

## THE POLITICS OF TIME IN DISASTERS: DISPUTES OVER REPARATIONS IN THE RESETTLEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY IN PARACATU DE BAIXO

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### Abstract

*The specialized literature highlights the disjunction between the bureaucratic timing of institutional responses to disasters and the duration of the established social crisis. The bursting of the Fundão Dam in Mariana, in the state of Minas Gerais, does not escape this dynamic. In this article, we seek to examine how the institutional timing for reparation has been enacted and how it has engendered new correlations of strength. Thus, we investigate the negotiations regarding the resettlement of the community in Paracatu de Baixo. The objective is to problematize how the “politics of time” operate within the measures for reparation.*

### Keywords

*Disaster; Politics of time; Power; Reparation.*

## A POLÍTICA DO TEMPO NO DESASTRE: DISPUTAS PELA REPARAÇÃO NO REASSENTAMENTO DA COMUNIDADE DE PARACATU DE BAIXO

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### Resumo

*A literatura especializada destaca a disjunção entre o tempo burocrático das respostas institucionais aos desastres e a duração da crise social instalada. O rompimento da barragem de Fundão em Mariana, Minas Gerais, não escapa a essa dinâmica. Neste artigo, buscamos examinar como o tempo institucional da reparação atua e engendra novas correlações de força. Para tanto, investigamos as tratativas para o reassentamento da comunidade de Paracatu de Baixo. O objetivo é problematizar como opera a “política do tempo” no interior das medidas de reparação.*

### Palavras-chave

*Desastre; Política do tempo; Poder; Reparação.*

# A POLÍTICA DO TEMPO NO DESASTRE: DISPUTAS PELA REPARAÇÃO NO REASSENTAMENTO DA COMUNIDADE DE PARACATU DE BAIXO

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## Introduction

One morning in early November 2018, three years after the Fundão<sup>1</sup> dam had burst, R., a resident of Paracatu de Baixo, emphasized in her report: “*You make a complaint, a request, you make an application to Renova [...] question, do you get an answer? No!*”. She continues: “*We are affected every day of our lives*”<sup>2</sup>. R.’s understanding is not uncommon. Similar misgivings are shared by those who have the same experiences: a repetitive, prolonged, constrained time, removed from the expected course of life. A time, the expression of which, may be synthesized by M., a resident of Paracatu de Cima: “*I continue to live in a time that is endless [...] When will this end? When are we going to get our lives back again?*”.

Examining the “sociopolitical nature of a crisis classified as a disaster”, Valencio (2014, p. 22) emphasizes the disjuncture between the chronological time of institutional responses and the social time of those who experience them. In many cases, the established deadlines and previously determined terms for actions of emergency and reparation do not coincide with the long-lasting experience of the victims.

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1. This article is the result of research and extension projects conducted by Grupo de Estudos em Temáticas Ambientais da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (GESTA/UFMG). We would like to thank the entire GESTA team for the shared construction of knowledge. We are also grateful to the State Research Support Foundation of Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG), APQ01598-16 and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), 404990/2016-9, for the support that made this work possible

2. About standardization used in this paper: (1) Italics have been used to register statements by the interlocutors; (2) Double quotes are used to indicate expressions used by the interlocutors and direct citations; and (3) This and all non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

Paradigmatic cases point toward this direction. Limited compensation and debilitating illnesses have led survivors in Bhopal, India, to continue for more than thirty years with their demands for corporate accountability, for full recognition of the harm caused and for healthcare (MARTINS, 2016). Having followed, for over ten years, the developments of the radioactive disaster in Goiânia, Brazil, Silva's (2004) assessment does not diverge from this. Crisis management measures, organized from a "dosimetric clinical-laboratory paradigm" (SILVA, 2004, p. 209), have not met the demands of the survivors, who have denounced the limited number of identified victims, outdated pensions and the inadequate offer of treatments. Similarly, the effects of the nuclear reactor explosion in Pripyat, Ukraine, do not permit the disaster to be restricted to a "controllable biomedical crisis" (PETRYNA, 2011, p. 30), and it is possible to observe "the disconnect between the strategies for handling the disaster's consequences and the individual and social disorder" (PETRYNA, 2011, p. 31).

The bursting of the Fundão dam in Mariana, in the state of Minas Gerais<sup>3</sup>, does not escape this dynamic. In this particular case, there also prevails a similar disconnection between the technical and legal formulas for managing the crisis and the experiences of those who have been affected. In the situations mentioned and in the statements that introduce this article, there is one aspect that attracts our attention: the temporality of disasters and, in particular, the social manipulation of time and of conducting the established crisis. We would especially like to focus on a dimension that is still relatively unexplored in the specialized literature on disasters (RODRÍGUEZ *et al.*, 2007; VALENCIO, 2009), namely, the manner in which the time of the reparation management is enacted and presents itself as being capable of producing new correlations of strength. Thus, what concerns us here is not just the mismatch between the bureaucratic process of reparation and the prolonged duration of the disaster experiences of the victims. What particularly instigates us is how the control of time is a form of domination that builds and reproduces asymmetrical relationships throughout the course of the reparation itself. We intend to examine how the handling of durations, the manipulation of delays or hassles and the administration of rhythms come together to configure a regime in which the temporal structure of reparation and control over the forms of temporalizing the crisis constitute for the victims, significant mechanisms of political subordination.

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3. On November 5, 2015, the Fundão dam burst. This was a structure owned by Samarco Mineração SA, and was responsible for causing the release of more than 35 million mining tailings that reached the Gualaxo, Carmo and Doce rivers. The disaster produced a wide range of serious socio-environmental damage.

We take two important contributions as references. First, the reflections developed by Bourdieu (1996), who examined the management of time in the form of an interval between gifts and counter-gifts<sup>4</sup> as a mechanism that introduces uncertainty and, thus, configures a particular economy of power in relationships. As the author argues, uncertainty “brings in the factor of time” that has the effect of positioning the other into “expectation”<sup>5</sup> (BOURDIEU, 1996 p. 14). We also consider the relevance of Javier Auyero’s contribution (2016) when examining the role of waiting in three different contexts of interaction between citizens and the Argentine state: waiting for resettlement from Villa Inflammable and Ezpeleta (areas with problems arising from environmental contamination); obtaining the DNI (National Identity Document), which regularizes the situation of foreigners in the country, and claiming social assistance by vulnerable families. Attentive to the “extreme relationship between time, behavior and submission”<sup>6</sup> (AUYERO, 2016, p. 18-19), he demonstrates the manner in which domination functions in the experience of making the other wait, since the course of the procedures in this condition calls into question assessments on the status of those involved and the relationships of authority involved within them. Thus, control over time contributes to the construction of “acts of cognition that are, simultaneously, acts of recognition of the established political order”<sup>7</sup> (AUYERO, 2016, p. 25). In a similar direction, we suggest that the temporal structure of reparation should be taken into account as an important expedient in reproducing power asymmetries. Therefore, we discuss, in detail, the control of time in the reparation of the “right to housing”. By investigating the negotiations for the resettlement of displaced families from Paracatu de Baixo, we intend to demonstrate how, within the measures of restitution and reconstruction, a “politics of time” is in operation (VERDERY, 1996; OSBORNE, 1994; KIRSCH, 2014). In addition to the cultural variation in the social constructions of time (DURKHEIM; MAUSS, 1999; EVANS-PRITCHARD, 2007), it is important to emphasize the fact that such constructions integrate contexts of disputes in which new forms of control are built over perspectives and possibilities of action for victims.

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4. We do not suggest that reparation should be thought of through the gift paradigm, but we do consider Bourdieu’s (1996) indication of time management as a mechanism for the production or reproduction of asymmetric relations, i.e., as an instrument of power.

5. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of BOURDIEU, P. Marginalia: Some additional notes on the gift. In: Alan D. Schrift (Ed.) *The Logic of the Gift. Toward an Ethic of Generosity*. New York; London: Routledge. (1997, p. 237).

6. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of AUYERO, J. *Patients of the State: the politics of waiting in Argentina*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012, p. 4.

7. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of AUYERO, J. (2012, p. 9)

Along this path, the notion of the “politics of time” seems to us particularly enlightening. Peter Osborne (1994) highlighted three possible approaches to time: objective or cosmological, relating to the processes of nature; phenomenological, which portrays the time lived as duration and which refers to the temporal organization carried out by and in the experience; and, finally, intersubjective or social, related to the varied forms of temporal awareness, the multiple temporalities of social practices and the temporal structures constructed as distinct forms of articulation between past, present and future. Similarly, Elias reflects on the “ontological status of time” (1998, p. 14) and, rejecting objectivist and subjectivist approaches, indicates the process of the “social institution of time” (1998, p.14), its symbolic, intersubjective character. In the intersubjective dimension, it is necessary to consider that certain social practices are capable of engendering different senses of time and different forms of temporalization.

For Osborne (199, p. 7), the notion of the “politics of time” is central, since it enables us to problematize the conflicts between different temporalizations and temporal structures, in order to apprehend “the temporal logic of these structures insofar as they open onto, or foreclose, specific historical possibilities, [...] It would rethink the political significance of social practices from the standpoint of their temporal forms.”

On the other hand, Katherine Verdery (1996) argued that the social construction of time implies a political effort that produces and enforces new disciplines and rhythms. Instead of addressing the different representations of time, the author emphasized its uses, particularly the state devices for the production and legitimization of new temporalizations, such as the rationing imposed on Romanian citizens. Hence, Verdery (1996) highlights the disputes surrounding the forms of temporal apprehension or marking, the temporal investments in certain practices and their relationship with the construction of self, thus highlighting the political nature of this process.

In another context, the notion of the “politics of time” is also mobilized by the anthropologist Stuart Kirsch (2014). His aim was to examine the resistance strategies put into place by activists mobilized to bring to justice the damage caused by the OK Tedi Mine operation in Papua New Guinea. In this case, the focus shifted from the hegemonic state or corporate devices to what Kirsch (2014) terms the “new politics of time”, dedicated to anticipating the actions and strategies of political incidence, preceding the socio-environmental impacts and before the installation of mining projects. Thus, the time of action is transformed into an object of consideration and political planning, i.e., time becomes a tactical element, since the temporality of the project and its effects are associated with the prospects of success in the actions of resistance or criticism.

Despite their theoretical differences, Osborne (1994), Verdery (1996) and Kirsch (2014) convergently accentuate the political content existing in the forms of organization, marking and apprehension of time. Focusing on the temporal structures of reparation practices, our aim is to examine the “politics of time” in disasters, highlighting the ways of controlling time and the imposition of waiting in disputes involving the resettlement of the community of Paracatu de Baixo. Before undertaking a precise examination of how the resettlement of the community of Paracatu de Baixo has been conducted, a few brief notes on the research methodology are needed.

#### 1. Paths taken for developing the analysis

As part of the research and extension projects conducted by Grupo de Estudos em Temáticas Ambientais da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (GESTA/UFMG), between 2016 and 2019, we monitored the negotiation spaces organized between those affected (their representations and technical assistance), the Renova Foundation, the responsible companies (Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton) and the Public Prosecutor’s Office in the municipality of Mariana. The objective was to analyze the interactions that took place between the victims and the institutions involved in dealing with the disaster. For this, we participated, as listeners and observers, in the monthly meetings of the base groups of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, as well as in the legal hearings at the Mariana court of justice. We also attended the regular meetings conducted by the Renova Foundation to present proposals and discuss them with those affected, and observed the meetings of the so-called “GT Housing”, the nature and purpose of which will be discussed throughout the article.

Participant observation in these reparation negotiation spaces was fundamental for being inserted into the field, becoming familiarized with the institutions and the process, and for forming bonds of trust with the affected families. This methodological strategy also enabled the construction of a diachronic reading of the institutional management of reparation. Concurrently, we dedicated ourselves to analyzing documents, examining public civil actions, minutes, reports, descriptions, technical notes, judgments and published articles on the case.

During the same period, combining research with extension activities, in collaboration with 30 families from the subdistrict of Paracatu de Baixo,



we developed the social cartography of the community<sup>8</sup>, which had been subjected to compulsory displacement after the Fundão dam had burst. In 2017 and 2018, workshops and field campaigns were held that enabled us to establish a meaningful interlocution with those who had been affected. Registering memories regarding the affected territory and coexistence in collective or public spaces, through workshops, work groups, audiences and religious festivities promoted by the communities, allowed us to understand the damage associated with the disaster and the problematization of the institutional devices and expedients mobilized for its reparation.

In this article, we chose not to name our interlocutors. This choice is justified due to the context of crisis and disputes that are still under way. We believe that anonymity would avoid any risks related to exposing the families or any possible discomfort or damage resulting from being identified within a conflictual environment.

## 2. Contextualizing: the disaster and its endless time

When the Fundão dam burst, the lives of families living in places such as Bento Rodrigues, Paracatu de Baixo, Paracatu de Cima, Pedras and Campinas were profoundly reconfigured through their compulsory displacement to the urban center of Mariana and by the requirements of the political process of reparation. Having followed the Samarco disaster since 2016, we had observed that the long-lasting experience of displacement is marked not only by a break in the ways of life and territorialities, but also by depending on the institutions managing the reparation process, including the Renova Foundation. This foundation was created by the Transaction and Conduct Adjustment Term (TTAC) [*Termo de Transação e Ajustamento de Conduta*], signed in 2016 between the Union, the Federal Units (Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo) and the companies Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton, with the aim of proposing and implementing programs of environmental recovery and reparation for the socioeconomic damage associated with the Fundão dam disaster. However, in Mariana, emergency measures were demanded and negotiated in November 2015, through civil actions proposed by the local prosecutor.

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8. The social cartography of Paracatu de Baixo was undertaken by GESTA/UFMG, in partnership with the Programa Nova Cartografia Social da Amazônia (PNCSA) and with the collaboration of the Cáritas Brasileira team in Mariana. The work was published as Information Bulletin 16 of the PNCSA: "Community Cartography /of Paracatu de Baixo – Multiple Damage from the Burst Fundão Dam, Mariana, Minas Gerais". Available at: <https://conflitosambientaismg.lcc.ufmg.br/producao-academica/categoria/cartilhas/>. Viewed on: November 21, 2021.



Among the emergency action plans were funding the costs of rented accommodation for the displaced families and providing financial assistance<sup>9</sup>.

Although abrupt, the deterritorialization was marked by continuous ruptures. The forced adaptation to a completely different environment, a lack of perspective for restoring the previous living conditions and the distance between relatives and neighbors caused daily turmoil and suffering. City life has also reconfigured the needs of families. Additional family expenses appeared, such as the cost of food shopping and school transport for the children. This situation is reported by M. A., who resented this, because “*in Paracatu, everything was easier, everything was near at hand*”:

*So now I live up there [in Mariana], and my boy goes to school down here [...], near the city hall. So I went there [the Renova Foundation office] and asked to move. It's been a month since I went and no one has come to my house. [I asked] to move to somewhere closer or whether they couldn't also provide a transport voucher. (M.A., affected from Paracatu de Baixo, March 2017)*

The case of M. A., although seemingly trivial, partially reveals the drama of the relocated families. In facing new everyday needs, M. A. and others are compelled to demand, request, insist, and struggle for the basic provisions of their daily lives. What previously was something simple, able to be solved with the available resources (such as depending on neighbors or family members for the short walk to school with children), now became an object of dispute. The provision of a home, school, and forms of mobility became, at the same time, subject to the modus operandi of the institutions and the temporality of reparation: it is necessary to go to the Foundation's office, make the request and wait for the answer, without knowing if or when your request will be attended. The provisional life began to organize itself within the rhythm of reparation:

*Just this year alone I've had 128 meetings related to negotiating our rights. Samarco fails to recognize this time as something useful that is being taken away from us. I could be fixing a car, studying or with my family, but I need to go to the articulation meeting so that one day I may see our lives getting back to normal. (M. U., affected by Bento Rodrigues, in a statement to the Folha de São Paulo newspaper, November 3, 2019)*

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9. Financial assistance consisted of a minimum wage (at the time of writing U\$195), plus 20% per dependent, in addition to the provision of a basic food basket.

The reports by M. A. and M. U. highlight an important aspect for our analysis, namely, their compulsory insertion into the institutional time of reparation. We may describe this movement as a kind of ‘bureaucratic capture’ (AUYERO, 2016, p. 138) that institutes between the provider of the reparation and the “claimant victim”, a complicated relationship of subordination toward the design and rhythms of the former. Thus, inspired by Jaramillo (2012, p. 59), we may investigate the effects of waiting, thereby questioning: “which social relationships [...] are created in the very act of reparation (or making people wait for reparation)?”

### 3. In times of waiting: provisional life, suspended life

In a court hearing held in Mariana, on October 5, 2017, 30 cases of “non-compliance” were discussed - which was the term given to describe the situation of those victims who had not yet received emergency financial assistance and whose status, after nearly two years since the disaster, was “unrecognized”. This was the condition of G., who was waiting, outside the forum, for her claim to be determined during the court hearing. She had lived with her daughter in a house on her ex-mother-in-law’s land in Paracatu de Baixo, had “lost everything” since the disaster and also faced serious health problems. Due to the logic of eligibility put into practice by the Renova Foundation, until that moment, G. had not been recognized as being “impacted” and, consequently, had not received “emergency financial and temporary rental assistance”, due to the fact that the property where she lived belonged to another person and had not been registered in her name.

At the same hearing, other situations were being discussed by the Renova Foundation, such as “dual dwelling”, terminology that referred to the condition of those who were similarly not considered eligible for rent, since, although they had lost their homes and their “home improvements” in the affected communities, they had divided their week between periods in the city of Mariana and periods working “in the fields”, organized in a variety of manners, according to the needs of the domestic group (for example, the requirements for certain educational and health services only available in the urban area). This was the case of V., who alternated between “the fields” and the city. In November 2015, when the Fundão had burst, V. worked in Mariana, and despite being “born and raised in Paracatu”, had a home, family and relationships within the community. However, the residence in Mariana, at the time of the disaster, was an indication that, according to the logic of reparation, she had not lost her “regular dwelling”. Under this condition, V. remained unrecognized for emergency financial and temporary rental assistance until October 2017. At this hearing, almost two years after the Fundão Dam had burst, 30 “non-compliance cases” were finally examined among the claims classified as “emergency”: financial aid and rent for temporary housing.

The cases of G. and V. and the very temporality of reparation illustrated at a hearing organized 23 months after the disaster for deliberating over “emergency financial and temporary rental assistance” led us to a number of reflections. First, it should be noted that, since the TTAC had been signed, the adopted administrative categories have had the effect of underestimating, diluting or invisibilizing the damage, thereby restricting the responsibilities of the companies that establish, through the Renova Foundation, the eligibility criteria for claiming reparation.

In addition to the restrictions and gaps in the process of identifying and registering the victims, the underlying problem lies the very organization of reparation as a process conducted through negotiations that require the consent of the defendants (ZHOURI et al, 2017). Illustrative of this control is the time that G. was forced to wait for her “emergency” measures claim to be decided, a claim that was in fact turned down, since G.’s situation did not exactly fit into the defined eligibility criteria. We argue that waiting, symbolized by the positions of G., V. and M. A., enables us to identify a condition of dependence on the concessions and rhythms defined by others. Indeed, the sense acquired by the experience of reparation is of a “life on hold”, as revealed by M.’s testimony in a media interview:

***Our life is on hold, because nothing gets decided, everything has to be negotiated. It’s been four years with a series of undefined agreements. We’re not asking for anything. We just want what is ours: a dignified resettlement and recognition of the damage suffered over all these years*** (M., affected in Paracatu de Cima, interview with Folha de São Paulo, November 3, 2019 – emphasis added).

M.’s assessment is extremely relevant, because it highlights the *modus operandi* of reparation and its “politics of time”. In this case, the option for extrajudicial alternatives for a negotiated resolution - justified as quick, efficient ways to overcome the indeterminacy and slowness of the judiciary system - proves to be uncertain, because, when a request is presented, it is impossible for those affected to predict the complex plots, deadlines and justifications that will compose its outcome. Furthermore, the dynamic is not only experienced as being time-consuming (indicated by the interval between the disaster and holding a hearing for emergency cases), but also perverse, since it centers both consent and initiative onto the somewhat dubious agents, who were responsible for both the disaster and the reparation: the companies and the Renova Foundation. However, G.’s waiting and M.’s assessment make us realize, as described by Jaramillo (2012, p. 53), that “victimization circuits have an implicit capacity to create highly hierarchical social relationships through the manipulation of waiting, of hope and the struggle to

dominate time”. It is thus that we argue that the “politics of time” is capable of forging new correlations of strength. Dependence on the course of decision-making processes adds to the artifices for manipulating uncertainty. In this context of irresolution and unpredictability regarding the conditions for resuming one’s own life, the conduct of reparation ultimately affects subjective aspirations, expectations and forms of “uncertainty about the future”<sup>10</sup> (BOURDIEU, 2001, p. 275).

What is outstanding within this scenario are the negotiation practices that make it difficult for victims to apprehend possibilities or alternatives. As discovered by the technical team at Ramboll, the institution responsible for monitoring the reparation programs of the Renova Foundation, delays related to the resettlement schedule and to maintaining an indefinite horizon even influence the assessment conditions of those affected on adhering to the different modalities of reparation (pecuniary indemnity, collective resettlement, assisted purchase):

As the Renova Foundation issues no public statements concerning the impossibility of reaching the stipulated date, it is concluded that: by not providing transparency with regard to the foreseen dates to complete this process, the Renova Foundation creates obstacles for those who have been affected to make their decisions in a conscious and safe manner. It is assumed that, upon becoming aware of the prospects of significant delays in collective resettlement, part of those affected may eventually choose to: claim additional compensation for the delay in completing the resettlement process; or migrate to some other type of resettlement, should that be their desire. (RAMBOLL, July 2019, p. 21)

A life on hold, through waiting, also signifies a temporary life in rented accommodation; it is to experience a time of insecurity and uncertainty, centered on the arrival of restitution that extends and escapes into an uncertain future. According to M.: *“today I live in a property rented by Renova. Inside this property, I can’t plan, I can’t dream, I can’t organize my things”*. A similar perspective is shared by M. G., a resident of Paracatu de Baixo and relocated to Mariana. She also assesses this provisional, life on hold as being “in disarray” (a life without “her” control):

*I know that after this mud came, after it arrived, it threw many people’s lives into disarray. Even though Samarco pays a salary into an account. But it all went out of control. There is no justification, you know. No justification... because we could in the past have even been receiving less, but there were compensations ... you knew you were taking care*

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10. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of BOURDIEU, P. *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 237

*of what was yours, today you take care of other people's houses [a rented house]. But then, while I take care of other people's houses, mine is falling down. Can you see the situation my house is in? So, while I take care of the [house] of others, mine falls down. And if tomorrow morning Samarco turns its head? Then I go back to my house falling down? So where am I going to get the money to get it back to what it was? Because all the money I had, I put into that house (M. G., resident of Paracatu de Baixo, 2017).*

Losing control of budgets, plans, and hopes invariably takes shape in complaints regarding the loss of homes, in the imposition of a “provisional solution”, which has lasted six years. Living back in their “own home” then becomes an object of struggle, of daily efforts “to participate”, “to accompany” the meetings, “to organize” them and “supervise” the resettlement works. It becomes a symbol or a powerful expression of “lost time”, which is now subjected to other disciplines and rhythms.

#### 4. Uncertainties, insecurity and waiting: instruments of domination in the resettlement negotiations in Paracatu de Baixo

In September 2016, almost a year after the Fundão Dam had burst, the companies Vale, Samarco and BHP identified and presented the residents of Paracatu de Baixo with land alternatives to resettle the community. A voting process was organized and the land designated “Lucila”, close to the old place of origin, was selected. By implementing technical assistance for those who had been affected in the municipality of Mariana<sup>11</sup>, professionals hired for this function diagnosed that there was insufficient land for the resettlement of all the inhabitants of Paracatu de Baixo. However, it should be noted that the insufficient extension of the area, initially presented as being viable and selected by the residents, cannot be understood as a simple, specifically technical error.

On the contrary, we feel that speculation regarding the Lucilla land as being a possible, appropriate destination seems to reflect the very conceptions of the responsible agents with regard to those affected and considered “eligible” for resettlement and other cases that were dealt with exclusively through indemnities. Such a distinction was expressed in the notions of “residual area”, “remaining area” and “affected area”, presented by the Survey and Registration Program of the those Impacted (PLCI) (SYNERGIA, 2016), and in the expenditure projections for

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11. The Technical Assistance was a conquest of all those affected men and women in Mariana, who were negotiating with the companies in an extremely asymmetrical manner. In November 2016, Cáritas Brasileira was chosen to advise victims in the city.

the reconstruction of damaged buildings and/or relocation to remaining areas (not directly covered or affected by the tailings).

Furthermore, the feasibility assessed or assumed by the companies in the selection and proposition of alternatives only considered “regular housing” in the sub-district of Paracatu de Baixo, ignoring the social and economic connections between this neighborhood nucleus and the small or medium-sized owners of the surroundings - the latter, called “small holders”, were excluded from community resettlement. In the process, for all residents to be included in the resettlement project, it was necessary to purchase a further eight plots of land, in addition to the one originally chosen (QUEIROZ, L; GERALDA M.; GERALDO, R., 2018). Indeed, the need to acquire the eight complementary pieces of land was accompanied by new negotiation procedures with the respective owners, triggering a long, slow process of land purchase and regularization.

This entire dynamic was permeated by numerous doubts regarding the environmental conditions of the location in terms of constituting a feasible resettlement. The environmental licensing of the project was initiated by the State Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development (SEMAD) of Minas Gerais. In November 2017, SEMAD representatives emphasized issues and limitations in relation to the selected terrain. The existence of extensive floodplains, high slopes and, consequently, the concentration of Permanent Preservation Areas (APP) indicated a deficit of available, viable areas for conducting the interventions necessary for resettlement.<sup>12</sup>

The disqualification of the land by the state agencies - SEMAD and SECIR<sup>13</sup> - generated a climate of insecurity, followed by the proposition of new “suggestions” to be voted on by the community. The alternative suggested by the aforementioned departments was to return to the original territory destroyed by the mud, an area over which there were numerous doubts concerning the potential for contamination and any prospects of environmental recovery. Those affected were unanimous in refusing any proposal to return to Paracatu. In addition to a refusal linked to doubts regarding the viability of the land, many rejected returning to an area subject to the risk of flooding due to further dam disasters in the Germano mining complex. At that point in the process, changes in the choice of terrain meant, for many, “starting from scratch” after more than two years, even though

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12. Since the original speculation over the Lucila land as an option for resettlement, residents of Paracatu, who had known the selected land for a long time, warned about its precariousness. However, the doubts and questions raised were systematically ignored or disallowed by Renova.

13. State Secretariat for Cities and the Development of the State of Minas Gerais (SECIR) [*Secretaria de Estado de Cidades e Desenvolvimento do Estado de Minas Gerais*]



few definitions and guidelines had been established. On that occasion, the strategic reaction of the Renova Foundation was to remain silent with regard to the requests from the secretariats and the controversial proposal to return to the original destroyed territory. New studies were then requested from Renova, in order to clarify the questions that had been presented. Months passed before we recorded, in February 2018, during fieldwork, reports by those affected of how tired they had become regarding the bureaucratic process, and what they called the “push and shove game”: while the Renova Foundation claimed that SEMAD did not carry out the necessary procedures for licensing, the secretariat argued that it would not be possible to proceed with the assessment, as the answers to the aforementioned questions had been not presented. More than two years after the dam had burst, no sanctions were applied to the Foundation for non-compliance with deadlines. On the other hand, those affected remained in a distressing scenario, facing successive court hearings to negotiate reparation (ZUCARELLI, 2018). The purchase of additional land was only completed in January 2018. However, the land tenure regularization had not been completed and its forecast was extended to April 2018.

It should be noted that the process of community resettlement in Paracatu de Baixo required the inclusion of the areas foreseen for interventions in the urban growth vector of the Mariana Master Plan, which signified new additional bureaucratic procedures, as one resident stated: “*you complete one stage, and then others are created*”. The agreed solution was the proposal of a “mixed” resettlement, covering an urban nucleus (where public facilities were to be installed) and areas destined to family land, with differentiated extensions and appropriate zoning for a “rural” profile. However, the absence of a legal provision in the municipality that contemplated a “mixed” occupation made it necessary to create “special guidelines”.

In the view of many of those affected, the construction and execution of the project was not done in order to review the legal instruments so as to meet the needs of the reparation, but to adapt their expectations to the regular, previously-planned frameworks for land use and occupation. Within this horizon, doubts proliferated on the possibility of resuming production practices, particularly the management of vegetable plots and livestock. We specifically emphasize the discussion between the “consolidated uses” on the original territories and the current planning requirements regarding the inviolability of the APP areas. As one of the leaders stated: “*The law will come and change our lives*” (L., resident of Paracatu de Baixo, field notes, April 2017).

The need to approve a Bill of Law, with the prevision of opening Areas of Special Guidelines (ADIES), in the City Council, became a new front for dispute.



The efforts to understand and mobilize then extended to the field of municipal institutions. While the additional requirements created a prolonged, laborious dynamic concerning the decipherment of the “legal nebulosity of reparation” (JARAMILLO, 2012, p. 59), the delays and setbacks constituted a state of waiting and suspicion. This journey, crossed by the interweaving of new bureaucratic plots, consolidated the perception of reparation as being a process “without end”.

In addition to successive postponements, the Renova Foundation insisted on the imposition of time frames to delimit the scope of the reparation. A striking example of this strategy was the insistence by corporate agents, in setting, with the competent court, a deadline for forming new “family nuclei” to be admitted to the resettlements. Despite the reconfigurations of domestic groups, including new relationships, divorces and other arrangements throughout the years of discussion and resettlement planning, the practice of registration is centered on a basic unit of reference called “family nucleus”. The dismemberment or formation of “new nuclei” signifies, from a corporate perspective, additional registerable units to be admitted within the resettlement. Thus, it is possible to understand the insistence of companies in setting the date of January 2019 for the formation of “new nuclei”. In turn, affected people and advisors, lacking control over the reparation schedule, claimed that the only coherent deadline for recognizing family reconfigurations was the day before the transfer to resettlements. To that extent, as in other resettlement processes already examined in the literature (SCOTT, 2009), the registry acts as a kind of static filter that seeks to remain immune to the passing of the years and to family dynamics, especially to new arrangements.

Refusal to recognize the “new family nuclei” compromised the future of families, annihilating their practices of inheritance transmission and succession, since the “prospective growth of the family group” (SCOTT, 2009, p. 81) is interpreted by corporate agents as a suspicious subterfuge. However, families often find themselves compelled to review plans and strategies in view of the tensions and possible conflicts that arise in the experience of negotiating the rights of each nucleus. A significant example observed was the review of informal living donation practices, which guarantee a co-ownership regime, considerably common among the peasantry (ALMEIDA, 2006; WOORTMANN, 1995).

Indeed, the control of the companies over the future of reparation, either in ignoring deadlines or refusing to comply with them, sometimes setting milestones for the reconfiguration of families or insisting on closing the registration of victims, reveals that asymmetries are reproduced and aggravated by such corporate strategies. In short, in the temporal regime established by the reparation,

the schedule, successive postponements<sup>14</sup> and decisions on deadlines for the completion of resettlement are, to a large extent, beyond the control of the victims. For those affected, achieving referrals does not occur as a progressive materialization of what is being negotiated.

In an attempt to circumvent the profusion of specific, individual solutions and to alleviate the delay in the process, the local prosecutor's office organized a new space, called "Working Group for the Reparation of the Right to Housing", or, in a synthetic, more colloquial manner, "GT Housing". The initial objective was to concentrate the entire discussion on resettlement processes in a single deliberative forum, bringing together those affected, technical advice, companies, the Renova Foundation and the State Public Prosecutor's Office.

However, at several meetings, we witnessed the predominance of impasses. It was rare for the demands and proposals presented by those affected and/or their advisors to be incorporated or accepted by the Renova Foundation, which, given the tenacity of those affected, preferred to submit decisions to court. Within this dynamic, the responsibility for the length of the process was transferred to those affected, especially when they asked questions and/or exercised the right to present their claims that did not coincide with the offers of the Foundation. As one of the leaders from Paracatu de Baixo assessed:

*At the last resettlement meeting we held, when the problem of a community resident from Bento Rodrigues was being questioned, the matter was just being settled when I heard a Renova employee say to another: "This gets us nowhere". How can we accept "this gets us nowhere"? If the only thing the affected person wants in life is the answer? And we don't have an answer! Hearing "this gets us nowhere" for me was the last straw, because I think that the problem of those who have been affected has to get us somewhere! They have to come up with a solution, so that the person at least has an answer. When in fact this is not what happens. (R., November 2018)*

Although the meetings always had the tone of participatory progress, the answers, when presented, were evasive, inconclusive, negative or postponed. Participation assumes, therefore, the concreteness of a frustrating experience via a performance that does not produce effects or that is limited to verbal manifestation, whose content is not incorporated. Hence, to the fatigue of a performance devoid of effectiveness, there is added the strategy of inverting or transferring responsibility

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14. The first deadline stipulated for completion was March 2019. Subsequently, it was extended to August 2020. However, a new court decision extended the deadline to February 2021. The deadline, once again, was not met, bringing new uncertainties regarding the conclusion of the process.

for the delay of the process. Doubts, demands and requests for change become undesirable, as they lead to further delays, such as the evaluation of the then deputy mayor who, in one of the meetings of the “GT Housing”, in view of the criticism of those affected, underlined in a warning tone: “*change generates a deadline problem*”.

## 6. Final considerations

In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu reminds us that “the all-powerful is he who does not wait but who makes others wait”<sup>15</sup> (2001, p. 279). As we have argued, successive postponements and delays ultimately create a kind of harmful slowdown in the reparation process, the responsibility of which has not been transferred to the companies, nor to the Renova Foundation, to the shortness of its “eligibility protocol” or to the failures and malpractice of its projects. On the contrary, delays have invariably been attributed to the families themselves, whose demands (interpreted by corporate representatives as numerous and/or superlative) never seemed adjustable or proportional to the “reasonableness” of the reparation. This reparation, which is intended to be built through the “coercive harmony” of negotiations and agreements (NADER, 1994), transforms those responsible for the disaster into creditors capable of regulating the relevance, legitimacy and pace of expenditure necessary to restore damage defined by them as admissible or eligible.

Examining the conduct of the resettlement negotiations in the Paracatu de Baixo community, we hope to have problematized the corporate strategies that have led to the construction of a temporal regime of reparation that, although proclaimed dialogic and participatory, has reproduced the asymmetry of power and opened up perspectives of domination, through the control of time and the establishment of incessant waiting. By following the negotiation spaces and paying attention to the narratives, the positions and the very dynamics of the interaction, we have sought to present the fundamentals of this domination and how it has taken place along the strenuous path of participation, in the revisions of procedures, in the profusion of bureaucratic requirements, in the difficulties of mobilization at each stage, in the delays of the extended deadlines and in the summons addressed to those affected to review, concede or admit the necessary sacrifices for the transactions of negotiation. The outcome of the disaster apprehended within the course of the proceedings has not only revealed the practical difficulties of the dispute over reparation, but also the operation of a strategy concerning the “politics of time” employed by the corporate agents. The perceptions of those affected regarding the conduct of the process reveal the social positions involved and engendered in this

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15. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of Bourdieu (2000, p. 228)

“politics of time”, organized in such a way as to produce dependence, frustration, fatigue and a renunciation of the demands, complaints and rights. The dynamics observed in the resettlement negotiations in Paracatu de Baixo, including efforts to stretch out the time scales and attempts to unilaterally define deadlines (as in the case of forming the new domestic nuclei) demonstrate a corporate effort towards monopolizing the forms of temporalizing disaster through control over the rhythms and courses of reparation. Thus, in the wake of Bourdieu (1996) and Auyero (2016), we indicate that the management of the temporal structure of reparation is a political expedient that produces and reinforces asymmetries within the transactions required in the extrajudicial resolution of conflicts.

However, if waiting produces subjection and if the unpredictability of the process leads to suspicion with regard to the prospects of success, it is not passivity and submission that we find in the observed dynamics. Although it causes fatigue, hopelessness and frustration, tardiness does not translate into resignation. In the experience of prolonged uncertainty, waiting does not become normalized and trivialized, but addressed as a condition on which they wish to intervene, whether by demanding deadlines and biweekly monitoring of works, or by weekly meetings to organize and debate the “New Paracatu”. Waiting does not imprison them in the present, nor does it completely hijack their future. With the resources and means available, leaders and residents of Paracatu have persisted, even in the face of adversity, demanding, inspecting and nurturing the dream of the “new land”. In this process, the new home, a narrative witness of the family trajectory, assumes centrality in the conflict and becomes the repository of efforts to reconstitute its destiny, of control over time itself.

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