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## Deconstructing Migration Paradigms through Studies on Emigration and Immigration of Women in Italy

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et les immigrations des femmes en Italie*

*Deconstruyendo los paradigmas de la migración a través de estudios sobre la  
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# Deconstructing Migration Paradigms through Studies on Emigration and Immigration of Women in Italy

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- 1 In this paper, I propose to explore the way in which the position of women has been made visible in studies on migration in Italy. During the 1960s, immigrant women began to arrive on the Italian Peninsula, while emigrant women continued to depart for other countries. At that time, the former were ignored and the latter were seen as merely fulfilling their duty as wives, mothers or daughters. In the 1970s, the first research on emigrant women was conducted from a historical and anthropological perspective; from the 1980s onwards, studies on immigrant women developed with a particular focus on care work. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have seen the complexification of this epistemic space. While some authors use the concept of gender as a statistical variable that refers to an abstract and universal representation of women, thus supporting an androcentric view of migration, others have adopted the prism of gender relations. This research examines the intertwining of forms of domination from an intersectional perspective<sup>1</sup> and, in so doing, questions interpretative migratory paradigms in general.
- 2 In order to better understand this process, two premises are essential. The first is that, in Italy, research on migrant women was initially carried out in the field of migration studies and, later, in the field of gender studies;<sup>2</sup> the second is that work on the gender/

migration issue is strongly influenced by the international circulation of ideas, theories and researchers. The partial review that I present here is set in this context.<sup>3</sup> It underlines that studies on emigrant and immigrant women have demonstrated the inadequacy of “traditional” interpretative categories, by emphasising that the female migration must take into account themes that are typically women-related: health management, care, education and child-rearing (Favaro and Tognetti Bordogna, 1991). Both study traditions have therefore paid essential attention to the issue of reproductive work, making it possible to grasp the implications of non-economic factors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while research on emigrant women often looks at studies of immigrant women, it is less common for such research to look at the history. This lack of interest leads to making comparisons, often implicit, between migrant women of the past and those in the present, based on a series of prior generalisations “the merits of which no one any longer seeks to evaluate” (Remaud, Schaub and Thireau, 2012: 14).<sup>4</sup>

- 3 In this paper, I will show the value of linking studies on emigrant and immigrant women, based on three questions. What explanatory force does an androcentric vision still have in these studies? What consideration should be given to the demonstrated variability of women’s migratory situations in the past and the present? How can gender studies contribute to the development of a critical view of migration? My hypothesis is that by questioning the caesura that is often employed between the figure of the emigrant woman and that of the immigrant woman, we challenge the use of antinomic hierarchical interpretative categories. Integrating the heterogeneity of women’s migratory situations into our reflections shifts our attention from “why” to “how” migration is organised and to the linkages that are created between the transnational, the national and the local, while taking into account the structuring force of power relations. A joint study of women’s emigration and immigration can therefore provide a basis for analysing migration as dynamic and historicised situations.

## In search of the specificity of emigrant women

- 4 As the bibliographic review by Tirabassi (2015) shows, from the mid-1970s onwards, the world of research, both academic and political, began to focus on Italian women and their female descendants living abroad.<sup>5</sup> These investigations into the “hidden side” of Italian emigration noted the specificity of women while at the same time liberating them from the values of passivity and immobility that had been attributed to them. Two publications marked this research tradition. In 1983, the journal *Studi Emigrazione* published an issue entitled *La donna nei fenomeni migratori*. In the introduction to this collection of articles, which emerged from a colloquium held in Cagliari in 1982, Wihtol de Wenden (1983) discusses the weight of a certain feminist universalist and evolutionary vision in relation to the research community. She points out that the cultures of origin of immigrant women in Mediterranean society can be the source of forms of conflict, particularly between generations, and she draws attention to the fact that the migration of women can go hand in hand with an improvement in material conditions, but also with forms of professional de-skilling. In 1993, the journal *Altretalia* published eight articles on Italian women emigrants in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada and the United States. Iacovetta (1993) recalls that the aim of this issue was to

analyse continuities and changes, both synchronically and diachronically, between different migration flows, but that the contributions demonstrated the difficulty of making comparisons, given the different levels of maturation of this field of study in each country.

- 5 These studies, informed by the discussions in the United States on women's studies, ethnic studies and ethnic women's studies, coincided with the development of a new perspective on Italian women. The publication of the volume *Donne che vanno, donne che restano. Emigrazione e comportamenti femminili* edited by Corti (1990) contributed to the recognition of women's mobility as a structuring element in the functioning of Italian society. The research that was carried out during this period, adopting a historical and anthropological approach, leads to four important observations. The first is that the feminisation process of migration is rooted in the history of the rural environment and its transformations cannot be explained without taking into account the economic role of women (both those who departed and those who remained) and the way in which the domestic economy was linked to the seasonal or permanent movements of both men and women. Numerous case studies have shown that women's economic self-sufficiency has often enabled men to leave (Audenino, 1990; Merzario, 1996), especially when accompanied by birth control. The second observation is the coexistence of different forms of mobility of women. Temporary migration, particularly of girls, intersected with seasonal migration that regularly led women to travel varying distances to work in the reproductive sector as nannies or laundresses,<sup>6</sup> as well as in the textile industry or in agriculture. This mobility could therefore be an extension of domestic work, but it was above all a response to the rationale of the plurality of women's economic activity (Bianchi, 2001). The third observation is the significant role played in migration systems by women who have not physically emigrated.. A consideration of migration from the perspective of the women who remain in the place of departure revealed the need to understand the individual choice of leaving or staying through the lens of gender relations at different levels. The women who did not depart took on the work in the fields, including the most arduous labour, in addition to raising children and supporting elders; they also learned to administer an economy that was no longer limited to the local level (particularly through the management of remittances) and their propensity to save played an essential role in the success of migratory projects. The fourth observation is that the migration of men did not change the status of the women who remained in the place of departure. Indeed, the substitution role of women in the fields was considered to be temporary and, during men's absence, a kind of 'suspension of the gender order' occurred which did not eliminate the subordination of women.
- 6 Meanwhile, research carried out in places of arrival confirmed the significance of the economic role of migrant women and that joining the world of work did not go hand in hand with the alleged "integration cycle". Italian women moving to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century often found employment in the informal and domestic economic sectors as well as in industry or in the home-based garment sector (Tirabassi, 1993; Bianchi, 2001; Gabaccia and Iacovetta, 2002). In France, at the beginning of the twentieth century Italian women were more frequently engaged in salaried work than in the 1970s, and their entries into and exits from the labour market were adapted to the economic demands of the domestic group and to the implementation, across time and place, of the family migratory project (Miranda, 2001).

Moreover, women emigrants experienced a new way of managing the reproductive sphere and its “*datità utilizzabile*”,<sup>7</sup> i.e. the role of the domestic world as a place of primary security for themselves and for other family members. Women emigrants have had to learn to manage the (sometimes meagre) economic resources of the household, to reorganise their knowledge of private and intimate matters, to confer a new market value on their reproductive work, in some cases by monetising certain domestic tasks (Tirabassi, 1998; Gabaccia and Iacovetta, 2002). This reorganisation of domesticity has given them a central role in migratory projects, structured by both individual and generational temporalities.<sup>8</sup>

- 7 Research on emigration has shown the close link between migratory situations and kinship structures. Emigration and the transmission of wealth intersected with family rules and marriage rationales, sometimes resulting in the reproduction of tradition and sometimes in its manipulation (Piselli, 1981; Ramella, 2001). Thus, girls invested their dowries to finance the departure of the man they had just married or developed matrimonial strategies to move abroad<sup>9</sup> or from the southern regions to the countryside of Piedmont (Marchesano, 2010). The attention paid to matrimonial dynamics demonstrated the specificity of women’s migratory strategies and the significance of negotiations structuring the dispersion of family relatives through adjustments of individual and family logics.
- 8 Analyses of the role of the domestic sphere within kinship relationships have made it possible to deconstruct the stereotype of the Italian emigrant woman as a passive peasant woman, imprisoned in the values of honour and the religious beliefs of the Mediterranean family, who is said to have achieved emancipation through emigration, by entering the world of productive work. As Tirabassi (1993) and Gabaccia (1998) have pointed out, this stereotype, based on the values of the spatial segregation of women, governed initial studies of Italian women in the United States, but it has never been corroborated by the lived experience of migrant women, who had often already been working in the Italian countryside.
- 9 Many case studies confirm the variable nature of the process of adaptation to the society and culture of the countries of settlement. Individual itineraries, especially when studied as part of and across generational journeys, show that changes and continuities have reshaped the value attributed to the family and the relationships between ascendants, descendants and those of indirect lineage. Italian women who arrived in Australia, sometimes after marrying by proxy, transformed and adapted traditions and, despite hard work in the fields, made significant changes in both the public and private spheres of the country (Vasta, 1993). In the United States, some girls have taken on new social roles and challenged traditional gender relations (Carneval, 2007) by referring to “dominant ethnic groups” (Jones, 2007). Finally, many girls participated in social struggles<sup>10</sup> or took on transgressive roles such as becoming models for Parisian artists’ studios.

## The arrival of immigrant women: the structuring effect of care work

- 10 In Italy, questions about the linkages between gender and immigration have intersected with the issue of the internationalisation of the service sectors. From the 1960s onwards, the first women migrants arrived in Italy from the Philippines,

Eritrea, Somalia and Cape Verde, but it was not until the 1990s that a degree of academic interest was shown (Vicarelli, 1994). This lack of attention to immigrant women is the result of a dominant androcentric vision in social sciences and the fact that at the time Italy was not considered a country of immigration. Yet, it must also be viewed in connection with the type of employment occupied by immigrants: from the start, research pointed to a high percentage of women working in the domestic sector. Numerous studies carried out on *badanti* (domestic carers) and *collaboratrici domestiche* (domestic helpers) linked the arrival of immigrant women to the neo-liberal economic trends generated by the sectors of female employment that were even more flexible and insecure. The presence of migrant women correlated with the emergence of a new Mediterranean migratory model (Pugliese, 2012), which referred to a bourgeois model based on the demand for full-time domestic work.

- 11 However, these studies overlooked a whole aspect of the reality of female migration, such as the role of women entrepreneurs, or the continuity between migratory situations and prostitution. Above all, they ignored studies on Italian women. During the 1990s, research on the socio-economic conditions of Italian women drew attention to their low rate of integration into the labour market and to the fact that their forms of identification with the domestic role were in serious crisis (Groppi, 1996; D'Amelia, 1997). However, since paths to emancipation are not linear, changes were structured in a syncretic manner, combining traditional and new elements. In Italy, high unemployment rates among women and the rejection of domestic work coexisted with strong value attributed to the maternal role and the consumer sphere (D'Amelia, 1997; Siebert, 1999; Oppo, Piccone and Signorelli, 2000).
- 12 This reality contradicts the idea that the arrival of foreign women must be linked to the entry of Italian women into the world of extra-domestic work, confirming the functionality of immigration flows in relation to the emancipation of native women. In fact, the immigration of women to Italy calls into question the so-called "patriarchy crisis" and its analysis ties in with the question posed by Signorelli (2011: 38) as to whether "women are drawn into a process that attributes new functions and diverse meanings to known forms of domination and submission".
- 13 Studies that have looked at Italian and immigrant women together have shown that relationships between foreign and Italian women are constructed in the domestic space, within a gender relationship that creates subordinate status between women from different cultures (Miranda, 2002). Andall (2000) pointed out that the migratory experience of Cape Verdean, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women who arrived in Italy between the 1970s and 1990s is linked to the fact that Italian women, who retain their full domestic role, try to offload some of their work onto foreigners, thus maintaining a certain social balance, especially between the sexes. Indeed, the arrival and settlement of immigrant women is not a direct result of the economic emancipation of Italian women, but of the formation of a domestic labour market encompassing gender relations. Consequently, the economic role played by immigrant women cannot be studied in terms of "substitution" (as has been applied to migrants working in industry); it requires revision of androcentric interpretative paradigms. The functioning of the reproductive labour market goes beyond classical theories of demand and supply or costs and benefits; at the intersection of both migratory systems and forms of labour market segregation, it is structured by the effects of networks of belonging and by individual migration itineraries (Catanzaro and Colombo, 2009).

- 14 Studies about immigrant women have also brought to the forefront the ways in which motivations and causes are intertwined in migratory journeys. However, in most cases they have taken a Western-centric view. This research has highlighted the links between individual women's migratory temporalities and migration policies,<sup>11</sup> but above all, it has interpreted women's migratory experience as different to that of men, in that it is linked to the emergence of new aspirations and structured by the search for autonomy and personal and professional fulfilment that would be denied to women in their societies of departure. The desire to escape male violence, repudiation and forced marriage were cited as decisive factors in understanding this "modern gender culture" which is said to guide immigrant women towards more egalitarian horizons in terms of gender relations. This reading of migration, which establishes that the choice made by women is determined by a non-economic rationale, emphasises their cultural role. Migrant women are commonly described as "mediators between cultures" (Favaro and Tognetti Bordogna, 1991), "the real protagonists of a silent and slow adaptation" (Mariti, 2003), "the factor that regulates the process of community integration" (Raffaele, 1992) or as those who contribute to the "creation of a multi-ethnic society" (Caritas/Migrantes, 2003). From this research perspective, gender is reduced to a sort of variable that predisposes, guides and determines women's migratory behaviour and attitudes.
- 15 The "immigrant woman" is thus transformed into a cultural indicator which, through schooling and fertility rates and entry into employment, informs the level of emancipation of the social group of origin. Seen as a "mediator" between cultures and generations, the role of the migrant woman is part of the integration process within the society of arrival. This view essentialises cultural affiliation which, often reduced to the religious dimension, is mentioned as the factor explaining differences between women belonging to various national groups.<sup>12</sup> The reference to an abstract and universal "feminine" normativity thus forms the foundation of conformist academic thinking. This approach invokes gender affiliation, establishes dissimilarities and similarities between women from different cultural and economic backgrounds, and is based on the opposition of tradition and modernity, subjugation and emancipation of women (Miranda, 2008). In this context, the concept of gender loses the epistemological strength that characterised its initial usage and instead upholds an assimilationist vision and defines the various actions carried out with migrant women by institutions and agencies, which often continue to apply an androcentric perspective.

## Persistent androcentric representation

- 16 The current presence of foreign women in Italy and Italian women abroad raises a series of questions about the rationales for women's departure and the impact of schooling, motherhood and employment rates on their migratory journeys. These questions seek to understand the issue of migration through a generalising approach, referring to an abstract category of "migrant woman" that fails to reflect varying situations across both space and time or to deal with the difficulty of finding a single explanation to shed light on women's itineraries.
- 17 Research into different migrant national groups has confirmed this heterogeneity at various levels. Firstly, it has shown that even when women depart with men, their role is not reduced to that of mere companions. Secondly, it has demonstrated that



consideration of religion as an independent variable obscures issues related to social background, marital status, number of children, age (Schmidt and Saint-Blancat, 1998; Maciotti, 2000; Campani, 2000; Giacalone, 2002). Thirdly, a long-term analysis has made it possible to gain a better understanding of variations in migration dynamics within and between groups (Vlase, 2006; Perra and Pilati, 2008; Pagnotta, 2012). Thus, research on Italian women in Switzerland, France, Australia and Argentina has painted a picture reflecting the complexity of situations, depending on the scales of analysis adopted (individual, family, collective).<sup>13</sup> This study framework has also been complicated by the resumption of internal and international Italian migration, which has highlighted the emergence of new models that are of particular interest to single women with a higher level of education (Todisco *et al.*, 2004; Pilato, 2011).

- 18 Although the adoption of a perspective on the diverse situations of women's migration, in the past and in the present, shows a heterogeneity of journeys and migratory experiences, most research continues to use a series of statistical indicators derived from a certain androcentric approach, as shown by the use of the ratio of men to women. This relates women's participation in migration flows to that of men without taking into account the structuring action of gender rationales in social stratifications, the importance of the role of women who remain in the place of origin and the significant presence of women in past migration flows.
- 19 According to the AIRE (the register of Italians living abroad) in 2014, the number of women living abroad with Italian nationality was 2,312,309, i.e. 48% of the total 4,811,163 Italians living abroad. Italian passport-holders are settled in Argentina, Germany, Switzerland, France and Brazil, among other countries (Fondazione Migrantes, 2016), and are spread out according to regions of origin and timing of migration. The rate of women's participation in emigration is therefore variable, but it continues to be viewed as capable of informing on male migration typologies.<sup>14</sup> This is the case despite qualitative research which emphasises that this indicator hides complex realities and that, in order to understand the position of women in migratory chains, it is necessary to examine both local and international economic contexts, the functioning of the family and the couple, as well as the migration policies of the countries of departure and arrival.
- 20 For example, according to the French census, Italian women represented more than 40% in 1901 and 56% in 1975. These data confirm that the presence of women is linked to the project of stabilising the family, but a more in-depth analysis shows that the departure of women was not always a "post-dated appointment" with men. Indeed, although it is true that the presence of Italian women became more visible with the permanent arrival of the entire family, many migration networks were composed exclusively of women who left as workers (Corazza, 1995) and above all as domestic servants, nannies or maids.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the stabilisation of families intersected with the journeys of men who continued to go back and forth. Long-standing migration flows (especially from the north of Italy) stabilised and were superimposed on new ones (especially from the south of the country) in which men continued to journey back and forth (Miranda, 2001; Sirna, 2005).
- 21 With regard to immigration, the research has highlighted the significant female presence from the outset. This finding was confirmed in 2015: foreign women were almost as numerous as foreign men (49% of the 5,026,153 foreigners) (IDOS, 2016). However, their presence is distributed differently according to nationality. The



Moroccan, Albanian and Romanian groups (which are among the most numerous in Italy) are more male dominated than the Ukrainian, Polish, Brazilian and Moldavian groups, which are composed of a majority of women. A diachronic analysis also shows that over the last thirty years there has been a substitution and overlap between and within migration flows of women to Italy (Miranda, 2012). On the one hand, some majority women groups saw an increase in the proportion of men, as in the case of the Philippines. During the 1970s, women immigrants who arrived in Italy were mostly single and seeking a form of independence; during the 1980s, married women arrived, who were later joined by men. On the other hand, new national groups composed mainly of women are replacing other women dominated migratory groups. This is particularly true of migration flows from former communist countries. This process of substitution between different groups of foreign women is the consequence of Italian immigration policies that seek to meet the needs of an ageing society. The management of migration flows has enabled the replacement of women's labour in care work sectors where the employment rate among women from the more women-dominated groups has remained very high. This situation, linked to the economic and political situations in the societies of departure and arrival, has been used to develop classification that contrasts "single women" with "accompanying women": the former are described as "actresses" of their own destiny; the latter as being subject to the projects of their husbands.

## Linkages between transnational and local levels

- 22 The adoption of a transnational approach has contributed to a better understanding of the position of migrant women. This perspective examines the continuities between places of departure and arrival and goes beyond representation of the migrant woman as the main factor in the transmission of traditions. Building on studies about the transnational maternal experience, research has confirmed that, in most cases, migrant women retain their family responsibilities and learn to manage physical and emotional distance with their children. With departure, forms of reconciliation between family and professional responsibilities change: the spatial scale expands, and links are structured around different temporalities. The (still too few) studies on returning and elderly migrants confirm the variability of family configurations over time and that individual migration projects resonate with different types of family reconstitution. Indeed, the forms of grouping set up by these mothers lead to various typologies of transnational families (Balsamo, 1997; Salih, 2000; Decimo, 2005; Ambrosini, 2009; Bonizzoni, 2007; Baggio, 2012).
- 23 Research on emigration from this same viewpoint has demonstrated the importance of the comparative approach (Gabaccia, 1998) and, above all, has put the significance of the present into perspective by corroborating the fact that the transnational behaviours of migrant women are not new (Luconi and Varricchio, 2015). Studies conducted from this angle showed that it was already the case in the past that the formation of international migratory areas determined the plurality of location of family members and that this process has generated constant processes of relocation/resettlement of emotional relationships. The transnational approach looked at the adjustments that were made between the men and women who left and those who stayed, thus going beyond the cyclical understanding of integration (Gabaccia and

Iacovetta, 2002). This work thus contributed to rethinking the available interpretative paradigms by emphasising the need to consider the complexity of the conjunctions and disjunctions that are created between and beyond national frameworks, but also between localisms.

- 24 Studies from a localised perspective are widespread in the Italian context. They are a consequence of Italian regionalised migration policies, but they are rooted in a historical and anthropological tradition that focused on migration dynamics in networks of “*compaesani*,” i.e. people from the same village of origin. The introduction of this scale questions the contexts of knowledge production and makes it possible to overcome the limits of methodological nationalism that consists in understanding the social world by taking the nation-state as the unit of analysis.
- 25 The attention devoted to small scales of analysis show that migrant women play a fundamental role in the reconstitution of economic localities and emotional anchors, inserted into transnational configurations. These women maintain the family homes that, beyond their periodic use with varying degrees of regularity, have a symbolic value around which the family’s migratory memory is attached. A localised approach also makes it possible to know which women leave, the social and cultural experience that accompanies their journeys, but also the contexts in which this experience is situated. It therefore provides an analytical framework to gain a better understanding of gender rationales and at the same time to consider political, economic and cultural structures.

## The issue of social power relations

- 26 As we have seen, studies into immigrant women in Italy took into account the similarities and differences between migrant and non-migrant women, as well as among migrant women. This focus contributed to shifting academic scrutiny from the individual migratory profile and/or that of the group to which the migrant women belonged, to the linkages between gender, ethnicity and class (Colombo, 2003; Nare, 2013). The research carried out from this perspective led to the disassociation of migration from kinship relations and the deconstruction of the essentialisms developed around the figure of the migrant woman. By shifting the focus to social, political and cultural structures, it appears that the conditions that determine the departure and fate of migrant women vary according to the positions of power occupied in the migration space. This approach leads to the study of linkages between gender and migration, and to the study of the driving force of power hierarchies and subordination. Schmoll (2017), drawing on research related to women asylum seekers, has shown that intersectionality helps to decipher social perceptions, practices and behaviours with respect to migrant women’s positions in social stratification. Migration leads to a reconfiguration of social positions related to gender, race and class, which result both from individual actions and from the effects of social structures and processes (such as divisions of labour based on gender or race) on migrant women. As a result, women adapt to existing hierarchies, sometimes they thwart them by situating relationships in a reversible set of scales that blur boundaries and belonging; thus, while some act for the reproduction of traditional hierarchies, others cause disruption.

- 27 At the same time, the intersectional lens highlighted the links between racism,<sup>16</sup> sexism and different forms of oppression of immigrant women and provided an opportunity for Italian feminists to reposition their actions. After many years during which immigrant and Italian women's associations ignored each other (Campani, 2011), we are witnessing the emergence of a movement that questions the interactions between women in terms of race, ethnicity and class in its global forms (Pojmann, 2006). From this perspective, research spaces take on a political significance. This positioning is claimed by a number of young researchers<sup>17</sup> who emphasise that sexualised and gendered discourses are essential in the construction of ethnicization processes; indeed, they are a foundation for politics that use migration as a power strategy (Bonfiglioli, 2012), because in order to interpret the migratory experience, we need not only to grasp the difficulties experienced at an individual level, but also to understand how the "colour of skin" operates in integration processes (Curti, 2007).
- 28 The critique of Western thought on androcentrism, heterosexuality and gendered ethnocentrism means studying linkages between colonisation and migration. Le Houérou's article, published in this dossier, shows how revisiting historical sources through a gender lens reveals new perspectives of analysis. The reinterpretation of the colonial experience is all the more important because, as Marchetti (2014) points out, it structures women's migratory experience, as shown in the case of Eritrean women. The migratory situation reproduces the mechanisms of construction of alterity in the private sphere and creates the figure of the "postcolonial migrant domestic worker". The current model of servitude is based on that of the colonial era and, as a result, in the construction of boundaries between migrant and non-migrant women, reactivated colonial relations of domination operate first and foremost through women's bodies and their use in domestic work. Such a perspective not only recognises the heuristic value of studying the plurality of "points of view" in relation to reality, but, above all, provides the basis for understanding the different worlds in which subjects evolve and give meaning to their position in power structures.
- 29 The adoption of a transnational feminist approach from a postcolonial perspective raises questions about differences and inequalities in developing an epistemic space that calls into question the universal dimension in order to rethink the divisions and hierarchies of the social order in terms of intersectionality. By analysing the "cultural use" that the native population makes of the figure of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to reach Italy, I have noticed that it is important to adopt a reflexive approach that leads to considering both the interpretation of the presence of new migrants and the way in which Italians relate the migratory phenomenon to national history. The figure of a man arriving alone, fleeing war and conflict (an image that contrasts with the longstanding presence of foreign women in Italy) has become central to this conception of migration, which today refers to racial backgrounds. The semantic boundaries constructed between Italians and "others" evoke the intertwining of gender and race around the image of the male/black/unemployed migrant (Miranda, 2018).
- 30 In pursuing this work, the aim is to raise questions of differences and inequalities in order to develop an epistemic space that contributes to the emergence of new sites of knowledge production. In studying the actions carried out by members of associations and movements in Palermo and Verona (*Palermo Lesbicissima, Casa di Ramia, l'Italia sono anch'io*, the Gaysprides), Alga (2015) adopted a "postexotic" ethnographic approach

questioning forms of knowledge hierarchisation. The epistemological core of such reflexive scrutiny demands a profound revision of field practices (in order to put the academic point of view in perspective, by opening it up to confrontation with other points of view), while calling into question the universal dimension in order to rethink divisions and hierarchies of the social order, and thereby to contribute to the redefinition of the geopolitics of knowledge and a globalised epistemic space.

## Conclusions

- 31 Research on Italian emigrant and immigrant women has evolved in the same epistemic space, posing the same questions and providing complementary answers that enable gender-migration studies to move forward on the basis of three observations. The first is that the complexification of migration flows is a developing process, linked to a continual superimposition of gendered migration patterns; the second highlights the fact that power structures involve all women, both migrants and non-migrants; the third emphasises that differences and similarities are not binary opposites (current/past migrants, migrant/non-migrant). This work reveals the inadequacy of traditional explanatory models and shows that the study of migration must simultaneously take into account mobility and immobility, centrifugal and centripetal forces, economic and cultural structures, and administrative and political dimensions.
- 32 Furthermore, a joint analysis of the situations of immigrant and emigrant women defies evolutionary rationales, making it difficult to generalise; it shows the inadequacy of the concept of “migrant woman” and leads to the consideration of the diversity of migratory situations as being structured by the multidimensionality of interconnections existing between migratory phenomena and gender rationales. As a result, these studies open up a series of questions to which only a comparative approach can provide an answer. The reflexive, intersectional exercise that I presented in this paper aims to grasp the gendered dimension as consubstantial to the construction of knowledge on migration. This theoretical and methodological reflexivity around the issue of gender and migration in Italy must be pursued in order to contribute to a critique of the interpretative paradigms of social sciences and to reconsider the relationships of hegemony and subordination in the production of knowledge.

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## NOTES

1. These studies refer to the intersectional perspective developed since the work of McCall (2005) and Crenshaw (1991) in particular.
2. This form of circulation raises two main questions: how did the dialogue between these fields of study come about? And what have migration studies brought to gender studies and vice versa? These relationships have not yet been explored in depth.
3. I will make a selection from the vast literature, the production of which is declining in the Italian academic context and in the Italian language.
4. This implicit comparatism establishes continuities and fractures which equate the Italian women of the past with the women arriving in Italy today in the context of family reunification, or which operate distinctions between the emigrants who left in the 1960s-1970s and those who have left since the 2000s (Campani, 2000).
5. At the beginning of the twentieth century, we can already see signs of women being considered through a family-based or victimist approach (De Calboli, 1902), but interest in emigrant women really developed during the 1970s, both in the academic and political worlds. See also: Charlot (1979); Yans-McLaughlin (1977); Knowles (1978); Caroli, Harney and Tomasi (1978); Mormino and Pozzetta (1983); Schiavo (1984); Chistolini (1986); Vecchio (1989).
6. The history of domestic service leads to two important considerations. The first is that the profession became more dominated by women during the nineteenth century, and the second is that such work was mainly of interest to women from the Italian countryside or the poorest regions of the country (Arru, 1996).
7. Referring to De Martino's theory, Signorelli (2000) used this concept to understand the cultural dynamics of population movements.
8. The departure and/or cohabitation of migrants, men and women of different generations, has created a new space of interaction, of interdependence of individual actions.
9. Luigi Zampa's film *Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* (1972) provides an illuminating portrayal of this strategy.
10. See the contributions of Gabaccia and Iacovetta (2002, Part 3).

11. The arrival of migrant women has been facilitated by regularisation programmes that derogate from the principle of closing national borders. Despite the security rationale displayed in Italy, particularly since the Bossi-Fini law (2001), the State opened two regularisation processes in 2002 and 2009, aimed in particular at women employed as *badanti* or *collaboratrici domestiche*.

12. Thus, deeply different national groups (e.g. Polish and Filipino women) are aggregated; their migration pathways are seen to be guided by the same individual rationale, in contrast to that guiding women from Morocco.

13. The literature is now extensive. See among others, Allemann-Ghionda and Meyer-Sabino (1992); Marengo (1993); Iacovetta (1993); Vasta (1993); Niccolai (2004); Fibbi, Bolzman and Vial (1999); Gandolfo (1990); Grandi (2001); Bruno (2009); Arru and Ramella (2008); Rosa (2013); Borruso (2017).

14. In the recent past, based on the assumption that women follow men, the volume of permanent emigration was calculated when women left and the remaining departures were considered to be temporary pendular migration by men (De Clementi, 2011).

15. In 1901, more than 90% of Italian women were registered as “maids”. Corti (1996) underlines that by the end of the nineteenth century, approximately 140,000 Italian women were employed as domestic workers, chambermaids or domestic servants in the Savoy and Côte d’Azur regions in France.

16. Since the 1980s, racist discourse has become increasingly commonplace. As Tabet (1997) pointed out, the arrival of migrants brought Italy out of the denial of its negationist past.

17. See the website of the movement “Non una di meno,” in particular the workshop “Femminismo Migrante” (<https://nonunadimeno.wordpress.com/2017/02/08/tavolo-femminismo-migrante>) and the lecture series “Cartografie Subalterne: sguardi postcoloniali su confini, conflitti e traiettorie insorgenti” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8hcZxBozqs>).

## ABSTRACTS

Research on Italian emigrant and immigrant women has evolved in the same epistemic space, posing the same questions and providing complementary answers that enable gender-migration studies to move forward on the basis of three observations. The first is that the complexification of migration flows is a developing process, linked to a continual superimposition of gendered migration patterns; the second highlights the fact that power structures involve all women, both migrant and non-migrant; the third emphasises that differences and similarities are not binary opposites (current/past migrants, migrant/non-migrant). The theoretical and methodological reflexivity that has developed around the issues of gender and migration in Italy makes it possible to grasp the gender dimension as being consubstantial to the construction of knowledge on migration. This work reveals the inadequacy of traditional explanatory models and shows that the study of migration must simultaneously take into account mobility and immobility, centrifugal and centripetal forces, economic and cultural structures, administrative and political dimensions.

Les recherches sur les émigrées et les immigrées italiennes ont évolué dans le même espace épistémique, elles ont posé les mêmes questions et apporté des réponses complémentaires qui permettent d’avancer dans les études genre-migrations à partir de trois constats. Le premier est

que la complexification des flux migratoires est un processus en devenir, lié à une superposition constante des modalités migratoires genrées ; le deuxième fait apparaître que les structures de pouvoir impliquent toutes les femmes, migrantes et non migrantes ; le troisième souligne que les différences et les similitudes ne s'inscrivent pas dans des oppositions binaires (migrantes actuelles/du passé, migrante/non migrante). La réflexivité théorique et méthodologique développée autour de la problématique des questions genre et migrations en Italie permet de saisir la dimension genrée comme étant consubstantielle à la construction du savoir sur les migrations. Ces travaux montrent l'insuffisance des modèles explicatifs classiques et mettent en évidence que l'étude des migrations doit prendre en compte d'une manière simultanée la mobilité et l'immobilité, les forces centrifuges et centripètes, les structures économiques et culturelles, les dimensions administratives et politiques.

La investigación sobre las emigrantes e inmigrantes italianas ha evolucionado en el mismo espacio epistémico, ha hecho las mismas preguntas y ha proporcionado respuestas complementarias que permite avanzar en los estudios sobre la migración de género basados en tres observaciones. La primera es que la complejidad de los flujos migratorios es un proceso en desarrollo, vinculado a una superposición constante de patrones de migración de género; la segunda muestra que las estructuras de poder involucran a todas las mujeres, tanto migrantes como no migrantes; la tercera enfatiza que las diferencias y las similitudes no son binarias opuestas (migrantes actuales/pasados, migrantes/no migrantes). La reflexividad teórica y metodológica desarrollada en torno a la cuestión del género y la migración en Italia permite entender la dimensión de género como consustancial a la construcción del conocimiento sobre la migración. Este trabajo muestra la insuficiencia de los modelos explicativos tradicionales y destaca que el estudio de la migración debe tener en cuenta simultáneamente la movilidad y la inmovilidad, las fuerzas centrífugas y centripetas, las estructuras económicas y culturales y las dimensiones administrativas y políticas.

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**Palabras claves:** Italia, emigración de mujeres, inmigración de mujeres, relaciones sociales de dominación, reflexividad

**Keywords:** Italy, emigration of women, immigration of women, social relations of domination, reflexivity

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