



Hope in the trenches of resistance: Interview with Talíria Petrone

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1 Cropped version. Full image available through this link: <https://www.camara.leg.br/internet/bancoimagem/banco/2019/05/img20190507202534273.jpg>

Abstract

Talíria Petrone is a federal deputy in Brazil (2019–2022) who has undertaken remarkable work on the defence of human rights, on gender and LGBTQIA+ agendas and on support for Brazil's poor Black population. She has also become closely involved with topics related to security and police brutality in Brazil. In this interview, among other topics, she talks about her earlier career, the impact of death threats in her political work and her proximity to the politician Marielle Franco, who was murdered in 2018. The interview was conducted by criminologist Ana Mária Carinhanha, based in Brazil, and urban criminologist Lucas Melgaço, based in Belgium.

Ana Mária Carinhanha: Who is this woman, Talíria Petrone? What makes you you?

Lucas Melgaço: And did your academic background have any influence on your work as a politician?

Talíria Petrone: I am a history teacher, a graduate of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). I studied on the UERJ campus in São Gonçalo, one of the largest cities in in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro. It is a city where the state comes with a lot of violence by its armed arm, a city where rights are very precarious, with many *favelas*. It is close to Niterói, where I was born and grew up. The students at that university, in general, are Black, peripheral and working students. Most of the people who studied there worked during the day and studied at night. The experience I had at that university was crucial to strengthening the role of political militancy and to giving the face of the mandate that we started to build years later.

I'm the daughter of a school teacher and a musician. I grew up in Fonte Seca, a poor neighbourhood in Niterói. I think of the following two aspects: my academic background at this university, even before my master's degree, which I combined with the ongoing political struggle; and my family history, especially my relationships with my mother, my grandmother and my great-grandmother. These are two of the memories that make up the parliamentarian I am today. I have a memory of my mother going up the slope of the street where I lived, there in the Fonte Seca neighbourhood. Today, it's an area that seems to have become controlled by a militia. And I have a memory of my childhood, of us taking the bus, my mother climbing up a slope pregnant with my sister, with my brother in one arm and me on the other. This is an image that stuck with me: the scene of this woman, a teacher, who went to university already as an adult, who was the head of the family, and my example as a woman, who did not see herself as a feminist, but was the epitome of the Brazilian working woman.

And the university came after other experiences. I worked in telemarketing, which was necessary to be able to pay for the public transport to go to class. This work experience shaped me as a university student. It influenced me to not get involved in student movements, because I did not see myself represented, despite recognizing the importance of these movements. But this experience as a worker – and then the experiences of colleagues at the university in São Gonçalo – constituted me as a militant. More than the academic life itself, which I consider quite important, my experience as a school teacher, my jobs in São Gonçalo, in the Maré *favela*, dealing with students who arrived having not eaten, with students who saw their neighbour die the day before, murdered by the state, influenced me greatly. To experience the world within the (micro) classroom space was important for me to decide to become politically involved.

I thought at that moment – and still do – that the school is a very powerful space to experience such an unequal Brazil. I arrived at a school where Brazil's historical inequalities were very sharply and

evidently present, which gave me a great need to go further and organize myself politically. I joined PSOL (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade) and became involved with agendas on education and human rights. Through my candidacy, we wanted to bring the racial and gender agendas into the centre of Brazilian politics within the context of Niterói city. We created a campaign with the slogan 'For a Black, popular and feminist Niterói'. With little money and few people, but by circulating through the squares, and making sure we were closely connected with the neighbourhoods and territories, our mandate obtained the most votes in the city. It was a surprise, but also a sign that there was a need among the majority of the people to feel represented.

Our campaign was mainly a response to the murder of Marielle Franco, who was very close to us. We were both Black women in politics. When she got killed, we felt provoked to nationalize the struggles that were occurring in the state of Rio de Janeiro. That is what pushed us to take on this task of the federal mandate.

L. M.: Still, about your mandate as a councilwoman in Rio de Janeiro, could you please talk about your participation in agendas such as sexual violence and security policies?

T. P.: I was president of the Commission on Human Rights, Children and Adolescents during the two years I was a councilwoman. We had a space for welcoming victims of human rights violations in the city of Niterói, in a broad conception of human rights, including for example the right to daycare as a human right. There were three themes that were directly linked to what we will continue talking about today. The first were issues involving women's rights and gender, which were themes that have become very present in our work. So much so that we, from the perspective of criminal abolitionism, believe that prisons maintain a form of historical repression that always falls on the same bodies. We understand that, before a woman is assaulted, we want her alive and without marks of aggression. So, preventing violence against women was a fundamental point in addressing the gender inequalities that are so glaring in Brazil.

One of the first measures that we had as a mandate was a representation to the Public Prosecutor's Office to bar an amendment to the Municipal Education Plan which prohibited gender, sexual diversity and sexual orientation from being debated in schools in Niterói. We managed to overturn the amendment. This generated a series of violence against us by fundamentalist sectors in the city.

Also, the housing debate, which often seems to be detached from debates involving police violence. But on the contrary, the struggle for housing always involved some other violation to that territory. Niterói is a city where more than twenty-five per cent of people live in areas of housing deficit, *favelized* areas, without drainage, without sanitation. And these are areas where police lethality comes in very hard. Niterói experienced a socioenvironmental disaster that killed more than a hundred people, called the 'Bumba disaster'. A massive landslide occurred after heavy rainfall. The government's response was to either reallocate the affected residents far from the central area, or do nothing. Then, police violence in the city came to this same body, which was the body of homeless people, mostly women, heads of families and Black women.

This was intimately connected with the struggle for another model of public security. At that time the 'Niterói Presente' programme was being established in the city, as a complement of public security through municipal resources. Niterói, although a beautiful city that appears to be peaceful and that has a very high human development index (HDI), sees more people killed by police intervention on average than the city of Rio de Janeiro. However, these deaths are concentrated in slums and peripheries. Icaraí, an affluent area of the city, does not experience the same violence as that on the periph-

ery, in the *favelas* of Niterói. We received many demands from mothers of incarcerated children, children murdered by the state. And often, these women were homeless and did not have access to a day-care centre. It's astonishing how these violations came to fruition in the same body.

Still on these agendas: we intensively fought to bar the armament of the Municipal Guard. There was a proposal from the City Council to arm the Guards, seeing it as a complement to the Military Police, much in this logic of war as a model of public security. Seventy per cent of the population voted through a popular consultation for not arming the Municipal Guard. It was a very great victory of this mobilization, to which our mandate was added.

Just one other thing, which I think may be worth saying: we had a way of working during my mandate as a councilwoman that I miss a lot, which was the travelling cabinet. These violations were received when we circulated through the neighbourhoods of the city; with our stool there, we sat, listened to people and went back to the mandate and to the Human Rights Commission, taking these complaints into account and thinking about parliamentary initiatives to face them.

L. M.: About the non-armament of the Municipal Guard, I imagine you must have faced strong opposition. Was this the case? And when did this take place? What year?

T. P.: I was elected as councillor in 2016.

L. M.: And I imagine that if this had been today, in the current political context, maybe the outcome would have been different.

T. P.: Yes, I think so. And I think the right, the far right, was not sufficiently mobilized at that point. There was already polarization in the House, especially with a councilman who was a Bolsonaro supporter and the main spokesman for this far-right policy of extermination. But I don't think they were able to get organized enough.

Niterói, although it is a conservative city, also has an interesting progressive left history. We were able to mobilize these sectors and also mobilize sectors of the Municipal Guard, which understood that, armed, they were also targets. So the Guard was very divided on this issue.

The mayor was from a progressive field, so that's why he made a public consultation. He called it a plebiscite, but it wasn't exactly a plebiscite: he already had a position on weaponry. So it turned out that he didn't take the Guard's weapons process forward after that consultation.

A. M. C.: I wanted to ask a question about the travelling cabinet. How did this experience come about? Did you get inspiration from somewhere or someone else?

T. P. – In fact, this came up from a collective discussion in the mandate. I think there must have been other experiences like this, but I don't remember borrowing from some other objective experience. But we had a very territorial campaign. We gathered ten people in a square, in a neighbourhood, then ten in another. We wanted a mandate that was closely tied to the territories. This is the role of a coun-

cillor's mandate: to be very connected with the city, in a direct relationship with the people living in the city. Every fifteen days we were in a different neighbourhood holding small meetings to listen to the demands of the population.

L. M.: In what way does the political polarization of parties, with different ideals, also become a form of polarization that is, in some way, itself violent, too? And how has this discussion about guns been going at the federal level? Have you suffered any form of political violence for opposing the current government on these matters?

T. P.: Political violence occurred from my first day in office. There was violence within the parliament itself. Niterói had some councillors coming from the Military Police and I was the only woman in office. Imagine, a Black woman and 22 men, some of them cops. One of these men was very connected with the *bolsonarista* ideals.

Violence was a common reaction, in particular, to two themes: themes involving women and gender; and issues involving public security. Whenever I positioned myself in a speech, or with some legislative initiative, on these two topics, violence came with great force. There were tensions inside the parliament, things like a councilman who was a cop hitting the holster in a threatening tone and saying, 'I'm here armed, are you going to talk badly about the police here?' Sometimes we almost ended up in a physical confrontation, especially in a small plenary: the melee there was very strong. And usually, tensions within the parliament developed into many attacks, beginning with attacks on social networks and then developing into other forms of threats.

There was a moment when there was a police operation. Some police officers organized an ambush in São Gonçalo – which is the city where I taught and studied, neighbouring Niterói – and the operation resulted in at least eight people getting killed. We called it the 'Salgueiro slaughter', as it took place in a *favela* in the Salgueiro complex. We received several reports of torture and deaths that did not appear in this statistic. No one took responsibility for this operation. This was a theme that we continued to see at the federal level, because of the Federal Army's involvement in the operation. We then had some meetings with the Military Prosecutor's Office. The case was dismissed with no effective response as to what had happened to these young people who were tortured.

And I asked in the plenary of Niterói for one minute of silence in memory of the families of these young people. This turned into a string of death threats on different social networks and unfortunately did not stop there. A man called to PSOL's office insistently, asking for my phone number, saying he was going to kill me. This man was even identified by the police and, upon being identified, he said he felt incited by the webpage of another councillor, who was a supporter of Bolsonaro. He got angry and decided to react. Then, we never heard about this man again. But anyway, there was an institutional climate of political violence that encouraged violence from the outside as well.

Niterói is a city where there are organized white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. There are ongoing inquiries into this. And for me, this reflects the unresolved history of a slave Brazil, of a colonial Brazil. I think Brazilian capitalism and the Brazilian bourgeoisie – the Brazilian elite – have never abandoned a slave logic, which has to do with choosing which body is to be dehumanized, which body can be exterminated. The public security policy in Brazil as well as that of the city of Niterói understand that the body to be eliminated is a poor, Black body, either through incarceration, homelessness, or poverty, but also through death, summary execution. But the body of those who fight this scenario, depending on what body this is, is also likely to be eliminated, as was the body of Marielle and as is mine and so many other women.

I don't see my case today, which I understand to be a serious case – I'm exiled, practically, within the

country – or the case of Marielle as isolated cases. This is the expression of a Brazil in which democracy is fragile and increasingly fractured in the Bolsonaro government. A country that did not break with the colonial slave logic that structured the Brazilian state and institutions.

A. M. C.: You feel exiled within your own country and talk about the difficulties in exercising a public mandate, in a country that claims to be a democratic state of law and that at the same time does not offer conditions for you to work safely. When you feel faced with these threats, how is your personal and public life affected?

T. P.: It is important to make these serious issues visible. Since the beginning of my parliamentary life, there have been many forms of violence. These have include explicit racism ('Disgusting nigger, go back to the *senzala*'²; 'If I find you on the street, I'll beat you to death'), allusions to rape ('You deserve a penis this big') and death threats ('I'm going to shoot you dead'). Social networks, since my first week in office, have been marked by these kinds of threats. We look at this situation with worry and sadness. It's always been very hard to exercise a mandate like this. For those who are Black women and who choose to make a mandate to face this elite that, since forever, has been the majority in the occupation of Brazilian power, it is very hard. This has always been a non-place for us. Racism and patriarchal logic have structured our capitalism and are very evident in Brazilian institutions. Therefore, whoever is there and occupies a space of power in the fight against it is a victim of violence.

When Marielle was executed, all these threats were taken to another level. This was exactly the type of violence that occupied my conversations with Mari. We had always been concerned, but we didn't think political violence could lead to an execution. Even in a polarized country, even in a country that we understood was moving towards the possibility of a totalitarian regime. But when Marielle was executed, those fears became very real. Especially because Marielle was never directly threatened. The plenary, in Rio de Janeiro, where she worked, was less tense and polarized than that of Niterói. From then on, the threats and risks became more concrete. I do not know if we started to see more of the risks because a fellow was executed, or if, in fact, the divided situation in Brazil was also intensifying.

After Marielle's murder, I started receiving protection from the parliamentary police escort. The former secretariat of security of the state of Rio de Janeiro offered me an escort from the Military Police for a few months, because they understood that I had a similar profile to Marielle and was already a parliamentarian who had received threats. And not knowing who killed Marielle increased the likelihood of me becoming a target. But on the first day of the federal deputy campaign, the escort was revoked. Right after, there was a conflict with a military policeman on the Rio-Niterói ferry. This cop asked me to stop distributing leaflets. But I wasn't sharing any leaflets on the boat. This cop told me to hide my campaign materials and I told him I wasn't going to do that. Then he throws my phone on the floor, picks up the materials and starts getting very aggressive, very violent. At some point, he pulls out a gun, in the middle of a boat full of people going to work. He was very nervous with the gun in his hand. When he pulls out the gun, I try to stay calm, saying, 'People, calm down: gun kills'. And he responds systematically, 'Ideology kills more'.

This, for me, was the inauguration of what would become my campaign for congresswoman in 2018.

2 Translator's note: Brazilian slave quarter.

On another occasion, during an activity with young Black people in the city of Bangu, a policeman in civilian clothes whispered in my ear saying that I had to leave, that he was going to 'Come back shoot everyone'. This was the degree of intimidation to which I was exposed.

Life, which was hard, got even harder. I used to bike or take the bus to the City Hall of Niterói to work and after all that I was not even able to go to a bakery without an armoured car. That's my situation to this day. But we understood that the threats that hit our mandate, that hit me, came from a field of hatred that could involve white supremacists, organized racist and sexist groups. New threats, including a plan to kill me that was being organized on the deep web, allowed me to have an escort from the Legislative Police of the Congress.

And then there was a twist, in the last year, when I, in the full exercise of my maternity leave, with my daughter on my lap and with my escort from the Legislative Police discontinued as we were in a pandemic and I was not leaving home, the director of the Legislative Police calls me and says, 'Look, madam, do not leave your house. We found out about a militia group planning to kill you. Next morning, we are resuming with your escort'. I almost dropped my daughter on the floor. I got scared. I knew the militia didn't like us. But objectively, even with Marielle's execution, we had done nothing concretely to take economic power away from the militias. There are at least seven other detailed reports that include names of police officers, both in duty and retired, planning my death. One of them mentions a prison director conniving with militia prisoners ordering my death. The reports are very detailed and include messages where they question why I have not been killed yet.

And then a saga began, because it was either a planted tip, or a concrete tip. But it was from someone in the militia. It was very detailed, very concrete. Some progressive police officers told me to leave Rio de Janeiro. They understood that it is not safe for me to stay there until they can run a risk analysis. This is also because the Legislative Police, which protects me, has formally said that there is no way they can make my security effective in Rio de Janeiro, that they have neither weapons nor enough staff to guarantee the protection of someone threatened by a militia. My case is the most serious in the Federal Chamber. I haven't been in Rio for eight months.

I was then forced to hide here with my family. And forced to be away from my own territory. This situation is forcing me to raise my daughter away from my family, with no support network, away from the territory in which I was born and raised and where I want to live. I am also living with an escort, having to use an armoured car to go to a bakery. This is a very frontal attack on democracy. So much so because I'm not the only one. The answer to the question of who ordered the murder of Marielle remains unknown. On top of that the militias dominate a third of the territory of Rio de Janeiro. For these reasons, I can't go back to the territory that elected me. Brazilian democracy is fractured, incomplete. It has never fully reached the *favelas* and peripheries and is experiencing a very serious setback in the Brazilian political moment. The Democratic State of Law in Brazil, which, for me, has never been completely reached, has been increasingly attacked by a government that not only does not give answers about all this, but also authorizes extermination groups to function at full steam in Brazil and, in particular, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

L. M.: There is indeed a huge contrast between your work as a councilwoman in Niterói, meeting people at their places and this exile within the country. What impact has this situation of being under permanent threat had on you, in the motivation for your parliamentary work? Have you ever considered giving up, or does it give you even more strength to fight? What impact did Marielle's death have on your motivation as a parliamentarian?

T. P.: I think it's actually a mixture of all of it. Every day, I feel like interrupting this task. I have no doubt that, for my personal life, I could even say that I would be happier if I weren't parliamentary. But every day, I too am convinced of the need not to stop. Because I couldn't live with the victory of those who want to disrupt bodies like mine. Because this is a victory for the far right, a victory for the Brazilian elite that makes up the far right. I'm a very cheerful person. I like samba, beer, local bars. There is a subjective dimension of an attempt to steal some of our joy and create restlessness for us. It's somehow also a way to dehumanize our bodies.

So many times – and even more so after I gave birth to Moiana Maiaalú – I have thought, 'What am I doing with my life and my family?' There is a constant fear of death. At the same time, Brazil is going through an unprecedented political moment which, together with the health crisis, has sharpened an economic crisis of an already deeply unequal Brazil. On top of that, there is the risk of a coup d'état, of an authoritarian closing of the regime. There will also be no future for my daughter if we do not interrupt this cycle of authoritarianism in Brazil. While motherhood invites me to another lifestyle, it also makes me sure that I should keep fighting – and the way to do it at this moment is to continue occupying the mandate.

And there is also Marielle. The task of nationalizing these struggles was triggered by the political execution of Marielle. The Brazilian state has not answered the question of who ordered the murder of Marielle. This is also a dimension of the impossibility of stopping fighting.

And one last point: every twenty-three minutes, a young Black man is murdered in Brazil. The militias dominate a third of Rio de Janeiro's territory. There's no other way. It's not a fight choice, you know? So every day, I think about stopping, but every day I have the conviction to move on.

A. M. C.: When you talk about how Marielle's execution provoked this response of the party to mobilize a national struggle, I see how you two had an effective partnership in Rio and Niterói. How would you describe Marielle and her work to our readers? And what was behind Marielle's execution?

T. P.: I think Marielle combined what her body represented with what the struggles encompassed by her mandate represented. Marielle was a woman in a country with the fifth-highest femicide rate in the world. A Black woman in a country where femicide is Black and where every twenty-three minutes a young Black man, the son of a woman like Marielle, is murdered. And most of these murders are by the police force. Marielle was a *favela* Black woman. The state sees those who live in the *favela* in a dehumanized way: instead of providing rights, the state arrives with an armed arm. Marielle, a Black mother in a country where obstetric violence is Black, where the Brazilian obstetric scenario is frightening, where maternal mortality is Black and where these mothers, mothers like Marielle, are mourning the deaths of their children, who are victims of this police, judicialized and criminal state, a combo that has been extended in the current period.

She was a lesbian woman, married to another woman, who turned the mandate to this agenda, in a country where lesbian women still suffer corrective rape. She was a socialist woman, in a country that has the second-highest inequality between rich and poor and the second-highest concentration of income in the world. And Marielle was a human rights defender in a country famous for being one of the most murderous in the world when it comes to human rights defenders. So her body carried a series of stigmas, stigmas of violence in Brazil. And that mandate was a mandate to denounce all these stigmas. This was a mandate to make the resistance to this set of agendas visible. This was expressed when Marielle advocated the legalization of abortion, when she was shouting in the plenary to respect lesbians and wanted to institute Lesbian Visibility Day; when Marielle denounced every police opera-

tion in the city of Rio de Janeiro, on the microphone, loud and clear, and used the reach of her social networks to denounce the truculent actions of the state.

Her body is the typical body historically dehumanized by the Brazilian elite in a slave Brazil and a body that has needed to be silenced, from the point of view of the elite, because it is a body that bothers the historically constituted power. That was Marielle, besides being a very strong woman, an incredible and irreplaceable popular leader. Marielle had a capacity for dialogue with different sectors and led an act in the *favela* of Maré like no one else. Imagine the tension. Surrounded by guns, whether from the illegal drug trade, or the police. So I have a memory of Marielle there, even before I was a councilwoman. The scene began to get tense: the young boys were very angry at the murder of another young man, throwing stones at the police. Marielle started screaming, 'Stop it now, go there' and became a lioness. And because of the Brazilian colonial elite, which continues to occupy power in Brazil, this lioness needed to be tamed. And you couldn't tame Marielle. So she had to be silenced.

We may not know the exact reason for the killing of Marielle. But all that I said is reason enough to try to shut up this body.

L. M.: Both your work – your demeanour – and Marielle's have always been very critical of the police, especially the police in Rio de Janeiro. As we are speaking to an audience of criminologists (and also specialists in police studies), it may be interesting to give them a bit of an idea of the Brazilian context. As a teacher myself I find it difficult to portray the Brazilian police to a Belgian audience, being something so far from the reality in Belgium. Even with numbers, the Belgian public can have some difficulty in understanding the reach of such violence. In Brazil, your approach and Marielle's are often placed as a counterpoint to the police. Some opponents of your work classify you as not only averse to the police, but also a defender of bandits. How do you see this polarization? Do you see any way out for the Brazilian police?

T. P.: Violence found the Brazilian state. The police in Brazil were created to contain popular uprisings, to guard the power of the court and then the power of the Brazilian bourgeois elite. This was the role of the military police in Brazil: to stifle popular uprisings, be it Canudos or the Bahian Conjuration. We are talking about the kidnapping of people from Africa here; the attempt to exterminate the indigenous population; the different dictatorships that constituted Brazil. We haven't broken with that past yet. Brazilian institutions have these scars and the police institution was established to operate this violence. We need to deconstruct this myth of a polarization between mandates like ours and the police. We are not against the police officers, not least because many officers in the field have a working-class origin. Most of the military police officers who die on duty are Black. So the problem is this police state. We live in a moment when the rule of law is being dismantled and the criminal legal state is being strengthened through legislative initiatives, through a discourse of criminal populism. It is this criminal populism that convinces people on the one hand that 'more police' will make them safer and on the other hand that violent police, in an oppressive logic, will promote a sense of security – which is just a feeling. In the end, the role of the police is to maintain the property of the Brazilian elite. Private property, but also their power, which is a kind of property, too. Thus, the criminal populism that is often popularized within the people, who are even victims of this armed arm, serves to maintain the power and property of the Brazilian elite, which is still the colonial elite.

That said: it is unacceptable that the Brazilian state, through its armed arm, continues to operate a genocide in Brazil. It is, in fact, difficult to explain what the police in Brazil are for those who do not live this reality. In Rio de Janeiro, this situation is already something that people from other Brazilian states can't understand. The police in Rio de Janeiro flash rifles from their vehicles in the middle of an

urban centre. A rifle is a weapon of war, which today is circulating through the state of Rio de Janeiro. Today, unfortunately, the Brazilian police are one of the deadliest institutions in the world. If you take data from 2020, at least 3,181 people were killed in police interventions. Almost eighty per cent of these people were Black and young. It's shocking how much the police kill, they are made to kill. But, this police officer who brings about death, is also the victim of death. The model of public security in Brazil is organized by a logic of war, supposedly a war on drugs, but which is in fact a war against those who are poor, Black and from the *favelas*. It's a bloodbath.

This way the public security model works is linked to what the Brazilian prison system is. We have the third-biggest prison population in the world, in absolute numbers. When we think of women, we have the fifth-biggest prison population in the world. The vast majority of those arrested are Black and in large part for the illegal drug trade. It's a war on drugs, but a war on the same body, which is the same body as Marielle and her children. So, what to do in this scenario?

There are two paths. One: consolidating the idea of bringing the police officer closer to the worker. Currently, the officer is denied the very condition of being a worker. This is very serious. For example, a recent amendment to the legislation was approved that will dismantle labour rights, which affects the police, but this is an amendment operated by the government, and the police officers are the basis of this government. A policeman is a worker, but he will never be understood as such if the public security model is not modified. And for me, that's the second key. This logic of militarized warfare, which refers to dictatorships, is the logic that constitutes the Brazilian police, especially the military police. So, demilitarize the police or, better, democratize the Brazilian police. There are several models: we could reform the police in Brazil and merge the civil and military police in one integrated force. I know there's no consensus on that. But these are debates that go through the logic of democratizing the police institution in Brazil. There's no way a cop still operates on a dictatorial logic, which is the logic of war, right?

A. M. C.: Beyond the historical difference with regard to coloniality, Belgium greatly values this place of centre, of neutrality, of *garantismo*, even if formal. It is certain that there are also conflict zones, in which abuses exist, but we know that there is a completely different perception, for example, of the logic of prevention and the logic of war that, in Brazil, is established and normalized. There's this sense of fear when the police are around. It's a stark difference that we can see with the naked eye.

T. P.: The basis of the military police is formed by the poor Brazilian class. However, the police create fear among the poor because they serve to maintain the property and power of the rich in Brazil. It's very shocking what is done to the body of these officers. And it's a body that's trained to do that, it's trained to know who the internal enemy is. The public security model in Brazil is based on the constitution of the internal enemy, unfortunately. And what's the face of this inner enemy? The internal enemy is the same young, Black body of the *favela*. That's it, reinforcing this given: every twenty-three minutes, at least one young Black man is murdered in Brazil. That's not reasonable. More are killed in this model of public security in Brazil than in countries at war.

A. M. C.: Just to add an issue that it may be important for us to observe as well, is the difference in the appreciation of police officers between the two places.

T. P. – Yes, I think that's it: valorization, whether career, but also training in human rights, which is

absent. The training of the police is a training in a logic of war. There is also a dimension of the legal framework that makes it even more difficult to investigate these murders. The homicide investigation rate in Brazil is ridiculous.

A. M. C.: This question directs me to the assassination of George Floyd, which has put the theme of racism at the centre of many discussions in the United States and around the world. You have mentioned a lot of data that force us to consider the existence of unquestionable structural and institutional racism. How do you see this difference between the way racism is approached in the United States – for example, with the case of George Floyd, which culminated in the conviction of the police officer who murdered him – and here in Brazil, where institutional responses are failing?

T. P.: If we take the history of the Brazilian state, we've spent more time under legal slavery than since slavery was abolished. We lived for centuries with legislation that enslaved Black bodies. I think that's the first thing, because it's part of a characteristic of what the Brazilian state is.

Second, there is a difference between Brazil and the United States. Brazil lives with the myth of racial democracy. The miscegenation that exists in Brazil has somehow tried to make racism invisible. We often hear, 'There is no racism in Brazil', 'Everyone is mixed in Brazil', when in fact this is not what the numbers and data show. The myth of racial democracy is nefarious for the construction of a real Brazilian democracy. And you can't think of anything in Brazil without thinking about the racial issue. Racism structures all other Brazilian social relations. And, unfortunately, this has been hidden by the myth of a Brazilian racial democracy.

So, if we look at the most contrasting areas: the unemployment rate in Brazil among Black workers reaches almost eighteen per cent, but among whites it is ten per cent; the average wage of Black women is seventy per cent lower than that of white women; comparing Black women to white men is even more shocking. In addition to police violence, it is necessary to think about unemployment. You can't think of Brazil without thinking about how much racism structures all the social relationships that are here.

I think the case of George Floyd resembles, a little, the execution of Marielle. We were already seeing a growing organization of Black movements and the anti-racist struggle. Marielle's execution was a milestone: it brought light to a racism that was already clear to many of us, but not to the whole population and to the actions of the state. I think that today the anti-racist fight is one of the camps that is most mobilized to fight Bolsonaro's government. It is today the most dynamic phenomenon of struggle in Brazil – perhaps even more dynamic than the feminist struggle that has also arisen. The struggle of Black women, the organization of Black women, is gaining momentum.

But, unfortunately, I don't think it's had any consequences. The urgency of the anti-racist fight is not the urgency that is within every Brazilian. Let me give you an example: in the Federal Chamber there is a women's delegation. There is a secretariat of women members, which is an institutional space of the House dedicated to organizing women's agenda. Women with different agendas. But when it comes to racism, there is no secretariat for ethnic-racial equality. We even filed a project on this, because it is still very invisible. Racism is still very hidden. Racism in Brazil is seen as an authorization to kill the Black people. But I think this situation is becoming to change thanks to the dynamism of the anti-racist fight. But as long as there are no institutional mechanisms that recognize racism and fight it, we will continue with a very incomplete democracy.

A. M. C.: Would you like to leave a final message to our readers?

L. M.: Complementing that, I imagine that this interview will be read by other Black Brazilian women who want to get involved in politics and seek change. But they may be scared, too. What kind of message should we give to them?

T. P.: I would like to conclude with two points. One: because this is an international interview, I think it is important to insert this Brazil into a historical and conjunctural international dynamic. Brazil is part of a Global South whose inequalities are also operated by a colonial logic. The violence that founded the Brazilian state came from invaders of this territory, who were European invaders. The Brazilian elite is still connected with the international elite of the Global North, which unfortunately often enriches itself at the expense of developing countries, countries of the Global South. I think that international solidarity, especially in these times of pandemic, is a fundamental thing to face inequalities and racism in Brazil. It is essential that the countries of the world be aware of what is happening in Brazil, but also understand their responsibilities towards what is happening here. There is a developmental logic, production oriented, which is also operated from the outside in by financial capital.

And it is logical that it is hard for us, as Black women, in a country with these issues and this government. A country with a history of racial inequality and poverty. But what is the exit available to us? I understand that politics means the cost of a bus fare, it's the price of bread, it's whether this woman's son is going to come home alive, if he's going to have a job, if he's going to have to find a way to make some money every day. The policy is very concrete. And in concrete politics, we Black women have long been protagonists, who come from *quilombos*, who are the face of Brazilian resistance, of Brazilian real politics. I have no doubt that, for some bodies, fighting is not a choice. These women battle day to day. For them to work as domestic workers in other people's houses, they will have to leave their sons with other women, with their neighbours. There is a network of solidarity that is political. What we need is to bring the institutional policy closer to real, concrete politics, already led by Black women. The way out of this is to have more Black women, with this profile, combative, with pen in hand. To visualize resistance in the territories – which already exists – and to help purge the Brazilian colonial elite from power. So, it has to be more of us. It's not a silly hope, you know? And, pardon my French, it is not a white and colonial hope: it is a hope that is already expressed in the secular, ancestral resistance of women in their territories.

Talíria Petrone Soares is a black woman, feminist, socialist, school teacher, graduated in History from the State University of Rio de Janeiro and has a Master in Social Work and Social Development from the Fluminense Federal University. She taught in the favelas of Maré, in São Gonçalo and in Niterói, and the reality of schools was always a reason to keep fighting. In 2010, she met the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL) and began her party militancy, deciding, six years later, to run for councilor in Niterói. In the campaign for a black, feminist, LGBT and popular Niterói in 2016, she was elected the most voted councilor in the city and, for more than a year, was the only woman in the City Council. She was president of the Commission on the Human Rights of Children and Adolescents. In 2018, Talíria was elected federal deputy by the Rio de Janeiro PSOL, with 107,317 votes — the ninth most voted in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

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How to cite this article (APA– 7th ed.): Petrone, T. (2021). Hope in the trenches of resistance: Interview with Talíria Petrone [Interview by A. Miria & L. Melgaço]. *Criminological Encounters*, 4(1), 145-157. doi:10.26395/CE21040110



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