



Gender and Expatriation: Overcoming Barriers and Building Careers in an International Environment

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the intersection between gender and the labor market, focusing on the experiences of South American women, especially Brazilians, who hold management positions in Sweden. The research explores the influences of gender and race on the career paths of these professionals in a context perceived as more gender-equal. Still, it presents challenges related to the intersection of identities, as they are non-European women. By addressing expatriation, the study highlights the difficulties women face in international careers, such as cultural differences and barriers to career advancement. Additionally, it examines gender inequalities in the workplace, often associated with social norms that reinforce traditional roles. The literature review includes discussions on the underrepresentation of women in expatriate positions and leadership roles, indicating that such gaps are more related to organizational policies than a lack of interest or ability among women. This study aims to contribute to understanding gender dynamics in contexts of international mobility and to support the creation of strategies that promote inclusion and gender equity in global corporate environments.

Keywords:

Gender, gendered organization, expatriation, gender inequality, international mobility, glass ceiling

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I dedicate this work to my grandmothers, women of courage and resilience, who, in their time and social context, did not have the opportunity to pursue an education or a career as I have. Their strength and spirit inspire me deeply and remind me of the importance of building a more inclusive future for all women.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender relations have been widely discussed in the context of labor market dynamics, where inequalities persist that directly affect the opportunities and employment conditions for men and women. Understanding how gender and race influence the experiences, opportunities, and access barriers women face in international mobility processes and their challenges is central to this debate. Analyzing these topics is essential to understanding how social and economic norms shape gender interactions in the professional environment.

Thus, this work aims to analyze the intersection between gender and the labor market, focusing on South American Brazilian women holding managerial positions in Sweden. Despite the perception of greater gender egalitarianism in the country, distinct challenges persist, especially regarding the intersection of being a non-European woman. Throughout the research, we will reveal the multifaceted challenges that expatriate women face, such as issues related to cultural differences and career progression. Additionally, the research aims to present perspectives on women's experiences and the organization's influence and thus contribute to formulating strategies that support foreign women in pursuing successful careers in a new cultural environment.

When examining the intersection between gender and the labor market, disparities in occupational relationships between men and women are evident. These gender inequalities are reflected in various aspects, such as labor force participation and occupational segregation, with men and women directed into distinct roles within the market (Degraff & Anker, 2004, p. 164).

Gender inequalities present in society are reflected in professional environments, often reinforcing traditional roles of women as primary caregivers and responsible for domestic and family harmony. This reality places them in a secondary position in the labor market. At the same time, men are predominantly seen as the main providers, responsible for the financial and structural support of the family (Abramo, 2010).

The practice of sending employees to work in foreign countries, known as expatriation, involves a commitment to living and performing professional activities in a culturally different environment (Caligiuri, 2000, p. 62).

Studies on expatriation emphasize the growing importance of global mobility in advancing one's career and taking on strategic management and decision-making roles. Expatriation typically involves transferring employees abroad, either temporarily or permanently, to perform tasks at the company's headquarters or branches. This international experience is a valuable opportunity for skill development and professional growth. However, studies have underexplored the specific possibilities and limitations of international careers for women (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). Beyond acquiring knowledge and experience, expatriation is a key pathway for developing global leaders, offering professionals the chance to enhance their skills and competencies while navigating the challenges of an international career (Lima & Braga, 2010).

International studies indicate that the reasons behind the low representation of women in expatriations compared to the number of men suggest that gender inequality acts as a barrier to accessing these international experiences for women (Polson, 2016; Domínguez et al., 2019).

Adler's (1984) pioneering study sparked debates in the 1980s by highlighting the scarcity of women in international management positions in large companies. Initially, the research examined the premise that women would not be interested in expatriation due to family commitments. However, a survey of MBA students in North America found no evidence to support this hypothesis. Adler then explored the bias of host country nationals towards female managers but found that, in fact, they were receptive to female leadership. Additionally, Adler analyzed the reluctance of certain companies to recruit women for expatriation, which could limit their international career opportunities. This point proved partially true, as many organizations hesitated to send women on international assignments. Adler concluded that the shortage of women in expatriate positions is more related to organizational policies than to a lack of interest or ability on the part of women.

Billing and Alvesson (2014) argue that the low presence of women in management roles is influenced by complex and interconnected factors, such that analyzing each in isolation does not provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon. Many studies indicate no

significant differences between men and women regarding leadership capabilities and intellectual skills, and psychological research reveals that gender differences are minimal or non-existent. Thus, the scarcity of women in leadership positions seems to be more associated with structural and social factors rather than individual or psychological limitations of women.

Gender inequalities present in society are reflected in professional environments, often reinforcing traditional roles of women as primary caregivers and responsible for domestic and family harmony. This reality places them in a secondary position in the labor market. At the same time, men are predominantly seen as the main providers, responsible for the financial and structural support of the family (Abramo, 2010).

Therefore, this thesis aims to deepen the understanding and stimulate debate regarding the underrepresentation of women in international management positions. The research aims to provide a more comprehensive view of the factors contributing to gender inequality in international management contexts and offer insights to support formulating more inclusive and equitable policies and practices in the global corporate environment.

1.1 Problem statement and research question

The globalized world has significantly increased individual movement (Czaika & Haas, 2018). Salt (1992) argued that the contemporary pattern of labor migration reflects the globalization of the world economy and labor markets. More and more countries are participating in global migration systems, leading to the term "the globalization of international labor migration."

A recent study by Mercer on international assignment practices (2023) revealed that the global average of women designated for such roles (20%) is still far from reaching parity, with regional percentages of 25% in North America, 22% in Europe, 17% in Latin America, and 13% in Asia (Meier, 2023).

Analyzing the trajectory of expatriate women, their aspirations, challenges, and opportunities, especially those who have overcome barriers and achieved positions where they are often underrepresented, is essential for understanding the dynamics behind the underrepresentation of women in international management roles. By exploring the motivations of these women,

such as the desire for new experiences, career development, or cultural immersion, it is possible to gain insights into the factors that drive them to choose international mobility. This investigation identifies the barriers, challenges, and structural and cultural factors that influence this underrepresentation, contributing to a deeper debate on gender equality and creating opportunities in the global corporate environment.

The research focuses on understanding the difficulties and perceptions of achievements and successes that characterize their trajectories. Thus, the following research question was established: How do cultural dilemmas, gender dynamics, and organizational influences intersect to shape non-European expatriate women's experiences and career trajectories in Sweden?

Sub-questions:

1. What motivates non-European women to seek international career opportunities and expatriation in Sweden?
2. What are the main perceived challenges for non-European expatriate women in their adaptation process and professional integration within Swedish environments?
3. How do family dynamics affect non-European expatriate women's career progression and well-being in Sweden?
4. Which organizational factors, such as diversity initiatives, support programs, and cultural norms, contribute to or alleviate the challenges faced by non-European expatriate women in Swedish workplaces?
5. What opportunities do non-European women perceive in pursuing expatriation and career advancement in Sweden, and how do these experiences influence their professional growth and personal development?

1.2 Objective of the thesis

This study investigates women's perceptions of challenges and opportunities they face in management positions during the expatriation process, focusing on career progression and organizational influence. It explores the motivations for pursuing a new international position, the main obstacles, and the opportunities encountered during the transition, including cultural, emotional, family, and career-related issues.

1.3 Justification

In the context of increasing globalization, it is essential to understand how cultural differences, gender dynamics, and career aspirations interact to promote more inclusive workplaces. Expatriate women operate at a complex intersection of cultural norms, organizational structures, and social expectations, profoundly shaping their professional experiences.

Moreover, the results of this research will be relevant to studies and organizations worldwide that seek to position themselves as diverse and inclusive. Understanding the complexities involved in international labor migration is crucial for advancing global gender equity, providing valuable insights for building work environments that recognize and value the diversity of experiences and perspectives.

2. THEORY

2.1 Expatriate women

Freitas (2000) defines expatriation as transferring a professional from a company to a unit in another country for a determined or undetermined period. Since the 1980s, research has anticipated that the next generation of executives would require international experience to reach high organizational levels. After World War II, with the expansion of U.S. companies, managers were transferred to implement new businesses globally. Other configurations, such as inpatriates, flexpatriates, and global citizens, illustrate different overseas experiences, varying in duration and connection to organizations (Fraga et al., 2020).

Ramazani *et al.* (2019) emphasize that globalization has significantly transformed global markets in the last two decades, requiring multinational companies to adapt to maintain competitive advantage. These companies have struggled to adapt to the constantly changing business environment, leading them to internationalize their operations gradually. During expansion and consolidation periods, the demand for international managers has increased as organizations continue to globalize their activities. Furthermore, rapid technological advancements and the advent of artificial intelligence encourage companies to select the best talents to offer global expertise, often through expatriates, especially when local talent is insufficient. Thus, many multinationals urgently need to develop international expertise within their management teams to sustain their global strategies.

Despite the significant presence of women in entry-level positions within organizations, it is noted that they experience a hierarchical funnel leading to higher management roles. This commonly invisible barrier, which prevents women from advancing up the corporate ladder - generally associated with greater prestige and salary- is known as the glass ceiling or indicative of a labyrinth (Ramazani *et al.*, 2019).

Carly Speranza's studies (2017) point out how women in expatriate leadership positions can reduce the gender barriers faced in multicultural environments through specific leadership behaviors, such as competence, respect demonstration, and active listening. These behaviors allow expatriate leaders to gain confidence, establish relationships, and dismantle existing biases against women leaders.

Speranza (2017) highlights that, despite facing challenges like gender and cultural biases, expatriate women who employ these practices stand out and are seen as effective leaders. By adapting their leadership approaches to the cultural context, they not only overcome gender barriers but also transform the perception of women in leadership positions. These behaviors help women lead successfully abroad and contribute to the social deconstruction of gender biases.

The study by Janssens et al. (2006) explores how successful expatriate women build effective professional identities while facing issues of gender, hierarchy, and culture. Women are presented as active agents who strategically utilize their identities to thrive in predominantly male environments. The study highlights that they interpret and strategically position themselves in interactions with men in international organizational contexts, using their hierarchical position, gender, or culture to overcome prejudices and gain respect. These women transform barriers into opportunities, manipulating stereotypes and competencies to strengthen their professional identities and create more space for female leadership in multicultural environments.

Although there is an increase in studies focused on non-traditional expatriates, considering different family backgrounds, there is also a predominance of studies addressing the importance of family as a stable bond and source of support during expatriation, considering the need for acculturation in the host country. Cases of husbands accompanying their wives during expatriation are rarely portrayed in the literature. Considering that the population of spouses is predominantly female, stereotypes and biases depend on the country to which the family is expatriated (Nunes & Casaca, 2015).

It is recommended that employees and their accompanying family members receive training and support throughout the expatriation process, both during the relocation and upon return to their home country. It is common for accompanying spouses, regardless of gender, to pause their careers to support their partner or explore new opportunities. Some studies suggest that sensitivity, cooperation, active listening, compassion, and an emphasis on harmony—traditionally stereotyped as feminine qualities—could benefit performance in international assignments. However, there is evidence that instead of valuing these qualities, expatriate women often need to adopt behaviors aligned with managerial masculinity, reflecting the dominant gender structures in the corporate environment (Fraga, 2020).

Regarding family dynamics, Nunes and Casaca (2015) emphasize the importance of family situations in international experiences, highlighting that it affects both the decision to accept an international mobility opportunity and the unfolding and success of that process. In contexts where both partners have professional ambitions, an international move can significantly affect their personal and professional lives. The authors note that, in many cases, a woman's career is placed on the back burner in relation to a man's professional development, which complicates the management of these situations. This difficulty is particularly exacerbated when expatriate women are mothers of young children, as the demands of balancing family and professional life are even greater, intensifying the conflicts between these two aspects.

According to Ramazani *et al.* (2019), the PwC report “Modern Mobility: Moving Women with Purpose” (2016) reveals a significant disconnect between women's expectations and companies' approaches to female expatriation. The research shows that women represent an average of 20% of expatriates, highlighting the need for multinationals to reconsider the view that the requirements for international assignments are exclusively male. The demand for international assignments among women has never been higher; 71% of the 9,000 Generation Y women surveyed in over 70 countries desire to work abroad, and 84% consider international experience crucial for career progression. Limiting international management to one gender is an outdated approach that does not reflect the diversity of the modern workforce, resulting in a lack of diversity and, consequently, less effective decisions.

Linehan and Scullion (2004) highlight the challenges expatriate women face in Europe, emphasizing gender barriers in organizational cultures and host countries that limit leadership opportunities. Women excel in building relationships, which helps overcome these barriers, but support networks and organizational policies are crucial for career development.

Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) identify four factors impacting female expatriation success: personal traits, organizational and family support, and host country attitudes. Organizational support includes training, cultural preparation, and relocation assistance, while family support, especially from spouses, is vital.

Despite efforts to show that women succeed abroad, gender differentiation persists, affecting opportunities (Freitas, 2000). Gender inequality remains widespread, including pay gaps and underrepresentation in senior roles (Calás *et al.*, 2014). Acker (2009) adds that while women

are advancing in education and professions, leadership roles still elude them, particularly for women from racial minorities.

2.2 The glass ceiling

The glass ceiling remains a major obstacle for women seeking leadership positions, as invisible barriers persist despite qualifications and performance. Women not only face gender discrimination but also encounter a lack of organizational support and an absence of clear equality policies. Breaking this ceiling requires more than just qualifications; companies must actively implement policies promoting equal opportunities and visibility for women. Additionally, fostering a cultural shift that challenges gender stereotypes and embraces diversity in leadership is essential for meaningful progress (Kiaye & Singh, 2023).

According to Crenshaw (1989), women face not only gender discrimination but also other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism. In the corporate context, the phenomenon of the glass ceiling reflects these dynamics, limiting the professional advancement of women, especially those who are black or from other minorities, regardless of their qualifications and competencies. Studies indicate that the presence of this invisible ceiling significantly affects women's well-being at work, contributing to feelings of devaluation and constant stress arising from structural barriers to career progression. Women who manage to advance to managerial positions often face ongoing obstacles that men in the same positions do not experience, reinforcing the need for policies that address the multiple layers of discrimination within organizations (Crenshaw, 1989).

At the organizational level, the study by Elacqua et al. (2009) examines how managers' beliefs and gender stereotypes, combined with the lack of effective organizational policies, perpetuate the "glass ceiling" that limits women's advancement to leadership positions. The absence of female leadership role models and diversity policies exacerbates the cycle of exclusion, directly impacting women's professional development. Furthermore, unconscious biases in recruitment and promotion practices reinforce these barriers, creating a work environment that discourages qualified women from aspiring to positions of power, resulting in their ongoing underrepresentation in decision-making roles. The study suggests structural interventions, such as training to eliminate biases and mentorship policies, are necessary to promote gender equity within organizations.

A set of factors can help explain the existence of the glass ceiling. Among them are gender stereotypes, which fail to recognize women as possessing characteristics attributed to leadership roles. These stereotypes perpetuate distrust in women's competence and the idea that balancing domestic duties and motherhood is incompatible with the investment required by leadership and entrepreneurship positions (Dantas et al., 2010).

Researchers such as Domínguez et al. (2019) discuss how these invisible barriers become even more complex when they interact with the local culture of the destination country. In many cases, gender expectations and norms vary considerably across different cultures, creating an even more challenging environment for women seeking to occupy leadership positions as expatriates. Cultural bias and a lack of adequate institutional support are also cited as factors contributing to the perpetuation of the "glass ceiling" in this context.

Babic and Hansez (2021) explore the causes and effects of the glass ceiling on female managers, highlighting how cultural, organizational, and individual factors, including social norms and gender stereotypes, limit women's professional growth by assigning them primary responsibility for domestic tasks. Organizational policies often lack flexibility, intensifying these barriers. The study also shows how the glass ceiling affects the work-family balance, leading to stress, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction, which can result in burnout or even exiting the labor market. It emphasizes the profound impact of inadequate organizational support and societal expectations on women's leadership development.

According to Magalhaes (2000), throughout their careers, as they advance to leadership positions, women frequently face the "glass ceiling." One of the greatest challenges is the social pressure surrounding motherhood, which demands a balance between professional and family responsibilities, often generating feelings of guilt and emotional overload. Furthermore, the traditional concept of leadership values heroic and assertive traits, typically associated with masculinity, marginalizing qualities such as empathy, collaboration, and flexibility, often viewed as feminine and undervalued in the corporate environment.

According to studies, the glass ceiling also reflects profound organizational dynamics that affect women's career trajectories. These invisible barriers are internalized from an early age, leading many to believe they must meet all the requirements of a position to consider themselves qualified. At the same time, men often feel prepared even without fulfilling all criteria. Research such as that of Rocha (2000) shows that the issue is not a lack of

self-confidence but insecurity about how their skills are perceived by others. This leads to a more cautious posture, limiting their applications for new opportunities. To overcome these barriers, organizations must value women's contributions and promote a supportive culture that encourages diversity of experiences and the confidence to pursue leadership roles.

As women try to advance in their careers, they encounter the same obstacles as their predecessors, creating a continuous cycle of distrust and underrepresentation that hinders real transformation in the corporate landscape (Rocha, 2000). Thus, to overcome these obstacles, organizations need to adopt inclusive practices that promote constructive feedback, value diverse leadership styles, and offer policies that facilitate work-life balance, especially for women facing the dual burden of work and motherhood (Magalhães, 2000).

In addition to the glass ceiling, which limits women's career progression, there is the concept of the "glass floor," which refers to less visible obstacles affecting women already established in their careers, restricting their growth. These obstacles include subtle discrimination, such as lack of recognition, exclusion from support networks, and the perception that their skills are less valued than those of men. Gender stereotypes fuel the glass floor and creates environments where women must constantly prove their worth, resulting in stress and difficulties in advancing their careers (Rocha, 2000).

Despite these challenges, researchers argue that the glass ceiling is not an insurmountable barrier, as organizational policies and support programs, such as mentoring and expatriate networks, can help mitigate obstacles. By promoting gender diversity and implementing concrete measures, global companies can create a more equitable environment for career advancement. While some women have successfully overcome these barriers, gender inequality in international leadership remains a significant issue. Cultural norms in host countries often shape perceptions of female leaders, and traditional expectations can hinder their integration and acceptance, further complicating their advancement (Domínguez et al., 2019).

It is increasingly necessary to see women challenging and redefining traditional beliefs, but this requires more than individual strength. Structural changes are essential to foster culturally diverse and inclusive cultures, promoting gender equality (Romero, 2009). Business environments often reflect societal structures, so companies must evolve their cultures to give women the visibility, opportunities, and equal participation they deserve. Intersectionality

further amplifies these barriers, as overlapping social markers create additional layers of prejudice. To drive meaningful change, it is crucial to include all women and recognize their unique contributions to cultural, economic, and social progress (Romero, 2009).

In the context of globalization and professional mobility, women face specific challenges in reconciling their personal and professional identities with invisible barriers that limit their growth. The article "Identity, Glass Borders, and Globally Mobile Female Talent" by Kirk (2019) explores "glass borders," subtle barriers that hinder women's advancement in international careers, similar to the "glass ceiling." However, it focuses on gender and cultural challenges in global markets.

These "glass borders" limit women's access to international opportunities due to cultural norms and gender biases. These manifest in inadequate corporate policies, a lack of support networks abroad, and unequal social expectations regarding women's roles. Female global mobility involves not only qualifications or performance but also how these women's identities are perceived in their organizations and societies.

The article also addresses the identity of globally mobile women, showing that the intersection of gender identity, culture, and career can be both a conflict and a source of resilience. Women in international positions often need to adapt their identities to new cultural norms and professional challenges, which can be more difficult due to restrictive expectations regarding behavior and family responsibilities (Kirk, 2019).

2.3 Intersectionality

Collins and Bilge (2020) argue that intersectionality is a tool for understanding and analyzing the world's complexity, highlighting that isolated factors do not fully explain living conditions. Race, gender, and social class, for example, should be understood in relation to power dynamics, such as racism, sexism, and class exploitation. According to them, power operates in four interconnected domains: interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural. Using intersectionality as an analytical approach, six main ideas emerge: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice, which help to better interpret global inequalities by considering the impact of neoliberalism, nationalism, and capitalism (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

The concept of intersectionality, which examines the overlap of social identities and the systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination that interconnect, is fundamental to understanding why women, especially those from marginalized groups, are often considered "lesser beings." Women do not only face gender discrimination; they often suffer from the overlap of other forms of oppression, such as racism, class inequality, ableism, or homophobia. This intersectionality creates a scenario in which oppression is multiplied, reinforcing the idea of female inferiority (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality can also clarify how a country or state perceives a social problem and how it attempts, or fails, to address it; that is, what the country's public policies, political strategies, and laws are. It is essential, however, to mention that, according to Collins and Bilge (2020), intersectionality is not a finished framework that can be applied to a specific project, as its use can present different forms. Generalizing intersectionality based on a specific case may result in losing the discovery process that underlies the actual use of intersectional frameworks. The authors pointed out that intersectionality can suggest critical inquiry and critical praxis. They state that in practice, critical inquiry and praxis as organizational principles are interconnected, despite being theoretically distinct. Intersectionality, as critical inquiry, uses intersectional frameworks to study social phenomena, while, as critical praxis, it aims to transform power relations. It is seen as a tool that connects theory and practice, empowering communities and individuals (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Ahmed (2012) argues that institutions often use diversity to manage conflicts but frequently ignore power and historical context issues. Citing Mohanty, she criticizes diversity as a "benign" discourse that depoliticizes intersectionality, turning it into a superficial concept that fails to address structural inequalities. For example, in many companies, diversity campaigns may focus on increasing the number of women or people of different ethnicities in the workforce without considering deeper issues such as wage disparity, institutional racism, or sexism in the workplace. Thus, intersectionality, which should expose the complex power relations between race, gender, class, and other factors, is depoliticized. The concept is reduced to a slogan that ignores the oppressions experienced by marginalized groups, losing its critical and transformative potential.

In the text "Regimes of Inequality: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations," Joan Acker (2006) defines intersectionality as the interconnection of social categories such as race, gender, and class that overlap to create complex systems of discrimination. Intersectionality is

essential for understanding how inequalities are structured and maintained within organizations. Acker introduces the “Regimes of Inequality” concept to describe organizational processes that systematically reinforce class, gender, and racial inequalities. These inequalities are rooted in organizational structures and influence workers' experiences and opportunities.

The author emphasizes that in organizations in the U.S. and Europe, the highest prestige positions are dominated by white men. At the same time, women and people of color are often relegated to lower-prestige positions or excluded from power. Organizational practices, such as hiring networks and flexibility programs aimed at women, reinforce existing inequalities. While many companies promote diversity, Acker (2006) points out that this is often superficial and does not address the underlying causes of inequalities. She also suggests that significant changes only occur when social movements and external legislative support combine, highlighting that inequalities persist even with equal pay policies, especially in subsidiaries in developing countries (Acker, 2006).

Regarding the practical aspects of implementing organizational change, Kumra and Manfredi (2012) state that companies must constantly change and adapt to the internal and external environment to survive. The authors propose triggers for organizational change: globalization and intense global competition, legislation and government policies, demands for consumer satisfaction, and flexibility in organizational structures.

The studies by Metcalfe and Rees (2010) reveal that globalization, far from being gender-neutral, perpetuates structural inequalities, especially in developing regions. The organizational practices of transnational corporations and development agencies are influenced by gender norms, reinforcing economic and social inequalities. The authors advocate for awareness of human rights and gender equality, promoting strategies to eradicate these inequalities and ensure a fairer human development. Furthermore, Kumra and Manfredi (2012) emphasize that the effective implementation of diversity in companies requires support from senior leaders, a clear strategy, and ongoing review and measurement of policies. This implementation relies on extensive and continuous communication among different company areas, with involvement from all levels, starting from top leadership, in diversity programs.

Makkonen's (2002) concept of the "vicious circle of discrimination" illustrates how stereotypes and prejudices lead to discrimination, resulting in social and economic

inequalities that, in turn, reinforce those same stereotypes. Marginalized groups, such as women, face barriers in the labor market and education, limiting their mobility and reinforcing perceptions of inferiority. This is evident in practices that devalue their work and leadership, keeping them in professionally and domestically subordinate roles. Structural machismo in social, cultural, and economic institutions perpetuates these inequalities, despite progress like increased representation and feminist movements. The "double shift" further deepens this inequality by disproportionately assigning domestic responsibilities to women. Without structural changes, the cycle of discrimination continues.

Historically, feminism has centered on the perspectives of white, heterosexual, middle-class women, excluding Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and lower-class women, whose oppressions stem from intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Ribeiro, 2018). This exclusion spurred movements like Black and Decolonial feminism to amplify these women's voices. In the 1980s, critiques of early feminism challenged its focus on gender and power, highlighting the limits of liberal feminism, especially for Black women and those from the "third world" (Crenshaw, 2002).

These critiques have expanded feminist theory and activism, which now address multiple markers of inequality. The concept of intersectionality, particularly in dialogues between the U.S. and Europe, has gained prominence. However, its theoretical development and historical trajectory remain underexplored. There is a need to highlight women's intellectual and political struggles throughout history, as they have long fought to be recognized as political subjects and creators of counter-hegemonic discourses (Hirata, 2014).

Understanding discrimination as an intersectional problem requires highlighting racial or gender dimensions as factors that contribute to the production of subordination, as only then is it possible to conduct a thorough analysis and formulate more effective intervention proposals. (Crenshaw, 2002).

2.4 Organization and gender

This study will examine the concepts of gender and sex and their connection to the labor market and organizations. Kumra et al. (2013) outline two key approaches: the traditional view sees sex as biological and gender as a social category, treating organizations as neutral; the second approach, "gendered organizations," views gender as a social construct shaped by

organizational dynamics. Since the 1970s, studies shifted from focusing on sex differences to analyzing how organizational practices perpetuate gender inequalities. This critical approach suggests that organizations are not neutral but spaces where power relations and gender inequalities are continuously reproduced. Thus, contemporary research on gendered organizations goes beyond analyzing individual differences and focuses on how organizational practices create and sustain power relations that reinforce gender inequality.

Robin J. Ely and Debra Meyerson (2000) analyze three traditional approaches to gender in organizations: "fixing women," which focuses on helping women compete with men; "valuing the feminine," which acknowledges gender differences but risks reinforcing stereotypes; and "creating equal opportunities," which removes structural barriers but leaves underlying practices intact. They propose a new approach, "Frame 4," which views gender as complex social relations reinforcing male dominance. This approach seeks to transform oppressive practices through continuous change in formal policies and informal interactions that perpetuate inequality, aiming to eliminate gender as a power axis and foster a more equitable organizational culture, especially in leadership roles where women, particularly non-white women, face significant barriers.

The concept of "gendered organizations," developed by Joan Acker (1990) in her article "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," proposes that organizations are structured and shaped by gender norms and are not neutral entities. The division of labor, hierarchies, and interactions within them follow gender expectations that often favor men and marginalize women, reinforcing traditional roles and perpetuating inequalities. In a gendered organization, functions and tasks align with expectations of masculinity and femininity, resulting in disparities in power and opportunities. These organizations may practice exclusions such as wage inequality and specific barriers for women in leadership positions. Acker's conclusion highlights that to transform these dynamics, it is necessary to challenge and restructure these practices, creating more equitable and inclusive environments.

Gender inequality is widespread, affecting various sectors, including the corporate world. It is recognized as an ethical concern and a barrier to corporate performance and sustainable development. Despite progress, women, particularly in leadership, continue to be underrepresented globally (Billing & Alvesson, 2014).

Women entering international management face structural and cultural barriers. Linehan and Scullion (2000) identify three main challenges: gender stereotypes linking leadership to masculinity, lack of organizational support (e.g., flexible policies, relocation help), and restricted networking, limiting access to international roles. Organizations must revise recruitment, promotion, and support policies to address these.

Johansson and Abrahamsson (2017) argue that gender inequality impacts workplace learning, with factors like task segregation and the perception of “work” as neutral reinforcing inequalities. Companies must tackle informal practices that sustain power imbalances and ensure competency-driven development for effective organizational learning.

Calás et al. (2013) highlight how early organizational research introduced sexual roles to evaluate women as leaders, later shifting to gender and social roles. These frameworks outline differences in men’s and women’s social influence and achievements, perpetuating gender roles that describe and prescribe expected behaviors.

Gender inequality is further intensified by intersections with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, affecting individual and organizational outcomes. Gender diversity enhances performance, innovation, decision-making, and governance (Verma and Sandhar, 2020), aligning with global sustainability goals, such as the UN’s Goal 5 on gender equality (United Nations, 2015). However, organizations still face systemic barriers to achieving diversity.

Contemporary women have made significant strides in education and qualifications, excelling in various fields and occupying important positions in the job market; however, they continue to face challenges in achieving professional equality. Pay disparity and underrepresentation in leadership roles remain persistent issues, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equity in the workplace. Women, despite being equally qualified as their male counterparts, still contend with systemic barriers that limit their advancement while also managing the "double shift" of balancing work and domestic duties. Efforts toward gender equality are advancing through diversity policies and feminist movements, but achieving full equity requires ongoing cultural and institutional changes (Verma & Sandhar, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology that underpins this thesis. First, the adopted methodological stance will be discussed. Then, the method used, the data collection criteria, and the selection of interviewees will be described, as well as the data analysis process illustrated.

3.1 Methodological foundation – social constructivism

Social Constructivism has gained prominence as a critical approach in various fields of knowledge. It argues that many aspects of social and scientific reality are constructed through human interaction and not solely determined by natural factors. According to Detel (2015), the theory's core is that social actions are fundamental to producing and transforming social elements, such as beliefs, social relationships, and scientific facts.

In accordance with Chapter 1 of this work, this thesis aims to explore the interplay between gender and the labor market, focusing on South American women, specifically Brazilians, who hold management positions in Sweden.

The research seeks to highlight this phenomenon from the perspective of social constructivism. According to Detel (2015), the theory's core is that social actions are fundamental to producing and transforming social elements, such as beliefs, social relationships, and scientific facts. Constructivism holds that the categories people use to understand nature and social reality are, in essence, social products. These categories and the words chosen to describe them are shaped by the interaction between individuals in everyday life. Therefore, the categories and the language surrounding them are fundamental for a social constructivist researcher.

This study adopts a social constructivist approach, viewing knowledge as socially constructed rather than fixed. The practices, beliefs, and perceptions analyzed will be seen as shaped by social, cultural, and historical influences. This approach enables exploration of how social context and power dynamics influence the experiences of expatriate women.

3.2 Qualitative research

The topic will be investigated using qualitative research methods, as it is a complex social phenomenon that cannot be easily quantified or measured. In this case, the aim is to

understand the experiences and perspectives of expatriate women and how their cultural differences have affected their opportunities and professional advancement.

The qualitative approach emphasizes obtaining "contextual understanding," whereby researchers typically seek to comprehend "behavior, values, beliefs, and other factors within the specific context of their research" (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Consequently, qualitative research offers meaningful contextualization and elucidation for research and concepts related to non-European expatriate women.

Interviews offer the opportunity to establish an open and interactive dialogue, allowing both the interviewee and the researcher to influence the flow of the conversation. This flexibility enables the identification of emerging themes, which can be explored in greater depth as they surface during the discussion. This approach is particularly valuable when addressing topics such as cultural identity and career development in an international context, as it allows women to express their experiences in their own words, revealing how they navigate challenges related to integration, adaptation, and prejudice.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are well-suited for investigating subjective phenomena, such as perceptions of career advancement, workplace challenges, and the support—or lack thereof—found within organizations. Considering that this research aims to explore women's perspectives in international management positions, it is crucial to employ a method that allows for a contextual and personalized understanding of their experiences.

3.3 Data collection methods

This study aimed to interview participants who could provide rich and in-depth information on the topic at hand. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted, proving to be the most suitable approach. This method provided a guiding set of questions while allowing the necessary flexibility to explore interesting responses and adapt questions according to the interviewees' narratives.

Although there was already a prior understanding of the theories and concepts that facilitated a deductive analysis of diversity and inclusion, the semi-structured interviews opened the door to further investigating employees' experiences. Additionally, this methodology allowed the study to maintain a flexible structure, enabling follow-up questions in an interactive

manner and ensuring that the information obtained was sufficiently detailed (Bryman, 2008, p. 206:344), contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under analysis.

3.3.1 Selection of interviewees

To select the participants, the author searched among women known to her, leveraging her network as a Brazilian to secure the interviews. The material was chosen for its relevance to the research question, ensuring diversity and depth. Interviews were conducted and fully transcribed in Portuguese, preserving the nuances of the speech. The research question guided the entire process, ensuring focus and avoiding arbitrariness. The coding framework was developed using inductive and deductive approaches based on main categories and subcategories.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) non-European (Latin American) women who moved to Sweden for work in an international setting; 2) involvement in expatriation or international mobility; 3) holding management or highly qualified positions; 4) residing in Sweden for over two years.

Focusing on Latin American women is valuable due to their unique challenges related to both gender and cultural background. The distance between Latin America and Europe amplifies these difficulties, making their adaptation more complex and offering insights into strategies for overcoming such obstacles. Moreover, investigating women in management or highly qualified positions provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender, power, and cultural identity in international work environments. These women face issues of cultural integration and adaptation and challenge organizational and social norms regarding female leadership in a predominantly male context. This research contributes to the existing literature on leadership diversity and inclusion by highlighting the organizational factors that either facilitate or hinder the success of these professionals. Additionally, by choosing participants who have lived in Sweden for over three years, the study allows for a deeper exploration of how challenges and organizational support systems evolve over time, offering insights into both the short-term and long-term strategies these women develop to navigate and thrive in international environments. Below is the list of participants with their anonymous names and additional information:

NAME	POSITION	EXPATRIATION TIME	MARITAL STATUS DURING EXPATRIATION	CHILDREN
JOANA	MANAGER	4 YEARS	SINGLE	NO
CLARA	DIRECTOR	7 YEARS	MARRIED	YES
MARIA	MANAGER	3 YEARS	SINGLE	NO
RITA	MANAGER	5 YEARS	MARRIED	YES
ISABEL	MANAGER	4 YEARS	SINGLE	YES
ALICE	DIRECTOR	6 YEARS	MARRIED	NO
ANTONIA	GLOBAL ACCOUNT	7 YEARS	SINGLE	NO

The research delves into individual narratives, cultural backgrounds, organizational efforts, and support mechanisms to understand the multifaceted nature of expatriate women's experiences. Furthermore, based on their narratives, the investigation seeks to identify and incorporate organizational factors that influence their experiences.

3.4 Data collection

The qualitative research method used will be data collection through semi-structured interviews. The interviews will allow participants to express their opinions, experiences, and perceptions about living in a foreign country, the motivations that led them to move abroad, their experiences, obstacles, and any paths to achieve a new career.

For the interviews, an interview guide was prepared containing 25 (twenty-five) questions and 8 (eight) sub-questions (see APPENDIX 1). The author of this work conducted interviews, which were conducted online and lasted approximately 40 minutes each. The sub-questions in the interviews are formulated flexibly, arising based on the particularities and experiences of each interviewee. This approach allows the content explored to be tailored to individual narratives.

The data analysis approach of this thesis is structured in two phases. The first phase began with a review of the literature related to the topic while simultaneously starting the interviews. Subsequently, we proceeded with the transcription of the recordings. After each interview, based on the suggestion of my research advisor, we wrote about our perceptions of each interview. From the outset, we adopted the perspective that data analysis was a continuous and integrated process, occurring simultaneously with data collection.

After completing all the transcriptions in the second phase, we moved on to data coding. We opted for conceptual analysis to identify key concepts and their frequencies within the material.

The transcriptions were reviewed several times to identify categories that would help organize the material. The categorization was performed systematically, grouping information into major categories treated as empirical data. Additionally, we maintained flexibility during the coding process, allowing for adjustments and adding new categories as necessary. It is emphasized that the topics and themes were seen, subsequently questioned, and reformulated as the research developed.

4. UNVEILING STORIES: INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH EXPATRIATE WOMEN

In this section, we present the analysis of the interviews that were conducted. The main points addressed are: 1) understanding the reasons behind women's pursuit of international careers. 2) Analyzing the impact of host country cultures on expatriates' selection and future performance. 3) Evaluating the influence of family on the motivation of women to participate in expatriation missions. 4) Highlighting the positive aspects of expatriation. 5) Investigating the impact of corporate policies.

4.1 The process of achieving the position and their motivations

This section will analyze the trajectories of women who aim to achieve international positions. The interviews were conducted with women between 35 and 45 years old who hold management or director positions within the same company. At the time of their relocation to Sweden, three interviewees were married, four were single, and among the seven interviewees, only three had children (one single and two married).

Considering that the interviewees work for the same Swedish company, the identity of the respective company will be referred to as Company XYZ in this context. All interviewees had already worked at the Brazilian branch of the company before their transfer to Sweden, and three of them had prior international experience. At the time of the interviews, two of these women had returned to Brazil after spending two and five years in Sweden, respectively, while one interviewee was in the process of relocating to Spain, where she would take on a director position after eight years living in Sweden.

The trajectories of these women in starting their international careers were diverse. Some received direct offers from the company, while others took the initiative to actively seek such opportunities, either through their immediate supervisors or by directly applying for internal positions at the company's headquarters in Sweden. Some were transferred to roles related to their previous positions, while others assumed entirely new roles. In total, three of the interviewees (Silvia, Rita, and Joana – fictitious names) received invitations from the company for international positions. At the same time, in the other four cases, the employees

directly applied for positions in Sweden, which involved going through the entire selection process with the company's headquarters in Sweden.

The interview transcripts reveal valuable insights into the process of professional internationalization. All interviewees perceive expatriation as a fundamental step for advancing their careers, often seen by companies as an essential stage for reaching more strategic and higher-level positions.

In this context, the expatriation experience is viewed as a “toll” necessary for achieving greater organizational responsibilities, especially because the company's headquarters are in Sweden, where all strategic decisions are made, and the global networking network is concentrated. Employees like Joana illustrate this process of securing an international position, which requires planning and preparation and continuous support from their managers, who contribute to building a path focused on such roles over time. Joana mentions that she has always made her interest in an international position evident and has achieved the role after restructuring her department in Brazil. Although the international position was initially part of her career plan, she does not believe she will stay in Sweden for long. For her, this experience will be a means to advance her career in her home country.

Joana: In terms of ambition within the company I am in today, having this international experience is a ‘tool’ to reach higher, more strategic positions. So, if I want to reach those higher positions, I need to take this step outside the country. It was part of my plans, but not to stay long; I have not seen myself here for 10 years. It is like paying a toll to get where I want, in higher positions in my home country.

The interviewee, Clara, recounts her initiative to move to Sweden following previous discussions with her manager. Her involvement in international projects facilitated the process, which frequently brought her to Sweden and allowed her regular interactions with the local team, highlighting the importance of networking. In addition to these aspects, she emphasizes that her performance during the selection process and the reputation she built in the Americas were key factors that made the opportunity possible.

Clara: I had already been coming to Sweden quite often and knew the people here. That helped, but I think it was mainly my performance in the selection process and the reputation I built in the Americas that made my transfer easier.

The excerpt above highlights the importance of prior experience, professional connections, reputation within the corporate environment, and performance as factors that facilitate international mobility opportunities. Clara further emphasizes her perception that international experience is “highly valued” in Brazil and can significantly contribute to career advancement.

Clara: I think that if I went back to Brazil, I would be more valued, you know? And I believe that even now, with us going to Spain, having an international career greatly helps. In many aspects, because today, as I mentioned to you, I participated in a selection process, and they asked me: Oh! What is your experience with multicultural teams?’ I replied that not only do I have experience, but I also have lived through it, right? So, I think that gives a life portfolio and maturity that really helps in a career. In Brazil, this is even more valued.

Preparation for international roles also requires the development of specific skills. Improving language skills, maintaining consistent professional performance, and building a network within the company are crucial factors for accessing these opportunities, as demonstrated by the interviewees' experiences. In addition, as mentioned by Clara, self-awareness and the pursuit of a balance between personal and professional life emerge as fundamental elements for sustaining a long-term international career. Proactive employees, like Alice, show that seeking international opportunities, even without full support from the organization, can open new doors in one's career, expanding growth possibilities compared to remaining in the home country.

Alice: I always wanted an international career, so I sought to work in global companies. After four years in Brazil without any growth prospects, I realized that to reach a leadership position, I would have to look for opportunities abroad. When the position in Sweden came up, I took the initiative alone, without any support or encouragement, and applied for several positions. The whole process was an individual effort.

The case of Rita, one of the interviewees who was offered a position by the company, illustrates the importance of a well-structured career development plan that considers international experience as an essential component, supported by mentoring and training programs. According to the interviewee, such preparation ensures that employees are ready when a suitable international opportunity arises, maximizing the impact of these experiences

on their careers. Rita mentions that she received numerous offers throughout her career for international experience but only accepted on the fourth occasion.

Rita: Over the past 18 years, I have received three international offers that I declined due to important personal moments, such as pregnancy and marriage. When my second child turned one year old, I accepted the fourth offer, as I had already established a support network.

Antonia considered the opportunity as a chance to step out of her comfort zone and gain valuable global experience for her career and personal life.

Antonia: I believe that moving abroad provides professional and personal growth. My transfer to Sweden was an opportunity offered by the company, initially planned as a temporary experience of two or three years before returning to Brazil. However, Sweden became a part of my journey over time, especially after meeting my husband in my fourth year of expatriation, which led me to stay.

Clara shares that, beyond professional matters, her motivation was also the desire to provide a better future for her daughter and the political situation in her home country:

Clara: One of the motivations was the political situation in Brazil, which, if it did not improve, would affect social and economic conditions. With my young daughter, I decided raising her in a country with better opportunities would be better. In the past, I left Brazil without a job, which made my adaptation difficult. This time, I would only leave with a job, thinking more about my daughter's future than my own career, while keeping the same position in a better environment for her.

Isabel, a single mother living in Thailand, saw Sweden as an opportunity to improve her career and have more time to care for her daughter, so she decided to apply for a position there:

Isabel: After almost five years in Thailand, where I always planned to move to Sweden because of the Tetra Pak headquarters, I applied for a product manager position and was selected. The move was motivated both by my career and personal reasons. I had a daughter in Thailand, where the cost of living and schools was high.

The COVID lockdown also made me reconsider my priorities, and Sweden, with free schools and a more child-friendly environment, seemed like a better option.

4.1.1. Interpretation of the findings

The interviewees showed that there are different paths to gaining international experience. Some interviewees received offers directly from their companies, while others were proactive, seeking or applying for positions abroad.

Adler's pioneering study (1984) and the analysis of the interviews conducted with expatriate women in Sweden converge on several key points regarding the barriers and opportunities faced by women in international management roles. Adler highlighted that the scarcity of female expatriates was not due to a lack of interest or reluctance on the part of women to take on international commitments but rather to organizational policies that limited their opportunities. Similarly, in the interviews conducted with women, it was observed that the barriers to expatriation were less related to a lack of interest among women in pursuing a career in Sweden and more to the organizational and familial context.

While some were actively invited by their companies, such as Antonia, Rita, and Joana, four others, like Alice, took the initiative to apply on their own, overcoming the lack of initial encouragement. These experiences demonstrate that, in many cases, women show both interest and the ability to embrace an international career but must navigate organizational policies that do not always facilitate this path. Furthermore, the case of Joana, who considered expatriation a “toll” for advancing in her career, highlights that international experience is essential for rising to strategic positions, emphasizing the importance of institutional support to ease this process, as pointed out by Adler.

Additionally, an established professional network was crucial for many interviewees to secure their positions. International experience is seen not only as a requirement for promotions to higher positions but also as an opportunity to expand one's network, develop intercultural skills, and consequently achieve higher and more strategic roles.

Fraga's (2020) doctrine emphasizes the relevance of international experience as a fundamental component of professional and personal development in an increasingly globalized world, including the attainment of higher positions. Living abroad allows individuals to develop intercultural competencies, expand their networks, and acquire essential skills for navigating

diverse work environments. Moreover, Fraga (2020) argues that this experience is essential for shaping leaders capable of dealing with contemporary society's complex and interconnected challenges, making it a strategic investment for any professional seeking to stand out in a competitive job market. The interviewees acknowledge that international experience is a “toll” necessary for attaining higher and more strategic positions within the company. This confirms that expatriation is seen as essential for growth within global corporations, aligning with the view that international assignments are strategic components for advancing in careers, a point observed in the accounts of the interviewees, such as Clara, Joana, and Alice.

The study by Janssens et al. (2006) explores how expatriate women build effective professional identities while navigating issues of gender, hierarchy, and culture. Expatriation catalyzes empowerment, allowing women to challenge traditional norms and strengthen their intercultural skills. By negotiating the complexities of gender and culture, they achieve prominent positions and contribute to gender equity within organizations, inspiring future generations and promoting more inclusive and collaborative work environments.

4.2 Family support: When the decision to expatriate is a joint one

Family plays a crucial role in the experiences of individuals who move abroad in search of professional opportunities. In the interview conducted with Clara, she highlighted that her husband's support was essential throughout this process.

Clara: When I decided to apply, I spoke with him and said: 'If I enter the selection process, it is for real. And if I get accepted, we are going.' So, from the beginning, we had already decided that if I were approved, we would go together. He gave me 100% support throughout the entire process, from the application to each stage I faced. We planned everything together, celebrating each step I passed. When I received the offer and shared the news with the family, it was a moment we both shared. This support and involvement in every phase were fundamental.

The transcripts indicate that a husband's support and participation are significant factors in a married woman's decision to accept an international career opportunity. In the interview, Antonia, who moved while she was still single, comments that migrating with a husband,

especially if he is Brazilian, would make the situation much more complex, as he would likely take on a secondary role in the relationship.

Antonia: I built my international career as a single woman, and I believe this had a significant impact. When you are married and have children, the likelihood of taking a chance on an international experience is lower, especially if you need to convince your husband to take that step, which can be even more challenging if he is Brazilian due to the traditional expectation that the man should be the provider. In my case, being single made this decision much easier. I believe that for an executive woman, migrating with a husband can be much more complicated, as I mentioned, especially in the Brazilian context, where the man is still seen in most households as the primary provider.

On another note, some interviewees shared examples of husbands who provided significant support. Clara's husband managed to continue working remotely for his company in Brazil, which made their transition possible. Alice's husband, however, was initially unemployed in Sweden, so he tried to integrate himself and later found a job, contributing to his adaptation process.

These cases illustrate how a husband's willingness to adapt and support his wife's career can positively impact on the international relocation experience.

Such cases exemplify a positive reversal of traditional gender roles, where husbands support and adapt to their wives' international careers. These examples highlight the importance of an equitable and collaborative approach to women's professional success and family adaptation in global contexts by challenging conventional stereotypes. In this scenario, Rita addresses the need to confront traditional gender roles and expectations, given that her husband was the primary provider in Brazil. However, the couple developed a plan that worked well for their careers and family life.

Rita: At first, there was a conflict with my husband about him quitting his job to accompany me, especially because of the strong culture in Brazil that views the man as the primary provider. With the help of therapy, we worked through this concept and understood that we are a partnership where, at different times, one can focus on

their career while the other provides support. Expatriation also gave him the chance to reevaluate his path and seek a new professional purpose, something he always dreamed of but never had the opportunity to pursue.

Clara emphasizes the importance of family well-being during expatriation, highlighting that the integration and happiness of her daughter and husband are essential for professional and personal success abroad.

Clara: My priority was to ensure a good school for Laila and a soccer team for Cadi, as that would ensure my family's integration, allowing work to flow naturally. From the beginning, my concern was the family's adaptation since if they were not happy, I would return to Brazil. I believe this is a common concern among many women when considering a move.

The support of a network of friends in the new country is equally important. In the transcript from the interview with Antonia, who moved alone, she highlighted that her adaptation was quite difficult. However, she received the necessary support after joining a group of Brazilian friends who already lived in the country. This support network was crucial for her decision to stay.

4.2.1 Interpretation of the findings

Overall, the transcripts highlight that family considerations are essential for individuals or families moving internationally in search of work.

Family support, especially from partners in the case of married women, proved fundamental for married women to accept and adapt to career opportunities abroad. While some face challenges related to traditional gender roles, others benefit from the active support of their partners, facilitating both the transition and adaptation. The family situation plays a significant role in international experiences, influencing decision-making and the success of mobility. In cohabitation cases where both partners have professional aspirations, it is crucial to consider the implications of relocation on both personal and professional lives. Interviewees such as Alice and Clara highlighted the primary importance of their husbands' support throughout the process, reflecting the significance of family and support networks in the success of expatriation.

Nunes and Casaca (2015) emphasize the relevance of family support and the impact of family dynamics on international mobility decisions. According to these authors, expatriation can have significant implications for both members of the couple, especially when the husband is the primary provider.

In the cases of Clara, Alice, and Rita, the fact that their respective husbands provided support—and two of them even gave up their careers—demonstrates a reversal of traditional gender roles, where the man also adapts to the woman's career, challenging the traditional stereotypes mentioned in Abramo's (2010) text, which describes how the man is traditionally recognized as the primary provider while the woman is assigned the domestic role.

When mentioning that being single favored her expatriation, Antonia addresses a relevant issue discussed in the literature, specifically by Nunes and Casaca (2015), who highlight that married women face more challenges in accepting international assignments, especially when they need to negotiate with their partners. This dilemma is also reflected in the difficulties mentioned by Rita, whose husband had to confront the traditional provider role, even with the help of therapy, before finding a new personal purpose.

The doctrine of Nunes and Casaca (2015) elucidates that, although men face gender stereotypes and prejudices, especially depending on the destination country of expatriation, the accounts of Antonia and Rita suggest that the greatest challenge may be the internal resistance of the accompanying men to break paradigms and assume a secondary role, as well as dealing with structural machismo in the country of origin. Researchers such as Domínguez et al. (2019) add that these invisible barriers become even more complex when interacting with the local culture of the destination country. Gender expectations and norms vary across cultures, creating a more challenging environment for expatriate women seeking leadership positions. Furthermore, cultural prejudice and the lack of adequate institutional support are factors that perpetuate the "glass ceiling" in this context.

The emotional and practical support from husbands, like that of Clara and Alice, allows these women to maintain a balance between professional and family demands, challenging the "glass ceiling" and gender roles that limit women's opportunities, as described by Calás (2013).

The relationship between family dynamics and the international careers of expatriate women is a determining factor, as evidenced in the interviews and reinforced by Babic and Hansez (2021). This family support challenges the stereotype that the man is the primary provider, a concept deeply rooted in Brazilian culture, as mentioned by Antonia and Rita. The article precisely explores how gender stereotypes and family responsibilities can restrict women's professional growth opportunities. Rita, for example, reports that her husband had to confront the traditional provider role to find a balance that benefited their life and career trajectories. Rita's experience is an example of how flexibility and support within the relationship are necessary for women to overcome cultural and organizational barriers.

As women seek to advance in their careers, they face obstacles like those encountered by their predecessors, perpetuating a cycle of distrust and under-representation that hinders true change in the corporate landscape (Rocha, 2000).

4.3 Organizational Support: structures that facilitate the international path

In the corporate environment, organizations often provide support for international assignments, such as relocation costs, housing, and cultural training. For Silvia, this support was essential to accept the transfer to Sweden. However, interviewees noted that the level of support varied based on the contract. Most received assistance from a third-party company for visas and housing, but only two were satisfied with the service.

Support during international transitions varies among cases. Only two interviewees received cultural training, while most said help was limited to visas, documentation, and housing. Those with partners or children reported no additional assistance, like school enrollment or family services. Ultimately, only two interviewees, Rita and Antonia, reported satisfaction with the service.

Joana mentioned that mobility teams lacked cultural sensitivity and international experience, leading to inadequate support. Third-party companies provided only basic assistance without addressing cultural differences, impacting expatriates' experiences. Joana echoed these concerns, criticizing HR and third-party providers for failing to meet diverse expatriate needs.

Moving alone with her daughter, Isabel expected more practical help from the company. Instead, she relied on friends to navigate Sweden's educational system and find housing, highlighting insufficient support.

Isabel: When I arrived, I realized the rules had changed. Previously, those who moved received three months in a hotel and a sum of money to restart. Now, those who apply for the position only get one month in a hotel and no longer receive any money. The short accommodation period was challenging because it was difficult to find housing. Thanks to a friend's recommendation, I was lucky to find an apartment last week. The company did not offer support, and as a solo mother, balancing work and dealing with the bureaucracy of adaptation was complicated. However, friends helped with things like enrolling my daughter in school.

On the other hand, COMPANY XYZ appears to provide more comprehensive support. While support varied across cases, it was notably more thorough for two of the interviewees. Before accepting the international offer, Antonia, who was invited by the company itself for a position in Sweden, was given the opportunity to visit Sweden to familiarize herself with the country and its culture. Additionally, cultural training courses were provided to ease her adaptation and assistance in handling bureaucratic processes and securing housing. Antonia emphasized that this support was essential in smoothing her transition between countries.

Rita, who received the proposal directly from the company, also reported that the support offered was exceptional, both in preparation for the move and in returning to Brazil. The company organized visits to help choose housing, provided training on local culture, and handled all operational aspects, such as visas and insurance. Rita praised the support received, highlighting that it had exceeded his expectations in every aspect.

Rita: They took care of all the operational side, right? Visas, moving, documentation, insurance. From my point of view, both operationally and emotionally, with my family, I found it very important. When my son and I returned, he had many concerns about adapting to school, right? They helped with everything.

In summary, the company in Sweden offers various opportunities for women and expatriates, such as flexible work arrangements, diversity initiatives, professional development programs, and support during the expatriation process, as reported by several interviewees. However, the package of services can vary significantly from person to person. One of the main issues identified is the lack of preparation of third-party companies to handle cultural differences and the expectations of these employees. This lack of cultural sensitivity can hinder expatriates'

adaptation, compromise the integration process's effectiveness, and impact the expatriate's retention.

4.3.1 Interpretation of the findings

Organizational support during international assignments is crucial for expatriates' adaptation and success, particularly when facing cultural challenges. Interviews reveal that organizational support, or its lack, shapes expatriate women's professional and personal paths.

The interviews show wide variation in the support provided: some received robust assistance, while others were limited to basic bureaucratic help, such as visas and housing. This reflects an inequality in access to support, often influenced by whether the position was company-initiated.

Antonia's case illustrates strong organizational support, including cultural training and pre-visit trips to Sweden. Her experience highlights the importance of cultural preparation in reducing cultural barriers and enhancing integration. By contrast, Joana and Isabel reported dissatisfaction with third-party companies offering minimal assistance, emphasizing that deeper cultural understanding is often missing.

The disparity in support was even more pronounced for women with families. Success in international assignments depends not only on the expatriate but also on the integration of their family. Isabel, for instance, had to rely on friends to navigate school systems and housing due to insufficient company support.

Barriers for women in international management positions persist, largely due to inadequate organizational support. Linehan and Scullion (2000) argue that the absence of family support policies, flexibility, and networking opportunities limits women's leadership opportunities. Organizations must strengthen recruitment and promotion practices, offer family support, and create flexible work arrangements to overcome these barriers.

Acker's (1990) concept of "gendered organizations" explains how policies reflect masculine expectations, disadvantaging women seen as primary caregivers. This helps explain why broader support is often lacking for expatriate women.

Joana's experience underscores a gap in mobility teams' training, as companies overlook cultural differences' impact. In contrast, Rita praised the company's comprehensive support, facilitating professional and personal growth. Billing and Alvesson (2014) argue that women's leadership success depends on organizational contexts that support their development, linking structural and social factors to the scarcity of women in leadership roles. Domínguez et al. (2019) emphasize that invisible barriers, exacerbated by local cultural differences, contribute to the "glass ceiling" persistence for expatriate women.

4.4 Overcoming Obstacles: Personal and professional challenges of expatriation

This section will address the interviewees' main challenges and uncertainties while moving and adapting to life abroad. The interviews reveal that, besides practical barriers such as the climate and the distance from their support networks, cultural differences—especially regarding social interactions in Sweden - posed a recurring challenge. The participants shared how these factors influenced their experiences, from initial adaptation to integration in work and social environments, highlighting the strategies and resources used to overcome such obstacles.

4.4.1 Impact of climate and solitude

This section addresses the challenges expatriates face in adapting to Sweden's climate and culture. The interviews indicate that climatic and cultural differences significantly impacted the participants' well-being and integration, particularly the long and dark winter and the more reserved social interactions. Joana, for example, highlighted how the prolonged and gloomy winter months in Sweden posed a major obstacle for her. In addition to the climatic difficulties, she found it hard to make friends, especially as a single person. At the same time, most of her Brazilian colleagues were accompanied by their families: *Among our group of Brazilians, I am the only single one. We have different plans and priorities. This situation is quite relevant for a single person*, she said.

She concluded that while the country offers excellent conditions for families and children, the experience can be more challenging for single women who do not plan to have children: *I do not see myself here long-term because I find it quite lonely and difficult to socialize, which shocked me initially. So, staying here long-term does not make much sense to me. This personal issue weighs heavily and remains one of my biggest challenges* (Joana).

Clara also commented on the difficulty of adapting to the cold weather and the lack of warmth among people in Sweden, which resulted in loneliness and difficulty making friends, even in the workplace. Rita pointed out how the cloudy winter complicated her daily routine. Maria mentioned that the lack of sunlight depressed her and emphasized the cultural shock regarding local habits. Coming from Thailand, Isabel also faced challenges with the cold climate and difficulty integrating socially, describing Sweden as a "rather closed" country compared to Brazil and Thailand.

4.4.2 Cultural differences in the workplace

Antonia emphasized the cultural differences that caught her attention during the adaptation process, noting that Swedes' direct communication style contrasted with her more flexible approach. These cultural disparities between Latinos and Swedes, especially regarding flexibility and direct communication, highlight the importance of balancing these styles to optimize adaptation and achieve better professional outcomes in an international environment.

Antonia: Swedes tend to be more organized and direct, while we Latinos are more flexible. For example, I prefer to avoid direct responses like 'no,' opting to say 'I will try' to soften the situation with the client. I have received feedback from Swedes who prefer direct answers, believing it saves time. However, I see value in Brazilian flexibility; these cultural differences have been a mutual learning experience. I believe that balancing both approaches brings benefits to both sides.

Joana faced resistance from her Swedish colleagues regarding her more flexible and dynamic work approach, which she believes results from a cultural difference. *Swedes tend to be more cautious when making decisions, while I am used to a more ambitious and proactive environment.*

She also addressed the difference in team engagement and her cultural impact in management: *Ambition is viewed differently between Swedes and Brazilians. In my nearly 10 years of leadership experience, I was used to motivating Brazilians with positions, salaries, and bonuses. Here, professional growth cannot compromise work-life balance. Family is a priority for Swedes, which I greatly admire, although it was difficult to understand at first (Joana).*

Antonia and Joana's experiences illustrate how cultural differences between Latinos and Swedes, particularly concerning communication and management, can manifest in the professional environment. However, such situations also provide opportunities for mutual learning, highlighting the importance of integrating and balancing distinct styles to build a more effective and harmonious workplace where values like flexibility and organization can coexist productively.

Notably, some interviewees, like Joana and Alice, mentioned leading teams composed of individuals from diverse nationalities. However, when asked about providing cultural training to manage this diversity, both reported that they had never received such support from the company.

4.4.3 Family challenges and social integration

The transition in family and personal life brought significant challenges for the interviewees during the adaptation process in Sweden, particularly for those who came with children. They reported that the lack of a support network, as evidenced in the cases of Rita and Isabel, along with the need to adjust marital routines, as mentioned by Alice, highlights the overload they face, especially in balancing domestic and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, the mental load related to reconciling career and family life was crucial for Clara, reflecting the difficulties of adapting without adequate support. The interviews revealed that, in Brazil and Thailand, as reported by Isabel, it is common to rely on domestic services and nannies in daily family life. This type of support is widely accessible and culturally accepted, facilitating the balance between professional and personal life. The interviewees highlighted the contrast with the reality in Sweden, where these options are less accessible or culturally less common.

Alice mentioned that it took her and her husband 3 to 4 years to adjust their routines: *I spent the whole day at the office, while he stayed home or went out alone, creating conflicts.*

Rita found it difficult to adapt to the lack of support networks, such as family and domestic help like nannies and housekeepers, that she had in Brazil: *Without this support network, I felt overwhelmed with domestic tasks, which also impacted my work productivity, it took time to adjust to the routine.*

Clara reported the mental weight of being a working mother, which often involved dealing with emotional and physical overload. *The issue of balancing professional and family life also emerged as an important challenge when I moved. The mental load really affected me.*

Isabel commented on the difficulties she faced moving to Sweden compared to her previous experiences in Brazil and Thailand. *Sweden is a rather closed country, and people are more reserved. In Brazil and Thailand, I had a support network – in Brazil, it was family, and in Thailand, a nanny and housekeeper, which made life much easier.* She highlighted the impact of the move as a single mother: Coming to Sweden and starting everything on my own was difficult. In Thailand, I had more time for myself and my daughter, thanks to the support network I had there.

4.4.4 Cultural and linguistic integration

Cultural adaptation and language barriers were other salient aspects highlighted by the interviewees. Clara mentioned the absence of warmth in Sweden, emphasizing the loneliness she experienced during lunch breaks at the office:

Clara: My personality is to be around people who smile, you know? Here, you must ask someone to hug or smile at you. It is a little daily pain for me, having to go to the office and sometimes having lunch alone because people eat lunch alone here. She noted the lack of human warmth and light significantly impacted her experience. However, professionally, she acknowledged some positives: “Here, people are very respectful; there is a consensus; they listen to your opinion and invite you to participate in an idea. I think there is a greater openness than in Brazil.

Alice highlighted cultural barriers and the difference in treatment towards male expatriates: *I faced cultural barriers, especially in meetings that started in Swedish, which was an obstacle because I do not speak the language. Additionally, I noticed that male expatriates in leadership positions received more welcome and personal support, such as questions about their families. In contrast, as a woman in a management position, I did not receive the same kind of attention.”*

Clara also emphasized that the lack of fluency in Swedish possibly hindered her social integration and opportunities for connections at work, generating frustrations and feelings of

isolation: *Learning the Swedish language was a significant challenge, and I did not learn it. This may have impacted my friendship connections inside and outside work.*

Maria shared a situation where her language skills were questioned at work, affecting her confidence: *Right on my first or second day at work, during a presentation about a project from Brazil, I made a mistake in English. One participant made a derogatory comment, saying it was 'very Brazilian,' insinuating that my English was poor. The atmosphere became uncomfortable, and people laughed at the situation.*

4.4.5 Emotional impact and mental health

Finally, the emotional and psychological impact of the adaptation process proved considerable, influencing not only the well-being of the interviewees but also their ability to integrate into a new environment fully. Clara mentioned going through a period of depression, illustrating how adapting to a new country and culture can deeply affect mental health. *"I swallowed it, I settled because I saw the opportunity, but I think the cycle closed."*

She shared her experience of facing a depressive crisis in 2022: *I suffered from symptoms of stress and anxiety, which culminated in a depression crisis characterized by negative thoughts and an intense period of sadness.* She emphasized the importance of self-care and healthy habits, such as going to the gym, to cope with the challenges: *I think it is essential for women to take care of themselves. Performance drops in the long run if we do not prioritize ourselves, affecting both work and family life.*

In summary, the participants' experiences reveal challenges associated with cultural adaptation, language barriers, the search for balance between professional and personal life, and social integration in Sweden. These are vital elements for understanding the complexity of the expatriate adaptation process in international contexts.

4.4.6 Interpretation of the findings

The interviews' analysis revealed a series of challenges faced by expatriate women in Sweden, reflecting cultural, familial, and professional barriers. One of the most common challenges among women with children, mentioned by several interviewees such as Rita, Isabel, and Clara, was the difficulty in balancing family and professional life due to the absence of a support network, such as nannies, which is common in Brazil, or close family members. The lack of this structure increased the mental burden and the feeling of loneliness, especially for

expatriate mothers. This dilemma reflects Brandão's (1994) concept of the "glass ceiling," where social expectations regarding women as primary caregivers can hinder their professional advancement. The invisible barriers, known as the "glass ceiling," result from gender stereotypes that associate women more with domestic life than with the corporate environment. In the context of international mobility, these challenges intensify, as women need to balance multiple roles: mother, wife, and professional. The mental overload and lack of organizational support impede progress, especially in leadership positions.

The context of the interviews also aligns with what Kirk (2019) presents, arguing that in the landscape of globalization and professional mobility, women face challenges in reconciling their personal and professional identities with invisible barriers that limit their growth.

Kirk (2019) explores the concept of "glass borders," subtle barriers imposed by gender biases and cultural norms that hinder women's advancement in international careers. These borders manifest in inadequate corporate policies, lack of support networks, and unequal expectations regarding women's roles. Furthermore, the article highlights how the intersection of gender identity, culture, and career can generate conflicts and strengthen women's resilience in international positions, reflecting the reality of the interviewees.

In summary, the challenges expatriate women face in Sweden reflect broader issues of gender, culture, and organizational support, as discussed in the literature on expatriation and gender equality. The interviews highlight the need for more inclusive policies sensitive to cultural and familial differences to provide women with a more equitable and satisfying expatriation experience. As Acker's (1990) theory on "gendered organizations" suggests, these policies should challenge the gender norms in organizational structures, creating environments that recognize and value more flexible leadership styles, such as those adopted by many expatriate women.

4.5 Gender and inclusion- challenges in the Swedish corporate environment: realities and perceptions of expatriates

This section explores the experiences of expatriate women in Sweden, highlighting their perceptions of gender and race in the Swedish corporate environment. Despite the country's reputation as a model of equality, the interviewees' narratives reveal cultural and professional challenges and the need to overcome gender stereotypes.

The women reported that they consider Sweden a more gender-balanced country than Brazil, yet it still requires improvements. It is important to note that they all worked at the same company. Many of them reported that they work with a multicultural team, and their immediate supervisors come from various nationalities.

Joana's experience highlights the complexity of gender inequalities. By crossing the boundaries of race, nationality, and gender, Joana has faced many challenges, including the perception of needing to assert herself more firmly and the awareness of a double standard in evaluation. Her narrative emphasizes the importance of considering intersectionalities to understand women's experiences in different contexts, as she recognizes that her biggest challenge is being Latina.

Joana: Sweden promotes a theoretical environment of openness and inclusion, but this is not so evident in practice. Although the workplace does not seem sexist, I perceive signs of it in some situations. I believe that, in addition to gender, it is also a cultural issue, as facing a predominantly Swedish environment has been challenging for a Latina woman. Despite promoting diversity, this reality still does not fully reflect, and there is much to improve.

Antonia's experience revealed a paradox: in a country with a reputation for equality, she observed the persistence of traditional gender norms. A significant point in her narrative was the perception that behaviors deemed assertive in men were seen as aggressive in women. Another noted fact was the underrepresentation of women in high management positions, even in Sweden. However, Antonia highlighted the appreciation for cultural diversity within the company, which contrasted with her experience in Mexico, where she felt the impacts of machismo more strongly.

When comparing her experience in Sweden to Brazil, Rita highlighted the nuances of gender inequalities in different cultural contexts. Although Sweden is often praised for its equality policies, Rita observed that male leadership and organizational culture perpetuated inequalities. The promotion of men, even in teams with a female majority, and the lack of alignment between the company's discourse and practices caught her attention.

In comparing her experience in Sweden to other cultural contexts, Rita noted that even in a more progressive country, women occupying intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity

face additional challenges. The constant need to prove their worth was a point that struck her, highlighting that the struggle for gender equality is still an ongoing process.

Rita: I thought there would be more gender equality in Sweden, but I realized that although inequality is not as explicit as in Brazil, it is disguised. Men, dominant leadership, and competent women are often overlooked. The representation of women in top management is low, and they have to prove their worth much more."

The case of Company XYZ, a multinational corporation based in Sweden, demonstrates that gender inequality can persist even in organizations that value cultural diversity. The analysis of Rita's experience reveals that, despite the inclusive discourse, the company's practices reinforced male dominance in senior leadership. The underrepresentation of women in areas such as engineering and the absence of women in high management positions highlight the need for more concrete actions to promote gender equity.

Rita: At Company XYZ, like in others in Sweden, there is a discourse of equality and inclusion due to cultural diversity, but in practice, the attitudes do not match. Senior leadership is predominantly male, and opportunities for men and women are unequal, especially in engineering.

Isabel reports feeling underestimated in her workplace, especially when presenting new ideas. A particular incident in which her superior publicly questioned her capability led her to reflect on whether being a woman negatively influenced how her contributions were received.

Isabel: He (the boss) did not say I was stupid, but he said I did not know what I was doing during an important meeting and assigned the task to a man. I do not know if it was because I am a woman or if he treats everyone that way.

Alice shared her experiences facing gender discrimination at her company, where men in expatriate roles received more attention and support. Antonia highlights the difference in perception between men and women in the workplace. Men view assertive behaviors positively, but women view them negatively.

Antonia: I see many reactions that a woman gets compared to a man. If a man is more pragmatic, he is considered very good. He is a leader; he encourages the team. When a woman is tough, she is labeled as hysterical or crazy. So, the same behavior

still has a difference in the perception of good and bad; this different treatment between what is considered positive in a man and the same behavior considered negative in a woman.

Joana, in turn, mentioned that, unconsciously, she has adopted characteristics traditionally associated with masculine behavior over the years to be recognized as an effective leader.

This difference in judgment reflects the impact of gender stereotypes, which impose obstacles on women seeking leadership positions. Joana, by unconsciously adopting masculine characteristics, illustrates women's pressure to conform to a leadership model largely associated with masculinity.

Interviewee Rita highlights a disconnect between discourse and practice within the organization. Although the company, through its leadership, claims to promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities, the observed reality is different. The disproportion between men and women in high leadership positions, as mentioned, indicates a lack of significant female representation during a restructuring.

Rita: During the restructuring of the next chapter, the CEO emphasized the importance of equality and opportunities for all, but in practice, senior leadership remained predominantly male. In my area, for example, out of 30 directors, only one was a woman. Despite the promises, no concrete actions exist to change this reality, and female representation in leadership is still minimal.

Clara also addressed the mental and emotional burden that women face, especially concerning family responsibilities and childcare, which can pose a significant obstacle to their international careers. However, she acknowledged that Sweden offers more professional growth opportunities for women, especially in international companies like COMPANY XYZ, which implement mentoring programs aimed at women and prioritize gender diversity in recruitment processes. Clara suggested that although these initiatives are positive, offering additional benefits, such as access to domestic support services, could further facilitate the balance between personal and professional life for expatriate women.

Isabel shared her experience of deciding to move, mentioning that, contrary to the common perception of work-life balance in Sweden, she faced an extremely demanding work environment. She highlighted that the company has a multicultural environment, which may

explain why her immediate superior brought aspects of their home country's culture, adopting a stricter management approach. However, she acknowledges that the company, in a way, tolerates and allows this type of behavior, reinforcing the perception of complicity with these practices. In the early years, the workload was intense, leaving little time to dedicate to her personal life and her daughter. However, Isabel is unsure if this is a specific characteristic of the service sector in which she works or if it is more related to her supervisor's leadership style: *I have always heard that it is possible to have a good work-life balance in Sweden, but for me, it was a lot of work and a demanding routine, especially in the first few years. I do not know if this is due to the area I work in or my supervisor.*

In her accounts, Joana reflects on the challenges and resilience of women in the workplace, highlighting the constant need to prove their abilities: *I am a dreamer, and I believe that women always need to prove themselves more than men. That is why I try to recruit women, as I know they are competent. I am reflecting on how we sometimes create armor to achieve our goals.*

Antonia observes that, although women in Sweden find it easier to reach middle management positions compared to Brazil, advancement to executive levels is still restricted. She emphasizes that, despite the country's progress in promoting gender equality, many companies, like XYZ, still maintain a predominantly male senior leadership:

Antonia: In Sweden, women can achieve middle management positions more easily than in Brazil, but reaching the top is still difficult. In the company XYZ, for example, the culture is quite traditional, and the highest positions continue to be predominantly held by men.

In her accounts, Rita, when thinking about family, gave up other international experiences after Sweden:

Rita: They gave me the freedom to choose the country and provided all the necessary information, but despite their generous offer, I decided not to accept it. The decision was based on personal reasons: my eldest son wanted to spend his teenage years in Brazil, and the youngest wanted to be close to family. I prioritized their experience and return, placing family above my career.

Thus, the experiences shared in the meetings reveal the challenges immigrant women face in Sweden, including cultural and communication barriers, gender biases in the workplace, the emotional burden of balancing personal and professional life, and the constant need to prove their competence. Although Sweden is often seen as an egalitarian society, these accounts highlight the persistent gender inequalities that these women, especially immigrants, continue to face in both their careers and personal lives. However, despite the reported gender difficulties, the interviewees always emphasized that, when comparing their experiences with those from their countries of origin, Sweden still stands out as a more advanced and progressive environment regarding gender equality and professional opportunities, particularly for positions they consider to be middle management.

4.5.1 Interpretation of the findings

The perceptions of the interviewed expatriate women reveal a Swedish corporate environment that, while having a reputation for equality compared to Brazil, still faces challenges related to gender and inclusion. Many interviewees mentioned the existence of gender stereotypes, the lack of female representation in senior management positions, and a disconnect between inclusive rhetoric and actual practices. Additionally, the intersectionality of gender, race, and culture exacerbates these difficulties, forcing them to prove their professional capabilities constantly.

Intersectionality, as discussed by Crenshaw (1989), shows how different forms of oppression, such as gender, race, and nationality, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination. Expatriate women face not only gender discrimination but also deal with other forms of oppression, such as racism and cultural inequality. Joana's case is emblematic as it illustrates how gender, race, and nationality add challenges to her professional journey, reinforcing the need to constantly assert herself in an environment that applies double evaluation standards.

Collins and Bilge (2020) deepen this discussion by explaining how intersectionality reveals that immigrant women face gender, race, and class biases simultaneously, amplifying the existing gender inequalities. They advocate for intersectional solutions that address organizational, cultural, and ideological policies to create more inclusive and equitable work environments. Rita's narrative exemplifies this point, which highlights how women in racial and ethnic minorities, such as Latinas or non-Europeans, face additional challenges when trying to break through imposed barriers.

Joan Acker (2009) defines intersectionality as the interaction of social categories, such as race, gender, and class, which overlap to form complex systems of discrimination. While many companies promote diversity, this often does not address the root causes of inequalities. She concludes that real changes occur only with the combination of social movements and legislative support.

The theory of the "glass ceiling," as mentioned by Kiaye and Singh (2013), reflects an invisible barrier that prevents women's professional advancement despite their qualifications. Companies must adopt inclusive policies that promote equality of opportunity and challenge gender stereotypes, ensuring equity in recruitment and promotions. Actions such as implementing mentoring programs, training to combat gender biases, and flexible work policies are essential to balance women's professional and personal responsibilities and monitor the effectiveness of these practices to ensure equality in leadership positions.

These challenges are reinforced by Rita's experience, highlighting the male predominance in leadership positions, even in teams composed mainly of women. Although Swedish policies advocate for gender equality, corporate practices often fail to reflect this rhetoric, perpetuating structural inequality. This aligns with Acker's (1990) analysis of the gendered nature of organizations, where men predominantly occupy leadership positions, and organizational structures often ignore the specific needs of women, maintaining barriers that hinder their advancement. Kumra and Manfredi (2012) emphasize that to ensure their survival, companies must constantly change, adapting to both the internal and external environment. They identify globalization, worldwide competition, government policies, and the demands for flexibility and consumer satisfaction as key triggers for organizational change.

4.6 Opportunities

The adaptation experiences in Sweden, as reported by the interviewees, reveal a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities, particularly in relation to intersectionality and the nuances of life in a new country. Despite significant obstacles, particularly in male-dominated top management positions, the satisfaction expressed regarding professional growth suggests that the international experience offered valuable learnings and career development. Immigration to Sweden was viewed positively from a professional standpoint, with the country's egalitarian public policies, such as parental leave, being highlighted as a major advantage compared to Brazil. However, while benefits like longer vacations, job stability,

and incentives for male participation in family care were appreciated, the perception remains that the corporate environment could be more inclusive, especially at higher leadership levels.

The interviewees reported on developing skills that an international position can provide, such as the ability to relate to people from different backgrounds, which are highly valued competencies in global careers. Moreover, this experience allowed some of them to achieve leadership positions they might not have attained in Brazil.

For Joana, she lives a unique experience in terms of social equality in Sweden. Even facing challenges related to cultural adaptation and a certain slowness in organizational transformations, Joana felt privileged to work in a context where social hierarchies were less rigid and equality of treatment was more palpable than in her experience in Brazil. This contrast made her value the opportunity to work in a country that provided a fairer professional environment, where differences in social status were not so pronounced and where she felt her abilities were more recognized. This experience, for her, represented a significant advancement in terms of dignity and respect in the workplace, even in the face of existing gender and cultural barriers.

Antonia's trajectory, which included experiences in Peru and Sweden, was fundamental in her achieving a global position within the company. It allowed her to navigate different cultures. She believes that without this international experience, it would have been "impossible" to reach her current position as a global director.

Clara's experience in Sweden enabled her to take on a leadership role within the company. She believes this international experience will be crucial for her professional growth if she returns to Brazil, just as it helped her secure a global director position in Spain.

Clara: I believe that if I were to return to Brazil, there would be an appreciation for my international experience. Now, going to Spain, I see that having an international career really makes a difference in various aspects. In the selection process, for example, they asked about my experience with multicultural teams. I could answer not only with my professional experience but also with my life as an expatriate. This brings a portfolio of life and maturity that, in my opinion, greatly helps in my career.

Alice's move to Sweden opened various career and professional growth opportunities. Although it took some time for her to adapt to the new culture and establish herself in the

company, Alice states that she would never have reached her current position if she had not taken the risk of moving. She acknowledges that the company offers opportunities for both men and women but also admits to the historical male predominance in high leadership positions.

Rita's experience in Sweden enabled her to hold a management position in the Americas cluster and later a global role, providing her with a strategic business vision and the ability to navigate diverse cultures. Although she faced some challenges related to gender inequality, which she understands persists in Sweden, Rita managed to stand out and secure leadership positions, serving as an inspiration for other women seeking international opportunities.

Rita: International experience is extremely positive for one's career, as it provides contact with different cultures and ways of thinking. Over five years, I have realized that this experience developed new skills, such as flexibility and negotiation techniques adapted to each context. I learned good practices from different markets, absorbing the best from each and expanding my vision and operation in the global market.

Isabel's move to Sweden and work at the company's headquarters strengthened her resume and expanded opportunities for growth and networking. Although the work environment is more intense than expected, she considers the experience an important achievement in her career and the country's social benefits: *Being at the company's headquarters facilitates professional growth and internal mobility. Regarding quality of life, education stands out, with free and good schools for children and many activities. These are the main opportunities.*

Maria's experience in Sweden helped her improve her language skills and adopt a more balanced approach between work and personal life, which she implemented upon returning to Brazil. Additionally, the network of contacts she formed in Sweden continues to benefit her professional journey.

Joana and Rita reflect on the balance between work and personal life in Sweden, highlighting how the local culture values family above work, in contrast to the Brazilian reality. She shares her surprise at realizing that, as a leader, she could disconnect during vacations and after working hours, which would be unthinkable in Brazil.

Joana: They place life and family above work, which differs from Brazil, where work comes first and then family. However, at the same time, I notice this difference in my role as a leader. I work less here; no one bothers me outside of working hours, and when I take a vacation, I really take a vacation—something I never had in Brazil, where 30 days of vacation were unthinkable.

Rita: Living in Sweden for five years brought many positive aspects, especially regarding quality of life and culture, which positively influenced our family. One of the greatest gains was the strengthening of our bonds.

In summary, these professionals' experiences in Sweden offered a wide range of career opportunities, including access to leadership positions, global exposure, and developing skills and networks.

Finally, the interviewees highlighted the enrichment that cultural diversity in Sweden brings to their professional experiences. Besides facilitating a mutual learning exchange, this diversity enriches daily interactions, exposing professionals to different approaches and work styles. Interactions with people from various backgrounds were reported to have broadened their perspectives, fostering innovation and creativity. Furthermore, this cultural interaction promotes a more inclusive environment where everyone's ideas and contributions are valued, resulting in a more dynamic and collaborative workspace.

4.6.1 Incentive policies for women in management

The literature suggests that the low number of women in leadership positions in the home country may contribute to the scarcity of women in international roles. The interviewees reported being unaware of specific programs to train women in management in their home countries but highlighted the availability of such initiatives in Sweden. Some interview participants mentioned being aware of professional growth support programs for women within their companies. These programs aim not only to promote professional development but also to expand networking among women. However, not all interviewees actively participated in these initiatives. For example, the mentoring program for potential women requires the recommendation of superiors, which can limit access and inclusion for many candidates. The interviewees emphasized that such programs are not exclusive to expatriate women but are open to all women within the company.

Alice participated in a mentoring program that was not exclusive to immigrants and significantly helped her navigate professional challenges. The external mentor allowed her to discuss issues freely, making the experience highly beneficial at a crucial stage in her career.

Alice: It was very good because I could speak without a filter about what was happening, discuss how to approach situations or react, and mention names since the person on the other side did not know the people involved. This helped me a lot. The program lasted six months and was extremely helpful because it also allowed me to see who the other women in the company participating were, and that was nice.

The interviewee also mentioned that the company took a significant step by placing a woman in a leadership position historically held by men, sending a powerful message and encouraging hiring more women for leadership roles. Additionally, the company implemented specific initiatives for the career development of women: it has promoted the presence of more women on the team. Previously, her team was composed exclusively of men; now, she has managed to increase female representation to 20%, with women taking on roles that men have always dominated: *Although there is still much to be done, I believe the company is gradually working to provide tools and create opportunities in a more equitable manner.*

Clara, who works as an HR director, shed light on the support programs for women in the company, mentioning initiatives such as the mentoring program exclusively for women: We have, for example, a mentoring program just for women, and COMPANY XYZ has various initiatives in different parts of the world. However, she questions the effectiveness of these programs: *I do not know if it is enough because we, women, still carry a hefty mental load. We work all day and continue to think about what must be done. She suggested that a more practical type of support could be more useful, for example, a support network, especially for newcomers.*

In her interview, Clara highlights the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives, which extend beyond gender to include nationalities and diverse perspectives. She also acknowledges the supportive environment for women through programs like female-focused mentoring. However, she questions the effectiveness of these initiatives, pointing out that women still bear a significant mental load related to household tasks, a challenge not addressed by the programs. Clara suggests that practical support, such as subsidies for nannies

or housekeepers, could help women better balance personal and professional responsibilities. Her observations reveal a gap in corporate diversity programs, as they often overlook practical needs affecting work-life balance, and she emphasizes that integrating policies addressing women's broader realities could enhance gender equity. Her statement also reflects the inequality in the division of tasks that still persists for women.

Clara also praises leadership development initiatives, attributing their success to corporate policies and local guidelines, such as Sweden's paternity leave, which encourages gender equality. However, she notes that male-dominated culture hinders such progress in Brazil. Despite recognizing significant advancements, Clara believes current efforts towards gender equality remain insufficient, particularly emphasizing the importance of the company's mentoring program for women with growth potential, which identifies talent, maps opportunities, and places them on a career development path

Clara: Our program is aimed at women with career growth potential, regardless of whether they are already managers or not. We have a Talent Review process where we identify individuals with potential, map their positions within the organization, and assess how far they can grow. Based on this, we have an annual quota to include these women in the mentoring program, and thus, we nominate those who will participate. It is a development pipeline to prepare and support these women in advancing their careers.

Antonia does not consider the programs sufficient to promote women to senior management: *Yes, Company XYZ has diversity policies, but that is mostly at the middle management level. When women reach senior leadership, many do not talk about the challenges they faced as women, focusing more on their qualifications. Moreover, they do not always support other women, which keeps the environment predominantly male.*

Alice reflects that, in addition to programs for women, female support networks have positively impacted her professional journey, highlighting how other women have been essential to her growth. She acknowledges the importance of these connections in contrast to the lack of initiative from her male bosses.

Alice: When I stopped to think, I realized that all the opportunities and support I had to grow professionally came from other women. I had two male bosses, but they were

not responsible for offering me chances for growth; they just kept things as they were. So, if there is a "boys' club," there is also a circle where women help other women, which I think is fair.

The interviewee emphasizes the importance of supporting other women who wish to expatriate and develop professionally, recognizing the sacrifices involved in this process. As a leader, she believes that it is her responsibility to open opportunities for these women and ensure they have access to international experiences and career growth.

Alice: As an expatriate woman, I know what I sacrificed to prioritize my career. That is why I feel inclined to offer that opportunity when I see another woman willing to do the same. If I had openings and could sponsor visas, I would seek out women dedicated to this international experience. I believe that by paving the way, we must ensure that other women also have that chance.

4.6.2 Interpretation of the findings

As noted by the women interviewed, the recognition of career opportunities through expatriation aligns with theories on gender, labor markets, and international mobility. Their experiences in Sweden reflect Caligiuri and Cascio's (1998) view of expatriation as a key tool for developing global leaders, with many interviewees acknowledging that these opportunities opened doors to leadership positions otherwise inaccessible. However, as highlighted by interviewees like Alice, women face more challenges accessing expatriate roles, underscoring the importance of mentoring programs and organizational support. Although Company XYZ has implemented such initiatives, Clara observes that these programs are more effective at the middle-management level, offering less support for women aiming for executive positions. This reflects Ely and Meyerson's (2000) argument that gender-neutral practices often perpetuate inequalities. Alice's rise, facilitated by female colleagues rather than male bosses, emphasizes the importance of women's support networks in overcoming invisible barriers, as evidenced by Alice's experience.

Adler's (1984) study on companies' reluctance to recruit women for expatriation still resonates, with Clara noting that while Sweden enforces egalitarian recruitment policies, such practices remain rare in Brazil, where cultural and institutional barriers persist. This contrast reinforces how these obstacles limit women's international mobility. Furthermore, Clara's

suggestion of subsidies for domestic support to alleviate the mental load of expatriate women echoes Linehan and Scullion's (2004) findings on the need for practical, tangible support and formal diversity policies to help women balance personal and professional responsibilities. The lack of effective support networks remains a key gap, as noted by several interviewees.

Finally, the effectiveness of mentoring programs, as highlighted in the interviews with Alice and Clara, can be related to theoretical discussions about the importance of inclusion and diversity policies in organizations (Elacqua et al., 2009). Alice reports that the mentoring program she participated in positively impacted on her career, allowing her to discuss the challenges she faced openly. However, Clara and Antonia question the effectiveness of such programs in promoting women's advancement to senior leadership, suggesting that the "glass ceiling" persists, even with diversity policies in place.

Thus, the experiences shared by the interviewees reflect many of the challenges discussed in the literature on gender, leadership, and expatriation. Invisible barriers, such as the "glass ceiling," continue to limit women's advancement. Although diversity policies are present in some organizations, they do not always address expatriate women's practical and cross-cultural needs.

The experiences of expatriate women in Sweden are deeply aligned with theoretical principles addressing gender equality, intersectionality, the "glass ceiling," and the impact of expatriation on the development of female leadership. Sweden exemplifies how structural changes can promote a more equitable environment by offering inclusive policies and professional development opportunities. However, the invisible barriers and cultural challenges still demonstrate the need for a continuous and systematic approach to ensure that women advance in their international careers without limitations imposed by gender inequalities.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of interviews with non-European expatriate women in Sweden demonstrates a complex intersection of cultural dilemmas, gender dynamics, and organizational influences. These women face unique challenges in their professional journeys, stemming from both the cultural norms of the host country and global organizational structures. Theories about the "glass ceiling" and "gendered organizations" highlight how invisible barriers and gender norms within corporations continue to hinder women's advancement to international leadership positions, even in a country like Sweden, known for its equality policies.

The interviewees' motivations for seeking expatriation opportunities in Sweden are varied but often linked to the desire for professional growth and an improved quality of life, both for themselves and their families. However, cultural differences, such as Swedes' direct and reserved approach in the workplace, complicate the adaptation and integration process. The lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of companies, especially those contracted to assist expatriates, exacerbates these challenges, limiting the positive impact of mobility policies.

Furthermore, family dynamics play a crucial role in expatriate women's experiences, often resulting in a mental burden due to the absence of adequate support networks. Balancing personal and professional life demands becomes even more difficult in an environment where support structures, such as assistance with enrolling children in schools or programs for family members, are inadequate or nonexistent. These factors reveal a significant disparity in how companies support their expatriates, creating additional challenges for those who do not receive adequate assistance.

Despite these obstacles, expatriation remains a valuable opportunity for women's professional advancement, as they often view this experience as a necessary step toward attaining more significant corporate roles. The trajectories of the interviewees reinforce the argument that expatriation can be a mechanism of empowerment, allowing them to develop intercultural skills, expand their networks, and occupy leadership positions in global environments. However, this advancement becomes possible only when companies adopt inclusive and effective diversity and organizational support policies.

It can be concluded that although expatriate women in Sweden face significant challenges related to culture, gender, and family, the presence of appropriate organizational policies can mitigate these obstacles and facilitate their success. The effectiveness of diversity and support

programs, however, still needs to be evaluated, shifting from a superficial approach to a strategy that recognizes and addresses the specific needs of these women. Only with more robust organizational support that is sensitive to cultural and familial issues will it be possible to promote true equality of opportunity for expatriate women in global contexts.

Additionally, it reinforces the need for companies to implement structural and operational changes in their international mobility programs, ensuring that women, especially those from non-European contexts, have access to support that goes beyond standard practices and fosters environments that truly promote inclusion, gender equality, and the well-being of their expatriate employees.

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ATTACHMENTS

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Education:
- Work experience:
- Time of employment within the company:
- Country/ countries of international assignment:
- Position before the international assignment:
- Position during the international assignment:
- Current occupation and position:
- Civil status/family situation:

Basic Information about the process

1. Can you tell me about your career background?
2. What motivated you to seek an international position?
 - a. Was this position proposed by the company or did you look for it? How/why?
 - b. Did your networking contribute? Did someone encourage you to apply?
 - c. You already had international experience before?
3. Were there specific career aspirations influencing your decision to move abroad?
4. When you received the proposal, did you receive support from your partner?

Motivations and Opportunities

5. What were some of the key opportunities you saw in pursuing an international position, particularly in Sweden?
6. Do you believe that having an international career can bring more opportunities for you professionally?
7. How do you perceive the opportunities for career advancement and professional growth as a female expatriate in your host country compared to your home country?
8. How do you believe that Sweden, supposedly more egalitarian more egalitarian country, offers more opportunities for women in terms of career advancement?

Family Dynamics

9. How has the expatriation process impacted your family, if applicable?
10. How was the adaptation process like for your family?
 - a. School
 - b. Work
11. In your opinion, what additional support mechanisms or resources could have been beneficial for you and your family during the transition?

Obstacles and Challenges

12. Can you describe some of the main challenges you faced during the transition to Sweden, both professionally and personally?

- a. How was the adaptation process?
 - b. Thinking back, would you do anything different?
13. Would you say that there are barriers or issues for female expatriates depending on which position and the role she has?
14. Did cultural differences influence your adaptation process?
How did it influence your personal life?
- a) How did it influence your work?

Gender-Specific Foundations

15. Do you think your gender has played a role in your international career progress?
How? Positive? Negative? What is your ethnicity/cultural background?
16. How do you perceive the characteristics and conduct of a typical expatriate?
17. Do you believe that women and men have the same possibility to obtain expatriate assignments in your company?

Organizational Culture and Support

18. Do you believe that your organization has specific policies or initiatives aimed at promoting gender diversity and supporting female expatriates?
19. What are the most obvious differences in the culture compared with the office you used to work in? - What are the apparent similarities?
20. Based on your experience, does the company offer programs to encourage women to take on leadership positions?
21. Based on your experience, do you believe is the organizations' view of females' suitability for an expatriate role?

Personal Perceptions and Adaptation

22. Can you share any strategies or coping mechanisms you've employed to navigate the expatriation experience and career progression?
23. Has your international experience helped you with your career progression?
24. Have your perceptions or expectations of gender roles and career opportunities evolved since moving to Sweden?

Closing

25. Is there any additional information or insights you would like to share regarding your experiences as a female expatriate in Sweden?