



Indigenous leaderships beyond the tangle of concepts and their functions in the tracks of history: An exercise in listening

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Abstract— *This study is an excerpt from a broader research, which was conducted between the years of 2014 and 2017, on the implications of non-indigenous schools on the formation of indigenous leaderships. Here, we analyzed the scholar upbringing of two leaderships from the Krikati people, who inhabit the western Maranhão area, and how the knowledge from the Western society contributed to their trajectories and life stories, without diluting their culture and indigenous identity. In this paper, we focus on the concepts of traditional and political leadership. We highlight characteristics of what it means to be a leader in indigenous societies, with the purpose of analyzing what can be considered as political constancy by leaderships from different cultures, historical and geographical contexts. We also discussed the types of leaderships, their attributions and functions from the theoretical framework that supports these discussions. We used accounts from traditional indigenous leaderships, Krikati political leaderships and from political leaders who are nationally recognized by Brazilian native peoples. The determination of native leaders to appropriate Western knowledge has been contributing to the strengthening of their leaderships and, consequently, to the realization of projects in their Territories. Thus, this work is theoretically and methodologically based on the history of the present time and history from oral sources.*

Keywords— *Indigenous Leaderships, Krikati People, Schooling.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is focused on discussing indigenous leaderships, mainly Krikati political leaderships. It is an excerpt from a PhD thesis² in History at the Universidade Vale dos Sinos, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Characteristics of traditional leaders in indigenous societies are discussed, analyzing what can be considered common to different cultures, historical and Characteristics of traditional leaders in indigenous

societies are discussed, analyzing what can be considered common to different cultures, historical and geographical contexts. To develop such reflections, we used research from Clastres (1979), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1976), Monteiro (1994) and Laroque (2006), even at the risk of simplifying them. We also discuss the types of leaderships, their attributions and functions that are internal and external to the community. Thus, we bring forth accountings from elders, Krikati leaders and leaderships

from other peoples who also have political representation in the Brazil's National Indigenous Movement (Movimento Indígena Brasileiro - MIB). These interlocutors aid us in understanding that these functions and attributions, despite being generally similar among indigenous people, are dynamic and become specific to each society or people.

Authors such as Monteiro (1994), Cunha (2012), Oliveira (2006), among others, have guided us to an understanding that places the indigenous as actors in the center of the stage, not to act, but to tell their stories from their interpretations, memories and experiences.

This work encompasses the theoretical-methodological basis of the history of the present time and the history from oral sources. In the present time, we analyzed the singularities of each subject as live testaments of their own life stories. This way, our study brings forth narratives of traditional and political leaderships of the Krikati and other indigenous peoples considered as political leaders, who have national and international representativeness. As to the methodology, we used oral accountings; we are not, however, concerned with absolute truths, but with the experiences lived by the sources, as well as by our interlocutors.

Indigenous leaderships: in the tracks of History, meanings and senses are intercrossed in the past and in the present.

The term leadership is used routinely and not always moderately. We attribute this function to people who are in the center of the media, or to those who occupy management positions considered relevant to society. Thus, almost always the figure of the leader is linked to those who play this role in the religious, political and economic fields, to the detriment of other contexts in which they are present.

Among indigenous peoples there are several types of leaderships, such as: spiritual leaders³, singers, storytellers, healers (both male and female), those who are responsible in organizing ritual festivals, fishing, hunting, among others. We can also identify traditional and political leaderships.

Traditional leadership receives many names, according to the historical and geographical context, to the role to be played and that is required by society, and to how the contact was made. Thus, we can find several nomenclatures in the Portuguese language, such as: chief, captain, cacique⁴, shamans etc.

The term "political leadership" is used by Gersem Baniwa (2006, p. 15) to institute "people who are given specific roles to act in the relationships with non-indigenous

societies" and who do not necessarily need to manage with the same set of predicates that is traditionally expected of a traditional leader.

Most researchers who conduct ethnographic studies in indigenous societies agree with some characteristics that are common amongst their leaders. Clastres, in his classical work "Society against the State"⁵, points that the first travelers and chroniclers of the 16th century, such as Jean de Lery, André Thevet, Hans Staden and others, observed that "the most notable thing about the indigenous chief consists in the almost complete lack of authority; the political function seemed to be, within these populations, only very faintly differentiated" (CLASTRES, 1979, p. 27).

His investigations on South American indigenous societies signaled as a pertinent trace of their organization the absence of social stratification and coercive power. In this sense, leaderships.

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² Thesis defended in 2018 at UNISINOS: "Krikati Leaderships: implications of non-indigenous schooling in their histories and life trajectories", advised by Prof. Dr. Maria Cristina Bohn Martins.

³ This leadership, among the Krikati, is called pajé. Their teachings are passed on by people chosen by them, confidentially. Our work did not intend to discuss this type of leadership, as we understand that this would be a whole new thesis and only an ethnographic work would enable us to understand the complexity of the role that this leadership exerts in its community.

⁴ Among the Timbira peoples, from which the Krikati are a part of, the term for traditional leaderships is "cacique". Thus, we only refer to Krikati traditional leaderships as "cacique" in our work.

⁵ In our work we do not intend to discuss power and authority in societies with States, but to bring forth the thinking of Pierre Clastres and other authors who studies the role of leaderships in indigenous societies.

[...] have no authority, no enforcement powers, no means of giving an order. The chief is not a commander, the people of the tribe have no duty of obedience. The role of the chief is not the place of power, and the figure of a savage 'chief' does not prefigure at all that figure of the future despot. It is certainly not from the primitive leadership that one can deduce the general state apparatus (CLASTRES, 1979, p. 222).

In this perspective, power is not alien to the indigenous society, but the leadership does not apprehend it, prevented by society itself. The latter detains a certain power, and it remains diffuse in the community. Therefore, it does not constitute a separate political sphere⁶. This demonstrates that indigenous peoples attribute a higher relevance to social aspects when compared to individual ones.

Lévi-Strauss, in his "Sad Tropics", in the chapter on "Men, Women and Chiefs", discourses on his experiences with Nambikwara people chiefs, in the end of the 1930s. He emphasizes that these chiefs complained of their arduous responsibilities, but also saw them with pride. In this sense, "[...] the chief shows up as the cause of the group's desire to establish itself as a group, and not as the effect of the need, felt by an already constituted group, for a central authority" (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1976, p. 293). The indigenous leadership, in the conception of the aforementioned author, does not find backing in a specific power nor in a publicly recognized authority. It is consent that is in the root of this power and maintains its legitimacy.

In any case, leaders had and still have a prominent role in the becoming of Brazilian indigenous societies, and this is recurrent in the literature about them. Monteiro (1994), when reporting on the shaping of the São Paulo society and economy, in between the 16th and 17th centuries, highlights the processes of integration, exploitation and destruction of indigenous peoples brought from other regions. However, he also presents the role of "chieftainships" to conduct strategies for cultural and political survival of those collectivities who, in no conditions of fully reproducing pre-colonial forms of organization, sought to forge their own spaces in the interior of the colonial society:

The shaping of the São Paulo society is causally linked to alliances, conflicts, resistances and deals between indigenous leaderships and the Europeans. When they arrived in São Vicente, the first Portuguese

immediately recognized the fundamental importance of war in intertribal relationships. [...] They realized that they could achieve a lot through their engagement with them. The natives, on the other hand, certainly saw other immediate advantages in forming alliances with Europeans, particularly in the warlike actions carried out against their mortal enemies. However, they soon discovered the harmful effects of similar alliances (MONTEIRO, 1996, p. 23).

⁶ Analogy to the policy of the State as an institution of sovereign power to govern a people within a defined territorial area.

We observe that interests and objectives changed during the colonization process, and the natives were not passive to the conditions imposed to them. In this process, Monteiro (1996) highlights that indigenous leaderships played several roles, such as: contributing to the economic development – through alliances with non-indigenous, which generated labor –; taking care of building new villages, when needed; organizing social and material life in the community; serving as examples and guardians of traditions etc.

The same author also says that the role of guardian of traditions was shared with shamans and pajés, who also accumulated, sometimes, political authority. Citing the chronicle of Yves d'Évreux ("Journey made in the north of Brazil during the years 1613 and 1614"), he points out an important role played by Tupinambá shamans in Maranhão: they occupied, amongst the indigenous, the position of mediators between spirits and their people. With effect, they performed several essential functions, such as healing, dream interpretation and the protection of local society against external threats, including malevolent spirits. Their authority derived mainly from the esoteric knowledge they possessed, and which resulted from long years of learning from experienced shamans.

In the same understanding, Laroque points out that the Kaingang leaders, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lived

[...] generally in imás, villages of 50 to 100 individuals, under the directive of a captain, whose authority is small or nearly null: they are therefore very independent. These captains, or rather, chiefs, can only maintain

discipline through good words, gifts etc. As soon as these means are not achieved, the entire village abandons them: even their children themselves emigrate, in search of a better captain, who is kinder and more gift-giving. (KRUG⁷, apud LAROQUE, 2006, p. 84).

It is noteworthy that indigenous societies did not present broadly uniform characteristics in this regard. According to the literature we have found, common characteristics predominate, such as: moderating internal conflicts in communities, being generous with your assets, and, finally, being a good speaker. This triple

⁷ Edmundo Krug: botanist and professor at the Mackenzie College, contributed with the creation of the “Sociedade Científica” of São Paulo on June 10th, 1903.

⁸ Expression used by Lévi-Strauss (1996).

⁹ In a further moment of this work, at page 125, we will give a more profound explanation on the importance of the “courtyard” to Timbira villages

¹⁰ Expression used by Clastres (2004) when referring to the oratory of indigenous leaders.

qualification seems to present the essential characteristics for indigenous societies today, as well.

Maintaining harmony within communities is one of the tasks that demands from the leader acuity, listening and discernment. Similarly, the sensibility to perceive internal conflicts in a timely manner, because when they take unwanted forms they can contribute to the imbalance of the social organization of the community. With a compromise of being “peacemakers”⁸, leaders use only their virtues and prestige to pacify internal disputes.

Generosity is an essential quality to most indigenous peoples. This characteristic is still very much present in their societies and contributes to the turnover of traditional leaderships. When they cannot meet the demands of their communities, their prestige is discussed, and they can be replaced without question. To Lévi-Strauss (1996, p. 293) “[...] although the chief does not seem to enjoy a materially privileged situation, he must have control over surplus food, tools, ornaments, [...]. When in need, it is to the chief that they appeal, in order to be satisfied.”

The needs to be met by the leaderships are connected to the culture of each people. Generally speaking, leaders should provide the needed elements for rituals, festivities or mourning days. Likewise, the dynamics of the leaders in distributing tasks to the community can be considered an

act of generosity, because in addition to providing equal opportunities among the other members, it implies the share of responsibilities.

It is common to hear from leaders that they “are tired” of so many attributions. In wanderings along the Krikati villages, it was often possible to hear caciques complaining of the lack of support from the youngsters when holding festivities and rituals. In these occasions, they complained that the involvement of all community members helps to maintain harmony, sharing, unity, and to constantly exercise generosity in their villages.

These statements usually occur at dawn or dusk, when elders, chiefs and other members gather in the courtyard⁹ to talk about the administration of the village, in the case of the Krikati. That way, the oratory emphasized by Clastres and other anthropologists, remains another valuable quality, as well as being appreciated almost unanimously by all indigenous societies.

Thus, the word spoken by the leadership is intricately linked to the role of moderator of the community, even if it is often said “to the desert”¹⁰. That is, it seems normal to have to repeat the same speech several times, without being bothered by the generalized indifference of their listeners. However, due to experiences with the Krikati, it was noticeable that the apparent “indifference” is just a misunderstanding of those who do not know the proper way to hear, learn and love the word “as a non-oppressive means of solving problems” (CLASTRES, 2004, p. 62).

At the Krikati villages, you can listen to elders make long speeches to young people, children and adults without being challenged. It is possible to perceive, from the contact with the villages, that these speeches are guidelines to the community, becoming a routine activity. Traditional knowledge is orally transmitted, with the goal of teaching, caring, guiding, educating – to know how to live in a community -, strengthening their culture and valuing indigenous identity.

In view of the bibliographic research that attests to essential characteristics to identify recurring medallions in the figure of traditional indigenous leaders - conflict moderator, generous and good speaker -, those being able to cross geographical and historical borders, it is possible to highlight, perhaps with different meanings, that these characteristics are prevalent among Krikati leaders.

Starting from the 1970s, Brazil’s National Indigenous Movement is consolidated in Latin America, questioning the official indigenist policies, especially those aimed at the integration and assimilation of indigenous peoples. In this context, it is reinforced what Oliveira (1988) called a “feeling of indigenous fraternity” and the involvement of new leaderships. Thus,

indigenous leaders begin to emerge in a different sense from the traditional one, very close to the Western conception of union and political leadership. This category of social actor originated using grassroots ecclesial communities, and its model was based on community leaders capable of facing the “established” power. The leaders assert themselves as an alternative [...] and their trajectory is structured based on their contacts with public and private institutions, NGOs and different support entities (BITTENCOURT, 2007, p. 65).

The space created by MIB for intermediation between indigenous people and the national society demanded a leadership profile different from the traditional ones, which, until then, had little movement (1970) outside their communities. The new context imposes no overlap between the leaders, but rather, roles to be developed distinctly in line with the needs of indigenous societies. Following, we will discuss how traditional and political leaderships understand their responsibilities in this new social and political context.

Traditional and political leadership: listening to the indigenous

As previously mentioned, anthropologists agree that some characteristics are common to most traditional indigenous leaderships. They discuss them equally, positioning them through a historical, social and political context. However, they warn that the functions and attributes depend on the specificities of each people.

From the accountings of Gersem Baniwa (2006, p. 64), the traditional indigenous leadership plays the role of “representing, articulating and defending the interests of their people as a responsibility inherited from their parents from the standing social dynamics, but without any decision-making power, which is exclusively up to the totality of individuals and groups that constitute the people”. Monteiro (1994, p. 23) highlights that this way of being and living the condition of leadership led Europeans, in their first contacts, not to “identify the sources of political authorities among indigenous societies”, considering them, as said by Cunha (2012), without law, without faith and without a King.

To Edivaldo Krikati – cacique of the Jerusalém village –, the traditional leadership must “care for the wellbeing of the community, as he teaches by giving the example, knowing how to listen to the community, because we do

not have the power to decide. We listened to the community, took it to the courtyard and made decisions together” (EDVALDO. Interview granted in the Jerusalém village on February 10th, 2016).

José Tourino Krikati – cacique of the São José village ¹¹ – agrees with Edivaldo and notes that “[...] caciques need to listen beyond the words. Leave their homes and visit people.

Understand what the community needs. It is the role of the cacique to encourage the performance of rituals, festivals and the participation of young people in our culture” (JOSÉ TOURINO. Interview granted in the São José village on June 15th, 2016).

The understanding of the functions of a traditional leadership is symbolically carried by the experiences and by the way each one does things. As an anthropologist and researcher, and as an active political leadership, Gersem Baniwa amplifies the role of the traditional leader, that is, considers them to be not solely an internal representative, but also an articulator between the defense of the community and the society that encompasses it.

To Certeau (2014, p. 141), “[...] the ways of doing things do not just designate activities that a theory would take as objects. These ways of doing also organize their construction”. In this sense, to Edivaldo and José Tourino, representations of what comes to be a traditional leadership are rooted in the internal reality of the village. They have the same understanding as Gersem Baniwa (2006) regarding the role of articulators. However, they refer to the experiences practiced, lived in the village and authorized by the collectiveness.

In this sense, indigenous people account that traditional leadership organizes and brings life to a specific form of living together, of social, political and economic organization, having as a basic principle the interests of the collectiveness. Thus, they do not require external rules and do not care about what should be right or wrong in the conception of the non-indigenous.

The expression used by Gersem Baniwa (2006) – “to be a leadership is a responsibility inherited from their parents” –

justifies the specificities, the comprehensions that each people or community builds to define it. As an inheritance, there is a need to continue what is “learned and lived”, giving it meaning with everyday experiences. In this aspect, we perceive “the unraveling of a time not gathered, but disseminated in repetitions, memories and successive knowledge in time”, as Certeau argues (2014, p. 240).

To be available to listen to **others** ¹² is a fundamental characteristic to the exercise of traditional leaderships, as

¹¹ Mister José Tourino was a cacique at the São José village, municipality of Montes Altos, Maranhão, Brazil, between 2015 and 2017.

previously mentioned in this study. From the accountings of Edivaldo and José Tourino, we then consider that knowing how to listen means, to indigenous peoples, to practice an exercise in alterity. It is to be able to wonder and be open to the surprise of a presence that is manifested, even if it goes against previous expectations.

In the rounds of conversations and decision-making at the Krikati villages, there was an opportunity to experience the exercise of listening. In such situations, we observed that silence is the most important language when it is time for the other to manifest themselves. Time marks the need for expressions in several languages and is not limited to the space for speaking and listening. That is, the speech of the other is what determines the time to shut up, to think and to position yourself.

This kind of situation is not random to the everyday lives of the villages. Everything has its meaning; thus, it is the culture that displays the footing and thinking of a people, through their orality and experiences. In this sense, the essential points among all peoples, as a function of traditional leaders, are: taking care of the wellbeing of the community, the quest to impose respect, to educate by the example, to share decisions and to know how to listen, to be generous, as previously highlighted by the Krikati leadership accountings.

It is from this perspective that we understand the dynamics of the culture and the tracks drawn by history in the lives of people. The reflections of mister Herculano Krikati, as follows, represent the need of the “come to be” that originates from the current context, with the past being used as a bridge to analyze the present. He reflects on his formation and notes the changes between past and present. However, he reaffirms that the essence of this formation continues to exist with features from the present.

Our culture has laws. So, I participated in many things. I got beaten up by the elder. They said it was necessary, as only from getting beaten up I would become a man [...]. Today it is not done anymore. You do not beat up the boys like before, but there is a ritual to become cacique. You must be a serious and well-respected man. Everything we do in our village, we need to be

reminded of our culture, but we can not think that everything is as before, things change, boys need to study, learn other stuff that the village does not have. They need to be lawyers, doctors. They come and will serve the community. (HERCULANO. Interview granted at the Jerusalém village on February 12th, 2016).

Generally speaking, we can say that indigenous peoples are differentiated from the rest of the Brazilian society by innumerable cultural elements, including social and political organization. Each people, during each time, defines how and who must be the traditional leadership. The accounting given above alerts us that the culture of a people must not be synonymous to stagnation, and the dynamics of time do not conduct it to oblivion.

To Gersem Baniwa (2006) and Oliveira (2006), all actions from traditional leaders can be considered political, in the sense of knowing what they want for the communities. They are that the role of articulation with the national society was performed by leaders ever since the first contacts with Europeans. Therefore, every traditional leadership has been and is political. It makes alliances, seeks strategies inside and outside the villages, a role that was also developed by the new leaders from the past three decades.

Let us take as an example the relationship of the religious Carmelite Friar Manoel Procópio do Coração de Maria with indigenous peoples for the founding of the military colony of Santa Teresa (1848), where today is the city of Imperatriz. During his first contacts with the indigenous that inhabited the margins of the Tocantins river, he counted on leaderships to make it a peaceful encounter. In fact, attempts to colonize the region prior to his arrival proved to be unfeasible due to the opposition of the indigenous peoples of the Gavião and Krikati groups. Thus, with the initial objective of catechizing them and making the region apt to be explored, he first dealt with

The Apinajés, but unfortunately, they rebelled and abandoning the place, which they inhabited, they went inside. He made way to the huts of the Caracatigês (Krikati) and Gaviões (Gavião), and with luck he was able to strengthen friendly relations with them, having already reached the point of getting their tuxauas, or chiefs, to promise to follow him and settle under his direction. The missionary had chosen to settle the

population at a place named Campos dos Frades, which seemed most convenient. The tribe of the 'Gaviões' alone he calculates to be close to a thousand souls (D'AGUIAR. August 15th, 1851. Emphasis added).

In view of the friendly relations between friar Manuel Procópio and the Krikati leaderships, there was a new development. Mister Ângelo Thomaz do Amaral (1861) remembers the role played by the "tuxau Agostinho, of the tribe Caracati (Krikati), who accompanied them with a grown number of indigenous, ensuring the opening of the indicated road [...] I come to delegate ye a new exploration [...]". In this new endeavor, mister Amaral (1861) names new explorers and presents strategies to facilitate contribution of leaderships to enlist the indigenous people to work on road openings. Thus, he determines that "[...] during the whole exploration it would be convenient not to abandon the main explorers Pedro Tavassos de Alencar and Boaventura José Lima, and to seize the help of, preferentially and with reasonable gifts, the indigenous of the Caracati tribe (Krikati), whose tuxaua so effectively helped the first exploration" (1861).

We cannot think of passiveness or neutrality from indigenous leaderships, as these have always been at the forefront of situations of peace, alliances, but also of conflicts. In this process, traditional leaderships played several roles: among them, fighting for the survival of their belonging group.

Carlota Carvalho, not sparing complaints about the killings, enslavements and other atrocities committed against the indigenous peoples of Maranhão, by bandeirantes and squatters in the region, highlights some of the strategies that the indigenous people and their leaderships used in the face of each circumstance presented to them.

Then, reporting an episode that took place by the end of the 19th century, between the bandeirantes and the indigenous, Carvalho (2006, p. 116) points out, for example, that these peoples had not ceased to have armed resistance on their horizon.

In 1813, the almighty bandeira came to Pastos Bons to take the last piece of land from the infidels, to kill men and women, to steal the fields and enslave their children [...] on the morning of June 28th, eve of São Pedro's day, which was to be solemnized with the celebration of the victory of Catholics, the bandeira,

having found the climb, ascended to the top of the sierra, carrying the ammunition of war conducted by mighty horses. At the top, in the terrace, it found the Timbira. There they were to die, defending their freedom, their homes, women, children and elders. Crusaders and infidels faced each other, the smoke of gunpowder blurred the clarity of the day and the front wing of the Timbiras fell to the ground, felled by bullets. This destruction did not wane the spirits of the natives. Knocked down by bullets hurled in a continuous firing, passing over their dead and wounded, the Timbira got through the bandeirantes and seized the load of ammunition without knowing exactly what they were taking. Losing their firepower, the crusaders took their rifles like clubs and, matched in weapons, succumbed. Dead by tacape were 86 bandeirantes on top of the sierra. Those who escaped took to Pastos Bons the news of the 'disorder that

12 Other, in this case, refers to the collectiveness.

happened'. And thus, it was named Serra da Desordem.

Despite the indefinite subject of the phrase "There they were to die, defending their freedom, their homes, women, children and elders", we believe the expression referred to the leaderships that were defending the remaining members of the community. This was but one episode among thousands that occurred for five consecutive centuries. Therefore, the disappearance of many ethnic groups and the violence against indigenous peoples is a fact. However, the result of this reality cannot be reduced to the binomial extermination or miscegenation. To Cunha (2012, p. 14) alongside wars,

[...] epidemics are normally seen as the main agent of indigenous depopulation. This epidemiological barrier had a positive effect in Africa. There, Europeans died like flies; here, it was the indigenous that died: pathogens of smallpox, measles, whooping cough, chicken pox,

typhus, diphtheria, flu, bubonic plague and possibly malaria have impacted the New World.

Even in face of these adversities, diseases and other possibilities for the disappearance of indigenous peoples, they found, as we have said, with dynamism and creativity, different ways of positioning themselves before the historical process in order to continue to exist as a collectiveness. They did transform, because that is part of the condition of human societies, but did not cease to be indigenous peoples.

The acts of indigenous leaderships in defense of their peoples' interest were fixed in several official documents. In this sense, indigenous leaderships were and still are relevant to the organization of their communities. In the current context, they defend, in one way or another, the internal dominance over the trajectory of their cultures, but they recognize the need to be open to changes and re-elaborations, including to live and share the space of their communities "with other people who started to have important roles in collective life, as is the case with the leaders of indigenous organizations, the teachers, indigenous health agents and other indigenous professionals", as thought by Gersem Baniwa (2006, p. 65).

Starting from 1970, rivalries between different ethnic groups¹³ were gradually surpassed in face of a new form of action. In other words, by turning a page of history, instead of rivals, indigenous peoples became relatives with the aim of bringing together what was separate.

With the emergence of the indigenous movement, organized starting from the 1970s, the indigenous peoples of Brazil came to the conclusion that it was important to keep, accept and promote the generic denomination of indians or indigenous, as well as an identity that unifies, articulates, makes visible and strengthens all peoples from the current Brazilian territory and, most importantly, to demarcate the ethnic and identity boundary between them, as native and original inhabitants of these lands [...] From this moment on, the pejorative meaning of indian began to change to a more positive one, of multiethnic identity of all peoples from the continent. From pejorative, it became an identity mark capable of uniting historically distinct

and rival peoples in the struggle for common rights and interests. It is in this sense that today all indians treat themselves as relatives (GERSEM BANIWA, 2006, p. 30).

Their interests cease to be individual and become collective, and so begins a process of revindication of respect and recognition of their novel forms of social organization and of another type of relationship with the National State, in the sense of freeing themselves from its tutelage and all forms of paternalism.

This does not authorize us to affirm that the indigenous movement is a harmonious whole and that there are no disputes between organizations and ethnic groups. Bittencourt (2007, p. 51) points out that the concept itself already gives us a dimension of dynamism, circulation of people and ideas. In this conception, "[...] in the indigenous movement, homogeneity is not achieved, despite the intense exchange of information and experiences. Each ethnic group has its specificity, its rhythm. Sometimes, in the same group there is a diversity of opinions".

Gersem Baniwa (2006, p. 98) tells us that the

[...] Brazilian indigenous movement is not exempt from profound weaknesses, which in any case express a sum of the wills and political projects of these peoples. Some indigenous leaderships, traditional or not, conscious or not, began to copy negative ways of living and relating with each other, contrary to the principles of collective autonomy of their peoples.

¹³The stimulus towards wars and rivalries was a strategy used since the beginning of the contact, by the colonizers, to form alliances, exploit and enslave indigenous labor, as well as to facilitate the process of assimilation and integration into the surrounding society.

Even in face of disputes or factions¹⁴, of contradictions in relation to what is expected of the indigenous movement, it is important to emphasize that it was from this point that indigenous voices, hitherto silenced, began to resonate in institutional spaces, thus making it essential that the new "[...] leaders have more contact with society, that they move with familiarity in that context, that they can display with clarity the new attitudes from the movement and that their social and discursive practices are more in tune with the national system" (BITTENCOURT, 2007, p. 66).

The emergence of indigenous leaders in a different direction from the traditional demands, as well, new knowledges so that these leaderships can exert the mediation between regional, national and governmental bodies. Starting from these prerogatives, the so-called “political leadership”, “modern leadership” or “new leadership” cannot be mistaken with the “traditional” one, because its role is one of mediation between traditional leaderships and the surrounding society, even if it needs the consent of its people to perform this function. Just like the traditional leadership, a political leadership is always the result of a decision and of the recognition of its belonging community.

Political leaderships generally exert specific activities to articulate two or more societies. That means, they arise from the ground of their communities, but do not follow the same sociocultural processes of the traditional leadership. They usually perform functions such as: heads of indigenous posts, leaders of associations, technicians in the areas of health, education, environment, public institutions. Finally, they are subjects who are prepared to mediate and walk between different worlds with the aim of managing the wellbeing of their people. Thus,

[...] indigenous leadership with a political bias is basically the leadership that performs the role of mediation. It is the facilitator. Therefore, we understand that the indigenous leadership in this political field is what we could call a servant of the people, that means, one who is at the service of their people to mediate, facilitate the community process. This already makes it remarkably clear that the indigenous leadership is not a holder of power, as no indigenous leadership – traditional or political – has legitimacy, mandate, representativeness to make decisions. All decisions are taken in reunions, assemblies, meetings to negotiate the decision. Otherwise, this leadership is stripped of its leadership role. A simple way of conceptualizing what is a political indigenous leader is to simplify them as a facilitator, mediator, basically a servant of the community and who is at its service exactly to mediate. That is, any decision that the community needs to make, it does so by gathering, mediating, dialoguing with

the community and not by the leadership making a decision (GERSEM BANIWA. Interview granted at São Luís on November 12th, 2015).

As much as the traditional leaderships, modern leaders do not hold a power that belongs to the society they represent. The representativeness of these leaders is conditioned to the decisions taken by their community or people, and not their own, what makes them different from their Western congeners. On the other hand, differently from the traditional leaders, they often leave the villages because of their activities as mediators. However, this does not necessarily imply conflicts with the community.

We emphasize that there are common narrative elements when different interviewees refer to the concept of the political indigenous leadership and the outcomes of their actions. Edivaldo Krikati corroborates the ideas of Gersem Baniwa and adds that this leadership needs to be humble, in the most sublime sense of the word, as it is required from them wisdom to understand the aspirations of the community and to share every single activity to be carried out with the traditional leadership in the first place. To him, “the political leadership needs to know how to listen, mediate, articulate, represent, but never with the right of taking decisions for their people” (EDIVALDO KRIKATI. Interview granted at the Jerusalém village on February 10th, 2016).

The political indigenous leadership arises to meet the specific demands of each people in particular, but is not absent from the collective objectives, as this leadership understands that the achievements are the result of the articulations of the indigenous peoples, which they are still ongoing, showing advances and setbacks. Although slowly, important decolonization principles have already been inaugurated, as a result of the daily struggle of indigenous leaderships, many of which still need to be put into practice. Among them, the need for the State to recognize the importance of implementing indigenous policies and the insertion of its representatives in all sectors of society. In this regard, another important leadership points out that

[...] to be a political leadership is to not give up fighting. It is to step forward, disrupting all vestiges of colonization. It is to ensure their presence on this project of articulation of public policies, of the indigenous policies. We do not have indigenous policies. We have indigenist policies. In this sense, the

leaderships that act in this space, I like to say that they are the organic intellectuals Gramsci was speaking of. Not that we do not seek to transform structures either, but we need to act within them to be able to get to know them and transform them as much as possible (RITA POTIGUARA. Interview granted at São Luís on November 12th, 2015).

This quote from Rita Potiguara brings forth elements for us to reflect on the strengthening of the Brazilian indigenous movement, the intellectual formation of leaderships and their participation in all spheres of society. The presence of the indigenous at institutional spaces contributes to bury any and all possibilities of us thinking of them as incapable or in need of tutelage to think, live and make individual and collective decisions.

Therefore, we point out that the organicity of the political indigenous leadership comes from a critical awareness on the part of the indigenous people, in the sense of establishing collective projects and in the organization of their struggles and political actions.

The indigenous are organizing themselves to be inserted in all circles of the Western society. Significant advances can be seen if we consider that this insertion is gradually increasing, as is the case of their entrance into politics. In 2012, several Brazilian states elected indigenous people to positions in the Executive and Legislative powers. This happened again in the polls in 2016. That means that indigenous representation in the politics of this country is an achievement resulting from the works carried out by the organizations and the MIB, with international articulation. Among these works, we highlight the National Council for Indigenist Policy (Conselho Nacional de Política Indigenista - CNPI), installed in a collegiate body of an advisory nature, responsible for the elaboration, monitoring and implementation of public policies aimed at indigenous peoples¹⁶.

¹⁴ It is not a goal of this work to deeply study the existing disputes of the MIB.

¹⁵ In 2012, indigenous peoples managed to elect 98 candidates, from which 9 were to Executive positions and 89 in the Legislative office. This number is higher than the estimated for the elections of 2008, in which at least 78 indigenous took public office. It is worth to remember that this right was ensured after much fight from the indigenous peoples. Through the Federal Constitution of 1988, Indians conquered their space on politics and the right to candidate themselves to public offices, such as mayors, city representatives and state representatives. The

first congressman elected in Brazil, in 1982, with 31 thousand votes and representing the state of Rio de Janeiro was Mário Juruna. His election caused a huge buzz in the country and in the world. Juruna was responsible for creating the Permanent Commission of the Indian in the National Congress, that led the indigenous problem to formal recognition, and João Neves Silva was the first indigenous mayor, elected in 2002 at the city of Oiapoque, state of Amapá. Available at: <http://www.socioambiental.org>. Access on September 15th, 2016.

Due to the importance of the role played by the political indigenous leaderships towards indigenous and Western societies, there is an increase in demand for academic training. Thus, schooling is relevant to the exercise of the political leadership, as it contributes to the articulation with the non-indigenous society; however, it is considered that this should not be a rule or carried out as a single possibility, because

[...] having a good schooling does not mean being a good political indigenous leadership. However, in some moments, schooling is also important to qualify the performance of the leadership, but this is by no means a precondition; but, at the same time, it cannot be said that a political leadership does not need such training (GERSEM BANIWA. Interview granted at São Luís on November 12th, 2015).

There are evident contradictions when leaderships affirm that formal education is not decisive in the process of formation of political leaderships while at the same time valuing the acquired knowledge and opportunities that it may come to offer, as shown by the accounting of Lourenço Acyxit. We analyze these contradictions in a different view, since, from a recent past, indigenous political leaderships have articulated with the national society – especially during the 1980s – and demanded from the State their rights to have access to schooling. As an example, Álvaro Tukano makes a summary of his life while a leader.

Lourenço Acyxit also classifies academic training as relevant. He notes, however, that it cannot be the single most relevant training during the construction of a political leadership, not least because he considers that many teachings must be learned in living with traditional leaders. In his conception, training in non-indigenous schools contributes to

[...] view the Western society with a different eye. It serves for us to appropriate the Portuguese language; know the organization of the non-indigenous society; feel in our flesh what they think about us; to know the legal instruments used by the white to deal with bureaucracy and the administration of the State, that is, this training provides us with a range of opportunities to make decisions, often of which paths we must follow in search of our rights. We are not islands, as well. We need to dialogue with other people, learn other stuff that is not part of our culture (LOURENÇO ACÏXIT. Interview granted at Imperatriz on April 6th, 2015).

16 The CNPI was created by Decree nº 8,583 of December 17th, 2015, and installed on April 27th, 2016. It is composed of 45 members, out of whom 15 are representatives of the Federal Executive Branch, all with voting rights; 28 representatives of indigenous peoples, 13 with voting rights; and two representatives of indigenous entities with voting rights. The Council emerged after 9 years of works from the National Council for Indigenist Policy installed in 2007, which functioned as a space for dialogue, debates and proposals involving representatives from the indigenous, the indigenist movement and the Brazilian State. In this sense, the Council was created with the objective of consolidating itself as an instance of proposing principles and guidelines for public policies aimed at indigenous peoples, as well as for the establishment of priorities and criteria in the conduction of the indigenist policy. Among other things, there were expectations that its operation would enable greater transparency and the establishment of instruments for monitoring and controlling the execution of the actions of the Brazilian State by the indigenous peoples and the civil society. Available at: <http://www.funai.gov.br/index.php/cnpi1>. Access on September 15th, 2016.

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different view, since, from a recent past, indigenous political leaderships have articulated with the national society – especially during the 1980s – and demanded from the State their rights to have access to schooling. As an example, Álvaro Tukano makes a summary of his life while a leader.

My father faced a really hard world, when hearing from priests and several others that it was necessary to end traditions, while at the same time hearing an earful from his father on the importance of traditions... My father preferred to do something else: to keep the traditions, realizing that it was necessary to deal with the colonizers, and put me in school to learn how to read and write, to be able to defend a dialogue with our strategic points of view, to be able to talk about our things, to weave new allies among us, and to say clearly that our values must be maintained by us. [...] I am 63 years old today, but I still think of my grandfather and of my father. There is a new generation today. My father did not know much, he learned extraordinarily little. I learned a bit more. Today, my children are at the universities, they must have picked up more academic information to be able to lead the discussion. All of this is relevant to end the lack of dialogue, the difficulty that we had to speak with people from outside (ÁLVARO TUKANO, 2017, p. 15).

We observe that the contradictions do not exclude the need for knowledge from the Western society; much to the contrary, it is needed indeed. For indigenous peoples, political leaders must be concerned with everyone's lives. Having a deep knowledge of their roots, their culture and the expectations of each people they belong to, and of indigenous peoples in general, are essential conditions for a political leadership.

Thus, there is no doubt that traditional knowledge is the foundation for political leaders to act in order to understand their own needs and to strengthen their cultures. And schooling is not ruled out, as this can be a cunning to develop possibilities for action, as Gersem Baniwa points out (2006, p. 167):

Despite all contradictions, the historical process of schooling of indigenous peoples became one of the conditions and one of the causes for the formation of citizenship awareness, insofar as it enabled the mastery of the basic structuring codes of the non-indigenous society; the consequent capacity to reformulate resistance strategies and to promote cultures, values and knowledge; the appropriation of other useful and necessary knowledge to improve living conditions.

Other specific knowledge for the formation of indigenous political leaders, is generally offered by institutions or entities linked to indigenous peoples. The Missionary Indigenist Council (Conselho Indigenista Missionário - CIMI), body of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil - CNBB) – created in 1972 as an expression of a new missionary project of religious people linked to the Liberation Theology and the Union of Indigenous Nations (União das Nações Indígenas - UNI) – prioritized with their first actions, while entities of support for indians, the formation of indigenous leaderships. Starting from 1980, these stand out as the first preparation initiatives for the leaders to act as representatives in the National Constituent Assembly.

The formation offered by these institutions is understood by the CIMI as an indispensable tool at the service of the social struggles of the indigenous peoples. It considers formation as an integral process, collectively constructed and rooted on social practice. Therefore, training takes place in the performance itself, in the permanent reflection on challenges, perspectives and paths, based on the experience of each community, people and indigenous organization. It is consensual to think of political indigenous leaderships as those that are recognized by communities and constituted on the MIB, whose performance takes place on the sociopolitical field acknowledged by the organizations. That means to say that the formation that happens continuously through the MIB does not rule out academic training, even if the absence of the latter is no impediment to act as a political leadership; it does, however, hinder the articulation process due to lack of knowledge of the conjunctural reality of the non-indigenous society

To Bittencourt (2007, p. 68), the legitimacy of representation is one of the essential problems for political leaders, and this is based on the knowledge that the new actors have about national and international society, their

institutions, and in their contacts with support organizations. We understand that, in addition to knowing the individual and collective histories of indigenous peoples, it is salutary that these representations have the “maturity to evaluate the organization of Western society” to act in favor of the objectives of all indigenous peoples.

II. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the characteristics and functions of traditional indigenous leaders and policies evidenced by authors who discuss the subject and in reports by indigenous people, we consider the consensus for their definition. We understand that, to exert political leadership, the person needs to be legitimized by its community, to be an interlocutor subject, to fight for the wellbeing, the rights, the causes of the indigenous peoples, to consider themselves as a facilitator and mediator between indigenous peoples and the surrounding society; to recognize themselves and to be proud of being indigenous, and, more, to participate in the indigenous movement, acting in the spaces created by the organizations.

This study pointed out that schooling is not one of the main characteristics to be a political leadership recognized by their community and by the MIB, and that not always a good intellectual is a good leadership, as perceived by Baniwa (2006). However, for their performance it is necessary to be constantly in training, in the sense of perceiving the changes in society and acting from these in defense of the rights of indigenous peoples. This means that the formation that happens constantly through the MIB does not dispense with academic training, although the absence of the latter hinders the process of articulation due to lack of knowledge of the conjunctural reality of the non-indigenous society.

Thus, beyond knowing the individual and collective stories of indigenous peoples, it is salutary that political indigenous leaderships are aware of the social organization of Western society to act towards the goals and aspirations of all indigenous peoples.

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