Female Leadership as a Praxis of Resistance and Social Transformation: A Feminist, Intersectional, and Decolonial Perspective

Liderazgo Femenino como Praxis de Resistencia y Transformación Social: una Mirada Feminista, Interseccional y Decolonial

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Abstract

This article analyzes female leadership from feminist, intersectional, community-based, and decolonial perspectives, emphasizing current theoretical debates in Latin America. Through a critical literature review, it examines the contributions of key authors who enable a reconfiguration of the concept of leadership beyond traditional patriarchal frameworks. First, it explores gender approaches—drawing on Joan Acker and Judith Butler—to demonstrate how organizational structures and identities are constructed and gendered. Second, it addresses intersectional and situated perspectives through the contributions of feminists of color such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, who underscore the importance of experiences from the margins in the transformation of power. Third, it discusses community and territorial leadership based on the communal feminism of Indigenous authors like Lorena Cabnal and the reflections of Ochy Curiel, who link women's emancipation to the defense of land and community. Finally, the article delves into a decolonial approach to female leadership through the theories of María Lugones, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Gloria Anzaldúa, who propose the necessity of

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dismantling the coloniality of power and embracing hybrid identities in leadership practices. The article concludes by highlighting that these theoretical frameworks offer a vision of female leadership as a tool for social change from the periphery, challenging hierarchies of gender, race, and colonialism while proposing horizontal, collective, and emancipatory models.

Keywords: female leadership, intersectional feminism, community leadership, decolonial feminism, Latin America.

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza el liderazgo femenino desde perspectivas feministas, interseccionales, comunitarias y decoloniales, poniendo énfasis en los debates teóricos actuales en América Latina. Mediante una revisión crítica de la literatura, se analizan las contribuciones de distintas autoras clave que permiten reconfigurar el concepto de liderazgo más allá de los moldes patriarcales tradicionales. En primer lugar, se exploran enfoques de género que evidencian cómo las estructuras organizacionales y las identidades son construidas y generizadas, tomando como referencia a Joan Acker y Judith Butler. En segundo lugar, se aborda la perspectiva interseccional y situada a través de las aportaciones de feministas de color como bell hooks y Patricia Hill Collins, quienes subrayan la importancia de las experiencias desde los márgenes en la transformación del poder. En tercer lugar, se discuten los liderazgos comunitarios y territoriales con base en el feminismo comunitario de autoras indígenas como Lorena Cabnal y las reflexiones de Ochy Curiel, quienes vinculan la emancipación de las mujeres con la defensa de la tierra y la comunidad. Finalmente, se profundiza en un enfoque decolonial del liderazgo femenino a través de las teorías de María Lugones, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui y Gloria Anzaldúa, que plantean la necesidad de desmontar la colonialidad del poder y abrazar identidades híbridas en la práctica de liderar. El artículo concluye destacando que estos marcos teóricos ofrecen una visión del liderazgo femenino como herramienta de cambio social desde la periferia, desafiando las jerarquías de género, raza y colonialismo, al proponer modelos horizontales, colectivos y emancipadores.

Palabras clave: liderazgo femenino, feminismo interseccional, liderazgo comunitario, feminismo decolonial, América Latina

Introduction

Structural gender inequalities have historically excluded women from spaces of power and decision-making. For centuries, the conventional notion of leadership has been associated with "masculine" attributes—such as vertical authority, competitiveness, and detached rationality—consequently leaving women in a subordinate role within the social imaginary. As Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde (2023a) points out, "women have been educated for subordination and not for power," which has limited their access to and recognition as leaders in various spheres. However, this patriarchal construction of leadership is not neutral; it responds to a gender system that values the masculine as a universal norm and delegitimizes feminine ways of exercising influence. Consequently, those who challenge this order—women leading social movements, rural communities, or Indigenous collectives—have had to confront not only the gender gap but also other intertwined hierarchies such as class, ethnicity, and the coloniality of power.

In recent decades, the study of female leadership has been profoundly renewed by various currents of feminist, intersectional, community-based, and decolonial thought, which have questioned traditional models of power and authority. These approaches have contributed to dismantling the assumed neutrality of leadership, demonstrating that it is intersected by gender relations as well as inequalities of class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, and by the historical traces of coloniality. From this perspective, leadership is no longer understood as an abstract individual capacity but is recognized as a situated practice, inseparable from the material, symbolic, cultural, and political conditions in which it is exercised.

The purpose of this article is to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework on female leadership from contemporary feminist approaches, utilizing a qualitative methodology of critical and analytical review of specialized academic literature. This review focuses on key authors selected for their theoretical and political impact on gender studies, leadership, intersectionality, and decolonial thought in Latin America and the Global South.

In the first section, the gender perspective in leadership is explored based on the contributions of Joan Acker (1992) and Judith Butler (1990), which allow for an understanding of how organizations and discourses have been historically constructed under regimes of inequality that relegate women to the private sphere. The second section addresses leadership through the lens of intersectionality, revisiting the reflections of bell hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (2002) regarding women who lead from the multiple margins of society.

The third section focuses on community and territorial leadership, grounded in the Latin American communal feminism of Lorena Cabnal (2010) and Julieta Paredes (2010), as well as the idea that the body and the territory constitute central axes of collective female agency. The fourth section analyzes leadership through a decolonial key, building on María Lugones' (2011) concept of the coloniality of gender and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) border metaphor, while also incorporating Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (2015, 2018) contributions on Indigenous resistance practices.

Finally, the conclusions offer an integrative reflection on how these perspectives redefine female leadership as a historical, political, and situated praxis of resistance and social transformation. This is particularly relevant for Latin America and other contexts where women face interconnected oppressions.

Leadership, Gender, and Power: Contributions of Joan Acker and Judith Butler

Feminist sociological approaches have demonstrated that leadership does not occur in a vacuum but within gendered social structures that systematically favor men. Sociologist Joan Acker argues that modern organizations are not neutrally meritocratic environments; rather, they incorporate masculine values and assumptions into their very design, reproducing gender hierarchies. In her theory of gendered organizations, Acker (1992) points out that traits traditionally associated with leadership—authority, rationality, and autonomy—are encoded as masculine, while feminine contributions tend to be rendered invisible or devalued. Thus, spaces of power often require women to adopt "masculine" styles to be considered legitimate leaders, reinforcing the idea that authentic leadership is a masculine preserve. Acker also introduces the concept of "inequality regimes," which describes the intersection of gender with class, race/ethnicity, and other forms of domination within institutions.

For example, within a company or organization, women—and especially racialized or working-class women—may face double barriers: they are not only expected to conform to a male leadership model but must also contend with racial and elitist prejudices that further limit their advancement. In this way, Acker's analysis makes evident that the distribution of power in formal structures is permeated by a complex web of inequalities that places female leadership at a structural disadvantage from the outset. These organizational dynamics can also be understood in light of the "gender

order" proposed by Connell (2005), who notes that hegemonic forms of masculinity structure power relations in both public and private spheres, reinforcing the symbolic and material subordination of women in leadership roles.

In parallel with this institutional perspective, post-structuralist feminist theory provides a discursive and performative understanding of leadership. Philosopher Judith Butler (1990) revolutionized gender studies by proposing that gender identity is not an essential fact, but rather performativity: a repeated act according to social norms. Applied to leadership, this implies that what we understand as a "female leader" or a "male leader" is largely the result of cultural discourses and expectations. Historically, qualities of command and leadership were linked to the "male" subject, while women were denied that symbolic authority.

However, Butler (1990) suggests that since gender is a repeated performance, it is possible to subvert those norms through alternative performances. A woman exercising leadership challenges the hegemonic notion that command and femininity are incompatible, re-signifying in practice what it means to lead as a woman. Furthermore, following Foucault, she emphasizes that power does not only restrict but also produces subjects: that is, female leaders emerge within a field of power that constitutes them with certain margins of action, and they, in turn, can push those margins. In this sense, every female leader navigates a constant tension between subjection and agency.

On one hand, she must operate within institutions defined by patriarchal rules (which may lead her to "act" in an expected manner to be heard). On the other hand, her mere presence and her own style can challenge established norms regarding who can lead and how. Butler (1990) suggests that it is in these interstices where change is forged: by repeating the norm of leadership in a non-identical way—that is, by incorporating traditionally feminized perspectives of care, collaboration, or vulnerability—the woman leader parodies and alters the norm, clearing a path for those behind her.

Both Acker's structural perspective and Butler's performative lens agree that gender profoundly permeates the phenomenon of leadership. At the macro level, organizational and cultural structures raise material obstacles for women (glass ceilings, horizontal segregation, implicit biases). At the micro level, gender expectations influence the subjectivity of female leaders and the perception others have of them. Recognizing this allows for the denaturalization of the idea that leadership is neutral or merely individual. On the contrary, it becomes evident that it is socially constructed: it rests upon symbols, habits, and gendered institutions. Simultaneously, this understanding opens the door to transformation: if "masculinity" has been the criterion for leadership by social construction, then it is possible to reconstruct leadership images and practices by incorporating feminist values.

Similarly, Lagarde (2023b) advocates for women in positions of power to avoid imitating learned authoritarian models, instead exercising a different kind of leadership "grounded in the affirmation of life, collectivity, and the defense of human rights." In her Feminist Keys for Endearing Leaderships, Lagarde proposes a need for power that is not "power over" others, but "power to" drive collective change through an ethic of care and sorority. This proposal resonates both with Acker—in imagining more egalitarian organizations—and with Butler—in redefining leadership performances—pointing toward a horizon in which female leadership is exercised on its own terms and contributes to dismantling unequal power relations.

Intersectional and Situated Leaderships: Voices from the Margins

No woman experiences gender in isolation, as it is always interwoven with other dimensions of her identity and context. Consequently, intersectional feminist theorists have critiqued homogenous visions of "womanhood" and highlighted the importance of the situated experiences of racialized, poor, and rural women, among other marginalized identities. African-American intellectual bell hooks (1984) warned early on that hegemonic

white middle-class feminism ignored the realities of Black, working-class, and Third World women. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), hooks asserts that truly transformative knowledge emerges from those margins of society that central power tends to neglect.

In this way, women situated in subaltern positions develop a "dual vision" or a "double gaze": they understand the rules of the dominant system (because they suffer its consequences) but also maintain perspectives and knowledges inherent to their oppressed communities. This dual consciousness is an invaluable political resource, as it allows marginalized women to clearly identify injustices normalized by the "center" while simultaneously imagining alternatives from the "edge." Hooks (1984) describes this position of being "inside and outside" at once as a source of transformative leadership; those who have experienced multiple oppressions can articulate inclusive struggles that challenge established structures on all fronts (sexism, racism, classism).

A crucial contribution from Hooks to the leadership debate is her distinction between different concepts of power. She critiques how, even within the women's movement, leadership has sometimes been confused with a mere role reversal where women "exercise power over others" in a hierarchical fashion. Hooks proposes instead to conceive of power as collective energy and joint efficacy—that is, "power to" accomplish things, rather than "power over" to dominate people. In hooks' words, "leadership qualities should not be confused with the desire to be a leader" (Hooks, 1984, p. 157). That is, leading is not about personal ambition or a thirst for control, but about the capacity to mobilize others toward common goals of liberation.

This vision grounds a model of horizontal and democratic leadership, where the female leader is not a charismatic "messiah" separated from her base, but part of a community in struggle that empowers its members. To achieve this, Hooks emphasizes the need for a conscious sorority—a political sisterhood among women of diverse backgrounds that does not erase their specificities but integrates them into a common project of social justice. An intersectional feminist leadership, therefore, requires humility and active listening, recognizing that no single leader knows everything and that collective wisdom—including that of the most oppressed—must guide decision-making.

On the other hand, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2002) developed the concept of Black Feminist Thought and the idea of the matrix of domination to explain how oppressions operate simultaneously. She argues that African-descendant women in the United States empower themselves through self-definition and the creation of their own knowledge to challenge the stereotypes society imposes upon them. Translated to the field of leadership, this implies that Black female leaders often rely on spaces of community resistance—such as women's networks, Afrocentric academic circles, or progressive churches—where they can articulate an autonomous collective voice.

Collins underscores that critical consciousness-raising is a primary source of power for marginalized groups. In other words, before they can transform external structures, women need to understand and name the power dynamics that intersect their lives. She describes consciousness as a "sphere of freedom" even within oppressive contexts. A woman who recognizes both the racist and sexist roots of her oppression is better positioned to lead movements that attack both simultaneously. Furthermore, she emphasizes the collective and transnational element of empowerment: "the full empowerment of Black women in the United States can only occur within a transnational context of social justice" (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 19).

This statement stresses that the leadership of Black women does not seek mere individual promotion, but the liberation of their entire community in solidarity with other oppressed peoples globally. In this way, Hill Collins (2002) expands the notion of leadership beyond the local: the intersectional leader understands that her cause (e.g., against racist police violence in her city) is

connected to broader struggles (such as the civil rights movement, international Black feminism, Indigenous demands, etc.). The matrix of domination she describes—a web of gender, race, class, and nation-based oppressions—requires equally interconnected responses. An effective intersectional leader weaves alliances and recognizes the connections between different injustices, avoiding the myopia of fighting for "one cause" at the expense of others.

The perspectives of Hooks and Hill Collins demonstrate that female leadership situated at the margins possesses a deeply transformative potential. Far from being a disadvantage, marginality provides a unique political sensibility: women who experience it can lead with empathy toward multiple forms of oppression, articulating an integrative discourse. These leaders challenge the traditional image of the lone, omnipotent leader, replacing it with collective leadership where many women contribute from their respective shores.

From a materialist perspective, Federici (2018) warns that gender inequalities are also sustained by the historical exploitation of women's reproductive and community labor—a central element in understanding why many female leaderships emerge precisely in spaces of care and the sustenance of life.

In Latin American contexts, this approach is especially relevant given that many female leaders are Indigenous, Afro-descendant, or peasant women (*campesinas*) who simultaneously face sexism, racism, and poverty. Their intersectional leadership manifests in movements where the gender struggle is entwined with anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles. These experiences confirm the idea that the margins can become the center of a new vision of power—one that breaks hierarchies and promotes collective liberation.

Community and Territorial Leaderships: Body, People, and Land

In the rural and Indigenous contexts of Latin America, forms of female leadership deeply linked to community and territory have emerged. Unlike the Western individualistic model, which is centered on personal achievement and competition, community leadership emphasizes collectivity, reciprocity, and rootedness in the land. However, community leaders do not always hold formal titles; they are often recognized for their roles as local organizers, guardians of traditional knowledge, or defenders of their people's common well-being. These leaders arise in response to both the patriarchal dynamics within their communities and the external threats of a colonial and neoliberal system that seeks to exploit their resources and break their social bonds. In this sense, their leadership is doubly resistant, as it challenges internal *machismo* while simultaneously confronting injustices imposed from the outside.

Communal feminism, a current born from the Indigenous women's movements in Bolivia and Guatemala, provides a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon. Activists such as Julieta Paredes (2010) and Lorena Cabnal (2010) have maintained that the liberation of Indigenous women is inextricably linked to the liberation of their peoples. Cabnal coined the slogan "our body is our first territory," emphasizing that women's bodies are the first land colonized by patriarchy and that reclaiming them—attaining autonomy over one's own life and body—is the first step toward reclaiming collective land. From this perspective, female leadership cannot be understood apart from geographical and cultural territory. A concrete example is that of Maya women in Guatemala leading the defense of their rivers and forests against mining companies: their territorial leadership involves mobilizing the community around environmental protection while revaluing their identity as Indigenous women and challenging both corporate power and communal patriarchy.

These territorial leaders act as bridges between the gender struggle and the struggle for the autonomy of their peoples. As the Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) observed in colonial contexts, female identity and cultural identity are intertwined; one cannot separate their struggle as

women from their people's struggle for territory. In practice, this means women assume the leadership of collective processes—protests, communal assemblies, local productive projects—with a clear awareness that by empowering women, they are also strengthening the entire community's capacity for resistance.

The Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2015) provides valuable conceptual tools to deepen the study of this type of leadership. Rivera Cusicanqui has studied Indigenous insurgencies in the Andes, highlighting the central, though often invisible, role of women in community cohesion and anti-colonial rebellions. Her concept of *lo ch'ixi*—an Aymara word describing the juxtaposed coexistence of opposite elements without them merging into one—offers a powerful metaphor.

A *ch'ixi* world is one where irreducible difference coexist (e.g., Indigenous/Western, feminine/masculine, human/nature) without one hegemonizing the other. Applied to leadership, this idea suggests that Indigenous female leaders embody both the "self" and the "other": they integrate qualities considered "feminine" (cooperation, care) with qualities considered "masculine" (firmness, decisiveness) without hierarchizing them. In other words, they break with the colonial dichotomy that opposed a submissive feminine ideal to a dominating masculine one. Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) argues that during colonization, traditional forms of authority in which women held an active role were disparaged and de-structured. Therefore, the recovery of ancestral community practices—such as the Andean *ayllus* or Indigenous *cabildos*—also entails a resurgence of female leadership in those structures where women had historically been significant prior to colonization.

This renewed leadership, however, is not a simple return to the past but a hybrid creation: women weave elements of modernity (human rights discourses, legal tools, transnational networks) with their original worldviews (spiritual relationship with the land, the principle of gender complementarity). Rivera Cusicanqui uses the image of the "woman weaver" to describe these leaders because they spin connections between different spheres—the local and the global, the traditional and the modern—to articulate effective collective resistance.

A fundamental principle in the community leadership of Indigenous women is the notion of autonomy and self-definition. Just as a woman must narrate her own identity—"naming herself"—in the face of the patriarchal gaze, communities led by women similarly seek to narrate their own history and future in the face of the State and the market.

Afro-Dominican thinker Ochy Curiel (2009) posits that the goal of Latin American decolonial feminism is not merely to ensure that some women access positions of power without modifying existing structures. Rather, it is to drive profound transformations oriented toward collective well-being—encompassing men, women, and nature—from a non-Western perspective of the common good.

Curiel (2013) expands this analysis by showing how the modern nation is constructed upon compulsory heterosexuality and the patriarchal order, reinforcing the need to conceive of decolonial female leaderships as practices that simultaneously contest political, sexual, and epistemic power.

This perspective intertwines gender liberation with broader social liberation. In practice, this translates into leadership where women spearhead projects such as food sovereignty, intercultural education, or the reclamation of communal lands, understanding these as feminist struggles because they improve women's lives and challenge oppressive structures.

Furthermore, female community leadership possesses particular characteristics that distinguish it from other models: it is horizontal, rotational, and relational. It is *horizontal* because it avoids personalistic concentrations of power; many Indigenous communities practice collective decision-making (through assembly consensus) and assign their representatives the role of spokespersons rather than "bosses." It is *rotational* be-

cause this leadership does not seek to perpetuate itself; there is usually a rotation of offices so that multiple people (including women) gain experience and to prevent *caudillismo* (strongman rule). Finally, it is relational because authority is understood as service: a good female leader is one who knows how to listen to her community, care for it, and maintain harmony, rather than imposing her will.

This latter point connects with the ethics of care that feminism has long reclaimed; for many rural women, leading includes traditionally feminized tasks such as mediating neighborhood conflicts, providing emotional support to vulnerable community members, or guarding the natural environment as part of the "common home." These tasks, invisible in conventional leadership models, are fundamental to the sustainability of community life. Consequently, an increasing number of leadership theories, even within Western academia, advocate for incorporating a care perspective and learning from these communal feminine practices (Tronto, 1993).

This relational dimension of female leadership dialogues with the propositions of Gilligan (1982), who proposes the ethics of care as an alternative form of moral reasoning centered on responsibility toward others, empathy, and interdependence—principles that deeply permeate communal female leadership.

Updating this perspective, Tronto (2013) argues that care is not only an individual ethical practice but a fundamental political category for democracy, allowing us to understand female leadership as a form of reorganizing power based on the sustainability of life.

Ultimately, the community and territorial leaderships led by women in Latin America constitute a decolonial alternative to the dominant paradigm: they reconfigure what power is, what its purpose is, and whom it should benefit, anchoring it in the land and the collective web rather than at the top of a pyramid.

Female, Decolonial, and Borderland Leadership

The contributions of the decolonial perspective deepen the understanding of female leadership within contexts marked by colonial history and its continuities. Argentine philosopher María Lugones (2011) introduces the concept of the modern/colonial gender system to explain how colonization imposed a patriarchal and binary vision of gender upon subjugated societies, destroying many pre-existing forms of female authority. Lugones demonstrates that the coloniality of power operated not only through racism and economic exploitation but also through the violent instatement of the "male provider / dependent female" dichotomy inherent to Europe, nullifying the complementary roles that women held in various Indigenous peoples. In the author's words, "gender is a colonial imposition."

This means that understanding female leadership in Latin America requires attending simultaneously to gender and race/ethnicity, as both hierarchies were born intertwined during the colonial process. Indigenous and Afro-descendant women were situated at the base of the colonial social pyramid, and their exclusion from spaces of power was a pillar in maintaining imperial dominance.

Faced with this heritage, Lugones (2011) explores how women from oppressed groups develop strategies of multiple resistance. She proposes the notion of "multi-mes" (diversified selves) and the practice of "world-traveling" to describe the ability to move between different cultural codes and perform different roles depending on the context. For example, a woman may be a community leader in her village (speaking her mother tongue and appealing to traditional values) and simultaneously an activist in urban or international spaces (speaking Spanish or English and utilizing the discourse of human rights).

Far from seeing this as a double life, Lugones (2011) interprets it as a form of creative resistance: by navigating between worlds, hybrid women

break the unidimensional expectations imposed by the system. Acts such as alternating languages, transgressing gender roles (taking political decisions as a woman, or using irony and aesthetics to subvert stereotypes) are examples of what Lugones calls "curdling" alternative identities. This identity flexibility allows for the construction of unexpected coalitions: for instance, Indigenous women joining forces with Afro-descendant and peasant women, discovering affinities in their struggles despite their cultural differences.

In terms of leadership, this translates into a decolonial leader possessing a sharp awareness of being "between worlds." She recognizes the logic of the oppressor (having had to learn it to survive) but does not surrender to it; instead, she keeps the subaltern knowledge of her community alive and seeks ways to integrate both knowledges to subvert the existing order. Her leadership is *situated* in the sense that she perfectly understands the colonial/patriarchal context in which she acts, but it is also *visionary*, as it articulates anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal horizons from that borderland position.

Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) offers another powerful lens for imagining decolonial female leadership through her concept of the borderlands and mestiza consciousness. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa describes the experience of living in the borderland margins—in her case, the U.S.-Mexico border, but extensible to any situation of multiple identities—as a source of suffering but also of creativity and spiritual power.

Mestiza consciousness is that which can tolerate contradictions and transcend binary divisions. The *mestiza* woman (whether Chicana, urban Indigenous, or intercultural Afro-descendant) learns to integrate distinct worlds within herself without sacrificing any: she speaks two languages, inhabits two traditions, and simultaneously obeys and oversteps opposing cultural norms. Anzaldúa (1987) posits that this position, far from being a weakness, provides women with a visionary capacity to imagine "new worlds." By rejecting the rigidity of categories—whether male/female, black/white, native/foreigner—the door opens to relational and solidary identities.

Anzaldúa advocated for leaderships that built bridges and tore down walls, calling for the use of empathy and intercultural knowledge to connect separated communities. In this sense, borderland female leadership acts as a bridge: the *mestiza* leader, or the leader with double consciousness, can mediate between groups that would not normally dialogue, translating demands between different spaces (for example, between a community assembly and an international conference) and generating common understandings.

In the Latin American context, this can be observed in migrant women who organize both their local compatriots and external allies to defend rights, or in women from Indigenous peoples who integrate ancestral worldviews with modern political languages to garner broad support for their causes. The borderland leader feels comfortable in plurality: she can convene urban feminists, traditional Indigenous leaders, young students, and elder women within the same struggle, finding an inclusive language that resonates with all. This ability stems from her multiple identity, which grants her a transversal sensitivity to understand diverse oppressions and aspirations.

In sum, the decolonial and borderland approach reveals a female leadership that defies conventional definitions of authority and success. It does not seek to fit into the system; it seeks to remake the system. These leaders act with the historical memory of colonization ever-present, giving them a long-term understanding of their people's struggles. Simultaneously, they operate under a distinct ethic: where colonialism-imposed hierarchy, they propose horizontality; where it imposed cultural homogeneity, they celebrate hybrid diversity; where it imposed domination, they emphasize complementarity and mutual justice. These are women who often do not label themselves "leaders," as the term may sound elitist to them; they prefer to consider themselves "coordinators, spokespersons, or facilitators" of collective processes.

Their leadership is recognized not by formal mandates, but by the moral influence and the power of mobilization they possess by remaining faithful to their community and identity. In Anzaldúa's (1987) words, leading from the borderlands is a process of healing divisions: decolonial leaders help heal the fracture between humans and nature (defending *Pacha Mama*), between genders (fostering collaboration between men and women in the struggle), and between cultures (inhabiting *Nepantla*—the space in-between—and showing its fertility).

This is a profoundly spiritual leadership in the sense of creating a feeling of unity in diversity, a broad "we" against shared oppressions. This spirit was seen, for example, in the movement of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina: although it emerged in response to a dictatorship (a political issue) and the participants were mostly elderly women, they managed to summon international solidarity and persist for decades, transforming their pain into a collective force for change, aspiring not to state power, but to moral power.

Thus, decolonial female leadership can be conceived as a practice in which women, situated at the intersection of multiple identity borders, dismantle colonial logics of domination through new forms of relating. it is a leadership born at the periphery of the system that imagines futures for everyone, not just for women. In that dreaming and doing, decolonial female leaders restore the hope for a civilizational change where equity, community, and respect for diversity prevail.

Conclusion

In light of the perspectives discussed herein, female leadership is revealed not as a mere variant of a universal leadership model, but as a deeply political and situated category. Contemporary feminist theories—ranging from the sociology of gender to decolonial feminism—agree that when a woman takes the reins of a collective, that act transcends the individual: it questions structures, renews discourses, and opens unprecedented possibilities for social transformation. In societies marked by inequality, female leaders frequently embody a praxis of resistance. Whether in corporations, academia, rural villages, or social movements, they challenge with their presence and methods the patriarchal and colonial norms that dictate who can lead and in what manner.

A primary contribution of these approaches is to render visible the systemic barriers leaders face. Acker and other sociologists warn us that it is not enough to promote "female leaders" without changing institutions; otherwise, we risk demanding that women adapt to masculine molds, thereby perpetuating inequity. Inequality regimes persist in modern organizations, and recognizing them is the first step toward dismantling them. Similarly, Butler reminds us that the identities of female leaders are subject to internal tensions: they must negotiate between acting according to external expectations or subverting them to remain true to themselves. Thus, this understanding opens a field of empathy and support toward women in leadership positions, who often walk the tightrope between two critical evaluations (for "commanding too much" or for "being too soft")—a dilemma born of gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, intersectional and decolonial lenses broaden the focus beyond gender, showing that female leadership can be (and usually is) anti-racist, community-based, and anti-capitalist. The stories of Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and peasant women organizing their communities demonstrate that their gender struggles are interwoven with the pursuit of comprehensive social justice. This finding has far-reaching practical implications: public policies or empowerment initiatives seeking to foster effective female leadership must consider the multiple dimensions of oppression affecting women.

For example, leadership training programs in rural areas will be more successful if they incorporate local knowledge, promote collective economic autonomy, and strengthen cultural identity, rather than imposing an urban-individualistic model of leadership. Likewise, alliances between women's movements and other social movements (en-

vironmental, ethnic, labor) are strategic; today's feminist leaders are often also defenders of territory, popular educators, or human rights activists, embodying that convergence of causes.

Another contribution is the resignification of power practices. Female leadership with a feminist focus proposes ways of exercising power radically different from traditional domination: emphasizing horizontal participation, the ethics of care, consensus-building, and sorority. Marcela Lagarde spoke of "endearing leaderships", close to the people, seeking collective empowerment rather than individual power. bell hooks distinguished "power to" from "power over," insisting that authority need not translate into oppression. These ideas have gradually permeated certain spheres—such as transformational and ethical leadership approaches—showing that feminist contributions do not only benefit women but enrich the concept of leadership in general, making it more human and sustainable. A less hierarchical leadership builds bridges, generates trust, and can achieve deeper, more lasting changes by actively involving the base in decision-making.

Finally, by focusing on Latin America and rural and Indigenous contexts, this article highlights the agency of women who have been doubly marginalized in global narratives: by gender and by belonging to historically colonized peoples. Their experiences offer invaluable lessons. In their communities, female leadership is often exercised collectively and rooted in daily life, blurring the boundary between "leading" and "serving." Far from the stereotype of the isolated charismatic leader, here the female leader is strong precisely because she acts in a network with other women and men who support her.

Her legitimacy stems from community and moral recognition rather than formal investiture. In a world facing crises of representation and abuses of power, these practices invite us to rethink governance "from below," based on principles of community, reciprocity, and respect for Mother Earth (*Madre Tierra*).

In conclusion, addressing female leadership from a feminist, intersectional, community-based, and decolonial perspective allows not only for justice to be done to the diversity of leaders' experiences but also for the imagining of fairer and more solidary ways of exercising power. Women leading from the margins—be they economic, ethnic, or geographic—are broadening the frontiers of the possible. As Rita Segato (2016) mentions, in contexts crossed by multiple violences, the subordination of women is a pillar of the contemporary patriarchal order; therefore, female leaderships can also be read as political responses to a system of structural and symbolic violence.

Thus, the understanding of female leadership as a situated praxis dialogues with the critical epistemology of De la Garza (2012), who conceives social action as a configurational process where structure, subjectivity, and context are dynamically articulated. Their voices and their praxis become a collective tool for social transformation. The goal is a leadership to liberate power itself, returning it to those to whom it belongs—peoples, collectives, life—and opening paths toward more equitable and humane societies.

Nonetheless, this study presents certain limitations that are important to recognize: as theoretical research based on a critical literature review, it does not include empirical fieldwork to contrast these conceptual frameworks with specific situated experiences. Likewise, the selection of authors prioritizes Latin American and Global South feminist thought, which opens the possibility for future analyses to expand through interregional dialogues, comparative studies, and participatory methodologies. These limitations, far from closing the discussion, open fruitful lines for subsequent research on women's leadership in concrete contexts.

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