Rhizomatic communication: reflections on resistance movements in Covid-19 times

Comunicação rizomática: reflexões sobre os movimentos de resistência em tempos da Covid-19

Michele Nacif Antunes[1], Jandesson Mendes Coqueiro[2]

ABSTRACT Historically, the public health risk and emergency communication model has been hierarchical, less cooperative and democratic. However, when it comes to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is possible to observe that the guarantee of universal, equitable and integral communication, to expand citizen participation in health policies and in the guidance of care, has not been an exclusive task of the authorities, of health experts, science communicator and journalists, but it has incorporated the participation of health professionals and collectives in different territories. This essay proposes to discuss rhizomatic communication in the field of health, highlighting some resistance movements, protagonists in communication processes, such as the actions developed by the residents of Complexo da Maré (RJ), Xingu and Rio Negro peoples and quilombola communities. The forms of rhizomatic communication developed by these movements, using podcasts, newspapers, radio, for example, produce new forms of life and new modes of existence, as they do not have a pre-established aspect, in which different points connect in the flow between different factors, situations, key elements, areas and knowledge in a systematic and creative way of thinking about the world and its complexities, sustaining as differences and heterogeneities within the communicational territory.

KEYWORDS Covid-19. Pandemics. Health communication.

RESUMO *Historicamente, o modelo de comunicação de risco e de emergência em saúde pública tem acontecido de forma hierárquica, menos cooperativa e democrática. Entretanto, em se tratando da pandemia da Covid-19, é possível observar que a garantia de uma comunicação universal, equânime e integral, para ampliação da participação cidadã nas políticas de saúde e na orientação do cuidado, não tem sido uma tarefa exclusiva das autoridades de saúde, dos especialistas, divulgadores científicos e de jornalistas, mas tem incorporado a participação de profissionais de saúde e de coletivos em diferentes territórios. O presente ensaio propõe discutir a comunicação rizomática no campo da saúde, destacando alguns movimentos de resistência, protagonistas nos processos comunicacionais, como as ações desenvolvidas pelos moradores do Complexo da Maré (RJ), povos do Xingu e de Rio Negro e comunidades quilombolas. As formas de comunicação rizomática desenvolvidas por esses movimentos, com utilização de podcasts, jornais, rádio, por exemplo, produzem novas formas de vida e novos modos de existência, por não terem um aspecto preestabelecido, no qual diferentes pontos se conectam no fluxo entre diversos atores, situações, elementos-chave, áreas e saberes em um caminho sistemático e criativo de pensar o mundo e suas complexidades, sustentando as diferenças e heterogeneidades dentro do território comunicacional.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE *Covid-19. Pandemias. Comunicação em saúde.*

[1] Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz), Escola Politécnica de Saúde Joaquim Venâncio (EPSJV) – Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brasil. *michelenantunes@gmail. com*

[2] Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (Ufes) – Vitória (ES), Brasil.

Introduction

The year 2020 began with news that turned the world upside down. A respiratory illness, which started with few reported cases in Wuhan, China, quickly became the main topic in the international media. The number of people infected with the new Coronavirus has increased exponentially, and within a few months the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that a global health emergency.

The Covid-19 pandemic, given its complexity, brought several complicating elements: a new infectious agent for scientists and health teams, about which little was known, highly connected world, excess of information and difficulty in identifying reliable sources and data, the outcome of the pandemic with strong dependence on decisions taken by authorities and citizens. Thus, informing the population about the health risks presented by Covid-19 has never before been as important as other protective measures[1]. In the pandemic context, increasingly disclosing accurate and reliable information allows people to make conscious decisions and adopt positive behaviors to take care of themselves and others.

However, the response to the coronavirus was accompanied by an inordinate abundance of misinformation, which quickly spread across social media platforms and other media. In this new scenario, an immense amount of accessible information was presented that can affect and change understanding and possible actions, both positively and negatively.

At a time when a new pandemic is emerging, science disseminators and communicators need to act responsibly, to disseminate clear and well-founded information, without promoting insecurity and panic. The mass media are important vehicles of information in risk and emergency situations, especially due to their wide reach. However, increasingly, the performance of communication teams from research organizations and even the individual action of scientists and communicators can gain large proportions on the internet, especially on social networks[1].

There is a set of best practice manuals and guidelines for communicating with the public during public health emergencies. The WHO guidelines[2], for example, consist of five principles to guide communication during outbreaks and other emergencies: build trust, announce early, be transparent, respect public concerns, and plan ahead. However, from the experience of the recent H1N1 epidemic and, more recently, of Covid-19, it is evident that control and reporting of outbreaks is rarely a simple process with regard to public trust and the transmission of information in an objective and transparent way.

Many advances have been made in the theories and models of risk and crisis communication and, specifically, in the communication of emerging infectious diseases. Although the consensus is that theories and models are up-to-date and relevant, in practice, the information flow remains one-sided, linear, assuming that the message is projected from sender to recipient, without any possibility of feedback. This feature reflects an outdated notion of stable and unchanging roles in communication[3].

Most scientific and health organizations develop communication in a basically hierarchical structure and much less cooperative and democratic. Organizations should involve the public in social media based on a participatory approach and consider the public as a partner, one who can work together with organizations to develop a more open and innovative field, promoting online citizen science projects. Only those who are inserted in local contexts can contribute to organizations in adapting their messages according to socioeconomic, cultural, educational contexts, among others[4].

Thus, it is essential to overcome these deficiencies, including new communication technologies. Increasingly, social media

plays an important role in disseminating information and often misinformation during any crisis or emergency. It is a fact that technological advances have transformed the way public health organizations see information and disseminate it to affected communities during emergencies, interacting with them. Thus, risk and emergency communicators must consider how to leverage the use of new communication technologies in dealing with the situation. Likewise, there is a new repositioning of the public as an active participant, which is facilitated by new mobile technologies, especially smartphones, social networks and tools available on the internet[5].

In short, the current model adopted by risk communication and public health emergencies, such as in the Covid-19 pandemic, points to the need for changes that incorporate new strategies and practices that take into account the diverse territories, scenarios, contexts and existing social processes. Thus, as stated by Sodré[6], it is necessary to think of communication from the angle of transcendence. The transcendence of dialogue, not as a mere exchange of words, but as an action to bridge differences, in a shaping action and a process of putting differences in common, without the process and action being considered arbitrary on the part of individuals[6].

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was possible to observe that ensuring universal, equitable and integral communication[7] to expand citizen participation in health policies and in care guidance has not been an exclusive task of organizations, health authorities, specialists, scientific communicators and journalists, but it has also incorporated the participation of health professionals and collectives in different territories.

Thus, the question remains: is it possible another way of communicating risks and emergencies in public health in Brazil? A communication that is anchored in the integration and articulation of different actors in dealing with risk? A communication that is not anchored in hierarchical and linear relationships? A communication in which the public assumes a leading role and not a peripheral one?

Thus, based on these questions and given the informational challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this essay proposes to discuss rhizomatic communication in the field of health, highlighting some resistance movements as protagonists in communication processes, with different territories as triggers for communication practices and strategies.

The Deleuze-Guattarian rhizome: notes

The rhizomatic communication, which we propose to discuss here, arises from thinking about the population's role in the face of the media and other communication processes, configuring a resistance movement that invents, produces new modes of existence and living, which are amorphous, not having certain forms to emerge.

The concept of Rhizoma, in a philosophical perspective, coined by Deleuze and Guattari[8], concerns the broad perspectives for understanding life, going towards the complexity that is inherent to it. These authors are considered philosophers of difference, multiplicity and/or immanence, in which they understand the construction of knowledge as a becoming, that is, they renounce the notion of concepts as certainties about something and identify that knowledge is a genuine circumstantial production[9].

The joint productions between Deleuze and Guattari began with the writing of the classic work 'Anti-Oedipus'[8] (first edition published in France, in 1972), in which the authors discussed the potency of desire, calling into question the way in which

psychiatry and psychoanalysis work the theme. They then followed with the works 'Kafka: for a minor literature'[10] (published in 1975 and 1976), raising questions about minor literature as an expression of collective desires and agencies, and 'A Thousand Plateaus'[11] (published in 1980), which proposes a review of the structures of thought based on the Earth and opens new perspectives for the conception of the human being, capitalism, the State and ways of life in society; and ended with the work 'What is philosophy?'[12], discussing the production of concepts, something they defend as the role of philosophy and which ended up being the trademark of these authors. In this way, concepts demonstrate attempts to understand events and circumstances, and not a search for the definition of things as they are (concept as essence)[9].

In addition to the creation of concepts, another fundamental characteristic in Deleuze and Guattari's writing was the constant interface with different areas, such as literature, music, biology, cinema, education, among others. This connection of different knowledge became, for the authors, a systematic and creative way of thinking about the complexity of the world, based on differences and heterogeneities[9].

Taking into account this constant interface with the different areas in which Deleuze and Guattari worked, it is worth mentioning that the concept of Rhizoma itself is a clear reference of this overlapping of different knowledge, since, as mentioned in the first chapter of the work 'A Thousand Plateaus'[11], it is a term from botany, consisting of subterranean stems with branches on all sides, such as tubercles and bulbs. From a philosophical point of view, the rhizome is understood as a form of life, in the broadest sense, in the form of connections, without beginning or end, interspersed with segmentarities, lines, intensities and layers[11].

For a better definition of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari presented six guiding principles of this theory, the first and second referring to the idea that in the rhizome all points can be connected, without central or hierarchical reference (connection principle), associating them to the principle of heterogeneity, characterized by the notion of a complex reality in which different statutes of something coexist in motion, forming multiple and diverse connections. In this way, one cannot reflect on one thing or another, but one thing and another. An example of these multiple connections is presented through the analysis of language, which is not restricted to what is said and its expressed meanings, but carries with it forms of agency and particular social power variables[11].

As for the third principle, that of multiplicity, directly related to the previous ones, it refers to the abandonment of dichotomous thinking, which has determined the binary separation between poles as object and subject, man and woman, good and evil. These ways of understanding life, for Deleuze and Guattari[11], are not capable of translating it, since there are countless intersecting lines and connections, they are movements, assemblages – "growth of dimensions in a multiplicity that necessarily changes its nature to as it increases its connections"[11(17)].

The fourth principle constitutes a signifying rupture, which defines the freedom that the rhizome has to break any of its points, as well as to be able to resume its process. This system, marked by connections, heterogeneity and multiplicity, understands and embraces the different, always allowing space for reconfiguration. There is no permanence, but, on the contrary, the prevalence of the temporary, such as, for example, the good and the bad are only the product of a temporary and active selection to be restarted eventually[11].

The fifth and sixth principles of a rhizomatic system are configured as cartography and decalomania in which "a rhizome

cannot be justified by any structural or generative model. It is foreign to any idea of a genetic axis or deep structure"[11(21)].

In this way, the Deleuze-Guattarian rhizome has neither beginning nor end, it is always found in the middle, between things. The tree determines the verb 'to be', but the rhizome has the conjunction 'and... and... and...' as a disposition. In this conjunction there is a force capable of moving and uprooting the verb to be, in which the medium is not an average, but the place where things acquire speed[11].

Reflections on rhizomatic communication and resistance movements

Nowadays, it has been verified that society participates in the communication process in different ways and in spaces different from those already institutionalized, such as newspaper offices, for example. This has caused interference in the ways of thinking about communication, as these actions, undertaken by society, materialize in the most diverse forms and can be taken as resistance movements. These mobilizations, as stated by Foucault[13], spread with more or less density in space and time, sometimes causing the uprising of people or groups in a definitive way, stimulating certain moments of life, some types of behavior and some parts of the body. It is seen, more commonly, as a transitory and mobile point of resistance, which includes cleavages in society that displace units and give rise to regroupings, which travel through individuals themselves, remodeling them, tracing irreducible regions in them, in their body and soul.

Resistance movements are configured as a social creation of other life possibilities, undertaken without a pre-established intention, that is, there is no prior planning of action[14]. However, Romagnoli[15] explains that, if there is resistance, it is because there was no capture of the inventive forces of life, that is, if there is

production of new ways of living, it is because there are resistance movements.

It is also worth adding that the resistance calls into question the pre-established and hegemonic form of institutions, such as the media, for example. In this context, institutions, according to Baremblitt[16], are logical deliberation trees that moderate human activities, presenting what is allowed, prohibited and indifferent. Institutions are understood by a movement that generates them (instituting), a result (instituted) and a process (institutionalization). In order to concretely carry out their regulatory function, institutions materialize into organizations and establishments.

When it comes to the field of communication, the resistance movements question the pre-established way of disseminating information imposed by the media, being a way for the population to communicate in an alternative way to the hegemonic media. Thus, reflecting on the communication process and resistance movements beyond the hegemonic media represents thinking of this process as an instituting action, that is, a process mobilized by productive-desiring-revolutionary forces that tend to create institutions or modify them as part of becoming potencies[16].

These forms of communication that are present in resistance movements, that produce new forms of life and new modes of existence, are called rhizomatic communication, as shown in *figure 1*, as they do not have a pre-established aspect, where different points connect in the flow between different actors (media, social movements, opinion leaders, government organizations, pharmaceutical industry and commerce), situations (disasters, epidemics, pandemics and emergencies), key elements (ethics, transparency, literacy, disputes, integrality and equity), knowledge fields (communication, health and education, for example), in a systematic and creative way of thinking about the world and its complexities, sustaining the differences and heterogeneities within the communicational territory. This flow happens systematically, and each item

can gain greater prominence depending on the historical context experienced, the angle analyzed and the perspective from which point the communication process will be analyzed.

Figure 1. Rhizomatic communication flows.
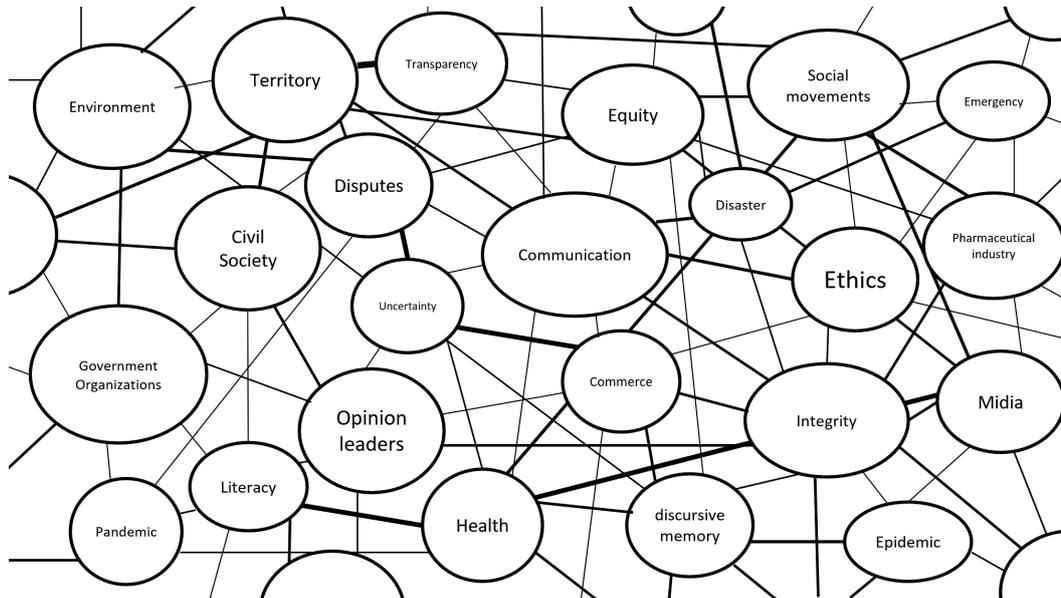
Source: Own elaboration.

In this communication process, the rhizomatic flow is formed by lines that connect and highlight the multiplicity of knowledge involved in the way of rhizomatically communicate, with the public as a great ally in the production of content on the most diverse subjects and, furthermore, shaping the way in which the news is produced by the media and public health organizations. As an example, the communication process developed by the residents of Complexo da Maré (RJ), who use community media to obtain information during the pandemic, and initiatives in Xingu and Rio Negro, which seek to bring information and alerts about the pandemic for indigenous peoples and traditional communities, can be used as an example.

With the use of podcast, newspaper and 'Utility Post Radio', the moderators of Complexo da Maré – territory composed of six communities, located in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro (RJ), with a population of 64 thousand inhabitants – have carried out the process of rhizomatic communication in times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The podcast 'Maré in Times of Coronavirus', also popularly known as 'Big Whatsapp Audio', is an initiative created to inform the population about the fight against Covid-19 in the community. As the population does not have access to quality internet, the audio is disclosed in the form of 'voice message' in apps such as WhatsApp, which is accessible and requires few resources on mobile phones, in addition to distribution on specific digital podcast platforms. Moreover, the newspaper 'Maré news', which seeks to confront fake news, is distributed monthly, and some issues were published online to avoid physical contact and a possible spread of the disease. The community radio, known as 'Utility Post Radio', works with diverse music, advertisements,

information of public utility for the community and, with the pandemic's advance, also explored the subject[17].

The communication processes promoted by the peoples of the Xingu and Rio Negro during the Covid-19 pandemic work through the recording of podcasts and the creation of newsletters in their mother tongue, which provides a better understanding of the information by the indigenous peoples. In addition, videos, cards, audios and information are produced with updated data and prevention guidelines, which are disseminated in villages, communities and cities through social networks and message applications. However, in places without internet availability, information disseminated by radio prevails. For this, health professionals, educators and organizations such as the National Foundation of the Indian (Funai), Indigenous Xingu Land Association (Atix) and Xingu+ Network, send radiograms on preventive measures by Covid-19, and when there are news about the subject, the community turns on the radio at the same time to receive guidance and ask questions[18].

These movements are considered rhizomatic communications, as they present themselves as amorphous, unpredictable and inventive. They put to judgment the ways in which the hegemonic media structure their news, but with the intention of creating flows that can make something new emerge and enhance the ways of life in each of the existing communities.

In this way, the community inserted in this rhizomatic communication process can be understood, in the context of implementing actions close to the reality of each territory, as a Subject Group[16], that is, a collective that constitutes an active utopia, capable of generating its own norms – such as carrying out agendas with subjects destined to the place, as seen by the Complexo da Maré community, and in the production of information in the native language, as happens among the peoples of the Xingu and Rio Negro. Thus, they moved away from the situation of a Subjected Group,

that is, alienated in terms of objectives, procedures and rules imposed on them, such as, for example, listening passively to information on the radio without being able to clarify doubts about the matter or passively accepting the information that is imposed without being linked to the reality of each community.

It is noteworthy that, when reflecting on the subject and subjected group, rhizomatic communication presents points of convergence and divergence with the characteristics of community communication. Convergence takes place in the sense that community communication is understood as a process in which every message receiver from the media has the potential to become a subject of communication, a sender[19]. However, the media in the territories, although they address different local issues, may not be characterized as communitarian. This happens when this communication is produced and exercised reproducing the standards and interests of the hegemonic media, still closed to the expanded participation of citizens[19]. Thus, in rhizomatic communication, there may also be a rupture with this conception of community communication that is imposed on territories.

It is also important to add that, for rhizomatic communication in these resistance movements, podcasts, newspapers and radio have been configured as an agency[16], which are also called devices, and are an innovations-producing assembly that generate events (something unpredictable) and becomings, often ignoring the limits constituted by molar entities (conservatives), such as traditional media. These devices, when used by these groups, can generate absolute difference and produce revolutionary realities, as they enhance the voices of subjects, not often heard by health organizations, research, etc.

In this scenario, it is noteworthy that rhizomatic communication was also established between collectives, often as a response to the crossings suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Baremblitt[16], a crossing is an articulation, interweaving and

interpenetration of a conservative articulation, which serves as domination, exploration and mystification, presented as necessary and beneficial.

One of the crossings identified during the Covid-19 pandemic was the invisibility of the disease in quilombola territories[20]. Data in this population are underreported, and the Ministry of Health has neglected specific attention to black populations, since the issue of race/color was not eligible for analysis of the Covid-19 epidemiological situation in the first epidemiological bulletins[20], and the incorporation of this information as a category of analysis took place after the positions of the Working Group (WG) Racism and Health, the Black Coalition and the Brazilian Society of Family and Community Physicians[21].

This crossing faced by the Quilombola population led the National Coordination for the Coordination of Rural Black Quilombola Communities (Conaq) and the Socioambiental Institute to create the 'Observatory of Covid-19 in Quilombos', with the objective of monitoring confirmed cases and deaths resulting from Covid- 19 among quilombolas. The platform is updated with information sent by Conaq's regional focal points, which monitor the situation of confirmed cases and deaths with communities and local organizations in the territories. With the updated information, Brazilian society and, in particular, quilombola communities have more information to demand action from the State, so that it takes measures in defense of the lives of quilombola families, since most territories are located far from hospitals structured and close to municipalities with a weakened health system[22].

In the rhizomatic communication process, resistance movements, such as those presented by the Complexo da Maré community, the Xingu and Rio Negro peoples and the quilombola community, configure themselves as deviant flows[16], that is, collectives that question the instituted (the State and the traditional media, for example), leading a departure from the hegemonic guiding line of the organization,

becoming the germ of a productive-desiring-revolutionary process.

Moreover, the rhizomatic communication process in these resistance movements presents itself as a desiring production, a production of what is immanent to desire, with desire being configured as non-representational; it is real-and-virtual, situated on the virtual plane, waiting for openings and connections to be able to operate on the plane of objects and modes of subjectivation[23].

Furthermore, this rhizomatic communication is one of the ways in which individuals recognize their opinions, build sources for the formation of beliefs and attitudes, thus being able to present the collective thinking of a given population. Therefore, communication processes, such as the rhizomatic form, must be explored, so that there is a reflection on the instituting actions that have been emerging in various territories during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as an analysis of the implication - place where the individual occupies in the world[24] – of the subjects in the communication process.

Final considerations: a half-opened door

Nowadays, the means of communication often assume a central role in the mediatization of risks and emergencies in public health, so that they can influence the establishment of beliefs, opinions and behaviors. This centrality of the means of communication drives health organizations to develop communication strategies in a hierarchical structure, less cooperative and less democratic.

Given the informational challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was possible to observe several movements that leveraged the population's protagonism in response to this centrality of the media and communication processes anchored in hierarchical and linear relationships, configuring a resistance movement that creates modes of living and

existing, not having, in this way, planned ways of revealing oneself in the territories.

Dealing with the pandemic presented, in each territory, different challenges, according to the needs and adversities that exist there, which were enhanced by access to information and communication technologies, through which local actors disseminated information about care, filed complaints and requests for support through newspapers, videos and audios. From the perspective of rhizomatic communication, they approached characteristics present in Subject Groups of communication and moved away from the context of a Subjected Group, that is, alienated in terms of objectives, procedures and norms imposed on them by the State, media and health organizations.

In addition, it is important to emphasize that the rhizomatic communication implemented by the collectives of Complexo da Maré (RJ), of the Xingu and Rio Negro indigenous peoples and quilombolas during the Covid-19 pandemic period is not an isolated case. Constantly, other movements, often without visibility, arise in order to create the new, enhance the forms of existence in each collective and fight for the challenges imposed by oppressive institutions. In addition, the rhizomatic communication of these and other collectives is in constant disruption, forming other connections, since the challenges faced by them are continuous and not limited to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on what was discussed, it is argued that effective dialogue with the public during health emergencies can be enhanced by health organizations based on the understanding of rhizomatic communication, in which different points connect in the flow between different actors, situations, key-elements, areas and knowledges in a systematic and creative way of thinking about the world and its complexities, sustaining the differences and heterogeneities within the communicational territory.

Thus, by involving the public based on a participatory approach and considering it as a partner, that is, one who can work together to develop communication strategies aimed at specific territories, research organizations will also be promoting a more citizen science, collaborative and open, that acts mobilized by productive-desiring-revolutionary forces in strengthening the becoming-power of the population's different ways of living.

At this point, we conclude, but with the door ajar so that further studies can be carried out in order to problematize the forms of communication in times of risk and public emergency, highlighting the role of resistance movements and collectives in facing the challenges encountered.

Collaborators

Antunes MN (0000-0001-8500-8930)* and Coqueiro JM (0000-0002-5321-5174)* also contributed to the preparation of the manuscript. ∎

*Orcid (Open Researcher and Contributor ID).

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