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*(DE)TERRITORIALIZATION AND THE COLLECTIVE RESETTLEMENTS OF
THE AFFECTED POPULATION IN MARIANA/MG¹*

**(DES)TERRITORIALIZAÇÃO E OS REASSENTAMENTOS COLETIVOS DA
POPULAÇÃO ATINGIDA EM MARIANA/MG**

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ABSTRACT

The collapse of the Fundão dam, which occurred in November 2015 in the municipality of Mariana/MG, released millions of cubic meters of tailings into the Doce River basin, tragically highlighting the deep and long-lasting impacts of the neo-extractivist model on the territories and ways of life of rural communities affected by large-scale mining ventures. More than material losses, the socio-environmental disaster caused the rupture of affective, cultural, symbolic, identity, and neighborhood ties, worsened by compulsory resettlement processes conducted under technocratic and standardized logics, disconnected from the socio-territorial specificities of the affected populations. This article aims to analyze the effects of this model through the case study of the collective resettlements of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, focusing on rights violations and the dismantling of peasant territorialities. The research adopts a qualitative approach, based on bibliographic and documentary review, combined with participant observation carried out by the authors in the context of their work with the Independent Technical Advisory Body (ATI) of Cáritas Brasileira – Regional Minas Gerais and the Research and Extension Group on Conflicts in Affected Territories (Conterra), linked to the Federal University of Ouro Preto. The imposed resettlements resulted in the weakening of solidarity networks, the disfigurement of traditional ways of life, the erasure of collective memory, and the intensification of social vulnerability. The neoliberal standardization of architectural and urban planning models, the obstacles to water access, and the absence of adequate spaces for the resumption of productive activities, among other issues, undermine the effectiveness of reparatory measures and highlight

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the lack of solutions based on principles of sustainability. By correlating the case of Mariana with other forced resettlements in Brazil, such as those observed in the Irapé, Belo Monte, and Minas-Rio projects, the article presents the existence of a recurring pattern of territorial violations promoted by megaprojects. It concludes that full reparation requires the recognition of territorialities as collective heritage, respect for sociocultural diversity, and the centrality of popular participation in the construction of fair, emancipatory solutions rooted in the ways of life of the affected communities.

Keywords: neo-extractivism, reparation, territoriality, socio-environmental sustainability.

RESUMO

O rompimento da barragem de Fundão, ocorrido em novembro de 2015 no município de Mariana/MG, lançou milhões de metros cúbicos de rejeitos na bacia do Rio Doce, evidenciando de forma trágica os impactos profundos e duradouros do modelo neoextrativista sobre os territórios e os modos de vida de comunidades rurais atingidas por grandes empreendimentos minerários. Mais do que perdas materiais, o desastre socioambiental provocou a ruptura de vínculos afetivos, culturais, simbólicos, identitários e de vizinhança, agravada por processos de reassentamento compulsório conduzidos sob lógicas tecnocráticas, padronizadas e alheias às especificidades socioterritoriais das populações atingidas. Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os efeitos desse modelo a partir do estudo de caso dos reassentamentos coletivos de Bento Rodrigues e Paracatu de Baixo, com foco nas violações de direitos e na desestruturação das territorialidades camponesas. A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, fundamentada em revisão bibliográfica e documental, aliada à observação participante, desenvolvida pelos autores no contexto de atuação junto à Assessoria Técnica Independente (ATI) da Cáritas Brasileira Regional Minas Gerais e ao Grupo de Pesquisa e Extensão sobre Conflitos em Territórios Atingidos (Conterra), vinculado à Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto. Os reassentamentos impostos resultaram no enfraquecimento das redes de solidariedade, na descaracterização dos modos de vida tradicionais, no apagamento da memória coletiva e na intensificação da vulnerabilização social. A padronização neoliberal dos modelos arquitetônicos e urbanísticos, os obstáculos para acesso à água e a ausência de espaços adequados para a retomada das atividades produtivas, entre outras problemáticas, comprometem a efetividade das medidas reparatórias e evidenciam a carência de soluções baseadas por princípios de sustentabilidade. Ao correlacionar o caso de Mariana com outros reassentamentos forçados no Brasil, como os verificados nos projetos de Irapé, Belo Monte e Minas-Rio, o artigo apresenta a existência de um



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padrão recorrente de violações territoriais promovidas por megaprojetos. Conclui-se que a reparação integral requer o reconhecimento das territorialidades como patrimônio coletivo, o respeito à diversidade sociocultural e a centralidade da participação popular na construção de soluções justas, emancipatórias e enraizadas nos modos de vida das comunidades atingidas.

Palavras-chave: neoextrativismo, reparação, territorialidade, sustentabilidade socioambiental.

INTRODUCTION

Recognized as one of the most serious socio-environmental disasters in Brazil's history, the collapse of the Fundão dam in Mariana (MG) in 2015 resulted in the release of millions of cubic meters of mining tailings into the Doce River basin. The episode laid bare the perverse impacts of the neo-extractivist model on the rights and territorialities of the affected populations, revealing not only irreparable material losses, but also the rupture of historically constructed identity, social, and cultural bonds. The communities of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, two of the territories that were profoundly destroyed, were forced into a process of compulsory displacement that goes beyond the physical dimension, affecting ways of life, cultural practices, and the symbolic relationship with the territory.

The fragility of involuntary resettlement and reparation policies was revealed, as they are generally structured according to a standardized and technocratic logic, detached from the socio-territorial specificities of the affected communities. The imposition of uniform models of housing and territory, the absence of effective participation in decision-making processes, and the neglect of the immaterial dimensions of community life constitute serious violations of rights, which are compounded by the physical destruction caused by the enterprise.

This article aims to analyze the effects of the mineral neo-extractivist model based on the case study of the collective resettlements resulting from the



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collapse of the Fundão dam, with emphasis on the violation of the rights of the affected communities and the disruption of peasant and traditional territorialities. To this end, a qualitative methodological approach is adopted, based on a literature review on the subject, the analysis of news articles published by the newspaper A Sirene — produced by the affected people, and the documentary analysis of technical reports released by the Independent Technical Advisory Service (ATI) Cáritas Brasileira Regional Minas Gerais. This analytical basis is articulated with participant observation experiences carried out by the authors, who worked at the ATI and currently belong to the Research and Extension Group on Conflicts in Affected Territories (Conterra/UFOP). This work involved direct monitoring of negotiations among the different actors in the reparation process, as well as visits to the areas of origin and the implemented resettlements.

Such a methodological perspective enabled attentive listening and the systematization of the experiences lived by the affected populations, making it possible to understand the multiple dimensions of deterritorialization and rights violations, which manifest themselves both on the material level and on the symbolic and affective levels. By discussing involuntary displacements and territorial ruptures imposed by resettlement processes, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the limits of reparation policies in the context of megaprojects and points to the urgency of alternatives that respect sociocultural diversity, collective memory, and the autonomy of the ways of life of the affected communities.

To develop this analysis, the article is structured into four main sections. The first addresses territorial dispossession in the context of the Fundão dam collapse. Next, it discusses how involuntary resettlements caused the violation of peasant territorialities. The third section addresses the impacts on cultural heritage and collective memory. Finally, the fourth section presents regional



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patterns of violation observed in other cases of forced displacement in Brazil, highlighting parallels with the situation experienced in Mariana.

TERRITORIAL DISPOSSESSION AND THE FUNDÃO DAM COLLAPSE

The collapse of the Fundão dam represents an emblematic milestone of the territorial dispossession promoted by the neo-extractivist model in Brazil. The tragedy, caused by the mining company Samarco (Vale and BHP Billiton), released millions of cubic meters of mining tailings into the environment, devastated entire communities, destroyed tangible and intangible heritage, and imposed violent processes of forced displacement and deterritorialization. It is an event that, more than an “accident,” expresses the contemporary face of the logic of expropriation of the commons, characteristic of neoliberal extractive capitalism.

Extractivism constitutes a historical pattern of colonial appropriation in Latin America, grounded in the intensive exploitation of nature and the subordination of local populations (Aráoz, 2020). This logic of domination, now reconfigured in the form of neo-extractivism (Svampa, 2019), intensifies through neoliberal rationality and developmentalist discourses, which naturalize the conversion of territories into commodities and accentuate processes of territorial dispossession. According to Porto Gonçalves and Leff (2015), capitalist modernity reconfigured the colonial appropriation of nature, intensifying territorial conflicts and deepening socio-environmental inequalities.

In Brazil, this logic is clearly expressed in mining, which promotes the erasure of traditional territorialities and imposes large-scale enterprises based on a productivist and concentration-oriented project. This dynamic not only compromises established ways of life, but also subordinates the daily lives of affected populations to the interests of transnational corporations. Territorial dispossession, in this context, operates through forced deterritorialization



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(Haesbaert, 2004), the destruction of community ties, and the denial of fundamental rights, especially the right to housing, territory, and a dignified life.

In this scenario, neoliberalism must be understood not only as a set of economic measures, such as privatizations, fiscal adjustment, trade liberalization, and reduction of the role of the State, but as a new stage in the expansion of capital over life. According to Araóz (2015), it is a process that expands, on an unprecedented historical scale, the appropriation of vital cycles and territories by capitalist logic. In response to the ecological and social crisis of the Fordist model and the exhaustion of the material bases of development, neoliberalism asserts itself as the expression of an imperial geopolitical project, articulated by the centers of global power.

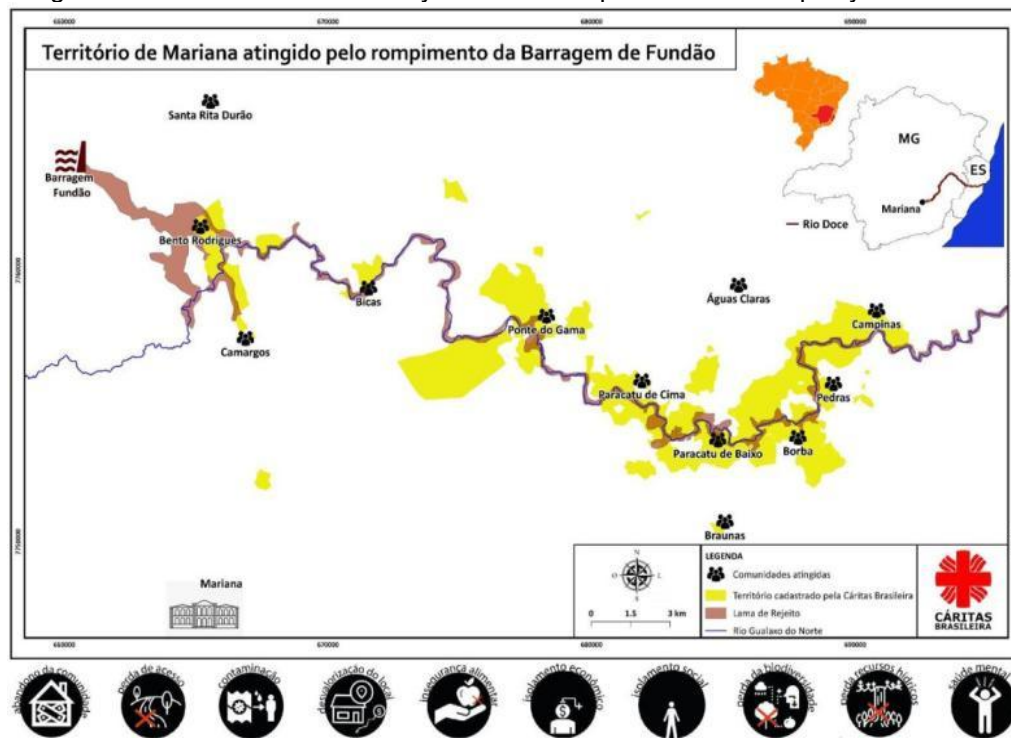
The collapse generated irreparable and ongoing damage in Mariana, affecting localities such as Bento Rodrigues, Borba, Bicas/Camargos, Campinas, Paracatu de Baixo, among others. The impacts include the destruction of permanent preservation areas, the loss of productive land for subsistence, restrictions on fishing, the death of aquatic fauna and domestic animals, as well as changes in the ways of life of rural communities. Urban infrastructure and housing were also destroyed; there were difficulties in the supply of electricity, the expulsion and isolation of communities, the prevention of artisanal miners from resuming their activities, changes in the quality and quantity of available water, and physical and mental health problems among the affected population.



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Figure 1: Communities affected by the dam collapse in the municipality of Mariana.



Source: Itabaiana, 2020.

The model of exploitation adopted in Minas Gerais and the dam collapses (Mariana in 2015 and subsequently Brumadinho in 2019) highlight the presence of environmental racism in the territories where large-scale mining projects are established. According to Pacheco (2017), environmental racism refers to environmental and social injustices that disproportionately affect ethnic-racial groups in situations of greater vulnerability, marked by color, race, or social belonging. These groups, often vulnerable and with low political representation, face multiple barriers to having their fundamental rights recognized and guaranteed, even in the face of large-scale disasters.

In view of this, it is essential to relate the location of mining structures, such as tailings dams, to the territories historically occupied by these communities, recognizing the selective and discriminatory nature of the socio-environmental impacts. Although Brazil is characterized by a mixed-race



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population, inequalities in the treatment afforded to different social groups remain profound and persistent. Several examples illustrate how these populations are systematically affected by actions that further weaken their territories and rights, such as the absence of effective oversight of dam safety, the flexibilization of environmental regulations, the exclusion of communities from decisions that affect their territories, the overloading of dam structures, and recurring violations of human rights and the rights of nature across multiple dimensions.

Figure 2: Distribution of the population by race/color in affected communities by the Fundão dam collapse.

Locality	Household Situation	Total Population	Race / Color					Proportion Browns/ Blacks
			White	Yellow	Black	Brown	Indigenous	
Bento Rodrigues Village*	Rural	492	76	2	80	335	-	84,3
Santa Rita Durão District	Total	1.956	323	72	196	1.365	-	79,8
	Urban	1.456	246	70	115	1.025	-	78,3
	Rural	500	77	2	81	340	-	84,2
Paracatu de Baixo Village*	Rural	300	59	-	29	211	1	80,0
Monsenhor Horta District	Total	1.740	317	17	327	1.072	7	80,4
	Urban	1.319	234	17	286	776	6	80,5
	Rural	421	83	-	41	296	1	80,0
Mariana Municipality (MG)	Total	54.219	16.340	1.279	9.874	26.593	133	67,3
	Urban	47.642	14.997	1.188	8.384	22.949	124	65,8
	Rural	6.577	1.343	91	1.490	3.644	9	78,1

Source: (Instituto Brasileiro De Geografia E Estatística, 2015 *apud* Milanez *et al.*, 2015) (modified).

The analysis of the data presented in Figure 2 reveals that the Black population was disproportionately affected by the impacts of the dam collapse. In Bento Rodrigues, located approximately 6 km from the dam, around 84% of the residents were Black. Paracatu de Baixo, another community devastated by the tailings mud and located approximately 40 km from the collapse site, also had a predominantly Black population (80%). These data indicate not only the asymmetry in the distribution of socio-environmental risks, but also the reproduction of a logic of environmental racism. The forced deterritorialization of



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these communities, with the compulsory displacement of hundreds of families, entailed the violation of the right to remain, to housing, and to territorial belonging. In addition, it resulted in the disruption of community ties and weakened the continuity of cultural and heritage expressions deeply rooted in the daily life of these territories.

This panorama shows that neo-extractivism, although an heir to the colonial appropriation of nature in Latin America, is currently intensifying under neoliberal logic, deepening the commodification of territories and the dispossession of local populations. The Fundão dam disaster is a clear expression of this dynamic, in which transnational capital imposes a productivist and extractive logic that causes profound material and symbolic ruptures. More than an environmental tragedy, this event exposes the structural relations of power and exclusion that permeate neo-extractivism, manifesting systematic processes of deterritorialization and violation of social, economic, cultural, and territorial rights, especially those of Black and vulnerable populations, highlighting the intersection between environmental racism and socio-environmental injustice.

The forced displacement caused by the dam collapse severed territorial ties, disrupted ways of life, and dismantled community networks, imposing suffering that transcends material losses and directly impacts the symbolic, identity-related, and affective dimensions of the affected communities. The tragedy, marked by environmental, territorial, and racial violence, demonstrates how the neo-extractivist model operates through processes that render populations invisible. In this context, it is essential to deepen the analysis of the involuntary resettlements carried out after the socio-environmental disaster, understanding how these new territories were organized and what continuities and ruptures they imposed on ways of life and popular territorialities.



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INVOLUNTARY RESETTLEMENTS AND VIOLATION OF TERRITORIALITIES

The abrupt and prolonged transition to the urban environment imposed challenges on the affected families, since it compromised not only their material conditions of existence, but also the symbolic foundations that sustain their ways of life. The forced migration to the municipal seat of Mariana and other cities disrupted networks of solidarity, kinship and neighborhood ties, as well as historically constructed socio-territorial practices. Data from the Independent Technical Advisory Office of Cáritas Brasileira Regional Minas Gerais (2022) indicate that only 395 families remained in the rural area, while 947 were expelled to the urban area, being compelled to forcibly adapt to the codes and dynamics of city life. The loss of the defining characteristics of the territories of origin proved profound: approximately 85% of the families migrated, experiencing the rupture of their ties with the land, nature, and references of belonging, which severely compromised their processes of social reproduction, access to adequate housing, and sense of territorial security.

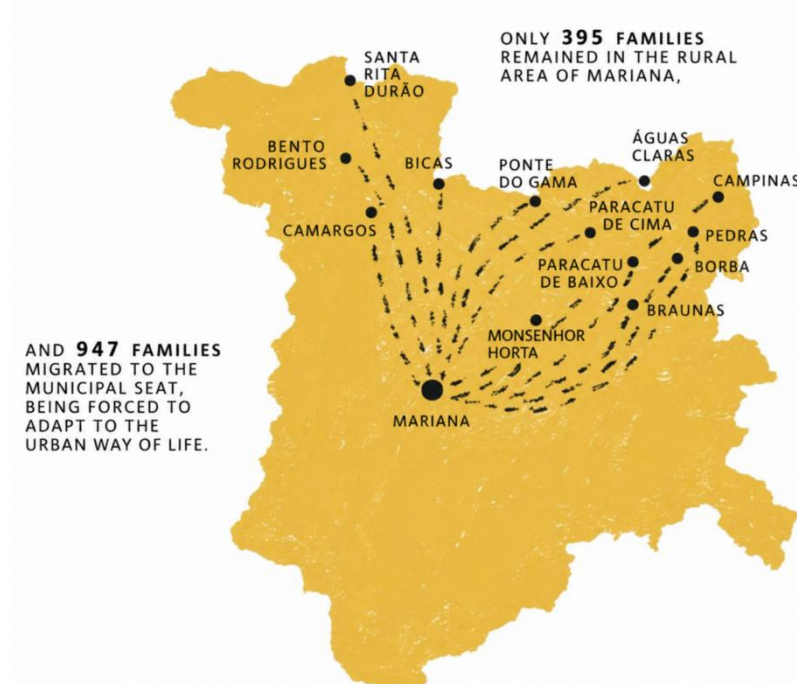
In the process of repairing the right to housing in Mariana, different modalities were established: (i) family resettlement, aimed at the construction of individual homes in locations chosen by the families; (ii) monetary compensation, as compensation for damages; (iii) collective resettlement, intended for the establishment of entire communities such as Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, aiming to preserve economic, cultural, and social ties; and (iv) partial reconstruction, for properties that suffered non-total damage, remaining in their original territories⁶.

⁶ For more information on the modalities of reparation of the right to housing in the territory of Mariana, consult the hearing minutes of cases no. 0400.17.004149-7 and no. 0400.15.004335-6 (Minas Gerais, 2018).



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Figure 3: Involuntary displacement of affected families in Mariana.



Source: Cáritas Brasileira Regional Minas Gerais, 2022.

However, the implementation of these modalities was marked by several violations, largely resulting from the absence of a specific federal legal framework for involuntary resettlements in Brazil, which generates profound legal uncertainty. This regulatory gap facilitates the imposition of technocratic and bureaucratic solutions that neglect the rights and needs of the affected populations. Furthermore, these processes are often guided by international guidelines, such as the World Bank's OP 4.12 (2001), which, although serving as a reference, are applied uncritically and without the necessary adaptation to Brazilian socio-territorial specificities. Such a scenario may favor the perpetuation of a reparation model based on financial interests.



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Figure 4: Territories of Origin and Involuntary Resettlements of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu.



Source: Rodrigues, 2018.

In the collective involuntary resettlements of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, the judicially approved guidelines⁷ were not fully respected. The areas chosen for the construction of the new communities present adverse geographical characteristics, such as steep terrain and unstable slopes, which make cultivation and direct contact with the land unfeasible, as well as a lack of raw water⁸ for a significant portion of the properties, elements that are fundamental to the reproduction of traditional ways of life. Furthermore, the

⁷ As a result of the damage caused in Mariana, the Public Prosecutor's Office of Minas Gerais filed Public Civil Action No. 0400.15.004335-6, which resulted in agreements establishing dozens of guidelines to ensure reparation of the right to housing, requiring that the new properties have conditions equal to or better than the previous ones. Among these guidelines are the maintenance of neighborhood relations, the preservation of the spatial characteristics of the communities, the guarantee of access to water in adequate quantity and quality, respect for family composition, and the effective participation of affected families in all stages of the process (Brasil, 2018).

⁸ Raw water is defined as water collected directly from natural sources, such as rivers, springs, or reservoirs, without any type of prior treatment. It may contain physical, chemical, or biological contaminants and is commonly used by rural and traditional communities for irrigation, watering animals, and other daily activities.



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disconnect between the agreed-upon projects and the works carried out intensified the sense of imposition and disregard for collective decisions.

There were several delays in the resettlement works, and to date some people have still not been recognized as affected persons entitled to collective resettlement. Not all of them have been able to move out of temporary housing, and some families are still in the development or construction stages of their new homes. As Cáritas (2021) highlights, the delays in the construction of the houses and in the preparation of the land stem directly from the Assistance Policy adopted by the Renova Foundation⁹ throughout the reparation process. Even before construction began, unjustifiable delays could already be observed in stages such as: negotiation and acquisition of land, conducting legal and environmental studies, preparation and review of urban and architectural projects, as well as failure to meet the deadlines established in agreements with public authorities.

Figure 5: Bento Rodrigues – territory of origin



Source: Soares; Bonduki, 2024.

Figura 6: Collective resettlement of Bento Rodrigues.



Source: Macaca Filmes *apud* Henrique, 2024.

⁹ A nonprofit entity created in 2016 to coordinate and carry out actions to repair the damage caused by the collapse of the Fundão dam in Mariana (MG). With the new repactuation agreement signed between Samarco, Vale, BHP Billiton, and public institutions (2024), the dissolution of the Renova Foundation and the creation of new structures to conduct the reparation process were established.



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Figure 7: Paracatu de Baixo – territory of origin



Source: Acervo Conterra, s.d.

Figura 8: Collective resettlement of Paracatu



Source: Macaca Filmes *apud* Henrique, 2024.

The standardization of housing, resulting from a neoliberal logic of reparation management, produced homogeneous and depersonalized spaces that resemble urban condominiums. The high building density, the excess of impermeable areas, and accessibility limitations compromise the use of spaces, mobility, and community ties, intensifying deterritorialization. As a resident of Bento Rodrigues reports:

And, when we chose, we had drawn where everything would be, and when the Renova Foundation began the construction works, it was already completely different from what we had planned [...]. When people arrive, they see that it really draws attention, right... because of the colors, right... each one a different color, bright colors, and these buildings today, right, always two stories, so they draw a lot of attention. It is as if the house were very large, much larger than the one we had, but that is not the case. Most people were left without land, because the land that remained is steep, there is no way to plant, right... there is no way to restore the ways of life, because we were used to flat land, with a backyard, contact with the land, vegetables, greens, all of that, fruits, and the vast majority today will not have that. [...]. The rooms are very small, although the Renova Foundation says that everything is according to the family's wishes, but we participate, yet our questions and our wishes are not taken into consideration (Interview with Mrs. M. S. Soares; Bonduki, 2022, pp. 23-24).

The testimony of Mrs. Maria Imaculada da Silva from Paracatu de Baixo, in turn, expresses indignation and profound dismay at the new housing conditions, which represent not only a physical but also a symbolic and emotional



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rupture in relation to the original territory. According to her, the restored housing has irregular and steep plots, reduced dimensions, and lacks the minimum infrastructure necessary for the continuation of everyday practices that were previously fundamental, such as raising large animals, cultivating vegetable gardens, and using a wood-burning stove with a water-heating coil, central elements of the rural way of life and the community's territorial rootedness.

The bedrooms are this size, nothing fits, the land is all irregular. You know the land I have there, look at the land they gave me here. How am I going to put a dog there, the chicken coop up there, where is the water going to fall? At the kitchen door. My outrage is very great [...]. In my house, in Paracatu, I have had a kitchen with a wood-burning stove with a water-heating coil for years, I raised 13 children there, the size of the bathroom I have there [...]. And here, I will not even have land to plant, I have six dogs in Paracatu and a female dog in Mariana that cannot stay near the others, where am I going to put her here? This makes me sad [...]. When the mud came through, I had a little house there in Paracatu with 80 chickens that I raised there. Today, what do I have? Nothing. I was the last person to leave Paracatu, they went there and convinced me to leave, to go to Mariana, and it was the worst thing I did in my life, leaving my little house to, today, receive this here. I never thought they would do to me what they are doing, no [...]. There on my land, I have everything, fruit, chickens, three fish ponds, a water spring and here, apparently, I will not even have water [...]. (Interview with Mrs. Maria Imaculada da Silva. Da Silva, *et al*., 2023, p. 7).

When comparing the previous dwelling, in the territory of origin, with the new house in the involuntary resettlement, the loss of autonomy and productive spaces becomes evident. The impossibility of keeping domestic animals, growing vegetables, or accessing nature such as springs and wells represents, for many families, the dismantling of an existence collectively built over decades. The situation is aggravated by the perception that there was a breach of trust by the institutions responsible for the resettlement, which promised participation and reparation but delivered standardized, inadequate solutions disconnected from the families' reality. This type of experience demonstrates not only the violation of the right to housing, but also the denial of the right to territoriality, a central dimension for the social reproduction of affected rural communities. It is,



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therefore, a clear example of the corporate control present in the adopted reparation model, in which technical and business decisions override the real demands, knowledge, and ways of life of the affected subjects.

During the work of the Independent Technical Advisory Service in the territory, according to data presented by Conterra (2025), several technical failures were recorded in the new constructions, such as the unilateral replacement of construction materials, pathological manifestations such as cracks, dampness, mold, oxidation of metal elements, as well as structural problems, inadequate finishes, and errors in the positioning of drains. In addition, the construction of buildings on steep slopes caused landslides and geotechnical risks, demonstrating negligence regarding environmental and territorial specificities. In some cases, such as the plots intended for the new clusters in block E of the Bento Rodrigues resettlement, parts of the slopes of the properties do not have adequate access, making essential activities such as accessing the higher areas for cleaning and maintenance unfeasible.

The mining companies offered compensation amounts significantly lower than the actual cost of the homes destroyed by the dam collapse. The proposed amounts do not allow the acquisition of properties with characteristics similar to the original residences. Furthermore, according to Cáritas (2021), the companies disregard aspects that are essential to the families, such as the time invested in building the houses, the historical value of the buildings, favorable topography, proximity to watercourses, the agricultural suitability of the soil, local biodiversity and, above all, the emotional ties with the spaces and the neighborhood. Many families who opted for monetary compensation (cash), with the support of the Technical Advisory Service, report that the choice was mainly due to successive delays in the resettlement works, both collective and family-based. These families prefer to give up the other forms of reparation and receive the amount in cash, even though they are aware that this is financially the least advantageous



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alternative. For them, this decision represents a way to resume the process of rebuilding their lives with greater autonomy and agility.

These violations occur in a broader context. In 2024, a new repactuation agreement was signed between Samarco, Vale, BHP Billiton, and public institutions, without the participation of the affected population, providing for R\$170 billion in reparation actions. However, the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) denounces that the amounts are insufficient and that the companies imposed their interests throughout the process, favored by long deadlines and by the now-defunct Renova Foundation, which was criticized for inefficiency and the political management of its resources (Wilker, 2024). The disaster affected multiple fundamental rights: in addition to housing, it compromised access to water, food, sanitation, and health. The contamination of springs and soil, combined with the destruction of productive backyards, generated water and food insecurity. The loss of territory disrupted cultural practices and solidarity networks, profoundly affecting autonomy, dignity, and community ties.

According to Acseirad (2010), the notion of environmental justice emerges as a response to the connections between social inequalities and environmental degradation, requiring that reparation take into account the territorial and collective rights of the affected populations. However, the case of Mariana reveals that involuntary collective resettlements were treated not as a comprehensive restitution of rights, but as a technocratic process guided by corporate interests and disconnected from the socioterritorial realities of the affected population. Thus, these processes must be understood as an expression of the territorial violence promoted by the mining model. By disrupting practices and ways of life, a new form of exclusion is imposed that compromises the permanence and reproduction of the affected territorialities.



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In view of the series of violations associated with the resettlements, the consolidation of a new dynamic of territorial violence becomes evident, in which the restitution of the right to housing was conducted according to market-driven logics. The standardization of housing and urban planning solutions compromised social networks and historically consolidated forms of land use and occupation, deepening processes of deterritorialization and exclusion. Even in the face of these ruptures, the affected communities continue to mobilize forms of resistance, both in the territories of origin and in the new territorialities forged in the resettlements, through struggles and confrontations with the hegemonic model, reaffirming memories, subjective dimensions of belonging, and cultural practices that express territorial rootedness. It is therefore necessary to analyze how cultural heritage, collective memory, and traditional ways of life constitute not only symbolic elements of community identities, but also concrete strategies for territorial reconstruction and the struggle for socio-environmental justice.

CULTURAL HERITAGE, MEMORY AND BELONGING

Territory must be understood as a space lived and experienced on a daily basis, where affections, memories, and human vulnerabilities intertwine (Santos, 2007). Furthermore, it constitutes a locus of resistance, in which creative forms of sociability and strategies for confronting the structural violence affecting communities in situations of vulnerability emerge (Svampa, 2019). Territory, therefore, transcends its merely physical or geographical function, constituting a symbolic and material field from which subjects build bonds, reaffirm identities, and produce meanings for their existences (Guattari; Rolnik, 2011).

This understanding is fundamental to comprehending the dynamics experienced by the communities of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo. The territorial constitution in these places resulted from a continuous process of social, cultural, and affective relations, through which residents appropriated



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spaces, whether concrete or symbolic, attributing meanings that express their historicity and their own ways of being in the world (Raffestin, 1993). It is a territoriality built over generations, which does not automatically dissolve with physical displacement and persists even in the face of the material rupture imposed by the dam collapse. In the territories of origin, this appropriation continues to manifest itself in rituals, celebrations, memories, and persistent bonds that reaffirm the communities' belonging to their roots.

Among the expressions of territorial continuity, religious and cultural practices that collectively reaffirm belonging stand out. Traditional festivities are part of this movement of resistance, renewing the presence of populations in their territories of origin and reinforcing their historical ties. Direct observation of the festivities in the affected territories reveals how these practices evoke collective memories and keep active the community network built over generations. Even in the face of physical destruction, these gatherings sustain the symbolic dimension of social life, resignifying space and strengthening the struggle for recognition of its historical importance.

In this sense, the notion of intangible cultural heritage, as described by Unesco (2006), encompasses practices, expressions, knowledge, and techniques, as well as the associated objects and spaces, provided that they are recognized by communities as an integral part of their cultural heritage. This heritage manifests itself, above all, in oral traditions, religious celebrations, rituals, artistic expressions, knowledge about nature, and craft techniques, and is fundamental to the continuity of collective life and the social identity of groups.

Despite the profound impacts on the territories and ways of life, these communities continue to practice and value their intangible heritage. They celebrate their patron saints, hold festivities, use traditional cemeteries for burials, and resume, whenever possible, the symbolic occupation of their territories of origin. Figures 09 and 10 illustrate, respectively, the procession in honor of Saint



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Benedict in Bento Rodrigues and the Folia de Reis in Paracatu de Baixo, manifestations that resist the cultural erasure promoted by forced displacement.

Figure 9: Procession in Honor of Saint Benedict - Bento Rodrigues.



Source: Cáritas Brasileira Regional MG, 2024.

Figure 10: Folia de Reis - Paracatu de Baixo.



Source: Arquidiocese de Mariana, 2024.

These practices demonstrate that cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, constitutes a living dimension of popular territorialities, whose continuity persists even in contexts of rupture and violence. In this regard, Tornatore (2010) proposes the notion of “sensitive heritage,” understood as a legacy constructed through affections, everyday gestures, and bonds with the territory. Such a legacy materializes in resistance to symbolic and material erasure, sustained by faith, memory, and community ties.

In conjunction with this perspective, Maciel, Passos and Costa (2024) analyze initiatives for the heritagization of the affected territories of origin in Mariana and highlight the lack of qualified listening and dialogue with communities regarding the effects of these actions. The lack of effective participation by the affected people can transform heritage into a tool of exclusion, emptying it of its reparative potential. Thus, safeguarding memories requires communities to take a leading role in defining the future of these territories, recognizing their historical relationship with the spaces and linking their preservation to the comprehensive reparation of violated rights.



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In the involuntary collective resettlements of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, in turn, multiple factors of rupture with traditional ways of living can be identified, widely recognized by the affected populations themselves throughout the process of constructing the new territories. Among the main problems, as previously highlighted, is the lack of equal access to raw water, which directly compromises practices essential to rural life, such as agroecological cultivation, food autonomy, animal husbandry, and the use of productive backyards. These elements are fundamental to the preservation of knowledge, productive routines, and traditional forms of relationship with the land.

Added to this material and functional loss is the imposition of technical urban planning criteria, which create artificial divisions between urban zones and rural areas, generating a new fragmentation in the community fabric. This model of territorial organization reinforces a scenario of “managed insecurity” (Scott, 2009), in which families’ autonomy is gradually replaced by standardized institutional norms, deepening the social vulnerability already aggravated by the experience of the dam collapse.

In addition to these limitations, there is a weakening of the everyday dynamics of coexistence that previously structured community sociability. Families, now arranged on regular plots and frequently surrounded by walls, experience greater individualization in the use of domestic space and less interaction with neighbors. Children’s circulation through the streets has become less frequent, and open spaces, which in the territories of origin functioned as areas for leisure, gathering, and sharing, have become underused or emptied of meaning in the resettlements. This new urban arrangement, although formally planned, does not restore the symbolic and affective ties of the former territorialities, disrupting circuits of sociability and belonging. As a consequence, the senses of community that sustained traditional ways of life progressively



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weaken, generating profound impacts on the social and cultural reproduction of the resettled communities.

Some of the traditional festivities were resumed in the involuntary resettlements, although in a manner quite different from how they were experienced in the territories of origin. The slowness of the reparation process and the delivery of the new homes meant that part of the affected population, including prominent community leaders, died before getting to know and inhabit the new territory. In addition, part of the population refused resettlement and opted for monetary compensation, as previously mentioned. Others did not identify with the new territory and ended up putting their properties up for sale. These processes resulted in the fragmentation of community experiences and the weakening of collective expressions.

Marc Augé (2012) distinguishes “place,” marked by history, identity, and social relations, from “non-place,” an impersonal space without community ties. The territories of origin of the affected families were places where community relations had consolidated over time. The resettlements, however, were designed without considering the cultural and social specificities of the residents. For this reason, they tend to become non-places: spaces devoid of identity, memory, and belonging.

In this context, compulsory resettlements failed to restore the symbolic, social, and material conditions that sustained the daily life of the communities. The new territorialities caused ruptures in relations with the territory, compromising the affective and collective bonds built over generations. Although each experience is unique, they reveal a recurring pattern of violations in mining contexts in Brazil. Other cases will be examined below, with the aim of identifying regularities in the processes of deterritorialization, invisibilization, and weakening of community ways of life among affected populations.



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REGIONAL PATTERNS OF VIOLATION

Experiences of involuntary resettlement in different regions of Brazil reveal systematic patterns of violation that directly relate to the cases observed in Mariana/MG. Such patterns involve, above all, the disruption of popular territorialities, the imposition of standardized housing solutions, and the denial of fundamental rights, such as access to adequate housing, territory, and the reproduction of traditional everyday practices. These processes, as evidenced in the resettlements of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, are embedded in a broader logic of corporate control and technocratic management of reparation.

In the Minas-Rio Project, located in the municipalities of Conceição do Mato Dentro and Alvorada de Minas (MG), entire families from communities such as Água Santa and Ferrugem/Mumbuca were displaced and resettled in rural areas such as Fazenda Piraquara (Conceição do Mato Dentro) and Fazenda Simão Lavrinha (Congonhas do Norte). These collective resettlements disregarded local ways of life and imposed a new territorial configuration. Several problems were identified in the socio-environmental assessment published by the independent advisory organization NACAB (2023). The designated plots, measuring approximately three hectares, did not respect the size of the original properties or productive practices. Territories previously surrounded by forests and water resources, such as springs, rivers, and streams, were replaced by pasture areas with low-fertility soils and severe water scarcity, both in quantity and quality. Furthermore, the resettlements lack essential public facilities, such as schools and health centers, and do not have community spaces for religious and cultural manifestations, causing the depletion of social life and the weakening of community ties. Added to this is the standardization of housing, often inadequate to the needs of families, with fragile structures that exhibit various pathological manifestations in construction.



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Figure 11: Rural resettlement Fazenda Piraquara - Conceição do Mato Dentro/MG.



Source: Filgueiras, 2025.

The construction of the Irapé Hydroelectric Power Plant, inaugurated in 2006, also led to compulsory displacements, profoundly altering the territorial dynamics of the Jequitinhonha Valley. Approximately 1,200 families were removed, of which 632 were resettled on properties acquired in municipalities in northern Minas Gerais (Azevedo, 2019). The compensation model adopted was based on the logic of “land for land” and “house for house,” including compensation for improvements (crops, chicken coops, corrals, etc.), as negotiated between CEMIG and the affected population (CEMIG, 2005). However, approximately 40% of these families were relocated to places significantly distant from their original lands, often seeking more fertile soils but, at the same time, moving away from the Jequitinhonha River (Azevedo, 2019).

Figure 12: Resettlement of the Peixe Cru community, in the municipality of Turmalina - Vale do Jequitinhonha.



Source: Freitas, 2014.



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A study by Pereira (2012), which analyzed six resettlements, four of them located in municipalities different from the municipality of origin, including three outside the Jequitinhonha Valley, revealed socioemotional impacts even five years after displacement. The families reported missing their former adobe houses, with large wood-burning stoves, productive backyards, and structures that ensured food security, as well as community interaction and leisure activities connected to the local landscape. In contrast, the new plots had standardized houses and land without minimum infrastructure, such as vegetable gardens, orchards, granaries, mills, or pigsties, and lacked the neighborhood networks that ensured mutual support and security. It is evident that the resettlements were planned from the entrepreneur's perspective, ignoring the specificities of the ways of life of the affected communities. Even so, CEMIG presented the resettlements as advances, highlighting the provision of masonry housing with basic infrastructure (water, electricity, and access roads), despite widespread dissatisfaction.

In Pará, the construction of the Belo Monte Power Plant caused the deterritorialization of approximately 40,000 people, promoting profound socio-spatial transformations. Many families were transferred to standardized housing developments or received compensation that did not enable them to maintain their ways of life. Even though the precarious conditions were visible, Norte Energia presented the resettlements as advances, concealing the real losses experienced by those affected. The consortium responsible for the project comprises state-owned companies, pension funds, and private companies, which highlights the economic interests that prevailed over the rights of the populations (MAB, 2016).



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Figure 13: Collective urban resettlement intended for families resettled as a result of the construction of the Belo Monte Power Plant.



Source: Antunes *et al.*, 2025 (Fotograph: Lilo Clareto).

The policies adopted ignored traditional ways of life, especially those of populations that depended on rural or urban territories for their productive and cultural activities. Forced to choose among limited options, many families lost their material bases of subsistence. The compensation payments were insufficient for the acquisition of adequate land, resulting in indebtedness, forced migration, and precarious insertion into the informal market. Urban resettlements, moreover, presented structural failures and a lack of basic services, particularly affecting women, who lost their work, support, and income-generation networks (Estronioli; Paulino, 2015). Thus, measures that should have mitigated the damage ended up deepening the social and economic vulnerability of the affected communities.

These parallels strengthen a critical interpretation of the case of Mariana (MG) as an expression of a recurring pattern of territorial violence associated with the implementation of large-scale projects. It is a development model that imposes projects on territories without effective dialogue with communities, operating through mechanisms of coercion. Reparation processes, when they exist, are conducted according to an economicist logic that is profoundly disconnected from the socioterritorial, cultural, and symbolic realities of the



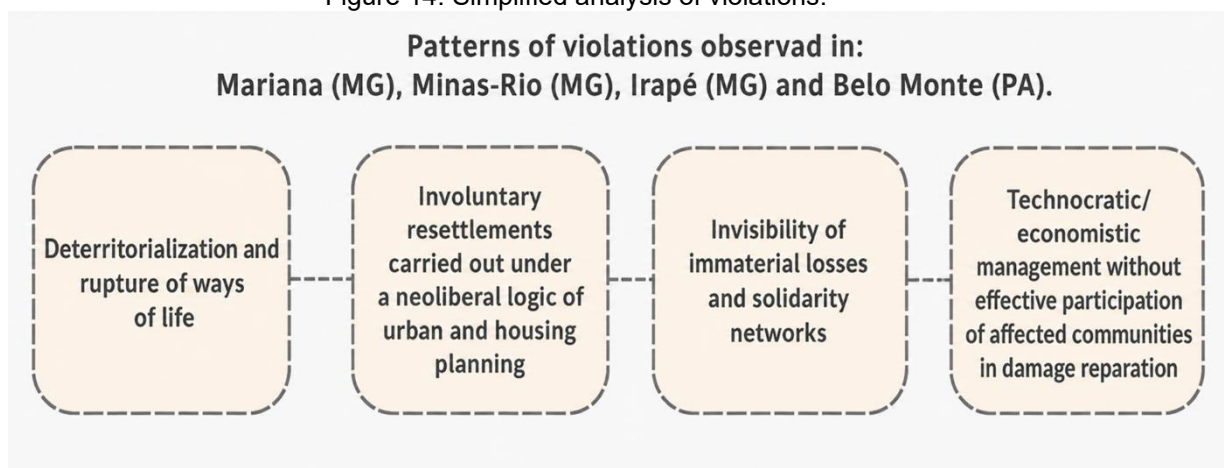
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affected populations. The similarities among the cases analyzed reveal that involuntary resettlements and forced displacement processes are not isolated exceptions, but constitute a systematic policy of territorial management guided by corporate interests, to the detriment of socio-environmental justice, the self-determination of peoples, and comprehensive reparation.

The objective of this article, therefore, is not to exhaust the analysis of these processes, which involve complex and multidimensional dynamics, marked by numerous rights violations and local specificities. Rather, it seeks to highlight the existence of structural elements and recurring patterns in the operations of large-scale projects in different territorial contexts. The forced displacement imposed by these projects causes the rupture of historical ways of inhabiting and producing life, disrupting territorialities constructed through the collective appropriation of space and the continuous relationship with nature, which are fundamental to the physical, economic, social, and symbolic reproduction of communities.

Figure 14: Simplified analysis of violations.



Source: Elaborated by authors.

The violations observed in the cases of Irapé, Minas-Rio, and Belo Monte not only resemble those experienced in Mariana, but also reinforce the existence of a hegemonic model of deterritorialization. In this model, the loss of material



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assets is accompanied by the invisibilization of immaterial losses, such as culture, symbolisms, memories embedded in lived space, solidarity networks, and the relationship with nature, which are fundamental to community life and territorial rootedness. As Ostrom (1990) states, the reproduction of communities depends directly on the collective management of common-pool resources, which have been systematically disrupted by these development projects.

In practice, involuntary displacement processes have been reduced to financial compensation, territorial exchanges in different areas, or collective resettlements conducted, for the most part, without the effective participation of the affected communities. Although intended to repair the damage, these measures rarely do so comprehensively. In addition to undervaluing land and failing to fully restore material assets, such as housing, improvements, public facilities, and spaces for collective use, resettlements disregard immaterial losses, such as cultural traditions, neighborhood ties, and affective memories, generating profound impacts that go beyond the financial dimension and leave lasting marks on the affected communities.

PARTIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The compulsory resettlement processes promoted by large-scale projects, especially in the mining sector, constitute systematic mechanisms of deterritorialization and rights violations, marked by an authoritarian and technocratic logic of reparation management. The case of Mariana/MG, taken as the central axis of the reflection, reveals how the imposition of neoliberal architectural and urban planning models, the absence of effective participation by affected communities, and the disregard for the immaterial dimensions of life in the territories result in the denial of the right to housing and the sociocultural reproduction of populations.



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By correlating this case with similar experiences in the Minas-Rio Project, the Irapé Hydroelectric Power Plant, and Belo Monte, it was possible to identify, albeit briefly, a recurring pattern of territorial violence, in which reparation processes are guided by economistic and simplified criteria, centered on financial compensation, land exchanges, and standardized construction. Such solutions, by ignoring traditional ways of life, cultural diversity, and collective forms of territorial appropriation, deepen the social vulnerability of affected communities.

In addition to material losses, compulsory resettlements cause profound impacts on social networks, affective ties forged in the territory, ancestral knowledge, and the productive autonomy of families, elements that are fundamental to socio-environmental justice. The erasure of these dimensions reveals a hegemonic model of development that subordinates human rights and the rights of nature to corporate interests and the extractivist logic.

Therefore, it is urgent to rethink reparation policies in contexts of impact, taking as a reference the centrality of the affected victims, respect for historically constructed territorialities, and recognition of the multiple dimensions that comprise the right to housing. This implies adopting truly participatory, intersectoral, and culturally sensitive processes, in order to pursue more forcefully comprehensive and emancipatory reparations that not only mitigate damage but also contribute to rebuilding lives with dignity, belonging, and justice.

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