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# Besieged Territories: Examining Psychosocial Harms in Communities Affected by Lithium Mining in the Jequitinhonha Valley

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## Abstract

The Jequitinhonha Valley, impoverished by colonial expropriation and by unequal exchange with other regions, has seen its role reshaped under the twentieth-century developmentalist paradigm through the establishment of enterprises linked to eucalyptus monoculture, hydroelectric plants, mining, conservation units, and transmission lines. This article seeks to analyze the psychosocial harms associated with lithium mining in the Jequitinhonha territories, drawing on ongoing investigative processes that employ a qualitative methodological approach, including participant observation, document analysis, and dialogues with key informants. Traditional peoples and communities are being exposed to situations of vulnerability, with the production of stereotyped images, prejudice, and false polarizations that trigger psychosocial harms capable of resulting in psychopolitical trauma. Corporate practices, by attacking collective identities, in conjunction with institutional neglect of psychosocial and environmental harms, erode the social and community fabric and weaken prospects for remaining in the territories. The development of psychosocial expert assessments is necessary to safeguard and ensure that collective human rights are brought into the debate.

**Keywords:** Community health status indicators; Community participation; Historical trauma; Mental health; Psychological trauma.

Around the 1700s, marking the foundations of the cities of Serro and Arraial do Tejuco, the territories of the Jequitinhonha region – situated within the Jequitinhonha River watershed – were incorporated into Western cartography, marked by the modern-colonial imprint that structured the contemporary world-system (Haesbaert & Porto-Gonçalves, 2006). The temporal and geographic markers of this narrative refer to the dates of settlement founded by colonizers, a process intensified as they advanced in the discovery of diamonds and gold in the region.

The invasion of Indigenous territories was structured through: 1) the production of documents and letters portraying Indigenous peoples as savage – “hostile Indians”; 2) the expropriation of their labor, subjecting them to servitude and slavery, as was already done with Black peoples captured on the African continent;

and 3) silencing and genocide, along with the plundering of common goods and expulsion from their lands, imposing the domestication of knowledge and bodies. Colonial violence established a racial division of labor in which the dehumanization of Indigenous and Black peoples was associated with territorial expropriation and was fundamental for financing the flourishing of capitalist industrialization in Europe. This logic persists in modern extractivist cycles: environmental racism operates as a political technology that naturalizes the designation of racialized territories (impoverished peasants, quilombola communities, and Indigenous peoples) as sacrifice zones, while concentrating benefits in white, urbanized spaces in the central countries of capitalism (Pinto, 2023).

These processes continued for at least 200 years in a movement of expanding agricultural and mineral frontiers, marked by the violent expropriation of common goods (lands, waters, forests, minerals) and of the people themselves. By the mid-1930s, the hegemonic narrative began to describe and classify these territories based on state indicators whose emphasis fell on their deficiencies: poverty measured through per capita income, population density framed as supposed demographic emptiness, health conditions, among others.

From the State's perspective at the time, this reality was to be overcome through modernization (Leite, 2014), by imposing a new agro-mineral-energy frontier defined by the arrival of development-oriented projects. To that end, municipalities along the Jequitinhonha were reorganized regionally, and the Jequitinhonha Valley and the *Comissão de Desenvolvimento do Vale do Jequitinhonha* (Codevale, Jequitinhonha Valley Development Commission) were created in 1965, tasked with promoting regional development and improving quality of life. The turn of the 21st century renewed the modern-colonial cycle with intensified extraction through mining enterprises.

By focusing on these historical markers and processes that have shaped socio-economic formation along the Jequitinhonha River basin, it becomes clear that these are territories that have been expropriated, plundered, and impoverished – and where sequential psychosocial harms have deep, transgenerational roots. The social and civil rights achieved through popular struggles and materialized in the 1988 Constitution established the legal foundation for claims to historical reparation – fueling struggles for land demarcation and affirmative policies, especially from the 2000s onward. Nevertheless, implementation remains incomplete. Indigenous and quilombola territories remain largely undemarcated, and traditional communities continue to face challenges exacerbated by structural racism, revealing the gap that still exists between the legal framework and the fulfillment of the recognition and implementation of historical and psychosocial reparations.

In this context, the arrival of new actors – particularly multinational mining companies and international financial institutions – linked to global chains such as lithium and to the energy-transition agendas of core economies, has contributed to deepening the socio-spatial inequalities and contradictions already present in the Jequitinhonha region. These initiatives rely on narratives widely disseminated by actors such as the International Energy Agency, the World Bank, and major corporations in the automobile and technology industries, which portray energy transition as an urgent opportunity to address the global climate crisis. However, it is necessary to note that this narrative rests on a development logic that perpetuates historical patterns of subordination, tied to Brazil's dependent integration into the world economy since the colonial period. This pattern – characterized by a peripheral insertion based on extracting natural resources to meet the demands of hegemonic centers – is renewed through a form of "green imperialism"; that is, the instrumentalization of environmental discourse to justify opening new extractive frontiers in countries of the Global South. In this sense, the recent expansion of lithium mining cannot be separated from strategies to restore global capital's profit rates in the post-crisis period, nor

from geopolitical and military interests associated with technological transition. It is, therefore, a reconfiguration of neo-extractivism at multiple scales, in which the Jequitinhonha Valley comes to play a strategic role in disputes over minerals deemed critical – at the cost of intensifying socio-environmental conflicts and producing sacrifice zones.

This reveals a broad set of circumstances that indicate psychosocial harms marked primarily by human rights violations, uprooting and weakening of social and community fabrics, social polarization, institutionalized lies, prejudice, and the erosion of identities and collective memory. It is by seeking to understand this reality that we analyze the psychosocial harms associated with lithium mining in the Jequitinhonha territories, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The reflections presented here are grounded in ongoing research and outreach projects linked to the *Observatório dos Vales e do Semiárido Mineiro* (Observatory of the Valleys and the Minas Gerais Semi-Arid Region), housed at the Federal University of the Valleys of Jequitinhonha and Mucuri, with a qualitative approach guided by community-based participatory research and methods such as participant observation, social cartography workshops, focus groups, interviews, and community integrative therapy circles. Residents' accounts will be presented using fictitious names such as GreenHouse, YellowHouse, etc.

In this first essay, to analyze psychosocial harms with a focus on the reality of Jequitinhonha territories in conflict with lithium-mining enterprises, five categories will be discussed – institutionalized lies, violence, social polarization, fatalism, and conscientization – as follows.

## 1) Institutionalized Lies

An important factor that triggers Psychosocial Trauma (PST) is institutionalized lies (Martín-Baró, 2000b), which are expressed through the actions of mining enterprises on social media, their efforts to identify local leaders and subject them to harassment, and the promotion of activities designed to involve local residents—activities that lend themselves to extensive photographic documentation as strategies for social validation. Such actions divert attention away from the socioenvironmental, material, and symbolic effects that generate tension and conflict:

There are places I no longer go. They call me: 'Let's go over there, there's going to be the opening of such-and-such'. But I don't go. Because if we go, they take a picture and publish it. As if you were supporting them. (...) Let me tell you what they did with the bishop. On the day the pope was elected, they called him and paid him a visit, and talked for a long time and everything. In the end they said: 'Let's take a photo'. He said: 'All right, you can take the photo, but you can't publish it'. The woman was embarrassed, but that was the strategy, right? Them being with the bishop. (YellowHouse)

Euzébios Filho (2023, p. 75) identifies the following as empirical manifestations of institutionalized lies: “institutional campaigns that, for example, praise governmental action while omitting or erasing contradictions and/or particular interests and/or the social and economic harms of the action being promoted”. A similar example is the official discourse of the Government of Minas Gerais, which publicizes the notion that the expansion of lithium mining in the region will finally bring the long-heralded development, enrichment, and redemption<sup>3</sup> of the population of the so-called “Lithium Valley” or “Valley of Hope”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The term “redemption” is used ironically in this context, echoing a salvationist discourse that equates corporate exploitation with spiritual deliverance. Within this perverse logic, the local population is rhetorically cast as “sinful” or as subjugated by a degrading condition from which they would supposedly be rescued by the enterprises arriving from outside. In practice, this promised “salvation” reveals itself as a euphemism for territorial acquisition, economic domination, and control of resources—whether in ventures involving gold, diamond, dams, eucalyptus, or lithium – a cyclical promise that generates the very poverty it claims to combat.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://www.agenciaminas.mg.gov.br/noticia/governo-de-minas-realiza-lancamento-mundial-do-projeto-vale-do-litioe> and <https://www.agenciaminas.mg.gov.br/noticia/vale-do-litio-completa-um-ano-de-operacao-e-e-destaque-na-maior-bolsa-de-valores-dos-eua>. Accessed on: Oct. 16, 2025.

The perversion underlying the act of renaming the Jequitinhonha Valley as “Lithium Valley” – an attack on memory and identity – mirrors the historical stigmatization of the territory and its people as the “Valley of Misery” in the 1960s. It carries an ethno-racial component: the association between poverty, backwardness, and non-white populations, reinforcing stereotypes and reproducing racist geographic determinism (Almeida, 2018), which links the territory to misery, naturalizes poverty as an intrinsic condition of the population, and erases the historical process of expropriation. Disparaging the place by characterizing it as miserable and devoid of alternatives is a structural condition enabling external agents to appropriate its mineral wealth, while local labor is exploited as compensation. The State’s absence lays the groundwork for the “success” of the private sector’s assistance policies. From the “Valley of Misery” to the “Lithium Valley” or “Valley of Hope”, what remains is epistemic violence: the replacement of collective meanings with narratives that convert exploitation into benevolence, in which stigmatization and technological fetishization are two sides of the same coin of domination and exploitation. In every case, harm is inflicted on the collective memory and the history of resistance of the peoples of the Jequitinhonha.

In the context of the middle Jequitinhonha Valley – the main epicenter of the lithium mining frontier – the region’s socio-economic formation, marked by a legacy of plunder, violence, and denial of human rights, is presented as an opportunity for business, particularly for international capital, through the hegemonic narrative of clean-energy production validated by Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices, which qualify companies as sustainable, socially responsible, and well managed.

Challenges related to access to water, job opportunities, well-maintained public roads, lack of investment in public education, art, and popular culture, among others – alongside the implementation of and access to public policies – come to be mediated by corporate interventions in communities or families. Thus, investments in schools; environmental education training courses; youth sports; healthcare; and other social services become public-relations tools of silencing and co-optation, validated as compensation or reparation and aligned with ESG principles. These include actions such as distributing food baskets, filling potholes on highways, offering microcredit programs aimed at women, funding traditional festivities and cultural groups, organizing horseback rides, and distributing gifts on commemorative dates, as well as taking part in or promoting campaigns against racist, sexist, or anti-LGBTQIA+ oppression – even when such campaigns are notably liberal in character. Finally, questions remain to be investigated regarding the financing of lobbying activities by political representatives.

Another relevant example of the process of Institutionalized Lies emerged during the processing of Municipal Bill No. 02/2025, driven by mining interests, which sought to reduce the boundaries of the Chapada do Lagoão’s Environmental Protection Area (EPA). Several inconsistencies<sup>5</sup> in the bill were reported, leading to intervention by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Minas Gerais<sup>6</sup>. One effect of this process was the mobilization of individuals, communities, and organizations in defense of the EPA, which highlighted and publicly internationalized the realities and contradictions of mining activities. On the other hand, the narrative dispute involved the dissemination of fake news and Institutionalized Lies from various sources, revealing how lack of knowledge and lack of access to information generate tensions, conflicts, and insecurities among families and communities

<sup>5</sup> See the statement “Manifesto in Defense of the Chapada do Lagoão’s EPA,” published by the Observatory of the Jequitinhonha Valleys and the Minas Gerais Semi-Arid Region, available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/DF-xn4jxoMx/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/DF-xn4jxoMx/?img_index=1). Accessed on Oct. 16, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> On April 13, 2025 (Case No. 5001603-10.2025.8.13.0034), the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Minas Gerais filed an Environmental Public Civil Action with a Request for Emergency and Evidentiary Injunctions to halt the processing of Bill No. 02/2025, which aims to reduce the boundaries of the Chapada do Lagoão’s Environmental Protection Area by 6,050.6 hectares. The grounds for the action are violations of the legal-environmental order and of the rights of the traditional communities affected.

directly affected by the issue. These matters were reported during a Public Hearing at the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais. Below is the statement by Councilman Danilo Borges, from the Municipal Chamber of Araçuaí, Minas Gerais<sup>7</sup>:

They are telling our people that they cannot work on their properties, that they cannot hold their cultural festivities or religious manifestations. (...) We even learned that people approached landowners and said: "You can't plant cassava here, you can't plant pigeon peas, corn, beans; you can't raise your animals here – your chickens or your small cattle." And we know that, given the EPA's environmental category, it is designated for sustainable use. It allows for the presence of the population, even to assist in the preservation process. In fact, traditional communities are present in this space. So the people, for the most part, are being mobilized (to support the bill reducing the EPA), believing that they cannot work and that, from now on, if this is not done (the reduction of the EPA), they will be prevented from working.

According to accounts from residents living within the current EPA boundaries, information was spread claiming that the management plan would impose limitations on agricultural cultivation and on water supply by tanker trucks. It was also said that their lands would be taken, that even the traditional annual horseback ride would be prohibited, among other disinformation campaigns and moral-panic tactics, involving speeches in public spaces and high-quality messages and videos flooding local WhatsApp groups. To date, it is not known who produced or financed these materials. Regarding the encroachment on the EPA, a resident of the region describes her suffering amid environmental threats and the erosion of the traditional knowledge of the women who live in the *chapadas* (the characteristic plateaus of the Brazilian Highlands) such as the preparation of herbal medicines:

the women who are involved in making medicines with medicinal plants there – the women of the Lagoão – are feeling threatened. For example, [Name withheld for confidentiality], you know? She cries whenever she talks about it. If they destroy this place, it will wipe out the plants: "How are we going to continue producing medicine?" And these medicines they make, the whole region uses them. Where do the plants come from? They are grown up there, in Chapada do Lagoão. (YellowHouse)

Blackmail related to the supply of drinking water is a common practice in the region, which, in addition to facing semi-arid conditions, forces residents to live with water scarcity and disputes over water, whether expropriated or polluted – a situation resulting from land enclosure and intensive water use by extensive eucalyptus monocultures and large mining enterprises. In a community affected by lithium mining, the same company that threatens springs and sources of clean water with pits and mountains of mining waste provides water by tanker trucks and gives cisterns to residents. The cisterns, which bear the company's advertising logo, must be returned if residents relocate; also, if they cover or remove the company logo from the cistern, the water supply is cut off, as the report indicates:

The other form of pressure is also related to water, you know? (...) The stream is completely contaminated. So what does the company do? Something wonderful: it gave us a 500-liter cistern. (...) Water for us to cook and drink. But you can't wash clothes. How are you going to wash clothes? You have to wash them in the river. So people have to use 500 liters of water for everything they need to do in their daily lives: washing clothes, cooking, bathing. Who is going to bathe in the river? No one has the courage anymore, right? But these cisterns are an example of the kind of pressure disguised as a solution to the problem. (...) You get there, and instead of the city government's name, the company's name is written in huge letters on the cistern. (YellowHouse)

<sup>7</sup> Available at timestamp 1:16:39, at: <https://www.almg.gov.br/comissoes/meio-ambiente-e-desenvolvimento-sustentavel/799/reuniao/1/2025-02-26/10:30>. Accessed on: Oct. 16, 2025.

This dynamic causes harm on multiple levels, such as the loss of autonomy of families and communities regarding access to and management of common goods, which, in turn, triggers food and nutritional insecurity and generates tensions and conflicts, weakening the social fabric. The continuous presence of the enterprise in the community, through different actors, creates an environment in which people feel watched and besieged. Control over water distribution imposes a dependency that contributes to the destruction of the conditions for the existence of ways of life and territories.

## 2) Violence

Violence is also understood as one of the elements that can trigger PST (Martín-Baró, 2000b). It is not, however, restricted to physical violence alone but encompasses the effects of verbal, symbolic, patrimonial, and institutional violence. During fieldwork incursions (2024–2025), there were documented reports of threats of physical violence, such as gunshots fired toward quilombola communities (which resist the advance of mining enterprises), as well as intimidation of residents to compel them to sign a request for a public hearing<sup>8</sup> on projects in the environmental licensing phase. Even so, other forms of violence prevail, such as threats of interruption of access to water supplied by the companies – as previously discussed – or of job loss, whether for the individual or their relatives, a topic that will be addressed later. To these practices, other forms of symbolic violence and institutionalized lies are added. For example, referring to affected populations as “miserable” and “ignorant”, in addition to reinforcing stereotypes and defamatory images that seek to justify the sacrifice of some in favor of an alleged global energy transition.

Although this is not fear associated with political repression on the scale of the wars or dictatorships in Latin America – analyzed by researchers such as Martín-Baró (1975, 1984), Lira (1990), Lira and Castillo (1991), and Shafir (2015) – the forms of fear observed in the affected communities also produce analogous psychosocial effects. With the proper distinctions in mind, in some contexts the work of mining companies and their intelligence services comes remarkably close to situations involving attacks on democratic rights and freedoms – including freedom of association and the right to privacy – as well as threats to physical integrity, through practices such as espionage, infiltration, wiretapping, intimidation, etc.<sup>9</sup> The psychosocial effects of such contexts may include bodily reactions, disorganization of behavior, inhibition of communication, withdrawal from processes of social participation, isolation, distrust in interpersonal relationships, and other harms. Some of these manifestations were expressed, for example, in the fear, hesitation, and inhibition of some residents of affected communities to sign a request granting them the right to the informational and participatory instrument of the public hearing on the expansion of mining operations in the territory, as well as in the fear of openly expressing critical opinions about the advance of mining.

In an analysis on this subject, Euzébios Filho (2023, p. 53) notes that “the violence generated by the forced urban displacements of the studied populations, due to issues related to police

<sup>8</sup> A public hearing is an informal public meeting – that is, a mechanism of public participation guaranteed by the 1988 Federal Constitution. It is a space where the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches can present an issue or debate with the population about the formulation of a public policy, the drafting of a bill, or the implementation of projects that may generate impacts on the city, on people’s lives, and on the environment. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/acao-a-informacao/participacao-social>. Accessed on: Oct. 16, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> “Mining conflicts drive 11 people to protection programs,” available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/hotsites/mina-de-conflito>. “Information leak exposes Vale’s espionage,” available at: <https://apublica.org/2013/09/abrindo-caixa-preta-da-seguranca-da-vale/>. “Vale’s private security assaults rural producers in Canaã dos Carajás (PA),” available at: [https://www.brasilefato.com.br/2017/03/02/seguranca-patrimonial-da-vale-agridem-produtores-rurais-de-canaa-dos-carajas-pa/#:~:text=O%20produtor%20rural%20Jorge%20Martins,Cana%C3%A3%20do%20Caraj%C3%A1s%20\(PA\)](https://www.brasilefato.com.br/2017/03/02/seguranca-patrimonial-da-vale-agridem-produtores-rurais-de-canaa-dos-carajas-pa/#:~:text=O%20produtor%20rural%20Jorge%20Martins,Cana%C3%A3%20do%20Caraj%C3%A1s%20(PA).). “Brazil is the country where the most environmental defenders are killed in the world, according to the United Nations (UN),” available at: <https://jornal.usp.br/radio-usp/pesquisa-revela-que-o-brasil-e-o-segundo-pais-mais-perigoso-para-ambientalistas-no-mundo/>. “Brazil is the second country that killed the most environmental defenders in 2023,” available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ambiente/2024/09/brasil-e-o-segundo-pais-que-mais-matou-defensores-ambientais-em-2023-aponta-ong.shtml>.

violence and drug trafficking, produces a situation of PST". To this scenario, one may add the forced displacements caused by the rupture or threat of rupture of mining tailings dams, a manifest risk in Brazil – which also tends to trigger situations of PST. Regarding population displacements, a process of unforced generational expulsion was reported, especially among young people, due to the rising cost of living and, more gravely, the lack of prospects for building a life project:

A lot of people are leaving. Especially the poorer population, the young people – they're taking off. (...) Many members of my family have left. Of my cousins, I think only I remained here, you know? Me and one other cousin – two cousins. The rest all left for elsewhere. Because they built their lives there, they say that life there made sustaining themselves easier. *There, they have enough to cover the cost of living and have managed to build their homes, structuring themselves financially as individuals.* Here in Araçuaí, young people cannot reestablish themselves. (...) Spending money just to get by isn't the same as sustaining yourself. (GreenHouse, emphasis added)

However, it is essential to consider those displacements that, although forced, are not explicitly acknowledged by companies, governments, or judicial institutions. This is what may be termed here unacknowledged compulsory displacement, informal in character: practices of violence and even psychosocial terror that render life and dwelling in the territory increasingly unbearable, leading to coercion, the breakdown of the community fabric, and population displacement. As one example, one may cite the periodic "accidental" sounding of sirens in areas at risk of accidents involving mining dams. Similarly, in the Jequitinhonha Valley, an elderly woman secured the right for the community to be notified via WhatsApp of upcoming explosions, after having fallen ill from the noise of the mining company's detonations. However, according to the *Relatório Técnico do Ministério Público de Minas Gerais* (RT – MPMG, Technical Report of the Public Prosecutor's Office of Minas Gerais), the detonations "do not always occur when announced, which ends up generating expectations and uncertainties among the local population, who wait for the detonation without knowing precisely when it will occur" (Silva et al., 2025, p. 58).

In addition to the radical transformation of the landscape – caused by the deposition of waste piles and tailings that increasingly encroach upon residents' homes, bringing contamination or the risk of water contamination – there are intimidations, explosions, structural tremors, and suffering caused by dust, among other harms. Together, these elements constrain daily life and create a scenario conducive to undeclared compulsory eviction.

A paradigmatic case of such coercion can be seen in the RT-MPMG, which documents that the mining enterprise induced severe socio-spatial fragmentation by suppressing the only terrestrial access route for four family units, confining them in a geographic enclave between the company's operational facilities and the natural barrier of the Piauí Stream. This configuration imposed a permanent logistical restriction, forcing residents to depend on internal company routes subject to prior authorization protocols, institutional escort, and interruptions due to industrial operations – amounting to a systematic violation of the right to movement. Concurrently, there has been a rupture of community ties, with a drastic reduction of social visits due to access barriers; disruption of supply chains, including refusal of commercial deliveries; and cumulative exposure to pollutants, aggravated by the critical proximity of 80 meters between homes and operational areas – particularly concerning given the presence of elderly residents. This scenario reveals a synergy between spatial confinement, a besieged territory, environmental degradation, erosion of the social fabric, and the constriction of everyday life – rendering life in the territory nearly unsustainable and inducing a form of undeclared exodus. The formal testimony of C.M.R. to the MPMG includes, among other details, the following occurrence:

during the rainy season, they are digging ditches to drain the runoff, and the water is reaching the home of Mrs. C.R.M., who is 96 years old. We, family members and neighbors, tried to contact the company to address and warn about the problem, but we received no response or solution. (...) Sigma's activities in the territory have caused countless problems. In the region, those affected have been living with incessant dust from ore extraction, tremors caused by explosions that crack their homes, and constant noise pollution throughout the night –which disturbs families' sleep and rest. As living conditions worsen, illness has become constant among residents. (H. M. M. Silva et al., 2025, p. 49)

During field immersions, the researchers heard accounts from families who, after generations living in the territory, felt driven to a breaking point of rural exodus, forced to abandon their roots and migrate. This scenario echoes the transgenerational nature of traumatization described by Gonçalves (2017) in the Krenak Reformatory Case. State violence during Brazil's business-military dictatorship (1969–1973) – including forced evictions, territorial loss, torture, murder, and political and cultural repression – generated psychosocial impacts that traverse generations, manifesting in individual illnesses and collective ruptures (prohibition of languages and spiritual practices, and loss of connection to territory).

As among the Krenak – where trauma persisted as a “traumatic crystallization of dehumanized relations in individuals and groups” (Martín-Baró, 1984, p. 123) – some communities in the Jequitinhonha Valley face a sequential assault on their territories, their people, and their livelihoods, as well as on their memory, cultural, and identity reference points. The pressure of unacknowledged compulsory displacement can rupture the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, destabilize community bonds, and reactivate historical violations, creating a sequence of harms – “which intensifies and renders more complex the process of collective psychosocial traumatization” (Gonçalves, 2017, p. 188).

### 3) Social Polarization

Just as institutionalized lies and violence do, social polarization is another factor that triggers PST (Martín-Baró, 2000b). The development and intensification of hostilities toward traditional peoples and communities, along with the strategic purchase of land around areas of interest to mining companies, are among the discomforts reported by a resident and community leader in the region:

There are people who were friends for a long time and who ended up fighting, you know? A lot of it has to do with land. Emotional blackmail to buy land. Imagine – one person sells their land, but their neighbor, who grew up alongside them, won't receive a single penny of that money and will be stuck there in the mining dust, with their property losing value. (GreenHouse)

The capitalist mode of production produces objective social polarizations – for example, between the large private owners of the means of production and the broader population that has only its labor power to sell. This is expressed in the conflict of interests between the majority shareholders of mining companies and those affected by mining projects. This polarization has an objective social existence and must be highlighted, made explicit, and recognized by affected populations so that the particular interests of shareholders – representatives of predatory, rentier capitalism a– re not assimilated as universal interests, and so that popular sovereignty can be placed on the agenda and ensured by the State, including in accordance with the National Policy on the Rights of Populations Affected by Dams, established by Law No. 14,755/2023.

False social polarization, in turn, can be observed in the creation and promotion of social antagonism among affected people when the company seeks to negotiate individually with each

person, offering unequal conditions or compensatory measures. It was also evident in the disputes and social tensions surrounding the debate over reducing the EPA of the Chapada do Lagoão, generating apparent differences among residents of the area to benefit the interests of mining entrepreneurs. It can likewise be observed in the stimulation of antagonism between the affected communities and their sociopolitical representations, social movements, or community organizations – accusing activists and community leaders of opposing progress, resisting the region’s development, or adopting a “denialist” stance regarding the need for mining inputs in the production of consumer goods. False polarization can also be observed when governments and companies try to set the municipality’s urban population against the residents of rural communities who are more directly affected and who resist the projects.

As in Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, some urban residents were turned against those affected in rural areas, who were blamed and stereotyped as “mud-feet” (Dias, 2020). Regarding mining in the Jequitinhonha Valley, one can observe the instrumentalization of historical forms of violence (especially the racist oppression and exploitation of non-white populations rooted in the European colonial expansion of the 19th century) to promote a campaign aimed at turning civil society against rural communities – especially traditional, Indigenous, and quilombola communities – since these have proven to be among the main territories affected by or resisting the advance of predatory mining. An illustrative example is an anonymous public letter, circulated on social media, that sought to deny quilombola and Indigenous identity in the region. Such dissemination of defamatory materials contributes to the creation of false polarizations and generates numerous challenges for the internal relations of families and communities.

Incidents that foster social division among communities are corporate practices that reinscribe racial hierarchies to legitimize expropriation and fragment collective struggle. The public defamation of these groups – labeled “backward” or “anti-progress” – racializes resistance: quilombola communities and Indigenous peoples are stereotyped as “obstacles to development and progress”:

The local landowners don’t accept the quilombola community at all: “these Black folks want too much”. (...) These families (the local landowners) are considered traditional families. There are many lands owned by them, and the quilombolas just happened to poke at this ‘hornet’s nest,’ right? They went deep into the land issue. And these are families (with ‘powerful’ surnames) rooted here since before the *Guerra Justa* “Just War”<sup>10</sup>. (YellowHouse)

These accounts make it evident that racism lies at the heart of the agrarian issue in the territories of the Jequitinhonha Valley:

When I talk about land purchases, it’s because most of the large landowners around the quilombola communities here are white people. They are descendants – going way back – of people who were plantation owners here, who enslaved Black people and Indigenous people. So most of these people own land surrounding our quilombola communities. And they prefer to buy up the land around us and create this enclosure, you know? (...) They prefer to buy the surrounding plots – from the local landowners – and leave us there in the middle, in the center, fenced in with no options. (GreenHouse)

<sup>10</sup> The Just War was a legal-theological doctrine used by colonial authorities to legitimize military campaigns, violence, and the enslavement of Indigenous peoples in Minas Gerais, under allegations of barbarism, cannibalism, and resistance to colonization. These expeditions, marked by extreme brutality, aimed to exterminate or subjugate groups considered obstacles to settlement and economic exploitation. However, the extermination decree also unfolded into more complex projects of domination, involving exchanges and agreements established under conditions of extreme intimidation, as well as processes of coercive and ethnocentric assimilation. Indigenous peoples were systematically portrayed as wild beasts, cannibals, fierce or not yet pacified, including those who resisted being catechized, which served to justify ethnocide, enslavement disguised under the term “administration,” and the forced expulsion from their lands, consolidating a colonial domination process that perpetuated the extermination and demographic and cultural disintegration of these peoples (Amantino, 2006; Langfur, 2017).

The hegemonic discourse that development projects are the only alternative for overcoming the conditions of the Jequitinhonha Valley through job and income generation is increasingly contradicted by the reality of the cost of living, the instability, and the profile of the jobs actually offered to the regional population:

I was talking with some people and they were really upset because, for example, there are people who come from outside who, in the same position, doing the same work, earn 7,000–8,000 reais, while others from here earn 2,000–3,000 reais. So it's very embarrassing, you know? (...) And if you look at the cost of living in the municipality, it has skyrocketed, you see? Development isn't supposed to be about paying to survive. (...) That's how I see it. You're working to survive, not to grow professionally. Development without local involvement. (GreenHouse)

Thus, it becomes evident that corporate power relies on denying the truly existing social polarization, the disputes over land, and the use of subsoil resources, in order to assert false social polarizations.

It is possible to understand that social polarization can produce psychological and social harm, with repercussions on individual behaviors and social relations. This phenomenon can cause suffering and even affect the mental health of residents, when mental health is understood as the capacity and power to overcome the “challenges that threaten the integrity of the person as a complex social and psychological entity” (Bellenzani & Carvalho, 2023, p. 23). From this perspective, mental health is seen as the production of unity and coherence among the different spheres of life, all of which are affected by social polarization.

Here, reference is made to the formulation by Bellenzani and Carvalho (2023), drawing from Cassell (2004) and materials from Brazil's mental health policy (2013):

Suffering, in turn, is understood as a state in which this effort toward unity and coherence encounters obstacles for which the mediations are ineffective at preserving unity, leading the person to stagnation and to the perception or feeling of imminent breakdown. This occurs not only as a biological or organic process, but fundamentally as part of the lived experience corresponding to a malaise, discomfort, or pain that blocks the person's capacity for transformation, hardening the ways they relate to themselves, to others, and to their environment. (Kinoshita et al., 2016, p. 52)

It was possible to observe some strategies deployed by corporate power to threaten the interpersonal and intrapersonal integrity of affected people. These practices aim not only to divide communities but also to divide the subject from themselves, weakening their capacity for action and favoring external influence and domination. An example of such polarization is the offer of employment in mining or in dependent activities for residents of the affected communities. Although most of the jobs offered in the region are at the lowest levels of the companies' wage hierarchies, there are also exceptions in which local representatives are promoted, seemingly to set an example and inspire belief in the possibility of receiving a reward for uncritical engagement. Moreover, many beneficiaries of corporate assistance policies or workers – especially local ones – are encouraged or pressured to position themselves publicly (for example, at public hearings) to express gratitude for the benefits received and for the right to work. Thus emerges the context to which Edgar Barrero refers as psychosocial trauma, since effective political participation is constrained by maneuvers adopted by corporate power. According to the RT – MPMG:

There were mentions of the company using residents' signatures on documents without their full understanding of the content, as well as reports of fear of expressing critical opinions about the company or the impacts experienced, due to the risk of losing their own job or that of a family member who works for the enterprise. (H. M. M. Silva et al., 2025, p. 32)

Although these jobs for local workers – even if temporary or low-paid – represent an opportunity for employment and income, it is important to remember that the historical legacy of the confinement and encirclement of communities entails a constriction of the material and immaterial modes of reproduction of community life. This includes the purchase of land – which tends to begin long before the true mining intentions are revealed – environmental degradation (such as the reduction of clean water sources), damage to territorial cultural identity, and the suffocation of other forms of subsistence (for example, tenant farmers, tourism, and other economic vocations that are less unequal and more sustainable). These conditions constitute part of the process through which economic and psychological dependence on mining is produced: affecting both the few who are hired and those who become dependent on the companies' welfare programs or on conditions as basic as the supply of water provided by the companies. Thus spreads a manipulative form of welfare provision, in which some scarce resources – scarce when compared to profits – are selectively allocated to certain people or groups, accentuating social inequalities and tensions:

Since the town does not have many jobs, and because it is a social stratum that controls the town – both in terms of employment and income generation – many people say things like: “I know it's wrong, but I need the job to survive.” (...) I know people who work on the inside and are afraid to take part in protests, afraid of being punished, you know? One example was when they used the workers themselves to counter a protest by the community. We received reports from employees saying they were being encouraged to attend the public hearing to give testimony. (...) In the community, everyone has a family member who works for the company. And families said, “We want to go to the hearing, we want to participate, but we're afraid to sign (the request for the public hearing) and face retaliation”. (GreenHouse)

During the social cartography workshops held in a community surrounded by mining operations, it became clear what families are up against: while having a family member employed provides access to income, they live daily with all the disturbances triggered by mining. A regional leader reported receiving phone calls from residents saying they no longer have the conditions to remain in the communities, as living there has become incompatible with a dignified life in the countryside. Personally torn between the motive that gives meaning (namely, fighting alongside their people for community and environmental protection) and the motive-stimulus linked to the need to sell their labor power in exchange for a salary, the person then seeks coherence and a sense of unity in their identity as a worker of the mining company – through their struggle for wages and family subsistence – and as someone engaged in community life, including in the resistance and struggle against the exploitative, devastating, and dispossessing megaproject. In attempting to navigate these mediations, the subject's integrity may be compromised:

A young man came from São Paulo, I think to take care of his elderly father, and lives there in the [redacted] community. He arrived full of enthusiasm and took part in this documentary [redacted], but then the company gave him a job. And that was it. He doesn't say anything anymore. As for the old man, one of his sons also reported the company because of the noise; he couldn't sleep at night. Suddenly, he got a job inside the company. So, this scheme of coopting people by giving them jobs is what happens here. (YellowHouse)

In addition to economic necessity, there is also the matter of the symbolic capital associated with this attraction:

It's a very well-designed trap. Once the guy gets in, he's stuck. He's suddenly afraid of losing his job, he has a family; sometimes, he even moved from another region to come here. (...) The companies are temporary, right? Once the study is finished, they leave. (...) For example, yesterday I was thinking about the Uber driver who picks me up to bring me back home. He's from this region, and wears a

nice uniform from a mining company – from a subcontractor, a firm. But, you know, he looks sharp. (...) A guy who never had anything, suddenly he has a uniform. Stands out, right? (YellowHouse)

If temporary work ceases to be an option, social polarization becomes manifest in the tension between remaining in one's place of origin – resisting and fighting for better living conditions – and the desire to leave in search of a fresh start elsewhere. Many peasants, farmers, street vendors, artisans, Indigenous people, and quilombolas express the desire to remain where they live, where their families have lived and worked, maintaining their community ties, their identities, and their life projects connected to the territory. However, predatory mining exerts enormous pressure to change traditional norms, standards, and values, causing socioeconomic and cultural transformation and degradation of environments and making the place no longer represent the same space of belonging. Faced with this, individuals may be gradually pushed to abandon the territory, in a prolonged process that can involve the disintegration of their own identity. This phenomenon – referred to in this work as undeclared and informal compulsory displacement – reflects the complexity of losing the territory as a space of life and memory.

#### 4) Fatalism and Conscientization

Euzébios Filho (2023), drawing on Martín-Baró (1998), presents fatalism as an undesirable and harmful post-PST response for emancipatory possibilities. Mining enterprises, working in tandem with the institutional apparatuses of the State, seek to present themselves to the local population as an inevitable historical force even before they obtain required legal licenses:

I think what's happening is a crime, you know? Because people have no alternative. What are they supposed to do, right? They file complaints, report things, but people stay quiet, afraid – many people are afraid to speak out. (...) *Afraid of a very powerful force.* (...) "Those people are very powerful; they have a lot of money. Not much can be done about it." Just yesterday I heard someone on the street saying: "This mining business has no solution; no good will come of it. They're going to destroy the region". I think the underlying feeling is this: this enormous power that will destroy everything, and that we have no way of confronting it. (YellowHouse, emphasis added)

Analyses and accounts of the situation of conflict and the State's neglect are recurrent:

For example, the community files a complaint about noise pollution—the government ignores it. There's an environmental regression in an EPA area—the government ignores it in favor of mining. And all the rights of the communities: they have to give in to mining; they retain no rights at all. We see the chaos in health care<sup>11</sup>, in the local population, in local housing, in traditional communities, and it seems that nothing is enforced. Everything that is provided for in law and in the Brazilian Constitution – none of it is enforced. And this generates indignation. Because if I rob a bank, I'll be arrested. (...) But the mining companies do whatever they want and face no consequences. This is generating a lot of indignation and exhaustion. Exhaustion because people no longer believe that Brazil has any law that is actually enforced. Brazil only has laws for the poor... Brazil's laws only apply to poor people and communities. (...) Because when it comes to the mining companies, there is no law. This is causing extreme exhaustion among communities. To know your rights are guaranteed by law, and yet nothing is upheld. What are we supposed to do? Who are we supposed to turn to? If no justice's ever brought to the other side, it only weighs against us. It only leans to one side. It's tiring, it wears people down. (GreenHouse)

<sup>11</sup> A news report documents that the expansion of lithium mining in the Jequitinhonha Valley, Minas Gerais, has increased hospital demand by 30% since 2019 in Araçuaí, the regional hub city that serves seven municipalities (125,000 people) with only 83 beds. Despite the volume of ore exports, only one of the three mining companies (CBL) provides ongoing financial support to the regional hospital. Yet the infrastructure remains insufficient for the demand, with emergency transfers taking 3 hours. Residents and administrators report a lack of corporate counterpart contributions and of public investment compatible with the population growth. Available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/especiais/litio-o-novo-ouro-de-minas/2025/6/23/avanco-da-mineracao-de-litio-no-jequitinhonha-aumenta-demanda-hospitalar-em-30>. Accessed on: Oct. 16, 2025.

Initiatives by families and/or communities – aimed at dialogue and mobilization in defense of their territories – are gradually undermined both by the State’s omission in guaranteeing access to rights and by corporate strategies that present themselves as the only possible path to meeting social needs.

Institutionalized lies publicizes the inevitable magnitude of these enterprises, making people feel small and suffocated. This kind of fatalistic response is what Euzébio Filho (2023) denounces as an obstacle to so-called subjective well-being and mental health.

Fatalism is associated with a reduction in the contribution that displaced people can make to society. According to the findings, they believe they lack the time and energy to contribute anything. This reflects passivity and conformity in the face of events, as it makes no sense to make an effort to change something that ultimately cannot be achieved (Llanos et al., 2009, p. 467).

Fatalism is encouraged through opposition, inhibition, constraint, intimidation, and the delegitimization of people’s accounts of suffering by company specialists, as observed in the public hearings for licensing and expanding new projects in the region and as highlighted in the MPMG’s own technical opinion: “Technical discourse ends up functioning as an argument from authority” (H. M. M. Silva et al., 2025, p. 62). A technocratic manipulation that, with its abstract technical language, not only detaches itself from but also contradicts, violates, discredits, and delegitimizes the concrete reality of the affected population’s lives.

The force that undermines the material and psychosocial conditions necessary for remaining in the territory – and the force of undeclared and informal compulsory displacement, leading all the way to the coercion toward fatalism and abandonment through exodus of their identity-rooted ties to community, environment, and territory – can be recognized as a limit-situation. However, a limit-situation is not only a boundary between being and nothingness, but also a boundary between being and being-more, as Paulo Freire (1981) highlights: “an opportunity for the relative overcoming of PST, marked, for example, by processes of conscientization and popular organization” (Euzébio Filho, 2023, p. 54).

Transformation toward being-more may also traverse the idea of fatalism – not in the sense that seeks to convince residents that large capitalist enterprises will always win, inevitably, and that there is little to do besides seeking less harmful individual alternatives. Instead, if we adopt a broader understanding of fatalism, it can also be seen as part of the process of conscientization and collective practice – as a moment in the emancipatory dialectic that runs counter to the history told and enacted by dominant classes as a straight, natural, unstoppable line of destructive capitalist modernization.

As in broader capitalist society, one can cite, for example, the fatalistic moment of potential conscientization in which people cease to believe in the superstitious promises of universal meritocratic upward mobility. By strengthening historical memory (Dobles, 2009) to establish connections between the past and the present, the subject may consider fatalistic the understanding that the history of predatory mining in the territory never produced the publicized wealth, nor the promised progress and development, and has instead been the history of a model of exploitation, dispossession, and degradation. This pattern has inevitably generated more harm than wealth for the broader population, its territories, and its environments in general. It is also possible to draw on current examples from the history of other communities and territories that went through the same promises of progress, development, and prosperity when, in fact, while those responsible allowed only but a few crumbs trickle down, those promises and local riches were exported and

concentrated elsewhere – in other places and among shareholders – which makes it possible to understand the “present future” (Euzébios Filho, 2023, p. 84).

A statement by a resident of the region reveals fatalism in its dual function: one that, when paralyzed in denial, takes on an immobilizing meaning – “It has always been like this, it won’t be different, we can’t do anything against them”(YellowHouse) – and another that, when developed as a negative moment of the process of awareness, acquires a more critical character – “This is the work of the powerful, and they only want to take advantage of the region. And judging from past experience, there will be no benefit for the poor” (YellowHouse). This latter meaning of fatalism corresponds to a moment in the conscientization process, such as, for example, the rejection of a rights-claiming consciousness – that is, the abandonment of the hope that rights will be granted by third parties (i.e., the State, companies). When community residents realize that the promises of development will not be fulfilled (at least for them) and that they cannot rely on the good faith of public or private authorities, a critical disenchantment emerges, a settling into the understanding that the changes they need will not come as a gift from mining companies, nor from governments or the judiciary, and can only be achieved by themselves, through their own strength. If stuck in denial, the community becomes fossilized in the paralyzing fatalism that nothing can be done. However, to advance toward active consciousness (the consciousness of action capacity), it is necessary to negate that very denial and develop one’s own strengths. By undertaking an expansive interpretation of the term “fatalism” – decoding these predatory ventures as a structural cycle of dispossession – it becomes clear that this interpretation is itself a moment of the conscientization process, marked by “the decoding of social injustices and at the same time the generation of practices to confront these injustices, seeking concrete alternatives for overcoming the ills produced by capitalism” (Euzébios Filho, 2023, p. 46).

According to authors such as Gonçalves (2017) and the Instituto Latinoamericano de Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos (Latin American Institute of Mental Health and Human Rights, 2019), the sequential and transgenerational nature of centuries-long conditions of exploitation and oppression (as described in the introductory contextualization of the Jequitinhonha territories) point to a condition of Pre-PST or a permanent PST. The historical sequence of violences implies the transmission of a silencing from past generations onto the present one, as the following account illustrates:

You head over to the market and strike up a conversation. People keep looking at you to see who you are. Yesterday, a friend struck up a conversation in the market: Yeah, there are a lot of people from out of town; they’ve been buying a lot here at my stall. Things got a little better, right?” “Well, yeah, but what do you think about all this?” “Oh, miss, I don’t like talking about this, but those people are going to destroy everything here; there will be nothing left.” (...) There is still a lot of silence. (...) It’s known that this place was militarized. What is currently happening in Gaza is a reflection of what happened here in the 19th century. So we are the result of this civilization, of this colonization, which passed from the hands of the military to the *coronéis*<sup>12</sup> “colonels” who remained in these territories. These people “ruled” for a long time. And from those *coronéis* came their children. The people’s reaction was to get employed in the families’ households, either as a laundress, farm guard, boatman, manual laborer, day laborer, artisan, you know? (...) Why is there so much handicraft? Remnants from a time of many *jagunços* (hired gunmen), and a lot of fear as well of the people in power, you know – of the *coronéis*. And this perpetuates itself, right? People are afraid to expose themselves. Today, for example, you see many people who are aware of things and who know what’s happening – it’s not that they’re alienated – but they have this historical experience of domination. (YellowHouse)

<sup>12</sup> The *coronéis* were large landowners who exercised political dominance in rural Brazil, particularly during the Old Republic. They coerced those under their authority into voting for their preferred candidates, thereby maintaining themselves in power.

Still regarding the process of silencing, of sequential and transgenerational harm, of institutionalized lies, and of the promotion of negative partial memories, the account continues:

The people here, of Indigenous and quilombola origin, are very strong (...) A process of erasure because of the war, right? They had to die because they were “causing too many problems”, right? And they needed the territories. And that resulted in this tragic memory. Sometimes people don’t remember much, or what they do remember isn’t recalled as something good but as something bad: that Indigenous person was very violent; they attacked the farms; Indigenous people are treacherous, they like cachaça. And this heavy memory persisted until 1994. (...) and how things changed after the arrival of the Pankararu-Pataxó. To reactivate that positive memory. (YellowHouse)

The recovery and strengthening of collective historical memory – of the natural, cultural, and human diversities; of the resistances, struggles, and achievements of the social groups of the Jequitinhonha Valley – also makes it possible for people to strengthen themselves against campaigns of disqualification and defamation (Martín-Baró), moving toward being-more, toward an unprecedented future – not as a dream on a horizon that is never reached, but toward what Freire (1993) called the untested feasibility, because it is grounded in the concrete analysis of the existing situation.

Collective restoration of historical memory also has the power, according to Dobles (2009), to establish a link between individual and collective biography. Therefore, there is also the possibility of working through the split mentioned above between the mining worker and the community resident. The strengthening of community bonds is a protective factor for mental health and an essential condition for developing “the practice of class-based solidarity” and “popular organization” – responses that expose the false social polarization. Together with “historical memory,” these three aspects: 1) community strengthening; 2) popular organization; and 3) class solidarity; constitute, according to Euzébio Filho (2023) drawing on Martín-Baró (1996, 1998), the post-PST responses that drive conscientization. By conscientization we refer here to the decoding of power relations (Freire, 2001) by the affected people – or, more precisely, the shift from a more fragmented, unilateral, naturalized, syncretic understanding of the immediate impressions of phenomena to a more historical-critical understanding that synthesizes the multiple determinations that compose the social processes affecting them. This necessarily involves a process of theoretical and practical instrumentalization: it involves both a moment of abstraction and analysis, and also emotion and motivation, the capacity to be affected and to affect, and the power to act (Pessanha, 2018).

From the accounts of residents of the region, it is possible to unfold an expanded conception of health related to another model of mining, to quality of life, justice, sovereignty, and popular power.

The only thing we demand from the government are the rights guaranteed by the Constitution itself. A Constitution that the government doesn’t comply with. (...) We also see that it is possible to do mining differently. But we have to keep in mind that: What is worth more – profit or life? (...) One of the greatest concerns of our people – though they didn’t phrase it in these terms – is the distribution of wealth among the people. How is this distribution carried out today in the Jequitinhonha Valley? Where is wealth concentrated in the Jequitinhonha Valley today? (...) Our people may not know how to read and write, but the people of the Jequitinhonha Valley are politically aware. My grandmother has political awareness. (...) So we know very well what is happening in the Jequitinhonha Valley. And this comes from our ancestors. It’s just that people in the past were very afraid to speak out. (...) But when they were gathered in the community circle, everyone would speak: “This is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong. So-and-so and so-and-so are getting rich by exploiting the community, and so on, and so on”. And today this is more explicit among the youth – this expression of the young people in the community. So yes, it is possible to do it. I believe it is possible to do mining differently; it is possible to do development differently. In a way that makes the population feel like they belong.

Because mining is necessary for human life, yes – but not in the way it is being done, promoted as “development.” This phony development in the Jequitinhonha Valley. (GreenHouse)

Considering social polarization as a triggering factor of PST, one can draw on the concept of ethical-political suffering proposed by Sawaia (1999), relating it to the obstacles that hinder the development of mediations capable of preserving unity, coherence, and wholeness not only at the individual level but also at the community level. In this sense, such obstacles can lead to the perception and feeling of powerlessness, to the imminent risk of community disintegration, and to the growth of a false sense of social polarization. Intertwined with the singular individual’s need for unity and coherence is the need for integration to overcome local and community fragmentation and, ultimately, to make possible the overcoming of human polarization and segmentation—an endeavor that involves the abolition of class divisions.

## Final Considerations

The Jequitinhonha Valley, a territory historically torn apart by the violence of colonial extractive cycles, today faces a new frontier of dispossession: lithium mining, justified under the discourse of energy transition. Thus, this work sought to show how the psychosocial harms resulting from this exploitation – from social humiliation to identity fragmentation – are not isolated accidents but products of a system that naturalizes dehumanization in the name of profit. Traditional peoples and communities, made vulnerable by the production of stereotyped images, prejudice, and false polarizations, face forms of violence that lead to psychosocial trauma. Corporate practices, by attacking collective identities and concealing the harm caused to the population, erode the community fabric, undermining not only people’s ability to remain in their territories but the very notion of shared humanity. Researchers uncovered and documented disinformation campaigns, false social polarization, what they termed manipulative assistentialism, new enclosures, undeclared forced evictions, strategic land purchases, blast-induced terror, the strategic offering of job opportunities, manipulative technocracy, the production of partial and pejorative historical memories, as well as the sequential and transgenerational nature of resistances and struggles.

This analysis, in dialogue with previous research and authors, shows that deepening our understanding of psychosocial harms is a fundamental condition for structuring reparative actions and effective public policies capable of confronting structural racism and the logics of inequality, exploitation, and sexist, ageist, and ableist oppression.

The sequential nature of these violations manifests in the Jequitinhonha Valley as a centuries-long historical process: from the “Just War” (1808–1832), to the business-military dictatorship (1964–1985), to the Reformatory Schools and formation of rural militias (1964–1985), to its stigmatization as the “Valley of Misery” (1960s), to the cheapening of land for eucalyptus monoculture, the cutting of communities by transmission lines and hydroelectric dams, gold and diamond mining, and now the colonial lithium mining. All of these constitute links in a single chain of violence, dispossession, and social inequality that signals, for the most vulnerable populations, a condition of pre-PST or permanent PST. Each extractive cycle reactivates a repertoire of violations: the territor – once relegated to a “buffer zone” and later stigmatized – is now rebranded as the “Valley of Hope”. But unlike Freire’s active and emancipatory hope, the “hope” marketed by the enterprise promotes a passive fatalism in the present; that is, waiting for future development while resigning oneself to present-day dispossession. As warned by Martín-Baró (2000a, p. 291), PST is the “normal consequence of the functioning of a social system” in which capitalist state violence

renews itself through corporate control of water and land. What affected ancestors reaches the present generation and threatens their descendants, converting territorial loss into identity erosion. Yet this historical experience also carries the strength and beauty of popular strategies of resistance, mitigation, reparation, and struggle – and the possibility of breaking with this transgenerational sequence of harm. The overcoming of the sacrifice zone toward the “untested feasibility” of a Free Jequitinhonha: from its spring to its mouth.

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