

The care of/for others: COVID-19 pandemics in minority  
Brazilian communities

O cuidado de/para os outros: pandemias de COVID-19 em  
comunidades minoritárias brasileiras

El cuidado de/por los demás: pandemias de COVID-19 en  
comunidades minoritarias brasileñas

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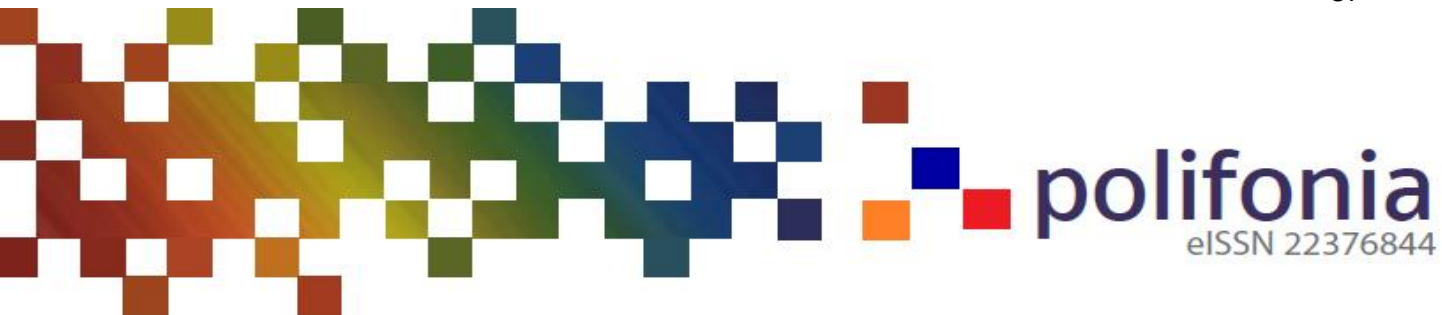
#### Abstract

In this paper, the relationship body, knowledge, and social practices within a decolonial perspective is addressed through a study on discourses of care and caring in the global COVID-19 syndemic by communities representing three vulnerable groups in Brazil - the Indigenous peoples, the Quilombolas, and the Landless Rural Workers Movement. These groups have been severely affected by the disease as national containment policies have failed to respond to their specific needs and disregarded their philosophies and practices of care. Our corpus comprises images, videos, and written materials produced by members of these communities and by government authorities on the matter of COVID-19. They were gathered from social media and websites under the thematic, qualitative enunciative criteria “COVID-19 + minority groups in Brazil”. A transcultural and discursive analysis of the data was performed to answer the following research questions: How have these communities resisted the necropolitics of the Brazilian government in the syndemic? How is care being discursivized by them? Our results point to a concept of care that is always collective, from which it is impossible to think of a form of human existence that could be only individual. Such concept materializes a non-Eurocentric, non-capitalist form of intelligibility on living collectively and caring, a view in which to live means to care and for a dignified existence.

**Keywords:** social vulnerability, minority groups, place of listening.

#### Resumo

Neste artigo, a relação corpo, conhecimento e práticas sociais em uma perspectiva decolonial é abordada através de um estudo sobre discursos de cuidado enunciados por comunidades que representam três grupos vulneráveis no Brasil - os povos indígenas, os Quilombolas e o Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra e no contexto da sindemia global COVID-19. Esses grupos têm sido gravemente afetados pela doença, pois as políticas nacionais de contenção não vêm respondendo às suas necessidades específicas e desconsideram



suas filosofias e práticas de cuidado, mas vêm tentando resistir. Nosso corpus é composto por imagens, vídeos e materiais escritos produzidos por membros dessas comunidades e por autoridades governamentais sobre o assunto COVID-19. Eles foram coletados em redes sociais e sites sob o critério enunciativo temático e qualitativo “COVID-19 + grupos minoritários no Brasil”. Uma análise transcultural e discursiva dos dados foi realizada para responder às seguintes questões de pesquisa: Como essas comunidades têm resistido à necropolítica do governo brasileiro na sindemia? Como o cuidado está sendo discursivizado por eles? Nossos resultados apontam para um conceito de cuidado que é sempre coletivo, a partir do qual é impossível pensar uma forma de existência humana que seja apenas individual, e que materializa uma forma de inteligibilidade não eurocêntrica, não capitalista de viver coletivamente, em que cuidar faz parte do viver e para a manutenção de uma existência digna.

**Palavras-chave:** vulnerabilidade social, grupos minoritários, lugar de escuta.

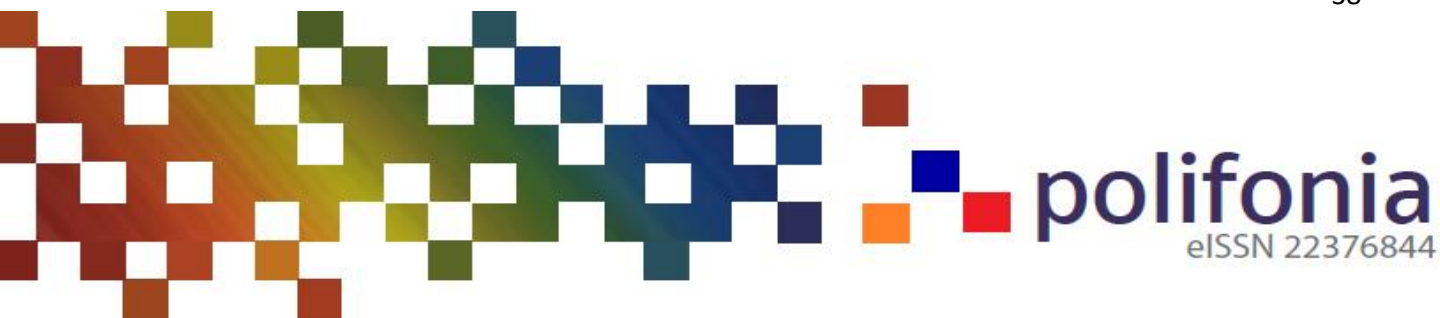
### Resumen

En este artículo, la relación entre cuerpo, conocimiento y prácticas sociales en una perspectiva decolonial se aborda a través de un estudio sobre los discursos de cuidado enunciados por comunidades que representan a tres grupos vulnerables en Brasil: los pueblos indígenas, los Quilombolas y el Movimiento de Trabajadores sin Tierra y en el contexto de la sindemia global COVID-19. Estos grupos se han visto gravemente afectados por la enfermedad, ya que las políticas nacionales de contención no responden a sus necesidades específicas y desconocen sus filosofías y prácticas asistenciales, sino que han intentado resistir. Nuestro corpus consta de imágenes, videos y materiales escritos producidos por miembros de estas comunidades y funcionarios gubernamentales sobre el tema COVID-19. Fueron recolectados en redes sociales y sitios web bajo el criterio enunciativo temático y cualitativo "COVID-19 + grupos minoritarios en Brasil". Se realizó un análisis transcultural y discursivo de los datos para responder a las siguientes preguntas de investigación: ¿Cómo han resistido estas comunidades a la necropolítica del gobierno brasileño en la unión? ¿Cómo discursivizan el cuidado? Nuestros resultados apuntan a un concepto de cuidado siempre colectivo, a partir del cual es imposible pensar en una forma de existencia humana que sea solo individual, y que materialisca una forma de inteligibilidad no eurocéntrica, no capitalista de vivir colectivamente, en la cual el cuidado forma parte de la vida y para el mantenimiento de una existencia digna.

**Palabras clave:** vulnerabilidad social, grupos minoritarios, lugar de escucha.

## 1. Introduction

Brazilian historian Lilia Schwarz (2020) recently pointed out that the turn of a century does not happen according to the calendar, but rather with something such as a severe crisis that marks it. This led her to consider the COVID-19 pandemics as the dramatic event that closes the 20th century. In this interpretive frame, the 21st century thus begins with a twenty-year delay and amidst one of the greatest humanitarian crises on earth.



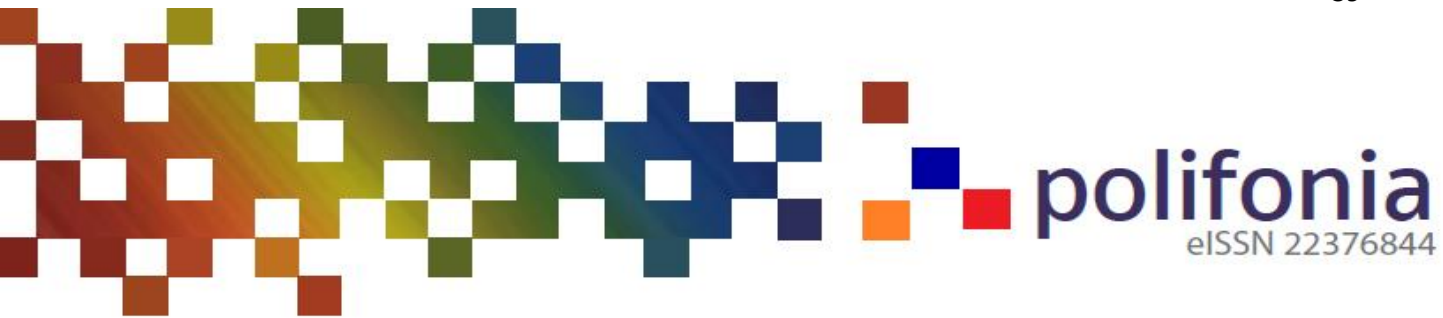
According to the World Health Organization - WHO, on January 14th 2021, as we write this article, there are 89.707.115 confirmed cases and 1.940.352 deaths worldwide. Of these numbers, 8.195.637 cases and 204.690 deaths happened in Brazil only, and the numbers will certainly be much higher as this text reaches readers. As privileged researchers, professors at public universities in Brazil who are able to work remotely and have access to information, we observe the pandemic tragedy happening in our country from a critical positioning and highlight that, despite all warnings, the federal government has dramatically failed to follow the international WHO guidelines for the COVID-19 response. Oliveira et al. (2020, p.8) summarize this lack of care by identifying the following aspects taking place in Brazil:

[...] absence of a Federal pact on the measures for containing transmission, such as social distancing (even lack of adherence to distancing by the Federal Government); absence of an effective social protection system for the more vulnerable populations; backing for controversial treatment measures with no consensus in Brazilian and international scientific societies; lack of prioritization of the testing strategy for individuals with respiratory symptoms and the more heavily exposed; low implementation of the expansion of supply of intensive care equipment and supplies; and insufficient supply of critical resources for treatment of the disease.

It is important to note that the epidemic situation here is not more serious only because we rely on a broad and well-structured Single Health Service - SUS that is public and free since 1988, when the Federal Constitution was created. SUS aims to guarantee to all Brazilian citizens “full, universal and free access to health services” ranging from “simple outpatient procedures to highly complex care, such as organ transplants”<sup>1</sup>. It is also SUS that, among several other actions related to health promotion and disease prevention and health surveillance, promotes and executes vaccination campaigns throughout the national territory. With all these years of existence, SUS has, therefore, extensive experience in the control of epidemics and in the treatment of diseases. However, in the midst of the current federal government's wave of negation and

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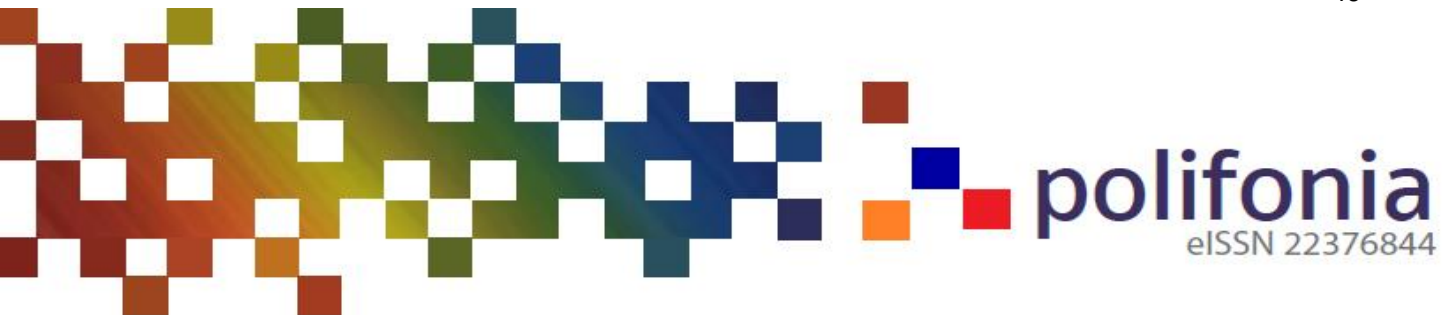
<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://pensesus.fiocruz.br/sus>.



negationism on COVID-19 and its gravity, and under the governmental pressure for the privatization of health services, SUS has been undergoing a scrapping attempt. Being the primary health care institution in the country, in the context of the pandemic, it has already collapsed in many regions. In our study, mention of SUS is essential because it is the first and only form of hospital care for the majority of the population, including the vulnerable social groups that we focus on in this study, namely: Indigenous peoples, Quilombola communities and the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (“Landless Rural Workers Movement”) - MST, which we discuss in the next section

It is undeniable that the pandemic affects different groups in different ways, with great severity in the southern global region, as verified by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2020). The sociologist reiterates his understanding of the global south not only as a geographical location, but also, above all, as a metaphor about the effects of capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal exploitation. This global “south” is home to many minority groups, stigmatized or historically exploited in the modern western world: women, precarious workers, homeless people, slum dwellers, refugees, disabled people, the elderly, gay, lesbian and trans people, populations and communities of traditional cultures, to name just a few. These racialized and genderized groups have been constituted in the Eurocentric colonial logic which began in the 16th century and still prevails in this historical stratum. By the same logic, they have been the most socially and economically vulnerable and have also been gravely hit by COVID-19.

The difference there is for different peoples and individuals to fight against the disease is a direct consequence of historical inequalities. As it has been experienced here, the incidence and mortality due to COVID-19 in countries like ours, former European colonies that are heavily marked by slavery tradition and structural racism, is much higher in these vulnerable communities. So much so that on April 23, 2020, the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO) signed a letter to the Ministry of Health emphasizing the importance of “including the race/color variable in the new COVID-19 notification form that was recently distributed for the Federative Units”. The understanding expressed in this letter was that the availability of information on

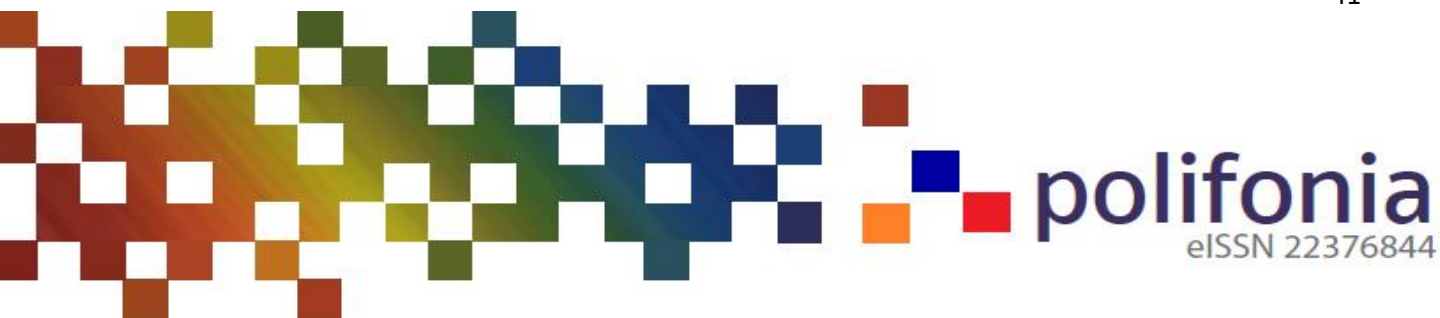


“race/color” would be fundamental to “ensure the confrontation of the epidemic and should be considered a priority in the planning of actions and monitoring in our country, especially in view of the extreme racial inequality profile in Brazil”.

Therefore, it is our understanding that reflecting on the theme of care, body and social practices during the pandemic implies an analysis within a colonial frame. According to Grosfoguel (2006), colonialism can be understood as the colonial situations imposed by the presence of classic colonialism, while coloniality refers to the colonial situations that remain much after the colonial administrations came to an end. Coloniality as a frame for colonial thinking, knowing, and being (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2007), inherited the cultural, political, sexual and economic exploitation patterns of colonialism and is a much more complex historical phenomenon that spreads to the present. It refers to a pattern of power that operates through the naturalization of territorial, racial, cultural and epistemic hierarchies that enable the reproduction of relationships of domination (RESTREPO; ROJAS, 2010), that is, it operates through the oppression and exploitation of the racialized/ethnic subordinate groups by the dominant racial/ethnic groups.

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, empirical data also supports the understanding of the colonial difference. As discussed in the study by Figueiredo et al (2020), the incidence and mortality rates of the disease varied in the Federative Units of the Brazilian territory according to economic conditions, housing, access to education and work. The ecological study analyzed data “related to socioeconomic, demographic, epidemiological factors, and the health structure of all Brazilian Federative Units (FU)” (FIGUEIREDO ET ALIA, 2020, p. 5). Its results show that the poorest part of the population has been the most affected by COVID-19. This part of the population is the one that is forced to live in overcrowded dwellings in peripheral areas of urban centers, has difficulty accessing water and the sewage system, is unable to work virtually and to adhere to and maintain physical isolation, and have difficulty to maintain their individual protection practices against the disease:



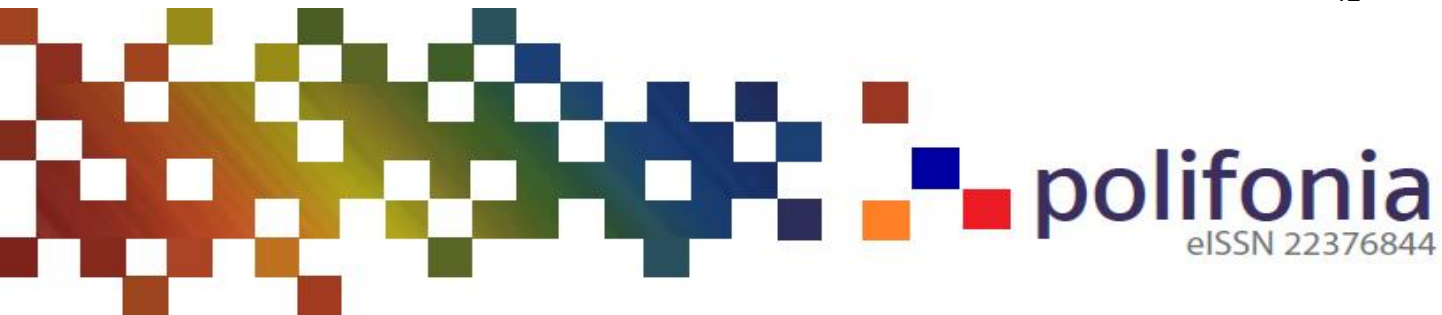


Incidence and mortality rates were quite distinct among the Brazilian F[ederal]U[nit]s, showing heterogeneity in the country's evolution of the pandemic. The incidence rates presented a negative correlation with the pandemic time, which indicates that the spread of SARSCoV-2 was different in the FUs. The positive correlation between the time of the pandemic, the GDP per capita, and variables of the system structure, associated with the negative correlation with variables related to inadequate housing conditions and a higher percentage of people without education, suggests that the pandemic started in FU with better socioeconomic conditions and expanded to more vulnerable areas (FIGUEIREDO ET AL, 2020, p. 5).

Reiterating the results of the studies by Hawkins (2020), and by Garcia et al (2020) on the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.A., the results of Figueiredo et al point to a direct correlation between social factors of vulnerability, poverty, COVID-19 infection and mortality rate from the disease. In addition, these populations are also those with high incidences of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, overweight, and nicotine dependence, conditions that aggravate the infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

In this sense, the concept of *syndemic* in place of pandemic, in our view, sheds light and more clearly expresses a first conceptual aspect on the theme of care, body and social practices in the condition of COVID-19. Horton (2020) and Tsai (2020), based on the concept of syndemic proposed by Singer (1996), explain that the contagion and severity of COVID-19 are necessarily related to these other chronic diseases, which happen to be also very frequent in vulnerable populations, as they may result from their vulnerable living conditions. As Tsai (2020, p. 1) explains, a syndemic disease aggregates with other diseases and arises from harmful social conditions. Horton (2020) asserts that:

The most important consequence of seeing COVID-19 as a syndemic is to underline its social origins. The vulnerability of older citizens; Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities; and key workers who are commonly poorly paid with fewer welfare protections points to a truth so far barely acknowledged—namely, that no matter how effective a treatment or protective a vaccine, the pursuit of a purely biomedical solution to COVID-19 will fail. Unless governments devise policies and programmes to reverse profound disparities, our societies will never be truly COVID-19 secure. [...] Approaching COVID-19 as a syndemic will invite a larger vision, one encompassing education, employment, housing, food, and environment. Viewing COVID-19 only as a pandemic excludes such a broader but necessary prospectus (HORTON, 2020, p. 874).



Complying with Hortons' s interpretation that “a purely biomedical solution” will not be enough in the case of the current pandemic, and as language researchers from the south addressing the theme of discourses of care in such context, our objective in this paper is (1) to analyze narratives told by socially vulnerable groups in Brazil on COVID-19, and (2) to learn and problematize, within our scientific realm, that which we recognize as being in (1) a non-mainstream philosophy of care which we align with our decolonial stance. Our guiding questions are: How have these communities resisted the necropolitics of the Brazilian government in the syndemic? How is care being discursivized by them?

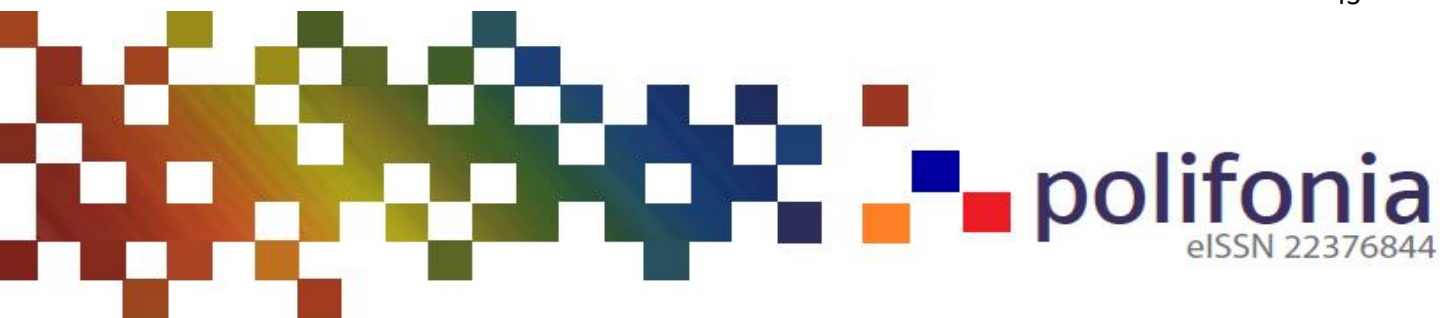
To answer this two sided question, we selected materials (written texts, videos, and other internet postings) on the theme of COVID-19 that were disseminated by the groups themselves. We followed a transcultural and discursive orientation which proposes that research based on different multimediatic materials and different languages helps us understand the social world. In the following sections, firstly, we describe the groups that were focused and the materials analyzed in each case. Secondly, we present the analysis and discuss the results. We conclude with a problematization on the concept of care in the condition of the COVID-19 and a reflection on a non-mainstream philosophy of care for the syndemic and post-syndemic.

## **2. The communities and their discourses**

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated experiences of life, death, isolation, care, and also localized survival and resistance. Even in face of the Brazilian State's necropolitics project (MBEMBE, 2018)<sup>2</sup>, practices of collectives erupt to confront the colonial logic of dehumanization and to plant discourses that urge an attentive listening by other communities. Inhabiting the periphery of power and of social and intellectual visibility, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas and the MST Movement have been resisting the oppression of different sectors of the society for a long time. In the context of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Mbembe (2018), necropolitics can be understood as the “power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”.



COVID-19 syndemic, in which the failure of neoliberalism is bluntly revealed (NUNES, 2020; KRENAK, 2020), their narratives tell us of local micropolitics strategies of survival and a philosophy of life that includes a sense of care that is perennial.

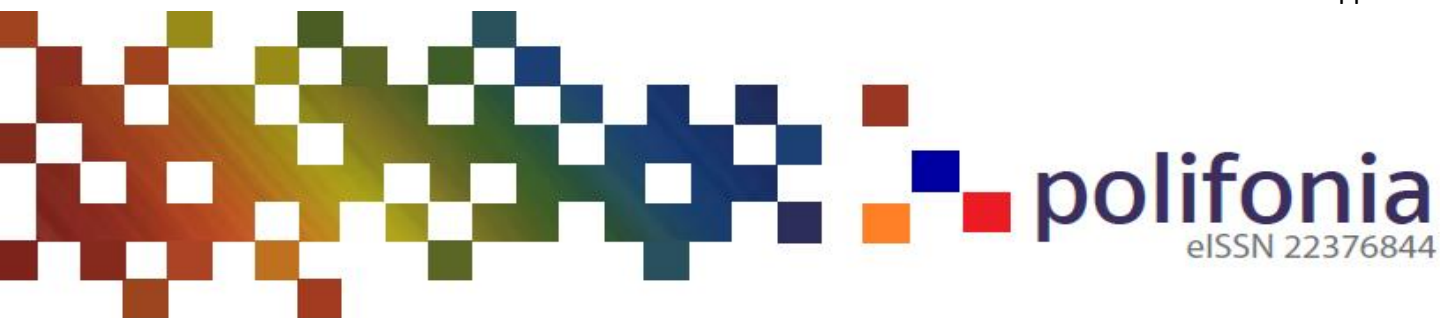
The first focus group that we approach is that of the Indigenous peoples. According to the National Foundation of the Indigenous Person (FUNAI)<sup>3</sup>, data from the 2010 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) indicate that, of the 190,755,799 million people who make up the Brazilian population, 817,963,000 are Indigenous, representing 305 different ethnicities and 274 languages. Many of these communities choose to live isolated from non-Indigenous peoples and maintain their original way of living in forest spaces. One of the biggest problems faced by these communities is precisely the non-demarcation of their lands, criminal arsoning of their territories, and invasions of the lands already demarcated by squatters, prospectors, and loggers. It is through these invasions that the virus reaches and spreads in these communities.

Because they have no immunity to various viruses, epidemics mark the history of these groups, being one of the main causes of death since the period of the European expansion in the Americas. In the context of COVID-19, they have difficulty in keeping the isolation of the villages and in having quick access to hospitals equipped for respiratory failure. According to the epidemiological bulletin of the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health - SESAI, the numbers of Indigenous people infected and killed by COVID-19 are, on January 17, 2021, 39,910 confirmed cases of infections and 526 cases of death. Many cases of contagion and death, however, are not accounted for. Their fight against the virus has basically been in the form of actions of “community leaders, Indigenous entities and health professionals” (WENCZENOVICZ, 2020, p. 242). Some leaders have demonstrated through social networks and other digital media, posting videos reporting and denouncing the seriousness of the situation in the villages and asking for help and collaboration. From these materials, we analyzed for this study three videos

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<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://www.funai.gov.br/index.php/indios-no-brasil/quem-sao?limitstart=0#>.





of members of the Paiter Surui People<sup>4</sup>, one video of the Yanomami People<sup>5</sup>, and an open letter from the Association of Indigenous Peoples - APIB, dated May 9, 2020.

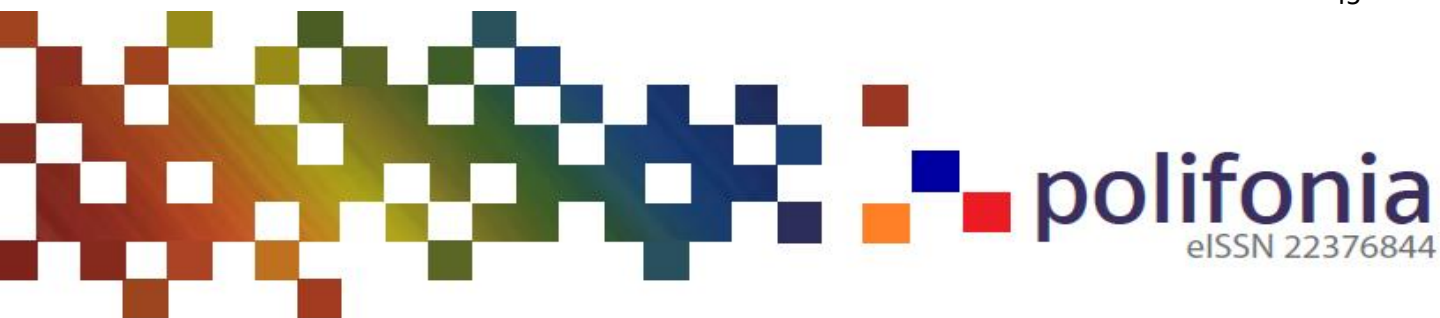
The second focus group is the Quilombola communities or “traditional peoples”<sup>6</sup> in the term of the Brazilian Federal Decree n. 4.887, from November 20, 2003. It is noteworthy to say that the “Quilombola issue” has to do with the set of disputes around the meanings and perspectives of its naming as Quilombola and to what it means to be such a group. In this sense, the Quilombola movement aggregates different social and political agents from various segments of the civil society: members of quilombo communities, members of other groups of the Black movement, religious leaders, trade unionists, among others, and with the support of non-governmental organizations, universities, political parties, unions and other social movements, such as MST, Indigenous peoples, etc., as Santos observes (2012, p.72). Much like the other vulnerable groups in Brazil, this collective resists in a history of struggle for *being*. Theirs and other social movements strengthened their organization especially from the 90's of the 20th century, a period marked by the rise of neoliberal policies, globalization, the breakdown of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, a Marxist-theoretical crisis, and great tension of the hegemony of nation-States (SANTOS, 2012). This tension is accentuated in the

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<sup>4</sup> Meaning “The true people, we ourselves”, Paiter is the name of a people whose territory is located in the Federal Unit of Rondônia in Northern Brazil. Source: [http://www.paiter.org/?lang=en\\_us](http://www.paiter.org/?lang=en_us). On their situation during the COVID-19 syndemics: <https://pt.wikiversity.org/wiki/UNIPAITER>.

<sup>5</sup> According to Albert (2015, p. 44): “The Yanomami constitute a society of hunter-gatherers and farmers of coivara that occupies an area of tropical forest of approximately 230 thousand square kilometers, on both sides of the Parima mountain range, a watershed between Alto Orinoco (in southern Venezuela) and the left bank of the Negro River (in northern Brazil). [...] Its estimated population is 33 thousand people [...]”

<sup>6</sup> Further information can be found at the Database on Indigenous and Quilombola peoples of IBGE, which consists of “a set of cadastral information, organized by municipalities, about the Indigenous and Quilombola locations estimated by IBGE for the realization of censuses and surveys”. As informed on its website, their data refers to clusters of inhabitants declared Indigenous or Quilombolas in the national territory, and in accordance with the principle of self-identification (Decree No. 5.051 / 2004, Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization). The current information was released due to the Covid-19 pandemic and is in the process of consolidation for the 2021 Demographic Census. They five us an idea of the human contingent we address in this paper. Source: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/geociencias/organizacao-do-territorio/tipologias-do-territorio/27480-base-de-informacoes-sobre-os-povos-indigenas-e-Quilombolas?=&t=o-que-e>.

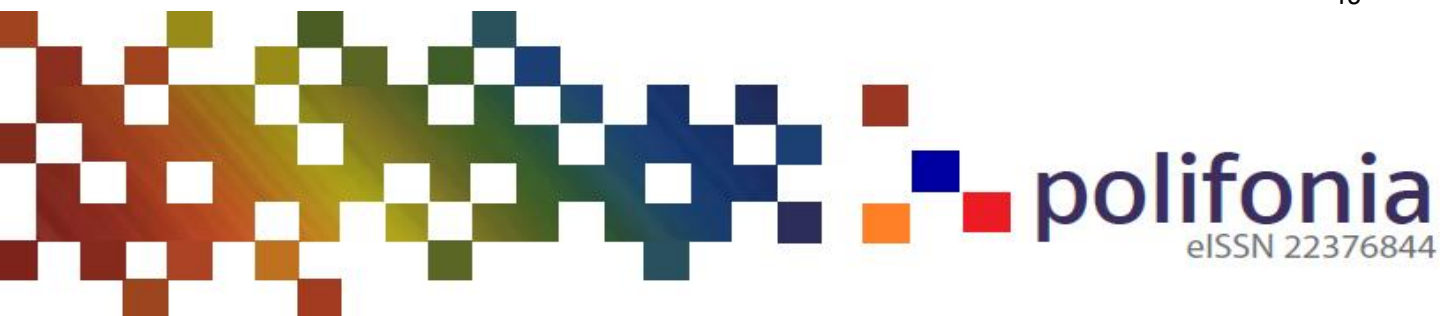


current syndemic crisis, as preservation for their lives still results from their resistance and struggle to be heard.

From this group, we selected four materials: two COVID-19 internet campaigns, and two videos produced by the National Coordination of Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities (CONAQ). The internet campaigns were promoted by the Quilombola Community from Pará (FU), in one case, and by the Kalunga Women from Tinguizal (Goiás FU) in the other. The two videos were retrieved from CONAQ social media channels. CONAQ plays an important role in the Quilombola Movement and they have been updating epidemiological bulletins with information from the Quilombola Communities. Together with the Socio-environmental Institute, CONAQ also created the “COVID-19 Quilombo Observatory”, which denounces that “Both the Health Departments and the Ministry of Health itself have neglected black communities”.

The third and last group is the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (Landless Rural Workers Movement) - MST, one of the most traditional social movements in Brazil considering that they materialize the “form that protesting most often takes place in the world today”, that is, by giving “ordinary people an opportunity to explore, articulate and experience their institutions and fundamental moral principles ”(JASPER, 2016, p. 13). In fact, in their nearly 40 years of existence, they have become something more of a social organization, given their complexity and different lines of action, which integrate agroecology, the world of work, politics, education, culture, etc. (CALDART, 2000).


MST arises in the context of several peasant struggles for land and for agrarian reform, especially in the 1970s, under the aegis of a civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. As pressure for democratization grew in the next years, the First National Meeting of Landless Workers took place in 1984, making MST official in the country. Since then, the movement has settled 350,000 families, distributed in 24 of the 26 Federal Units of Brazil. The history of MST can be summarized in three major moments, according to Caldart (2000): articulation and organization of the struggle for land, applying the strategy of occupation of unproductive lands or lands with debts to the State; constitution of the movement as a social organization, with strategic guidelines and actions to continue







to promote a permanent struggle for living conditions (education, health, citizenship), even after the settlements; and proposition of a new national project with maintenance of a political/practical agenda towards social justice and alternatives to capitalism. Nowadays the movement has official profiles on Twitter, Instagram and Youtube, in addition to its own website, where information is also provided in English and Spanish, and from where we selected three pieces of news to analyze.

Table 1 summarizes some information and displays screenshots and images of the selected materials for a better understanding of the results explained in the next section. Although our approach is qualitative, it should be noted that, being these materials produced and disseminated by vulnerable social groups, their circulation is generally limited to social networks that are politically aligned with their values, ways of life and demands, and that their quantity is much inferior to that produced and shared by humans and/or robots from big corporations, the mainstream media, influencers, etc. Our research started with the search for materials on the theme COVID-19 that were available on the official pages of these communities. We also revisited materials we ourselves received in our social networks. They cover the period between March 2020 and January 2021. Although most materials are multimediatic/multisemiotic, for this study, we decided to analyze only the linguistic materiality. In the table, they are separated by group and classified by genre. Their sequential numbers are for our internal organization.

Table 1: Summary of the dataset

Type of data/Image sample	Description
<b>Group 1</b>	
 <p data-bbox="416 1973 600 2000">Video1- Untitled</p>	<p data-bbox="799 1641 1353 1697">57'' video produced by the Paiter Surui Indigenous People from La Petanha Village – Rondônia FU.</p> <p data-bbox="799 1700 1353 1756">Content: Paiter Surui Sage requests for help to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p data-bbox="799 1758 1353 1848">Source: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCYEnP_8HDA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCYEnP_8HDA</a></p>

 <p>Video 2: Untitled</p>	<p>58” video produced by the Paiter Surui Indigenous People from La Petanha Village – Rondônia FU. Content: Paiter Surui Sage requests for help to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCYEnP_8HDA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCYEnP_8HDA</a></p>
 <p>Video 3: <i>Request for help to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.</i></p>	<p>1’60” video by the Paiter Surui Indigenous People from La Petanha Village – Rondônia FU. Author: ClaudiaWanderley, CC BY-SA 4.0 &lt;<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/</a>&gt;, via Wikimedia Commons produced Content: Request for help to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AjudaPaiter.webm">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AjudaPaiter.webm</a></p>
 <p>Video 4 - <i>The Xamã's Message</i> <b>A mãe terra enfrenta dias sombrios</b> 10/março/2020</p>	<p>2’14” video directed by Rodrigo Pimenta and produced by Mini Studio with the supervision of the Yanomami Indigenous People. Content: Request for help to stop the invasion of the Yanomami lands by illegal miners. Source: <a href="https://rainforestfoundation.org/video-the-shamans-message/">https://rainforestfoundation.org/video-the-shamans-message/</a></p>
 <p>Open letter: <i>Mother Earth faces dark days</i></p>	<p>Open Letter from the Association of the Indigenous Peoples (APIB), published on May 09, 2020. Content: Report the grave pandemic situation of the Indigenous Peoples. Source: <a href="https://apiboficial.org/2020/05/10/carta-final-da-assembleia-de-resiste%CC%82ncia-indigena/">https://apiboficial.org/2020/05/10/carta-final-da-assembleia-de-resiste%CC%82ncia-indigena/</a>.</p>



### Group 2



Vidas Quilombolas Importam

Video 5 – *Quilombola Lives Matter*

2'25" video produced by CONAQ.  
Content: Black Brazilian personalities speak for the Quilombola communities.  
Source:  
<https://www.facebook.com/342amazonia/videos/vidas-Quilombolas-importam/312797480022368/>.



Advogada da Conaq e Terra de Direitos, Vercilene Dias denuncia omissão do Brasil na ONU  
80 visualizações · 30 de set. de 2020

Video 6 – CONAQ Declaration to UN

1'57" video produced by CONAQ.  
Content: Quilombola attorney Vercilene Francisco Dias addresses UN on September, 2020.  
Source: [https://youtu.be/XIA18h2\\_FnQ](https://youtu.be/XIA18h2_FnQ)



COVID-19  
Veja as informações mais recentes do MS sobre o COVID-19 SAIBA MAIS

Veja as informações da Anvisa sobre a vacina

APOIO ÀS COMUNIDADES QUILOMBOLAS DO PARÁ NA QUARENTENA DO CORONAVÍRUS

Video 7 - Untitled

1'31" Video of COVID-19 Internet campaign 1.  
Content: Representatives from Quilombola communities in Pará request help to survive the pandemic.  
Source: <https://youtu.be/2mVqA6iwgYI>





 <p>Nós, mulheres Kalunga da comunidade Tinguizal, através do nosso coletivo Tuya Kalunga, em resposta à pandemia apresentamos as ações:</p> <p>@TIRAJEJUM KALUNGA @CESTAS BÁSICAS @ENCANAMENTO DA ÁGUA @HORTA - UM CANTEIRO EM MINHA CASA @DE RETALHO EM RETALHO SE FAZ ARTE KALUNGA @FEIRA DE ARTIGOS E ACESSÓRIOS KALUNGA ONLINE</p> <p>CONTAMOS COM SEU APOIO! TODA E QUALQUER AJUDA SERÁ BEM VINDA!</p> <p>contato pelo zap 62 996664120</p>	<p>Virtual poster of COVID-19 Internet Campaign 2. Content: Call for contributions to help to fight Quilombola communities during the syndemics. Released by Kalunga do Tinguizal. Source: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/tuyakalunga/">https://www.facebook.com/tuyakalunga/</a></p>
<b>Group 3</b>	
 <p>Desde o início da pandemia, MST já doou 3400 toneladas de alimentos</p> <p>As doações, que inicialmente começaram a ser feitas por acampamentos e assentamentos, hoje integram duas campanhas mais amplas de solidariedade</p> <p>9 de setembro de 2020</p>	<p>News story posted on MST Website Content: Informative text edited by Fernanda Ancântara disclosing the donation of 3,400 tons of organic, pesticide-free food produced by the various MST settlements. Source: <a href="https://mst.org.br/2020/09/09/desde-o-inicio-da-pandemia-mst-ja-doou-3400-toneladas-de-alimentos/">https://mst.org.br/2020/09/09/desde-o-inicio-da-pandemia-mst-ja-doou-3400-toneladas-de-alimentos/</a></p>
 <p>Entrevista especial: para médica omissão do governo e falta de plano de vacinação à covid-19 enfraquece o SUS</p> <p>Guímar Azevedo e Silva considera que ações individualistas das pessoas e corrida pela vacina por estados e municípios é reflexo da má gestão federal, que pode gerar longas consequências ao SUS</p> <p>11 de janeiro de 2021</p>	<p>News story posted on MST Website Content: News of an interview produced by João Vitor Santos reporting the government's omission in the syndemics, the absence of a vaccination plan, and the weakening of a public policy of combat of the virus. Source: <a href="https://mst.org.br/2021/01/11/entrevista-especial-medica-aponta-que-omissao-do-governo-e-falta-de-plano-de-vacinacao-leva-populacao-aosalve-se-quem-puder-no-combate-a-covid-19/">https://mst.org.br/2021/01/11/entrevista-especial-medica-aponta-que-omissao-do-governo-e-falta-de-plano-de-vacinacao-leva-populacao-aosalve-se-quem-puder-no-combate-a-covid-19/</a></p>
 <p>Sem conexão, sem aula: volta às aulas com ensino remoto preocupa estudantes do campo</p> <p>Acompanhamento de aulas remotas tornou-se inviável para 23,3% dos estudantes de Licenciatura em Educação do Campo da UFV</p> <p>31 de agosto de 2020</p>	<p>News story posted on MST Website Content: News produced by Caroline Oliveira, with favoring position towards distance learning in the schools in MST Settlements. Source: <a href="https://mst.org.br/2020/08/31/sem-conexao-sem-aula-volta-as-aulas-com-ensino-remoto-preocupa-estudantes-do-campo/">https://mst.org.br/2020/08/31/sem-conexao-sem-aula-volta-as-aulas-com-ensino-remoto-preocupa-estudantes-do-campo/</a></p>

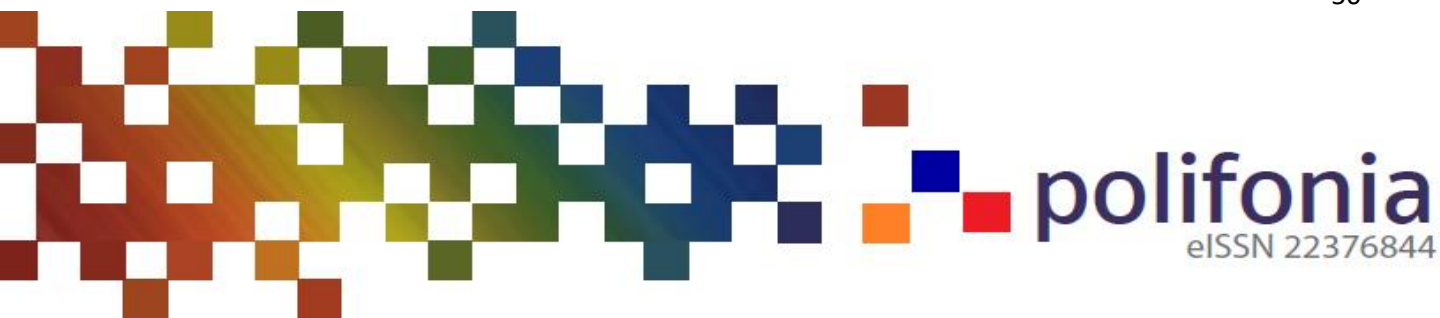
Image 1: Virtual poster

News Story 1

News Story 2

News Story 3





### 3. Coping strategies and existence

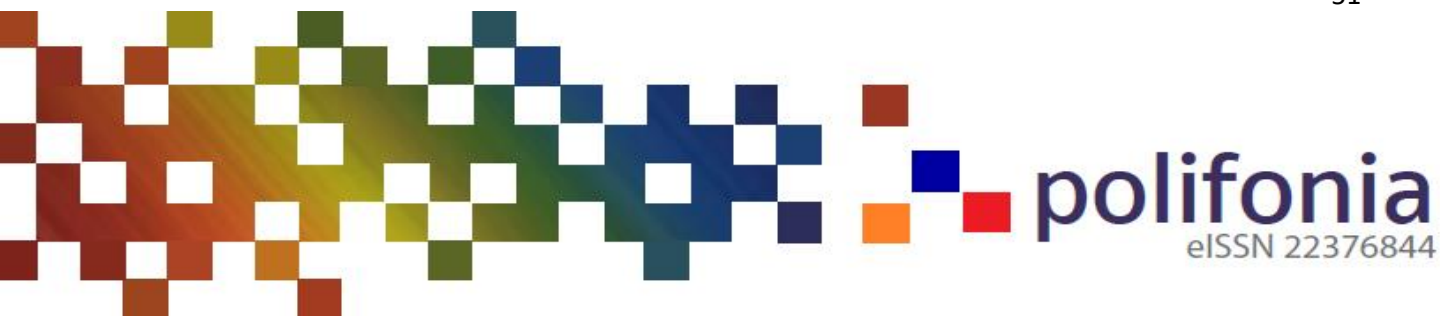
In spite of our understanding that the groups under scrutiny have differences and specificities between them, and that the communities belonging to each group are also distinguished from each other, in our analysis we set out to find one or more common points in their narratives that could inform us about the ways in which they are facing COVID-19 and how they conceptualize/practice care during the syndemic. First, we carry out separate approaches for each group, analyzing the discourses being practiced in these materials, observing enunciative regularities and/or discursive particularities about their identities.

#### 3.1 Isolation, solidarity, *Us, us and you*

To survive the COVID-19 syndemic, the first group has reenacted survival strategies long used by them to exist/resist as native peoples: to denounce their vulnerable situation and request the help and attention from the non-Indigenous communities to their cause, and to isolate themselves in their territories. To the extent of their structural possibilities, they have been producing and sharing videos on social media with requests for emergency aids to urgently acquire food, personal hygiene products, and medical equipment and supplies to the health clinics that serve them in the cities near their villages. In the long run, and with the understanding that, after the pandemic, things will not be the same<sup>7</sup>, they also ask for help to support what they call a “subsistence project” in the post-syndemic (Video 2). As expressed in Video 1, request for help and care, from these Indigenous communities, only happens in moments like this, in face of extreme danger to their lives. The second strategy is and has been the most difficult to effectuate as invaders and missionaries continue to approach these peoples regardless of their will and illegally. Moreover, even playing an important part to try and help these peoples,

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<sup>7</sup> According to audio documentary *A Doença e o Vale do Javari?* (The disease and the Javari Valley”), the individuals who recover from COVID-19 have had severe sequelae of the disease, as they do not have the same strength to keep doing what they have to do to survive (such as working with their crops and hunting). Podcast of *Terra Arrasada*, 12/22/2020.

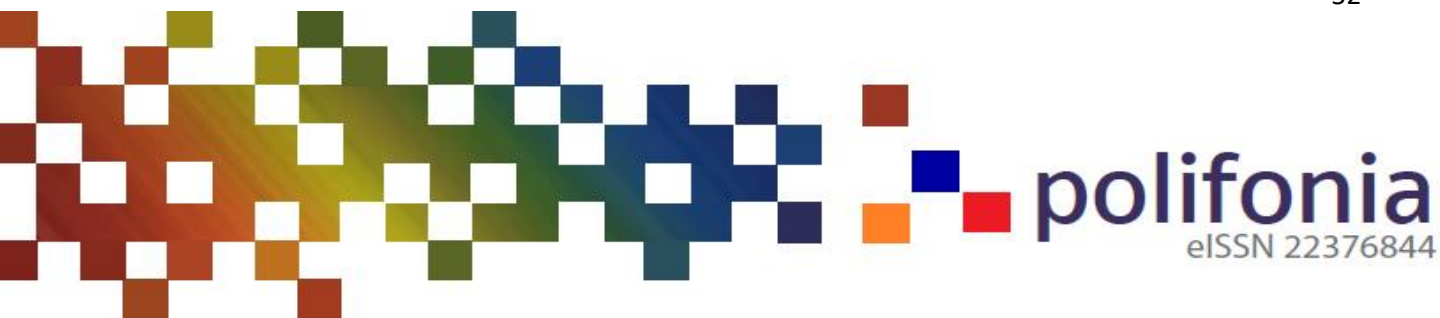


SESAI agents themselves can or may have taken the virus to them, when visiting their villages<sup>8</sup>. Another strategy underway, which we learned from the study by Benucci and Jabra (2020), in the case of the Yanomami, is that of mobility (*wayumi*) and retreat to the deep forests, temporarily abandoning their villages “to live entirely from hunting and gathering in the forest” (BENUCCI; JABRA, 2020, p. 28), as they can no longer count on their harvests.

In the materials analyzed, we understood that care is being discursively associated with what we identified as two different meanings of *us* that vary along the texts, in relation to a sense of “you”. The first refers to a sense of “Us”, Indigenous people, a group that is distinguished from the third element “you”, understood as the Other, white explorer and oppressor. The second refers to an idea of “us” as a human community that shares or can/should share characteristics such as solidarity, care for the other, and whose role is to protect nature for health. Nature, in this sense, is discursively objectified as a mother figure (as stated in Open Letter 1: “Mother earth faces dark days.”) while the first “Us” is discursively objectified as the subject who cares for her, following a collective, nature-integrated logic of existence. Such knowledge and logic, “Us” points out, have been purposefully neglected and made invisible by “you”, the non-Indigenous peoples. In this position, “Us” has been warning other peoples for more than 500 years that the Other way of life would bring consequences such as death and disasters, as it breaks the balance of our existence on the planet (as noted in Video 4: “Hey, look at me. We see you. We tried to show you. You never bothered to learn our language. You were always looking down. We’ve been warning you since the beginning.”). This proposition is narrated with the illocutionary force of an unequivocal truth (“That’s what I can tell you.”, asserted in Video 1), a death sentence (“We will only be further infuriating the force of nature”, stated in Video 1; “Can you see?”, enunciated in Video 4) because nature decides on our lives since it is “us” who belong to her, and not the other way around (also enunciated in Video 4 in: “The land is alive. This land can’t be owned. This land is us.”). In this discourse, “Us”

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Yanomami, invasões e epidemias (“Yanomami, invasions and epidemics”). Podcast of *Terra Arrasada*, 12/23/2020.

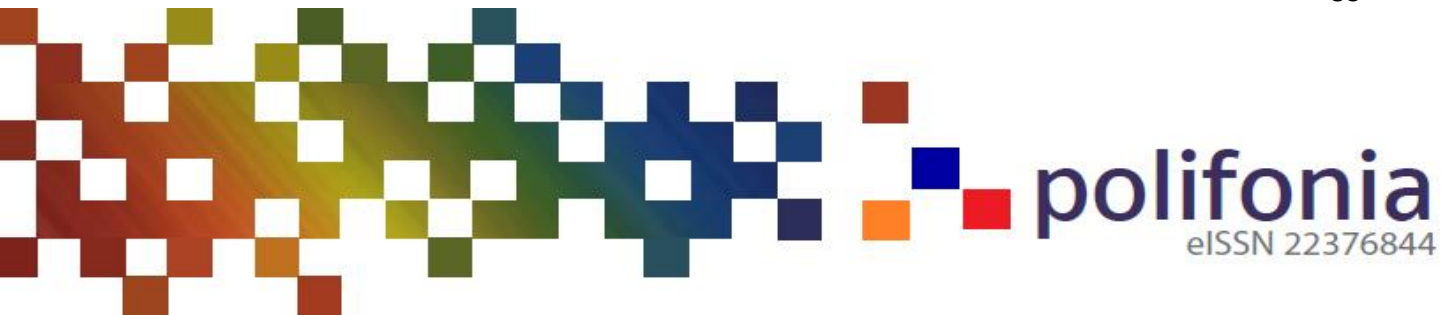


reinforces their fundamental role in maintaining a minimally balanced relationship with nature (as stated in Video 2: “Because of our existence that this forest still exists and that it feeds you and still maintains a stable temperature in the world. This is our contribution”). Despite that, nature as a living organism can become infuriated with what “you” has done, and punish “us” all.

“us” thus represents the interwoven relationship between “Us” and “us” in their entanglement with nature and as humanity. The request for help from “Us” to “you” indicates the need to rediscover solidarity and a sense of indistinction between peoples and nature. In this logic, that which has been an intrinsic aspect of the Indigenous communities (solidarity and collective existence) has to be redeemed in the western, monetized humanity that has forgotten it along the way of “progress” (as stated in Video 4). Videos 1 and 2 clearly address Heads of State, politicians, and businessmen, with the understanding that they have a clear choice to make, under the weight of possible heavy consequences (“Now, while you can, but won’t help us, putting our lives at risk, even before our time during this pandemic, we will only be further infuriating the force of nature”, asserted in Video 1). It is important to note that “Us” and “you” are objectified as *responsible political figures* in the current northern dominated global context, and given the need of discursive approximations with it to explain to the Other what their philosophy of “us” is and how “us” is their ultimate objective. That is, the distinction between “Us” – “you” is not meant to prevail in their project of society. On the contrary, it is the very cause of all the deaths and suffering we have experienced in the syndemic, and before it, in the divided, market and profit-oriented world.

### 3.2. Quilombola lives matter

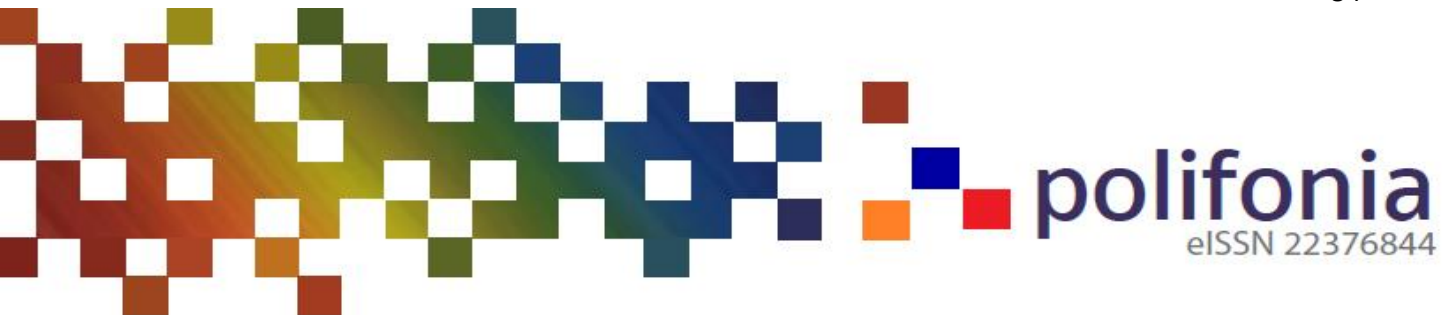
The motto that results from the analysis of the materials of the second group is “Quilombola lives matter”. This reference statement materializes the enunciative locus of the Quilombola communities. The sense of care in these materials is built around the objective to defend the rights of these peoples and in relation to the State. In this sense,



in Video 5, personalities (artists, educators, philosophers) representing the Quilombola Communities Movement give voice to a demand for care and protection during the syndemic, echoing and reterritorializing the relatively recent political motto “Black Lives Matter”. Despite the fact that members of Quilombola communities themselves are absent from the video, the message demarcates from which epistemic and social places these subjects speak from, that is, from the force of social-media movements fighting against structural racism in our country.

In Video 6, it is noteworthy that the enunciative locus is that of Quilombola attorney Vercilene Francisco Dias addressing the UN. Her speech, delivered in Spanish, denounces the lack of a federal care policy towards Quilombola communities in the syndemic. Her speech displaces the usual scene where white men detached from these communities enunciate proposals in English for their peers. The protagonist figure in this video is a black woman who is a lawyer and a Quilombola representative speaking a language from the south and occupying a southern epistemic place. From a decolonial perspective, she speaks from another position than that of the subordinate (SPIVAK, 2010) peoples and materializes the intersection of different voices (women, racialized peoples, traditional communities) in the global south. As Ribeiro (2019) points out, having and occupying a place of speech means to question “who can speak”, “what happens when we speak?”, and “what we are allowed to talk about”.

In Video 7, leaders from Quilombola communities identifying themselves as “rural black communities descending from enslaved Africans” reinforce that they “have been following the WHO guidelines against COVID-19, avoiding mobility mainly to protect the lives of [their] *Griôs* [“Elders”], who are numerous and fundamental in our communities” and that, likewise, care in the syndemic means the survival of these and all the other members, so they call for help with the purchase of fundamental food and hygiene items. The way they enunciate their identity exposes the tension between different meanings of slavery, belonging to different discursive formations, and bringing the sense of diaspora in the Quilombola Movement. In our interpretation of the video, we understand that one of the meanings of care in circulation is that related to ancestral roots.



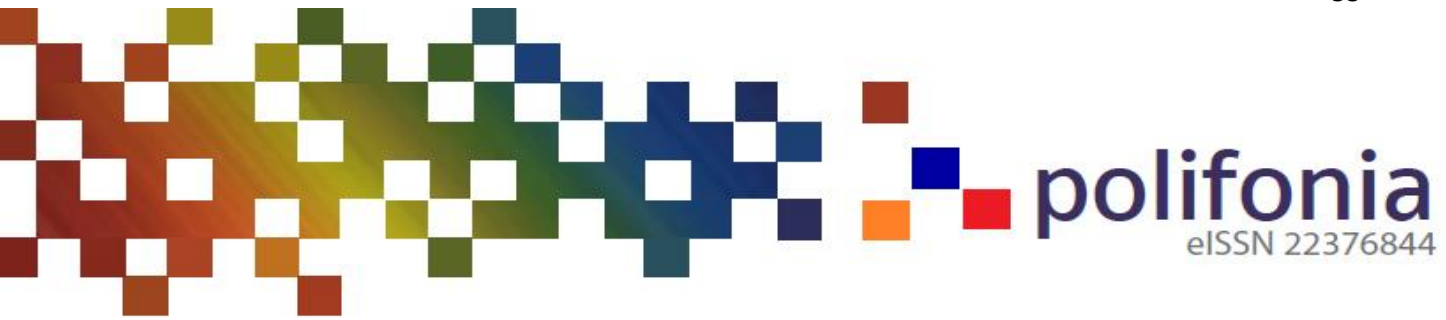
They also demarcate their relationship with the land through family farming traditions associated with the maintenance of their territory, and for the purpose of keeping and saving their land and its resources to promote “the resistance and propagation of [their] culture, way of life and ancestry”.

The last material is a virtual poster created by members of the Tuya Kalunga Collective of Quilombola women. Their strategy for care during the syndemic is to create a self-managing process of organization and action, organized in six different fronts of actions “related to food security and the sustainability of children, young people and the elderly in their community”, that is, actions aiming to help the most vulnerable in their community. Their positioning as Black Quilombola women stands out as they enunciate their proposal of help and care for the other and themselves from their territory, with their ancestral knowledge and relationship, and for the wellbeing of their community. This reinforces their identification as women being the “caregivers of the world”.

### **3.3 MST: agroecology, health and education as strategies**

The Publications Section of MST’s official page displays news and articles produced by the movement itself or by other organizations with the participation of the movement. Our search under the tag “coronavirus” in this section returned about 130 materials posted between March 2020 and January 2021. Structured as news headlines and news stories, they can be seen as being organized in three main thematic lines: (a) agroecology (News story 1), (b) care for the health of the rural population (News story 2); (c) schooling and education (News story 3).

Regarding (a), MST has long claimed that care for human health starts with the orientation of producing, making available and eating pesticide-free food. This is a form of protection for every party involved, from the farmers themselves to the markets and consumers. In their lands, they propose and practice organic agriculture and agroecology. In this discourse, the land is a maternal figure that, much like the previous Quilombola sense of “universal caregiver”, supplies food and life to her children. As asserted by MST



leader Eliandra Fernandes, their “relationship with the land is a respectful relationship, like a mother’s relationship with her son. The land is for us the one that generates everything we need for our existence; it is from her that we get the food to raise our children”<sup>9</sup>. This nurturing perspective is reiterated in caring practices such as the distribution by MST of tons of organic food to needy communities. This caring strategy, expressed in the *News story 1* (Table 1) expresses a philosophy/policy of life that is fundamental during a time of economic crisis, high unemployment rates, and absence of a policy to fight hunger from the Brazilian government.

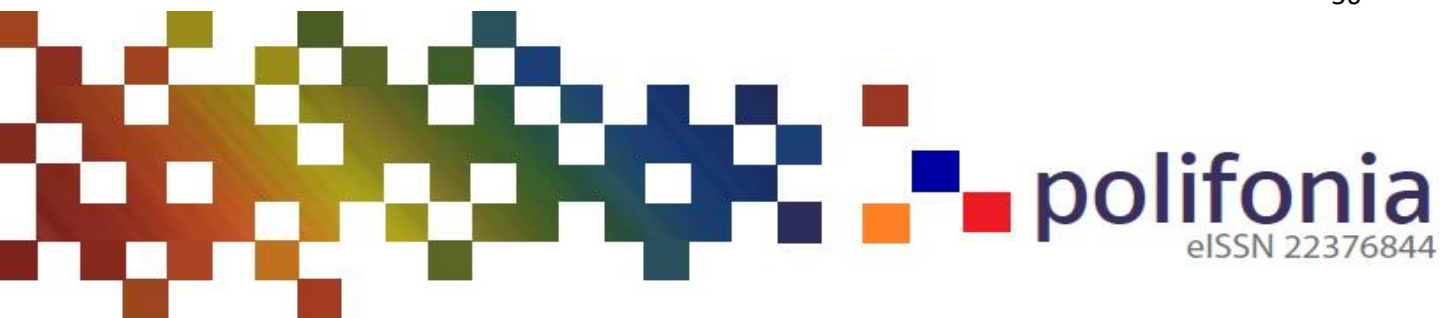
Another topic defended by the movement is a strict policy of health protection: MST has explicitly stated support to the WHO guidelines against COVID-19, stressing their concern at the lack of a government effort and plan for mass vaccination. Such positioning emerges from a collective ethos they have always defended (CALDART, 2000) and from which the subject is understood as collective, and not individually. In this sense, their practices have been regulated by the understanding and consideration of social effects on a broader scale. During the COVID-19 syndemic, therefore, adherence to vaccination, for example, cannot be an individual choice, as suggested by President Jair Bolsonaro. In the analysis of *News story 2*, we understand MST discourse on care revolves around the construction of a collective awareness about care in the syndemic.

Finally, on the matter of education, a fundamental item in MST political agenda (CALDART, 2000; LAGE, 2008; MARIANO, 2019), schooling is not reduced to theoretical learning, but seen as a practice to mirror their critical stance and political awareness. For this purpose, MST has strategically supported the maintenance of public schools in their settlements, where the students are engaged in educational practices that differ from traditional schooling, and that favor collective experiences and training that articulate technical and political knowledge. In other words, as synthesized by Mariano (2019, p.178): “education needs to be thought/carried out from fundamental connections in the historical constitution of the human being: productive life (work in the production

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<sup>9</sup> Stated during an interview in 2019. Source: <https://mst.org.br/2019/11/05/travamos-uma-batalha-contra-os-agrotoxicos-e-a-criminalizacao-do-movimento/>.



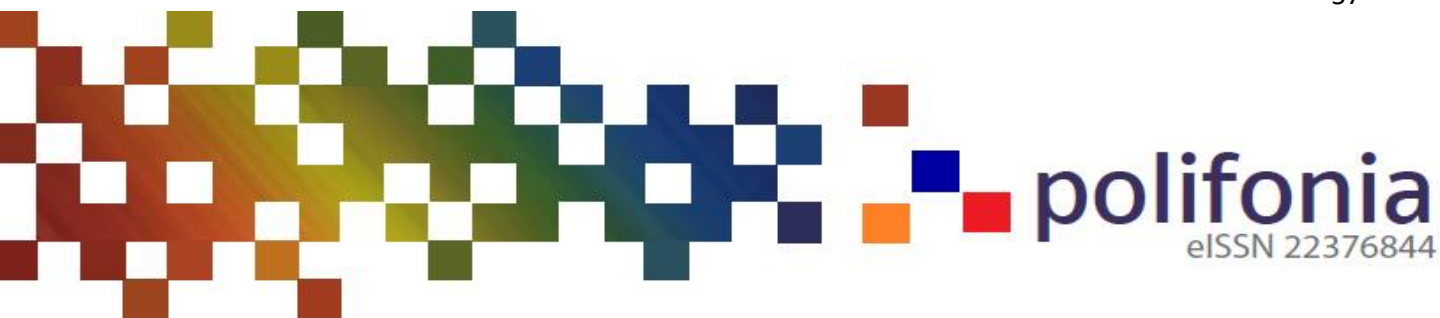


of material conditions of existence), social struggle, collective organization, culture, history”. Although seen as fundamental in their political project, during the COVID-19 syndemic, they are adamant presential classes are not an option until everyone is vaccinated, as it is argued in *News story 3*.

#### **4. Towards an *other* philosophy of care and an *other* way of life**

The concept of “us” in the texts of the first group; the relationship between memory, ancestry and care in the texts of the second, and the constitution of a social movement as a *collective subject*, in the texts of the third group, with the communal discursivization of the referents land/territory/nature as a mother figure in all the data analyzed, indicates that *nature* and *humanity* are terms meant to be understood as intrinsically entangled. Help and care during the syndemic, therefore, cannot (in the sense of a historical impossibility of meaning in their discursive memory as collectives) be signified as a matter of individual or political choice, as would be the case in the modern, rational and Eurocentric logic of civilization, but as an intrinsic human demand and condition for survival. They have to result from a process of recovery of a lost sense of humanity, that is originally collective and integrated to nature. In this sense, the continuity of life relies on the understanding of the humankind that existence is collective and that every individual action affects the whole. It also presupposes the reasoning of the urban and industrial human settlements and their logic of production and consumption of goods.

From this enunciative locus, in the direction of a reflection on proposals for ways of living during and in the post-syndemic, and with a philosophical/ethical/language-concerned stance on care, we understand that some concepts originating from these collectives can be entextualized in our discussion to materialize their discursivity. Krenak (2019), for example, defines Earth as a *common field* in which we necessarily live as a collective. Kopenawa (2015), complements this idea explaining that Earth as a *living being* is impossible to be owned. This implies that our existence must be one of *engagement* (KRENAK, 2019) with her and among us, and not that of development. This



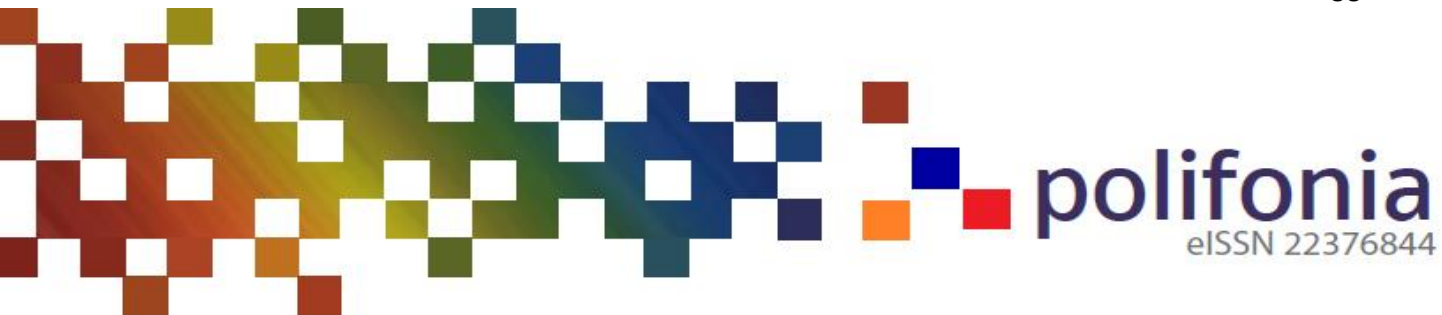
last term, as well as others originating in the neoliberal discourse (e.g.: progress), is only conceivable and tolerated in a way of life (that of consumerism, individualism and competitiveness) that is no longer viable (KRENAK, 2019). From our point of view, these propositions converge to the concept of *Bem Viver* (ACOSTA, 2016). According to Acosta (2016), *Bem Viver* expresses a peripheral proposal of a philosophical-practical change to be implemented. It recaps the senses of *umak kawsay*, in Kíchwa, *suma qamaña*, in Aymara and *nhadereko* in Guaraní and similar notions existing in several other native peoples in South and Central America:

[...] it becomes a starting point, path and horizon for deconstructing the colonial matrix that ignores cultural, ecological and political diversity. In this line of reflection, he [...] criticizes the monocultural state; the deterioration in the quality of life, which materializes in economic and environmental crises; the capitalist market economy, loss of sovereignty in all areas, marginalization, discrimination, poverty, the deplorable living conditions of the majority of the population, inequities. Likewise, it questions ideological visions that are nourished by the colonial matrices of extractivism and evangelization imposed by blood and fire (ACOSTA, 2016, p. 83).

This that we see as a decolonial dimension of care functioning in these vulnerable groups, where self-care means care for the other, echoes a historical memory common to them in their history for survival and maintenance of their cultures. It is settled on their experience of resistance practiced in local, micro policies that are peripheral to the wider public driven by corporate politics and the idea of a minimal State. Their resistance practices have allowed them to survive in extremely dangerous conditions prior to the syndemic and have also enabled the emergence of mechanisms and legal devices that guarantee they may exist as collectives.

## Conclusion

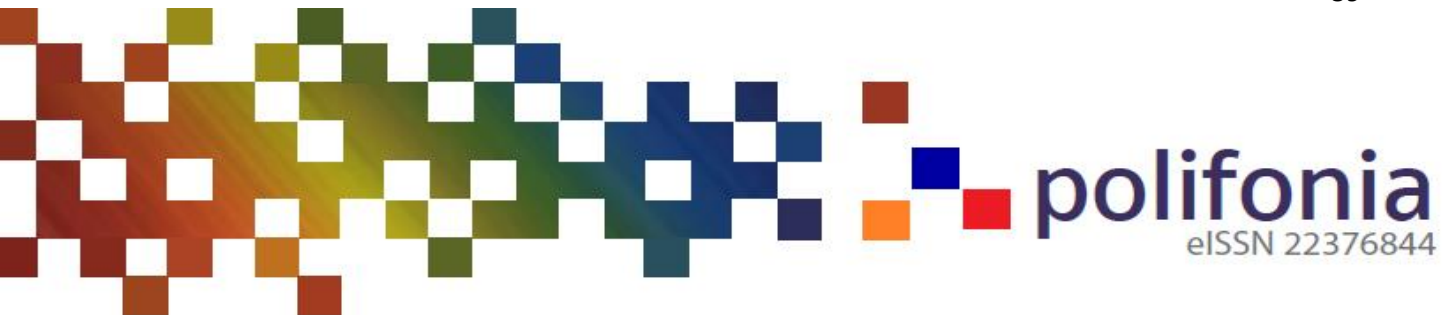
We began this study with the objective to listen, learn and give voice in our own scientific community to the narratives of vulnerable groups on their experiences during the COVID-19 syndemic, and in an effort to have conditions for a broader understanding



and better problematization of the social aspects involved in the present and future practices of care and body. In our analysis, we considered the materials selected to be expressive of enunciative loci (XXX) that speak of original and traditional practices of life that teach us that care can only be conceived from a logic of collectiveness. This change in meaning does not represent just a slight discursive slide, but a robust political proposal towards life: the sense of care in the post-syndemic has to be related to a significant social transformation to start now, during the syndemic and as care happens to everyone. Such interpretation resulted from the problematization of care within a colonial discursive frame, and with the consideration of the conditions of life of the three focus groups within historical circumstances of existence. On this matter, we proposed that the concept of syndemic discussed by Horton (2020) and Tsai (2020) would be more suitable to express the inseparability between health and living conditions. Moreover, understanding and relating the sense of nature as a living being and the inseparability of human life from her, we were also able to mobilize Acosta's (2016) study on the concept of *Bem Viver* as synthesizing the meanings of care that we reached in the materials and discourses we analyzed, which also reflect the concepts of the collective, entangled "us" present in the analysis, whose main characteristic is its responsibility for the life of the other and its intrinsic collective nature.

Reminding Sousa Santos' (2010, 2020) argument that, if on the one hand, the syndemic challenges us to experience loss, suffering and grief and to struggle for protection against the virus, and that on the other hand it exerts an "opportunity" to get out of a quarantine that had always been for the global south to deeply question the epistemic differences, hegemonies, our economic, political and social capitalist model of life, opening room for the circulation of different epistemologies and a southern view on being, we assert that it is of utmost importance that we, as a scientific community "authorized" and entitled to speak, listen to the subaltern (SPIVAK, 2010) voices striving to create their place of speech.

We hope our study helps shed light to the need of a revision of our own scientific practices and concepts in face of human suffering and for a collective politics of care. The



constitution of an ear for these other epistemologies means the acknowledgement of their existence, voice and knowledge, and the unfolding, by our part, of a *place of listening* (RIBEIRO, 2019) that has been long demanded. Finally, to stress the need for change in the way we have lived, we refer back to Krenak's (2019) fundamental question in the direction of an ethics of life and care: what kind of human settlement do we aim to become in the post-syndemic?

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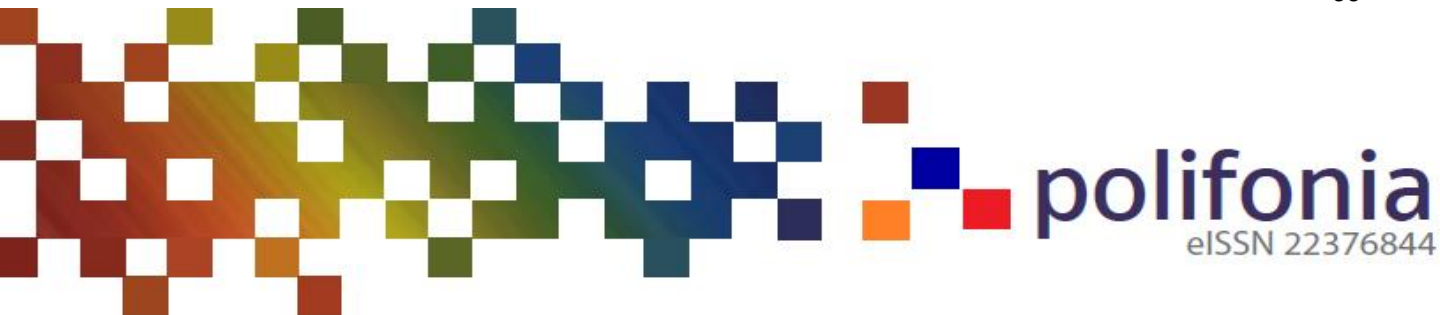
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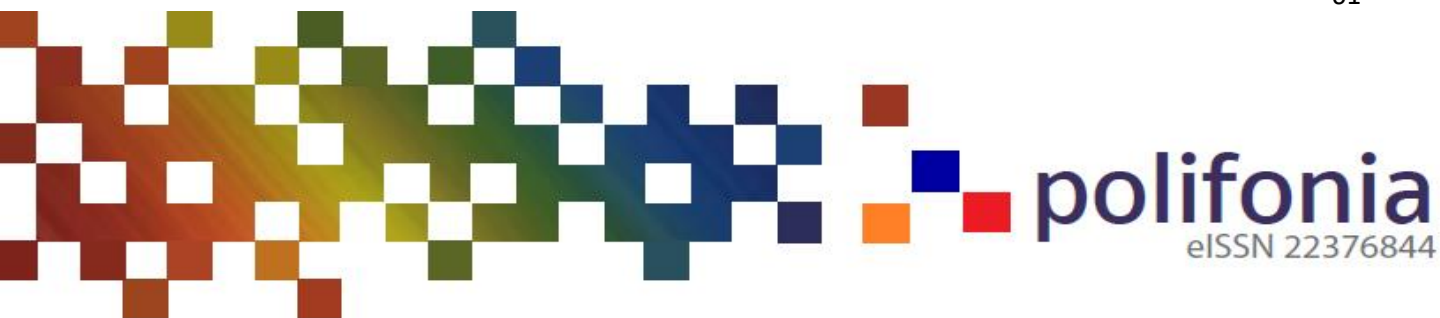
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