

The crimes of mining companies and the popular struggle towards mining

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Abstract: This narrative is the result of the round-table “Mariana, Barcarena, Brumadinho: mining and environmental crimes”, at the III Latin-American Congress of Political Ecology, in March 2019. We present the crimes in mining activities and the experiences born from the resistance to extractive projects that threaten the planet’s integrity and human life. We seek to understand and investigate the reactions to these projects, assessing economic, social and geographic dimensions. This transdisciplinary perspective contributes to understand that socioenvironmental and sociotechnical crimes are not isolated, and that extractive projects of mining companies are a result of a logic of global capital expansion and of a territorial structure where the mining activity takes place. This logic of accumulation is not only horizontal, with the expansion of the extraction frontiers, but is also vertical, because it penetrates the deepest parts of the earth, water, air and all the nature and living beings.

Keywords: Mining; socioenvironmental crimes; Mariana; Brumadinho; popular struggle.

São Paulo. Vol. 24, 2021

Narratives and Reflections: Decolonial Insurgences and Emancipatory Horizons

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-4422asoc20210158vu2021L5NR>

Introduction

A CASA REVISITADA

pela madrugada
o sal na moleira
e o ícone daquela geração
[soberba
prefere a lama
ante à água
com mãos mecânicas regozijam a
[geologia
daquela serra outonal

[em íntimo duelo
arrasto pela lírica - o toldo sangue e a economia dos seus abismos que predam corações]

senhores - essa sintaxe masculina do poder
o apregoado dos olhos denota
é o favo agudo que estrondas a pedra
[derradeira
os afazeres do grito
o alfazema do jardim e teu pulso
o relicário antigo
a criança que já não podemos ver o gesto

Vaga em ordem alfabética o silêncio

Chega - gritará os outros?
a estética do ferro desbotou o horizonte
e os cadáveres
implicarão novos dízimos
outras violetas que a nação
[apodrecem

eu beijei
um a um membro efetivo da canga mineral - são os animais que bestializamos

e tornamos sal e estrume esquecidos no objeto industrial.¹

Charles Trocate
Brumadinho [MG]
February 2019

In recent years, socio-environmental and socio-technical crimes in mining have increased in number and in their devastating effects. This tragic trail includes the ruptures of the tailings' dams of the company Vale S.A. in Mariana and Brumadinho and the evacuation of populations in other dams and waste basins in Barcarena, causing human and environmental disasters. This narrative results from the roundtable "Mariana, Barcarena, Brumadinho: mining and environmental crimes", at the III Latin American Congress of Political Ecology, in March 2019. We present the crimes in mining and the experiences born from resistance to extractive projects that threaten the integrity of the planet and human life. We want to understand and examine the forms of reaction to these projects, integrating economic, social and geographical aspects. This transdisciplinary vision helps to understand that these events are not isolated, but that these extractive projects express a logic of global capital expansion and a territorial structure where the mining activity is based on. This logic of accumulation is not only horizontal, with the expansion of the extraction borders to the Amazon rainforest, to the savannah and to all the territories where minerals are not yet being extracted, but is also vertical, because it penetrates the territory polluting the deepest parts of the earth, water, air and all nature and living things.

The expansion of extractive borders responds to a territorial reordering that shreds the thin fabric of social relations. Different Latin American governments and states encourage the specialization of production based on our supposed comparative advantages offered by nature (minerals, land and rivers) and cheap labor (people) with the aim of exporting goods mainly to the Asian giant, China. This extraction generates the appropriation of wealth for the companies and their shareholders, while it causes expropriation and damages for the peoples, negatively affecting the primary-exporting country.

Faced with this expansion, social movements and organizations that resist, challenge, and point out new paths have emerged. The people who live in the lands mining companies intend to exploit see their subsistence activities threatened, forests destroyed, water contaminated, and agricultural land turned into an unproductive open pit. The food sovereignty and health of millions of people are the object of the corporate game: maximum extraction with minimum costs.

1 - THE REVISITED HOUSE. through the dawn/the salt in the mill/and the icon of that /generation/ [haughtiness/ it prefers mud/to water/with mechanical hands rejoicing the/ [geology/of that autumn mountains/[in an intimate duel/I drag through the lyric - the blood awning and the economy of its abysses that prey hearts]/masters - this masculine syntax of power/the pleading of the eyes denotes/it is the sharp honeycomb that strums the lasting [stone/the toils of the cry/ the lavender of the garden and your wrist/the old reliquary/the child we can no longer see the gesture/silence wanders in alphabetical order/Enough - will the others shout?/the aesthetics of iron faded the horizon/and the corpses/will imply new tithes/other violets rather the nation/[rot/I kissed/one by one effective member of the mineral canga – they are the animals we bestialize/and turn into salt and dung forgotten in the industrial object.

The collapse of the company Vale S.A. dams, the continuous dumping of waste in the Norsk Hydro basin and the Equinox Gold dam, the threats to the regions where the mining companies are present and where they intend to set up generated a reaction from organizations involved in resistance networks and, despite the attacks and the constant criminalization perpetrated by governments in exercise, they were able to lay the foundations for regional, national and even global articulations.

On the articulation and organization of resistance to mining in Brazil, Charles Trocate, national coordinator of the Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining (MAM), says:

From 2000 to 2019, we experienced the emergence of some articulations that were important. In 2006, Justice in the Rails (JnT) appeared in the state of Maranhão, coordinating those affected by the Pará-Maranhão railroad (Carajás Railroad). In 2007, we organized a great day of struggle, in which we expose the power of the mining industry in Brazil regarding to the government and society. In 2008 and 2009, we built other Amazonian articulations, the movement of the prospectors in Serra Pelada, the Movement in Action, in the west of Pará state. In 2012, we held the first national meeting, in Parauapebas, with the presence of 36 people from 8 states of Brazil, and we decided to continue this articulation under the name of MAM. In 2013, the National Committee for the Defense of Territories Against Mining was created, and the discussions over the New Regulatory Framework for Mining were concluded in November 2017. Six years of fighting in the National Congress to approve the code. The committee was created in 2013 with 69 organizations to pursue an institutional struggle so the code would not entirely express the companies' interests, but it was hopeless. And in 2014, an articulation emerged from the churches, the Churches and Mining Network, in Latin America.

Resistance and popular struggles also arise based on productive initiatives that seek to form social relations qualitatively different from those imposed by mega mining. The debate over the ways of producing is fundamental for the construction of resistances and economic and social alternatives. In the following section, we narrate our debate on environmental crimes, particularly in from Vale, and new forms of production and thinking about the economy in mining territories.

Mining crimes and productive alternatives

The destruction of the Paraopeba River and the Doce River caused and continue to cause many losses for the economic activities of thousands of fishermen, artisanal producers and small farmers. However, the damage caused by mega mining to other economic sectors also occurs in mining regions where no dam breakdowns occurred.

Beyond mining multinationals, the economy is the way in which people produce and reproduce their existence, and this includes activities often seen by the neoclassical economy as having low productivity and a small economic return. In the economic perspective of mining megaprojects, family farming, fishing, artisanal forms of production and a myriad of small-scale activities are subsistence economies, a sign of backwardness. However, such activities

are the way to produce and live millions of people in the country.

The development preached by mega mining projects, such as the ones promoted by Vale in Brumadinho and other municipalities, creates difficulties for previous forms of production that used to be carried out in mining regions. These economic activities are determinately affected by the pollution, the alteration and destruction of streams and rivers, the lowering of the groundwater level, the emission of dust, and the migration of population, resulting from the installation and expansion of mega mining. In many cases, even, it annihilates them.

If this population, deprived of its economic ways, chooses to continue residing in the mining regions, it will seek jobs in the mining activity that requires less qualification and, consequently, offers worse contracts, wages and working conditions. Thus, the living conditions in these territories start to decrease, until reaching the point where apparently the only option beyond mining is to emigrate. This destitution of economic alternatives forces the workers and the population of the region to accept a supposed economic vocation, supported by the narrative of the companies, in which mining becomes the only viable option. Brumadinho's economy suffers from these problems, typical of large-scale mining-based economies.

In territories where mega mining has not yet settled, however, there is the possibility of promoting Mining Free Territories (FTMs). Considering the limited power of consultation and popular deliberation in the current model of environmental licensing of mining projects in the country, FTMs can be an important struggle flag gathering populations that decline the settling of mega mining.

However, there is still the question of what to do in mining territories, those who already face the presence of large mining enterprises. What can be proposed for the population of these territories? The answer must be built based on the knowledge of the reality of mining territories and their characteristics. In this sense, there is a need to debate the popular economic diversification in these regions.

By popular diversification, we understand the creation and promotion of economic arrangements that go beyond mining, through cooperative and solidarity economic forms, such as family and agroecological agriculture, community tourism, fishing, artisanal and traditional forms of production. In addition, policies aimed at productive diversification in these territories urgently require incentives to scientific-technological research through tax benefits and other types of funding. The resources for such diversification could come from the mining activity itself, for example the Financial Compensation for the Exploitation of Mineral Resources (CFEM). Also, the resources stemming from environmental fines paid by mining companies and new taxes can also serve as funding for these policies.

Finally, it should be noted that even if the state is an important mediator of these resources, without the active participation of the population of these regions in the decision-making process of how to create economic alternatives, any initiative will be unsuccessful. The participation of these populations is essential and any initiative must start from this participation.

Although it appears that the populations of mining territories are in a cul-de-sac, there are potentialities and alternatives to the pits proposed by mega mining. The popular

struggle is certainly the basis of these potentialities and alternatives. In the next section, we discuss the popular struggle and the grassroots activism, based on the speech of Magno Costa, articulator of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), who has participated in the resistance to mining projects in the countryside of the state of Bahia.

Popular struggle and grassroots activism towards mining

The events cited above demonstrate the need for the population to discuss and build a sovereign popular mineral political project. The massive participation of workers, *quilombolas*, peasants, peoples of forests and water is the basis of this construction. In this sense, it is necessary a social organization that supports the popular agendas, in their diversity, contradict the current mineral model. But how would that be possible?

In this process, it is important to highlight the democratization of power, that is, it is urgent that the people learn in practice what it means to take decisions, negotiate and indicate paths to follow. That is why the Popular Assemblies are a pedagogical, organizational, formative and fighting tool. This tool allows us to discuss the impossibility of the mining exploitation model, which stems from the capitalist mode of production, and to build an alternative that overcomes this model, based on concrete experiences.

Popular Assemblies allow actions directed towards the resolution of concrete problems of workers, peasants, the traditional peoples of waters and forests, but also foster the formulation, at the present, of the society we want in the future. In other words, a struggle proposal. One does not build a struggle proposal without dialoguing and experiencing the contradictions that people face, without looking at their daily reality. There is no way to propose a struggle without taking into account the need to build a new world.

In this reality, the structural changes require both the negation of the old (death project) and the practicing of the world we want to build (life project). Therefore, there is no popular sovereignty in mining without a structural change in society.

Faced with such complex reality, to promote grassroots work is dialectical; it means have intentionality, to announce the possibility of a new world and dialogically redeem dignity, to understand that we are able to change the reality in which we live. For changes to happen, it is necessary the popular organization within a new project, where each reality will tell the best form of organization, because we know that there is no single formula. What can guarantee the success of this work is the synthesis of theoretical knowledge applied to practice - so education is not separate from action. Practice helps us to step on a ground filled with contradictions, sharing experiences and qualifying the struggle.

It also seems important to us to affirm that all groundwork is an educational process. Why? Because it presents ways to know the social reality and to deal with the problems posed by it. For popular movements, it is a transformative action because it aims to change the conditions of reality by offering organizational, formative and struggle theoretical tools. It is also dialogic because one understands that this overcoming will only happen taking the other into consideration. It will be up to the oppressed of this land to free themselves from the oppressors and, dialectically, to liberate those who oppress them. In such a way, the grassroots activism guarantees a pedagogical praxis that articulates theory and practice.

Let us remember Paulo Freire's teachings. They help us to understand how we can

positively combine the systematized knowledge to popular knowledge. Popular knowledge produces a cosmogony that is effective for the explanation of phenomena in the world - from agriculture (when to plant, what to plant, etc.) to politics (because I live this way and not otherwise) - in other words, this knowledge solves the specific problems of the people who traditionally archive and reproduce this knowledge. For example, it has been passed from generation to generation that, to have a good harvest of corn in during the festivities of Saint John (São João), it is important to plant on Saint Joseph's (São José) day. Also, from generation to generation, the will of God has been used to explain poverty. The pedagogical exercise is to understand this learning process and overcome it with systematized scientific knowledge. This overcoming is nor proposed in a positivist sense, where one is superior to the other, but in a dialectical sense: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Systematized knowledge is, therefore, the one that obtains a theory from popular knowledge, that manages to reach the root of the phenomenon studied, extracting, from particular phenomena, the universal laws that contribute to the transformation of society.

This is not an easy path. The Brazilian people did not participate in the political decisions of our country. In the case of mining, it is possible to affirm that the mining model has been built through anti-democratic, antipopular and anti-national practices. This characterization reveals a bourgeoisie that never cared about the interests of the nation and always acted to undermine the interests of the people. For this, a strong and oppressive state is required, which is exemplified by the military dictatorship.

After the democratic opening in our country, political organizations focused their struggle on guaranteeing rights within the order and bourgeois democracy. The development of capitalism in periphery countries, in addition to the struggle initiatives within the order, has built a legalistic class in itself, which had a great difficulty of becoming class for itself.

Here lays an important question: why do various communities fighting against the same enterprise have difficulty in organizing a unified struggle? First, because large enterprises try to divide them, sometimes splitting the project during its licensing stage to facilitate approval. Second, because the state "appears" in these cases as an instrument of conflict mediation. Third, because poor economic conditions push the communities to the enterprises, mainly in search of the jobs promised by the mining companies.

Regarding the discussion on the Brazilian mining model, the MAM itself has undergone changes in its strategy, as Charles Trocate explains:

We started as a movement of those affected by mining, but soon after, we revise this concept, the negative "affected", and propose something else, even to avoid competing with the historical construction of the MAB, the concept of affected by hydroelectric dams. We revised from this negative conflict because it does not belong to those affected by mining the task of their self-salvation, of changing the mining model. We (...) propose something bigger, which is popular sovereignty in mining. It means that the regulation, control or even encouragement of another model of mining, or not, depend on a broad process of articulation with society, and is not only the task of the affected.

In order to be able to advance in the construction of a sovereign and popular project for a new Brazilian mineral model, it will be necessary, therefore, both to understand what is particularly lived in the daily concrete reality and to systematize this experience within the abstraction present in what is historical and universal in our social formation. This double movement must be constitutive of a grassroots work permeated by strategies and tools that vocalize, translate and systematize the consciousness that leads us from appearance to essence, ensuring a transformative process of society.

Faced with the problems pointed out above, we can affirm that the local battles in the territories are what best allows to expand the arsenal of struggle against the hegemonic mining model. An example of struggle that serves as a pedagogical instrument is the resistance of the Bom Gosto Settlement, located in the south of Bahia. The settlement is twenty-one years old and houses about seventy families who are in the impact zone of the construction of the South Port (Porto Sul)/West-East Integration Railway (Fiol), which aims to drain iron ore from Bahia Mining Company (Bamin) and South American Metals (SAM).

Since 2008, the settlement has been seen as a “thorn in the side” of these major ventures. At the beginning of the Bamin project, the polygonal on which the port would be built was 4,833 hectares, in the region of Aritaguá. Sectors of local society linked to the interests of the mining company, together with the fallacy of job opening, constructed a narrative that undermined small farmers. The defenders of Porto Sul relegated the importance of the settlement in relation to an international project.

The Bom Gosto settlers articulated and organized themselves. First they made a broad alliance with environmentalists, pastorals, churches and popular movements, like the MAM. Later, they were able to vocalize the importance of small farmers and agroecology. They pointed out the relationship between the projects, that is, between the mine shaft in Caetitê, the railroad that crosses more than forty municipalities and the port. Thus, they visited communities in the hinterlands and made a struggle alliance.

In 2014, the state government of Bahia reduced the polygonal to 1,860 hectares, allowing the settlement to remain outside the port area. This fact would be enough to soften the mood of the settlers. However, aware that they would be impacted even outside the polygonal, they remained attentive and participating in the articulations to strengthen the small farmers.

It has been more than twelve years of articulated resistance at different levels of struggle. They closed roads, articulated with large sectors of society, understood themselves as small farmers and sought legal support. With the certainty that those who fight for the land must always be alert, they won.

Conclusion

The struggle in mining territories or where mining companies intend to explore is complex. There are different groups, social classes, cultures, biomes and territories involved. In the regions where mining is present, the mobilization and organization of the populations that suffer from the effects of the activity and the creation of economic alternatives that enable other forms of production and living in these territories are sought. In the regions where

mining companies intend to install their projects, the focus is on promoting mining-free territories and the valorization of existing productive forms, such as family farming, agroecology, community tourism, traditional and artisanal forms of production, etc. It is also necessary to learn from the forms of organization that the native peoples have developed over the centuries; some of them are democratic methodologies for building popular mobilization and organization.

While the forms of resistance to mining in Brazil and in Latin America are multiplying, the crimes committed by mining companies also increase: dam breakdowns, pollution of rivers, soil and air, threats to militants, illicit financial transactions, violations of labor rights, and a long list follows. Therefore, the struggles in mining are followed the growing conflicts, which should be one of the political themes that will determine the next steps of Brazilian and Latin American societies. We hope that this struggle of social movements and communities in defense of territories will result in the effective application of the right to a healthy and peaceful life.

NOTE

This round of dialogue was supported by CAPES, CNPQ and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

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Submitted on: 06/09/2021

Accepted on: 07/09/2021
2021;24e:0158

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How to cite: COELHO, T. P.; OLIVEIRA, M. L. C.; NEYRA, R.; MUDREK, C.; TROCATE, C.; CAMPOS, C. M. The crimes of mining companies and the popular struggle towards mining. **Ambiente & Sociedade**. São Paulo, v. 24, p. 1-10, 2021.

Os crimes das mineradoras e a luta popular na mineração

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São Paulo. Vol. 24, 2021

*Narrativas e reflexões:
Insurgências Deco-
loniais e Horizontes*

Resumo: Este texto-relato é resultado da mesa-redonda “Mariana, Barcarena, Brumadinho: mineração e crimes ambientais”, do III Congresso Latino-Americano de Ecologia Política, em março de 2019. Apresentamos os crimes na mineração e as experiências nascidas da resistência a projetos extrativos que ameaçam a integridade do planeta e a vida humana. Queremos entender e perquirir as formas de reação a esses projetos, integrando aspectos econômicos, sociais e geográficos. Essa visão transdisciplinar contribui para entender que crimes socioambientais e sociotécnicos na mineração não estão isolados, mas que os projetos extrativos das empresas respondem a uma lógica de expansão do capital global e a uma estrutura territorial onde se assenta a atividade mineradora. Essa lógica de acumulação não é apenas horizontal, com a expansão das fronteiras de extração, mas também é vertical, porque penetra o território poluindo as partes mais profundas da terra, da água, do ar e de toda a natureza e seres vivos.

Palavras-chave: Mineração; crimes socioambientais; Mariana; Brumadinho; luta popular.

Como citar: COELHO, T. P.; OLIVEIRA, M. L. C. ; NEYRA, R.; MUDREK, C.; TROCATE, C.; CAMPOS, C. M. Os crimes das mineradoras e a luta popular na mineração. *Ambiente & Sociedade*. São Paulo, v. 24, p. 1-11, 2021.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-4422asoc20210158vu2021L5NR>

Los crímenes de las empresas mineras y la lucha popular en la minería

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São Paulo. Vol. 24, 2021

Narrativas y reflexiones: Insurgencias Decoloniales y Horizontes Emancipatórios

Resumen: Este texto-relato es resultado de la mesa-redonda “Mariana, Barcarena, Brumadinho: minería y crímenes ambientales”, del III Congreso Latinoamericano de Ecología Política, en marzo de 2019. Presentamos los crímenes de la minería y las experiencias nacidas de la resistencia a proyectos extractivos que amenazan la integridad del planeta y de la vida humana. Queremos entender e investigar las formas de reacción a estos proyectos, analizando aspectos económicos, sociales y geográficos. Esta visión transdisciplinaria contribuye para entender que los crímenes socioambientales y sociotécnicos en la minería no están aislados, sino que proyectos extractivos de las empresas responden a una lógica de expansión del capital global y a una estructura territorial donde ocurre la actividad minera. Esta lógica de acumulación no es solamente horizontal, con la expansión de las fronteras de extracción, sino también es vertical, porque penetra el territorio contaminando las partes más profundas de la tierra, del agua, del aire y de toda la naturaleza y seres vivos.

Palabras-clave: Minería; crímenes socioambientales; Mariana; Brumadinho; lucha popular.

Como citar: COELHO, T. P.; OLIVEIRA, M. L. C. ; NEYRA, R.; MUDREK, C.; TROCATE, C.; CAMPOS, C. M. Los crímenes de las empresas mineras y la lucha popular en la minería. *Ambiente & Sociedade*. São Paulo, v. 24, p. 1-11, 2021.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-4422asoc20210158vu2021L5NR>