

Violencia y resistencias: la mujer afectada por la ruptura de la represa Samarco, Vale y BHP Billiton en Mariana/MG

Débora Diana da Rosa⁹

Alis Itabirito College

Claudia Mayorga, Leticia Cardoso Barreto¹⁰

Federal University of Minas Gerais

Abstract

This article presents the results of an investigation into the effects of the Fundão dam failure, which took place on November 5, 2015, owned by the mining companies Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton on the lives of women in Mariana/MG. In its complexity and expression of different forms of violence, this disaster affected the lives of thousands of people, and the lives of women in particular. Examples of these effects are the loss of their jobs and income, the breakdown of communities and solidarity ties that contributed to the tasks of caring for children and family members, increase in domestic

⁹ ddddebor@yahoo.com.br

¹⁰ mayorga.claudia@gmail.com, leticiacardosobarreto@gmail.com

violence and financial dependence after the dam collapse. From fieldwork carried out for more than two years in loco, we observed that these facts drastically altered the daily lives of many families, we found that the violations of rights present in the Samarco crime are crossed by the patriarchy, with women being the most affected.

Keywords: Women; Mariana/MG; Samarco; Violations

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación sobre los efectos de la ruptura de la represa de Fundão, ocurrida el 5 de noviembre de 2015, propiedad de las empresas mineras Samarco, Vale y BHP Billiton en la vida de las mujeres en Mariana/MG. En su complejidad y expresión de violencia distintiva, este desastre ha afectado la vida de miles de personas, y especialmente la vida de las mujeres. Ejemplos de estos efectos son la pérdida de sus empleos e ingresos, la ruptura de los lazos comunitarios y de solidaridad que contribuyeron a las tareas de cuidado infantil y familiar, el aumento de la violencia doméstica y la dependencia de las finanzas después de la ruptura de la represa. A partir del trabajo de campo realizado durante más de *dos años en el sitio observamos* que el hecho ha alterado drásticamente la vida cotidiana de muchas familias, encontramos que las violaciones de derechos presentes en el crimen de Samarco, son atravesadas por el patriarcado, las mujeres siendo las más afectadas.

Palabras clave: mujeres; Mariana/MG; Samarco; Violaciones

Introduction

The gender inequalities are structural in our patriarchal society, however, situations as the one

occurred in Mariana/MG, make visible this wound, since they accentuate and update the violence against affected women, especially, in the economic field and at work. In march of, seven

institutions¹¹ linked to the judiciary, jointly elaborated a series of recommendations to the mining companies responsible for the rupture of foundation dam (Samarco, Vale, BHP Billiton and Renova Foundation) referring to the unequal treatment observed in the recognition of the suffered losses between men and women, in the occasion it was observed the disrespectful treatment given to the affected women in the process of indemnity. In these recommendations, among the facts considered to be the most abused, are the ways in which women have been invisible by the companies in the productive activities developed by them, and their work is considered as 'complementary' to the one developed by of their husbands, not guaranteeing them access to reparations that are fare to their living conditions prior to dam's rupture.

During the first months after the foundation dam's rupture, during a fieldwork, we observed that the same type of treatment by the companies

was present during the concession of the emergencies aid¹², where a range of informal and rural jobs, and fishing activities for women affected were ignored. The financial aid card were destined to the 'chief of the family' man, leaving women without economic autonomy and in positions of financial dependence. The situation of women affected and the level of violation that they have been exposed are revealing not only of isolated actions of companies in the context of the foundation dam's rupture and in the processes of damage 'reparation', but, mostly, it is about patriarchal and sexist practices.

The mud avalanche from the tailings dam rupture imposed to affected women a life condition strongly marked by gender inequality and violations of rights where their forms of fight and resistance are immerse in a context of strong economic and social oppression.

¹¹ Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF), Public Prosecutor's Office (MPT), Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Minas Gerais (MP-MG), Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of Espírito Santo (MP-ES), Public Defender's Office of the State of Minas Gerais (DP-MG) and the Public Defender's Office of the State of Espírito Santo (DP-ES).

¹² Emergency aid was considered by companies in the Public Prosecutor's Office to pay rent in a temporary house to the families who lost their homes and to grant a monthly financial aid card to those who lost income and work.

In the months we were in Mariana/MG¹³, it caught our attention the reports of many women affected that lost their jobs and income sources and that weren't being recognized by the company as victims of the disaster/crime to have access to the monthly financial aid card (emergency right) and/or being indemnified by the lost property to resume their work, in case of seamstresses, lingerie and cosmetics sellers, manicures, hairdressers, artisans, confectionery, bakers, and others. The economic questions related to the concession of the financial aid card to the 'head of the family' man caused deep impacts in the local families dynamics, leaving women in a bigger condition of financial dependence, and relegated to housework, also responsible for care of family members who became ill due the disaster/crime¹⁴.

Being recognized as an affected person started to be a great battle for millions of people along the

Rio Doce and, especially for women, who in the space of rural communities in which they live and worked, exercised a series of activities considered 'informal', but guaranteed the familiar sustain or significantly contributed to it.

This invisibility of the affected working women condition in front of the context of the foundation dam's rupture reveals not only the economic violence of a capitalism system, but also, its connection with the patriarchy, that updates and reinforce oppressive and exploring systems against women in our society, interlacing inequalities of class and gender (Miguel, 2017).

We observe that patriarchal practices exercised by large mining and other companies are not restricted to the reality of Mariana/MG, instead, different authors (Scott, 2012; Ulloa, 2016; Barcellos, 2013; Barroso, 2017; Júnior & Brasil,

¹³ This work presents a part of a doctorate research (in process) in the Program of Post-graduation in Psychology of UFMG, which the objective is to analyze the impacts of the rupture of Samarco's dam on the life of women affected in Mariana/MG. As method, we adopted the participant research, developing a fieldwork in the period from January of 2016 until April of 2018.

¹⁴ An example is the struggle of affected Simone Silva from Barra Longa to have access to a health treatment for her daughter Sofya who developed a severe allergy due the dust left by mud. The story of Simone was told in the 14th edition of May of 2017 of journal A Sirene, where she tells, "In the dawn of 6 of November of 2015, the mud came to Barra Longa and never left. With it, day after day, I saw my daughter Sofya became ill. At first moment, it came a diarrhea that lasted a month, at a time, in her skin, appeared bubbles and small lumps. When we went out, in the lower part of the city, near the river, Sofya got worse. Then I realized that her reaction was connected to the mud. I started to avoid leaving home, but the problem came to me when the Samarco's tailing were used by the prefecture to pave the street where I live". Simone's struggle to have access to her daughter treatment involved a peregrination for hospitals, and a denounce to Public Ministry, until the referral of Sofya to a specialist. She also reports that she got ill as well, in front of all suffering "I became ill seeing the risks and my daughter's fragility. I started to have high blood pressure, shortness of breath, stress crisis".

2015) point and denounce about gender oppressions suffered by women in face of the construction of major developments, such as dams and mining projects. Barcellos (2013), emphasizes that, in the matter of large developments, gender violence is systematic and should be understood as link between capitalism, patriarchy and racism.

Women affected by the large projects has publicized the consequences of these developments in their lives. Among the pointed questions, we highlight: the non-recognition of domestic and farm work; absence of women in deliberative spaces; the non-qualification of peasant women to urban jobs; the authoritarian and truculent way in which company employees treat and discriminate women; the absence of basic services that unfeasible mobilization and participation of affected women; the loss of ties with community and breaking of family bounds; and the aggravation of violence and prostitution.

In Mariana/MG, these scenarios of violation are not much different, and is intensified in front of the specificities of the mining activity that aggravates poverty, since this activity spreads for

territories and modifies its economic profile. Local economies cease to have an agricultural and livestock character as bases and thus lose less market-based lifestyles that prioritize existing community exchanges, for example, from crops in home gardens. Women, in the sexual division of work, generally are responsible for family agriculture (Paulilo, 1985) and end up being specially affected.

Comprehending the complexity that evolves such themes, crossed by the context of mining, gender, patriarchy and racism, we theoretically rely in discussions of feminism, overall, starting from notions of patriarchy, that even thought is a concept in dispute and controversy inside the movement (Miguel 2017, Safiotti, 1987, Pateman, 1993, Mayorga, 2014), were considered in this work as central in order to reflect about scenarios of oppressions experienced by women in both public and private spheres in the context of Mariana/MG.

To Pateman (1993) the patriarchy is a power based in women sexual subjection, that acquires a proper form in modernity trough an original/sexual contract that instituted marriage

and family, and it is still fraternal, by the meaning of it exists from the male alliance where, in order to guarantee its social and economic dominance, subject women, and it is the structural basis to a civil capitalist society. Safiotti (2004, p. 57-58) also argues that patriarchy “is not a private relation, but civil, grants sexual rights to men over women, configures a kind of hierarchical relationship that invades all spaces of society, have a material base, is embodied, has a power structure, based both in ideology and in violence”. These different definitions of patriarchy may be considered as complementary; because there is a consensus between them that, it is about a system of structural power of the capitalist society, branches in social institutions, in public and private spaces and aim to maintain women in subaltern positions. For this, it is a central concept to understand the relationships between women affected and mining.

Accordingly, to Ulloa (2014) it has been produced, in the past years, a large quantity of studies about extractives industries, overall, the mining companies, but the gender question has not being central in these investigations. However, these spaces are where it is evident the gender

inequalities and is observed the growth of violence against women. In addition, the author highlights that there is a lack of analysis about the effects of extractives in gender relations, about violence, and in which way it affects the relationships of indigenous population, afro-descendants and peasants. Na analysis about the relation between extractives and gender requires a different view that includes territorial, ambient, political, economic and social aspects.

Women and the rupture of foundation dam: violence, invisibility and resistance

The sexist practices of the Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton companies in Mariana/MG, overall, when not recognizing the dimensions of economic losses and the work of affected women expresses the public dimension that the patriarchy assumes as a power system, because it is not only about “a form of traditional domination, historically dated [...], but as a oppression system that remains and is updated” (Rezende, 2015, p. 20). Therefore, the forms of patriarchal domination can be public, institutional and collective, having structural, abstract and impersonal mechanisms of male

domination, always connected to the capital interests. So, it is valid to name as patriarchal the forms of domination practiced by the Samarco, Vale e BHP Billiton companies when considering the different treatment given to men and women affected after the foundation dam's rupture.

In an interview given to the dossier "Women in Mud and Fight", "Rosilene, former inhabitant of Bento Rodrigues [...] explains that women who were "only housewives" were an exception in Bento Rodrigues. Some of them worked outside the community, especially in the outsourced Samarco. Others would crochet or housecleaning, some even pick up firewood to sell or go to the river to mine gold. Sources of income lost to mud".

In front of that, further we will discuss about the effects of patriarchal logics and structural violence present in the foundation dam's rupture, and perpetuated by the companies in the conduction of the process of "reparation" in the daily lives of women affected, using three analysis categories 1) Relation of women with the affected community;

2) Impacts in the women's lives after the foundation dam's rupture; 3) Experiences of fight and resistance.

Relation of women with affected communities

As a starting point, we highlight that there are different experiences of being a women that are crossed by dimensions of class, skin color, sexuality, educational condition, and work, and perched by experiences in their original communities. Thus, to comprehend who are the women affected by the foundation dam's rupture in Mariana, it is necessary to approach a little bit more of daily aspects of community life of women from the affected regions of Bento Rodrigues, Paracatu de Cima, Paracatu de Baixo, Pedras, Borbas, Campinas, Ponte do Gama and Camargos, considering the districts of the city of Mariana the main locus of this work.

The community of Bento Rodrigues, unlike the other communities, had a less rural character, and from the observation performed during fieldwork, it was possible to perceive a greater diversification in the matter of occupations and developed work

by women. Many worked in outsourced companies of Samarco, performing cleaning jobs, or worked in Mariana at the commerce. In Bento also had women involved with communitarian associations for the production of “biquinho” pepper jam, other involved in craftwork, candies and snacks, or sell clothes and cosmetics in the neighborhood. Being a district away from the most central areas of the city of Mariana, there were also activities such as livestock family and growing home gardens (activities carried out mainly by women).

Other districts will be classified here as rural, classification used by the affected themselves to refer to the place where they lived: “I was from the countryside and I lived in rural zone” were expressions frequently heard from the affected of Pedras, Borbas, Ponte do Gama, Lower Paracatu, Campinas, Upper Paracatu and Camargos, during the fieldwork. In these locations, the predominance of work was in agriculture and milk production. In the matter of female work, they equally work in family agriculture and milk production. In addition, it was possible to testify the existence of women that exercised mining

activities, cotton first harvest and seasonal workers in harvest, such as the annual coffee harvest in the district of Paracatu.

It should be noted that the agricultural activities carried out by women in works which, in many times, were unfeasible, such as the house garden growing, livestock family, contributed greatly for food and family economy, since in producing, they stopped buying various foodstuffs. “In the countryside, the land is everybody’s boss, there isn’t unemployment, I planted everything I needed, even give to my children to bring to the city, didn’t have to buy eggs, fruits, vegetables, cheese. We always had it, and now we must buy everything” (Daily field excerpt, 07/05/17).

Impacts in women’s lives after the foundation dam’s rupture

We will center our analysis in two questions that appeared more frequently in women’s reports during the fieldwork. One of them is the impact of denial or invisibility of the work performed by women in communities in which they lived before the dam’s rupture. The second is about the considerable increase in the demand for tasks of care that relied on women after the dam’s

rupture, because the arrival of families to the city of Mariana implied in the loss of autonomy of many children and elder people, besides illness.

Women exercised a variety of work activities in the affected communities, some considered formal, that is, had registered in a work register, and others informal or autonomous without register. It is above all in the latter that the greatest difficulty for women is to prove that they have lost work and income. From a complete ignorance of the informal and rural local dynamic of production and income generation, the Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton companies denied for many women the receiving of the monthly financial aid card, which generated a series of effects of autonomy loss and a bigger economic dependence of women. The income loss also provoked the need of incorporating other work activities, such as cleaners and nannies to obtain income, jobs that they did not exercise prior the dam's rupture.

The impacts cross material questions, subjective implications generated by the autonomy loss, income and rupture of ways of life are translated also in psychosocial suffering and a heavier overload in daily activities to women. This

overload is due both because of the search for new ways of work for acquiring income and due the raising of demands of care of dependent people (children or elder) or of the ones that have got ill due the rupture and remained under women's responsibility.

Accordingly to Porto (2008, p. 288), the naturalization of female activities in the domestic/private sphere end up to crystalize the idea that every kind of care required for a family member is performed by a woman. Therefore, it is an obligation for her to accompany the ill, parents and children, in health treatments and, in the case of the latter in school reunions and other social life events.

Research performed in the end of 2017 focused in the mental health of the affected inhabitants of Mariana/MG verified high prevalence of psychiatric disorders related to stress in affected population. Besides a depression rate of 28,9% in the population of individuals affected by the foundation dam's rupture in Mariana, which characterizes a prevalence five times higher than the one described by the World Health Organization (WHO) for Brazilian population

evaluated in 2015 (Neves et al, 2018). This research, although hasn't been considered as an central element of analysis gender differences, presents as precursory factors for the developing of mental disorders in disaster situations, such as Mariana's, the fact of being female and the lack of social support.

Experiences of Struggle and Resistance

It is necessary to highlight that the stores of affected women are, overall, stories marked by oppressions, but not only that. If by one side is needed to make feasible the daily effects of patriarchal logics and of the capitalist exploring system present in the foundation dam's rupture, and in the effects that are dragged in affected women's lives, it is essential to tell the fights and resistances that women have been undertaken to combat the social and gender inequalities, and for reparation.

We find that, for women affected in the public/politic aspects, resisting means fighting against inequalities in the private/familiar environment. In addition, of the need of recognition of their condition of women/workers

that had/have their rights denied. The recognition of women as subjects to rights, who have lost and are affected, is not a simple process for many women with whom we had contact. Many of them spoke about the learning process of comprehending that "affected is when the mud messes with your life and not just your house" (Daily field excerpt, 06/14/2016). These questions are translated in fights, resistance and has been circumscribed the social and political places of women in local contexts and in wider social articulations.

Women, in their processes of participation and resistance for the reparation of damages, claim other concerns that go beyond repositioning of immediate material goods. During the fieldwork, it wasn't uncommon hearing from many women questions not only about the lost material goods (houses, animals, work tools, cars), but overall, concerns related to lost play areas, sources of water, religious celebrations, churches, the children's school, the health station.

Whether it is in the struggle to keep alive the memory and history of the affected communities up to the struggles to repair what has been

destroyed, women's participation has been fundamental and are expressed in an important form of political action. Whether organized in movements or not, their form of participation influences the possibility of transforming social and gender hierarchies, in the tensioning to "formal" spaces of political organization of the affected, in the construction of more equal relations and in the rupture of subjected conditions and emancipatory possibilities.

Final Considerations

Finally, practices exercised by the mining companies in the treatment referent to the reparation to women affected by the foundation dam's rupture in Mariana/MG are sexist and patriarchal, and updates inequalities and gender oppressions over women, having as appearing consequences the invisibility and muting of women in both public and private spaces.

However, even though in a context of strong economic and gender oppression, resistances are built in informal political spaces and in the own relationships of solidarity that the affected women raise to pursue a reparation for their losses,

besides the fights in defense of stricken territories, to maintain alive the memory and culture of their communities. This contributes to break up with positions of social submission, re-appropriating of their history and giving a new meaning. These resistances are insert in a political horizon of construction another model of society, humanly fairer and more emancipatory.

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