Another face of interaction: communication collectives from peripheries and the State

Outra face da interação: coletivos de comunicação das periferias e o Estado

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Abstract

This article sheds light on forms of collective action in urban peripheries that are rarely addressed in studies on participation in Brazil: the communication collectives. It proposes a history – and process based interpretation to understand who these actors are and why they criticize the interaction with the State. The research is based on content analysis and on an exhaustive thematic characterization of 14,315 posts on Twitter and Facebook pages of 8 collectives from four Brazilian regions, during the Covid-19 pandemic, collected from the social media platforms' APIs. The findings reveal the actors' perception that peripheries have long operated on the basis of "we for us" and disclose the differential and sometimes violent face of the State's interaction with peripheries.

Keywords: pandemic; peripheries; communication collectives; interaction; State.

Resumo

Este artigo dá visibilidade a formas de ação coletiva nas periferias urbanas pouco presentes nos estudos sobre participação no Brasil: os coletivos de comunicação. Sugere uma interpretação histórico--processual para compreensão de quem são esses atores e por que são críticos à interação com o Estado. A pesquisa baseia-se na análise de conteúdo e caracterização temática exaustiva de 14.315 postagens nas páginas do Twitter e Facebook de 8 coletivos, de 4 regiões do País, durante a pandemia de covid-19, coletadas da API das plataformas de mídias sociais. Os resultados revelam a percepção dos atores de que as periferias há muito tempo atuam na base do "nóis por nóis" e a face diferenciada e, por vezes, violenta da interação do Estado com as periferias.

Palavras-chave: *pandemia; periferias; coletivos de comunicação; interação; Estado.*

Introduction

"*No party!*" and "*The protest is non-partisan*" were the rallying cries of a group of demonstrators during June 2013 protests in São Paulo, while on the opposite side, partisan and social movement activists shouted: "*Raise the flags*" and "*Without parties there is no democracy*". While these initial scenes may not capture the diverse repertoires, actors, and demands (Alonso and Mische, 2017) of what became known as one of Brazil's largest protest cycles (Tatagiba, 2014), these protests, in their diversity, revealed a strong rejection of political parties and institutional politics. This has opened up a research agenda focused on understanding the calls for autonomy and horizontality of "new" social and collective movements (Gohn, 2016; Gohn, Penteado, and Marques, 2020). However, the notion of autonomy, defined as the rejection of and separation from the political system, has been challenged in research that highlights the relationship with political parties (Perez, 2019) and the persistence of certain internal hierarchies, such as those related to gender (Sarmento, Reis, and Mendonça, 2017).

In this article, we introduce an additional layer of complexity to the debate about the "novelty" of collectives and their rejection of the political system by concentrating on the viewpoint of the peripheries. First, we ask: *Who* are these actors? In addition to considering the generational effect, as many of these collectives are primarily composed of young activists, we argue, in line with the approach proposed by Gurza Lavalle, Bichir, and Castello (2004), that it is crucial to pay attention to the analytical bias that often creates an impression of novelty regarding phenomena that existed previously.

While these authors have emphasized that social movements were made invisible by the literature employing the category of civil society and examining its actions within participatory institutions, this article draws attention to the erasure of collective actors from the peripheries. It is important to note that, in this case, the absence is not limited to the analytical realm but is also observed de facto and de jure: not only have political studies failed to map the collective action and interaction of these actors with the state and public policies, with rare exceptions (Amancio, Dowbor, and Serafim, 2011), but peripheral actors in general have also been excluded from participatory spaces opened up with democratization.

The second objective is to assess *why* these groups are critical of their interaction with the state or what lies beneath the discourse of autonomy. According to a body of literature, the critique voiced by "new" movements and collectives concerning their engagement with the political system can be attributed to two main factors. First, there is a negative assessment of the limited results or impacts obtained through collaboration with the PT governments. Second, there is the emergence of new social and collective movements that not only express disapproval of the state but also adopt alternative repertoires of action (Perez e Silva Filho, 2017; Gohn, Penteado, and Marques, 2020).

By examining the peripheries, we uncover a complementary perspective. While not disregarding the discourse that political actors employ to distance themselves from the state, our objective is to understand, as proposed by Pereira and Medeiros (2022), autonomy or the claim of distance as a symbolic, discursive, multifaceted, and, as we add, historically

processual construction of the actors. This autonomy does not arise from a desire for non-interaction or the absence of a relationship, at least not exclusively. On the contrary, the discourses that reject the state are the result of a different form of interaction between agents and state institutions and peripheral territories and populations, which significantly diverges from the one examined by recent literature. The forms of collective action we observe in the peripheries today are the result of interactions and are characterized by a state that is both present and absent. This is because the state operates in the peripheries but has little interaction with its population and organized actors.

This conflicted and ambiguous relationship remains a prevalent element that runs through the struggles, identities, community organization, and collective action in the peripheries, aligning with the perspective proposed by Sader (1988). However, while Sader (ibid.) and Doimo (1995) previously analyzed how organizations and discursive matrices were formed in the peripheries – often referred to as popular movements at the time – in opposition to an authoritarian state, today we are faced with collectives and social movements whose grievances and demands, although not very different from those of the past, are now directed at a state that has undergone democratic consolidation over the past three decades. Nevertheless, these collectives and movements face difficulties in being included in discussions and recognized as rights-bearing subjects.

This study is based on different data collection techniques and on thematic content analysis. In selecting the cases, we first identified the communication collectives operating in the peripheries that took part in the Manifesto,[1] launched in March 2020. This manifesto aimed to establish a nationwide coalition to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in these urban regions. Within a set of 70 collectives, we selected eight collectives. Our selection prioritized regional diversity and focused on collectives that showed greater activity on social media and had a higher number of page likes during the data collection period. These eight collectives served as our primary sources of data. They are: Periferia em Foco and Tela Firme (Belém-PA); Força Tururu (Recife-PE); Agência Mural and Periferia em Movimento (São Paulo-SP); Coletivo Papo Reto and Voz das Comunidades (Rio de Janeiro-RJ); and Ruas (Ceilândia-DF). Among these, only the Força Tururu collective was not mentioned in the manifesto. Nevertheless, we included it in the study because, in addition to being a prominent group in the region, our goal was to expand regional representation and extend our analysis beyond the Southeast region, which is usually the focus of analyses.

All these collectives had been organized before the pandemic, so they had much knowledge of the local reality, which includes previous experience acting in emergencies, such as landslides, floods, and inundations. However, it is important to emphasize that our results cannot be directly generalized since the selection of cases was limited to metropolitan areas and capitals. In addition, communication collectives are just one of the various types of social organizations operating in urban peripheries that are actively addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

We selected these collectives because of their central role in disseminating and conveying ideas and concerns related to urban peripheries. These collectives were effective in "*passar a sua visão*" (slang for articulating their viewpoint) because they share visions, experiences,

and the language of their primary audience, the residents of the peripheries. Moreover, given their deep-rooted connections to these territories, rife with numerous contradictions, communication collectives assume a significant role in generating and spreading knowledge and fostering a sense of pride in belonging to the peripheries. While stressing the significance of community initiatives, these collectives also exposed the state's negligence and urged authorities to take responsibility.

The data under analysis was obtained through data extraction from the Twitter and Facebook APIs, involving a total of three data collection sessions. The first session, conducted between March 16, 2020, and June 30, 2020, involved real-time streaming retrieval of Twitter posts featuring the hashtags #CoronaNasPeriferias and #covid19NasFavelas, among others. From this collection, a simple sample corresponding to 10% of the posts was selected, totaling 4,559 posts. Data collection on Twitter was also conducted using the search mode for the same hashtags, covering the periods from March 16, 2020, to March 24, 2020, and from April 8, 2020, to April 16, 2020, resulting in a total of 1,257 posts. Additionally, between March and June 2020, data was gathered from the Twitter profiles of six collectives (Agência Mural, Papo Reto, Periferia em Foco, Periferia em Movimento, Ruas, and Voz das Comunidades), as well as from eight collectives on Facebook. These additional Facebook collectives included Coletivo Tela Firme and Coletivo Força Tururu, in addition to the previously mentioned six. This collection accounted for an additional 2,463 posts.

During the second data collection session, spanning from July 1, 2020, to September 30, 2021, we encountered even greater limitations in data extraction from Facebook, making it impossible to retrieve information from this platform. Moreover, we noted a decline in engagement with the previously selected hashtags during this period. As a result, during the second collection period, we only extracted data from the six collectives with Twitter profiles. This collection session added 6,036 more posts to the analyzed *corpus*. Therefore, the database analyzed in this article resulted in a total of 14,315 posts.

The two analysis periods cover different phases of the pandemic. The first period corresponds to a more critical moment, marked by the novelty of the phenomenon, organizational challenges, and a significant increase in the number of deaths. The second period includes both a substantial increase in deaths and the beginning and expansion of the vaccination campaign. Thus, we examined whether the perceptions about state action and the needs of peripheral areas remained the same or changed over time.

After collecting the posts, we conducted a content analysis in which we exhaustively categorized the topics addressed by the collectives. We differentiated between the collectives' self-perceptions and their perceptions of the government. To achieve this, we utilized the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, version 8.0. We sought to understand how communication collectives in the peripheries see themselves, the state, and the covid-19 pandemic. To do so, we developed codes that constitute the themes within the interpretative frames. In this article, we present the consolidation of two frames that directly address our two objectives: a) those reflecting the actions of collectives and their impressions about themselves and b) those presenting their perceptions about the state.

Chart 1 – Thematic Coding
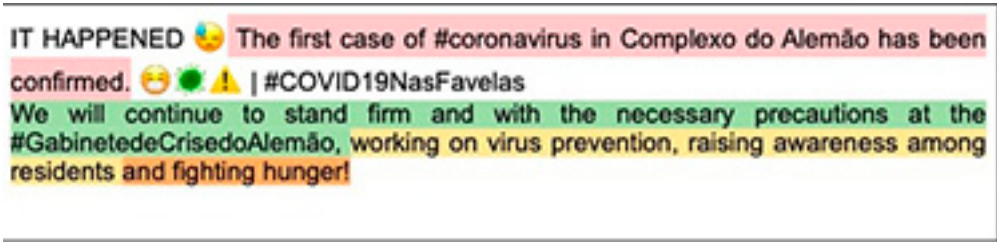
During the categorization process, it was possible for a single text excerpt to be associated with more than one thematic category, depending on the topics addressed in that passage. Chart 1 presents an example of the coding.

In this case, the entire pink excerpt was categorized as "disclosure of cases and deaths", because it refers to information about cases and deaths from the coronavirus in the peripheries. The green passage was categorized as "collectives' actions" and "support for prevention measures" because it describes the actions of the Alemão Crisis Office, emphasizing their focus on necessary precautions. The yellow passage was categorized as "raising awareness", characterizing one aspect of the collective's action. Finally, the orange excerpt was labeled "Hunger" because it refers to hunger as a demand or agenda item during the pandemic.

The study was conducted during the most critical periods of the pandemic, marked by a high number of cases and deaths. Consequently, online materials proved to be a more suitable source for conducting a content analysis of participants' perspectives and actions, primarily through their discourse, as opposed to relying on on-site observations or interviews. Subsequently, we employed Atlas.ti tools to extract specific quantitative data from the analyzed sample, including the frequency of mentions of certain frames and the grouping of frames according to their reference theme.

We chose to focus our analysis on the pandemic, considering it as a critical moment (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999) or a problematic situation (Cefai, 2017). The pandemic tends to stimulate critical reflection and contention among the involved actors, including the identification of victims and culprits, along with the formulation of new action strategies to tackle new issues. The pandemic challenges the dynamic between collectives and the state, providing an opportunity to scrutinize the collectives' expressions of criticism and their responses, their self-perception as reflective agents driven to take action. It also enables us to examine the role of the state, as the pandemic required direct state intervention. Moreover, the pandemic emerges amidst a backdrop of political and social turmoil in Brazil, characterized by deteriorating relations between the state and society, the erosion of participatory institutions, escalating social

inequality, and the dismantling of public policies (Bezerra et al., 2022). Within this context of uncertainties, where solutions, ideas, and proposals are not clearly defined (Abers and von Bülow, 2020b), there emerges a series of narrative disputes aimed at elucidating the needs, the stakes involved, and the potential courses of action to be pursued.

In the case of the peripheries, the attribution of blame or the perceived incapacity of the state in addressing the crisis, along with references to past instances of inaction or state intervention, as we will explore further later on, seems to influence the modes of action, interaction, and the demands originating from the peripheries. The pandemic has also highlighted the significance of local associations, innovative initiatives within the community, and collective actions (Abers and von Bülow, 2020a and 2020b; Castro, 2020; Della Porta, 2020; Franco et al., 2020). This development has introduced a fresh set of inquiries into the dynamics of the interaction between the state and society.

The remainder of this article is organized into two sections and the conclusion. In the first section, we provide a brief historical overview of collective action in urban peripheries dating back to the 1970s. Our goal is to illuminate the changes (or lack thereof) in daily practices in these areas and to explore the emergence and evolution of recent discourses and repertoires of self-initiated action, often described as "*nóis por nóis*" or "us for us", free from state interference. In the second section, we identify what are the peripheral youth collectives and analyze particularly those engaged in peripheral communication initiatives. In line with current literature on collectives, we introduce two key features found in these organizational structures: the central role of artistic and cultural activities, and the crucial significance of digital platforms in "*passarem a visão*" on what "*tá rolando na quebrada*" ("is happening in the hood")

In this section, we also analyze how these collectives perceive themselves and what criticisms they have regarding their (inter)action with the state during the covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic demanded extensive state response, which varied significantly in Brazil depending on government levels, administrative approaches, and the regions affected (Barberia et al., 2020). At the same time, the favelas and peripheral areas were the hardest hit by the virus due to their precarious urban and sanitary infrastructure, high population density, and a significant concentration of informal workers or jobs that required in-person presence. Therefore, the pandemic exposed the contradictions prevalent in the peripheries and the deficiencies in state efforts to provide essential goods and services. This, in turn, resulted in the emergence and/or heightened visibility of both preexisting and novel forms of community organization, along with critical perspectives on the conditions in these regions and the negative aspects of their interactions with the state.

This perspective remained consistent throughout the two periods under study. Conversely, the frames built during the pandemic underscored the self-perceived importance of communication collectives within the peripheries in responding to the covid-19 pandemic in these areas. This aligns with Cefai's (2017) assertion that, in such contexts, these collectives can be viewed as both victims and repairers. Despite the absence of historical data to analyze the state's perception outside this critical moment, the actors retrospectively evaluate their interactions, providing insights

into the possible reasons for their reluctance to engage with the state or political institutions. Among these actors, we notice the idea that peripheral communities have traditionally operated on the principle of "*nóis por nóis*", accompanied by a distinct and at times turbulent relationship with the state.

Collective action in the peripheries from a historical perspective

Between 1970 and 1980, Brazil underwent a significant urbanization process marked by the progressive expansion of cities, rising unemployment rates, and a growing need for access to public services, all against the backdrop of a military dictatorship. Within this context, peripheral popular movements emerged (Sader, 1988), primarily organized in neighborhood associations across various cities in the country. These movements articulated their demands through discursive frameworks, which were ways of addressing reality rooted in culture, language, and locality, all to promote social transformation.

The transformations in the daily lives of the peripheries, including changes in physical infrastructure, demographic characteristics, living conditions, and the development of interpersonal relationships, coupled with the restrictions imposed by the military dictatorship, created favorable conditions for individuals to come closer and cultivate a shared identity as workers and residents of peripheral neighborhoods. Within this context, these individuals organized themselves, established networks of sociability, identified their

demands, and developed political perspectives about the world and the circumstances in which they found themselves (Kowarick and Bonduki, 1988; Sader, 1988). In addition to their shared experiences and needs, collective mobilization was driven by the perception that the state was more inclined to benefit central neighborhoods rather than peripheral areas (Durham, 1988; Telles, 1988). The movements established during this period were thus instrumental in confronting the authoritarian context that hindered political sociability and did not acknowledge collective action as a form of social participation (Doimo, 1995; Sader, 1988).

The discourse of autonomy adopted by these actors, along with the emphasis on the innovative and democratizing potential of social movements, held significant importance. This was particularly significant given the various forms of state interaction with the peripheries, which included both clientelistic and coercive methods during the military era (Kowarick and Bonduki, 1988). Ultimately, the most impactful movements have consistently aimed to shape decision-making and cultivate connections with the state and political parties. They have played a crucial role in mobilization, despite situations where social movements faced fragmentation and internal divisions (Boschi and Valladares, 1983, p. 140).

The democratic transition created opportunities for more direct negotiations with the state, and the 1990s witnessed significant changes in how these interactions took place. Simultaneously, there was a shift in academic perspectives on the dynamics between the state and society. The creation of participatory institutions, including but not restricted to those outlined by the 1988 Constitution, such as policy councils and participatory budgets, led

research to focus on the places where collective aspirations are shaped, intending to influence political decisions and projects (Almeida and Dowbor, 2021).

At the same time, political scientists shifted their analytical focus to the category of civil society, highlighting a group of new actors, particularly NGOs and civil organizations (Gurza Lavalle, Bichir and Castello, 2004). As a result, certain popular and peripheral actors were marginalized from political studies. This occurred because the democratic transition only marginally incorporated peripheral movements into politics and the institutional environment. Accessing the state required a specific form of organization and a certain degree of institutionalization, resulting in only a limited number of popular movements, often with support from NGOs and churches, transitioning into formal associations and networks.

The actors who made this transition in an attempt to engage with the state were central in enabling the establishment of partnerships to implement policies in their communities. They also served as mediators through new channels, such as local councils (Correia, 2015; Doimo, 1995; Medeiros, 2017). However, this does not mean that all popular movements gravitated toward the state or gained access to institutional spaces. Whether due to unwillingness or inability, a substantial portion of the popular movements that originated in the peripheries did not transition into participatory arenas.

According to a study conducted by the Perseu Abramo Foundation, which mapped organizations and movements from various fields in the peripheries, 27% of NGOs and 23% of collectives had previously participated in some form of participatory institution at different government levels. This figure

is notably influenced by the year in which organizations were founded. Among those established before the 2000s, 74% reported participating in participatory forums, predominantly at the municipal level. In contrast, this percentage drops to 44% for organizations established after the year 2000, coinciding with the period when the collectives examined in this study were established and became active (Santos et al., 2021).

If on the one hand, the 1990s allowed certain popular movements to gain access to institutional and participatory spaces, on the other, this decade marked a period when peripheral actors encountered policies that exacerbated inequality and affected their collective action. During this period, Brazilian urban peripheries grappled with the consequences of the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, along with the rise of organized crime and a surge in violence within their communities. Additionally, work became increasingly precarious, pushing many of its residents into the informal sector (D'Andrea, 2013; Feltran, 2008; Telles, 2010). Meanwhile, the expansion of the drug trade and the illicit trade market have given rise to extensive grassroots networks spanning urban areas. Consequently, social issues have become more complex and encompassing, extending beyond traditional notions of exclusion, segregation, and poverty.

This situation pointed to the existence of additional power conflicts, involving organized crime factions and their confrontations with the state. These conflicts redefined the issue of the peripheries, expanding its relevance beyond the traditional urban dimension and intensifying what can be described as a state of exception (Agamben, 2004; Das and Poole, 2004). This

state operates simultaneously within and outside the law, in the margins. In other words, some practices establish zones of ambiguity, blurring the line between what is legal and illegal, resulting in the creation of a killable life – mostly black individuals – in situations that permeate the daily lives and work of people who live or travel through these territories (Brito, 2017; Flauzina, 2019; Pereira, 2019).

In light of this situation, the limited research addressing the forms of collective action that (re)emerge in the peripheries highlights two key elements. The first refers to the restriction of "cooperative" state-periphery interaction to the dynamics of projects and partnerships with non-governmental organizations. These actions are specific in nature and do not constitute an integrated set of public policies (Machado and Leite, 2004). The second element involves the emergence of new organizations and social movements in response to violent state action in the territories. One such example is the mothers' movements, which independently emerged in different peripheral areas during the 2000s. These movements have now grown into extensive networks focused on providing support, fostering solidarity, and taking action against violence (Almeida, 2019; Brito, 2017).

Moreover, public policy scholars have examined the development of initiatives such as Juventude Viva and the Programa Pontos de Cultura, which have played a role in organizing social movements and associations in the peripheries. (Braga, 2022; Gomes, Moura and Alves, 2019; Medeiros, 2013). In these instances, the community actively participated in the implementation of public policies within their territories. Juventude Viva emerged as a response to the demand from the black youth to address the issue of police violence in these territories. On the other hand, the Programa Pontos de Cultura aimed to engage cultural groups in promoting local culture. Amâncio, Serafim, and Dowbor (2011) also show how peripheral associations work to enable social oversight in health and social assistance policies. The goal was to monitor and improve the quality of services offered in the communities.

These different analyses seem to indicate that peripheral movements and associations interacted with the state primarily to react to or curb state violence and to monitor the implementation of policies (or lack thereof) in these areas, rather than actively participate in the joint construction of public policies focused on the reality of these communities. The historical pattern of violent and intermittent interactions between the peripheries and the state – the other, less explored, side of the socio-state interaction – shapes the way peripheries perceive state policies developed in these areas, as we will see in the next sections

Thus, it is not that the state is completely absent from the peripheries – although its ability to meet the demands of the community is subject to criticism – or that there is no interaction between the state and movements. The relationship between these entities involves different modes of interaction, characterized by alternating moments of intervention: recognition *versus* denial (Magalhães, 2019). In addition, their claims of autonomy or detachment from the state should be understood from the context of their historical interaction with the state. This interaction has a direct impact on the everyday lives of residents in these areas, shapes the organization of collective action in the peripheries, and influences their self-perception and perception of the state.

Emergencies on the margins: communication collectives in the peripheries during the covid-19 pandemic

Communication collectives in the peripheries have notoriously played a significant role during the covid-19 pandemic by taking on two primary responsibilities: informing their communities about the risks associated with the new coronavirus and how to prevent its spread, as well as collecting and distributing donations in their territories. In this study, it is important to clarify that when we refer to the peripheries, we are not only discussing geographical locations far from urban centers. Instead, we consider the peripheries from a political perspective, encompassing people who find themselves on the margins of policies, services, and social safety nets. The peripheries include areas such as favelas, neighborhoods, sectors or, simply, "*quebradas*". In the following subsections, we will discuss *what* are communication collectives in the peripheries are and *which* are these collectives we selected. We examine the interpretative frames they have built during the covid-19 pandemic, which reveal how these collectives see themselves and the state.

"Tudo que nois tem é nois" (all we have is us): the perception of communication collectives regarding their actions

The literature on collectives lacks a precise definition of the phenomenon, but some authors offer important insights. Collectives are typically recognized as groups primarily composed of young individuals who share ideas and values and use collectives as their platform for political engagement. They also underscore the significant role of digital media platforms in organizing, mobilizing, and promoting their activities; additionally, they emphasize how the everyday territorial dimension is crucial for constructing a shared identity and determining the scope of their political activities (Maia, 2013; Penteado, and Oliveira, 2019; Perez, 2019; Rios, Perez, and Ricoldi, 2018). Collectives seem to use these digital technologies not only as a tool to promote their actions but as a means to coordinate their activities and as a platform for marginalized voices to act and express themselves (Medeiros, 2017 and 2019). It is worth noting that there are distinctions between today's collectives in the peripheries and the popular movements of the 1980s. The latter emerged closely intertwined with urban struggles. Cultural movements that create spaces for social interaction and contribute to the development of collective identities in these areas are becoming increasingly important today.

Movements focused on culture and peripheral communication, which have gained prominence over the past two decades, share certain common characteristics. They prioritize artistic and cultural expression and acknowledge the vital role of digital platforms. These are movements and collectives made of young individuals who were born and grew up in peripheral regions, and who view art as a means of political and social expression. Peripheral culture is the combination of lifestyles, behaviors, values, practices, languages, and dress codes that foster identification among people. As means of exchange and interaction, both culture and communication play central roles in the dual process of simultaneously enriching people's identities and perspectives while enabling the expression of these identities and worldviews. (D'Andrea, 2013 and 2020).

Chart 2 – Posts about the situation of the peripheries

> Have you noticed that so far *the favelas have been abandoned by the government*? And if it weren't for the volunteers of #COVID19NasFavelas the crisis would be much worse? Congratulations to all involved @eurenesilva @raullsantiago and others!
>
> Since always, the poor and favela people have been forced to carry on.
> Stopping was never an option. *The meaning of resistance for the favela is to keep moving forward*. If there is a shooting on street A, we go to work on street B, but we keep going!
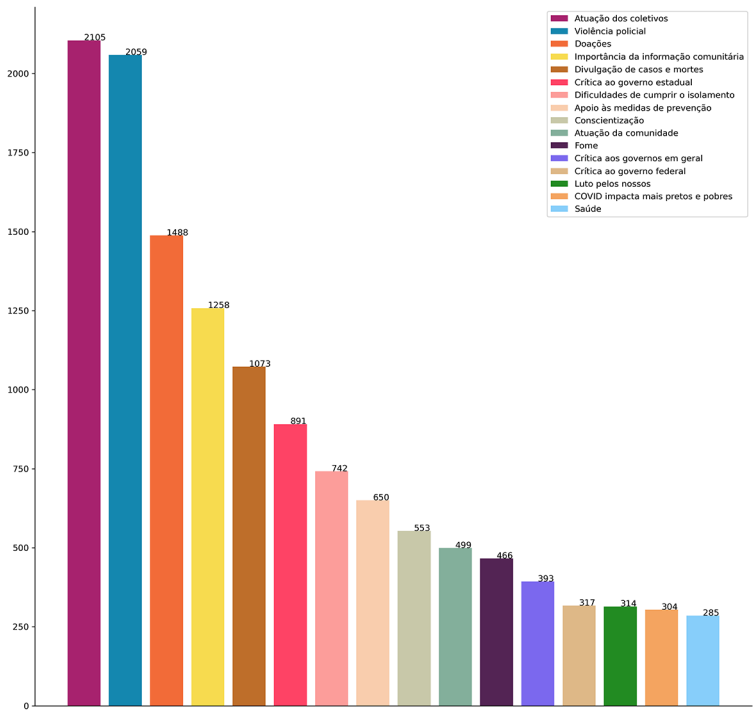> #covid19NasFavelas #CoronaVirusNasPeriferias

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added

The recognition of shared traits among young people from the peripheries contributes to the formation and continuity of communication collectives; it also helps define common interests and issues among its members (Aderaldo, 2013; D'Andrea, 2013 and 2020). Communication groups operate within a context marked by frequent violations of rights and a pervasive presence of illegal activities and criminal organizations. Furthermore, they contend with the state's neglect of peripheral communities and the lack of recognition of their needs, without effective and lasting public policies being properly addressed or implemented in these areas. These collectives have emerged over the last few years, focusing on producing content based on the reality of the peripheries. The young individuals who form these collectives are people whose lives have been marked by various instances where the state failed to ensure their rights and provide adequate, high-quality access to basic services. Moreover, the state has often been responsible for causing sorrow and perpetrating violence within these communities, as shown in the posts in Chart 2.

The collectives involved in the battle against covid-19 in the peripheries were already using social media as an operational tool. However, during the period of social isolation, the significance of these media platforms grew even more. Through virtual channels, the collectives organized themselves, disseminated information, requested support and donations, provided guidance to the community, and exposed the state's neglect of their situation. Furthermore, these collectives played a crucial role in on-site activities (Abers and von Bülow, 2020a and 202 Abers, Rossi and von Bülow, 2021; Franco et al., 2020) by distributing collected donations, disseminating information through pamphlets and brochures, and, on some occasions, even engaging in community cleanup efforts.

The categories derived from the analysis of the data clearly demonstrate the role assigned to collectives and the community itself during the pandemic. The posts emphasize the perspective that favelas have always taken care of themselves and underscore the importance of this aspect in ensuring the safety of their residents during this time. The actions of the collectives, as well as the community itself

Graph 1 – Main topics addressed by the collectives

Legend:
- Atuação dos coletivos
- Violência policial
- Doações
- Importância da informação comunitária
- Divulgação de casos e mortes
- Crítica ao governo estadual
- Dificuldades de cumprir o isolamento
- Apoio às medidas de prevenção
- Conscientização
- Atuação da comunidade
- Fome
- Crítica aos governos em geral
- Crítica ao governo federal
- Luto pelos nossos
- COVID impacta mais pretos e pobres
- Saúde

Values: 2105, 2059, 1488, 1258, 1073, 891, 742, 650, 553, 499, 466, 393, 317, 314, 304, 285

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed data.

Chart 3 – Perspectives on the peripheries

Social isolation sounds like a myth. Even among us who are fighting the pandemic. There's something greater than us, *the desire and need for basic guarantees for our people.* We act in the absence of public authority so that our people have a chance, a voice, a place.

When public authority fails, people need to fill that void. It's incredible that in the Borel favela, they're organizing themselves through WhatsApp to track the number of cases in the community. But we should not romanticize it. *Where is the state looking after at the peripheries?*

#covid19 | #JornalismoDeQuebrada | In times of crisis, the defense of "nossos para os nossos" ("ours for our own"), as manifested in the sense of belonging between journalists and the audience who share the same place of residence, is reflected in an even more creative journalistic approach.

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added.

(even without formal organization), and the importance of community-based sources are emphasized. Additionally, they highlight themes that have played a significant role in the daily lives of residents of the peripheries during the pandemic, including mobilization for donations, dissemination of information about covid-19 cases, the process of raising awareness, the challenges of adhering to isolation, the rise in hunger, and similar issues.

Some statements, on the one hand, indicate that the collectives do not expect the peripheries to receive external support, but they also highlight the need to act in response to limited and at times insufficient state-provided solutions. These statements revolve around the importance of the peripheries taking matters into their own hands (under the category "collectives' actions") and include posts that illustrate how such actions unfolded during the pandemic (e.g.,donations, awareness campaigns, preventive support, community engagement, and posts aimed at raising awareness). On the other hand, the posts reveal a positive view of the peripheries, characterized by their strength and ability to generate creative initiatives to overcome adversity.

"Pega a visão": which state for which society?

After identifying the key actors, the relevant factors shaping their formation, and their intended contributions, we move on to the second objective: gaining insight into how collectives in the peripheries perceive the state and the dynamics of interaction between them.

Graph 1 shows that the presence of the state in the peripheries has a significant impact on the everyday lives of these communities. The category "police violence", which reflects how collectives perceive the state, is the second most frequently mentioned in their posts. This category is also present in the posts categorized as "criticism of state governments". Even though state governments, on the whole, have responded to the pandemic with greater responsibility than the federal government (Barberia et al., 2020), police violence is often mentioned by those who criticize the actions of state governments.

Chart 4 – Perspectives on state action

> One more day without water here at Rocinha.
> They tell people to properly wash their hands, do this, do that, *but where are the basic resources?*
>
> Without waiting for government assistance, Paraisópolis hired doctors to combat the virus: The residents' association hired a 24-hour private medical service, including ambulances, doctors, nurses, and first responders.
>
> *While this government of lunatics carries out its follies, it's the people themselves who are looking out for the people.* The fact that the R$600 is still not available is another symptom of how perverse this government is.

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added.

Graph 2 – Main topics during the early months of 2020
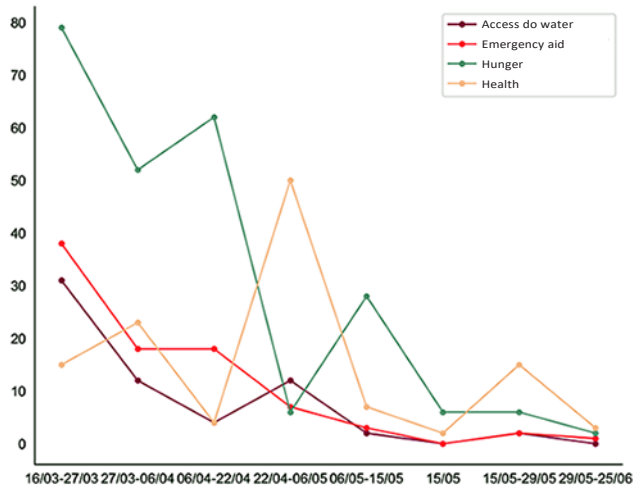
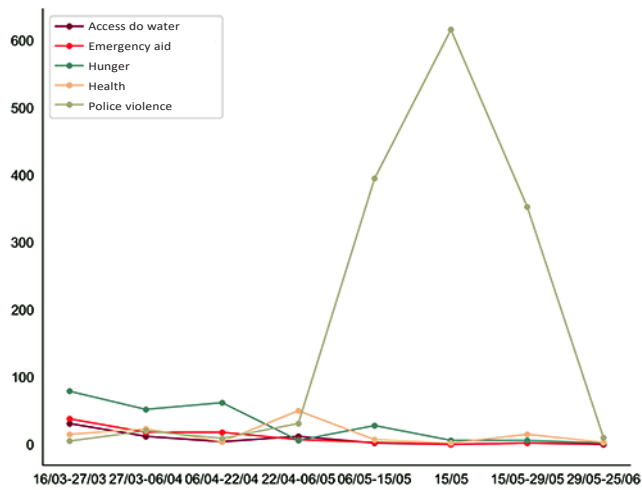Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed data.

The lack of guarantees by the state, both in prevention and crisis management, especially during emergencies in urban peripheries (such as floods, landslides, evictions, and occupations), drives residents to learn to "make do", as happened during the pandemic. Clearly, the deep knowledge that collectives have of these territories and their population, coupled with their accumulated expertise, have contributed to the actors' perception that the periphery is best equipped to act in its own interest – the well-known "*nóis por nóis*" – and, even more importantly, that it is more effective in meeting the demands of the population compared to the state.

This became clear during the covid-19 pandemic. While the state, especially at the state and municipal levels, tried to provide the population with information on how to contain the new coronavirus and implemented measures to facilitate social isolation and protect people, collectives in the communities (alongside residents engaged with their own initiatives) emphasized what they perceived as shortcomings in the state's actions and its inability to understand the local reality.

Additionally, the categories related to collectives' perceptions of the state highlight their criticisms of the government's handling of the pandemic crisis and its initial difficulty in recognizing the issues affecting the peripheries, especially at the beginning of the health crisis. This included problems such as water scarcity, lack of basic sanitation, poor working conditions, and inadequate housing, which added to other criticisms related to

Graph 3 – Police violence in the early months of 2020

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed data.

Graph 4 – Main topics after the first covid-19 wave and in the year 2021
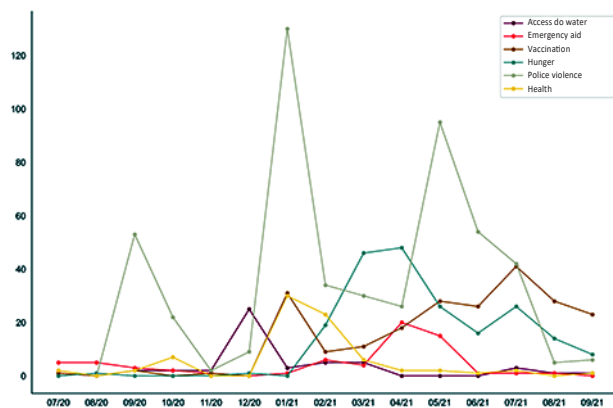
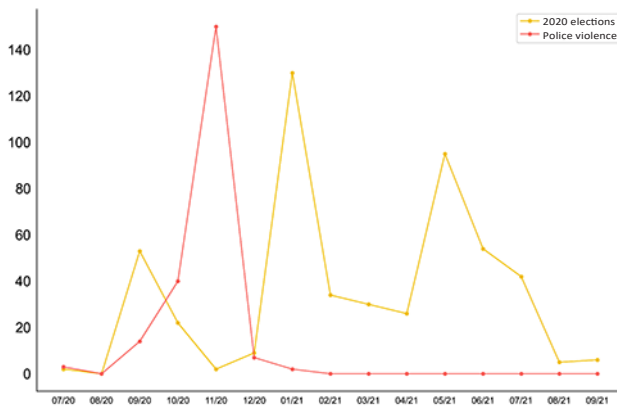Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed data.

the maintenance of a violent pattern of state intervention in the communities. During the first months of the pandemic, communication collectives drew attention to various issues affecting the lives of residents that hindered their ability to take preventive measures and were overlooked by the government. However, the most significant source of criticism was the continued presence of police violence in the favelas, even during the pandemic.

These topics, however, are much less prominent when considering data related to police violence, as shown in Graph 3. The date May 15, 2020, is particularly significant because the hashtags analyzed in this study were widely used at this time to denounce the massacre in the Alemão favela. This event subsequently led to the prohibition, mandated by the Supreme Federal Court (ADPF 635), of police operations during the pandemic.

Data from the second collection session, which refers to another crucial moment of the pandemic, namely, vaccination, clearly shows that police violence and its impact on residents' daily lives remained significant. In addition, despite the prohibition of operations, they continued to occur, instilling fear and insecurity in the peripheries.

Graph 4 highlights that during the initial month of vaccination, in January 2021, a topic of utmost importance to the public, the number of comments related to vaccines was exceeded by posts about violence arising from the numerous police operations carried out during that period. The same happened in May 2021, when vaccination began to expand beyond health professionals and the elderly. This event, however, was overshadowed by the massacre in the Jacarezinho favela in Rio de Janeiro, where 27 civilians and 1 police officer were murdered.

Graph 5 - Police violence versus 2020 elections

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample.

Reports of police violence only dropped during the electoral period in 2020, as shown in Graph 5.

We acknowledge that collectives' negative perception of public authority might have been exacerbated by a critical event, the pandemic, and by the presence of a far-right government at the federal level. These factors can prevent collectives from recognizing state actions in these territories. However, the data also highlight another crucial factor that cannot be overlooked when trying to understand the peripheries' desire to distance themselves from the state. The interaction between the state and society in the peripheries, marked by violence and informality, differs significantly from the interaction studied in recent literature, which has primarily focused on participation within institutionalized spaces and on partnerships with NGOs. Members of collectives express the perception that not only did the state fail to protect the residents of peripheries in the past, but it has also continued to violate their rights during the pandemic (see Chart 5).

Quadro 5 – Percepção sobre ação violenta do Estado

Gunfire doesn't stop and the terror only increases.
The state enters the favela to kill. *Governments come and go, but Public Policy is always the same:* @PMERJ to control the poor segment of the population.
Governments come and go: genocide of the favela population.

We ask so much for help from the state, and it is making itself present at this moment.
How to combat a virus?
How to feed those who need it the most? BY OPENING FIRE! *It is easier to kill a favelado than a virus.* The Complexo do Alemão is being torn apart by gunfire.

Favela medicine:
1) the patient sends a message because they won't be able to attend due to a police operation. 2) extracting a stray bullet in the middle of a pandemic.
There's a lack of tests, a lack of hospital beds, a lack of ambulances. But gunfire, it's never lacking.

Genocide and its various branches.
In the middle of a pandemic that kills more black, poor, and indigenous people, *the state doesn't give a moment's rest and continues* with harmful and deadly operations against black people.
There are no masks or hand sanitizers to protect us from racial hatred and a bullet from a rifle.

#CoronaNasPeriferias | Despite the social distancing imposed by the pandemic, demonstrators took to the streets of Cidade Tiradentes to protest last Saturday. In addition to the coronavirus, the *Brazilian state continues to kill* with bullets. Check out the news article: https://t.co/E5Gy40KAxB

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added.

Fonte: elaboração própria, com base na amostra analisada; grifos nossos.

It is worth highlighting that during the initial months, the limited access to public services, such as water and sanitation, significantly hindered the implementation of preventive measures against the coronavirus. The second phase of data collection revealed that even after this initial period, this narrative of the state's failures persisted. However, the collectives started using the visibility they had gained to shed light on the broader issue of limited access to public policies. This meant not only addressing the immediate shortcomings in serving the communities but also highlighting a range of preexisting inequalities and deficiencies on the part of the government.

The issue of hunger was extensively discussed in the early months, as clearly demonstrated in Graph 2. As the months passed, this topic was less emphasized as more donations were collected, and emergency aid was made available to the population. At the beginning of the pandemic, most posts drew attention to the need for donations so that people could stay at home, even if they lost their jobs. This discourse, however, subtly shifted when it became clear that hunger and food insecurity were becoming more tangible with each passing day. Requests for donations were no longer associated with the need to facilitate social isolation but to fight hunger. Graph 6 shows that posts related to hunger reached

Chart 6 – Lack of access to basic services

The pandemic had a significant impact on the favelas. In addition to severe cases and deaths from COVID-19, many residents suffer from a *lack of medical care, basic sanitation, security, unemployment, hunger, and fake news*.

The youth in the peripheries don't have many future prospects because of a country that doesn't enable long-term planning. The youth want to live in the moment, want to live in the present, and they won't stop living because of the threat of COVID-19. It's sad, but it's real.

In some states, the value of the basic food basket exceeds R$600. *With cuts in social programs and mass unemployment, how will people survive?* Government negligence is genocide. #TemGenteComFome

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added.

Graph 6 – Comparing mobilization against hunger with other issues
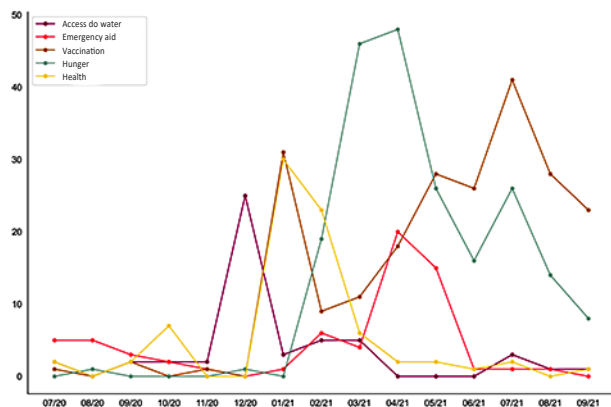
Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed data.

Chart 7 – Perceptions about the issue of hunger

The #pratodascomunidades was created at the beginning of the pandemic to provide food for those in need. The pandemic continues, and so does hunger in the communities. Every contribution is important and can help many people.

I am someone who believes in robust public policies rather than charitable systems, but hunger does not wait. In the face of a genocidal misgovernment, solidarity is harm reduction. #TemGenteComFome

Now more than ever we need to unite to get through this chaotic moment together, cooperating and empathizing with one another. All of this will pass, but we know we can't rely only on the government, each one must do their part and what is possible. #TemGenteComFome

Source: Made by the authors based on the analyzed sample; emphasis added.

their peak during the social media campaign using the hashtags #PratodasComunidades and #TemGenteComFome.

Posts related to hunger highlight factors such as social isolation, the inadequacy of emergency aid, rising prices, unemployment, and the state's responsibility in allowing people to reach such a precarious condition. This is not solely a situational matter, but one deeply linked to historical and structural issues.

Conclusions

This article aimed to provide insights into peripheral communication collectives and explore the reasons for their discourses advocating for distance from the state. In existing literature, these narratives are often interpreted as a call for autonomy or a lack of engagement with the political system. We shed light on both the key actors involved and the other, less explored side of their interaction with the state, characterized by violence, limited influence on policy decisions, and restricted access to institutional spaces. These aspects are often neglected in studies on social participation in Brazil and even within other domains of political science.

By treating the covid-19 pandemic period as a temporal reference point for our analysis, we were able to examine this interaction during a critical moment when state intervention, issue recognition, and solution prospecting are especially important. This context reveals how collectives perceive their role in the peripheries and what they expect from the state. During times of crisis, discourse often emerges that vividly frames problems,

solutions, culprits, and victims. While one could argue this may introduce bias against the state, the urgency of such moments reveals the narrative disputes that the involved actors see as a priority. Moreover, the posts consistently show that state neglect is not a newly arisen issue in March 2020, when the pandemic reached Brazil. On the contrary, according to the perspective of members of communication collectives, state inaction is a longstanding historical trend. Additional research is needed in peripheral collectives and organizations of various kinds, in different locations, to assess the impact of the historical interaction between the state and the peripheries on the various forms of collective action.

As for the communication collectives, we propose that addressing the peripheries requires an analysis of the historical and processual context of the relationship between the state and popular movements. Such research should emphasize distinctions between popular movements in the 1980s and contemporary collectives. First, it is important to note that peripheral actors were not fully integrated into the institutional spaces that emerged in the 1990s and beyond. The forms of collective action in the peripheries were affected both by the expansion of organized crime in these areas and by the violence imposed by public security forces. Secondly, while there are similarities between the forms of collective action in the 1980s and contemporary collectives, such as their engagement in underserved areas, the former are characterized by their strong emphasis on culture and art, extending beyond urban-oriented associativism. Furthermore, today's collectives heavily rely on digital media communication platforms as a fundamental part of their strategies.

The data reveals that communication collectives from the peripheries play a role in shaping the collective identity of the peripheral individual. This identity encompasses both the experiences with deprivation and the power and creativity of these communities. Social media, which assumed a central role in mobilizing various social movements during the pandemic, played a crucial part in enabling collectives to coordinate and promote their in-person activities. Additionally, it provided these collectives with a platform to express their self-perception ("*passar a visão sobre si*") and highlight their constant need to act on their own, as they are not considered a priority for state action. Therefore, despite the organizational disparities between past forms of collective action and present-day collectives (with the latter focusing on artistic and cultural expression), it is possible to identify a sense of continuity between the two. These collectives serve as arenas not only for crafting collective identity, voicing grievances, and articulating demands but also for taking action directed at addressing urban challenges.

The data shows that collectives see themselves as responsible for taking measures to combat the pandemic, either because they did not expect the state to take the necessary measures or because state actions in these communities were found to be inadequate and insufficient. By stating that "*the state has never looked out for us*", the collectives refer to a history of absent, incomplete, or insufficient public policies, as well as police violence in the communities. These prior experiences appear to override the pandemic experience for these actors. Moreover, they are aware of their ability to respond in emergencies because they had previously taken action during other crises, such as floods, landslides, displacements, and massacres.

With respect to the collectives' perspective towards the state, it is important to emphasize that the demand for keeping a distance from the state should be understood within the historical context of this interaction. The pandemic brought attention to the violent and neglectful presence of the state in the peripheries. This pattern of state intervention can be clearly observed in the initiatives taken by residents and collectives who do not expect a response from the federal, state, and municipal governments to address the needs of the peripheries. It is evident in posts that condemn the lack of access to water and sanitation when it is most crucial. The surge in unemployment, food insecurity and, most notably, police violence, are manifestations of state negligence.

The involved actors often characterize the state as a monolithic agent that always behaves in the same way, regardless of whether it is at the municipal, state, or federal level of government. Certainly, by underscoring this point, we do not aim to disregard the heterogeneity within the state and its differing impacts on territories and public policies. The intention is to highlight that this distinct perception of the state's absence or presence is a powerful element in shaping collective identity, crafting narratives, and uniting communication collectives in the peripheries. It may also offer insight into the calls for autonomy observed in other collectives.

The efforts made by the collectives and the communities themselves to promote social isolation in the peripheries undeniably showed a high level of creativity, organization, and commitment from these groups. It is essential

to highlight that, on numerous occasions and across various subjects, the state was urged to take responsibility. The collectives emphasize that they are doing a job that should be done by the state.

The fact that these collectives have taken action, demonstrating the knowledge and expertise necessary to do so, which they believe was executed more effectively, highlights their autonomous position. In other words, they have actively sought solutions independently of the state. Despite collectives frequently asserting that the state is absent from the peripheries and, when present, it is only through violence, they continue to assert that the state should ensure a range of rights and services for these communities, in addition to listening to their demands. This underscores an expectation that the state will take on this responsibility and foster a different form of interaction between the state and the peripheries.

These same statements elicit reflections on the depth of the impacts of the frequent contact of residents with state violence in the peripheries. Redemocratization brought about certain advances, including in the peripheries. However, given that these policies needed to be continuously monitored to ensure their maintenance and quality, and because a public security policy marked by violence is present, the actors' perspective towards the state often expresses feelings of abandonment and neglect.

For the collectives, the pandemic signifies yet another moment, albeit one greatly exacerbated, in which the peripheries did not have their rights guaranteed and were frequently subjected to police violence. However, the actions carried out during the pandemic cannot be comprehensively grasped by examining this particular context exclusively. This study shows that further research is necessary to understand how collective organizations are affected by rising violence in the peripheries and limited access to public goods and services. By examining the history of this interaction, we can gain insight into the motivations behind the discourses and forms of interaction of these actors, who seem to be pursuing solutions independent of the state.

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Note

(1) This is the Manifesto released by communication collectives to launch a coalition to combat the coronavirus through #CoronaNas Periferias campaign. Available at: <http://periferiaemmovimento.com.br/comunicadores-perifericos-se-unem-em-coalizao-nacional-pra-enfrentar-pandemia/>. Accessed: March 22, 2020.

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