried out by two local universities.

Some wonder how the outlaws manage to recover after police beatings, but the answer lies in their collusion with mafias, control of the clandestine lottery, and extortion of civilians and merchants.

During the mandate of the ultra-conservative Bolsonaro, the aforementioned gangs felt emboldened and confronted drug trafficking.

Governments in Brazil, and now Lula's, have expressed concern about violence in the favelas and other areas of Rio, whose neighbors note and welcome a greater police presence.

As Bolsonaro lost the last elections, more favorable circumstances are created in Brazil to confront violence in the favelas.

But it would be a mistake to think that the ultra-right-wing former president and his evangelical followers will abandon friends and front men.

With the morale that accompanied her in life in her struggle to improve the situation of the vulnerable, Marielle Franco continues to demand justice.

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