

# Brazil: the revolution is proportional to the size of the crisis

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The representative system being what it is, we need to create what we believe democracy is. The struggle for democracy has no end date. [Español](#) [Português](#)



A demonstrator, holding a sign with a message that reads in Portuguese; "Temer out", takes part in a rally in support of Brazil's suspended President Dilma Rousseff in Sao Paulo. June 10, 2016. AP Photo/Andre Penner

First of all, Temer out!

When I was invited to write this article about my view of the Brazilian political crisis, I could only think "goodness, what am I going to say?" I imagine that this thought goes through the head of many Brazilians: what is happening in Brazil?

We certainly have more questions and doubts than answers, but much of this questioning has to do with reflections that go far beyond the fact of being on one side or another, or defending a particular party or its opposition. We are living in difficult times and through a much needed fight, because the regression I am witnessing today in my country I thought I would never see in my life. There is a feeling of fear, anxiety, impotence. But, above all, a feeling that we young people cannot stand still and need to act right now.

## Where did it all start?

It seems such a short time since we took to the streets throughout Brazil, in June 2013, fighting not only against the increased bus fares, but also against the police repressive brutality that was pervasive during the demonstrations. It then turned into a mix of patterns that no one understood any more - people with placards against corruption, for improving education and healthcare, for gender equity, for the indigenous peoples and the environment. In short, everyone wanted to show their indignation at something. I think it was on June, 17, 2013, when millions of people drove Brazil to a standstill, that I realized the strength we had on the streets, but also the wide variety of the agendas

and questionings in Brazilian society.

When Dilma Rousseff was elected with 51,64% of the votes against 48,36% for Aécio Neves in the tightest elections since 1989 - when the country was leaving the dictatorship behind -, I thought that disgruntled people were too big a percentage. The vast and absurd media campaign, manipulated by the handful of media that dominate the country's communication, was primarily responsible for the strengthening of the pro impeachment movements arising since then. And as from March 2015, an opposition began to take to the streets without any other project than loudly demanding the resignation, or removal, of a president elected by a majority vote - people on the verge of a nervous breakdown, claiming for absurdities such as the return of a military government, who wanted that which was denied them at the polls, for the only reason that they wanted it, and shouted so.

### **The hole is further down, but where does it start?**

It is far from my intention to discuss the technical details of the huge corruption scandals in nearly all of the parties and the greatest economic crisis the country has experienced in recent years, or to comment on the more than 40 million Brazilians who came out of poverty during this government. There are two sides to everything, and there will always be positive and negative aspects in any evaluation.

A large mass of people who did not defend one side or another was co-opted by the media discourse "against corruption" and began to defend the impeachment as a way to solve all the problems in Brazil. Today, we know that the "non-partisan" Free Brazil Movement (MBL) received funding from parties such as the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) for the demonstrations it organized.

It is not only the corruption scandals, but the indecent consequences of the financing system of election campaigns, the collapse of political parties that no longer represent us on almost any issue, the terminal crisis of the so-called 'coalition presidentialism', which establishes and consolidates blackmail and the bartering of interests as basic principles of parliamentary activity: nearly everything in the Brazilian political system today is absurd and does not respond to our needs and demands.

We, young people, who are aiming at a dialogue beyond right and left, need to verbalize and think together what the future of politics is, or what is the politics of the future.

### **And where are we now?**

With the impeachment and Michel Temer's taking office as interim president on May, 12, we literally reached the mud at the bottom of the well. Two months prior to our hosting the Olympics, I feel our country has never been so upside down. The voting in Congress for the impeachment process was like a horror film - the lack of plausible arguments and the excessive use of references to family and God to justify the vote of the deputies was plainly shameful. How can these be our representatives, voted by us?

On the day Temer announced his team, it was not only appointments such as Blairo Maggi's, the Brazilian soybean villain, as Minister of Agriculture that shocked the most. The interim President reduced ministries from 32 to 23, excluding, for example, the Ministry of Culture, Communications, Agricultural Development and Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights, as well as the abolition of the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU). Many of the new ministers are being investigated by Operation Lava Jato, the corruption scandal ravaging the country, and two have fallen already. On top of this, Temer had the nerve to appoint NOT A SINGLE WOMAN to his cabinet.

At the same time, the environmental crime that happened in Mariana in November 2015 with the breaking of the mining tailings dam controlled by Samarco caused the greatest environmental disaster in Brazilian history and there was little debate on the subject. Many of the parliamentary members of the three committees responsible for the case (in Congress and in the legislative assemblies of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo) received corporate donations from the Vale Group to finance their election campaigns. Such donations totaled R \$ 2.6 million and are perfectly legal. The "punishment" for Samarco was to pay a deposit for environmental damage of R \$ 1 billion, and it

was agreed in 2016 to increase the amount to R \$ 4.4 billion by 2018, which does not come close to the estimated costs of the damage. Just to compare: when the British Petroleum rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, the company was ordered to pay 42.2 billion dollars, even though the spill did not affect the water supplies of any locality, as was the case in several municipalities in Brazil.

In addition, after the disclosure of the gang rape case in which 33 men assaulted a 16 years old girl, taped it and posted the video afterwards, though the country was moved and supported the victim, many male chauvinists blamed her for using drugs, for frequenting certain premises, and for wearing the clothes she wears. Meanwhile, the Minister of Education, Mendonça Filho, was receiving in his office advice on how to improve education from Alexandre Frota, a Brazilian actor who has made statements in open TV reporting "jokes" insinuating cases of alleged rape.

### **Is there something good in all of this?**

Of course there is. Focusing on the solution and not the problem, here are some of the initiatives that inspire me and allow me to breathe in the middle of this sea of insanity.

The first reaction by women to Temer's view of the gender issue, on May, 20, came after *Veja* magazine published an article titled "Beautiful, demure and at home," describing as positive the apathetic, sheepish attitude of our then future first lady, Marcela Temer, as if this should be every Brazilian woman's aspiration in life. The revolt in the social networks was so great that, on that day, you could only see posts with pictures of empowered and mobilized women using the same *#belarecatadaedolar* (*#beautifuldemureathome*) hashtag and mocking such an outdated image of the Brazilian woman. All of this, well before the current lack of representation of women in the cabinet.

The gang rape in Rio de Janeiro generated a feeling of revolt among Brazilian women: social network campaigns, debates in public spaces and street demonstrations have raised the flag to end the culture of rape, and oppose the draft bill that would prohibit abortion even in cases of rape.

The high school kids are teaching a lesson in organization and resistance throughout Brazil: fighting for public, free, quality education, the students have been occupying a number of schools across the country and resisting bravely in the face of constant, huge and outrageous police violence and repression.

The Activist Bench, launched on June, 12, in São Paulo, is a group of citizens active in many social, economic, political and environmental causes who have come together to support legislative proposals aimed at oxygenating the city council and collective learning, because they believe that only new people, proposals and forms of action in politics will be able to regenerate the system. I endorse that!

The *#OcupaMinC* (*#OccupyMinistryofCulture*) has emerged as the main resistance movement against Temer's government: it has occupied the headquarters of the Ministry of Culture in at least 27 cities across Brazil. Under popular pressure, the interim Minister of Education announced the re-creation of the Ministry, but the movement continues, the fight has grown and occupants are now saying that they will dislodge the buildings when the illegitimate government is deposed. We do not recognize Michel Temer as president of Brazil! The public space is the place for the political struggle.

### **Where do we go from here?**

The increasing polarization in Brazilian politics is weakening propositional social participation and engagement practices, so the challenge is gigantic. What is happening in Brazil today goes far beyond partisan discussion - the hole is much deeper. The system has to be far more dynamic to meet our demands! We urgently need, therefore, a profound political reform.

To think that the public space is the place for the political struggle, as is happening in *#OcupaMinC*, made me reflect on a video that I watched recently which makes us think about what is this democracy that everyone says they are

fighting for.

#WhyDemocracy1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8vVEbCquMw>

#WhyDemocracy2: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoP\\_mSIHqTY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoP_mSIHqTY)

The true government is in the streets. The struggle for democracy has no end date. Since reality is such that we cannot fight for a party representation system, we need to create and propose that which we believe is democracy - and that democracy needs to be a new model that fits in with the new technologies and formats for doing politics that are currently emerging.

The political system currently established in every country that we recognize today as being a democracy is a Representative Government Republic. This system was actually not a conquest by the people, nor do elections guarantee that representatives measure up to the job. The power does not reside in citizens, but in their representatives mediated by political parties that choose their candidates according to their ability to be elected, not to govern, and that write down electoral programs which are not met. The polarization between the parties forces the division of society into opposite poles and incites hatred and violence.

In Athens, where democracy was born, the system worked in reverse to the one we have today. Instead of electing representatives who have our full confidence to draft the laws, Athenians distrusted their representatives, who were chosen by lot from among qualified people, and any law or measure adopted by these representatives had to be approved by the Assembly. Yes, but who attended these assemblies and was considered a citizen? Being myself a 26-year-old woman, I certainly do not fit in this category.

The Representative Government Republics are a little over 200 years old, exactly the same time that democracy lasted in Athens. It is time to understand that the fight for democracy is not a fight for or against an impeachment, that the whole system is broken and that we need to build and operate together a democracy or a different system, suitable to modern times. We can and we must change this model.

It is time to look ahead and understand that this huge crisis may be our greatest opportunity to build the political system that we are dreaming of for Brazil. After all, they say that the revolution is proportional to the size of the crisis experienced. Since we are probably experiencing the greatest crisis since the military dictatorship, what about putting together a revolution of the size the country needs, led in public spaces by us citizens?