

ABA REPUDIATES THE TRAGEDY INVOLVING THE GIANT MINING CORPORATION, VALE S.A. IN BRUMADINHO (MINAS GERAIS), AND EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE AFFECTED

The Brazilian Anthropological Association (Associação Brasileira de Antropologia - ABA), through its Committee on Traditional Peoples, Environment and Large-scale Projects, publicly expresses sympathy for the victims of the disaster caused by the dam burst on the creek Córrego do Feijão, in the town of Brumadinho, Minas Gerais (MG). ABA expresses solidarity with those affected, their families and the entire population of Brumadinho and Minas Gerais state in the face of this terrible tragedy that has claimed the lives of hundreds of people, and decimated various forms of life in the Paraopeba River basin (a tributary of the São Francisco River that supplies water for, among other locations, the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte).

Three years have gone by since the previous disaster at a dam controlled by Samarco, a partner company of Vale. At that time, many lives, and the environment in general, were destroyed in the town of Mariana, with damage reaching 370 miles along the Rio Doce, as far as its mouth on the coast of Espírito Santo state. Traditional communities, fishermen, farmers, and indigenous peoples who were severely harmed by the disaster are still struggling to receive compensation for damages and rebuild their lives. While the Vale Corporation drags out negotiations, its stockholders and those of BHP Billinton, another partner of Samarco, never fail to receive hefty dividends in other parts of the world. We are well aware that disasters do not end with the catastrophic event that triggered them. To the contrary, they persist for a long time, in the form of social suffering inflicted upon the victims through endless and unresolved negotiations. History repeats itself in Brumadinho. A mining dam owned by Vale S.A. bursts, carrying with it hundreds of human lives. Most victims worked for the company.

For decades, Brazilian anthropologists have strived to understand the developmental logic behind economic choices and practices of the state which emphasize major infrastructure projects associated with hydroelectricity, agribusiness and mining. Ethnographic situations reveal how traditional communities, indigenous peoples and the lower classes in general have their environmental, cultural, territorial and human rights flagrantly violated by these projects. Invariably, the agents responsible for these violations are associated with for-profit, private ventures, as is the case of mineral commodities. State actions have played an essential role in supporting the predatory and expropriating interests of capital accumulation. Government collaboration takes many forms, particularly through the issuance of environmental permits, often in total disregard of technical reports and over protests from local populations. Throughout the years, we have observed a growing acceptance of the unequal territorial rights attributed to different social groups, spelling out a continued lack of protection for threatened areas and their exposure to recurrent, and increasingly catastrophic, disasters.

Studies demonstrate that environmental conflicts, and the disasters that often ensue, result from serious failures of environmental governance with regard to both regulations (laws, rules, institutions) and the *modus operandi* that fuels their operationalization. On the one hand, there is a lack of control by government agencies in relation to compliance with existing laws – Brazil's robust legislation has been undermined by deregulatory mechanisms and proposals for increasing flexibility. On the other hand, corporate governance has proven incapable of guaranteeing the sustainable and socially responsible planning and management of large-scale projects.

ABA denounces the flexibilization of environmental regulations in general, and licensing procedures in particular, as acts of *planned neglect and managed insecurity*, which provoke an increasing number of disasters, endangering human and non-human lives, as well as ecosystems. ABA repudiates the impunity of the responsible parties, and the political maneuvers that render increasingly difficult and innocuous the participation of populations threatened by these large-scale construction projects. It repudiates the manipulation of procedures that mitigate environmental compensations -- manipulation designed to make economic megaprojects bureaucratically “suitable”, while tolerating high levels of risk to the surrounding spaces and populations – some of whom have lived there for hundreds of years. ABA demands that civil and criminal liabilities for yet another disaster of tragic dimensions be quickly and accurately carried out, so as to produce exemplary punishments for those responsible. Justice must be done. Those affected by the collapse of the dam in Mariana remain tied up in endless negotiations that delay proper compensation for damages. These delays must cease immediately and must not be repeated in the case of Brumadinho.

Finally, ABA joins other sectors of Brazilian society to demand the end of tailings dams such as those in Mariana and Brumadinho which threaten people, communities and entire ecosystems. Life should be the primary criterion when assessing the viability of mining projects.

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