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## Voices of ancestry: Intersectional paths taken by indigenous women in organizational management

*Voices of ancestry: Caminhos interseccionais percorridos por mulheres indígenas na gestão organizacional*

*Voces de ancestro: Caminos interseccionales de mujeres indígenas en la gestión organizacional*

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Since the moment colonizers arrived in Brazil, indigenous women have been the target of discrimination and violence in various forms, mainly due to gender and ethnic prejudices. Thus, even after more than 500 years of fighting for a place of acceptance, efforts to preserve their origins and guarantee the subsistence of their people, these women still do not occupy the spaces of social and organizational prominence that they deserve.

**Purpose:** This article aims to understand the intersectional paths indigenous women take in organizational management. Regarding "intersectional paths," this study recognizes how the overlapping identities of gender and ethnicity can uniquely shape the experiences of indigenous women, influencing their journeys from academic formation to reaching leadership positions.

**Method:** It is a qualitative study that uses oral reporting. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews with the participation of four indigenous managers active in the Amazon region.

**Results:** The accounts obtained highlighted the violence caused by the interaction of the social markers of gender and ethnicity in the personal and professional lives of the interviewees, from leaving their communities to study in cities during their stay at the university to the occupation of managerial positions.

**Conclusions:** This research contributes to intersectional theory by addressing gender and ethnicity in a context little explored in the literature - indigenous women in leadership positions - and advances the understanding of diversity in organisations. It also contributes to reflection on the need to develop diversity and inclusion policies and to improve organisational management practices.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality Theory; indigenous women; gender; ethnicity; organizational management.

### RESUMO

**Contextualização:** Desde o momento em que os colonizadores chegaram ao Brasil, as mulheres indígenas têm sido alvo de discriminação e violência de várias formas, principalmente por conta de preconceitos de gênero e etnia. Assim, mesmo após mais de 500 anos de luta por um lugar de acolhimento, esforço para preservar suas origens e garantir a subsistência de seu povo, essas mulheres ainda não ocupam os espaços de destaque social e organizacional que merecem.

**Objetivo:** O presente artigo tem como objetivo compreender os caminhos interseccionais percorridos por mulheres indígenas na gestão organizacional. No que tange aos "caminhos interseccionais", este estudo reconhece como as identidades sobrepostas de gênero e etnia podem moldar de maneira única as experiências de mulheres indígenas, influenciando suas jornadas desde a formação acadêmica até o alcance de cargos de liderança.

**Método:** Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo que utilizou o método do relato oral. A coleta de dados ocorreu por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com a participação de quatro gestoras indígenas atuantes na região amazônica.

**Resultados:** Os relatos obtidos evidenciaram as violências causadas pela interação dos marcadores sociais de gênero e etnia nas vidas pessoais e profissionais das entrevistadas, desde a saída de suas comunidades para estudar nas cidades, durante a permanência na universidade, até a ocupação de cargos gerenciais.

**Conclusões:** Esta pesquisa contribui para a teoria interseccional ao abordar o gênero e a etnia em um contexto pouco explorado pela literatura - mulheres indígenas em cargos de liderança - e avança na compreensão da diversidade nas organizações. Além disso, contribui para a reflexão sobre a necessidade de desenvolvimento de políticas de diversidade e inclusão e de melhorar as práticas de gestão organizacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria da Interseccionalidade; mulheres indígenas; gênero; etnia; gestão organizacional.

**RESUMEN**

**Contextualización:** Desde la llegada de los colonizadores a Brasil, las mujeres indígenas han sido objeto de discriminación y violencia en diversas formas, principalmente por prejuicios étnicos y de género. Así, incluso después de más de 500 años de lucha por un lugar de aceptación, esfuerzos por preservar sus orígenes y garantizar la subsistencia de su pueblo, estas mujeres aún no ocupan los espacios de protagonismo social y organizacional que merecen.

**Objetivo:** Este artículo pretende comprender los caminos interseccionales recorridos por mujeres indígenas en la gestión organizacional. En cuanto a los "caminos interseccionales", este estudio reconoce cómo las identidades superpuestas de género y etnia pueden dar forma de manera única a las experiencias de las mujeres indígenas, influyendo en sus trayectorias desde la formación académica hasta el logro de cargos de liderazgo.

**Método:** Se trata de un estudio cualitativo que utilizó el método del relato oral. La recopilación de datos se llevó a cabo a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con la participación de cuatro gestoras indígenas activas en la región amazónica.

**Resultados:** Los relatos obtenidos evidenciaron las violencias causadas por la interacción de los marcadores sociales género y etnia en las vidas personales y profesionales de las entrevistadas, desde la salida de sus comunidades para estudiar en las ciudades, durante la permanencia en la universidad, hasta la ocupación de cargos gerenciales.

**Conclusiones:** Esta investigación contribuye a la teoría interseccional al abordar el género y la etnia en un contexto poco explorado en la literatura - mujeres indígenas en puestos de liderazgo - y avanza en la comprensión de la diversidad en las organizaciones. También contribuye a la reflexión sobre la necesidad de desarrollar políticas de diversidad e inclusión y de mejorar las prácticas de gestión organizativa.

**Palabras clave:** Teoría de la Interseccionalidad; mujeres indígenas; género; etnicidad; gestión organizacional.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Women from different eras and cultures share the same history of suffering, marked by exclusion and differences, even in the face of tireless battles (Albuquerque & Silva, 2019). This typical trajectory refers to the struggles for recognition of their rights since societies were built on the pillars of inequality and patriarchal power, attributing to biological or pseudo-biological traits the criteria for classification and social hierarchy that contemporarily structure human behaviour (Barros, 2019; Canavate, 2012).

Social movements such as feminism have played an important role in the fight for women's rights (Assis, 2019). Today, women have risen through the ranks and are increasingly frequent in positions previously considered male, such as law, engineering, the attorney general's office and the judiciary (Salvagni & Canabarro, 2015). However, even though they have sought professional development and have become highly capable, women have not achieved due recognition, a reflection of the gender inequality that persists within organizations, especially in strategic and leadership positions (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018; Proni & Proni, 2018; Salvagni & Canabarro, 2015).

In this way, research shows that women have slowly been occupying management positions. Recent studies show that women occupy just over 30% of managerial positions in Brazil (IBGE, 2021; GTI, 2021). Despite the optimism, the literature reveals the persistence of differences in organizations, especially in salaries, motivated by gender (Proni & Proni, 2018). In management positions, the pay gap is as high as 25.2% (MTE, 2024). Prejudice is disguised through identity markers of gender difference, tools that the labour market uses to try to justify the failure of women to climb the ladder, placing them as an eternal part of an inferior sphere, as it does with other social minorities (Salvagni & Canabarro, 2015).

Women, blacks, and indigenous people face a lack of representation caused by Eurocentric, racist and sexist ideas, where indigenous women are compelled to the lowest level (Clark et al., 2021). Indigenous women have suffered discrimination and violence in various forms since the colonization of Brazil, and even after more than 500 years of struggle for a place of welcome and efforts to maintain the origins and subsistence of their people, they do not occupy spaces of social and organizational prominence (Xavier et al., 2022).

According to the first data from the 2022 Demographic Census, Brazil has approximately 1.7 million indigenous people (IBGE, 2022). The indigenous movement has been going from strength to strength since 1980, with the formation of 1,029 organizations in the country. However, since 1987, the creation of specific indigenous women's organizations has begun, which currently number only 92, representing only 8.94% of all indigenous organizations in Brazilian territory; indigenous women's

organizations seek a place of leadership and voice, fight for the defence of their territories, respect for their customs, non-violence, and gender prejudice, as well as the maintenance of their ancestral values (Gomes, 2020).

In history, indigenous women have taken on significant roles in their tribes and communities, exerting spiritual, political, and economic influence and participating in crucial decisions, including the selection of leaders (Shotton & Mintborn, 2020). They face barriers in occupying social and organizational spaces, particularly non-indigenous ones (Kaine, 2017). This resistance in power environments can be better understood when we look at the interrelationship of the various prejudices that revolve around women and indigenous peoples. It is in this sense that Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), through the theory of intersectionality, defends the joint treatment of social markers and criticizes the dominant conception of discrimination that sees subordination as a disadvantage that occurs along a single categorical axis - ethnicity or gender, for example.

By recognizing these intersections, we can address the way in which discriminatory systems create basic inequalities related to class, race, gender, ethnicity, and other inseparable social markers (Crenshaw, 2002; Collins & Bilge, 2021). Thus, it is possible to observe that when stereotypes intersect, in the case of indigenous women in management, the ethnic factor produces an intersection that maximizes the difficulties of this group in different contexts.

In national academic production, there are studies that specifically address gender in the organizational context, sometimes also being related to race (Coelho Júnior & Hein, 2021; Miltersteiner et al., 2020; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018), but none that work on organizational leadership by indigenous women. On the other hand, the international literature only presents the indigenous issue in other areas of knowledge, such as education, politics, and public relations (Xavier et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2021).

Therefore, due to the difficulty in locating data on indigenous women in leadership positions, since most of the research found either works with female representation or with the indigenous issue, this article aims to understand the intersectional paths taken by indigenous women in organizational management. As a methodological procedure, the oral report method was adopted. Information was collected through semi-structured interviews with the voluntary collaboration of four indigenous women managers working in the Amazon region, selected using the snowball technique.

Finally, it is worth noting that this study makes theoretical contributions to the literature on management, since it discusses intersectional theory in the reality of indigenous women in leadership positions, showing testimonies and experiences in various organizational environments. It also encourages discussions about the gender and racial prejudices faced by the indigenous

population, given the contemporary Brazilian context of intense conflicts against indigenous peoples. Furthermore, it is hoped to arouse interest in future approaches that seek to understand the effects of overlapping social markers in organizations.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Theory of Intersectionality

The problem of intersectionality has Anglo-Saxon origins and is part of the black feminist legacy. As a study methodology, it was formulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and arose from the concern that gender and race were treated as mutually exclusive categories of analysis (Hirata, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989). The theory thus proposed a study that considers the interrelationship between social markers of difference and how they create situations of subordination.

Although intersectionality as a concept came from Crenshaw, other authors - such as Luiza Bairros (1995) and Sueli Carneiro (2003) - also warned of the need to look at gender and race issues in an interdependent relationship, since the hegemonic feminist movement did not represent race issues and the anti-racist movement did not represent gender issues (Assis, 2019). By placing the demands of white women as if they were universal, feminism ignored the racism that significantly shapes the experiences of non-white women; while the anti-racist movement did not represent gender issues, as it had no interest in debating the experiences of black women from a gender perspective, consequently leaving them under-represented in both groups (Assis, 2019).

As a result, debates arose about the demands of feminism being treated as universal needs for all women (Carneiro, 2003; Bairros, 1995). Bearing in mind that, while for white women the search for work was a priority issue, for black women it was not. Because there was a need for a means of subsistence and a lack of policies to support them, putting them in precarious jobs (Colling et al., 2018). In this sense, it is considered that the black feminist movement came to "blacken feminism and feminize race" (Assis, 2019, p. 14).

Crenshaw (1989), when dealing with gender and race issues, argues that when subordination is portrayed through a single categorical axis, black women are erased by the discourses of the privileged members of the group: white women in the case of gender issues; and black men in race issues. The author argues that this conflict cannot be resolved by simply including black women within an already established system of analysis, since it is not just a question of adding to the hostility caused by racism and sexism. Therefore, from Crenshaw's point of view, any approach that does not consider the intersectionality of these oppressions is not capable of satisfactorily contemplating the specific subordination that black women experience.

Hirata (2014) criticizes this by arguing that analyses from an intersectional point of view often prioritize the gender-race relationship, while social class is not emphasized. However, according to Colling and Oltramari (2019), Intersectional Theory is not finished and there are still other variables to be applied to address contexts that have not yet been studied, as proposed by this work.

Intersectionality Theory, dealing with gender and ethnicity markers in the context of organizations, is a novelty in Brazilian academic production. On the other hand, there are related international studies, such as that by Clark et al. (2021), which was concerned with discussing the perspectives of indigenous women in Australian public relations. For the authors, the devaluation of indigenous women in the professional field is a continuation of the racism and colonization that manifest themselves in the workplace. With a strong patriarchal background, colonial ideologies mean that Indigenous women are excluded or overlooked by society (Kuokkanen, 2011).

The intersectional approach can identify the various oppressions that affect indigenous women, the discrimination they suffer, as well as the forms and subjects of exclusion and domination. These oppressions of gender, race and class detected by the theory of intersectionality (Marceau et al., 2020) are manifested in various professions and areas of knowledge. Fredericks and White (2018) also observed the absence of indigenous women in management positions in higher education. This history of physical, moral, and psychological violence began with the colonization of Brazil and persists to this day, despite the constant struggles for their space, evidently still not accepted by everyone or seen as non-existent (Xavier et al., 2022).

### 2.2 Indigenous Women in Leadership Roles

Currently, indigenous peoples are faced with multiple manifestations of oppression, ranging from institutional violence promoted by the state to the systematic dehumanization of their identities and territories. These practices contribute to the construction of narratives that subjugate indigenous peoples, assigning them a position of inferiority. Faced with this scenario, it is imperative not only to recognize and denounce these forms of oppression but also to raise critical awareness about the need to preserve indigenous cultures and territories. Valuing cultural diversity and indigenous ancestry, as well as combating racism and discrimination against these peoples, is essential for strengthening their struggles and establishing fair and respectful intercultural relations (Silva et al., 2018).

In this context of oppression and struggle, the role of indigenous women within their communities and social movements stands out. The transition from the general struggle of indigenous peoples to a particular focus on the experiences and challenges faced by indigenous women represents a significant turning point in understanding and



addressing human rights and social justice issues. While indigenous peoples, in general, face challenges related to institutional violence and dehumanization, indigenous women deal with an additional layer of complexity due to the intertwining of gender and ethnic dynamics (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019). This overlap not only exacerbates their vulnerability to specific forms of oppression but also serves as a catalyst for their growing mobilization and activism.

The mobilization of indigenous women not only aims to protect and recognize their rights but also seeks to increase the visibility and recognition of their unique experiences, creating bridges with other women's movements that share similar aspirations for protagonism. Consequently, the growing institutionalization of their demands has led indigenous women leaders to participate more actively in national and international arenas, empowering their organizations and expanding their capacity to influence public policies. This engagement is reflected in the increased institutionalization of indigenous women's political organizations and expanding the debate on their rights. In this way, the active participation of indigenous women in social movements not only challenges existing power structures but contributes significantly to building an inclusive society in which their voices and demands are recognized and respected (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019).

Including indigenous women in leadership positions and decision-making spaces within national and international organizations represents a significant advance in the struggle for gender equity and recognition of indigenous rights. This trend towards greater participation, documented over the last few decades, reflects a gradual but significant change in recognition of the unique capacities and perspectives that indigenous women bring to the table for negotiations and political decisions. Institutionalizing their demands has been vital in this process, allowing indigenous women leaders to participate in meaningful and strategic meetings, exert significant influence in the public sphere and engage in productive dialogue with non-indigenous society (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019).

Indigenous peoples' movements are transforming into active resistance, seeking to expose the harmful effects of colonization and promote reconciliation between Western and indigenous worldviews. These movements have pushed towards the decolonization and indigenization of various Western institutions to value and embrace indigenous cultures and identities. The movements seek to recognize the diverse experiences and identities of indigenous peoples and the need to appreciate their distinct ways of organizing and thinking about both the pre-colonial past and the post-colonial present (Bastien et al., 2023). Women's support and solidarity networks provide a system for sharing knowledge, resources, and mutual support. Such networks strengthen the presence of women in leadership by creating an environment conducive to developing

management skills and collective decision-making aimed at the well-being of communities (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019).

In the field of management and organizational studies and practices, Parmenter and Drummond (2022) analyzed the situation of indigenous women in the mining sector in Australia, highlighting challenges such as under-representation, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Despite advances in representation, these women still face significant barriers, including occupying less qualified and poorly paid positions. The absence of specific policies for their empowerment exacerbates their invisibility. Furthermore, indigenous women face additional barriers when trying to access leadership positions due to the influence of racism and culture on their leadership opportunities, making the fight for representation and recognition challenging (Ryan, 2020).

Bastien et al. (2023) point out that the dichotomous view imposed by the colonizers, which considered indigenous practices inferior, persists and results in the disregard of indigenous modes of organization that were successful for centuries before the arrival of Europeans. In this sense, there is evidence that indigenous women end up being better represented in the management of their own organizations (McGregor, 2011) since they face significant disadvantages (higher unemployment rate, geographic barriers, different family responsibilities, etc.) in the job market (Kaine, 2017). This phenomenon can be attributed to a confluence of factors intrinsic to indigenous communities' cultural, social, and historical practices. Firstly, many indigenous cultures operate under matriarchal or egalitarian structures, where women play significant roles in community decision-making (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019). Therefore, the management of their organizations can reflect these social structures, promoting greater female inclusion in leadership.

Historically, indigenous women have held important positions in their tribes and communities, playing spiritual, political, and economic roles and making crucial decisions, such as choosing tribal leaders and determining the fate of prisoners (Shotton & Mintborn, 2020). Indigenous women often hold essential traditional knowledge, ranging from sustainable practices and agriculture to conventional medicine and environmental conservation. This ancestral knowledge passed down from generation to generation, positions them as natural leaders within organizations that value and depend on such knowledge for their operation and mission (Dutra & Mayorga, 2019).

Indigenous women have a unique intersectional perspective that combines the fight against sexism and racism and demonstrates an exceptional determination to overcome adversity and promote significant societal changes (Ryan, 2020). Therefore, the empowerment of indigenous women in management positions in their organizations can be seen as a direct response to historical marginalization, serving as an act of self-determination and

claiming space within and outside their communities. In this sense, female leadership challenges colonial narratives that have underestimated or invisibilized indigenous contributions and promotes a management model linked to resilience and cultural adaptability.

New research on indigenous women is needed to illuminate their complex challenges (Ryan, 2020). Focusing on the intersection of gender and race and the strategies adopted to mitigate the impact of colonial and patriarchal structures, this research contributes to the existing literature on indigenous women's experiences. We aim to understand the intersectional paths indigenous women take in organizational management. This understanding is necessary for developing effective interventions that promote the leadership and participation of indigenous women at all levels of society and organizations.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Oral Report Method

To achieve the objective proposed in this work, the qualitative method of oral reporting was adopted as the research procedure. According to Queiroz (1991), an oral report records an individual's or group's undocumented experiences. Oral accounts allow us to learn about the collaborators' actual experiences, allowing us to capture their universes through their own perspectives, thus strengthening the assumptions of intersectional studies (Colling & Oltramari, 2019).

The method was chosen because of the time taken to carry out this work, as it requires less time than similar methodologies (Queiroz, 1991). In this way, by bringing the oral accounts of indigenous women in the performance of management, the method fulfills its function when it incorporates precise, structured experiences into the research that have not yet been documented by

historiography (Holzmann, 2002), and may even be sources of research for new scientific studies.

#### 3.2 Selection of Participants and Data Collection Technique

Considering the methodological procedures of oral history, this study uses interviews as the data collection instrument. Initially, it was decided that the people who would collaborate in the research would be women from Brazil's indigenous peoples. It was also agreed that these women should hold management positions in the organizations, i.e., they should occupy positions of leadership, responsibility, and decision-making in their professional duties.

Due to the particularities and limitations of this group's desired characteristics, the snowball technique was used to select the participants. With this strategy, researchers locate key informants, known as seeds, who personally indicate other possible collaborators (Vinuto, 2014). In this sense, as she is a public figure, indigenous activist, and manager, the first collaborator (seed) was identified through social networks. After contacting her, she agreed to take part in the research.

The key collaborator nominated six indigenous women managers. After explaining the nature and specifics of the study, three agreed to participate in the interviews. Four indigenous women who had worked in management positions in public or private organizations were interviewed. All the collaborators and experiences collected were from the Amazon region of the country. This is due to this region's high concentration of indigenous peoples (IBGE, 2022). Furthermore, the ethnic diversity among the managers reflects the reality that this group is under-represented in organizational environments. The profiles of the interviewees can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Interviewees' profiles

Identification	Age	Ethnicity	Position/Function
Interviewed 01	43 years	Kambeba	Municipal Ombudsperson
Interviewed 02	42 years	Arapium	State Coordinator of Indigenous School Education
Interviewed 03	26 years	Kaxinawá	Reporting Supervisor
Interviewed 04	43 years	Borari	Head of the Municipal Division of Indigenous School Education

Source: Own elaboration.

For the interviews, the semi-structured script format was chosen with open and closed questions, allowing the participants the freedom to discuss the topic, as well as the possibility of bringing new and unexpected questions to the research through spontaneous responses (Boni & Quaresma, 2005; Queiroz, 1991). The interview script was

drawn based on concepts extracted from the literature on intersectionality and indigenous women in leadership roles. This data collection instrument underwent a pre-test phase in September 2022 and was approved by three women from the management area. The script used can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Interview script

Analysis Group	Question	Purpose
1	What does being an indigenous woman mean to you?	Understand the meanings that interviewees attribute to indigenous women.

1	What do you consider to be the most challenging part of your journey as an indigenous woman?	Identify the difficulties faced by indigenous women in society.
1	As an indigenous woman, have you ever suffered any discrimination or embarrassment? If so, could you describe the situation you faced?	Describe the discriminatory situations experienced by indigenous women in society.
1	How do you consider your area of activity about gender and racial equality?	Check the interviewee's perception of gender and racial equality in her profession.
1	Do you feel that non-indigenous women receive different treatment compared to indigenous women?	Capture the interviewees' perception regarding racial inequality in society.
1	What motivated you to choose your profession?	Understand the factors that led to the interviewees' choice of area of activity.
2	How do you describe your journey to reach your leadership position today?	Learn about the trajectories of indigenous women to leadership positions.
2	What do you find most challenging, being an indigenous woman in a management position?	Discover the main challenges faced by indigenous women in management positions.
2	How do you consider that the management of indigenous women is seen by society?	Identify the interviewees' perception of how society views indigenous women's leadership.
2	Have you ever felt or witnessed any discrimination in the workplace? If it happened, could you describe what happened?	Point out discriminatory situations experienced by managers in the workplace.
2	How do you use accounting and financial management tools in your current position?	Identify the financial management mechanisms used by indigenous managers.
2	How vital are accounting-financial reports to the decision-making process for the position you hold?	Discover the influence exerted by accounting-financial management on the interviewees' decision-making process.
2	What paths do you suggest for other indigenous women to reach management positions?	Point out possible paths for those who wish to occupy management positions.

Source: Own elaboration.

It should be noted that the interview script was divided into two groups for analyzing the oral data: (1) being an indigenous woman, in which we sought to understand the interviewees' trajectories as indigenous women in Brazilian society and their views on the difficulties they faced; and (2) intersectional paths of indigenous women managers, in which we sought to learn about the participants' paths to managerial positions, as well as to identify the intersection of prejudices in their personal and professional lives.

Before the interviews, after clarifying the main points of the study and any doubts, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) was sent to the participants, signed, and returned by them electronically. At their option and availability, the interviews were conducted virtually, via videoconference, in October and November 2022. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the audio was recorded for later transcription of the information collected. Although there were time constraints in the participants' schedules, there was no need to supplement their statements.

### 3.3 Organization and Interpretation of Evidence

As this technique is often used in examining text materials and interview data (Flick, 2013), content analysis was used in this research to organize and interpret the results found. This procedure aims to describe the information in verbal and non-verbal communication messages, going through three phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and interpretation of the results (Bardin, 1977). Among the types of content analysis presented by Minayo (2014), this study uses thematic analysis, focusing specifically on the trajectories of indigenous women managers. The application of the content analysis technique throughout this academic work is detailed below:

1. Pre-analysis: The recorded reports were organized into written texts, separated by collaborators, and described in the order presented in the interview script. The transcripts were adjusted to adapt the spoken language to the written language without changing the meaning or narrative of the statements. At this stage, it was checked whether the answers provided by the participants met the research objective, as well as whether the files transformed into texts were in line with the stored data (audios);

2. Exploration of the material: the transcripts were reviewed to identify patterns in the narratives of the collaborators, mainly related to the content of overlapping oppressions and discriminations (intersectionality). In other words, the influence of the interaction between gender and ethnic markers on professional performance. At this stage, the excerpts from the thematic stories linked to the object of study were selected, disregarding non-essential elements of the testimonies or those that did not represent the reality of the research phenomenon, such as the initial greetings of the interviews, pauses and distractions;

3. Interpretation of the results: the selected narratives were structured into topics, first to discover the collaborators' identity as indigenous women and then their experiences in organizational management. These findings were discussed with previous literature on intersectionality and indigenous women in leadership roles. At this stage, the aim was to gain insight into the advances, limitations, and implications of the results for the field of study. Finally, at this stage of the content analysis, the work was structured and revised in the format of this research report.

## 4 DESCRIPTIONS OF ORAL REPORTS

#### 4.1 As indigenous women: "Challenging, Resisting and Enduring"

Women from all eras and cultures have experienced embarrassment at some point. For some of the interviewees, the departure from the village to the city was an event that triggered a process of reflection on what it means to be an indigenous woman. This can be seen in the words of interviewee 01:

[...] when you're in the village, you're with your people. It's like you're in a place where no one would look at you wrong, no one would look at you as anything other than an equal, you're just like me, I'm just like you, and here we are a family. When you leave the village for the city, the reading is different, the building is different, the universe is different, everything is new [...] (Interviewee 01).

For interviewee 02, this awareness came about through her participation in indigenous movements: "When I lived in the community, in the village, I didn't really have this perception of what it was to be indigenous or what it was to be an indigenous woman. [...] I became aware of the identity of an indigenous woman from 1997 onwards when I started to participate in the indigenous awareness movement [...]".

For interviewee 03, being an indigenous woman is about maintaining the ancestry of her people and resisting the challenges of inhabiting social structures:

Being an indigenous woman is a challenge. It's resistance, permanence, and occupying space. It's bringing with you your ancestry, the challenge of keeping going because we have so many barriers as indigenous women. I think these barriers are even greater because people disbelieve in us, in our ability, so it's an act of resistance (Interviewee 03).

Although gender is an issue that is widely discussed nowadays, it happens differently in indigenous societies. As seen from the interviews, this issue has not been discussed internally. Interviewee 02 made the following observation:

[...] this issue of gender is not very much on our agenda, we don't focus on it, but then, as I said, we have an indigenous movement, so many women are at the head of the movement. However, the presence of men is still much greater (Interviewee 02).

In this sense, the interviewees showed different views within their communities. In some of them, women don't take part in meetings, but they do make decisions, while in others, the decision is made solely by men. Interviewee 03 points out that, although the role of women is important among her people, the position of leadership is still mainly a male issue:

[...] in marriage [among the Kaxinawá people] it's not the woman who follows the man, in our tradition, it's the man who leaves his house and goes to live with his wife in her mother's house. So the woman has a lot of decision-making power, and in our history of creation, in our people, we have a matriarch who is the founder of our people, so the woman is seen as something sacred, important (Interviewee 03).

Interviewee 01's speech confirms the difference in gender treatment in some indigenous societies. She reinforces the relationship of belonging and cooperation that has always surrounded her: "[...] this feminism that the city experiences, for us, doesn't have the same reading; it's different. I think the strength of indigenous women lies in this possibility of making connections through respect".

Leaving the village, this welcoming place, moving to the city, having to adapt to new customs and places, and going to university are some of the situations that expose these women to violence. These aggressions can erase traces of their ancestry. Interviewee 01 recounts the most significant violence she suffered in this process of "adaptation" outside her community: "[...] the worst violence was having to forget the language of the people who welcomed me; I think that was the worst violence I experienced because I had to forget the Ticuna language and learn to speak Portuguese fluently".

Similarly, the interviewees also reported discomfort in academic settings: "[...] asked [university professor] me like this: what was I doing here in [city], that I wasn't in my Village? I think it was the first time in my entire journey of the indigenous movement that I felt terrible about that speech' (interviewee 02). Interviewee 01 had a similar experience:

[...] in the master's program, I had to change advisors because my knowledge [was considered] was too basic to be in the master's program and have taken second place. So, I think that was one of the hardest things (Interviewee 01).

Interviewee 03, it was no different. She recalled her academic journey:

Everything is difficult from beginning to end, but I believe the beginning was much more complicated because I was young, a woman, and indigenous, because of those people who did not believe in my capacity. [...] First, the challenge was to enter college; I heard a lot: she is Indian, Indians are dumb, Indians are lazy, she does not have the ability, she will not succeed, she is not meant for this, she is poor, and people with low incomes should not even be in college [...] (Interviewee 03).

Interviewee 04 also faced discriminatory situations for having entered the university through a special selection process for Indigenous people:

[...] I entered [the university] through the special Indigenous selection process, and for these reasons, we always faced difficulties, with peers always making indirect comments towards us Indigenous people. [...] they labelled us as just occupying space there and that we would, let's say, cause a loss for the university [...] (Interviewee 04).

Moreover, she had to deal with another challenge which was balancing personal and professional life:

[...] my academic journey as a woman, being in undergrad, being a mother, being a leader, then I had to juggle everything so that I could handle



getting the education I so desired, performing the role of a mother which is not easy [...] (Interviewee 04).

However, prejudice is not always explicit. In some situations, there is doubt about certain attitudes, as was the case experienced by the interviewees: "People didn't want to give me a job because I had no classroom experience. So, I don't know if it was just me because of my gender or if it was a general thing" (interviewee 01). Interviewee 03 experienced this disguised by the false justification that she did not have the necessary knowledge to perform the function offered to her:

[...] I had to listen to: oh, but you are going to put this girl to manage a network, she doesn't know, she doesn't understand, she doesn't have the capacity for this, I think you need to put another person with more capacity [...] (Interviewee 03).

However, these women were not intimidated by the violence they suffered. On the contrary, they sought inspiration from other women:

[...] I have a reference to this woman who is at the forefront of struggles and participates in many actions, which is my own mother [...] I see much of myself in her because she has always been this courageous, fearless woman (Interviewee 02).

Thus, they have been building their space and earning the respect they deserve: "[...] today where I work, Indigenous women are chiefs, they are managers, they are directors" (interviewee 03). As can be seen from the accounts of the interviewees, there were countless challenges from the beginning of their journeys, but their determination and persistence allowed them to overcome all of them, and today, they inspire and encourage many others.

#### 4.2 Intersectional Paths of indigenous women managers: "If you can do it, so can I"

Women are brought up to be invisible in society. Wanting to occupy a prominent position may seem too ambitious, especially for indigenous women whose gender factor is compounded by their ethnicity. However, the interviewees reported that the fact that they had been brought up by strong women who were always at the forefront of their people's decisions inspired and encouraged them not to be intimidated in occupying this space:

I grew up watching my grandmother in her relationship with people, in her relationship with non-indigenous people, in her relationship with indigenous people, in decision-making. [...] I've had good examples on my journey that have allowed me to get to where I am, to have the recognition I have, to have the respect I have in the villages of various peoples in Brazil (Interviewee 01).

Interviewee 02 followed in her mother's footsteps, including in her profession:

She [her mother] has a gift for teaching, so I wanted to be a teacher like my mother. [...] It's funny because I always said I wanted to be in

education. I want to work in education management, but it was just a wish from a long time ago, you know? I never imagined I could be managing indigenous school education (Interviewee 02).

Entering the job market and socializing with colleagues has questioned the demands placed on women's image. Interviewee 03 said that she was discriminated against for wearing her personal items in the workplace: "I was asked to take off my beads, my feathers, my necklaces because they didn't want me to wear them at work, and I was very vocal that if they took them off, they would be taking away my identity". She also said that she had to take legal action to be able to sign with her indigenous surname, which was not allowed in the company.

The phrase heard from a coworker by interviewee 04 reinforces the stereotypes that still exist about indigenous peoples: "[...] I'm already going there to resolve the situation of the indigenous people before I get shot [the coworker's phrase]. For them it might be a joke, for us it's not, for us it's a lack of respect". The interviewee also recounted another similar episode she had with another colleague: "[...] ah, today is Indian Day, is it? I want to see everyone naked here [colleague's words]. These are the kinds of comments that aren't nice to us, it's total discrimination".

In addition, proving themselves competent for the position they have won was also one of the biggest challenges listed by the managers: "Showing that you have the ability to do it. No matter how much you don't know, [you have to] show that you have the legs to go after it and learn" (interviewee 01). Interviewee 02 also gave a similar account: "Some people think that we don't have the ability, that we're not competent to hold certain positions, no matter how hard you try, there are those who will always doubt your competence".

Similarly, interviewee 03 recalled that doubting her ability was one of the most difficult moments in her professional career: "Acceptance, people accepting that a 22-year-old girl, 23 years old, was going to take on a management position, an indigenous woman who theoretically didn't know anything, I was trained, and I went." For interviewee 04, the questioning of her ability was also something that marked her life story: "[...] I never forget it because it was one of the times they tried to diminish us, thinking that because we were indigenous, we weren't capable [...]".

Despite having conquered their space and proving themselves capable and worthy of the role they play, the interviewees recounted discriminatory situations in their positions because they are women:

In the position I hold, I talk to a lot of men. I once felt resistance because there are [indigenous] groups that only talk to men. So, when they arrived and saw that they would deal with the agenda with a woman, they didn't feel that comfortable until the meeting flowed (Interviewee 02).

Interviewee 03 has even experienced situations of harassment in the workplace, revealing that she was sent home for wearing a skirt and in another episode in which she was exposed, resulting in the expulsion of a coworker:

I've suffered some harassment, I've already been sent away because I went to work in a skirt, but the skirt was on my knee. [...] Another time, a colleague adjusted a camera, zoomed in, and focused on my private parts. So, I was wearing pants, and he zoomed in to show my private parts and forgot to delete it, so it was available to everyone in the company (Interviewee 03).

Interviewee 01, on the other hand, said she had never suffered or witnessed gender or ethnic violence in the workplace: "Thank God I have a perfect relationship with my team. [...] I feel very well respected and very welcomed in my work environment, at no time do I feel any kind of discomfort".

Regarding the use of accounting and financial management knowledge, interviewee 03 emphasizes its importance for the decision-making process: "[...] I need [accounting information] to carry out activities, to calculate my steps, how far I can go and what I can't do. [...] I think that without it I won't be able to walk, I'll be in the dark". The interviewees do not prepare or use accounting and/or financial information. They explain that their actions are based on reports on the activities.

Interviewee 04, coordinator of indigenous school education, revealed that she has no access to accounting or financial documents:

We don't have this access; this financial business doesn't pass through us. We don't even really know where the funds that are allocated to indigenous school education go. [...] We don't know about it unless we go there [to the municipality's Finance Department] to ask for an account; it's tough for them to answer us [...] (Interviewee 04).

Pride in their career and achievements can be seen in the words of the interviewees: "[...] I'm going to take the lesson of saying that an indigenous woman got in there and managed to meet promised targets [...]" (Interviewee 01). Interviewee 02 emphasizes how happy she is to inspire other women:

[...] I'm happy that several women have already said this to me, and I didn't even know the extent of this position and the fact that I'm a woman, taking on the coordination, they say - if you can do it, I can do it too. I've heard that a lot - if you got there, I can too (Interviewee 02).

Concerning the paths to be taken by those aiming for prominent positions, interviewee 03 emphasizes the importance of training and also the need to create opportunities:

I think that the opportunity and the search for knowledge, the opportunities, they also have to arise, they also have to come from companies, from institutions and we have to train ourselves, prepare ourselves for this position, it's not just about waiting for them to arise, but also not having

the necessary tools to occupy this space (Interviewee 03).

Interviewee 02, on the other hand, highlights the skills needed for the leadership role:

I think the first great quality that an indigenous manager should have been the ability to listen. [...] and respect, knowing that the other person is a human being, knowing that the other person is capable, but also has limits (Interviewee 02).

Interviewee 04 encourages those who wish to follow the same path:

The best way is for her to accept herself as a capable person, to seek knowledge in the field she likes best, in this case, whether it's health, education or art. We have a lot of artists here, so I think the best thing for women is to occupy these spaces, seek knowledge and not give up (Interviewee 04).

## 5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study aimed to understand the intersectional paths taken by indigenous women in organisational management. Based on the interviewees' narratives, the social markers present in their paths to leadership positions could be identified, revealing how the overlap of gender and ethnicity can affect their professional careers in organisations.

The first social marker in the research participants' accounts is their ethnicity, specifically their language. The transition from their communities to urban areas proved to be a challenging process; after all, to adapt to the city's customs and language, they renounced their linguistic identity. When we analyse this issue through the lens of intersectionality, we can associate this process of linguistic marginalisation with discrimination and prejudice stemming from their ethnic origin, perpetuated since the period of colonisation when the colonisers treated their practices and customs as inferior. In this way, this study has identified that language plays a crucial role in discussing intersectionality, especially in the context of indigenous peoples. After all, we cannot forget that the suppression of the mother tongue was one of the main strategies used by colonisers to subjugate and eliminate the cultures of colonised peoples. Thus, this loss represents not only the renunciation of a form of communication but also an act of cultural violence that seeks to erase the identity and autonomy of these people.

Linguistic marginalisation reflects the broader system of oppression that affects indigenous peoples and highlights the need to fight for the preservation and revitalisation of their languages as an essential part of the struggle for justice and equality. Therefore, by identifying language as an intersectional marker presented by the research participants, the issue of language plays a central role in the discussion of intersectionality. In addition, the interviewees' accounts of their experiences revealed social stereotypes about indigenous peoples related to their lack of knowledge and the way they dress and behave.

The second social marker present in the participants' accounts refers to gender. The experiences shared highlight gender-based violence, the challenges of proving competence and the inequalities faced by indigenous women when they encounter stereotypes and discrimination in urban areas. This violence has direct consequences for these women's achievement and retention in leadership positions. Although the literature shows that in some ethnic groups, women have a voice, are representative and take part in decision-making in their communities, most of the leadership representation is still male, as two interviewees said.

Understanding gender markers as a demand from Indigenous women represents an important finding for intersectionality theory. It means rethinking more effectively the inequalities and violence that Indigenous women face. Reflecting particularly on what Crenshaw (1989) said about the need to go further, adopting an approach that considers only the isolated categories of race and gender can be superficial. It is necessary to understand how these oppressions interact and intertwine in the experience of Indigenous women, as they are complex and unique.

The intersectionality of these markers occurred, according to the research participants' accounts, especially upon entering university and beginning their professional careers. It was during this period that violence—explicit or not—against their culture and gender became more prevalent, thus exposing the multiple forms of discrimination they faced. All interviewees revealed they suffered discrimination in the academic environment, whether from professors or fellow students.

It is no surprise that the academic environment has oppressive characteristics: Eurocentric and patriarchal, and the business environment remains stubbornly patriarchal. Unfortunately, the space that should be inclusive often becomes a place of exclusion and subordination for specific groups. For the Indigenous participants, access to higher education represented an additional challenge, as the interviewees mostly are the first in their families to earn a higher education degree. They revealed that they suffered discrimination in the academic environment, whether from professors or fellow students.

Inferiorized by their colonizers in their knowledge and culture, indigenous peoples now face attempts at subjugation in university environments and the market, which seek to place them in a position of subservience through the subalternization of their languages, the inferiorization of their gender, and even the ridicule of their clothing. According to interviews and evidence found by Cembranel et al. (2020) and Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018), indigenous women face restrictions regarding the use of cultural objects and traditional clothing. Additionally, there are reports about the accumulation of roles these women perform in their domestic, community, and family functions. This phenomenon has already been observed in gender studies, such as those by Cembranel et al. (2020), Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018), and Fredericks and White (2018). These studies highlight the burden faced by indigenous women, who assume multiple roles and

responsibilities both within their homes and in their communities and families.

The intersectionality of these markers — gender, race, language — is reflected in the low representation of social minorities in leadership positions (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). Even though these women play an active role in the spiritual, political, and economic decisions of their tribes, as presented by Shotton and Mintborn (2020), it is undeniable that they face additional complexities due to the intersection between gender and ethnic dynamics. Just as the discussion of intersectionality arises from the sum of struggles faced by white women and black women, gender and race, indigenous women face unique and complex challenges, as it has also been observed that gender issues have different perspectives according to each ethnicity.

It is important to note that most interviewees are the first in their family nucleus to have a higher education degree. Even under these circumstances, they sought to occupy these spaces of education and leadership. They were shaped by observing and living with women leaders who participated in meetings in their villages. Today, these women who were once inspired have become an inspiration for other indigenous women to become active presences in decision-making spaces.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Prejudice and invisibility have marked - and still mark - the entire trajectory of women's struggles. Despite the progress made with a lot of effort, time and academic and professional development, women still occupy fewer spaces and receive little recognition. Recent research shows that women are slowly taking over male-dominated areas.

The difficulties become even more evident when social markers are identified and intersected. When, in addition to gender, the ethnic marker is added, this representation becomes even smaller since the violence and discrimination faced by indigenous women since colonisation are still significant obstacles to reaching leadership positions. Given this scenario, this study aimed to understand the intersectional paths taken by indigenous women in organisational management.

The results showed that they have faced prejudice and a lack of opportunities since the beginning of their journeys, including the decision to leave their homelands, the academic environment—since they all have higher education degrees—and even after breaking through all the necessary barriers along their professional paths to occupy and maintain their leadership positions.

The findings show that all the women interviewed have suffered some prejudice at some point in their careers. Although they hold a management position, only 25% of the interviewees use accounting and financial reports; the others have a specific sector within the organisation. However, the interviewee with accounting and financial reports emphasised the importance of carrying out her activities. Despite their difficulties, they are all proud of their



origins and of everything they have achieved professionally. Above all, they are active voices in leadership positions, occupying spaces, defending their customs, and fighting for their people.

As for the limitations of the research, the under-representation of indigenous women in leadership positions stands out. Another limitation was the limited number of supporting studies on the subject. By understanding the paths taken by indigenous women who have reached management positions, this study contributes to the application of intersectional theory in situations not examined in the literature and encourages discussion of the violence suffered by indigenous women in organisations.

In addition, the interviewees' accounts of overcoming challenges and how they broke the historical bonds of prejudice and sexism stimulate other women to be inspired in their journeys. Finally, as a recommendation for future research, we suggest developing studies investigating the effects of new social markers in the organisational environment, such as sexual orientation, people with disabilities and ethics, and comparative analyses with indigenous women managers from other regions of Brazil.

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