

Memory Tourism as a Social Practice of Remembrance of Sensitive Heritage: possibilities for the preservation of the memory of Bento Rodrigues, Minas Gerais

Turismo de memória enquanto prática social de rememoração dos patrimônios sensíveis: possibilidades para a preservação da memória de Bento Rodrigues, Minas Gerais

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RESUMO

A emergência de novas perspectivas sobre o patrimônio tem suas raízes nos acontecimentos do século XX. As vivências das ditaduras cívico-militares, o Holocausto, os crimes coloniais e os impactos das bombas atômicas em Hiroshima e Nagasaki impuseram à sociedade contemporânea a demanda e o desafio de transformar locais associados a eventos traumáticos em espaços de memória e turismo. Essa transformação visa alertar e politizar a sociedade, além de buscar justiça memorial às vítimas desses eventos. Nesse contexto, este estudo se concentra em um dos maiores crimes socioambientais recentes do Brasil: a queda da barragem do Fundão, em 5 de novembro de 2015, no subdistrito de Bento Rodrigues, localizado no distrito de Santa Rita Durão em Mariana, MG. Por meio de revisão bibliográfica e pesquisa documental do

Dossiê de Tombamento de Bento Rodrigues e as 80 edições do jornal 'A Sirene', este artigo busca compreender se a modalidade de turismo de memória pode contribuir com a narrativa das vítimas, especialmente no que tange à consciência política social, compreendendo ainda as possibilidades de preservação dos vestígios arqueológicos a partir das práticas comunitárias como o Museu das Remoções no Rio de Janeiro em contraponto às propostas verticalizadas de preservação do patrimônio para o contexto de desterritorialização da comunidade de Bento Rodrigues. O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio da Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais – (FAPEMIG) – Chamada 013/2023 - Participação coletiva em eventos de caráter científico no país e faz parte projeto PIBIC/CNPQ-2024/25-DETUR. Agradecemos ao PPGTURPATRI e à UFOP.

Palavras-chave: Turismo de Memória; patrimônios sensíveis; identidade; memória; Bento Rodrigues.

ABSTRACT

The emergence of new perspectives on heritage has its roots in the events of the 20th century. The experiences of civic-military dictatorships, the Holocaust, colonial crimes, and the impacts of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki imposed on contemporary society the demand and challenge of transforming places associated with traumatic events into spaces of memory and tourism. This transformation aims to raise awareness and politicize society, while also seeking memorial justice for the victims of these events. In this context, this study focuses on one of the most significant socio-environmental crimes in recent Brazilian history: the collapse of the Fundão dam on November 5, 2015, in the subdistrict of Bento Rodrigues, located in the district of Santa Rita Durão in Mariana, MG. Through a bibliographic review and documentary research on the Bento Rodrigues Heritage Dossier and the 80 editions of the newspaper Sirene, this article seeks to understand whether the memory tourism modality can contribute to the victims' narrative, especially regarding social political awareness, while also exploring the possibilities of preserving archaeological remnants through community practices, such as the Museum of Removals in Rio de Janeiro, in contrast to top-down heritage preservation proposals in the context of Bento Rodrigues' community displacement. This work was carried out with the support of the Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation (FAPEMIG) – Call 013/2023 – Collective participation in scientific events in the country and is part of the PIBIC/CNPq-2024/25-DETUR project. We thank PPGTURPATRI and UFOP.

Keywords: Memory Tourism; sensitive heritage; identity; memory; Bento Rodrigues.



1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of sensitive heritage is deeply connected to the new contemporary concepts of heritage (Sampaio, Carsalade & Pessoa, 2023). Terms such as “heritage of suffering”, “heritage of pain” and “dissonant heritage” are also correlated. These “new heritage”, being highlighted by Poulot (2012), are associated to historical sites marked by pain and suffering, frequently related to traumatic events.

Historically, the concept of heritage has been linked to the reminiscent of heroic moments, aiming at the construction of a national identity. However, the important events of the 20th. century, which resulted in mass deaths, have boosted a broader reflection on the atrocities committed by human beings against other human beings. Within such context, technological advances and the globalization have contributed to expose globally arbitrariness committed by specific governments and groups, as well as systematic violations to human rights. Such happenings demanded an answer from the international community leading to the creation of UNESCO in 1946, a post-war organization with the mission to promote peace through educational and cultural initiatives (Marchi, 2019).

Among the actions of UNESCO, a List of World Heritage is highlighted, since it introduces the idea of heritage to be preserved by all humanity, broadening, therefore, the concept of heritage beyond the nationalist narratives. Such list includes categorized sites such as sensitive heritage, such as the Island of Gorée, in Senegal (1978), the concentration camps in Auschwitz-Birkenau (1979), the Atomic Bomb Cathedral in Hiroshima (1996), Robben Island, in South Africa (1999), and the Valongo Wharf, in Brazil, recognized in 2017 due to its importance to the memory of slavery and to the black community (Lima, 2018). Such locations broaden the possibilities of dialogue and learning, allowing the visitors to reflect on the pain and the history through the awareness. Examples such as the Resistance Memorial in São Paulo (Ogawa & Moreira, 2020), and the Madness Museum in Barbacena (Pinheiro &



Chimin, 2023), have shown how sensitive heritage may transmit ethical and pedagogical values. Such spaces promote a critical understanding of the past, serving as instruments to education and collective reflection.

In the scope of tourism of memory, after the First World War, the battle fields became places for pilgrimage, marking the beginning of such practice (Vázquez & Cerdan, 2018). On the other hand, in the 1970's, the valuation of the memories and the creation of places associated to the suffering consolidated the tourism of memory as a mechanism of transmission of values and territorial development. Such growing global interest demands interpretation tools that not only explain the historical events, but also engage the visitors in an ethical and meaningful way.

According to Lefort and Chevalier (2021), the tourism of memory operates in a field of tensions, privileging collective accepted memories meanwhile others remain marginalized. In addition, it acts as an active agent in the production and transmission of the narratives, synchronizing them to the demands and the contemporary contexts.

To Sartori (2022), tourism by anchoring itself on the issues regarding the memory without a critical perspective may reinforce relations of power and may contribute to an interpretation of heritage that may not be equivalent to the context within the tourist is involved. On the other hand, to Navajas (2024), the main problem which is inserted in the use of places of traumatic memories by tourism is not translated into commercialization itself, but into the fact that what is commercialized are intangible elements such as democracy, civil rights, justice, among other aspects.

Within such sense, Guixé (2008), quoted by Vázquez (2017), points out that tourism of memory may establish a connection among the places and the present, avoiding superficial approaches or commercialization that trivialize the past. It is essential to maintain a pedagogic guidance that prevents excessive anesthetization of horrors, and a constant surveillance is necessary



to balance the collective memory of suffering with the preservation of the integrity of the spaces (Vázquez & Cerdan, 2018).

In the Brazilian context, the rupture of the Fundão dam, which occurred in 2015 in the sub-district of Bento Rodrigues, Mariana/MG, represents an emblematic example of a large-scale socio-environmental crime, perpetrated by the companies Samarco S.A., Vale S.A., and BHP Billiton. The tragedy caused deep consequences for the community, including issues related to the reparation processes, the forced learning of legal language, the loss of cultural references and homes, as well as the forced displacement of residents, characterized as a process of deterritorialization.

Among the emerging impacts, the emergence of a new identity for the communities stands out: that of 'affected,' a concept that is in constant narrative dispute. On one side, the term is used by the companies from a patrimonial perspective (Vainer, 2008), as cited by Santos (2015), associating 'affected' only with the loss of property or even with the water-related notion, as highlighted by Vainer (2008) quoted by Santos (2015), which the "affected" is the one that suffered losses related to flooding. Such vision, however, does not consider the indirect aspects to neighboring populations, building a reductionist perspective of the damage caused by major enterprises. On the other hand, social movements such as The Movement of the Affected By Dams (MAB), gave new meaning to the term, linking it to the fight for rights and to the collective resistance.

The dam rupture resulted in the release of approximately 50 million cubic meters of mining waste, completely devastating the sub-district, which is now characterized as an archaeological site based on the remaining ruins. This situation challenges heritage preservation initiatives by exposing tensions between memory, identity, and social justice, revealing the complexity of integrating traumatic experiences into contemporary heritage discourse.

In this context, the research aims to analyze the emerging dynamics and tensions in the relationship between the community and the proposals for

heritage preservation of the sub-district's ruins. Through the preparation of the Bento Rodrigues Registration Dossier, which aims to establish a territory museum, and the editions of the newspaper *Sirene* (2016-2022), the study seeks to understand how the submission of this document, perceived by the community as a top-down initiative, highlights the conflicts and challenges arising from the potential heritage designation. Additionally, it discusses how memory tourism can contribute to broadening the communities' narratives about the crime.

2 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research is characterized as qualitative, which, according to González (2020), seeks to describe, interpret, understand, or transform problematic social and educational situations based on the experiences of the social actors involved. The bibliographic review underpinning the investigation covers themes such as sensitive heritage, memory tourism, identity, the concept of 'affected,' and collective memory, essential topics for building the theoretical framework in the fields of tourism and heritage.

For the data collection, the method of Content Analysis was adopted, according to what was proposed by Bardin (2011), which is structured in three phases: 1) Pre-analysis, which implies in the selection and the organization of the materials for the investigation; 2) Exploitation of the material or codification, phase in which relevant parts are coded to organize the content into pertinent themes; and 3) Categorization and 4) analysis, where the codes are grouped into categories, enabling the identification of patterns and allowing an interpretative analysis of the results. According to Bardin (2011), such method enables to identify implicit meanings and structures of sense, essential for the understanding of the complex issues that involve memory and identity of the "affected".

In this research, the pro-analysis involved the selection of two central documentation sources: the Dossier for the Heritage Listing of Bento Rodrigues,



created as part of an extension project linked to the Graduate Program in Built Environment and Sustainable Heritage at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), coordinated by Prof. Dr. Leonardo Castriota and delivered to the community in 2019, along with the first 80 editions of the newspaper *Sirene*. The selection of these 80 editions, covering the period between 2016 and 2022, was made to understand the repercussions following the delivery of the Dossier. The choice of these sources aims to capture the narratives and representations of the territory's memory in the post-collapse context, through a documentary analysis which, according to Junior et al. (2021), seeks to capture, understand, and interpret heterogeneous documents, investigating the context, authorship, authenticity, and reliability of the materials. The documentary analysis is justified by the need to understand the different social layers and power relations reflected in these documents, especially when dealing with issues of memory preservation and territorial identity.

During the codification step, the documents were tabulated and analyzed according to possible tensions and contradictions in the narratives, based on the following pre-defined categories: a) process of heritage listing/preservation; b) reparation processes; and c) accounts of the community's wishes. Complementing the data, photographs of messages left by the community in the territory of Bento Rodrigues after the collapse were included, captured during a technical visit on November 24, 2021, with authorization from local authorities and the Renova Foundation.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

3.1. PROCESSES OF HERITAGE LISTING AND PRESERVATION: THE NARRATIVES OF THE DOSSIER OF BENTO RODRIGUES AND THE NEWSPAPER SIRENE

The Dossier of Heritage Listing of Bento Rodrigues appears as an unfolding of the crime and it is part of a demand from the civil society who accompanied the unraveling of the actions after the crime. From an extension

project coordinated by professor Leonardo Barci Castriota in the Post-graduation Program of Built Environment and Sustainable Heritage from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), the initiative began from the moment when the City Council for Heritage in Mariana (COMPAT), “decided to protect through the institute for heritage listing the remain of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo” (Castriota, 2019, p. 13).

It was a temporary and provisional protection aimed at preventing more extensive destruction. According to Castriota (2019), at that time, and due to the urgency of the preventive action, no specific guidelines or exact object of preservation were established, which justified the elaboration of the Dossier. When addressing the case of Bento Rodrigues, Castriota (2019) emphasizes that preservation needed to be based on values, meaning a non-traditional approach to preservation that was not founded on material conservation. The historical value was no longer in the physical structures, the buildings, the streets, or the houses. Instead, “it would be the very process of transforming that site into a cultural reference for Brazilian society, through which it came to symbolize a significant event in Brazilian history” (Castriota, 2019, p.14).

In this sense, preservation occurs based on the values that society attributes to the object being preserved. This perspective is founded on the Burra Charter, a doctrinal document produced by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1999, which establishes specific procedures for the preservation of cultural heritage, from the characterization of cultural assets to intervention and valuation actions, based on the identification of the values contained in the operation (Castriota, 2019). In line with the guidelines of the Burra Charter, one of the first steps taken by the team responsible for drafting the Dossier was the production of a document known as the Statement of Significance, whose purpose is to describe what a historic place is and why it is important. According to Castriota (2019, p.16), this document can be considered a kind of synthesis that contains all identified categories of value, used as a means to interpret the territory and propose conservation and



management strategies. Furthermore, the author states that the process of assigning value to the Bento Rodrigues site was carried out in close contact with the community, with a preliminary version of the document being presented at the 1st Scientific Symposium of ICOMOS/Brazil, held in April 2017 in Belo Horizonte, and later to the “affected” individuals in Mariana for validation and improvement.

The Dossier then proposes the installation of a territory museum after its protection through heritage listing, which, according to Castriota (2019, p.23), “would allow that site of memory to become a site of conscience, actively confronting what happened there, helping to overcome trauma, and stimulating active reflection on the issues raised by the event.”

According to the Dossier, the activities for its construction were carried out through two focus groups: group 01 in December 2016 and focus group 02 in August 2017. Throughout the document, several excerpts from interviews conducted with the “affected” individuals can be found. However, it is observed that in the document's technical sheet, as well as in the logos of the institutions that participated in its development, there is no mention of the “affected” individuals, nor of Cáritas, which acts as an Independent Technical Assistance for the communities, or even a mention of the participation of the Commission of Those Affected by the Fundão Dam (CABF) or the Loucos por Bento movement, composed of former residents of the sub-district who actively work to preserve its memory.

Figure 1: Technical report

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Source: Dossier of Heritage Listing from Bento Rodrigues. (2019)

Figure 2: Institutions Logo



Source Dossier of Heritage Listing from Bento Rodrigues. (2019)

In this sense, it is inferred here that, the community's participation regarding the category a) heritage processes, appears only as devices to fill in



gaps, such as their vision on how Bento was before the rupture, or the importance of certain places to the community, which does not mean that the construction process has been performed in fact with everyone's participation, once that throughout the dossier there is no registry of the number of participants not even who the participants are, there is only the name "affected", which is also inserted as a problem, once in the Dossier there is the following part:

During the early years of drafting this Dossier, the team chose to refer to the residents of Bento Rodrigues as "affected," respecting the name they themselves adopted or accepted as their own— a term that carried with it a history: the history of the dam collapse, the loss of their belongings, among many other meanings. However, in the last meeting held with the residents of Bento Rodrigues, one of them expressed that she no longer wants to be called "affected" because she does not want to feel "like a marked animal," "just another number," alluding to the possible depersonalization that this term might evoke. Nevertheless, the term "affected" was kept in the Dossier, as it is the most recognized and accepted by the residents of Bento Rodrigues, with the precaution of emphasizing that its use respects each resident's individual identity and does not stem from the homogenizing perspective that must be avoided (Castriota, 2019, p. 14).

This issue arises as, in an attempt to avoid homogenization, such a process ultimately occurs, given that the community is not fully considered in all stages of the Dossier's construction. This overlooks the singularities that define the residents and the collective articulations that could have been established, contributing to a power asymmetry. The Dossier seems to be structured in a top-down manner, using the victims' accounts as a basis for proposing something intrinsically linked to their territorial belonging and a collective traumatic memory.

This process is further aggravated when considering that the entire construction relies on regulations, institutions, and other elements that have little to do with the conditions in which the communities found themselves at that time. Over the years, this has contributed to a process of erasure, as,

despite COMPAT having carried out a preliminary heritage designation, the remainder of the process to officially designate the ruins— as the community wished— remains without updates. According to Silva (2023):

The heritage designation process mobilized by the victims extended over long months without any effective results. It was only in 2018 that the state-level designation of the Chapel of Our Lady of Mercy was approved by Deliberation CONEP 19/2018, on October 17, 2018, and recorded in the Books of Registry II – Fine Arts – and III – Historical, for Historical Works of Art and Paleographic or Bibliographic Documents. [...] As for the municipal designation, nothing has been finalized; it remains under evaluation due to the complexity involved in designating an entire district, which requires extensive discussion. This process reveals power struggles and the question of which authorities have the power to determine what heritage should be protected (Silva, 2023, p. 100).

It was aimed at verifying the processes related to the heritage listing and the construction of the territory's museum, from the editions of the newspaper *Sirene* – a communication vehicle that appears as the principal mean of contact of the affected, who in consequence of the rupture of the dam, had become scattered throughout the neighborhoods of the city of Mariana, which became a challenge to the community that needed to rebuild itself starting from a new reality.

Through the reading of the newspaper editions, which in its early issues report the struggle of those affected throughout the entire reparation process, edition 41, from 2019, features a section entitled "Will we not be heard about the future of our heritage?" in which some questions are raised about the victims' effective participation in the construction of the Dossier. Some statements are relevant to the discussion:

For almost four years, we have been waiting for this heritage listing. However, the proposal, just like the one carried out by IEPHA, was not built in collaboration with the community. These facts are very concerning because, as in so many processes we have experienced so far, they result in new violations of the rights of the affected communities. This heritage listing is a tool to protect the marks left on this territory on



November 5, 2015. But we cannot ignore those who were born and raised in that place. There must be dialogue and respect through their involvement in this process. No one is truly involved when a proposal is constructed behind closed doors. For years, we have discussed the need to carry out heritage education work with the communities, something that has not yet been done. In the past, mining companies decided the future of the communities below their complex without any question of whether they wanted that future. Today, it is the “allies” who are repeating this process—it cannot go on any longer. (Sirene, 2019, p. 11)

We are talking about a proposal that directly addresses the history, memory, and identity of the affected communities—those who gave life to that territory. We are also talking about the largest socio-environmental disaster in this country and one of the biggest mining-related disasters in the world. In other words, today, this territory holds great global significance. However, any discussion about its future cannot ignore its protagonists—a fact that, so far, has been disregarded. Discussions about this future are taking place far from the territory and are being led by people who have never even set foot there. (Sirene, 2019, p. 11)

Based on other editions of the newspaper, which addressed the need to preserve the memory of Bento Rodrigues, it is possible to infer that the issue surrounding the Dossier does not stem from the community's opposition to the creation of a territory museum but rather from their demand for the right to autonomy in decisions regarding preservation. Furthermore, after the Dossier was submitted to the Public Prosecutor's Office, new concerns emerged, such as the fear of losing the territory. According to Maciel (2019), the State and Federal Ministries were negotiating an agreement with the companies responsible for the crime—Samarco, Vale, and BHP Billiton—the Mariana city hall, and the Minas Gerais government to expropriate the properties in the sub-district. According to the draft agreement, the authorities proposed the expropriation and heritage listing of the ruins of Bento Rodrigues to transform it into a territory museum.

"It's a second loss, and this one is even worse because if it happens, we know we will never get it back. And we run a serious risk of not even being able to go there anymore as we do today. For me, this feels even worse



than the day of the collapse itself," confesses Mônica Santos, a member of the Bento Rodrigues Affected People's Committee. (Maciel, 2019, p.1)

In edition 43 from November 2019, there is a timeline highlighting the main achievements of the "affected people" over the first four years since the collapse. In the November 2019 section, the timeline specifically highlights the struggle against expropriation in the month of September:

The affected people mobilize against the proposed TAC (Term of Conduct Adjustment) on heritage, which included the expropriation of the lands destroyed by the companies in Bento Rodrigues. Under pressure, the Public Prosecutor's Office publicly promises that there will be no expropriation until the victims of Samarco's crime have been resettled and that the solution for the territory's future will result from a collective action. (A Sirene, 2019, ed. 43, p. 7)

In this context, as previously discussed, the concept of a territory museum seems distant from the reality of those affected, who, even after nearly nine years, are still waiting for resettlement. It is undeniable that the territory serves as a site of sensitive memory, considering the events that occurred, and the creation of a museum, in the sense of preserving memory, could emerge as an option that would expand the community's narratives. However, the complexity lies in determining to what extent or in what way autonomy in the preservation process would be maintained.

3.2. PROCESSES OF REPAIR, NEW PERSPECTIVES, AND POSSIBILITIES FOR BENTO RODRIGUES

The year after the collapse of the Fundão dam, the mining company Samarco began construction of the S4 dam in the territory of Bento Rodrigues. The company claimed that the project was an emergency measure to contain the tailings, requiring the flooding of an already impacted area.

This episode reinforces the understanding of a deliberate erasure of the crime, considering that the community opposed the measure from the outset. Beyond the submersion of private lands, the S4 dam would also cover the stone



wall that is part of the subdistrict's history, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, and holding significant archaeological value.

It is even possible to deduce that nothing happened by chance and that the construction of the S4 dam is an attempt to put an end to something that began long ago. They started by buying everything around us, leaving us surrounded. We knew who had territorial control of the region. We became an obstacle for the companies, which simply couldn't find a way to buy people's lives [...]. The S4 dam is just one of many strategies the company has been using to exploit Bento as a source of profit. What they truly want is to build a massive tailing dam in the future. (Sirene, p. 16, ed. 7, 2016).

In light of this issue, exploring an alternative approach to the case of Bento Rodrigues aligns with discussions on New Museology, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, later evolving into the disciplinary field of Social Museology/Sociomuseology. These reflections stemmed from the 1972 Quebec Declaration, which emphasizes the construction of a non-normative museology in specific contexts, presenting unique approaches to equally unique problems and, above all, explicitly presupposing political and poetic values (Chagas et al., 2018).

The heated discussions of the 1970s and 1980s about museums arose from a desire to view them as social institutions with political agendas. In Brazil, according to Chagas et al. (2018), three museums can be considered references in the emergence of this new way of creating and thinking about museums: the Museum of Images of the Unconscious, the Museum of the Indian, and the Museum of Black Art. Each, in its own way, seeks to highlight different experiences of creative (de)colonial imagination, diverging from traditional classical museums. Thus, the construction of socially-oriented museums, whose genesis is rooted in the uniqueness of communities in constant struggle and advocacy, begins to adopt a decolonial perspective—one in which heritage preservation is based on autonomy. Transforming how we produce our subjectivities requires conceiving and acting from border epistemologies—distinct ways of naming reality that no longer stem from the



center of the hegemonic paradigm but from the places relegated to the margins (Siqueira, 2020).

The Museum of Removals, an initiative developed by residents, supporters, and friends of Vila Autódromo (RJ), serves as an example of how social museums can transform violent actions—such as those by the Rio de Janeiro city government, or, in Bento Rodrigues' case, the mining companies—into political acts that use destroyed physical spaces as narratives of resistance. In 2016, the Rio de Janeiro city government, catering to the interests of powerful construction companies, decided to remove more than 600 families from Vila Autódromo in the name of big capital and a mega-event: the Olympics (Chagas et al., 2018).

The removal process involved intense struggle, bloodshed, and disputes, culminating in the resistance of 20 families who reinvented new ways of existing in the world. They created the Museum of Removals, founded by a marginalized community that faced the destructive power of public authorities, discovered its own power through resistance, and took on the task and responsibility of telling the story of removals from the victims' perspective. The museum's motto, "*Memory is not removed*," became the foundation of all actions, projects, and initiatives (Chagas et al., 2018, p. 94). Between January and February 2016, a working group was formed to establish the Museum of Removals, using the rubble of demolished houses, documentary records, and the memories of Vila Autódromo (Chagas et al, 2018).

Figure 3: Vila Autódromo. It exists! It resists!





Source: Museum of the Removals. (S/D)

Figure 4: Memory cannot be removed



Source: Museum of the Removals. (S/D)

Based on the events that took place in Vila do Autódromo, the messages left by the community of Bento Rodrigues in their place of origin constitute, in themselves, a collection (Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8) that presents a narrative about the crime, independent of a memory management institution to exist:

Figure 5: So it will never be forgotten



Source: Personal archive (2021)

Figure 6: Samarco wanted to kill us, but Jesus saved us



Source: Personal archive (2021)

Figure 7: This marked our lives



Source: Personal archive (2021)

Figure 8: This territory belongs to the people



Source: Personal archive (2021)

Considering that, over the past nine years, the communities have faced significant difficulties, including lack of access to healthcare, water contamination, excessive dust, misinformation, and other processes of power asymmetry, and that even today the collective resettlement has not been fully

completed, regarding category b) processes of reparation and new possibilities, it is observed that there is an attempt to erase the crime by the very institution that should be repairing the damages caused to the community. Moreover, the territory today has become a space dedicated to resistance against processes of silencing.

3.3. THE COMMUNITY'S WISHES AND THE POSSIBILITIES TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY TOURISM

According to Vázquez (2017), memory tourism is an activity that combines territorial development with the dissemination of a memorial discourse, often stemming from the demands of civil society. Unlike other types of tourism, such as thanatourism and dark tourism, memory tourism primarily aims to transmit ethical values and develops through pedagogical activities designed to encourage visitors to reflect on a given historical event.

In the international context, memory tourism is closely linked to public policy initiatives, fostering memorial discourse through the institutionalization of memory sites to promote economic development in regions outside the framework of highly touristic destinations. However, as Hertzog (2012) points out, it is essential to distinguish between tourism designed exclusively for visitors and tourism that respects the testimonies of those whose territory is tied to a traumatic memory. The concept of memory tourism initially emerged in France, rooted in pilgrimages to battlefields from the First and Second World Wars as a form of tribute and respect for the victims.

In this sense, considering memory tourism for Bento Rodrigues requires an understanding that it is a discourse linked to pain, loss of reference points, and the process of deterritorialization. Visitors must recognize that the space itself represents the consequences of a crime, but it also embodies the community's emotional bond with the destroyed territory. This aligns with Vázquez's (2017) perspective, which emphasizes that the ethical message, as the core of



memory tourism, lies in its ability to counter negationist discourses—such as Holocaust denialism—or to advocate for democratic memory.

A possible approach to this modality, in a pedagogical sense, would be the development of activities such as heritage-focused workshops or sensory tours guided by the residents themselves, aimed at constructing a discourse of resistance—not only centered on pain but, more importantly, on what emerges in the post-disaster context. This process can contribute to greater autonomy in shaping narratives, as individuals, actively engaged in defining what is meaningful to them and what they wish to remember, transform the destroyed space into a site of political struggle.

In 2016, the process of designating Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo as historical sites of Mariana began. According to an excerpt from the newspaper *Sirene*:

Heritage listing is a measure aimed at preserving something of importance to a society, and in our case, it serves two purposes. It will help conserve what remains of the life we had in these places, as even while living in "New Bento" or "New Paracatu," we will continue to use the spaces of Bento and Paracatu as we did in the past. We will still be able to attend churches, swim in the waterfalls, and bury our loved ones—in short, we will decide the purposes of the protected areas. Additionally, the designation will help transform Bento and Paracatu into spaces for tourism and reflection on our history (who we were and who we want to become) and on the tragedy that befell us on that sad day, November 5, 2015. " (Mônica dos Santos, *Sirene* newspaper, p. 22, ed. 8, 2016).

Based on the excerpt above, it is possible to infer that memory tourism could become an alternative for the communities, given the existing desire to construct a memorial narrative and foster reflection through tourist visits.

One of the main challenges in implementing a public policy in this regard is the lack of interest from the Mariana City Hall, through COMPAT, since only the Chapel of Mercês was listed as a heritage site in 2018, as presented by Silva (2023) in a previous section. Furthermore, there are also attempts by the

Renova Foundation to promote dark tourism through the "Vim Ver" program in the affected territories, reshaping the narrative about the crime, as highlighted in the excerpt:

Renova/Samarco, instead of repairing the damage we have suffered, continues to cause even greater violations. I then ask, as I had the opportunity to question Roberto Waack (President of the Renova Foundation) during a meeting held on May 4, where he told us that this is not a project entirely focused on tourism, that it is a project aimed at bringing students, researchers, and the same old rhetoric. However, we actually see it as "disaster tourism".

Thus, we firmly state that nothing concerning our communities can be done without the direct participation of those affected. What they are doing is harming us deeply. We are resisting and fighting for the heritage listing of our spaces because we believe that this is what will ensure that this territory remains in the hands of those who rightfully own it. And let there be no mistake—because in the villain's version of the story, he is always the victim. (Mauro da Silva, *Sirene*, p. 3, ed. 27, 2018).

Over the past few years, the community has been carrying out its own means of remembrance and preservation of the subdistrict in its own way. This process can be observed through the continuation of traditions and the reoccupation of Bento Origem, despite the Renova Foundation's attempts to hinder the community's access to the territory. The traditional São Bento and Mercês festivals, along with the process of listing the church as a heritage site, have contributed to keeping Bento's memory alive.

Returning means resistance, as well as showing that we love this place. Bento Rodrigues is where we plan to live. I pray to God to live many days after the resettlement happens. I want to see where we will go. If we had not been coming here since the beginning, they would have done whatever they wanted with this place. The Public Prosecutor's Office and even the companies know that a significant number of people do not want Bento to be abandoned. So, our presence and our return are a way to show resistance. We will continue celebrating the festivities in Bento Rodrigues. (Marcos Muniz, *Sirene* newspaper, p. 15, ed. 38, 2019).



In this sense, according to category (c) *reports on the community's desires*, what can be observed is that, since the moment of the disaster, there has been a strong desire to keep traditions alive, preserve rural ways of life, maintain the unity of the community, and seek fair reparations. This remains an ongoing crime, considering that nine years have passed and even the resettlement has not been effectively delivered.

However, it is important to emphasize that, despite these adversities, the community has undergone political transformation and has taken a stand against those who systematically insist on implementing policies of erasure in daily life.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the objectives and data gathered in this research, it is concluded that memory tourism, as an activity of civic values, remembrance, confrontation with the past, and political nonconformity, will only be possible through actions proposed by the community itself, such as the Vila Autódromo community—whether through an ecomuseum or educational activities that encourage reflection on the memory of the territory, among others.

The possibility of memory tourism as a public policy for valuing the territory in a governmental sense, as some authors highlight, does not align with the reality of the community. This is because the processes that could contribute to greater autonomy for the affected communities are embedded within bureaucratic parameters, which highlight the pact established between governments and mining companies. This is evident in the fact that Samarco resumed its operations in 2020 and that, in 2024, the Regional Federal Court of the 6th Region (TRF-6), according to CNN, acquitted the companies Vale, Samarco, and BHP Billiton, citing a "lack of sufficient evidence to establish direct and individual criminal responsibility of each defendant involved in the case," even as BHP Billiton's trial had begun in the international court in London.



Regarding the Dossier, the top-down approach contributed to the understanding that the autonomy of decision-making about community life continues to be undermined, as their narrative is not included in the process of its construction. This directly affects their right to the territory—a demand that has been continuously made since the crime in 2015 and has been the subject of significant disputes between the victims and the mining companies, which today are the main entities behind the Renova Foundation.

Despite the destruction and the traces that surround Bento, the place remains a site of memory and continues to exist as a territory, as the community produces and reproduces its culture by reclaiming the sensitive space—an example being the annual Bento Rodrigues Festival, the patron saint of the subdistrict.

Simultaneously, decisions regarding preservation appear to depend on the resettlement process. After almost nine years since the dam collapse, much of what the affected people have fought for is simply the right to rebuild their lives with dignity—without meetings, assemblies, interviews, or the need to fight for the basic rights that were taken from them.

One limitation of this research is the need for a deeper dialogue with the community regarding their own means of remembrance and resistance in Bento Origem. Nevertheless, an effort was made to contribute to expanding the dialogue on new preservation proposals for the Bento community that align with their lived reality, while primarily respecting the autonomy of the victims. This discussion is far from reaching a conclusion, but it may serve as a starting point to foster future research on memory tourism and the relationship between tourism and heritage within the context of traumatic memories and sensitive heritage in Brazil.

That said, the necessity—or rather, the possibility—of creating a territorial museum, a museum of conscience, and a museum of a sensitive nature is not dismissed. However, it is emphasized that this desire, the narratives, what should be preserved, and, most importantly, the preservation of memory must come,



first and foremost, from those who are the only ones who should speak for themselves: the "affected" people.

Figure 9: Crazy about Bento



Source: Daniel Camargos, Piauí Magazine. (2017)

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