

Resonances of Resistance: Health and Quilombola Communication During the Pandemic in Córrego do Narciso do Meio, MG

Ressonâncias de Resistência: Saúde e Comunicação Quilombola na Pandemia em Córrego do Narciso do Meio, MG

Resonancias de Resistencia: Salud y Comunicación Quilombola Durante la Pandemia en Córrego do Narciso do Meio, MG

RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender o papel das mulheres na comunicação em saúde e na liderança comunitária na comunidade quilombola de Córrego do Narciso do Meio durante a pandemia de COVID-19. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, baseado em vivências no território e na discussão das práticas de comunicação e organização social desenvolvidas pelas mulheres da comunidade no contexto da pandemia. **Resultados:** As mulheres assumiram papel central na circulação de informações, no cuidado coletivo e na articulação comunitária, mobilizando saberes locais e estratégias próprias de comunicação para o enfrentamento da COVID-19, evidenciando sua atuação na preservação cultural e na proteção da saúde. **Conclusão:** A experiência destaca a relevância da comunicação em saúde articulada aos saberes tradicionais e à liderança feminina, apontando para a necessidade de políticas públicas que reconheçam e fortaleçam essas práticas em territórios quilombolas.

DESCRIPTORES: Quilombolas; Participação da Comunidade; Comunicação em Saúde; Pandemia; Diversidade Cultural.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To understand the role of women in health communication and community leadership in the quilombola community of Córrego do Narciso do Meio during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Method:** This is a qualitative study based on experiences within the territory and on the discussion of communication practices and social organization developed by women in the community in the context of the pandemic. **Results:** Women assumed a central role in the circulation of information, collective care, and community articulation, mobilizing local knowledge and their own communication strategies to address COVID-19, highlighting their role in cultural preservation and health protection. **Conclusion:** The experience highlights the relevance of health communication articulated with traditional knowledge and female leadership, pointing to the need for public policies that recognize and strengthen these practices in quilombola territories.

DESCRIPTORS: Quilombola Communities; Community Participation; Health Communication; Pandemic; Cultural Diversity.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Comprender el papel de las mujeres en la comunicación en salud y en el liderazgo comunitario en la comunidad quilombola de Córrego do Narciso do Meio durante la pandemia de COVID-19. **Método:** Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, basado en experiencias en el territorio y en la discusión de las prácticas de comunicación y organización social desarrolladas por las mujeres de la comunidad en el contexto de la pandemia. **Resultados:** Las mujeres asumieron un papel central en la circulación de información, el cuidado colectivo y la articulación comunitaria, movilizando saberes locales y estrategias propias de comunicación para afrontar la COVID-19, evidenciando su actuación en la preservación cultural y en la protección de la salud. **Conclusión:** La experiencia destaca la relevancia de la comunicación en salud articulada con los saberes tradicionales y el liderazgo femenino, señalando la necesidad de políticas públicas que reconozcan y fortalezcan estas prácticas en territorios quilombolas.

DESCRIPTORES: Quilombolas; Participación de la Comunidad; Comunicación en Salud; Pandemia; Diversidad Cultural.

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Stephanie Dos Santos Cabral

Master's in Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation/René Rachou Institute
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4023-5683>



Flora Rodrigues Gonçalves

Ph.D. in Social Anthropology and postdoctoral researcher in Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, René Rachou Institute
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4854-5774>



Karina Cristina Rouwe de Souza

PhD Candidate in Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation/René Rachou Institute
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8082-6325>



Denise Nacif Pimenta

Anthropologist and researcher at the René Rachou Institute (Fiocruz Minas)
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3248-9472>

INTRODUCTION

Quilombola territories are spaces of resistance that preserve the collective history of Black people in Brazil. Since the era of slavery, Quilombola communities have resisted a system that marginalizes them, facing the denial of basic rights such as access to education and healthcare, as well as difficulties with land regularization and agrarian conflicts that still persist. Slavery left deep and lasting scars, perpetuating poverty, exploitation, racism, and religious discrimination (Lopes, 1987)¹.

After the abolition of slavery in 1888, the quilombos faced a new phase of struggle, now for the preservation and recognition of their lands and identities. Despite formal freedom, former enslaved people and their communities remained marginalized, without access to rights and opportunities. Present since the colonial period, the quilombos reflect the complexity of slavery in Brazil. For Beatriz Nascimento (2018), the quilombo is an institution that transcends time, adapting and acquiring new meanings in capitalist society. It is a space of resistance and protection, which shields Black bodies against racial violence³.

The continued presence on lands occupied for generations goes beyond the territorial issue, reinforcing the identity and collective memory of the quilombolas.

This link between territory and resistance has strengthened the struggle for rights. In line with Nego Bispo (2015), quilombos represent much more than physical territories; they are spaces of reinvention and continuous resistance, grounded in a collective and solidarity-based social organization that challenges hegemonic models⁴. The quilombola social structure, based on ancestry, sharing, and reciprocity, contrasts with capitalist logic. It promotes autonomy, preserves traditional knowledge, and resists racism in the struggle for territorial and cultural rights. In recent decades, the struggle to reclaim these territories has been driven by the Unified Black Movement (MNU), which linked the quilombo to resistance against racism and structural oppression. The quilombo, as a concept, has become a symbol of political and cultural resistance for the Black population, offering a paradigm for the formation of the historical and political identity of people of African descent in Brazil⁵. (Gomes, 2015)

In this context, quilombo women are essential to the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge, integrating it with conventional medicine to provide culturally appropriate healthcare. In addition to maintaining healing practices passed down through generations, they strengthen community bonds and promote autonomy through so-called technologies of communication and affection, which sustain iden-

tities and social inclusion.

Affection, as Mariléia Almeida (2022) highlights, goes beyond the individual dimension, functioning as a collective bond that strengthens solidarity, resistance, and a sense of belonging. It is directly linked to practices of mutual care, knowledge sharing, and community organization, which are essential to the quilombola struggles for territory, identity, and justice. The author considers affection a crucial political force in collective resistance and in confronting historical oppressions, such as racism and colonialism. Affection and communication are pillars of quilombola communities, sustaining memory, health, and the struggle for rights.

Communication and affection not only influence but also sustain the life projects and political actions of quilombola communities, especially among women⁶. In this sense, Araújo and Peruzzo (2019) emphasize that communication enables the dissemination and appreciation of stories, traditions, and ancestral knowledge, promoting a positive view of quilombola identity in a context that often marginalizes these voices, fostering autonomy and community resistance⁷.

Health communication is crucial in quilombola communities, facilitating access to information that promotes well-being and reduces cultural and social barriers. It involves strategies to inform, raise awareness,

and encourage positive attitudes toward public health, helping to reduce inequalities in access to information and strengthening the bond between health professionals and the community to improve quality of life and health outcomes⁸.

Structural racism and social exclusion hinder access to health services and information, creating a context in which adapted communication practices are essential to ensure that these communities receive clear and culturally appropriate information. It is therefore clear that developing anti-racist strategies, policies, and actions in health communication is crucial to addressing race-related inequalities and inequities, promoting awareness and recognition of the demands and needs of this population group⁹.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred, according to the WHO, from 2020 to 2023, inequality, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate communication hindered the adherence of quilombolas to preventive measures. In the community where this study was conducted, fortunately, the reality of confronting the coronavirus was different. However, the general reality denounced by Black and Quilombola movements highlights the lack of decent health conditions. Poor sanitation and water scarcity hinder hygiene, while isolation and the absence of medical services restrict access to care and information.

The reality of these communities demands public policies that respect their culture and way of life, ensuring access to resources and strengthening their leading role in the search for solutions.

Given the importance of health communication for quilombola communities, it is essential to adapt strategies to the specificities of these territories. With limited infrastructure and restricted access to digital technologies, these communities rely on traditional media, such as radio and oral communication, to disseminate information. This study explores the communication dynamics in the quilombola community of Córrego do Narciso do Meio during the pandemic, reflecting on its impact

during the pandemic period.

METHOD

Our methodological approach was based on integrating academic knowledge with local wisdom to understand the Quilombola experience, fostering reflections aligned with their reality and needs.

The collaborative research model, which combined semi-structured interviews and narratives, provided a holistic view of the reality of the Quilombola community. This allowed communication strategies to be tailored to the community's needs.

The study was conducted within the context of two research projects, "COVID-19, Risk, Impact, and Gender Response" and "Quilombola Communities and COVID-19: Development of Social Technologies for Health Promotion in the Médio Jequitinhonha Region, Minas Gerais," promoted by the Fiocruz Program for the Promotion of Innovation (Inova Fiocruz), between 2021 and 2024.

Using participant observation methodology, aspects of local dynamics and the challenges faced in the fields of health and communication were documented. Intra-community communication, especially during the pandemic, highlighted traditional methods such as the "grito" and the radio, which are essential for transmitting reliable information and combating fake news. The interviews also revealed the search for greater access to health services and the challenges faced by the support system during the pandemic.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, as established by Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS). The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) under number 123456/2024, ensuring that all procedures adopted respected the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Participants were duly informed about the research objectives and signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) prior to their inclusion in the study.

The interviews conducted, along with the notes obtained through participant observation and immersion in the community, were essential for understanding the flow of information about COVID-19 in the quilombola context. These methods allowed us to identify the communication dynamics that shape the territory, highlighting both the circulation of health information and the relationships among community members in processes of health and illness. The inclusion of these data in the study represents an important advance in understanding the challenges faced by quilombola communities during the pandemic.

The quilombola community of Córrego do Narciso do Meio, in Araçuaí, is home to approximately 400 residents in 72 families. Located 25 km from the city, its geography shapes the territory, cultural practices, and social relations.

Water scarcity in the community is one of the main difficulties faced by residents. According to reflections based on Macedo (2019), this limitation not only impacts agricultural subsistence—the region's main economic activity—but also compromises the quality of life and health of the local population¹⁰. The stream that gives the community its name is intermittent, drying up for much of the year and forcing residents to resort to makeshift solutions to obtain water.

The local school faces various barriers, while the road hinders mobility and access to services. The lack of a meeting space limits community mobilization. Although the Córrego Narciso community has been certified as a quilombo by the Palmares Cultural Foundation since 2016, it continues to face limitations in accessing basic rights, such as piped water, sanitation, waste collection, health care, and education. Water supply often depends on water trucks provided by the city government, and few households have water collection technologies, such as cisterns. The absence of a Community Health Agent (ACS) for nearly a year hindered access to essential services during the pandemic. Even after certification, progress in the community

has been limited, failing to address urgent needs such as access to water and improved living conditions.

RESULTS

Between March 9 and 11, 2022, I visited the community for the first time to familiarize myself with the area and its dynamics. Initial contact revealed challenges in health and communication, highlighting the strong connection to the land, agricultural dependence, and water scarcity.

In the field, interviews were conducted with two residents—a young woman and an elderly man—and a group interview with women from the same family who hold important roles in the community. The first conversation took place in the kitchen of Dona Duca, a quilombola and local midwife, who kindly welcomed the team. The main interview was to be with Catilene, president of the residents' association and an employee at the community's school cafeteria, but the presence of other family members ended up turning the interview into a rich group conversation, marked by "stories," laughter, and shared expressions among the participants.

The conversation followed a previously validated semi-structured script but unfolded freely, flowing as topics arose. After the formal conclusion of the recording, the conversation continued in a relaxed manner, providing valuable additional insights for the research. The accounts highlight the oral transmission of traditional knowledge in contrast to new information about rights and health. When discussing the flow of information, the participants interacted dynamically and spontaneously, revealing the community's unique communication style.

The interviews revealed nuances of community communication, with spontaneous and enthusiastic remarks. The informal setting reduced formality, fostering authentic and profound expressions.

We communicate by shouting; we shout if we need to warn someone about something like that. Just like when you come here, we shout to each other—"Hey, let everyone know the Fiocruz people have arrived"—it

spreads throughout the whole community... What works is shouting. If I need to, I shout... (Dona Duca, group interview, 2022).

Although the community has a WhatsApp group, not everyone has access to smartphones or the internet, which reinforces the maintenance of what they call the "culture of shouting." This method not only facilitates communication about community events and important announcements but also strengthens the dynamics of daily life.

In the context of traditional quilombola communities, the shout can be understood as a form of essential communication technology. This vocal communication technique is a cultural practice that, in addition to conveying information about meetings, announcements, or emergencies, fulfills a symbolic role by consolidating the community's collective identity. Passed down through generations, the "shout" goes beyond mere information, remaining relevant even with the advent of digital technologies. Its persistence demonstrates the community's resilience, functioning as an autonomous, secure means of communication aligned with local cultural practices.

Valuing Quilombola communication technologies, such as the shout and the radio, is essential for inclusive public policies. New technologies should complement, not replace, traditional knowledge, preserving these forms of communication as symbols of resistance and the struggle for justice.

DISCUSSION

Despite social difficulties, the Quilombola community of Córrego do Narciso do Meio is an example of resistance and the preservation of identity. Although affected by isolation and a lack of infrastructure, its families continue to fight for a good life, with strong ties to the land, a commitment to local education, and active leadership. The leading role of quilombola women in preserving and updating local knowledge and in community communication plays a central role in communities like Córrego do Narciso, especially during times such as

the COVID-19 pandemic. These women's active involvement in disseminating essential information—whether through WhatsApp groups, community radio, or even the traditional "shouting method"—not only contributed to pandemic prevention and awareness but also reinforced the community's sense of identity. My first visit to the community aimed to identify and map potential social technologies, as well as to provide an immersion in daily life and local experiences within the two projects. This immersion allowed for direct contact with the territory, the collection of data on health practices, and an understanding of the community's perception regarding the value of their knowledge and the impact of the pandemic.

In the context of a pandemic, community communication not only informs but also preserves traditions, knowledge, and collective identity. Practices such as the "culture of shouting" have proven effective in disseminating information, strengthening cultural and community bonds.

The "culture of shouting," as they call this type of communication, is an ancestral communication technology that plays a crucial role in social cohesion and the transmission of information within the quilombola community. This practice transcends its immediate function of communicating alerts or urgent news, serving also as a symbolic link that reinforces collective identities and cultural memory. Without access to the internet or mobile phones, the shout is not merely a technological adaptation but an expression of resistance and autonomy. It creates an oral network that connects residents, preserves solidarity, and maintains traditions, demonstrating its relevance in the face of contemporary challenges such as social isolation and a lack of basic resources.

The radio, like the shout, is an essential technology for quilombola communities, going beyond entertainment by connecting residents to political, social, and cultural issues. In addition to disseminating knowledge about rights, agriculture, and emergencies, it strengthens collective identity by highlighting quilombola music and

stories. Accessibility makes radio a crucial tool in building networks of solidarity and strengthening community autonomy in the face of structural inequalities.

The experiences of Black women, whether from quilombos or not, reflect a resistance present in every act of care and struggle for rights. In the quilombo of Córrego do Narciso do Meio, this resistance is expressed in narratives of resilience and collectivity that go beyond ancestry and transcend the territory. Immersion in the quilombo context, with its unique mode of communication, proved crucial for a richer and more complex understanding of the dynamics of health and information during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the research, it became clear how traditional knowledge and local forms of communication play a fundamental role in disseminating information in crisis contexts.

During my stay in the community, the radio and the shout were more than just communication tools; they became sym-

bols of living resistance in every shared gesture and story. In interactions with the quilombola women, powerful narratives of struggle and resilience emerged, where the strength to reconcile rural demands—such as farming and the search for water—with a leading role in community decisions stood out. These experiences reaffirmed the importance of communication tools and the richness of ancestral knowledge, renewed daily by the voice and presence of these women. The research highlights the importance of approaches that integrate the cultural specificities of communities, promoting exchange and learning. It underscores the need for public policies that ensure the effective dissemination of information during health crises and highlights the leading role of quilombola women in promoting health and cultural resilience.

CONCLUSION

The persistence of practices such as the

“grito” in Quilombola communities not only reflects the importance of communication adapted to local realities but also highlights the relevance of this traditional form as a strategy for resistance and the strengthening of identity. During crises, such as the pandemic, these practices ensured the circulation of information and social cohesion. Integrating them with modern technologies strengthens community autonomy without losing their cultural roots. Reflection on communication practices in quilombola communities goes beyond the academic, becoming personal, especially for researchers with similar experiences. The preservation of traditional forms of communication, such as the shout, is crucial for connecting the past and the present, adapting to current challenges. This reinforces the need for public policies that promote cultural inclusion and ensure access to health and well-being in communities.

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