



## **"Village Politics": processes to promote Sonia Guajajara's political legitimacy**

### ***"Aldear a política": processos de promoção da legitimidade política de Sonia Guajajara***

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**ABSTRACT:** The article aims to examine the mechanisms that promote the political legitimacy of Sonia Guajajara, a Tentehar woman from the Araribóia Indigenous Territory in Maranhão, between 2018 and 2023, based on her actions in Brazilian indigenous movements and in elective politics, with an emphasis on her struggle for ecology and the defense of nature. The objective is to investigate the dynamics present in Sonia's trajectory based on the notions of political and environmental struggles. We analyzed testimonials available online on YouTube and Instagram profiles, as well as digital documents: letters, notes, reports, and news available on the websites of indigenous organizations. The results show the construction of Sonia Guajajara's political personality and public image, notably as a defender of indigenous rights, forests, and the climate. Due to her legitimacy and public recognition in different fields (such as indigenous political mobilizations and electoral party politics), Sonia uses a variety of strategies that allow her to highlight these and other agendas of indigenous movements.

**Keywords:** political struggles; legitimacy; indigenous women; Sonia Guajajara.

**RESUMO:** O artigo objetiva examinar os mecanismos de promoção da legitimidade política de Sonia Guajajara, mulher tentehar, do Território Indígena Araribóia, no Maranhão, entre 2018 e 2023, a partir de suas atuações em movimentos indígenas brasileiros e na política eletiva, com destaque para sua luta pela ecologia e defesa da natureza. Trata-se de investigar dinâmicas presentes na trajetória de Sonia com base nas noções de lutas políticas e ambientais. Analisamos depoimentos disponíveis *on-line* no YouTube e em perfis no Instagram, além de

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documentos digitais: cartas, notas, relatórios e notícias disponíveis nos *sites* das organizações indígenas. Os resultados mostram a construção da personalidade política e da imagem pública de Sonia Guajajara, notadamente, como defensora dos direitos indígenas, das florestas e do clima. Por sua legitimidade e reconhecimento público em distintos campos (como das mobilizações políticas indígenas e da política partidária eleitoral), Sonia utiliza um conjunto variado de estratégias que permitem visibilizar essas e outras agendas dos movimentos indígenas.

*Palavras-chave:* lutas políticas; legitimação; mulheres indígenas; Sonia Guajajara.

## 1. Introduction

Sonia Bone Guajajara, a Tentehar woman from the Araribóia Indigenous Territory (TI) in Maranhão, stands out as one of the most prominent organizers of mobilizations and agendas of Indigenous peoples at both national and international levels, among them the environmental agenda, which is central to the struggles of the Tentehar people. Sonia's trajectory shares common features with those of other Indigenous political leaders, such as spending years among the so-called "whites", a condition necessary to acquire education and understand their world (Almeida, 2019). In her actions, Sonia, like other leaders, mobilizes the knowledge of her own people along with that acquired through formal education and Indigenous organizations. She moves between these and other different spaces, planning and articulating distinct strategies.

This article aims to analyze the involvement of leader Sonia Bone Guajajara in Indigenous movements in Maranhão and Brazil, highlighting her political struggles for ecology and nature's defense, as well as the disputes within spaces of political representation. We discuss her strategies, articulations, and actions in Indigenous political mobilizations. The objective is to examine the mechanisms promoting Sonia's political legitimacy between 2018 and 2023, based on her work in

Brazilian Indigenous movements and elective politics, identifying dynamics grounded in the notions of political (Bourdieu, 2001) and environmental struggles.

Among other initiatives, in 2019, as executive coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (Apib), Sonia led the organization of the First National March of Indigenous Women in Brasília, under the theme "Territory – Our Body, Our Spirit". This represents the main struggle of Indigenous peoples in Brazil and, in particular, Indigenous women: territory. On this occasion, the National Articulation of Indigenous Women Warriors of Ancestry (Anmiga) was created. That same year, Sonia led the campaign "Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More" in Europe, whose purpose was to "pressure the Brazilian government and agribusiness companies to comply with international agreements on climate change and human rights to which Brazil is a signatory" (Apib, 2019, online).

We analyze these and other dynamics in Sonia Guajajara's trajectory, including contexts of political and social articulation, whether for Indigenous collective actions or political campaigns, such as her candidacies for Vice President of Brazil in 2018 and for Federal Deputy in 2022. These Indigenous actions, both daily and explicit (Scott, 2002), are considered strategies for building relationships with other agents within political and social struggles

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(Bourdieu, 2001). Sonia's trajectory is therefore situated both within Indigenous social, political, and environmental movements and within the field of partisan or electoral political disputes.

Theoretically, this study draws on the notion of political struggles (Bourdieu, 2021) and the concept of political opportunity structures (POS) (Alonso *et al.*, 2007), suggesting that Sonia Guajajara's struggles occur in conjunctures that generate opportunities for building actions that confront projects threatening Indigenous rights and territories. According to Bourdieu (2001), in the relationships that constitute social and political disputes, agents struggle for recognition and for the value of inherited or acquired capital, within a game of oppositions and relational distinctions. Thus, we propose that Sonia's trajectory can be analyzed through her involvement in local, regional, and national political, social, and environmental struggles that contribute to her incorporation and legitimation as a political actor.

According to Alonso *et al.* (2007), POS are favorable moments in which a series of diverse claims (Indigenous, quilombola, Afro-descendant etc.) arise in reaction to rights violations. Therefore, we employ the notion of POS to understand the recent context of federal policies related to Indigenous peoples, especially during the government of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022). Although not the first administration to do so, that government "laid bare" a set of conditions affecting Indigenous rights, which the cited authors describe as POS. In our analysis, such a conjuncture constitutes an opportunity context for Indigenous movements and leadership to act.

To reflect on the construction of Sonia Guajajara's public images in the context of political

legitimacy, we draw on Grill (2015) and his analyses of biographies, memories, and multiple forms of notability. Reflection on narrative and discursive constructions in the case of Sonia Guajajara, a woman, a leader, and an Indigenous person, is also inspired by Reis's (2020) analysis of women parliamentarians' "political confessions". Thus, by exploring key aspects of Sonia's trajectory, our focus lies on the narratives and actions that illuminate the processes through which she constructs her political personality, leadership, public image, and the agendas she defends, notably in relation to environmental activism.

These narratives encompass origins and ancestry, as well as Sonia's educational path and leadership experiences in Indigenous and pro-Indigenous organizations and partisan politics. We understand Sonia's narratives about her agendas and struggles, based on her historical and collective experiences, grounded in her worldview and knowledge, and imbued with political intentionality, as mechanisms or strategies that help construct her political recognition (Collovald, 1988). Such discourses, opposing projects that aim to "violate" Indigenous rights, are forged through the events composing her trajectory.

Methodologically, beyond the proposed theoretical discussion, we employed ethnographic techniques for data collection. Online observation was conducted in virtual environments of actions carried out between 2019 and 2023: the "Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More" Journey, during which leaders visited twelve European countries over thirty-five days (October-November 2019), making claims and denunciations of what they deemed Indigenous rights violations in Brazil; the *Acampamentos Terra Livre* (ATL) in 2020, held

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online under the theme “Occupy the Networks and Demarcate the Screens”, and in 2021, under the theme “Our Struggle Is Still for Life; It’s Not Just a Virus”.

We observed the National Assembly of Indigenous Resistance (2020), whose final document was titled “Mother Earth Faces Dark Days”; the “Indigenous April” action (2020); the inauguration ceremony of Sonia Guajajara as Brazil’s Minister of Indigenous Peoples (January 2023); and interviews with Sonia on TV Fórum (December 2022) and on the program Roda Viva, TV Cultura (2023). In these events, beyond observations and field notes, we collected public statements by Sonia and other leaders, transcribing excerpts relevant to this research’s objectives. We also analyzed a volume from the Tembetá Collection on Sonia Guajajara, which includes several of her testimonials.

Additionally, we gathered digital documents and files: the final letter from the 2020 National Assembly of Indigenous Resistance (“Mother Earth Faces Dark Days”); a news piece by Apib on the “Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More” campaign (“Delegation of Indigenous Leaders Travels to Europe to Denounce Violations in Brazil”); and two reports on honors awarded to Sonia – one from the Portal da Câmara Municipal de Imperatriz and another from Brasil de Fato. Virtual environments used for collecting leaders’ statements and these documents included Apib’s, TV Fórum’s, and Roda Viva’s YouTube channels.

We also examined publications on Instagram profiles such as the *Fórum Maranhense de Mulheres* (@forummaranhensedemulheres), *Articulação das Mulheres Indígenas do Mara-*

*nhão* (Amima) (@amima.ofc), *Mídia Indígena*<sup>1</sup> (@mídiaindigenaoficial), *Associação Ka’aiwar dos Guardiões da Floresta do TI Araribóia* (@associacaokaaiwar), and Sonia Guajajara (@guajajarasonia). The collected data were transcribed and analyzed in light of the proposed social theory.

Nevertheless, attention was given to the specificities of Sonia Guajajara’s history and experiences, her Indigenous belonging and identity, her educational trajectory, and her struggles in defense of forests and Indigenous rights. These elements distinguish her from agents previously studied through the adopted theoretical perspectives. Thus, the theoretical parameters and discussions proposed herein contribute to reflecting on various aspects of Sonia’s political legitimacy: the processes of image construction, her role as an Indigenous woman in political agendas, her parliamentary trajectory, her advocacy for participation in environmental issues, and her engagement in Indigenous mobilizations.

The following sections provide an overview of interpretative possibilities regarding the aspects mentioned above, which traverse the construction of struggles and disputes shaping the elaboration and legitimation of Sonia Guajajara’s public images, from what she describes as her childhood, navigating worlds beyond her place of origin, to her rise within the political field. Sonia’s case can be considered exemplary of the dynamics characterizing social, political, and ecological struggles in their intersections, while also inviting comparisons and contrasts with approaches by authors such as Collovald (1988), Elias (1994), Bourdieu (2001), Grill (2015), and Reis (2020).

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<sup>1</sup> With the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, following the 2022 presidential elections, and the measures that changed the name of the National Indian Foundation to the National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples, the collective Mídia Índia also changed its name to Mídia Indígena.

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## 2. *Sonia Guajajara: political and environmental struggles, from the Araribóia Indigenous Territory to other worlds*

Based on Bourdieu's (2021) notion of political struggles, it is possible to suggest that Sonia Guajajara seeks, incorporates, constructs, and apprehends various forms of capital, such as the knowledge acquired throughout her schooling since childhood and her activism in Indigenous institutions and political parties, as will be seen. Thus, on December 16, 2022, in Brasília, already elected as a federal deputy for the state of São Paulo and nominated for the position of Minister of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, Sonia granted an interview to *Revista Fórum*, an occasion in which she revisited defining elements of her trajectory.

I come from Maranhão, from the Araribóia Indigenous Territory [where I was born in 1974 and] where I lived throughout my childhood. I had to leave home very early to study, because in our territory and its surroundings [...] we only had the first four grades. I studied up to the fourth grade there, with my mother, my father, my sisters [...]. I always had this desire to know the world, to travel, to graduate, and to return to help my people. My parents were never able to study, they are illiterate in reading, but never ignorant. [...] They always knew that education transforms the world. [...] I am the second of eight siblings, five women and three men, and all of us studied. At eleven years old, I was no longer living with my mother. I left to study in the neighboring town, went to Grajaú, then to Amarante, which is my municipality [...], where I was able to study middle school, as it was called back then. At fifteen, I went to Minas Gerais, invited by Funai, where I completed high school and trained as a teacher, staying for three years in an agricultural boarding school [in the city of Esmeraldas]. [...] I returned and worked in the villages. After a short time, I wanted to study again, and that's when I took

the nursing technician course [in 1995, in Imperatriz, Maranhão]. I returned once more to work in the village. I also studied alternative medicine [between 1993 and 1995, at the Instituto Paulista de Promoção Humana in Lins, São Paulo]. I was always thinking about how I could help better. [...] I wanted to be able to discuss things more broadly, to think about how to improve living conditions [...], to change that reality, which already suffered from heavy logging and the destruction of our territory. [...] Later, I studied Literature at the State University of Maranhão, and that's when I also began to enter the Indigenous movement (Quem..., 2022).

Sonia's socially and ethnically differentiated origin – as the daughter of parents who did not attend school, when related to Bourdieu's (2007) notion of inherited cultural capital, influences the paths available to her. However, Sonia chose to pursue education to climb other steps in life. It is possible to see that this Tentehar woman viewed the possibility of acquiring knowledge, beyond that inherited from her Indigenous ancestry, as an open path to opportunities, including the chance to fight politically and socially for her people and for the territory, which has been the target of logging exploitation.

Her interest and struggles in defense of Indigenous territorial and environmental rights are distinctions that drive the paths Sonia has taken. Her rarity as a prominent Indigenous leader characterizes a form of expertise, something that Almeida (2019) analyzed in terms of sagacity in interethnic and Indigenous-non-Indigenous political relations, which seems to have been built through experiences and learning in different Spaces, worlds beyond the Araribóia Indigenous Territory and its social relations, that have allowed her to accumulate elements reinforcing an image of distinction. As will be seen,

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Sonia's interest in defending her territory would later take on proportions of a struggle for climate balance on a global scale.

As suggested by Sonia's account, the credentials she obtained throughout her trajectory are activated whenever they prove useful in her search for recognition within the field she seeks to enter. These are processes of acquiring and consecrating qualities, socially constructed attributes, school knowledge, and experiences that confer abilities activated in relations with alterities, whether with the State or within political relations inside and through Indigenous movements, in environmental action, and in the field of electoral political disputes, during campaign building. In this sense, in her speech at the inauguration ceremony as Minister of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, Sonia recalled:

When I was seventeen years old, my aunt Maria Santana called me to talk. Aunt Maria is a midwife and a respected spiritual leader. Since it was not an ordinary invitation, I thought: "What could Aunt Maria want?" I got on the back of a motorcycle and went to the Lagoa Quieta Village, in the Araribóia Indigenous Territory, in the municipality of Amarante do Maranhão, which is my territory, to meet Aunt Maria. When I arrived there, I found her with two gifts – a necklace and a maracá. Then she looked at me and said, with that serene voice: "Oh, my daughter, I want to give you these gifts, which are symbols of leadership. I pass on to you the power of the word. You will have the gift of communication. Everyone will listen to you. You will grow, and everything you have to say, do not hesitate, because everyone will stop to hear you. This maracá will resonate, and you will be the spokesperson for our people". And so I bring this small memory here to remind you that I am not here alone. I am here with the strength of our ancestry (Cerimônia..., 2023).

The account allows us to analyze that, in Sonia Guajajara's family history, there are social belongings that influence "choices", trajectories, and conditions of possibility. The excerpt suggests confirmation of the transmission, through inheritance and ancestry, of the ability to lead, which is also activated as a strategy in the construction of legitimacy for her position as minister, a woman capable of engaging in politics. In addition to school environments and her participation in Indigenous organizations and political parties, Sonia evokes the distinction acquired through inheritance, by family tradition and thanks to ancestry, highlighting her belonging to a lineage of female leaders marked by struggle (Figure 1), something uncommon and, at the same time, a distinctive sign in the intra- and interethnic political field.

The present study emphasizes that the Indigenous capital inherited and related to the profile of Tentehar leadership – together with the knowledge acquired during her formal education and, later, through activism in social movements, engagement in the agenda for the protection of territories and forests, and participation in political parties, is mobilized in contexts of political struggle as signs of Sonia's expertise. Given the evocation of her aunt during the inauguration ceremony, it should be noted that, among the Tentehar, a leader does not appear alone at major events: "I am not here alone". They are usually accompanied by *caciques* and associates who confirm their status as a leader, that is, as a representative chosen among the most sagacious (Almeida, 2019). In Sonia's case, this presence suggests, as we argue, the construction of distinction grounded in the values of Tentehar ancestry.

Sonia began her involvement in Indigenous



FIGURE 1 – Sonia Guajajara with her aunt Maria Santana, at the Lagoa Quieta Village, Araribóia Indigenous Territory, 2023.

SOURCE: Instagram @guajajarasonia, 2023.

politics in 2001, when she participated in the Post-March Conference in Goiás (Guajajara, 2018). As a leader in Indigenous movements, between 2003 and 2009, she served as secretary of the Coordination of Organizations and Articulations of the Indigenous Peoples of Maranhão (Coapima). From 2009 onward, she acted as vice-coordinator of the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (Coiab). Between 2014 and 2021, she was the executive coordinator of Apib, and in 2021 she became a counselor at Amima. Within these spheres, she worked on Indigenous territorial and environmental agendas, where she gained recognition for her defense of the forests. Such a context allowed her to build relationships

and partnerships with other Indigenous leaders, such as Maninha Xukuru in the Northeast, Fausto Makuxi and Jecinaldo Sateré in the Amazon, both active in Coiab. In Maranhão, Sonia developed close relations with leaders such as Lourenço Krikati, Dori Gavião, and Itamar Guajajara (Guajajara, 2018).

There were also connections with struggles from other social movements: women's movements, such as the Fórum Maranhense de Mulheres; human rights organizations, such as the Centro de Defesa da Vida e dos Direitos Humanos Padre Josimo; political and environmental movements; and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace and Survival. She also engaged with agents from institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), the United Nations (UN), and the World Climate Conferences (COP), among others. The NGO Survival works directly in the Araribóia Indigenous Territory as a partner of the Tentehar people and, in particular, of the group of men and women self-designated as the *Guardiões da Floresta* (Forest Guardians) (Silva & Shiraishi Neto, 2025), in their struggle to protect the territory, which has been a target of deforestation caused by logging exploitation and the advance of cattle ranching.

In 2018, Sonia ran for vice president of the Republic with the Socialist Party (PSOL), on a ticket headed by Guilherme Boulos. This made her the first Indigenous woman candidate for vice president in Brazil's history. On that occasion, Sonia built connections with various actors from different spheres: political, such as Manuela D'Ávila, Marina Silva, and Guilherme Boulos; artistic, such as Maria Gadú, Dira Paes, and Leonardo DiCaprio; and media-related, such as the Indigenous Youth

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Network (Rejuind)<sup>2</sup> and *Mídia Ninja*, where she also worked as a columnist. This context enabled her to expand her field of social relations and partnerships, which continued in the struggles that followed and were crucial in making Indigenous actions and agendas more visible to other sectors of society.

In 2022, also with the PSOL, she launched her candidacy for the position of federal deputy representing the state of São Paulo and was elected with an impressive number of votes. In this context, Sonia, originally from the state of Maranhão, moved to São Paulo, a shift facilitated by partnerships, especially with her party colleague Guilherme Boulos, who also ran for federal deputy. This movement stemmed from relationships built through her participation in Indigenous organizations but also from connections with influential agents in the Brazilian political sphere, artists, Indigenous leaders, and various communities.

In that campaign, her agenda, together with those of other Indigenous women such as Joenia Wapichana (RR), Célia Xakriabá (MG), Vanda Vitoto (AM), and Rosilene Guajajara (MA), organized around Anmiga, aimed to build what they called an *Indigenous caucus*. The so-called “feathered headdress caucus” (*bancada do cocar*) is part of a broader agenda of Brazilian Indigenous movements, particularly those led by women, whose slogan is “village politics” (*aldear a política*). This project promotes candidacies at the municipal, state, and federal levels, with the goal of introducing Indigenous perspectives into spaces of political decision-making and constructing policies oriented toward the promotion of Indigenous rights

and environmental protection.

In 2023, at the beginning of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s third administration, after a government described as one of declared violence against Indigenous peoples (Cruz, 2022), Sonia was chosen to assume the position of Minister of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, marking an unprecedented moment in the country’s history with the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples. Within Indigenous circles, she competed with Joenia Wapichana (RR), a federal deputy and the first Indigenous woman to occupy such a position, and Weibe Tapeba (CE), an Indigenous leader and city councilor in Caucaia. Both were part of the shortlist suggested by Apib to head the ministry.

According to Sonia, the creation of the ministry constituted an important step in the direction pursued by Indigenous agendas in the country, insofar as it enabled Indigenous people to occupy significant positions in government with the capacity to influence decision-making, especially when considering the harmful effects of the so-called anti-Indigenous policy implemented by the previous government of Jair Bolsonaro (Silva, 2021).

In the *Final Letter of the National Indigenous Resistance Assembly* (2020), the leaders, including Sonia Guajajara, mentioned several of that government’s actions that had direct impacts on Indigenous territories: the “suspension of Indigenous land demarcations, [...] the militarization of environmental control agencies, attacks on the Atlantic Forest, the advance of illegal mining, and the actions of rural militias that cause fires and illegal invasions in the Amazon” (Apib, 2020, on-line). These are government measures that, according

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<sup>2</sup>Created in 2009, during the First National Youth Seminar, Rejuind aims to “facilitate information and communication among the diversity of Indigenous youth” (Rejuind, [2009?]).



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to the document itself, led to “the weakening of Indigenous territories [...]. These measures increased deforestation in the Amazon, leaving our biodiversity vulnerable throughout the entire country” (Apib, 2020, on-line). In the following excerpt, in which she discusses the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sonia confronts the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, engaging in a struggle in defense of Indigenous rights:

[...] we are feeling the total negligence of the federal government. And we know they will not do anything to prevent people [Indigenous people] from dying. [...] We are [...] seeking partnerships [...] to implement this plan from within the Indigenous movement. The plan includes measures that are the responsibility of the federal, municipal, and state governments. We cannot [...] assume the responsibilities of the State [...]. We will continue bringing what is possible for us to do in a complementary way, and we will keep pressuring the three levels of government to fulfill their responsibilities [...]. We are forced to listen every day to the national secretary of SESAI speaking everywhere, through statements, in meetings, in interviews: “SESAI has enough money to face this pandemic; we don’t need donations from NGOs [...]”. But [...] they don’t implement any measures – preventive or for care. Likewise, Funai keeps saying it has a plan, but where is the implementation of that plan? [...] The agencies responsible for executing protection and health policies are totally paralyzed, totally negligent. [...] What they are actually doing are criminal practices, denying assistance (Fórum..., 2020).

In the excerpt, we see that Sonia not only describes what she characterizes as negligent and “criminal” governmental actions, but also mentions Indigenous actions of resistance, which, in our view, relate to the notion of POS (Alonso *et al.*, 2007). In this sense, the mobilization of

instruments of struggle by Indigenous political leaders generates tension in the field of power (Elias, 1994), forging dynamics of confrontation within relations with the State and other agents who seek to assert dominance over Indigenous peoples. From this perspective, we can affirm that Sonia exemplifies a political agent who breaks with the logics that would lead her to adopt the dominant common sense, positioning herself against it, even against the thinking of the State, whenever such a stance becomes necessary, as when opposing legislative proposals and other governmental actions that aim to violate already-conquered rights (Bourdieu, 2001).

The following passage describes an event illustrative of these dynamics, in which Sonia speaks about occupying new spaces, emphasizing that the transition from the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro to that of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had been favorable to Indigenous participation because there was “political will”:

For us, this is a new moment. Throughout all these years, we refused to take part in the structure of the State. [...] We were not prepared to take on these positions – not because we lacked qualifications, but because the State itself was not prepared to have Indigenous leadership in these agencies. It was another way of trying to demonstrate incapacity. If there were no conditions, no structure, we would not be able to do a good job. And now, it’s not that this structure exists, but there is political will, there is space for us to occupy all these positions that were previously held by non-Indigenous people, who did not do very well. So why can’t we take them on now? (Quem..., 2022).

From this excerpt, it is possible to perceive that the actions of Indigenous political leaders in motion, such as Sonia’s, in articulation with other

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agents and agendas, enable the reconfiguration of arrangements that transform the field of relations and the social structure (Bourdieu, 2001). Such processes, far from immutable, manifest in their plasticity, as circumstances and strategies of redefinition within the political game of struggles and disputes (Elias, 1994).

### **3. Sonia: forest protection, recognition, and the construction of public images**

Grill (2015) discusses the construction of multiple identities through autobiographical narratives, which are also, in our analysis, constructions of *strategic identities* (Collovald, 1988), that is, ways of achieving recognition and prestige. According to the author, multiple identities may result, for instance, from the act of writing and publishing books on different topics or in different literary genres. Such processes constitute the construction of resources, signs of distinction and rarity that, together with inherited or non-inherited capital, underpin the drive behind the choice of political careers by agents (Bourdieu, 2001; Grill, 2015; Reis, 2020).

The cases analyzed by Reis (2020), parliamentarians Cristina Tavares (PE), Benedita da Silva (RJ), Marta Suplicy, and Yeda Crusius (SP), and by Grill (2015), Afonso Arinos, reveal biographies marked by dilemmas that evoke the need for adjustments influencing the conditions under which one acts in the political sphere. From these authors, we may infer that biographies, memories, accounts, and confessions can express the capacity or possibility that a political agent possesses to intervene in the elaboration of their own image, in relation to images constructed by others.

Unlike the agents analyzed by Grill (2015) and Reis (2020), Sonia has worked and continues to work within Indigenous movements, organizations, and actions, occupying positions of leadership. However, her agendas go beyond the struggles for specific Indigenous rights. She constructs an agenda focused on the defense of forests and the planet's climatic balance, engaging with the agendas of other environmental movements. Her position as a defender of Indigenous rights, forests, and the climate frequently places her in the media, whether through Indigenous-led actions in which she gives lectures and testimonies or through interviews (Figure 2) granted to magazines, national and international television channels, YouTube programs, and Instagram live streams, among others.

In an interview for the program *Roda Viva* (TV Cultura, March 20, 2023), Sonia emphasized:

[...] today we are experiencing an absurd climate crisis caused, among other things, by large-scale production [...]. [Producers] also need to adapt so that we do not continue promoting the climate crisis that the entire world feels today. [...] We Indigenous peoples, for example, preserve biodiversity, protect our territory, protect the environment. [...] Therefore, [...] we have alternatives; we must strengthen family farming, agroecology, this sustainable agriculture [...], as long as they do not harm ways of life or the environment (Roda Viva, 2023).

In this excerpt, Sonia presents herself as an Indigenous woman who preserves biodiversity, protects the territory, and safeguards the environment. Beyond that, similar to other Indigenous movement leaders in Brazil, and recognized by Indigenous and pro-Indigenous organizations as a *forest warrior* and *climate warrior*, Sonia argues that when



FIGURE 2 – Sonia Guajajara in an interview on the program *Roda Viva*, TV Cultura, 2023.

SOURCE: Portal Primeira Página, 2023.

non-Indigenous projects of so-called development (hydroelectric dams, mining companies, logging, land speculation etc.) affect Indigenous territories, these must be involved; that is, Indigenous peoples must participate in decision-making processes (Roda Viva, 2023). This idea seems to sustain the notion of *village politics*. In other words, Sonia draws attention to the need for Indigenous voices to be heard. In this sense, she further asserts:

[...] now we are able to bring Indigenous issues, to bring the environmental agenda together as well, so that people understand that it is impossible to defend the environment separately from defending Indigenous issues. It cannot be done, because we, Indigenous peoples, and the environment are one and the same. This struggle must be united, it must be the same. Those who defend the environment must also

be aware that to ensure environmental protection, it is necessary to guarantee the rights of Indigenous peoples (Quem é..., 2022).

In their statements, Sonia and other Tenteihar leaders always connect the protection of Indigenous territories to the broader environmental question. An example of this articulation appears when referring to what Indigenous movements have called the “dismantling of Indigenous policy” and the “dismantling of environmental policy” under President Jair Messias Bolsonaro’s administration. Thus, Sonia and other leaders argue that the Indigenous struggle must be articulated with the environmental struggle.

Several authors discuss the relationship between the environmental crisis and capitalism. Ribeiro (2017) argues that the planet is engulfed in

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an environmental crisis linked to “the successive economic and social crises of capitalism” (Ribeiro, 2017, p. 34). For the author, the consequences of the predatory exploitation of natural resources are dramatic, already producing what he calls devastating impacts, and, in the long term, “jeopardizing a viable future for human societies and even the existence of life on the planet” (Ribeiro, 2017, p. 34). Löwy (2013, p. 81) also notes that the environmental crisis “has become, due to climate change, a crisis of the survival of the human species”, which aligns with Sonia Guajajara’s argument that it is necessary to *reforest thought [...] to ensure the continuity of life on the planet* (Quem é..., 2022).

Escobar (2005) explores the relationship between nature and so-called development in the context of globalized capitalism. For him, the latter disregards local knowledge and experiences related to nature. He argues that it is necessary to value localized experiences, knowledge, and relationships with the various natures activated in local contexts. Ribeiro (2017, p. 121) adds to this debate by warning of the importance of considering the critical contributions of social movements “particularly those linked to environmental causes, the defense of Indigenous peoples, and alternative forms of production”. As Sonia’s testimony suggests, Indigenous movements themselves, closely aligned with environmental agendas, may be proposing alternative modes of production. Accounts from the Tentehar people, Sonia’s own community, refer to initiatives such as “agroecological practices that respect the Earth and that form the historical basis of the Tentehar way of life” (Ka’aiwar, 2024, on-line).

Thus, Sonia Guajajara exemplifies Indigenous

movements and actions for the protection of forests, including within the Araribóia Indigenous Territory. In the words of Indigenous women, Sonia is referred to as “earth woman”, “biome woman”. We assume that this expression denotes her deep connection to what Indigenous leaders and movements commonly call *Mother Nature* or *Mother Earth*. As Sonia’s statements suggest, this refers to a conception of nature distinct from that of modern thought. In this view, nature’s condition as mother is not a metaphor, since Indigenous peoples and natures do not belong to two separate domains (Ingold, 2015).

The expressions “biome woman” and “earth woman” carry the notion that there is no separation between Indigenous peoples and the environment, expressed in the statement *we are one* (Quem é..., 2022). Understood this way, the thinking expressed in Sonia Guajajara’s words challenges the singular position assigned to humans in the world by the modern notion of humanity. Accordingly, Tentehar Indigenous struggles, and perhaps Indigenous struggles in Brazil more broadly, articulate ecological/environmental and social/political struggles.

In addition to the political and environmental actions already mentioned, Sonia’s participation in organizing and carrying out initiatives such as the most recent editions of the ATL in 2020 and 2021, the largest national Indigenous mobilization, and the *Assemblies of Indigenous Resistance* stands out. We accompanied these events as part of our field research. They took place online due to restrictions on in-person gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic. These actions were broadcast on the internet through national Apib networks and shared by regional organizations such as Coiab (Amazon region); state organizations such as Coapima and

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Amima (Maranhão); local Indigenous media such as *Mídia Indígena*, *Rádio Yandê*, and *Rejuind*; pro-Indigenous organizations such as the *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (Cimi); and partner and supporting networks such as *Mídia Ninja* and the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT). These articulations were essential for the broad visibility achieved by the national Indigenous movement and the work of its leaders. Such events are opportunities for leaders to demonstrate their abilities: leadership, communication, and negotiation of agendas with various agents.

These qualities are almost always activated by our interlocutor in contexts that Collovald (1998) conceptualizes as *self-presentation*. It is a wager on one's career, in which multiple identities are activated or elaborated with the goal of constructing political distinction. Thus, Sonia's trajectory in the political sphere also seems to involve multiple identities depending on the circumstance and the sphere of action: she is a woman, an Indigenous person, a leader, active in both Indigenous politics and electoral politics, an environmental activist, and more. Her statements illustrate that her self-presentation strategies mobilize varied instruments, discourses, memories, and images published on her social networks and those of Indigenous organizations.

Sonia's international engagement began in 2008, when she attended the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. Since then, Sonia states that she has participated in all the COPs: Copenhagen (Switzerland), Cancún (Mexico), Durban (South Africa), Doha (Qatar), Rio+20 (Brazil), among others (Guajajara, 2018). More recently, she has taken part in several reports denouncing Indigenous rights violations presented before the UN, the European Parliament, and

various COP meetings. In 2021, as a coordinator of Apib, Sonia collaborated in filing a case before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, accusing then-President Jair Messias Bolsonaro of genocide against Brazil's Indigenous peoples and crimes against humanity (Cruz, 2022). Sonia's activities in movements, media, organizations, and agenda-building, while marking her struggles for rights, also operate as elements in the construction of distinction.

Among the awards and honors received by Sonia, we highlight the 2015 *Order of Cultural Merit* from the Ministry of Culture, under then-President Dilma Rousseff. In the same year, she was honored with the *January 18 Medal* by the *Centro de Promoção da Cidadania e Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Padre Josimo* in Imperatriz (MA). Also in 2015, she received the *Medal of Honor of Merit* from the state government of Maranhão, under then-Governor Flávio Dino, in recognition of her struggle to defend the Araribóia Indigenous Territory. In 2010, she famously presented the *Golden Chainsaw Award* to then-Minister of Agriculture Kátia Abreu, as a critique of environmental destruction and the expansion of agribusiness in the country. In 2022, she was granted the title of *Honorary Citizen of Imperatriz* by the City Council (Barbosa, 2022).

In 2019, Sonia received the *João Canuto Award for Human Rights in the Amazon and Freedom* from the *Movimento Direitos Humanos* organization, and the *Packard Award*, granted by the World Commission on Protected Areas of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In 2022, her name appeared on *Time Magazine's* list of the 100 most influential people in the world (Figure 3) (Coelho, 2022), in recognition



FIGURE 3 – Sonia Guajajara named one of the 100 most influential people in the world, 2022.

SOURCE: Instagram @guajajarasonia, 2022.

of her advocacy for Indigenous and environmental causes. In this analysis, such honors, along with others attributed to her personality for her activism in defense of forests, the climate, and the planet, function as strategic elements in legitimizing her position across the multiple spaces and agendas in which she operates.

We interpret Sonia's interviews with television programs, magazines, and other media, as well as the dissemination of her actions through Indigenous communication networks, as part of Indigenous women's strategies to occupy spaces of

speech and political action. These also constitute strategies for constructing a leadership image and opportunities for self-presentation. At present, various Indigenous media platforms feature the participation of Indigenous people from Maranhão, such as *Mídia Indígena*, *Rejuind*, and *Mídia Guajajara*. Our research highlights the relevance of these instruments, revealing a strong movement toward their political use by Indigenous peoples. As Collovald (1998) notes, such changes have implications for the functioning of the political field, establishing new rules to which agents must adapt.

Thus, within Indigenous movements, Sonia's work and the communication strategies carried out through these networks reveal that the production and dissemination of identity are enhanced through the use of media. Following Collovald (1988), we can understand that identities, results of negotiation, adopt self-presentation strategies aligned with the specific rules of the institutions in which political figures operate. In these processes, constraints function as mechanisms to meet the demands of shared worldviews within the social field: rules, norms and so forth (Bourdieu, 2001).

It is possible to observe that images of Sonia Guajajara are constructed through discursive and visual elaborations of narratives. In these contexts, various symbolic resources are activated, titles, inheritances, medals, offices, honors, recognitions, and activism: woman, leader, politician, Indigenous (ethnic distinction), environmentalist. All these attributes, along with her environmental agendas, Indigenous perspectives, and proposals for relating to the territory, are presented as values that propose alternative ways of conceiving human relations with what is called "nature" (forests, rivers, and beyond), and, consequently, as resources of distinc-

tion and legitimacy within the political field. Thus, the processes of constructing public images lived and activated by Sonia Guajajara confer upon her notability, rarity, and consecration (Bourdieu, 2001) as a political personality *par excellence*.

The *Mídia Indígena* communication network is responsible for the media support of our interlocutor and several other leaders active in Indigenous movements. This network operates behind the scenes in the construction and publication of profiles, speeches, agendas, political campaigns, and digital representations. Regarding this articulation, it is worth noting that Sonia is the sister of journalist Erisvan Guajajara, founder of this network, which originated in the Araribóia Indigenous Territory and later gained national prominence.

Sonia's images are also built through rituals, tributes, ways of life, agendas, and political struggles. Symbolic and material investments are made in the project of constructing these images. They were, for example, mobilized by organizations that publicly supported Sonia's nomination to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, when she was considered alongside Weibe Tapeba and Joenia Wapichana<sup>3</sup>. In the elaboration of images, Indigenous trajectories, particularly Sonia's, also draw upon the dimension of ancestry.

The relationship with ancestors, within the realm of Indigenous politics and the construction of leadership images, serves as a foundational element for building legitimacy. Sonia is also the author of numerous speeches, interviews, and public statements (Guajajara, 2018), through which she constructs narratives. As has been shown, she possesses differentiated cultural and symbolic

inheritances, family ties, educational experiences, and political and environmental engagements as a leader in Indigenous organizations, political parties, campaigns, and other, so-called non-Indigenous, worlds. She thus constructs a system of relationships that confirms the idea that *knowing how to do politics means knowing how to play the other's game* (Almeida, 2019), mastering different logics across distinct contexts.

#### **4. “Village politics”: “reforesting thought” and combating climate emergencies**

Sonia Guajajara's rise into spaces of political contestation is situated within the broader context of the formation of what has been called the Brazilian Indigenous political movement. According to Luciano (2011), it was after the 1988 Constitution that Indigenous peoples began to occupy positions in official institutions, councils, commissions, and ministerial working groups, in areas such as education, health, environment, and agriculture. For the author, this participation has been fundamentally important to the construction of Indigenous political struggles as an organized social movement.

In the wider context of mobilizations during Brazil's democratic transition in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in addition to the national Indigenous movement, the Brazilian environmental movement also emerged as an organized force (Alonso *et al.*, 2007). Thus, it is possible to state that the agendas of both movements are intertwined. Indeed, for Indigenous peoples, the environmental question is inseparable from political and social struggles for land demarcation.

<sup>3</sup> After Sonia Guajajara's appointment to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, Joenia Wapichana was announced as president of Funai, becoming the first Indigenous woman to hold the position.

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Alonso *et al.* (2007) remind us that the formation of the Brazilian environmental movement arose from three POS: the process of redemocratization in Brazil, the National Constituent Assembly, and the institutional structure created by the Rio-92 Conference. According to the authors, from these POS, groups of environmental activists emerged, forming strategic and symbolic networks that led to the constitution of the movement. In our view, this process is closely related to the formation of the Indigenous movement. Munduruku (2012) called a “*field of possibility*” the analytical capacity of Indigenous leaders of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to interpret the moment as an opportunity for political action in building the movement.

This perceptive capacity also manifests in Sonia’s discourse on recent social, political, and environmental conjunctures. In the following excerpt, Sonia explains the idea of “village politics” (*aldear a política*) and how this agenda connects to struggles for territory:

Village politics was an initiative last year [2022] within the framework of the Acampamento Terra Livre [...] whose main theme was “Retaking Brazil: demarcating territories and village politics”. Understanding that the demarcation of Indigenous lands remains the top priority for Indigenous peoples. And for that, it is important that Indigenous representation exists within decision-making spaces. That’s why we organized it in this sequence: demarcate territories and village politics. Because if there are no people [in politics] who understand, who come from the lived necessity of being in a territory, of having their identity preserved through that territory, we can have allies, as we always have, but having one of us in these spaces gives a much more legitimate voice. [...] We decided collectively that I would accept the position in the Ministry, and the *bancada do cocar*, as we called it, could be present in both the Legislative and

the Executive, and, in an articulated way, strengthen this presence, this participation of more Indigenous women (Roda Viva, 2023).

The idea of “village politics”, a central aspect of Sonia Guajajara’s struggles, is part of the agenda of Indigenous women’s movements in Maranhão and across Brazil. In the 2022 Brazilian electoral process, Tentehar Indigenous women participated in legislative races at both the state and federal levels. Rosilene Guajajara, *cacica* of the Maçaranduba Village in the Caru Indigenous Territory, described as a “teacher”, “educator”, and “forest warrior”, led a joint candidacy of the *Coletivo Guarnicê* for a seat in the Maranhão State Legislature (Bancada Indígena, 2022).

In the same process, Sonia Guajajara ran for federal deputy representing the state of São Paulo, advocating the formation of an Indigenous caucus, also referred to as the *bancada do cocar* (“feathered headdress caucus”). Thus, the actions and mobilizations within the *village politics* agenda aim to promote Indigenous candidacies for political offices at municipal, state, and federal levels. However, this proposal goes further. In Sonia’s own words, it represents an attempt to *reforest* thought and political projects across diverse agendas, particularly regarding environmental issues. On December 16, 2022, in Brasília, Sonia, then elected as federal deputy and considered for the position of Minister of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, concluded an interview with *Revista Fórum* stating:

The message I leave is a call for the urgency of the struggle in defense of Mother Earth, and for that, the summons to reforest minds, to reforest thought, reforest ideas, reforest projects [...]. This is the



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call: for this new political, ecological, and global consciousness that the world needs in order for us to guarantee the continuity of life on the planet (Quem é..., 2022).

On another occasion, Sonia declared:

It is necessary to reclaim and rediscover Brazil, by demarcating territories and village politics, which must become a space for the reforestation of minds and hearts and an instrument to combat climate emergencies. In a state like São Paulo, which is home to one of the largest Indigenous cities in Brazil, building a collective and democratic way of shaping our futures seems very urgent (Guajajara, 2022).

*Reforesting minds, ideas, and hearts* is a proposal advanced by contemporary Indigenous movements in Brazil within the agendas of *village politics* and environmental struggles. This perspective expresses an Indigenous awareness of the need to reclaim ancestral values of connection with, and as part of, the forests (Krenak, 2022). It appears to be an invitation to reconnect with natures beyond modern nature (Escobar, 2005), understood as external to the human (Latour, 2019), the multiple natures of lived experiences among Indigenous peoples and other sensitive worlds in which they affirm relationships with ancestors, spiritual entities, and the beings of the forests (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015).

According to the narratives of Sonia and other Tentehar leaders, the forest is an expression of *integrality* (Ingold, 2015; Descola, 2023) and of connection among all beings, including those considered human. In Sonia's words, *we, Indigenous peoples, and the environment, we are one* (Quem é..., 2022). Therefore, it is possible to suggest that

*reforesting* means restoring the ancestral connection *with and as* the forest, one that, immersed in relations with alterities, for the Tentehar and other Indigenous peoples, is inseparable from the sacred dimension and from spiritual relations (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015; Krenak, 2022).

During the vote on Provisional Measure (MP) 1154/2023, which, according to Sonia, seeks to completely dismantle the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples by removing from it the responsibility for Indigenous land demarcations and transferring it to the Ministry of Justice, the minister made the following statement:

Everyone remembers President Lula's campaign, which brought the Indigenous agenda to the center of his electoral platform. Everyone remembers his campaign commitment to resume the processes of demarcating Indigenous lands. It was from this perspective that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples was created, which gave us full confidence to take on this responsibility. The entire world developed high expectations that Brazil could once again assume its leading role on the international stage regarding the fight against the climate crisis, the protection of the environment, biodiversity, and the rights of Indigenous peoples (Guajajara, 2023a).

From these accounts, it is possible to analyze that Indigenous candidacies are understood by their leaders as a *field of mobilization possibilities* (Munduruku, 2012) and as *structures of opportunity*. Such an analysis also helps us to understand the current articulation of Indigenous political Leaders, such as Sonia, and their strategies for entering electoral politics and what they refer to as "spaces of power". as a means of advancing their demands, among which are the protection of territories and what Sonia has described as the *fight against the*

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*climate crisis, the protection of the environment, and the preservation of biodiversity.*

Drawing on Reis (2020), we suggest that the relationship between activism within Indigenous social movements, such as the agenda of territorial protection and climate defense, and participation in the partisan electoral field shows that activism in Indigenous organizations becomes a social instrument within the arena of political disputes. Speaking about Indigenous women's struggles in the context of forming Anmiga, Sonia stated:

[...] the articulation of Indigenous women cannot be limited to the period of Anmiga's creation, because the struggle of Indigenous women is also centuries-old, and even those women who have not been made visible, who have not had the opportunity to demonstrate or gain recognition, have done important work within their territories. The struggle of women has always existed, it is a traditional struggle (Roda Viva, 2023).

Thus, the first *March of Indigenous Women Warriors of Ancestrality*, held in 2019, adopted the theme "Territory, our body, our spirit", and the second march, in 2021, was titled "Original women, reforesting minds for the healing of the Earth". According to Sonia, the theme of the first march arose from the understanding that "the territory and the body are the same thing; they cannot be separated" (Roda Viva, 2023). We can observe that the themes of these actions emphasize the Indigenous way of relating to territory, which, in Sonia's practice, is a strategic condition for linking environmental defense struggles to those for the protection of Indigenous lands.

The construction of these Anmiga actions and agendas took place in the context of non-Indigenous

governmental policies. For Sonia, the second march marked the moment when women understood that they needed to enter the processes of electoral political disputes. This argument helps to support the idea that the actions of President Jair Mes-sias Bolsonaro's government toward Indigenous peoples, as suggested in the leaders' discourses, generated na POS (Alonso *et al.*, 2007) or a *field of possibilities* (Munduruku, 2012). In this regard, Sonia spoke about President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's proposals for Indigenous peoples:

We are emerging from four years in which the paralysis of Indigenous land demarcations was public policy, it was a political decision, and we need to unblock these processes. During the transition working group, we conducted this assessment. We identified fourteen processes with completed studies and already signed declaratory ordinances. We presented this to President Lula during the transition, indicating that we needed to move forward on this agenda. And right after I took office at the ministry, this was the first issue we prioritized. [...] We expect that part of these fourteen lands will be signed within the first hundred days of the Lula government (Roda Viva, 2023).

The POS generated by the crisis arising from the State's relationship with Indigenous peoples unfolded into mobilizations and historic forms of leadership that, as has been observed, led to an "*village of politics*", with the insertion of leaders into political parties and electoral campaigns at the state and federal levels. As part of these processes came the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil and the appointment of the leader Sonia Guajajara as Minister, both unprecedented developments in the country's history. Our interlocutor understands that the creation of the ministry

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and the so-called *feathered headdress caucus* (*bancada do cocar*) are the result of this POS, born from the struggle and mobilization of Indigenous women. The ministry was described by leader Célia Xakriabá as “ancestral”, “the ministry of forests, of life” (Cerimônia..., 2023), marking the Indigenous specificity embedded in its creation.

Based on the foregoing, it is possible to analyze that “village politics” is closely tied to Sonia’s idea of having people [in politics] “who understand and who come from the lived necessity of being in a territory, of having their identity preserved through the territory” (Roda Viva, 2023). In the words of our interlocutor, a view shared by other leaders of the village movement, *village politics* would constitute a space for the reforestation of minds and hearts and an instrument for combating climate emergencies. In our analysis, this means reforesting thought and political projects, especially those concerning forest protection and Indigenous ways of life. Thus, we understand the indigenization of politics as a defining moment in Sonia Guajajara’s trajectory, when she enters the structure of the State itself, as Minister of Indigenous Peoples and as a defender of the forests and the peoples who inhabit them.

### ***5. Indigenous mobilizations, repertoires, and political resistances***

Following the approval by the Federal Chamber on May 24, 2023, of the urgency motion for voting on Bill (PL) 490/2007, which addresses the so-called *Temporal Framework* (*Marco Temporal*<sup>4</sup>),

Indigenous leaders and organizations, as in other moments of tension threatening rights, called for a national mobilization. The agenda of Indigenous mobilizations during the vote on this bill, as announced in the Coiab campaign “Indigenous Amazon against the Temporal Framework”, posted on Instagram, included actions in Brasília as well as in local territories. The mobilization’s rallying cry was “Our framework is ancestral”, timed to coincide with the ruling scheduled to resume on June 7, 2023.

According to Tilly (as cited in Bringel, 2012), in contexts of crisis, POS constitute propitious moments for the emergence of constellations of claims. A range of instruments of struggle, what the author calls *repertoires*, can be mobilized as resources linked to the organizational capacity of social movements in specific historical conjunctures. These are moments that Tilly describes as times of change, crisis, and transition, which enable variations and transformations in repertoires within the broader field of collective action strategies. In the case analyzed here, these mobilizations and constructions of political action occur at the confluence of Sonia’s struggles across different social fields: the Indigenous and environmental movements and the partisan-electoral political field.

The concept of *repertoires* sheds light on the analysis of Indigenous movements’ actions. Crisis contexts, such as the struggles against the so-called *Temporal Framework* and against its supporters, notably the ruralist caucus in Brazil’s National Congress, as well as the broader threats

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<sup>4</sup> The aforementioned bill was approved in December 2023, becoming the Temporal Framework Law (Law No. 14.701/2023), despite having been declared unconstitutional by the Federal Supreme Court (STF) in September of the same year. This law limits Indigenous peoples’ right to land only to those territories already occupied as of October 5, 1988, the date of the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of Brazil. Subsequently, the Senate proposed Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 48/2023, to be discussed by the Committee on Constitution and Justice, which aims to render the Temporal Framework Law constitutional.

faced by Indigenous peoples through territorial invasions, the assassination of leaders, and conflicts in rural and forested areas, constitute, in this study's understanding, *opportunity structures* that activate a repertoire of possible actions: public demonstrations, protests, occupations of public spaces such as National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (Funai) and Federal Court buildings, road blockades, Indigenous assemblies, and formal denunciations to judicial and human rights institutions.

The following passage is taken from the speech of the Indigenous communicator Erisvan Guajajara, delivered in homage to Paulo Paulino Guajajara, an Indigenous man assassinated in November 2019 for defending the forest in the Araribóia Indigenous Territory. The speech was given at the *Festival Ninja* event, held in São Paulo on November 30, 2019, during the return of the delegation from the “Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More” Journey to Brazil:

We, Indigenous peoples, bravely fight in defense of our territories, we fight in defense of something [...] fundamental: the right to life [...]. We, Indigenous peoples, fight day and night in defense of Mother Earth [...], not only for Indigenous peoples, but to guarantee the life of the planet and humanity. [...] Paulo Paulino Guajajara was a Guardian of the Forest, a brave warrior who fought in defense of the Green Planet. Paulo Paulino Guajajara died not only for us Indigenous peoples, he died for everyone here presente – for he died to defend life. [...] We, Indigenous peoples, will continue to fight for ourselves, for our ancestors, and for future generations (Guajajara, E., 2019, oral information)<sup>5</sup>.

The assassination of Paulo Paulino Guajajara became international news, disseminated by Indig-

enous leaders during the “Indigenous Blood: Not a Single Drop More” campaign. This movement allowed the murder of the Guardian of the Forest to be politically mobilized as an instrument of struggle, and Sonia was at the forefront, giving the case international visibility. Thus, the political opportunity drew attention to Indigenous issues in Brazil. Because Paulo Paulino was a Tentehar Indigenous leader of the Guardians group, his assassination was strategically connected to environmental agendas such as forest protection and defense, but also to human and Indigenous rights agendas, most notably, the right to life and existence (Silva, 2024).

For Tilly (as cited in Bringel, 2012), collective action generates interest, mobilization, and organization, representing a situation of political opportunity and the possibility of action. These elements can be observed in the motivations behind contemporary Indigenous mobilizations in Brazil, such as those provoked by contestation of the *Temporal Framework* thesis and the case of Paulino, but also in the context of building Indigenous candidacies for parliamentary positions. For Indigenous peoples, these moments of political, social, and economic crisis are also moments of political opportunity, with reverberations for environmental issues and social movements.

Sonia's speeches may likewise be analyzed as Indigenous discourses of resistance against what she and the movements she participates in regard as attempts to dominate Indigenous peoples and their territories. In this sense, actions that take place within villages and territories are linked to those occurring in public spaces of open Indigenous political struggle (Scott, 2002). This dynamic can be illustrated by the notion of political engagement

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from the speech by Erisvan Bone Guajajara, delivered during the Ninja Festival, São Paulo, November 30, 2019.

“from the ground of the village to the ground of Brasília” (Amima, 2022), or from the territories to the “centers of power” regarded as hegemonic. Symbolic representations of these centers include Brazil’s federal capital and the city of São Paulo, which, in Sonia’s discourse, are both *central to national politics*, the latter for housing *major corporations whose decisions affect peoples and territories across the country* (Guajajara, 2022), a factor that also motivated Sonia’s parliamentary candidacy for the state of São Paulo.

Sonia Guajajara often shares, on her social media, scenes of daily life in her village, bathing in the river (Figure 4) or walking through the forest. According to her, these actions strengthen and renew her energy for the struggle. As Scott (2002) notes, such actions take on symbolic dimensions as acts of resistance that may lead to forms of open resistance. In this regard, the author adds that resistance, within infrapolitics, although sometimes appearing as individual acts, does not arise from formal coordination but from “dense informal networks and rich subcultures of resistance to external demands” (Scott, 2002, p. 29).

Sonia’s actions in the village, in contact with the earth, rivers, and forest, as we have observed, articulate everyday gestures and public acts as expressions of *expertise*, skill, and sagacity characteristic of the Tentehar Indigenous people (Almeida, 2019). On the other hand, these Indigenous actions integrate elements of ancestry and spirituality. In this regard, Sonia frequently invokes ancestral and spiritual teachings and values as symbolic elements of political struggle. Thus, being on the land connects her actions to the spiritual dimension, which, in Indigenous cosmologies and ontologies, is inseparable from nature and from the Earth itself.



FIGURE 4 – Sonia Guajajara bathing in the river, Lagoa Quieta Village, Araribóia Indigenous Territory; Instagram post titled “Roots that heal”, 2023.

SOURCE: Instagram @guajajarasonia, 2023.

Regarding the ancestral dimension, as we have seen, Sonia reaffirms her family lineage to assert her position as the niece of Maria Santana, the matriarch of a family of women leaders who, following ancestral inspiration, affirm the legitimacy of Tentehar women’s political action as *cacicas* and leaders beyond traditional chieftaincy. Sonia thus introduces elements such as spirituality, ancestry, Indigenous experience, and knowledge into the political arena, elements that, in our view, are part of the processes of *village politics*, but also constitute strategies of legitimation and of constructing the public image of a leader capable of

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engaging and playing the political game.

Within Indigenous actions, empirical elements inform an active mode of positioning oneself in the face of acts and circumstances of attempted domination. This mode of positioning constitutes, in this analysis, resistance to the actions of various powers and their attempts to control and dominate, bodies, voices, territories, images, and more. These are, on the part of Indigenous peoples, acts of disobedience. Thus, there are struggles that are simultaneously discursive and symbolic, existing in the interstices of overt political actions such as the *Acampamento Terra Livre*, assemblies, protests, and the so-called *Indigenous April* mobilizations. These struggles contribute to the construction of Indigenous public image and political repertoires.

## 6. Final considerations

This study analyzed elements indicative of the construction of political legitimacy by the Tentehar Indigenous leader Sonia Bone Guajajara and examined strategies involved in the construction of her public images. In her accounts, interviews, and public statements where Sonia speaks about herself, it was observed that she adopts self-presentation strategies through the production of narratives. In these processes, she mobilizes a diverse array of repertoires: communication networks with advisory roles, Indigenous communicators and journalists, the construction of public profiles on the internet, interviews with personalities considered influential, celebrities, politicians, artists, environmental activists, among others, and the development of political campaigns and Indigenous advocacy agendas. Throughout her trajectory, Sonia employs strategies of notabilization, presenting herself in

the way she wishes to be seen: qualified, distinct, and remarkable.

However, within media, activist, political, and academic spheres, Sonia's personality has been associated with qualities such as influence, distinction, rarity, acumen, and adaptability to new instruments and possibilities of mobilization in both the political and media arenas. Due to her legitimacy and public recognition across various spaces, Sonia employs strategies that allow her to bring visibility to her own agendas and/or to those of Indigenous political and social movements. These agendas form an essential part of the construction of Sonia Guajajara's public image.

The case analyzed here allows for reflection not only on Sonia's trajectory but also on the broader participation of Indigenous women in politics, specifically from the state of Maranhão. The analysis of Sonia's case enables the establishment of a connection between political mobilizations within Indigenous movements and developments in electoral partisan politics, including the launching of women's campaigns for parliamentary seats and the indigenization of politics. This discussion is situated, following Tilly, within the broader research demand concerning social movements, in this case, Indigenous movements, and their relationships with political institutions, including Indigenous organizations themselves, their relational networks with other organizations, political parties, and various collectives, particularly NGOs concerned with environmental causes.

It is important to emphasize that the empirical investigation conducted for the preparation of this article does not exhaust the available corpus of sources on Sonia Guajajara. Thus, it does not aim to account for her broader political trajectory, nor

to examine exhaustively the social conditions that enabled her rise as a political leader. Instead, the focus was placed on specific aspects, such as the agendas of territorial demarcation and forest protection, which we consider central for reflecting on the processes of constructing her political legitimacy.

Methodologically, this study presents a two-fold challenge. On one hand, research based solely on digital sources challenges the researcher to engage with new methodologies; on the other, it contributes to the visibility of Indigenous movements in media and social networks, spaces traditionally considered external to these actors. It is also worth noting the limitations inherent to this type of research, since the use of secondary sources does not allow for the observation of the backstage dynamics involved in the production of advisory work, speeches, interviews, profiles, and digital media content. This remains, therefore, an open field for further investigation and future contributions.

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