



#Olympics

Mariza do Amor Divino and the clothes line left waiting for compassion

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Mariza do Amor Divino, 60, woke up at dawn in a rush to go see a doctor. The clothes she washed the day before would have to wait on the clothes line because it was already 4:40 am and she had to leave in a hurry. She knew that only the first twenty people to arrive at the hospital would get an appointment. Later that morning, while waiting to see the doctor, her cell phone rang. It was her neighbour calling to give her the news: "Mariza, they demolished your house".

One Friday in October 2015, the City of Rio destroyed Mariza's house, her past and her hopes of staying in the place where she had gone to live 34 years earlier: Vila Autódromo, the community located beside the Olympic Park and on the banks of the Jacarepaguá lagoon.

The municipal police arrived early in the morning and blocked residents' access to the area, while the tractors knocked down another five houses built near the water. No one took the time to warn Mariza that the house she was living in would be demolished that morning.

When the employees went inside, they found clothes on the line and the medicine Mariza took for diabetes and depression on the table. They did not know that her savings were hidden under the carpet. The furniture was taken to one of the municipality's warehouses. Clothes, medicines and money are things that Mariza needs everyday — and that she never managed to recover.

The life that she had built on that piece of land were buried under the rubble. It is difficult to go back to look at an area that is now full of stones and fallen trees with one's own eyes, even in the company of the photographer who became her friend.

"Oh my God. I went numb when I found out. What about my things? The x-ray of my back? I have back problems and all my papers were in there", Mariza exclaimed. She had undergone surgery on her tailbone two months earlier and was getting ready for a second operation, this time on her back.

Without her medication, she needed to find help fast to avoid getting sick because of her diabetes and depression. Mariza asked her neighbour Maria

da Penha for shelter. The elderly woman did not have anyone else to ask, as she did not have any children or close family.

Mariza stayed with Maria da Penha until March 8th, 2016 — the day when her neighbour's house was also demolished. Days before Penha was evicted, Mariza went up on her neighbour's roof and, speaking softly to herself, said goodbye to the lagoon that had given many people their livelihood, and even abundance, for many years. This was the third eviction she was going through.

Three times homeless

Before her life was turned into rubble, Mariza worked as a housekeeper in Vila Autódromo. The owner of the property paid her the equivalent of one minimum wage per month for her services. The municipality had made an offer to the owner in exchange for the house, but the owner did not think the amount offered was enough. As a precaution, the owner gave away his belongings. Mariza continued staying there and began to take care of the place.

Fate led Mariza to go to work precisely on the piece of land from which she was evicted for the first time. When she arrived in the community 34 years ago, she set up a shed on the edge of the lagoon in which she would go fishing every day in the wee hours of the morning.

"I was the first one to arrive, as a fisherwoman. As soon as it started getting light out, I had to run out to sell the fish. If not, it would all go bad on me", she recalled. The fisherwoman would go out on the lagoon at 2, 3 in the morning. She often did not even sleep. At 6 am, she would begin pushing her cart around

to sell fish, as back then, there was no electricity or refrigerator to keep it refrigerated.



One day, some strangers arrived and evicted her from the shed she lived in. "As I did not have a husband, I lived alone. Some people came and took over the land. They sold it to others, who sold it to others", Mariza recalled.

She tells us about the moments of violence during the eviction. "They beat me, kicked me, took my land", she explained. She was taken in by other fishermen in a shed nearby, but the number of fish declined as the pollution in the lagoon increased. "I stayed around here because this was my world. It was my life. I depended on the lagoon to survive". Moving from one house to another, Mariza became a professional housekeeper.

Decades after her first eviction, the inhabitant of Vila Autódromo found herself once again with nowhere to go. "My home is being destroyed for a

second time. It's so hard. Darn it!", Mariza exclaimed before falling into a silence that echoes strongly even today. The resident had expected some compassion from the ones who demolished her house.



“They saw the clothes on the line. They knew that someone was living there. They could have left my medicine with a neighbour. ‘Look, I am going to leave these with you. When she gets here, give them to her’. Couldn’t they have done that? ”, she argued, as she imagined what the ones who executed the cruel act could have done. From the mercy she was hoping for, only the brutality of the act that reduced her life to debris remained.

Would the judge that authorised the tractor be the one who should have tried to find out that a woman taking her first English classes lived there? Would the driver of the tractor be the one to go around gathering up her class material before turning it into dust and rubble, as Mariza had hoped? “It’s funny. They talk a lot about violence and they are so violent. The money I had isn’t much for them, but for me, it’s a lot. I saved up. The hospital does not give me all the medicine I need. So, I have to have my savings. Now, it’s all buried under earth. It’s hard to bear”, she concluded.

Nearby, the machines from the construction site of the Olympic Park did not take the time to observe a minute of silence to mourn yet another life turned into rubble and covered in dust in Vila Autódromo. The next day, the plywood fences moved towards the community ping-pong table built by the residents themselves. In November, it too was destroyed. Will the best table tennis players in the world competing at the Riocentro very close to there hear the story of the ping-pong table destroyed in the name of the Olympic Games?

From October 2015 to March 2016, Mariza had no home to call her own. In April, the City of Rio took Mariza to live at the Colônia Juliano Moreira building, 6.6 km from Vila Autódromo. When asked about her old place, Mariza prefers

not say much. She would rather avoid the sadness that comes when someone touches on the issue.

In the countdown to the Olympics, there is no time or pity to lose on an elderly woman without her medicine, her carpet to save money under, English books, or "a wall to lean on", just like José in the poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade. A life left with no clothesline to hang clothes on.