

The Trial, Marabá, Pará, Brazil – 3rd April 2013.

People had gathered outside the court well before we arrived at 8.30. Two very large canopies had been put up by MST to shade the people with lots of white plastic chairs. The fence surrounding the court was festooned with banners and collages of the assassinated and most impressive of all were the memorial crosses in a pile of burnt wood and on top of the railings.



The riot police were fairly discreetly positioned and dwindled in numbers as the day proceeded. Around 300 people were demonstrating for justice to be done. Many were crammed in the corridors of the court pleading to be let in to hear the trial but there was only room for 90, so people took it in turns. The families of the 3 accused men and the families of the two murdered were given priority, as were the press.

We three were lucky enough to gain access after a time, and it was interesting to see that the press were able to take sound recordings although not to take pictures. I managed to get a quick picture through the glass entrance doors (as I was waiting to be let in) from which you can see that the room was divided into the public space and then after a wooden divider at waist height at the far end the 7 jury members have their backs to us and the court officials are seated. The Judge cannot be seen as he is behind the notice on the door that appeals to everyone to keep quiet.



The atmosphere was calm and fairly relaxed with little security and some quiet chatting was allowed, so we had some basic interpreting. This was mainly because, sensibly and unlike our system, the judge, advocates and witnesses (whoever was formally talking in the trial) are given hand held microphones, thus we can all hear what is going on.

By the time I got into the court the jury had already been chosen. The Judge was taking a much more proactive role, than in the legal systems I have experienced before, by questioning the witnesses himself and some jury members also asked questions. I was told that it was only because of immense public pressure that this trial was taking place at all. José and Maria Cláudio had been murdered in 2011 and it was very unusual for the police to have arrested suspects and for them to be brought to trial.



While all this was going on the majority of the supporters were outside in the broiling tropical heat being interviewed and also being reminded of the words and lives of some of those who had been murdered. There were friend and relatives amongst the crowd and it was heart wrenching to see some of the younger family members in tears as they re-lived their traumas.

On the fences and inside the shaded areas were written statements, photos and short biographies of the assassinated. There was also a screen and electric power and one particular documentary was shown, amongst others, called Toxic Amazon. It can be seen on the internet and is well worth watching as it gives much of the context of the ongoing violence – see <http://www.vice.com/toxic/toxic-amazon-part-1>

I met Felipe, who is the journalist in the film. He is studying for a PhD in Manchester at the moment and came over just for the trial so I hope to get to know him more once we both return to the UK. The film reminded me that José had been a nut forager and made many beautiful and useful objects from nuts and other forest materials. Some of his work was arranged in the centre of the gathering. 6 months before he was brutally murdered after having his ear cut off (one of the ways the murderers prove they have completed the assassination) he had predicted his own death – he knew he was being targeted.



We had a chance to speak with people throughout the day and during lunch when we went to a local church which was offering space for those campesinos coming in from the countryside. They had hung hammocks or pitched tents. Some had prepared food to share – beans, rice, manioc. One of the journalists accompanying us had been talking to an active MST leader who is known to have a price on his head. She asked him how he protected himself and he laughingly asked her to notice where she was sitting. She was between him and the window and he had his back to a wall and was in dark shade!



We returned for another swelteringly hot afternoon, and witnessed more of the court case. The trial will only last 2 days and in this first day all the witnesses for both sides were questioned on the basis of their written statements. It seemed a rather cursory and brief process but I have been told that much of the process lies in the gathering of the evidence and the depositions which is done well before the public trial takes place. There is much that I do not understand but there is not time or adequate translation to do more than get the gist and just be here bearing witness.