



#Rio2016

Mônica Lima's maraca dictates the rhythm of resistance that will never be silenced

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It would be too much to ask Mônica Lima to tell her story without talking about the years of activism she has accumulated in the various fronts in which she participates. An indigenous woman from the Manaú ethnic group of the Arawak people, she has worked for 21 years as a health professional at

the *Hospital Universitário Pedro Ernesto* (Pedro Ernesto University Hospital). She also worked as an educator in the prison system until October 2014, when she was removed from her position by a politically motivated decision. From the defence of the right to health and the indigenous cause to the fight for a less punitive society, the activist's past is full of stories marked by the steamroller working for the interests of the city of mega events.

Mônica learned about the indigenous cosmovision — respect for the Earth, the influence of water in the cycles of life, collective experience, among other things — from her people at the *Aldeia Maracanã* (or Maracanã Village) and her grandfather. “I am an Indian living in an urban setting. I don't live in the villages, even though I sometimes go there. My grandfather was a village Indian who was brought to the city to work. I did not live with him much, but I remember some things: his great respect for life, the prayers during the rituals, his respect for animals. One of the things I learned from him was that it is not human beings that are at the centre of this Eurocentric culture. All living things have rights”, Mônica recalled.

Aldeia Maracanã is the indigenous village located next to the stadium that hosted the 2014 World Cup final. There, the government has let the old Museu do Índio (Museum of Indian Culture), built in 1862, fall into ruin. In the village, the sound of maracas brought the ancestry dormant within Mônica to life. Maracas imitate the sound of birds and connect the village with the spiritual practices of their ancestors who, according to a common belief, are resting under the ground there.

For indigenous people, bird songs are equally as sacred as this instrument. That is why she makes a point of showing her maracas in photographs to

indicate the sounds that always accompany her in her bag and in her work as an activist. “Maracas are collective. They belong to everyone and don’t have an owner. In the rituals, they are passed around to everyone in the circle. Our culture is very circular”, she explained.

Maraca’na, according to Mônica, means “collective maraca”. This meaning is very distant from what the stadium is now. When viewed from above, it imitates the shape of a large maraca. Maracanã is no longer ours, nor of soccer fans. There is no longer anything “general” about it — not in the stands, nor the street vendors outside. When the state government passed the management of the stadium over to the Maracanã’s new owners, they decided not to share the space with the indigenous people anymore. In 2006, these people returned to their ancestors’ burial site, following a decision made after an indigenous congress was held.



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In January 2013, the Aldeia resisted a police attack. On March 22nd, the police used pepper spray, tear gas, moral effects gas and even a sonic weapon that causes earaches on the villagers whom they forcefully removed from the village. The news of the military police's brutal actions spread rapidly around the world, with the symbolic image of an angry indigenous woman confronting an impassive police officer. This woman was Mônica Lima. "That day, I was shocked by the police. They used pepper spray, rubber bullets. There were children and elderly people there. The children left there and had to be hospitalised", she denounced.

Once the Confederations Cup was over in August 2013, Sérgio Cabral, the state governor at the time, allowed the villagers to return to their homes. The villagers were divided between those who chose to leave the village and live in an apartment paid for by the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House My Life) programme, and those who decided to go back. Mônica reported that "now, they complain a lot about not being able to live their culture and pay rent, electricity or gas because they suffer discrimination". As for those who resisted, such as Mônica, there is still the constraint of not being allowed to enter the Aldeia to perform their rituals imposed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in late June 2016.

Furthermore, a large proportion of the village's 14,500m² is covered by the pavement of a parking lot and a fence that is expanding towards the trees, including the Jenipapo tree under which they carry out their prayers around a fire. "We don't want pavement. We want a connection with the earth. The museum needs to be restored. Our hut is in there and unfortunately, the police officers are defecating in it. Our tents, our craftwork were stolen. Our library, with rare works, was destroyed. They set it on fire. Inquisition. The

shock troop set our books on fire. It hurts. I get emotional just talking about it", she stated before falling into silence.

The strangling of the *Aldeia Maracanã* — a group offering political training based on indigenous self-management and way of life, as Mônica describes it — is suffocating the educator's identity. She argues that "we were a laboratory of resistance. In addition to us having a museum and actively working to revive our culture, through our presence, we were a popular indigenous intercultural university. That is why we were attacked right away". Mônica always talks about how she had a very strong "feeling of emptiness" before she discovered indigenous culture, even while living in a large urban centre. "The feeling of emptiness was greater because the principles of the city, of capitalism, are totally different from our indigenous principles. We live in another kind of society", she explained.

Mônica's account follows the rhythm of her culture: in circles that are difficult to organise into a short and linear text like this one. In August 2014, after the court ordered the arrest of several activists days before the World Cup final, her struggle crossed paths with institutional persecution. Mônica participated in a vigil held outside the prison in Bangu where the activists had been taken. Since then, her life as a prison educator has been hell. "The police agents and guards came up to me and questioned the fact that I was a professor and was participating in the protest. They took pictures of me in the restaurant and that is when I began to suffer harassment and persecution", she noted.

Mônica fights to get her job back as a prison educator and, for this, she is asking for support for an online petition addressed to the state department of education [Sign at: <http://bit.ly/29YYRac>]. Even before she was removed

from her position, she recalls having experienced a certain amount of persecution for being indigenous and due to her educational approach to her work with prisoners. “All professors are persecuted and we have to question this in the system, because we are the liberators and they are the repressors. The majority of the people who are in prison shouldn’t be there. And again, this is a class struggle. The ones in there are black and poor. And that’s not to mention what the justice system is like today. Many in there have not had their cases heard in court”.

In the numerous struggles in which Mônica is involved, there is still room for the call for dignity in health. She continues to defend the Pedro Ernesto Hospital, which is suffering without the state transfers. She also got involved in the struggle of the people from Santa Cruz, who are suffocating from the lethal dust emitted by ThyssenKrupp CSA’s steel mill. As a researcher, Mônica studied the steel mill’s impacts on health and, because of this, she was sued by the company.

“This is who I am. I’m genuine. Even the way I dress is a form of activism, resistance. And I truly do not let anyone enslave me. I don’t let anyone persecute me”, Mônica stated. In the heart of this mother of three children, one of which she took in for adoption, there is always room for a just cause. “No one will ever be able to silence me”.

Though we have been referring to her as Mônica, we will now say our goodbyes using her indigenous name: Tripuira Kuaray, or the bird who sings at dawn. Inside this educator and indigenous activist who is only short in height, there is a tiny bird who flies high in the sky and whose song echoes the dreams she awakens at daybreak — dreams that will never sleep again.



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