



# The Migrant Feminism: A Qualitative Study on Cape Verdean Women in Italy

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## Abstract

This study explores the migratory experiences of 15 Cape Verdean women in Italy, aiming to analyze how migration has shaped their self-perception, personal emancipation, and relationship with the host society. We adopt a qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach to explore the gendered experiences of Cape Verdean migrant women in Italy. Through a qualitative analysis of interviews, key themes emerge, including the importance of education, the challenges posed by intersectional discrimination (based on gender and race), and the value of multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue. The narratives reveal a strong connection to their culture of origin, coupled with the ability to adapt and engage with the Italian context, constructing a new identity rooted in autonomy and resilience. The participants also highlight the crucial role of female solidarity networks as tools for support and integration. This study underscores the need for inclusive policies that recognize skills and promote the full participation of migrant women in social and professional life, contributing to greater social cohesion. Cape Verdean women emerge not only as protagonists of complex migratory paths but also as agents of change who challenge stereotypes and foster models of planetary citizenship based on universal values of justice and equality.

**Keywords** Female migration · Transnational identity · Empowerment · Cultural integration · Women's autonomy · Autobiographical narrative · Intersectionality · Migrant women

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## Introduction

The current trends in feminism and migration have produced indelible changes in social structures. However, a dialectical correlation between immigration and feminism remains rare in public debate, activism, and academic discourse. Migrant women and feminist struggles are deeply intertwined, as both unfold within the sphere of womanhood and operate as interconnected systems that seek recognition and legal redefinition in societies historically shaped by masculine norms (Facchi, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Gendered and cultural specificities, when properly acknowledged and protected, represent essential elements of equality rather than obstacles to it (Facchi, 2006; Anthias, 2012). A deeper understanding of women's realities, migration experiences, and cultural identities reveals the tensions embedded in multicultural coexistence. As Crenshaw (1989) and Mohanty (2003) argue, the dimensions of gender and racial or ethnic difference intersect to generate layers of oppression and invisibility. Migrant women often experience this through both legal marginalization and socio-cultural exclusion—a condition that amplifies their vulnerability and calls for critical, inclusive approaches to justice and rights (Farris, 2017; Facchi, 2006).

A profound understanding of female realities, migrant life, and cultural dynamics allows us to comprehend the conflicts inherent in multicultural coexistence. For immigrant women, the dimensions of difference and discrimination—being both women and foreigners—combine to create multiple layers of exclusion and lack of protection (Facchi, 2006). This dual disadvantage has been further explored by Anthias (2020), who examines social inequalities through the lens of *translocational* belonging, highlighting how axes of oppression, including gender and migration, intersect and reinforce each other. Similarly, Davis and Murphy (2022) emphasize that migration and integration policies often fail to address the specific needs of migrant women, underscoring that social vulnerability is not solely a consequence of economic barriers but also rooted in structural inequalities related to race and gender.

Kofman et al. (2020) have shown that integration policies often overlook the diversity of female migration experiences, perpetuating marginalization that deeply affects the well-being of migrant women. Yuval-Davis (2021) expands on this by analyzing citizenship and migration through an intersectional lens, exploring how gender and migration identities shape experiences of belonging and exclusion. These studies collectively demonstrate that the convergence of gender-based and migration-related barriers creates unique challenges for migrant women, necessitating a critical reassessment of inclusion policies.

Over the years, studies on immigrant women have developed the concept of “triple oppression,” referring to discrimination based on gender, culture, and social class. This intersectional model has been analyzed in various contexts, illustrating how migrant women often face multiple, overlapping marginalizations. The foundational works of Hill Collins (1990) highlight how race, gender, and class overlap to produce unique forms of inequality (Hill Collins, 1990; Goga, 2000). However, the perception of these oppressions is not always shared by the migrant women themselves. Research by Geertsema and Sligh (2018) indicates that many migrant women adopt the values and customs of their host society and do not necessarily view their condi-

tion as oppressive according to the triple oppression model. Instead, migrant women often shape their identities based on diverse values drawn from both their cultural origins and their host society, revealing a plurality of experiences that defy traditional academic categorizations (Geertsema and Sligh, 2018; Rodny-Gumede, 2020).

In summary, while the theory of triple oppression remains relevant for understanding the exclusionary dynamics faced by many migrant women, their lived realities are far more complex and varied. Migrant women's experiences reflect an ongoing tension between adhering to the values of their host culture and maintaining personal cultural traditions. Multiculturalism, as theorized by Kymlicka (1995) and Taylor (1992), posits that societies receiving ethnic minorities must safeguard and valorize their cultural identities to promote integration and social justice. Public recognition of cultural identities, according to Taylor (1992), is fundamental for the individual and collective dignity of minorities. Although cultural components may influence each other, multicultural societies enable these identities to coexist, preserve traditions, and assert their right to survival.

Legal systems play a central role in improving the living conditions of migrant women by creating normative instruments tailored to the needs of multicultural societies. The challenge for contemporary legal frameworks is to develop coherent laws that recognize and protect cultural differences while upholding principles of formal and substantive equality, such as those enshrined in Article 3 of the Italian Constitution. International models, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the European Union Directive 2011/36/EU against human trafficking, provide legal tools that address the specific vulnerabilities of migrant women and promote diversified and inclusive approaches. At the national level, legislative instruments like Italy's Legislative Decree 286/1998 (Consolidated Immigration Act) demonstrate how law can foster migrant women's integration by acknowledging their cultural identities without sacrificing fundamental rights. Such legal approaches, inspired by substantive equality principles, aim to secure the full realization of individual rights within a multicultural migration framework (Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000).

Cape Verdean migration—central to the present study—was historically male-dominated. However, from the 1960s onwards, and more prominently in the 1970s, the emergence of independent female migration altered this trend. Female migration from Cape Verde, often permanent, predominantly targeted countries like Italy, Spain, and Portugal, where domestic work was in high demand (Carling, 2008; Batalha & Carling, 2008). Cape Verdean women migrants quickly adopted strategies to integrate into their host societies, such as learning the language and customs. In Italy, nearly all Cape Verdean immigrants are women, demonstrating strong transnational attitudes across economic, emotional, sociocultural, and symbolic dimensions and this study includes both first- and second-generation Cape Verdean women living in Italy. Although they share a common cultural background, these two groups differ in terms of their migration trajectories, socialization, and experiences of belonging. While first-generation women often emphasize adaptation and resilience in the face of displacement, second-generation participants tend to engage more critically with identity and rights, negotiating between inherited cultural expectations and Italian societal norms.

Migration often signifies a radical change in lifestyle for these women, challenging traditional gender roles prevalent in their hometowns and fostering a form of emancipation (Åkesson, 2009).

Cape Verdean society exhibits gendered disparities in various domains, including access to higher education, labor market participation, and decision-making within households (Carling & Åkesson, 2009). While women play a central role in migration processes and transnational caregiving, they often face structural inequalities both in Cape Verde and in host countries, which amplify their vulnerability during the migration journey.

Despite this emancipation, there is rarely a complete rupture with their cultural context of origin. Cape Verdean migrant women frequently assume the role of remote family heads, redefining gender dynamics within transnational families (Carling, 2001). Through their economic participation and maintenance of transnational ties, they create a new form of matrilineal family that transcends national boundaries, influencing societal structures and gender relations both in the host country and in their homeland. This dual transformation—emancipation without disconnection—reflects the evolving identities of Cape Verdean women migrants. They embody a transnational consciousness that reconciles their experiences in migration with their origins, contributing to gender equity and social change (Carling, 2001; Åkesson, 2009).

According to recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020), nearly one-third of Cape Verde's population resides abroad, with women comprising a growing proportion of this diaspora. Italy hosts one of the largest Cape Verdean communities in Europe, with approximately 6,000 registered individuals, a number likely underreported due to irregular migration patterns. These figures highlight the relevance of investigating the experiences of Cape Verdean women in the Italian context.

## The Current Study

Considering these theoretical premises, the aim of this study is to give voice to migrant women, retracing through their narratives their perspectives on feminism and the evolution of their self-perception and understanding of their rights within the migratory context. This research seeks to explore how the migratory experience has influenced not only their views on gender roles and personal autonomy but also the challenges they face in both their countries of origin and host societies. Furthermore, the investigation aims to understand how migration intersects with their ideas of feminism, which are often rooted in cultural frameworks different from Western ones, and to what extent these perspectives align with or diverge from those prevalent in traditional feminist movements. An additional objective is to analyze how migration has transformed these women's access to rights and available resources, assessing whether it has contributed to increased awareness and decision-making power or, conversely, introduced new forms of marginalization. By recounting their experiences, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between gender, migration, and identity. It offers insights into how these women

navigate social and legal barriers in host countries and how these challenges impact their self-perception and their ability to act autonomously.

## Participants and Procedure

Cape Verdean migration is characterized by a strong female presence, particularly toward European countries such as Italy and Portugal. Many women migrate for family reunification or to pursue caregiving and domestic work, often supporting transnational families. The participants in this study came from diverse educational and professional backgrounds, ranging from domestic work to community organizing, and were actively engaged in social or religious networks within the diaspora and have resided in Italy for a period ranging from 8 to 25 years.

The study sample consists of 15 women of Cape Verdean origin, selected using a purposive sampling approach to maximize diversity in terms of age, years of residence in Italy, educational level, and occupation. The age of the participants ranges between 29 and 71 years, with a mean age of 48.3 years and a standard deviation of 13.1. The sample is distributed across three age groups: 26.7% of participants are between 20 and 40 years old, 46.7% are between 41 and 60, and the remaining 26.7% are over 60 years old. First-generation women, defined as those who directly migrated to Italy, represent 66.7% of the sample, with most having arrived during the 1970s and 1980s. For data collection, an initial connection was established with the *Associazione delle Donne Capoverdiane in Italia* [Association of Cape Verdean Women in Italy] – *O.M.C.V.I.*, an organization active since March 27, 1988, dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of Cape Verdean women in Italy. This association, which has long been committed to the social integration of migrant women, proved to be an ideal channel for reaching a group of women who are already well integrated into the Italian social fabric, providing a valuable perspective for this research. The process began with an official presentation of the project to the association, explaining the study's objectives and emphasizing the importance of collecting first-hand testimonies on feminism and self-perception among migrant women. The association enthusiastically welcomed the initiative, recognizing the importance of amplifying these often-overlooked experiences, which are typically marginalized in public discourse.

Subsequently, the association facilitated initial contact with potential participants, acting as a mediator between myself and interested women. Once the first contacts were established, I organized individual and collective meetings with the participants, striving to create an environment of trust and openness to encourage the sharing of personal stories. The women involved have resided in Italy for several years, and many have actively participated in association activities, which have supported their social integration process. From the outset, the participants demonstrated great willingness to collaborate, showing a deep interest in sharing their experiences and reflections. They appreciated the opportunity to express their views on issues that directly affect them, such as feminism and women's rights, which are often addressed from detached perspectives or by voices that do not represent their realities. The interviews, conducted mainly through face-to-face meetings and, in some cases, via online platforms, proved to be an essential tool for gaining a deeper understanding of

how migration has influenced their identities, relationships, and perceptions of rights and equality. All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee, as well as the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its subsequent amendments or comparable ethical guidelines, all participants provided informed consent prior to the interviews. Participants were informed about the study's aims, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. We used purposive and snowball sampling to ensure heterogeneity in age, education, and migration history. All interviews were anonymized and treated confidentially to protect participants' identities and privacy.

## Methodology

The present study was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology that aims to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 1999). This approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective realities, especially in relation to gender, migration, and identity within a socio-cultural context.

To conduct an in-depth and contemporary analysis of gender and multicultural dynamics, the chosen methodology emphasized the use of semi-structured interviews, focusing on an autobiographical-narrative approach. This method allows migrant women to voice their experiences and recount, in their own words, the transformations they have undergone during the migration process. A narrative approach was chosen not only for its epistemological value but also for its ability to capture how these women perceive themselves and their rights in both their countries of origin and destination. Narrative analysis allowed us to reconstruct the participants' lived experiences by focusing on how they structured and made sense of their stories across time. This approach emphasized turning points and identity transitions in the narrative arc. The selected sample, while homogeneous in terms of nationality, offers heterogeneity in age, occupation, educational level, and duration of residence in Italy. This diversity enabled the exploration of a broad range of experiences and reflections, analyzing how migration influences not only their material conditions but also their perceptions of their roles within both the origin and host societies. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 71 years, had lived in Italy between 8 and 25 years, and held various occupations including domestic work, social care, and community leadership. Educational backgrounds varied from primary school to university degrees. The interviews, conducted through face-to-face meetings, focused on key aspects of migrant women's lives, including work, family, societal roles, religion, and gender-based violence. Particular attention was given to the women's perceptions of the Italian context and the rights they have acquired there, contrasting these reflections with their realities in their countries of origin. This comparison allowed for an examination of whether and how migration has led to transformations in their status and gender perceptions.

The questions were ad hoc designed to encourage personal and critical reflection, addressing central themes such as the differences between their conditions and those of Italian women, the influence of family, and the impact of living in Italy on their

gender awareness. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their relationships with peer groups in both their countries of origin and Italy to better understand potential changes in their perspectives. The comparison between their experiences in the country of origin and the host country was crucial for observing any evolution in their awareness of women's rights and opportunities. This dual analytical framework enabled a deeper understanding of how migration influences their views on feminism, personal autonomy, and opportunities for empowerment. The analysis of the interviews was carried out through thematic coding with the aid of NVivo software to identify patterns and differences across the narratives.

The data analysis began with an initial phase of careful and repeated reading of the transcripts, aimed at fostering a deep engagement with the participants' stories. During this process, notes and reflections (memos) were recorded to support the emergence of early insights, patterns, and guiding questions. NVivo software was used as a support tool to organize and manage codes, but the interpretation remained closely tied to a direct and critical interaction with the narratives. Particular attention was paid to the cultural and biographical context of each interview, in order to preserve the richness of meaning and lived experience and to avoid a purely technical or reductive reading of the content.

This approach aimed to provide an empirical examination of migrant women's conditions and the challenges they face, while also assessing to what extent migration has fostered greater awareness and transformation in their societal status. This process created a detailed and nuanced picture of the difficulties, opportunities, and achievements of migrant women, contributing to a broader dialogue about their integration and emancipation. The interview results were cataloged as individual life stories for each participant, focusing on key aspects such as their migratory experience, integration process, gender perceptions, and relationships with feminism. For each woman, the most significant moments of their experience were highlighted, analyzing how migration influenced their self-awareness, their understanding of their rights, and their roles within the family and society. Each narrative was interpreted through analytical lenses that captured intercultural dynamics, adaptation challenges, and the participants' perspectives on women's conditions in both their country of origin and Italy. Particular attention was paid to their reflections on gender discrimination, both in the private and public spheres, with a focus on work, family, and social participation. Through a comparative analysis of their stories, various models of transformation in self-perception emerged, shaped by the empowerment opportunities offered by the migratory context but also constrained by barriers resulting from gender stereotypes and ethnic prejudices. Fictional names were used to respect the privacy of the participants. Moreover, to ensure accuracy and reduce bias, we initially analyzed the interviews separately and then discussed them together.

## Results

The results of this research offer a rich and multifaceted overview of the experiences of Cape Verdean women in Italy, highlighting the complexity of their lives as shaped by the intersection of cultural identity, gender, and race. The analysis of the collected

narratives has identified key themes that cut across the participants' stories, revealing both common patterns and significant differences based on generational, social, and individual contexts.

The results are structured around six main macro-themes:

1. Cultural identity and sense of belonging, which explores how women perceive and experience their dual identity between Cape Verdean culture and Italian society.
2. Intersectional barriers, analyzing challenges stemming from the combination of gender, racial, and social class discrimination.
3. The role of education, seen as a key factor for emancipation and access to new opportunities.
4. Generational differences, shedding light on shifting priorities and perspectives between first- and second-generation women.
5. Perception of Italian women regarded both as a source of inspiration and a cultural contradiction.
6. Resilience and adaptation, a transversal theme celebrating the strength and ability of Cape Verdean women to build better lives despite hardships.

This thematic framework enables an understanding of how cultural, historical, and personal factors intertwine to shape these women's experiences, offering an intersectional reading of their stories. Below, each theme is examined through the direct testimonies of the participants, highlighting shared points and differences that make each experience unique.

### Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging

Cape Verdean women perceive a strong connection to their culture of origin, described as resilient, communal, and supportive. However, integration into Italian society is seen as a constant challenge, particularly for younger generations.

- First-generation migrant: *"Being Cape Verdean means carrying within me a collective strength. But in Italy, I often had to prove who I was because, for them, working well isn't enough—they want to know where you come from"* (Participant T, 50 years old).
- Second generation: *"I feel torn between two worlds: Italy, which sees me as a foreigner, and Cape Verde, where I'm expected to be Italian"* (Participant S, 32 years old).

Common theme: Cultural identity is both a resource and a source of conflict with Italian societal expectations. Younger women struggle to reconcile their desire for belonging with the need for individual emancipation.

### Intersectional Barriers

Gender and racial discrimination are recurring themes, experienced with varying intensity depending on generation and professional context.

- First generation: *"I always knew that as a Black woman, I would have to work twice as hard to be recognized on the same level as others"* (Participant E, 65 years old).

- Second generation: *“It’s frustrating when someone assumes I can’t be a university graduate just because I’m Black. It’s as if I constantly must explain who I am”* (Participant L, 33 years old).

Common theme: Cape Verdean women report frequent microaggressions and stereotypes related to both race and gender. These factors contribute to a dual marginalization in the labor market and Italian society.

### **The Role of Education**

Education is seen as the key to personal and professional emancipation, though access opportunities vary significantly across generations.

- First generation: *“I didn’t have the chance to study, but I made sure my children received a good education because it’s the most important thing for changing one’s life”* (Participant D, 71 years old).

- Second generation: *“I had the privilege of attending university, but I often feel scrutinized, as if a Black woman with a degree is an anomaly”* (Participant F, 39 years old).

Common theme: While the first generation prioritized their children’s education, subsequent generations view education as a tool to combat prejudice and build an autonomous identity.

### **Generational Differences**

Life experiences and priorities differ significantly between first- and second-generation women.

- First generation: *“When I arrived, I didn’t think about myself. My goal was to work and send money to my family in Cape Verde”* (Participant M, 61 years old).

- Second generation: *“I don’t want to live solely for my family. I love my roots, but I want to define who I am freely, without having to prove anything to anyone”* (Participant R, 29 years old).

Common theme: While the first generation sacrificed their aspirations to support their families, younger generations strive for a balance between tradition and autonomy, while also facing cultural and societal pressures.

### **Perception of Italian Women**

Italian women are often seen as models of independence, though some participants highlight cultural contradictions.

- Positive aspect: *“Italian women inspired me to find my own path, especially in the workplace. I learned a lot from them”* (Participant M, 66 years old).

- Cultural critique: *“Italian women are strong, but sometimes they don’t seem to trust one another. In my culture, solidarity among women is fundamental”* (Participant G, 56 years old).

Common theme: Italian women are perceived as emancipated but often constrained by societal expectations or a less communal culture compared to Cape Verdean traditions.

## Resilience and Adaptation

A transversal theme is the resilience of Cape Verdean women, who have found creative ways to face challenges and build better lives in Italy.

- Testimony of resilience: *“I arrived here with nothing, but I always believed I would find a way to make it. My strength comes from my history and my family”* (Participant A, 63 years old).

- Cultural adaptation: *“We’ve learned to adapt. We maintain our identity while also embracing what is good about Italian culture”* (Participant P, 45 years old).

Common theme: The ability to adapt and reinvent themselves is a defining characteristic of the interviewed women, regardless of generation.

## Discussion

This study aimed to uncover the life stories of Cape Verdean women, with the objective of exploring how migration has influenced their self-perception, their understanding of rights, and their roles within both origin and host societies. Through their narratives, the research sought to investigate gender dynamics, the impact of migration on their autonomy, and their relationship with feminism in a multicultural context. Six thematic categories identified during analysis: (1) cultural identity and sense of belonging; (2) intersectional barriers and discrimination; (3) access to education and employment; (4) generational differences in values and expectations; (5) contrasting perceptions of Italian and Cape Verdean women; and (6) forms of resilience and resistance. These themes offer nuanced insights into the ways Cape Verdean migrant women construct their gender identity in a transnational context.

From the analysis of the interviews, it emerges that the narratives demonstrate how female migration is far older than often assumed, despite its frequent omission in historical accounts. This invisibility stems from the fact that female migrants predominantly work in private households, often considered, through a patriarchal lens, irrelevant from a sociopolitical perspective. Nevertheless, for decades, researchers have highlighted the feminization of migration, a defining characteristic of contemporary human mobility, where women constitute approximately half of all migrants and often represent a primary source of income for their families. In many countries of origin, this phenomenon has reinforced a “culture of female migration,” reflecting both the gendered dimension of poverty and profound transformations in women’s roles and societal systems.

In Italy, as evidenced by the women’s narratives, the migration transition began in the 1970s, marked by the arrival of foreign women, most of whom, like the study’s participants, were employed and housed within urban households, performing roles traditionally associated with domestic service. This reproduced outdated stereotypes of servile and feminized labor. Common among these women is their aspiration to carve out an individual identity, free from the societal ghettoization that relegates them, both in their countries of origin and destination, to narrowly defined societal roles. This silent population, arriving in the 1970s and employed full-time in private

households, remains hidden behind domestic doors, evading broader societal visibility and demographic census data.

Studies on female migration reveal three main forms of invisibility: women are invisible because they are not seen in public spaces, because they work in segregated and private settings, and because they remain excluded from the public sphere (Ambrosini, 2020). In the 1980s, women continued to migrate to Italy, gradually emerging from this overwhelming work segregation. They began to change their integration patterns and working hours, carving out public spaces and forging ties with the native population. The 1990s, on the other hand, were characterized by family reunifications and the arrival of women trafficked into prostitution, exacerbating negative stereotypes of immigrant women and fueling widespread societal distrust.

The women's testimonies revealed a diverse map of age, educational levels, life experiences, social and cultural backgrounds, current living conditions, and related issues. For all participants, their cultural world of origin remains a fundamental part of their identity: it cannot be ignored, even when challenged by the intermingling of cultures inherent to migration. There is a clear connection between female identity and cultural reference points, often expressed as a cohesive and unifying discourse. The interviews reveal a strong awareness of cultural diversity and a rejection of being rigidly reduced to specific cultural models or personal choices. When female identity is experienced as a shared form of economic and social marginalization, the relationship with the new cultural reality often manifests as uncritical acceptance. From the women's narratives, a transversal way of living emerges, characterized by the conscious selection of cultural models and practices depending on life contexts, moments, and opportunities. For these women, culture does not act as a separator or a barrier but rather as a reservoir of ideas, behaviors, and values from which they freely and consciously draw to consolidate their identity as individuals and as women (Lips, 2021).

Therefore, it appears that the woman holds an identity model that seeks to balance aspects of both the past and the present, along with profiles of women who sometimes leave behind their roots to fully embrace the traditional models of the culture they adopt in their new land.

The migratory experience of these women represents a symbolic transformation of aspects related to the self and their personal histories—leaps toward greater emancipation, as well as the psycho-educational challenge of understanding shifting social roles. This path fosters inclusion and reflects the strong drive these women must be part of their new communities. Although they still feel a deep connection to their families of origin, they recognize the need to integrate into their new environments to fulfill aspects of self-realization and pursue emancipation. In this process, the social network may play a crucial role sometimes, acting as a balancing point between cultures. In other words, these women become a bridge between worlds—between their individual and family histories, and the story they are now rewriting in a new setting, with new challenges but with a sense of hope.

The Cape Verdean women, indeed, represented here recognize the positive value of education as a means of social inclusion and a cultural asset. Being well-educated is seen not only as a tool to improve economic and social conditions but also to enrich interpersonal relationships. However, balancing educational aspirations with fam-

ily responsibilities remains one of the primary obstacles that prevents women from accessing this opportunity. Adequate education is viewed as a source of personal security and a way to escape family environments that are sometimes too restrictive and closed. Many immigrant women also face the problem of unrecognized qualifications obtained in their countries of origin. As a result, they often must restart their careers and reinvent themselves, frequently taking up lower-paid jobs that do not match their skill levels. Education, in this context, is both an achievement and a value, actively empowering those who possess it. Beyond personal qualifications, education provides the cultural capacity to navigate diverse social realities. Gender discrimination in education is a tangible issue, and for those who have the opportunity, it becomes both a goal and a tool to achieve parity with men.

The concept of education emerges from the interviews as a tool for personal and professional growth, a means of integration into a new country, a way to compare diverse cultural models, and a source of security and freedom of choice. It offers an opportunity to escape restrictive family environments and develop the necessary intellectual and social tools to assert one's rights across national boundaries. The women's biographies reveal, in some cases, a diversity in their starting points within their home country: many women had already diverged from traditional female roles, demonstrating an early need for individuality and self-awareness. This became particularly evident during the migration process and their approach to integration in the host country.

These findings lend empirical support to the theory of triple oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), as many narratives reflect the interlocking effects of race, gender, and class. First-generation participants reported being racialized and undervalued in the domestic and care work sectors—a form of structural devaluation aligned with what Farris (2017) describes as femonationalism. Second-generation women, on the other hand, experienced class-based stigma and cultural ambivalence within educational and professional contexts, often tied to both gendered expectations and ethnized identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These overlapping forms of inequality shaped the women's life trajectories but also triggered responses of resistance and renegotiation of self—through identity redefinition, reclaiming of agency, and active community participation (Mohanty, 2003; Anthias, 2012).

Thanks to newfound economic independence and a new individual and social status acquired through migration, these women reveal a new feminine identity—one rooted in emancipation, independence, autonomy, and self-fulfillment. At the same time, during their return visits to their hometowns, they reaffirm their Cape Verdean identity, emphasizing the success of their migration through the promotion of local rituals and cultural traditions enriched with external cultural elements.

The life project of each woman appears to determine her settlement and integration strategies, her interpersonal relationships with origin and host groups, her engagement with work expectations, and her pursuit of economic and social advancement. A salient common thread among the participants is the value placed on multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturality, and universalism of rights. While multiculturalism—understood as the coexistence of different cultures—is often taken for granted by both host and immigrant communities, interculturalism emphasizes the

need for constructive dialogue to promote productive interactions that celebrate and recognize differences (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Meer et al., 2016).

The Cape Verdean women interviewed demonstrated a strong aptitude for exchange and productive dialogue, embodying two (or more) cultures and finding ways to make them coexist in various aspects of life. This capacity is essential because it highlights a crucial distinction: for members of the host community, there is no urgency to understand immigrant cultures, whereas for migrants, cultural understanding is inherently necessary for their social and professional integration, helping them avoid isolation and marginalization. Even more profound is the centrality these women place on transculturality and the urgent need to transcend individual cultural boundaries. This is based on a shared consciousness of belonging to a single humanity and a common earth, with the goal of realizing a shared vision of planetary citizenship founded on universal ethical principles and values, applied to humanity without categorical distinctions.

These findings resonate with previous literature on migrant women's identity and transformation. As Åkesson (2009) argues, migration often prompts a radical redefinition of gender roles and family responsibilities. Similarly, the concept of "belonging" as framed by Yuval-Davis (2006) emerges clearly in participants' attempts to navigate cultural hybridity and situational identities. The results also align with Mohanty's (2003) critique of homogenizing representations of migrant women, showing instead the complexity and agency embedded in their narratives.

## Limitations

While this study has provided valuable insights into the experiences of Cape Verdean migrant women, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. First, the limited number of participants reduces the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population or different geographical contexts. Consequently, the results reflect only a small fraction of possible experiences and cannot be extended to all migrant women, even within the Cape Verdean community itself. Another limitation pertains to the exclusive use of interviews as the data collection method. Although autobiographical-narrative interviews are an effective tool for eliciting personal and in-depth reflections, they may encourage participants to provide socially desirable responses. Interviewees might have omitted or downplayed certain difficulties to align with what they perceived to be expected or appropriate, thus limiting the complexity of their responses. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the study, while beneficial for exploring subjective experiences in depth, does not allow for the quantitative measurement of migration's impact on gender dynamics and empowerment. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it would be useful to integrate interviews with quantitative tools such as surveys or questionnaires, which could provide comparable and more generalizable data. A mixed-methods approach would allow for the exploration of both qualitative aspects, linked to individual narratives, and quantitative dimensions, ensuring a broader and more balanced perspective on the phenomenon.

Future research could also focus on a more diverse sample, including not only Cape Verdean women but also migrants from other cultural contexts, to compare experiences of empowerment and integration within a wider multicultural framework.

## Conclusions

The study on the experiences of Cape Verdean women in Italy provides an in-depth look at the complexity of female empowerment within a migratory context, highlighting the challenges and opportunities these women encounter along their journey. Their narratives reveal the dual impact of migration: on one hand, it serves as a source of marginalization and discrimination, often tied to gender and skin color; on the other, it presents an opportunity to renegotiate personal and social identity, access new avenues for autonomy, and build extraordinary resilience. The interviews brought to light recurring themes such as the importance of education, seen not only as a means of economic empowerment but also as a tool for building meaningful interpersonal relationships and overcoming cultural barriers. However, the lack of recognition of qualifications obtained in their countries of origin and the challenge of balancing family and professional roles remain significant obstacles for many migrant women. These findings underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies that promote the recognition of skills and encourage the participation of migrant women in the social and professional life of host countries. Another key element emerging from the study is the value attributed to multiculturalism and interculturality. Cape Verdean women demonstrate a unique ability to build bridges between their culture of origin and Italian society, fostering a dialogue that enriches both realities. This attitude serves as a concrete example of how migration can be a resource for promoting social cohesion and equality, rather than a source of division. Finally, the participants' stories highlight the central role of women's solidarity networks, which provide emotional and practical support during challenging times. These networks, combined with the active engagement of women within their communities, represent a crucial element in building a more inclusive and just society. Cape Verdean women in Italy are not merely silent protagonists of migration but agents of change who, through their work, commitment, and determination, challenge stereotypes and contribute to redefining the role of migrant women in contemporary society. These results emphasize the need for an intersectional approach to migration and gender policies, one that recognizes the complexity of migratory experiences and values the contributions of women to global society. The future of female migration lies not only in overcoming barriers but also in promoting a model of planetary citizenship centered on the values of equality, justice, and solidarity.

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## Declarations

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants followed the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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