

“It was no accident!”¹

The place of emotions in the mobilization of people affected by the collapse of Samarco’s tailings dam in Brazil

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Abstract

This article presents the dynamics of collective action and the construction of claims of people affected by the rupture of a tailings dam of the Samarco mining company in Minas Gerais, Brazil in November, 2015. Our analysis focuses on affected people in Espírito Santo State and is based on interviews, observation, participant observation and a series of meetings with affected people during the year following November, 2015. We describe initial processes of mobilization which involve various actors and interactions marked by emotions and by the creation of affective bonds. We draw on a culturalist framework of social movement studies to understand the emotional mechanisms in play in the construction of collective action, in particular, claims for justice (Jasper 1997; Gamson 1992; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2009; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). We conclude that emotions play fundamental roles in the process of mobilization. The manner in which the disaster on the Rio Doce was felt by activists constituted a critical emotional event.

Key words: environmental disaster; social movements; people affected by extractivism; critical emotional events; frame of injustice; emotions

¹ The cry of the people in all demonstrations protesting the disaster caused by the three companies with the rupture of the mining tailings dam in Minas Gerais, Brazil.

“Não foi acidente!”

O lugar das emoções na mobilização dos afetados pela ruptura da barragem de rejeitos da mineradora Samarco no Brasil

Resumo

O artigo apresenta as dinâmicas de ação coletiva e a construção das reivindicações dos afetados pelo rompimento de uma barragem de rejeitos de mineração da mineradora Samarco ocorrido em novembro de 2015 em Minas Gerais, no Brasil. Nossa análise circunscreve-se aos afetados no estado do Espírito Santo e está baseada em: entrevistas, observação, observação participante e em uma sequência de encontros com os afetados ao longo de um ano desde novembro de 2015. Apresentamos os emergentes processos de mobilização que envolvem vários atores, com interações marcadas por emoções e pela criação de laços afetivos. Dentro de uma perspectiva culturalista dos estudos de movimentos sociais buscamos compreender quais os mecanismos emocionais operantes na construção da ação coletiva, sobretudo, quando tratamos de reivindicações por justiça (Jasper 1997; Gamson 1992; Goodwin, Jasper e Polletta 2009; Johnston e Klandermans 1995). Concluimos que as emoções desempenham papéis fundamentais no processo de mobilização. A forma como o desastre no rio Doce foi sentido pelos ativistas revela a constituição de um evento emocional crítico.

Palavras-chave: desastre ambiental; movimentos sociais; afetados pelo extrativismo; evento emocional crítico; enquadramento de injustiça; emoções.

Introduction

The time between the rupture of the Fundão dam² and the arrival of the mud from the dam in the neighboring state of Espírito Santo was 11 days. On November 16, 2015 the mud reached the municipality of Baixo Guandu and from there, mud spread, day after day, across the territory of Espírito Santo, over the course of the Rio Doce. Upon reaching the Atlantic Ocean, the mud was affected by new dynamics in the direction of the coast to the south and to the north. The mud³ remains there.

The Fundão dam and the “Mariana disaster”⁴ made history in Espírito Santo in an unusual manner. Residents of the cities of Baixo Guandu, Colatina, Linhares, Aracruz and São Mateus could never have imagined that they would be affected some day by a tailings dam located at a distance of approximately 600 km⁵ which they didn’t even know existed.

Nevertheless, a major segment of affected people of that region has an historical relationship with iron ore. This is due to the fact that most iron ore extracted in Minas Gerais State is transported through territory of Espírito Santo for export through ports of this state, the principal port having been inaugurated in 1966. Above all, people affected by this disaster lived side-by-side with trains which transport iron ore daily in open container cars. Thus, affected people of Espírito Santo and Minas Gerais had been connected for a long time by iron ore extraction, in various aspects of affectations. The map below illustrates cities directly affected by the mud, from the dam all the way to the mouth of the Rio Doce and the route of the iron ore railroads from the mines until the port of Shark’s Harbor (*Porto de Tubarão*), in Vitória.

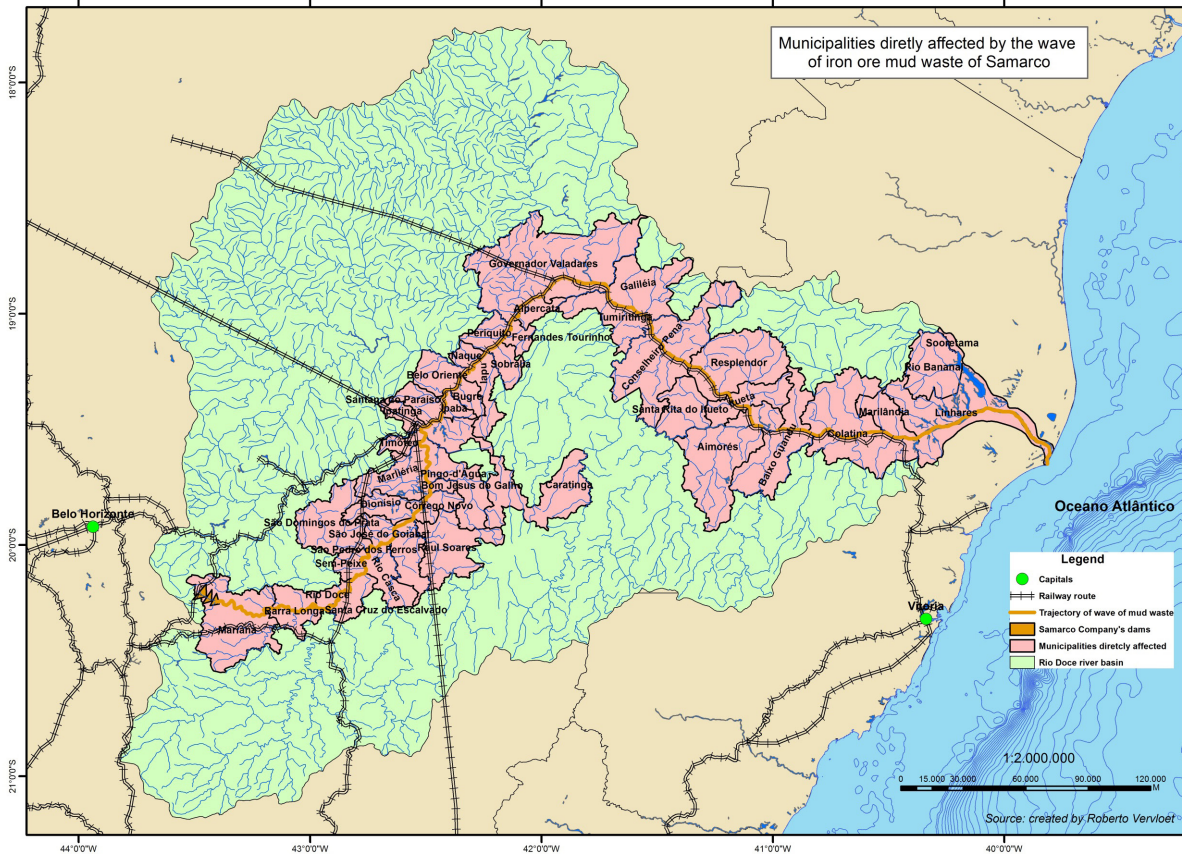
² The Fundão tailings dam, located in the municipality of Mariana, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, ruptured on November 5, 2017. The mud from the dam killed 19 people, hundreds of domestic animals in the region, buried small villages near the dam and moved downstream via the Rio Doce, crossing the State of Espírito Santo, until reaching the sea. Along the length of the Rio Doce, the fifth largest river of Brazil, more than 11 million fish were found dead, among other damages to nature. This is considered one of the largest environmental disasters in Brazil and the largest mining disaster in terms of the volume of wastes which leaked from the dam.

³ The term “mud” came to be widely used by the media, by affected people and by authorities involved in the issue. From the perspective of the natural sciences, what is called “mud” is a compound formed by the wastes resulting from iron ore extraction, contained in a dam. The composition of the mud was the object of several scientific controversies among specialists and studies have been undertaken with regard to its density, toxicity and dynamic. Nevertheless, the element which can be observed with the naked eye, and which continues to be known as “mud”, is a yellowish-brown plume which floats on the water and does not dilute or sink.

⁴ The Mariana disaster is the term initially used to refer to this disaster. As time passed, activists and the affected people of Espírito Santo themselves claimed that the disaster should be identified with the companies responsible for the disaster, rather than with the city where the disaster occurred, considering the breadth of its effects. Therefore, the disaster came to be known as the “crime of Samarco/Vale/BHP”.

⁵ The distance between the Fundão dam and the affected cities in Espírito Santo State is variable.

Image 1: Municipalities directly affected by the wave of iron ore mud waste of Samarco



Source: Created by Roberto Vervloet

Although the iron ore extracted from *mineiro* soil⁶ had been moving through these locations for a long time, it was only when the mud arrived that its chain of effects became evident to the affected people. The first visible reaction to this chain of effects among affected people in Espírito Santo was in the realm of emotions. Anxiety accompanied expectations, even before the mud waste reached their municipality.

Following the terror of the devastation and death caused by the disaster, widely reported by the media, the forecasts were that the mud waste would move along the Rio Doce river bed. Therefore, every day, residents of Baixo Guandu, then Colatina and Linhares, would go to the banks of the Rio Doce to wait for the arrival of the mud waste. When the mud waste finally arrived, dyeing everything orange, the people could be seen crying. From that moment on, the feeling of sadness was evident and the sadness was shared and spoken. An immense mourning overcame Espírito Santo and even people who lived far away from the Rio Doce were attracted and deeply moved by this pain and sadness.

There were a variety of effects resulting from the mud waste in this state and these have still not been fully identified and mapped. Among effects already known, we highlight: 1. Impairment of water supply of urban regions which depend on the Rio Doce and of riverine communities which use this river's water directly; 2. Impairment of a variety of economic and leisure activities which depend on the water and/or the river; 3. Drastic change in the way of life of traditional populations; 4. Interference in preexisting social relations; 5. A variety of collective and individual emotions.

⁶ "Mineiro" is a reference to that which is from Minas Gerais State.

How did such interference in the life of affected people result in processes of mobilization and contentious collective action?

This article seeks to answer this question by describing emerging processes of mobilization which involve interactions between various actors marked by emotional mechanisms. We draw on a culturalist framework of social movement studies to understand the emotional dynamics in play in the construction of collective action, in particular, demands for justice (Jasper 1997; Gamson 1992; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2009; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Such emotional dynamics involve the organization of affected people and the construction of a framework of injustice. Our analysis focuses on Espírito Santo State and is based on interviews, observation, participant observation and a series of meetings with affected people during one year and four months since November, 2015.

Methodology

This study is based on on-going research and is *sui generis*. At the time the disaster occurred, we had already been working with communities affected by companies and projects involving extractive mining in Espírito Santo. Taking this into account, actors within these territories and other external actors called on us to help them understand what had happened. At the same time, the initial demands began to emerge.

Field work completed one year and four months since the rupture of the dam and involved (and continues to involve) comings and goings between affected territories and the capital Vitória, where the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo is located. Field work was always conducted by a group of researchers who are part of a center of studies which I coordinate and which involves a multi-disciplinary group of researchers at various stages of their academic coursework⁷.

Our fieldwork had several objectives. At times we engaged in specific research activities, namely, interviews, filming, photographs, informal conversations, etc. At other times we employed an experimental method, with the objective of creating open spaces for discussion in the communities. This method, which we named “public arenas⁸”, was conducted in communities affected by the mud waste. We began by elaborating a proposed theme for debate, then constructed a methodology and chose the spaces and materials to be used and the forms of recording data collected. Our analytical work, based on the technique of semi-structured interviews, consists not only of the transcription and observation of the content of the account. We also take into consideration the scenario, intensities, pauses and inflections of the account and of the gestures. For the analysis of emotions, data obtained in an interview go well beyond the accounts as conscious constructs of the affected person, the body matters (Scribano 2013). Together with regional activists, we considered alternative locations to conduct these arenas, taking into account the perception of the need for open spaces for debate in these communities. Four arenas were conducted in the following locations: Mascarenhas, em Baixo Guandu; Itapina, in Colatina; Maria Ortiz, in Colatina; Mascarenhas Resettlement, in Baixo Guandu and Povoação, in Linhares. In these arenas, in addition to identifying the impacts of the mud waste on the lives of people, participants were encouraged to speak and express themselves using drawings and/or texts with respect to challenges experienced in local mobilization and organization to deal with these problems.

⁷ The study group is named “Organon – Center for study, research and extension in social mobilization” and the results of our work can be seen on the website <http://organon.ufes.br>.

⁸ The public arenas have as reference the work of Dewey (1934), Cefaï (2009) and Jasper (2014). We also took into consideration discussions proposed by Bertolt Brecht in “A short organum for the theatre” (1964).

Image 2



Source: Image produced by Cláudia Rangel during public arena conducted at river's edge in riverine community of Maria Ortiz in, in November, 2016.

Image 3



Source: Image produced by Cláudia Rangel during public arena conducted in the community of Itapina in Colatina, in November, 2016.

Image 4



Source: Image produced by Cláudia Rangel during public arena conducted in the community of Povoação in Linhares, in November, 2016.

In addition, rounds of informal discussion were conducted with residents of Regência, Barra do Riacho, the urban area of Colatina and Linhares; Barra Nova and various communities in the north of the *Mouth of the Rio Doce*. Until the present moment, we have conducted 40 non-structured interviews with activists and affected people in Espírito Santo and monitored weekly meetings of the Capixaba Forum in defense of the Rio Doce, created in November, 2015.

Mobilization of People Affected by Mining Activities Prior to the Disaster

Popular mobilization related to mining projects is very recent in Brazil. The two principal organizations responsible for broadening popular demands on this theme into an issue at the national level are the Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining (MAM) and the Committee for Defense of Territories Affected by Mining, both established formally in 2013. However, since the middle of the decade of 2000, many formal organizations have been created in territories experiencing conflicts resulting from mining activities. For example, the Justice on the Rails network (*Rede Justiça nos Trilhos*), was created in 2007 to contest violations of rights caused by the mining company Vale in the Carajás Project in Maranhão State, in the northeast of Brazil.

We emphasize that our focus in this study is social mobilization as a process of collective action in which popular contestation occurs in a routine, self-conscious and coordinated manner, as Jasper defined protest movements (Jasper 2014). This is only one focus and does not imply that an unorganized and less visible political dimension does not exist. According to Scott (1990), there is a difference between public discourse, in which power relations are energized explicitly, and hidden discourse in which power relations are conducted in the form of resistance, usually without being perceived. Both discursive dimensions are

political. Our analysis, consistent with Scott's explanation, is not in one or the other dimension, but rather in the connections between these dimensions and in the mechanisms which make hidden resistance, declared.

The emergence of social movements⁹ which deal specifically with issues of mining is recent; as are social struggles which involve this theme in Espírito Santo.

Mobilizations which are most similar to those involving mining are those related to cellulose extractivism. The latter emerged at the beginning of the decade of 2000, in the form of the Network Alert Against Green Desert (*Rede Alerta Contra o Deserto Verde*) and demonstrated strong critiques of enterprises involved in cellulose extraction. More recently, another type of mobilization with similarities to mining mobilizations is the Not One More Oil Well Campaign (*Campanha Nenhum Poço a Mais*). Both types of mobilization are organized in networks which combine affected people in their territories, previously mobilized affected people and external mobilizing agents whose actions focus on the same claims¹⁰.

Thus, although there was no organization in Espírito Santo which focused specifically on mining issues, there were, historically, mobilizations which articulated around similar issues, in particular extractivism, with respect to the effects of large projects and extractivist and commodity export infrastructure ventures (cellulose, iron ore, petroleum and natural gas). Furthermore, there was overlap among activists who were already organizing on petroleum or cellulose issues, or had been engaged in campaigns against the installation of ports for commodity export.

In addition to the convergence among preexistent issues of activism in the region which were closely related to the mining issue, actors who organized around other causes, but were joined together by mutual support of a set of progressive causes (agrarian reform, agro-ecology, environmentalism, human rights, etc.) also became engaged in defense of the Rio Doce, with a focus on critiques of the mining companies and of the development model based on mining.

The disaster itself, which had widespread national and international media attention, also extended connections and contacts between local actors and a variety of external activists who became interested in local conditions of affected communities. Given the magnitude of the disaster, subsequent actions (in terms of reparations for affected communities and for environmental damages, as well as attribution of responsibility of companies which caused the disaster) attracted the interest of a variety of activists who deal with mining companies and disasters caused by transnational companies. As a result, new actors became involved and have exercised influence in the mobilization process.

Along these lines, we underscore the entrance of the Movement of People Affected by Dams (*Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens – MAB*), which set up an organization in Espírito Santo following the disaster event. MAB, which has a trajectory of more than 20 years of organization, and broad experience in similar situations of displacement and disasters caused by dams in general, quickly obtained the support of people affected by the disaster. Their organizational structure has been effective and is in the process of spreading to various communities along the Rio Doce.

In addition to the role of external actors, traditional local actors were fundamental to the process of mobilization of people affected by the disaster. The Catholic Church, in particular, played an important role, especially progressive priests and specific dioceses. The participation of the Commission for Justice and Peace (*Comissão Justiça e Paz – CJP*), linked to the Church, was also fundamental to the mobilization process in the capital. It contributed through fund-raising for mobilization and the organization of

⁹ Jasper makes a distinction between protest movements and social movements. According to Jasper, the latter have a propositional dimension as an addition to characteristics of protest movement (2014). In the case of mining issues we can affirm that consolidated national movements also involve the propositional dimension in that they propose alternatives to the existing mining model and to the model of society based on extractivism.

¹⁰ These three categories were developed in greater detail in Losekann (2016).

Forums, both in affected territories and in the state capital. The creation of the Espírito Santo Forum in Defense of the Rio Doce (*Forum Capixaba em Defesa do Rio Doce*) was fundamental in connecting claims of people affected by the disaster with activists historically involved in the state, especially in relation to human rights issues. These activists are widely influential at national and international levels in defense of human rights.

In addition, there have been some attempts at mobilization by a number of communities, individuals and local associations. However, field work identified a series of problems of coordination among affected people, aggravated by the actions of companies whose actions have the effect of causing misunderstandings and divisions among the people.

In the context of serious existing problems in local associativism, these divisive actions further exacerbate organization. Among the main problems of local associativism are: associations which are in debt and thereby unable to operate formally/legally; problems of legitimacy of executive councils, some of which have remained in office for more than ten years without relinquishing the power they hold; problems in the conduct of elections; corruption, etc. We will return to these issues in the final section¹¹.

However, there are relevant initiatives to mobilization in specific communities. An example of on-going self-organization with likelihood for success is the commission created in the community of Povoação. Following an internal crisis of the association, resulting from the voluntary separation of the president to seek election as municipal councilman, local leaders concluded that there was a need for unity in initiating negotiations with the companies. According to a local person who we interviewed, they convoked a general assembly of the association, which had more than 400 participants. The assembly resulted in the creation of a temporary commission composed of 11 residents selected by the community. The function of this commission was to provide assistance and support to the interim president. The management of this temporary commission has been so successful that it has come to act on behalf of the association in an on-going manner. The commission is studying the possibility of filing a civil public action (*ação pública civil*) against the companies Samarco, BHP and Vale in the name of the community of Povoação.

Summarizing, we can affirm that, in addition to several local and specific initiatives, there are currently two axes of mobilization in Espírito Santo around issues related to the disaster: the articulation of the Forums and MAB's organizational structure. At the present moment, in addition to these two actors, commissions of those affected have emerged as a third actor. It could be stressed that we are dealing with an initial and ongoing process, therefore, new actors may come on the scene and significant changes should happen.

Experiences and interactions in the constitution of emotions

Social movement theories suggest that the existence of previously organized activists, the availability of resources for organization and the existence of a political opportunity structure or windows of opportunity for action, are important factors contributing to the generation of insurgency (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Based on this perspective, in the case of the Rio Doce disaster, the preexistence of organizations and activists in the region contributed to the formation of an organization specifically focused on disaster-related issues. In turn, this contributed to framing the struggle, elaborating collective action repertoires and mobilizing resources for organization.

¹¹ These affirmations were produced from a work of evaluation of the problems faced by the affected communities in the construction of the collective action.

Furthermore, the disaster itself can be understood as an event which precipitated a window of motivation for activists to mobilize. However, although the disaster was a reality for much of the population, not everyone mobilized around its effects.

Taking this into consideration, we suggest that, although the event may be considered a landmark for the process of mobilization, the event itself did not result directly in engagement. The principal aspect which links the event to insurgency is the manner in which affected people experienced it, which involves the dimensions of experience and interactions and how they are reflected in the emotions. Although these three dimensions are interlinked, for purposes of discussion they will be treated separately in this section and in the sections which follow.

Considering the dimension of experience means observing that a new activist or an organized collective process can emerge from the construction of lived experience with the disaster. According to John Dewey, philosopher of pragmatism, who attributed a significant value to experience:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges (Dewey 1934: 35).

We experience potential mobilizing experiences all the time and, thanks to them, we construct and explain our engagements in our life histories. An activist rarely narrates his engagement through macro-level categories. In general the explanation is constructed as an individual act based on a transforming experience. But this is not a matter of merely any experience, but rather what Dewey calls “singular experience”. According to the author:

Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. [...] In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience (Dewey 1934: 35).

In this perspective, some people experienced the disaster on the rio Doce as a “singular experience”. There was a transformation in that person such that he perceived himself as an affected person and decided to become involved – what can be thought of, within Dewey’s thinking, as a consummation. We use the term “decision” here in the sense used by Dewey: not as a strictly rational, mental process which occurs discretely, but rather as a sequence of acts which compose a direction for action. The affected person experienced the disaster in a manner which channels that experience to another field of action – that of collective action. But it is clear that the disaster is transformed in this singular experience in that it provokes specific emotions, which stimulate the action of the affected people.

Dewey also understood that singular experience is emotional. He argued that emotions are not discrete elements which are part of experience; according to Dewey, “experience is affective”. We have found it difficult to understand emotions because in “institutionalized life” we historically construct a false perception of separation of body and mind, reason and emotion. And in addition to this false separation, we place in hierarchical valuation reason over emotion and spirit over body. He writes: In fact emotions are qualities, when they are significant, of a complex experience that moves and changes. I say, when they are

significant, for otherwise they are but the outbreaks and eruptions of a disturbed infant. All emotions are qualifications of a drama and they change as a drama develops (Dewey 1934: 41).

In a convergent, but transformed version of this thinking, Guobin Yang, analyzing emotions in contentious collective action processes in China, develops the notion of critical emotional event, which he defines as “[...] a ramified sequence of emotional occurrences that results in the transformation of the dynamics of collective action. An emotional occurrence is a unique instance of emotional expression. Such occurrences may take various forms, such as narratives, facial expressions, gestures and voices” (Yang 2005: 80).

These ideas about emotions are relevant to our analysis of the disaster. The latter constituted a singular experience which engaged the activist and produced mobilization because it is a critical emotional event, constituted not in a single moment, but rather in modulated sequence of emotions which was initiated, as we related in the beginning of the article, by expectation and anxiety with the arrival of the mud waste.

According to the activist we interviewed, “We were preparing ourselves because when the mud waste arrives, the impact will be enormous¹²” (Márcia, activist from Colatina, interview conducted in September, 2016). Note that the confusion of the tenses of the verb reveals the process of reflection during the interview, accompanied by a temporal transposition in different moments of the event. She relates in the present that they were preparing (past) and introduces the sentiment experienced in the past as if it were the present once again (“since when the mud waste arrive”). In the process of transposition, she presented to us the expectation of shock which was projected upon the arrival of the mud after the experience was experienced (she is speaking of an expectation felt in the past concerning something which in the present was already experienced). Such linguistic process reveals the complexity of the experience, the modulation of emotional occurrences and their effects on the perception of that individual who is currently engaged.

Emotional Mechanisms for Contentious Collective Action

Emotions entered social movement theory upon the enhanced importance attributed to culture and to micro-sociological explanatory perspectives. James Jasper, who has dedicated himself to the study of emotions in protests, presents the cultural perspective as composed of thoughts, sentiments (emotions which motivate action) and moral principles. Culture is composed of three components: i. Cognition, constituted by words, beliefs, frames, collective identities and narratives which we create; ii. Emotions defined as feelings in process, inseparable from cognition and part of rationality. They permeate life and decision-making processes; iii. Moral valuations, described as a set of explanatory principles, intuitions which are also meanings (Jasper 2014).

The way these components are interlinked is fundamental, since emotions are schematized in moral and cognitive terms, creating frames which attribute causal relations to the problem experienced, condemn or excuse authorities, etc.

In the case of a critical emotional event such as the disaster generated by the rupture of the Fundão dam, the manner of explaining what occurred, identifying different moments of the event, attributing and distributing blame among local and national authorities and various companies, is not a simple process. It is a process which requires the connection of the emotions with notions of right and wrong shared among the communities, but depends as well on complex information organized cognitively and dependent largely on actors external to the territories.

¹² After consultation, affected interviewees asked that their names be cited in the text.

In the following account, another activist tells us about his process of mobilization, linking apparently distant dimensions, such as concern with his child and his understanding of the debate about mineral extraction inherited from his activism in social movements:

And the mud waste, I felt it, I felt it. Look, I have a child, and there are things you don't see as affecting you, like the mud, you may not even care. But when it comes to children and my child... My child going to pre-school and drinking water that you don't know if it's okay... That's something which really hits home, which motivates you a lot and drives you to really understand what is happening, search for information. We also talk to many mothers, and they are very much into the movement. I've been involved in the mining issue for a long time. Collaborating with the social movements, discussing the development model. So, it seems like everything came together, you know? As a directly affected person together with a reflection which I brought from other spaces of activism (Ricardo, activist of Colatina, interview conducted in September, 2016).

As Jasper argues, "emotions are potential keys to move from micro to macro" (2011) and in this testimony, as well as in others presented in this article, we perceive how a critical emotional event can articulate such distinct levels as every-day cares and profound issues debated by social movements which discuss the problems of extractivism.

Another cognitive chain can be observed in the account of the fisherman who is now one of the affected riverine inhabitants mobilized in the cause of the disaster. The fisherman's account, recorded in an interview conducted on the banks of the river, refers to the affective memory of what he experienced in that place, contrasted to the current bureaucratic routine in meetings, limited to the small "salary"¹³ received from the company and the already recognized psychic problems. In the second excerpt there is a return to the past through the affective memory and immediately after another temporal moment is incorporated, the projected future of grandchildren, who will not be able to experience the rio Doce in the same way.

Now we've gotta depend on this really small monthly salary we get from Samarco. It comes to about the minimum wage; we weren't used to this and now that's all we've got¹⁴. Understand? I go down to the edge of the river in the morning, take a look at the boat over there, take the water out of it, fix it up a little so it doesn't break down. And go back to the house and find something to do... I enrolled here [fishermen's association]. Sometimes I go to the meetings, looking for help from somebody who can help the fishermen here. And the days I don't do any work I stay in the house. I haven't been in the water since November 5. When I look at this river, which was my life, I get such a sad feeling! It was my life! It was my life! Getting up at four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, coming down here and getting into my little boat and going downstream! Doing a little fishing, setting a hook, or going down with my fishing rod, getting some bait and going to the deepest part of the river to catch a fish. We had a life like that and now we lost all of that. Now what do we have? ... Nothing but depression! What we're getting is sickness, high blood pressure, depression, that's all, because we're always nervous.

[...]

We even lost the history! Now you're going to tell a grandchild of yours, who's 6 or 7 years old now..., in another 3, 4 years... say: -- Ah, I was a fisherman, I caught such a fish, there was a lot of mullet, small catfish, sea bass, hardshelled catfish, common catfish. And he's going to ask: Grampa, what did these fish look like? You don't even have a photograph to show what these fish looked like! [pause of 3 seconds] ... I mean, you lost your history! [pause of 2 seconds] The flood carried away your history... and here we are ... lost (José de Fátima "Seu Fatim" Fisherman and activist of Maria Ortiz, interview conducted in September, 2016).

¹³ Indemnification aid which came to be received by all riverine dwellers recognized as affected following the arrival of the mud waste.

¹⁴ Most of the fishermen report monthly incomes which varied between R\$2.000,00 and R\$5.000,00 per family, depending on the time of the year and the luck in fishing.

The relationship which we established with this fisherman was fundamental to allow us to perceive particular aspects of the emotions he felt in his relation with the place. We were in a group of seven researchers and two social movement activists invited to participate in our trip. At the end of our brief visit to the fisherman's house he invited us to sail by boat on the rio Doce. We were aware that the cost of fuel was expensive, so we insisted on paying for crossing the river; however he was emphatic in saying that he wished to give us this experience as a present. He then arranged for two other fishermen to transport us in four boats on the rio Doce during approximately 30 minutes.

The emphasis with which the fisherman extended the invitation assured us that his singular experience with the river could be contagious and mobilizing. The river crossing could enable him to allow us to experience the feeling of living free on the river. All of us were affected and mobilized by his cause (Favret-Saada 1990). We had a profound understanding of the pain felt by those communities which lost the river due to the iron ore mud waste.

Upon reflecting on this experience, we perceived the importance of the dimension of place for emotional dynamics. The affected place is impregnated with memories which are fundamental for mobilization processes¹⁵. It is not coincidental that "toxic tours" are a practice considered fundamental in the repertoires of established and organized movements of affected people. These "toxic tours" are trips which have as objective to learn on-site about polluting enterprises and the affected communities. These tours are singular, constructed experiences between affected people themselves, mobilized affected people and activists who mobilize affected people.

Network analyses have also contributed to theories which discuss collective identities and engagement by giving value to the importance of places as free spaces of meeting where exchanges of ideas and establishment of counter-hegemonic positions takes place (Polleta and Jasper 2001). In this manner, places are important spaces for the construction of singular experiences and, as a place of shared emotional memories, can contribute to dynamics of a critical emotional event.

Image 5



Source: Photograph taken by Júlia Castro member of our team during field work in which we were invited to cross the Rio Doce, in September, 2016.

¹⁵ For other texts about the relevance of place see Yang (2005) and Benski (2005).

As Yang argues, emotions are interactional and temporal situations, and can be understood as events. In everyday life, we function with emotional schemes which carry emotional meanings, memories and prescribe forms for social action. According to the author, emotional schemes are our shared collective memories which suggest to us what to feel in certain situations and stimulate us to act upon memorized emotional schemes.

One of the aspects raised by the literature on environmental conflicts and disasters is that emotions which provoke action as well as emotions which provoke inaction, can emerge in these contexts (Murrieta, Martin Ceron, Macario Sánchez 2016; Auyero 2008). For example, the feeling of melancholy, in relation to the impeded way of life, can be highly paralyzing.

Helena Flam argues that we need to understand how emotions can generate demobilization. Towards this end, it is important to understand the dynamics among different types of emotions and identify what are subversive emotions (2005: 20). Loyalty and gratitude are fundamental emotions for the construction of mobilization and organization. They provide confidence and impel us to act. Anger is also an important feeling for provoking action, especially because our societies impel us to control anger. Obedience and resignation are taught since birth (Flam 2005: 22). Thus, the emergence of anger, its conscious display and its direction are crucial for contentious collective action.

Jasper explains the emotional dynamics which stimulate or do not stimulate action, employing the concept of “moral battery”, which he describes as a pair of emotions which interact in contrast, generating, as a battery does, a force which stimulates action. For example, pride and shame, pity and happiness (Jasper 1997).

On the basis of fieldwork conducted with people affected by the disaster, we perceived that the feeling of injustice is suggestive of a moral battery. It is not a simple feeling but rather a combination of emotional elements produced by the internal singular experience of each affected person, together with dimensions of corporality and of place, interactions between actors, and cognitive processes through which explanatory frameworks are constructed.

Gamson’s empirical studies argued that the feeling of injustice is necessary for collective action. According to the author, “Different emotions can be stimulated by perceived inequalities – cynicism, bemused irony, resignation. But injustice focuses on the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul. Injustice [...] is a hot cognition, not merely an abstract intellectual judgment about what is equitable” (Gamson 1992: 32).

Returning to Jasper’s definitions (2014), emotions combined with cognitive and moral elements constitute “moral feelings” which relate the pieces of a given conjuncture, producing meanings and strategic possibilities for action. For the author, strategy is a cultural dimension of protest, involving decisions, networks of interaction, opponents, and frameworks. These are arrangements constructed by cultural meanings which are available or invented.

Cognitive Elements – “The Companies are to Blame!”

The construction of the injustice frame is complex. As we have argued, it extends from the micro to the macro and transports the subject from resignation to engagement in social movements.

The cognitive elaboration of events is fundamental to the direction which the frame will take. It involves the flow of information from the media and individuals’ personal networks and the possibilities of collective interaction. Public spaces of meetings, exchanges, presentation and exposition are fundamental for the cognitive construction of the individual and for the passage from the micro to the macro level. It is in the public space that the individual tests certain arguments, tests explanatory hypotheses, perceives the position of allies and opponents, identifies ambiguous personalities, etc.

For Benford and Snow, there is a connection between frames, ideological and discursive fields and opportunity structures and, although they may be different, if considered together they produce a more complete understanding of the ideational and interpretative factors associated with the emergence and functioning of social movements (2000). The perspective of framing is rooted in symbolic interactionism and in the constructivist principle that meanings are not set automatically or naturally, but rather, on the contrary, meanings emerge through interpretative processes based on interactivity and experience. Many frames are created in social mobilization, but some take hold more than others and these can be denominated collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000).

Collective action frames specify and indicate what is important and what is not and they construct causal relations. They aggregate things, persons and feelings and isolate others. This process produces a particular narrative and not another. And it becomes fundamental for the success or lack of success of the organization of mobilization. This process also determines the success or failure of a claim. Of particular interest in the present study is the fundamental role that the frame has for the transformation of feelings of paralysis into feelings of action. The construction of the injustice frame depends on the transformation of suffering from an experienced misfortune into anger and hope. In this way it constitutes a moral battery of injustice.

Equating the actors involved, and attributing culpability are fundamental in this process. What we have observed until the present in the frames produced about the disaster is a process which began by blaming Samarco, the mining company responsible for the dam. The interpretation constructed following presentations by Samarco executives in the media was fundamental in this process of attributing culpability. The fact that they did not publicly assume responsibility, together with the judicial strategies which included a request for preventive *habeas corpus* for the chief executive officer of the company, were interpreted by affected people as a stance of contempt for the population. This generated indignation and anger, widely displayed in the words of affected people who we interviewed during the year and a half of our research.

Shortly thereafter, federal and state governments joined the roster of opponents by reaching an accord with the company without even a minimum participation of affected people. In addition, the federal government issued a decree on November 13, 2015 (*Decreto 8276*, November 13, 2015), which considered the event a “natural disaster¹⁶”, which was considered by affected people as outrageous, considering that the causes of the rupture of the dam were not natural, but rather the precarious conditions of security of the dam. That marked the forceful beginning in the social media of the *#nãofoiacidente* and indignation increased among affected people, who rejected the words “accident”, “disaster”, “tragedy”, claiming that

¹⁶ The central objective of the decree was to add language to existing legislation, which deals with the possibilities of withdrawal by an employee from the *Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço*, that classifies the rupture of dams as a natural disaster, thereby justifying a withdrawal by the employee. The major controversy resulting from this governmental act was the association of rupture of dams to natural disasters, caused by acts of nature, rather than by human beings.

the event should be understood and named as a “crime”. At that point, a new flow of information emerged, promoted by specialists, the media and national and international organizations connected to the issue of mining, ascribing responsibility also to the other two companies, Vale and BHP. Activists began using the designation “crime of Samarco, Vale and BHP”.

Image 6



Source: Photograph taken by Thaís Henrique Dias member of our team during public hearing in the Legislative Assembly of Espírito Santo in August, 2016.

According to Gamson (1992), the construction of the injustice framework is necessary for collective action and he affirms that the manner in which the explanation of its origin is constructed is fundamental for the feeling of injustice to be transformed into anger and action.

In this perspective, the “naturalization” of the disaster by the government and the companies was perceived as an attempt to intervene to disorganize the indignation of the people. In addition to the decree cited above, the companies attempted to sustain the idea that the rupture of the dam resulted from an earthquake, seeking to transfer responsibility to the intemperate weather of nature. As Gamson writes: “Vague, abstract sources of unfairness diffuse indignation and make it seem foolish [...] When we see impersonal and abstract forces as responsible for our suffering, we are taught to accept what cannot be changed and make the best of it.. Anger is dampened by the unanswerable rhetorical question: who says life is fair?” (Gamson 1992: 532).

However, that attempt to naturalize the event was seen as a devious and malicious maneuver to deceive affected people. Gamson argues that “competition over the defining targets is a crucial battleground in the development or containment of injustice frames” (Gamson 1992: 32). Applying Gamson’s argument to this case, the attempted maneuver to blame nature was unmasked and served to reaffirm perceptions that companies and governments have common interests, commercial and otherwise, which lead governments to seek to protect companies rather than aligning themselves with affected people. On the basis of these perceptions, in the eyes of the affected people the government is hardly trustworthy.

Injustice frames require concrete targets and the identification of these targets must be constructed with the help of other actors, which can be the media, social movements, universities, religious and social leaders in general. The more concrete the target, the stronger the injustice frame will be. Furthermore, the distance of the target in relation to activists is also a fundamental variable for the concreteness of feelings and their performatization in organized collective action.

Thus, it was fundamental for the affected people of Espírito Santo to identify Vale as co-responsible for the disaster, since that mining company is physically present in their territories through the railroad tracks, trains and ports which transport the iron ore. Once Vale was identified, affected people found a point of vulnerability which allowed them to call attention to the company – the occupation and blockade of their railroads and, less frequently, protests in front of the company’s headquarters in the state capital. This became a pro-active protest performance with regard to demands, and also helped reinforce the injustice frame, considering that the company’s reaction to the occupations reaffirmed their responsibility for the disaster.

Image 7



Source: image found on posters and graffiti made during protest in front of the headquarters of Vale

The establishment of guilt in the case of the Rio Doce disaster was a fundamental component in the elaboration of the feeling of injustice. The actions of the various actors involved combined to attribute guilt to a very concrete target, the three companies: Samarco, Vale and BHP. At the same time, factors in the national political conjuncture favored the position of the government, as over a period of time the president of the republic was impeached and a new government was composed. In addition, governments, in general, have a greater ability to deflect guilt. The complexity of management systems, especially in federalism, greatly distributes responsibilities in a way that politicians are shielded, to a certain extent, from the damages of being identified as those responsible for injustices, an aspect noted by Alinsky (1972).

The outrage directed at the companies constituted a powerful and effective instrument of collective action¹⁷. To the extent that these companies are responsible for the reparation of damages and effects which resulted, they need to be permanently present in the territories, acting, speaking and negotiating with affected people. This exposes them to a series of evaluations and critiques of their actions. The three companies responsible for the disaster have subcontracted with numerous other companies to perform specific functions in contact with affected people. However these contacts have not diminished the perception of guilt attributed to the three companies by affected people. Any company entering their territory to perform some disaster-related action is identified as the same as Samarco, Vale and BHP. The same holds for the Renova Foundation (*Fundação Renova*), created as part of the extrajudicial settlement between the companies and governments involved in administering resources and developing actions of reparation. In addition to the three mining enterprises, Samarco, Vale and BHP, and the Renova Foundation, we can list at least the following: Synergia; Golder; HP; Integratio; Futura; Repense; Polifônica Consultoria; Ernst & Young.

Flam also suggests that the re-articulation of anger-related emotions which are paralyzed is crucial to generate mobilization. Understanding the dynamics in collective action processes which lead to one or another type of emotion is fundamental for purposes of our research. In this perspective, the amplitude of the affectations, together with the very restrictive recognition of the damages on the part of the companies introduces new foundations for indignation and anger. Nevertheless, as we have affirmed since the beginning of this text, interactions among the actors are fundamental and are present in all aspects which were isolated for explanatory purposes in this text. They are the actors and their agencies which effectively energize and construct the cognitive and emotional processes of mobilization.

Elements of Interaction – “We Were All Affected!”

The central role of emotions in the process of mobilization is the conversion of individual and self-directed feelings to feelings which are collectively shared and directed to an external target. This conversion of feelings is produced by two mechanisms: interactional and cognitive¹⁸. These two are interlinked. We have already presented the central aspects of the cognitive mechanisms present in the initial context of production of a collective action frame for the struggle of people affected by the disaster on the Rio Doce. Now we turn to aspects of the interaction.

The interactional mechanisms are those which connect and energize the relations between people and places. This involves various types of actors, generally speaking, activists, (public) audiences and adversaries.

Activists are not isolated, atomized individuals. They are involved in complex schemes which establish ties of affinity and tensions of separation. This explains why people cooperate, according to Fireman et al. (1977).

For Jasper, a call for mobilization can occur without necessarily being preceded by collective identity. For example, the “moral shock” produced by the image of an animal suffering may be sufficient to generate engagement. However, the understanding of the action as part of a collective scheme depends on a frame which is recognized by other activists, by antagonists or by the audience (Jasper 1997).

¹⁷ Generally speaking, there have been significantly fewer studies of the relation between social movements and private companies, as compared to the relation between social movements and the state.

¹⁸ The discussion of mechanisms which informs our analysis is found in McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow and in the critique pointed out by Jasper, especially with reference to the need to energize the relational aspect (2012). Therefore, we call them interactional mechanisms rather than relational mechanisms.

Yang also underscores the importance of multiple actors and suggests that critical emotional events “may transform the dynamics of collective action. They do so by dramatizing the relationships among movement activists, publics and opponents. Such relationships compel action” (Yang 2005: 80). This aspect of dramaticity is what places the actors in a relation. The dramatics in the relations between supporters, audience and adversaries was the fundamental element, according to Yang, for the conduct of student protests in China in the decade of the 1980s.

We noted in the previous section the importance of the dynamics between private companies and governments for the construction of a collective action frame. Along these lines, when we refer to incipient processes of mobilization, it is important to take a closer look at existing differences between these contentious actors. We argued in a different study (Losekann 2016) that at least three types of actors can be observed in conflicts of people affected by extractivist enterprises: affected people themselves; mobilized affected people and others who mobilize affected people. The first type is not necessarily mobilized like the second, but nevertheless plays an important role in mobilization. The latter are, in general, actors external to the territory who experienced similar conflicts in other places. They can also be large organizations, such as ONGs, or can be people who became sensitized to the situation of the affected people. The latter are, in general, activists involved in other causes, professional radicals, as Habermas called them, lawyers, researchers, professors or authorities who become involved professionally and are won over by the causes (Habermas 1997).

The mobilized actors are important in the processes of training new activists by constituting a type of listener. By paying attention to the causes of the affected people, they are also legitimating their claims, that is, they confer importance to the suffering of the other party. This process of empathy is important for the victim of injustice to not internalize blame and remain paralyzed in resignation. When I see that someone finds my pain important, I am encouraged to manifest it more intensely. I can recreate meanings through dramatization, reconstitute scenes in my memory and produce indignation. Thus, the look of the other is fuel for action.

During all of our visits to affected communities, we perceived the value attributed to our presence. It was not a question of doing a high-quality job, or of producing immediate, specific effects for them. What was in play was our presence there; only that. In one of the arenas, a man effusively thanked our presence, because we left “our own homes to go there”, and complained about the lack of attention by authorities to the community, which he describes as “humiliated” by the authorities:

Until today, we have not been served; I would like to have received attention, to tell the truth, by a judge, who could see our situation, evaluate our situation. I would like, we would like, to have our situation evaluated by a chief of staff of a Federal congressman. We would really like to broaden the range of this conversation, because our loss is very large ... and it's really unfortunate that nobody wants to leave, few people want to leave from the zone of comfort to come to our community (Public statement by resident of Povoação during the public arena held in the community in November, 2016).

The statement of another affected person, recorded during one of our arenas, is an example of a feeling which we noted in every place, the contempt that the community perceives in the attitude of the companies.

The authorities, Samarco, Vale and BHP need to know that we exist (Public statement. Resident of Povoação during the public arena conducted in the community in November, 2016).

The process of recognizing affected people by the companies, and now by the Renova Foundation, is still in progress and, in keeping with the statement of the resident transcribed above, many people who consider themselves as affected still have not been acknowledged as such. This is the case of the communities whose livelihood depended on fishing and related activities in the north of Espírito Santo.

Analyzing data for reports produced by the Renova Foundation itself, in October, 2016, one can note a pattern in the recognition of affected people in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. Those municipalities which were quickly recognized and which had the largest number of affected people recognized coincide with those through which Vale's railroads pass. The 15 municipalities with the largest number of affected people recognized (more than 100) have railroads which haul iron ore and in only four of them we were unable to identify records of railroad tracks blockaded by disaster-related protests. This observation suggests that recognition on the part of the company is more related to the risk of being subject to reprisals than to a real intention to repair the damage. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that until March 2017, those communities which are located to the North of the mouth of the Rio Doce had not been recognized as affected, despite the existence of studies by official environmental agencies which identify impacts reaching the south of Bahia (neighbor state of Espírito Santo). That is, the lesser the population's threat to the company's business, the lesser the chances that population has of being recognized as affected people.

These aspects appear to be perceived by affected people in Espírito Santo and, therefore, one of their major demands is for visibility. In the statement below by an affected woman who had a history of activism in other causes, the connection is clear between an emotional mechanism characteristic of a critical emotional event and the rationalization of the need to obtain visibility outside of the local territory. The directing of the strategy includes the feeling of pain, the feeling of suffering, the negative evaluation regarding the reactions of the closest actors and the directing of the action to other actors who she imagines can help the mobilization in the territory through their networks, connections, skills and resources.

That is death. It's as if you can hear the noise of death. I've already seen it in various forms, but that also was a death, although different. And then I ended up externalizing that pain...I cried! But after crying came a jolt, like this. A kind of catharsis. I began like this...But, sister, I can't watch what's coming, in person, without having that sensation! I can't, I can't. So then I began calling people and people came who could echo what I was feeling so it could be heard by people on the outside. I called Tânia, and it was talk, well... that Colatina was in a state of... that here we became a state of nobody, of nobody. Because I saw the people in my neighborhood going through a frenzied search for survival. Survival, I mean, storing water. Everything they had that was empty, a pot, everything became a deposit for water. That changed the routine of the families, of the people. [...] And what made me most indignant and motivated me to have that talk with Tânia was the passivity and, even more, the indifference of public authorities. Because at that moment the public authorities were not in the media; when I talk about public authorities, I'm talking about the local government. At no time did they use the local media, things like that, to reassure the people. Nobody, nobody! And the media didn't do this either. They talked a lot about the mud waste but nobody mentioned Samarco. In a talk at my church, my parish, also, on Sunday, nobody said anything. Even local government, religious leaders, etc. Nobody said a word, nobody. And I said, "damn it, man, us sheep here are screwed!" We literally have no shepherds here. So the day I arrived here and got this sample from what I witnessed and saw, I said: "No, we outsiders need to know what is going on here in Colatina" We outsiders need to know what is going on here in Colatina!" And thinking of old friends I said: "Who can?" At that moment I remembered Tânia. She has direct ties to the Human Rights authorities in Geneva. [...] (Márcia, Colatina activist, interview conducted in September, 2016).

All of these statements reveal that the interactions between actors help convert emotions, whether by the glance that confers importance, by the possibility of strategic alliance, or even by the absence of the authorities and parties responsible for the disaster, the interactions produce emotional reactions that collaborate in the characterization of injustice.

Interaction with mobilizing actors is clearly the principal type of mechanism for the conversion of feelings. The latter act as brokers of emotions, transforming and re-signifying the realities experienced by the affected people. They contribute to the creation of new frames of struggle that can evoke new emotions, more mobilizing than paralyzing. These actors can constitute mechanisms that produce engagement. By building fundamental meshing to the process of formation of collective action, they can centralize the mobilization network, acting more like colonizers of the affected people, as well as become triggers of new mobilizing actors, thus acting like mechanisms of emancipation.

Thus the arrival of MAB¹⁹ in Espírito Santo was celebrated as well as feared by many local activists. Besides the natural fears with the arrival of “outsiders”, the concern was to know how the dynamics of a large movement, organized nationally, would mesh with local dynamics. However, the fears quickly gave way to the enthusiasm of engagement and the movement won the assent of many local affected people, who came to identify themselves as MAB.

The fear of the entrance of highly politicized actors, with histories of successful struggles, especially in terms of collective mobilization and organization resounded from the beginning in the companies involved, who quickly positioned themselves contrary to any interlocution with MAB. Nevertheless, given the dynamics of interaction in the construction of the frames, in which the companies have been adversaries since the very beginning, when they became frankly opposed to MAB, this had the result of enabling the movement to gain credibility among affected people.

We heard about a meeting here with the company. And knowing how the company would act, which is the same anywhere... put together a commission inside the community to represent the community, but which the company itself controls. And they themselves elected those who would represent the community. And it was then that we entered this meeting to participate and they were emphatic in saying that if the movement didn't leave, they wouldn't initiate the meeting. And it was then that we called together several residents and we began to talk and we can say that, considering the size of the community, we created a fact. Because when the company left, they mobilized nearly 100 people in front of the school. The next day, we conducted an assembly with almost all the residents, filling the school, and we began to explain what is a movement, what was our role... which is to organize the people, fight for rights, that the company wanted to recognize only 17 people here as affected people, that only the fishermen who had official working papers and that they were up to date. And that it wasn't because the whole population had been affected, and that they would have to reimburse the population and guarantee their rights, and that this would be possible only if the families began to organize, that they avoid fighting with one another. And we began to explain our proposal of working with them. [...] And we continued doing the work every week. I came once, twice a week. And from that time forward, the company decided to enroll all the families (Geovani, MAB activist, interview conducted in Mascarenhas, September, 2016).

Clearly, no movement group obtains total support, especially in the early stage of getting established in the region. Nevertheless, until the present moment MAB has been successful. This is due, in part, because of the perception that MAB's interest and physical presence in the region represents an important external recognition of the plight of affected people in Espírito Santo. Another factor was the ability displayed by

¹⁹ Movement of People Affected by Dams (*Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens*)

MAB organizers at the local level, including respect for existing community associations. MAB's organizing strategy was wise and effective. As noted in the statement above, the work of organizers began slowly, becoming involved in the daily life of people and showing respect for the community. Affected people whose rights had been denied by the company were the first to join with MAB. Affected people began to feel a sense of dignity and increasing numbers in various communities came to support MAB and their strategy. MAB organizers thus were effective by not trying to impose a broad MAB agenda from the outset but rather gradually obtain broad support for MAB by grassroots work of helping affected people to fight for their rights and, thereby, restore their dignity²⁰.

The presence and importance of mobilizing actors can be more fully appreciated considering the context of existing problems of local associations, together with divisive actions by the companies which result in divisions among affected people and, consequently, the undermining of collective action.

The most important challenges perceived by residents for collective action are questions of engagement with the cause and unity among themselves. The differing amounts of compensation has become a source of distrust among affected people. Other problems, which appear less difficult to resolve, are more procedural, namely, internal communications in the community and in the associations, structuring of meetings, methods of participation and, especially, establishment of formal and transparent criteria of relationship between companies and communities.

Among practices employed by the mining companies or their subcontractors that were reported during our fieldwork were: meetings of the companies with only some community leaders; choice, by the company, of leaders more susceptible to influence by the company, instituting practices of cooptation and patronage; defamation, delegitimizing and criminalization of leaders considered problematic and intransigent; attempts to remove leaders with alleged ties to existing social movements, and who operate as mobilizing agents of affected people.

The major complaint among residents is individual harassment by the company, seeking to negotiate with individuals, making information and possibilities of collective organization more confusing and fragmented.

We have noted that an initial step in mobilization and the formation of local activists is the perception by the local resident that he or she is an affected person. However, for the affected person to go beyond that stage, we note the importance of the presence of mobilizing actors and of allies in the development of activists with an increasingly broader perception of claims and strategic potentials for contentious action. The process involves the development of consciousness of issues going beyond the local community to a broader territorial scale. This transformation in the scale of claims and frames is fundamental for the organization of a protest movement. Generally speaking, this process of scaling up occurs through mediation conducted by mobilizing actors and allies. This is what Kirsch (2014) called "politics of space" when he analyzed the connections between actors in multiple places in a campaign of contestation against the Tedi mine in Papua-Nova Guiné.

Even those regions where there are local associations functioning and are seeking to collaborate, there is a need for organisms at a broader level where mechanisms of mediation can function. The organization of the Forums was important precisely for this reason²¹.

²⁰ These aspects were observed in the course of living with and learning from the experiences with MAB organizers and other activists.

²¹ The Espírito Santo Forum in Defense of the Rio Doce was established in November, 2016 as a state organism to deal with issues related to the disaster. Initially, 88 organizations signed the manifesto creating the Forum. The number of organizations actually participating has diminished, but meeting continue to be held weekly. In addition, local Forums were established in Colatina, Norte da Foz, Regência, Barra do Riacho, and Baixo Guandu.

Since the Forum appeared in our life we've had the possibility of recovering our dignity, of reviewing what happened, what was destroyed. So that is our hope with the Forum. No other entity, no other organism has been as good for us as the Forum. I see the Forum as a mother. [...] When we come to the Forum we see not only our own local situation. We see the situation of all the affected people, of all the communities. Because every community has a representative in the Forum. So we can begin to match what happens to us in Barra do Riacho with the situation of Regência, Povoação, Colatina, Baixo Guandu. We can see that what happens there is no different from what happens here. (Joice, fisherwoman and activist of Barra do Riacho, interview conducted in Vitória in July, 2016²²).

Finally, in addition to the Forums and external activists who operated as mobilizing actors, the constant presence of the Public Defenders (*Defensores Públicos*) of Espírito Santo has been important for processes of mobilization and of scaling up. They can be categorized as allies, in the sense proposed by Tarrow (2011). They are “influential allies” who provide certification to the claims and frames of injustice, affirming that emotions find space in the law or in principles of rights. This is not a minor aspect; we have argued previously that the relation between rights actors and activists has constituted a process of “legal mobilization” in environmental movements (Losekann 2013; 2016).

It can be said that Public Defenders also act as mobilizing actors. The normative character of juridical discourse already confers the potential of mobilization for any one of its operators; but it is the manner in which this discourse has been used by the Defenders which makes it especially mobilizing, to the extent that it does not remove the agency of affective people.

In fact, the Public Defender Office has performed in a much less bureaucratic manner than other juridical institutions, traveling to the field, getting to know *in loco* the conditions of the conflict. This aspect is fundamental in that is in the everyday interactions with the affected people in their places (rather than in an office), that the subjectivity of the Defender can be affected, won over by the cause²³. This is a fundamental point. Before becoming a mobilizer, he needs to be mobilized to the cause of the other.

There is no lack of problems and injustices in everyday life of a country like Brazil (or any other) to fill the workload of a juridical institution. So that in order for a specific conflict to be chosen over a different one, there is also a particular type of engagement by the operator of the law. This individual is, clearly, susceptible to experience a singular experience. And there are many opportunities for this to occur when he experiences the place of the affected person, shares his daily struggles to have access to water, or the frustrations of being unable to eat fish due to contamination, etc. That is, he shares the pain of suffering with the affected person. In this manner, the feeling of injustice in the operator of law can be converted to mobilizing actions via juridical discourse.

Final Considerations

Rather than exhausting the many possibilities of biographical trajectories and ways of constructing engagement, this study has sought to demonstrate how emotions play fundamental roles in the process of mobilization. The manner in which the disaster on the Rio Doce was felt by activists reveals how a critical emotional event was constituted, energized by cognitive mechanisms and by mechanisms of interaction.

In explaining the mobilization process constructed by the most engaged and prominent activists in Espírito Santo, I also introduced the principal issues related to the actions of the companies in this process.

²² Interview conducted by Arthur Augusto Santos, holder of an extension project scholarship.

²³ This is a process similar to that which occurs with the researcher and which I reported in the experience which we had navigating with the affected fishermen.

Actions of reparation marked by the monetization of damages caused by the disaster are directed to individuals or leaders who, in general, have been coopted by the companies

Existing associativism in local communities as a potential source of grassroots mobilization is weakened by formal organizations which are either beset by indebtedness or other legal problems; or, on the contrary, in the hands of centralizing, authoritarian local leaders.

Some associations have been able to act as protagonists with affected people and scale up claims beyond the territory of local communities. However, it is the actions of mobilizing actors and allies which has been fundamental in this process. These actors are key components in the transformation of emotions from an intimate, individual level to the collective level.

We have also discussed the importance of place as an element which helps feed and mold collective action dynamics through emotional memories which are collective products, but which reverberate subjectively in individuals. Mobilization practices which are anchored at the local level not only create external links but also are the most effective forms of constructing processes of engagement and mobilization. The singular experience is constructed as a critical emotional event in the territory, but in order to constitute a broader cause of a protest movement, it must travel, go beyond the territory and explain to the world the injustices which are occurring there.

That, perhaps, is the main challenge for the constitution of a protest movement of affected people against the crime of Samarco, Vale and BHP. In this sense, although, on the one hand, this study seeks to tell the story of processes experienced in little-known communities in Brazil, on the other hand, these are processes that may (and can) occur anyplace in the world where these giant transnational companies operate their mining activities.

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