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Political Engagement of Luso-Venezuelan Migrant Women in Portugal in the Context of the Venezuelan Humanitarian Crisis

Juliete Andreina Da Costa Da Silva

Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

PhD. Thais França, Invited Assistant Professor,
ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon

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Department of History

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*Para todos aquellos que creyeron en mi
cuando yo deje de hacerlo.*

*Para Lili, Francisquito, Ricky y Tace.
Donde quiera que estén.*

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who took part in this study, from my supervisor, for her guidance, the interviewees, their openness and contribution, my family and friends, and their continuous and unconditional support. Thank you all!

There is a reason why I choose to use the name of mythological Goodnesses to represent the interviewees. To me, every woman who decides to migrate into the uncertainty is a Goodness. We are fighting for our rights and dreams, and we are doing it while learning new cultures, and languages, and figuring out our place in the new reality.

You all deserve recognition and appreciation. This is my way of doing so.

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Hay una razón por la que elegí usar nombres de diosas mitológicas para representar a las entrevistadas. Para mí, cada mujer que decide migrar hacia lo desconocido e incierto es una diosa. Estamos luchando por nuestros derechos y sueños, y lo hacemos mientras aprendemos nuevas cultura e idiomas, y encontramos nuestro lugar en una nueva realidad.

Todas ustedes merecen reconocimiento y aprecio. Esta es mi manera de hacerlo.

Summary

This study examines the political participation of Luso-Venezuelan migrant women in Portugal, focusing on how their identities as both women and migrants with dual nationality influence their political involvement. The shift of Venezuela from a migrant-receiving country to a migrant-sending one, driven by a socioeconomic and political crisis, along with the migratory ties between Venezuela and Portugal, are crucial to understanding this community's decision to migrate and their political behavior after their migration. Through in-depth interviews with 10 Luso-Venezuelan migrant women, the study underscores the importance of considering gendered experiences in migration and political participation, emphasizing that women's political activism often extends beyond formal politics into everyday acts of caregiving and community-building. This study addresses the gap in research about the unique intersection of migration, gender, and political participation, concerning how gendered experiences, and belonging feeling affect political involvement.

Keywords: migrants, migrant women, Luso-Venezuelans, political rights.

Resumo

Este estudo examina a participação política das mulheres migrantes luso-venezuelanas em Portugal, focando-se em como as suas identidades, tanto como mulheres e migrantes com dupla nacionalidade, influenciam o seu envolvimento político. A transição da Venezuela de um país recetor de migrantes para um país emissor, impulsionada por uma crise socioeconómica e política, juntamente com os laços migratórios entre a Venezuela e Portugal, são cruciais para compreender a decisão desta comunidade de migrar e o seu comportamento político após a migração. Através de entrevistas com 10 mulheres migrantes luso-venezuelanas, o estudo destaca a importância de considerar as experiências de género na migração e na participação política, sublinhando que o ativismo político das mulheres muitas vezes vai além da política formal, manifestando-se em atos quotidianos de cuidado e construção comunitária. Este estudo aborda a lacuna existente na investigação sobre a interseção única entre migração, género e participação política, particularmente no que diz respeito a como as experiências de género, e sentido de pertinência afetam o envolvimento político.

Palavras-chave: migração, mulheres migrantes, Luso-Venezuelanos, direitos políticos.

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Glossary of Acronyms

IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OM	Observatório das Migrações
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OAS	Organization of American States
PEP	Permiso Especial de Permanencia (Special Permit of Permanence)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

Introduction

Moving out of Venezuela 8 years ago made me rethink my political persona. I have always been interested in politics, in the national as well as the international sphere. In Venezuela, I took part in demonstrations against the government, elections, debates, and student movements. When I first moved out of Venezuela I went to Colombia, where I obtained a Special Permit of Permanence (PEP, in its Spanish acronym), a political instrument to regularize my migration status, which confers certain duties and rights to the migrants but restricts others (*Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores*, 2017), such as political participation. On one hand, I didn't feel part of the society enough to participate in demonstrations, but on the other, I wanted to participate in local and presidential elections, as it affected Colombia's relations with Venezuela and my life in that country. As I wasn't a resident under traditional regulations or a national, I didn't have the right to vote. It was then that I realized how important it was to be national of the country where you are living, to fully enjoy political, economic, and social rights, as well as to be integrated into society, to feel the motivation to understand and participate in the national political environment.

Coming from this background, this dissertation focuses on how Venezuelan migrant women in Portugal with dual citizenship (Venezuelan and Portuguese) engage with politics in the host country.

Venezuela was the second destination for Portuguese in Latin America, after Brazil. The country was perceived then as one with great economic advantages and as an opportunity to start over (Baptista, 2006; Gomes, 2009). In the Venezuelan case, the returnees are not mainly the generation who left Portugal in the XX century as a direct consequence of the economic crisis, but the first- and second-generation migrants, the Luso-Venezuelan one (Padilla and López, 2021).

From 2015 to 2019 as a consequence of the political and economic situation in Venezuela, more than three million Venezuelans left the country, mostly to other South American nations (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2018), although, this figure does not reflect the population in an irregular situation or citizens with double nationality. A significant proportion of this group chose Colombia as their final destination, with around

600,000 migrants in 2018 (IOM, 2018), mainly because it is accessible by land, the border city of Cucuta being the one most populated by Venezuelans outside the country.

On the other hand, a significant number of Venezuelan citizens arrive in Europe through family connections (Gomes, 2009; Padilla & França, 2022). However, many enter the continent using a second nationality, which excludes them from the official statistics of Venezuelans in Europe. Many of these migrants are considered returnees and not migrants as original migration flows existed previously from Europe to Latin America (Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog, 2021).

In 2021, the extinguished Portuguese *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (SEF) registered Venezuela as the fifth nationality – second from Latin America – with the highest number of requests for Portuguese nationality (SEF, 2021) with 1.345 requests. Venezuelans are currently the second nationally requesting Portuguese citizenship by the effect of will (marriage or union of fact) with a total of 865 requests (SEF, 2021), and until 2021, there were 8.296 Venezuelans (with and without double nationality) residing in Portugal, 3.440 males and 4.856 females.

As it can be noticed, Venezuelan migration to Portugal is a growing phenomenon. This thesis sets the foundation to explore the historical connections between Venezuela and Portugal, to understand why Venezuelan women choose to migrate to Portugal and how their migration experience has affected their way of exercising political rights, as well as how this migration has affected Portugal from a political perspective.

Understanding how migrants exercise political rights can help the host country improve its integration policies. Having an active political population is crucial for the well-being of a country and its citizens. It can lead to more representative, accountable, and democratic institutions and governments, as well as a more stable and peaceful society (Lijphart, 1997). In the case of Luso Venezuelan migrant women, as they have double nationality, they are entitled to exercise all political rights in Portugal (Abrantes, et al, 2015). However, there is not enough exploration of how the intersectionality of being a migrant and a woman, with social, political, cultural, and economic differences, affected the way women exercise political rights once they are residing in the host country (Szczepaniková, 2006; Caggiano, 2019). Furthermore, there is little research on how second-generation returnees engage in domestic affairs in the host country (Wessendorf, 2007).

The choice of Portugal to study how Venezuelans with double nationality exercise their political rights responds not only to the historical connection between the countries but also to the political characteristics of Portugal. Modern democracy was instituted in 1974, after the Carnation Revolution, and since then, Portugal has maintained institutional stability. As a democratic country and a part of the European Union, it has a series of institutional standards to fulfill. Portugal is also the 6th most peaceful country in the world according to the 2022 Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022), while Venezuela is the 148th, remaining as the most unstable country in South America for the third consecutive year. Such characteristics make Portugal a good place to understand if the perception of governmental institutions and the change in daily-based aspects, such as personal security and economics, influence political behavior.

Based on the ideas explained above, this dissertation will explore the following research question: How do Luso-Venezuelan migrant women who arrived in Portugal after the outbreak of the Venezuelan Humanitarian crisis exercise their political rights in the country? To answer this question, the research is based on the analysis of ten (10) semi-structured deep interviews with Luso Venezuelan migrant women resident in Portugal set on three specific aspects:

- Understand how moving to Portugal has or has not influenced Luso-Venezuelan women's political engagement, and whether or not they are more interested in participating and learning about Portuguese politics, taking part in elections, demonstrations, and political groups.
- Perceive which type of political right they exercise the most.
- Find out if Luso-Venezuelan migrant women consider the level of integration into Portuguese society to influence their level of political engagement.

This dissertation is structured into five sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework, initiating with a discussion of key studies on migration, focusing on how migrants engage politically in their host countries, and how the intersectionality of gender and migrant status shapes their political participation. It also includes a review of research on Portuguese returnees and transnational families. Additionally, it outlines the conceptual framework applied in this study, emphasizing reflexivity and feminist perspectives to inform both the fieldwork and the data analysis. The following section offers a detailed contextualization of Venezuela's socioeconomic and political landscape over the last decade. This context is crucial for

understanding the motivations behind the migration of Luso-Venezuelan women, as well as the historical and contemporary ties between Venezuela and Portugal that influence their migration patterns. The third section dips into the methodological approach of the study, detailing the qualitative techniques employed to collect and analyze data. It describes the design of the interview guide, and the selection criteria for participants, and presents an overview of the interviewees' sociodemographic profiles. The fourth section is dedicated to the analysis of the interviews, offering an examination of the data gathered, and engaging with the experiences shared by the participants. Finally, the dissertation concludes by summarizing the key findings and offering recommendations for future research on the political participation of Luso-Venezuelan women.

Chapter 1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

To address how Luso-Venezuelan migrant women who arrived in Portugal after the outbreak of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis in 2014 exercise their political rights in the country, it is important to highlight women's migration and recognize the difficulties women face when moving abroad, as well as the challenges migrants encounter in exercising political rights. Moreover, since the research focuses on women with dual citizenship, the thesis includes studies on Portuguese returnees and transnational families. The Luso-Venezuelan migrant women intersectionality represents a significant gap in existing research, offering a valuable area for further exploration of how these two factors may impact the way they engage with and navigate political participation.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Migrants in the political sphere

In 2020, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 281 million people, around 3.6% of the world's population, were living outside their country of origin. Furthermore, most of the migration “takes place from South to North” reflecting “older colonial links” (Kofman, 2020). Current crises, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and conflicts in the Middle East, and their impact on the global economy have also brought new challenges for migration dynamics. Given the increase in cross-border mobility and people's engagement with transnational politics, in their home country and the host country (Padilla & Ortiz, 2012), it has become mandatory to understand how migrants participate in society, and their political behavior in a globalized world, especially in their gendered aspects.

Globalization and migration have put in check how citizenship, political and civic participation are understood, and how rights and duties should be exercised by immigrants and emigrants in both their country of origin and their destination (Padilla & Ortiz, 2012). Additionally, taking gender into account is crucial for understanding the political behavior of

migrants because gender shapes experiences, opportunities, and constraints in significant ways (Benería, Deere & Naila Kabeer, 2012), such as access to resources, agency and empowerment, cultural expectation, and norms.

Before delving into how migrants engage in politics in their destination country, it is necessary to define what political rights entail. Political rights are fundamental rights that allow individuals to participate, directly or indirectly, in national political activities (Gray Group International, 2024). Specifically, political rights, according to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (n.d), refers to:

“...an individual's ability to participate in the civil and political life of the society and state without fear of discrimination or repression, and is tied closely to citizenship status. Such rights include not only the right to vote in an election, but also the rights to join a political party; run for office; and participate freely in political rallies, events, or protests.”

However, people can only exercise political rights concerning their country – or countries – of nationality or by having legal citizenship status in a third country. Beyond the methods by which host countries regulate political rights for non-nationals, immigrant political integration must be comprehended from a multifaceted process, which, as Schlumbohm (2013) explains, requires consideration of individual characteristics, social networks, and political opportunity structures. For her, “political integration depends on the individual’s societal and economic integration”. At the same time, Schlumbohm (2013) considered that individuals interested in homeland politics could motivate their integration into the political life of the resident country. This is because politically engaged individuals value participation and are aware of its necessity in effecting beneficial changes in their daily lives. Likewise, for Christou & Kofman (2022), migrant integration responds to a mutual intergroup process between immigrants and the receiving society, in which citizenship, and subjective perceptions of social status and belonging correspond in different societal contexts to sociopolitical integration.

In Peltoniemi's (2018) article about transnational political engagement and emigrant voting, political participation has to do with national and transnational identity. When an individual decides to migrate their identity changes over and over again. How individuals align themselves with particular social groups, communities, or ideologies increases the possibility for a migrant to participate in political activities and collective actions on behalf of the group

they identify with. The author affirms that “political transnationalism is more than political activity across territorial boundaries, as it also refers to the changing and increasingly overlapping boundaries of membership in political communities” (Peltoniemi, 2018, p.394). The study illuminates the evolving landscape of political engagement, urging a reevaluation of traditional notions surrounding national identity and encouraging a more inclusive perspective.

One significant conclusion from research about transnationalism is the need for policies and practices that support migrant political rights, including voting and participation in political parties and manifestations, enable transnational political engagement, and foster connections between migrants and their home countries and the destination country. Migrant voting has the potential to enhance democratic processes and promote the representation of their interests in political decision-making (Peltoniemi, 2018). This is because enabling migrants to vote ensures that their voices are heard and their concerns addressed, which is crucial for a truly representative democracy, as it would allow migrants to influence policies that affect their lives directly. By participating in political parties and manifestations migrants win platforms to advocate for their rights and interests, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement in the political life of the host country.

Concerning migrants' political participation in the host country, it is important to highlight that, in some cases, it depends on the migration trajectory and the international relations between the home country and the host country (Mügge, 2012).

1.1.2 Immigrant women and political participation

As noticed by Pipper (2006), regarding the context of politics and civic rights, few studies are focusing on women migrants. Gender significantly influences policies and interactions involved in immigrants' integration into host countries, impacting men and women differently (Piper, 2006). Nevertheless, as highlighted by Caggiano (2019), migration studies often overlook how “gender is politically articulated within the experiences of immigrant women”. That is to say, migration studies frequently fail to adequately address or consider how gender plays a role in shaping the political experiences and behaviors of immigrant women. Personal experiences, particularly those about gender -- the roles they are expected to play, and the opportunities and challenges they face based on their gender -- heavily influence migrants' social engagement, participation, and integration into various organizations and institutions, as emphasized by

Yuval-Davis et al. (2005). When migrant women choose to join organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their activism can reshape gender experiences, thereby affecting their subsequent activism. Moreover, it can also impact the family sphere, as migrants may encounter new dynamics, ideologies, and practices in the destination country that differ from those in their country of origin (Caggiano, 2019).

The studies conducted by Hardy-Fanta (1993) and Jones-Correa (1998) represent a starting point for social science to be aware of the influences of gender, race, culture, and class in migrants' experiences and subsequent socialization and political participation.

Hardy-Fanta (1993) conducted a gender analysis on “Latina Politics” in the U.S, providing a clear explanation of the interaction of gender, culture, and political participation as Latina women exhibit distinct patterns of political participation influenced by their unique experiences and intersectional identities. The study emphasizes the importance of recognizing these intersectional influences to understand and support Latina political participation effectively. Latina women often engage in politics through community-based activities and grassroots organizing, reflecting their commitment to addressing both gender-specific and broader social issues affecting their communities. In this sense, Jones-Correa's study (1998) helps to understand the different paths to political participation chosen by men and women. The study was centered in the Latin American community in the United States, more specifically in New York City, and it presents relevant information on how traditional gender dynamics, such as child care and male chauvinist patterns of socialization, lead women to be more interested in the national politics of the host country than men. Latino migrant men are shown to prefer maintaining social organization outlines (Jones-Correa, 1998, p.334). As a direct consequence, Latina migrant women are led in the opposite direction. By retaining the role of caregiver, the woman becomes more intertwined with the host country's society and its public institutions. As mothers, they often take on the primary responsibility for interactions concerning their children, whether at school or regarding their healthcare. As the household manager, they are more directly engaged with the economic challenges of the host country.

Kondo (2012) highlights how gender and race influence migrants' political engagement, particularly among women. The author explains that migrant women navigate and negotiate their political participation by engaging in community organizing and local-level politics through roles traditionally associated with caregiving. These women often extend their caregiving responsibilities beyond the household, taking on community-based activities that

support the well-being and empowerment of others within their communities (Kondo, 2012). This can include organizing childcare cooperatives, providing health and wellness support, or advocating for better access to education and social services. While these activities may not always be recognized as political, they are essential for promoting economic and social justice in their communities.

Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995), contradict the above-mentioned in their study on the political engagement of immigrants, as they asserted that people in socially privileged positions, including men, native citizens, wealthiest and most educated individuals, exhibit greater engagement in politics, particularly in formal, traditional, and institutionalized forms of political involvement. Therefore, due to gender dynamics women tend to participate less than males (Gatti, Bounomo & Strozza, 2023). Situational factors, such as a full-time job, being the caregiver, and taking care of the offspring, are considered time-demanding tasks that constrain female political engagement (Gatti, Bounomo & Strozza, 2023).

1.1.3 Portuguese Returnees

By studying Portuguese diasporas, Carvalho Arroteia (2010) pointed out that there is, among Luso descendants, a bipolarity of cultural references and a diversity of migratory marked by differentiated heritages, trajectories, and complex socialization. The Portuguese diaspora retains a strong bond with their ancestral land, through the language, culture, and gastronomy (Cardoso, Matos Pereira & Marques, 2018).

Sardinha (2014), also focuses on the Portuguese case of migrant descendants, ancestral homecoming, and transnational networks. Some authors have analyzed the Canadian-Portuguese and French-Portuguese migrants (Sardinha, 2014), the French-Portuguese individuals (dos Santos 2014), the Portuguese-Canadians in British Columbia (Mapril, 2017), and the Portuguese-Venezuelans in Madeira (da Silva Isturiz, 2020). These studies examine how returnees to Portugal experience a hybrid identity, balancing multiple cultures and languages, and how they could maintain transnational connections with their previous countries and other returnees, facilitated by technology. This supports a multi-dimensional sense of belonging across home, host, and migrant identities. The flexibility in belonging leads to unpredictable mobility strategies, often driven by economic needs rather than ethnic proximity (Sardinha 2014). Furthermore, the Portuguese emigrant descendants maintain strong

transnational ties, characterized by regular visits and dual residences between their host country and Portugal. Hence, the descendants' identities are shaped by their experiences in the host country and Portugal. However, the ties to Portugal evolve with generational changes (Mapril, 2017). For first-generation descendants, the connection to Portugal might be more immediate and direct, often reinforced by strong family ties, cultural practices, and the regular use of the Portuguese language (Mapril, 2017). These individuals may engage in frequent travel to Portugal, maintain properties there, and participate in community events that celebrate Portuguese heritage. As subsequent generations emerge, however, the nature of these transnational ties can change. Second- and third-generation descendants, while still maintaining a connection to Portugal, often experience a shift in how they relate to their ancestral homeland, becoming more symbolic rather than practical (Mapril, 2017). They might visit Portugal less frequently or view it more as a place of heritage rather than an integral part of their everyday lives. The cultural practices associated with Portugal may also evolve, blending more seamlessly with the dominant culture of the host country, or even fading as the focus shifts to the new context of their lives.

Despite these changes, the identity of Portuguese emigrant descendants remains deeply intertwined with their ancestral roots. The sense of belonging to Portugal may manifest in more abstract ways, such as through food, music, or participation in cultural festivals, rather than through direct physical ties. These evolving transnational connections illustrate how identity is dynamic, and constantly reshaped by generational shifts, social contexts, and the broader processes of integration and adaptation in the host country.

On the other hand, Portugal, as a traditional emigrant country, has policies to encourage its diaspora to maintain ties with it (Ponte e Sousa, 2017), such as allowing double nationality, the right to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections (Abreu da Silva Costa, 2000), promoting its language and culture (Carvalho Arroteia, 2010). These efforts reflect Portugal's recognition of the diaspora's importance leading these communities generally to feel a strong connection to their ancestral homeland, language, culture, and cuisine (Marques da Silva, 2015).

Venezuelan citizens with one of their parents or grandparents being first-generation migrants from Portugal usually identify symbolically with transnational ways of being and belonging, by supporting the Portuguese team in important sports events, and through folklore music and dance groups (Dinneen, 2015). Nevertheless, as described by da Silva Isturiz (2020),

in most cases Luso-Venezuelan's decision to migrate to Portugal was motivated principally by the political and socio-economic crisis in Venezuela, and not by their Portuguese roots, as this only influenced the destination of their migration process.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Reflexivity and Feminist Studies

“As teorias, antes que verdades absolutas, são apenas diferentes maneiras de construir e organizar o conhecimento e referendar uma práxis legitimada por determinada comunidade científica em determinado contexto histórico.” (Narvaz & Koller, 2006, p.648).

For qualitative social science research and knowledge production, reflexivity has gained significant ground as a paradigm of analysis among academics (Charmaz & Mitchelle, 1996; Finlay & Gough, 2008). As positivism faced criticism for its assumption of neutrality and detachment from the study subjects, the use of reflexivity as a theoretical frame emerged from critical theory and feminist policy, to guide our analysis, and allows the researcher to self-reflect on their socio-political role during their investigations (Alejandro (2021).

Researchers who adopt a reflexive approach in their investigations acknowledge how their perspectives, ideologies, and positions influence the knowledge they produce. This approach allows them to move beyond the insider/outsider dichotomy, recognizing both how they are affected by their fieldwork and how they, in turn, affect it (França, 2023). Moreover, reflexivity is crucial to the collaborative process between researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge (Dahinden et al., 2020), and it helps readers understand how researchers arrive at their conclusions (Subrami, 2019). It serves socio-political purposes by fostering awareness that knowledge and discourses co-produce the socio-political world they reference (Alejandro, 2021, p. 151). Consequently, I decided to use reflexivity to keep myself in check. Being an ‘insider’ of the population, I aimed to investigate, I harbored concerns about how my personal experiences and preconceived notions regarding the subject could influence my research. Recognizing that all human activities are inherently political underscores the importance of acknowledging our theoretical and methodological assumptions, including the

underlying political-ideological dimensions (Narvaz & Koller, 2006). Reflexivity aids in achieving this awareness by prompting self-reflection.

During my ‘reflexive journey’ (Subramani, 2019), I decided to observe my positionality (Sjolander & Cox, 1994) about what I think was crucial for this investigation, the concepts I chose to follow in doing qualitative research among Luso-Venezuelan migrant women while being one of them, “making conscious and explicit [my] practices, beliefs, and dispositions” (Alejandro, 2021, p. 152). Furthermore, as I centered my investigation on women I ought to recognize how my perception of the commonalities between myself and the subjects of my study, such as gender, nationalities, migration processes, and common history; could interfere during the knowledge production, I decided to follow self-reflexivity included in feminist theory to transcend these differences (Stanley & Wise, 1990), given the inherently activist nature of the ethical framework underlying critical approaches to feminist theories and practices (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By conducting this research with a self-reflexivity approach, the aim is to avoid expectations and assumptions in the ethnographic study and become “more aware of constructing knowledge and of the influences of beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings in the process of researching” (Wasserfall, 1993, p.24). Feminist theory argues that the “traditional way” of doing science –neutrality during the research process, disregarding the research's political, cultural, and social factors –, is a restrictive and oppressive approach to deny the importance of social diversity (Neves & Nogueira, 2005). In this sense, reflexivity is conceived as a method to guarantee more responsible social science research, as it recognizes power asymmetries among the researcher and the study subjects and the socio-historical implications of the investigation. Being reflective while conducting a feminist investigation means that the researchers are conscious of their role and involvement in the study (Reinharz, 1992).

Throughout this study, I tried to give space for the Luso-Venezuelan migrant women community in Portugal to express their political experiences in the country. However, not because I tried to implement a critical framework and provide a safe space for a ‘marginal’ community to express themselves it means that the knowledge produced is necessarily emancipatory (Anderl & Wallmeier, 2018; Latour, 2004), as Alejandro (2021) pointed out:

“We are socialized into discourses and dispositions produced by the socio-political order we aim to challenge, a socio-political order that we may, therefore, reproduce unconsciously while aiming to do the contrary” (p.154).

From this perspective, we need to consider the structure and the agent to identify when we are reproducing the notions we pretend to deconstruct and reflect on the changes we seek in the structure.

Part of the rationale for centering this study on women and employing feminist theories is that feminist theories allow us to see how the social construction of gender differences promotes different experiences between men and women (Fraisie, 1995; Jones, 1994; Louro, 1999; Scott, 1986). However, throughout history, men's experiences have been documented and valued, while women's experiences have been neglected and devalued (Narvaz & Koller, 2006). This disparity occurs because historical narratives and societal structures have traditionally prioritized men's perspectives and contributions, marginalizing and underrepresenting those of women. Feminist theories emphasize that impartiality is neither possible nor desirable, especially because they are committed to social change (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2004; Neves & Nogueira, 2003; Wilkinson, 1986, 1998). In this sense, reflexivity is crucial in feminist studies as it allows researchers to critically examine their own biases, perspectives, and positions. This self-awareness fosters a deeper engagement with the subject matter and enhances the collaborative process between researchers and participants, ultimately contributing to the co-construction of knowledge that is more inclusive and representative of diverse experiences.

Feminist Studies and reflexivity are intertwined, as both imply the acknowledgment of the influence of historical, social, political, and cultural factors on the construction of knowledge, rejecting any claims of neutrality and objectivity (Neves & Nogueira, 2005, p. 411). These approaches coincided as well in the relation of the research and the subjects of study and recognized the power asymmetries between them. Given these considerations, this thesis seeks to research a part of the migration process through women migrants- perspective using reflexivity and feminist theories as its framework of analysis. As the researcher, I employ reflexivity to transcend the limitations imposed by my own historical context within the ethnography I intend to analyze.

1.2.2 Migration from a gender perspective

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping tangible freedoms available to individuals, influencing their ability to pursue desired actions and aspirations (Eger, Miller & Scarles, 2008), primarily because societal norms and institutional structures often dictate different opportunities and

constraints based on gender. These norms and structures influence various aspects of life, including education, employment, access to resources, and decision-making power within households and communities. Additionally, it has an impact on an individual's agency, referring to their capacity for independent action and the ability to make autonomous choices (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2001; Nussbaum, 2003). Recognizing migration as a process influenced by gender, and one that also shapes gender dynamics, is a crucial insight for research concerning the civil, social, and political rights of migrants in any host society (Szczepaniková, 2006), as it helps to understand the reconfiguration of gender roles, the impact on family structures, gender-based violence, and cultural and social change, in the migration community.

Before the recognition of changes in the study and evolution of migration patterns, it was assumed that men migrated first, with women and children following as dependents (King, 2012). Consequently, as women were not taken into account, it was thought that men predominantly made immigration decisions, determining when and where it would occur (Jones-Correa, 1998, p.336). Examining migration from a gender perspective is essential for understanding the distinct ways in which being a migrant woman influences one's experience and access to political, economic, and social rights. Gender dynamics are integral to migratory processes, as noted by Sassen (2003), and they play a pivotal role in shaping identities, practices, and the institutions that govern them (Donato et al., 2006). The first major study of international migration from a gender perspective was introduced by Morokvasic in the *International Migration Review* in 1984 (Kofman, 2020). Her research shed light on the distinct experiences and challenges faced by women and men in the migration process, including differences in migration motivations, access to resources, and social integration.

When we apply a gender analysis to migration, we reveal a multitude of intricate dynamics that are crucial to understanding the phenomenon comprehensively. This approach allows us to delve into the nuanced aspects such as the gendered decision-making processes that influence migration choices, the distinct experiences and challenges faced during the journey, and the unique adaptation processes in the receiving country. Gender analysis is vital because it uncovers how migration experiences are shaped by gender norms, roles, and inequalities, shedding light on disparities, vulnerabilities, and opportunities that may otherwise remain obscured. It provides a more holistic view that is essential for developing inclusive policies and interventions that address the diverse needs and realities of migrants based on their gender identities.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), by 2020 women represented almost half of the total migrant population around the world (48.1%), with a large proportion of them migrating on their own and not as dependent (UN DESA, 2020, as cited by Migration Data Portal, 2023). In 2000 there were 86 million migrant women while by 2020 this number reached 135 million (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). Oso & Catarino (2012) in their work to study *The Feminization of Migration and Labour-Market Insertion in Spain and Portugal*, defined the feminization of migration as:

“a process in which the flow and/or stock percentages of migrant women increase in comparison with the total number of migrants. This does not mean that the absolute number of women exceeds that of men at any given time, but rather that statistical trends indicate an increase over time in the proportion of women who make up the migrant population (p.627).”

When talking about female migration great attention has been paid to gendered labor sectors, such as domestic work, care, and nursing, as they tend to be the main niche for women migrants (Christou & Kofman, 2022). Additionally, one of the most important findings of migration from a gender perspective is the study of how women's international migration has changed family dynamics and how identities might be reconfigured in the migration process. About this, scholars have studied how women's migration reinforces transnational families, swaps of gender roles, and gender inequalities, and the effects on those left behind, especially children (Schmalzbauer, 2004; Parreñas, 2005; UNFPA, 2006; Jolly & Reeves, 2005; Ghosh, 2009; Yeates, 2009; Holst, Schafer, & Schrooten 2012). Part of the debate is whether these changes represented empowerment for women as they have more economical and familiar agency or if on the other hand embodied an increase in their responsibilities (Holst, Schafer, & Schrooten 2012; Christou & Kofman, 2022).

As mentioned by Christou & Kofman (2022) women's migration is driven to a greater extent than male migration by “the desire to escape discriminatory institutions and social control” (p.6). Women's conditions in their country of origin, such as social restrictions, lack of job opportunities, and the desire for a more independent life, are usually pointed out as the main reasons for the increase in female migration (Benería, Deere & Naila Kabeer, 2012). Yet, women migrants face what del Río and Alonso-Villar (2012) called “double segregation”,

which implies more feminized jobs with lower pay, both concerning their peers in the host country and migrant men. This double segregation negatively impacts migrant women, at the economic level but also their independence and empowerment. In the long run, their integration into the host society is compromised, discouraging their interest in national affairs such as politics (del Rio & Alonso-Villar, 2012).

Conversely, since gender hierarchies are intertwined with social power dynamics and influence integration (Anthias, 2013; Anthias et al., 2013), migration can lead to an improvement in women's lives and their overall status. Migration has the potential to enhance not only their economic situation but also their political engagement and awareness, particularly when the destination country offers a more progressive social environment with significant freedoms and political participation for women (Holliday et al., 2018). This improvement can occur through several mechanisms. Firstly, being exposed to new cultural norms that value gender equality can challenge and gradually transform migrants' own perceptions and expectations regarding gender roles. Additionally, access to better educational opportunities and new legal and institutional frameworks in many progressive countries often provide stronger protections against gender-based discrimination and violence. As women have access to knowledge and skills and become more economically stable and politically active, they can influence policy and community norms both within their migrant communities and in broader society, thus fostering a more equitable social landscape.

1.2.3 Intersectionality

The increased interest from scholars in the issue of gender and migration can be noticed in the rise of knowledge production and publications in key journals such as *Gender and Society*, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Social Politics and Women's Studies International Forum*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *International Migration*, and *International Migration Review* (Kofman, 2020). This shift acknowledges that women's experiences, challenges, and contributions in the context of migration have often been overlooked or marginalized in traditional migration studies. It takes into account the intersecting influences of gender, class, race, nationality, and other factors to study and analyze migration.

The concept of intersectionality refers to multiple and entangled systems of oppression (Tiainen et al., 2020), highlighting how many policies fail to address inequities beyond gender

alone (Ferree, 2012; Hancock, 2007; Kantola & Lombardo, 2017; Squires, 2009; Verloo, 2007). In this regard, intersectionality was conceived by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), as an analytic framework to describe how Black women's social identities can overlap in instances of inequality and discrimination due to multiple forms of oppression (Christou & Kofman, 2022). As Warner, Kurtis & Adya (2020) remark, feminist scholars have taken intersectionality as a paradigm to analyze identity and power relations.

In a similar way to reflexivity, intersectionality accounts for these intersecting experiences in the conceptualization of knowledge production, helping to explain how power structures form individuals' perceptions of their experiences (Rodó-Zárate, 2022) and how their overlapping identities shape the experiences of migrants.

Intersectionality can thus be used to study how various markers of oppression, such as gender, race, economic background, and migratory status influence migrant women's sense of belonging in different spaces, as there are significant links between the role of places and intersectional dynamics (Rodó-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Hence, the experiences of migrants can vary greatly depending on geographic location, and socio-political environment. Understanding the intersectional dynamics of power is crucial for comprehending the spatial and emotional perspectives of migrants (Rodó-Zárate, 2022), as social categories are affected by place and time (Anthias, 2013).

The influence of intersectionality has significantly altered the perceptions of women's experiences (Carbado et al., 2013), and has highlighted how the interaction of multiple markers of oppression generates various forms of vulnerability (La Barbera et al. 2023), showing how migrant women might face different challenges compared to their male counterparts, necessitating gender-sensitive policies. Applying this framework to study Luso-Venezuelan migrant women allows us to emphasize their status as migrants, women, and individuals with dual nationality, and to understand how these aspects influence their political participation. This approach enables the recognition that people, in this case, women, possess multiple identities and are influenced by numerous social factors (La Barbera et al., 2023).

1.2.4 Transnationalism

With the advent of globalization, social sciences have increasingly focused on the transnationalism practices of individuals to explain how they maintain connections with their homeland while simultaneously interacting with, learning from, and participating in new cultures and practices (Warriner, 2017). Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) propose a transnational perspective on migration that challenges traditional theories, which often view migrants as moving from one fixed national context to another. They argue that migrants live across multiple national spaces, creating transnational social fields that reshape their identities, including race, class, and ethnicity. The authors critique the conventional assimilation model, emphasizing that these identities are fluid and continually reconstructed in different contexts. They highlight how migrants maintain and cultivate ties across national borders. The transnational perspective they advocate reveals the interconnectedness of global migration and calls for new approaches to understanding and managing the complexities of race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism in a transnational world (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton; 1992). Meanwhile, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994) explore the concept of transnationalism, highlighting how migrants maintain social, economic, and political ties across national borders. The authors argue that globalization has led to decentralized nation-states, where traditional boundaries are increasingly porous, and migrants operate within transnational social fields that connect their countries of origin and settlement. This transnational perspective challenges conventional views of migration and citizenship, shifting the focus from assimilation to understanding migration as a multidirectional flow of people, goods, ideas, and identities. Key practices such as remittances, political participation, and cultural retention illustrate how migrants sustain dual loyalties and develop hybrid identities (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc; 1994).

Academically, the term "transnationalism" has been used to describe the "sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders—businesses, non-government organizations, and individuals sharing the same interests" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 3). It encompasses the "continual links across borders within the frame of the 'nation' and to reassess the ambiguous concept and process of integration" (Harney & Baldassar, 2007), the ties across countries and social transnationally formations such as networks, groups, and organizations (Faist, 2010b).

Migrants become transnational individuals, maintaining ties and interests in both their home and host countries (Conway, Potter, & St Bernard, 2008; Ong, 1999; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999) and with a capacity to systematically operate beyond the borders of a given state (Ponte e Sousa, 2017). Tsuda (2012) argues that while migrants are often marginalized in their destination societies, a strong sense of belonging to their countries of origin persists. Consequently, their political interests are primarily focused on their homeland, with limited concern for political issues in their host country. However, long-term residence and improved socioeconomic status in the destination country increase the likelihood of political engagement in the host society (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Padilla, & Ortiz, 2012; Warriner, 2017; Tsuda, 2012).

As migrants expand their cross-border activities – interactions, relationships, learning processes – public policies and local practices in the country of origin and the receiving country can evolve to incorporate new social norms and practices (Faist, 2010a), as the rationale and linear progress of the host country is “disrupted by the encounter with differences” (Harney & Baldassar, 2007). Additionally, when migrants and locals participate in activities across borders, they interact more and get to know each other better. This helps them understand different cultures and perspectives, which gradually changes their views on differences. As a result, they become more accepting and tolerant of each other (Visconti & Kyriazi, 2024).

By studying migration and transnationalism, Appadurai (2008) concluded that identity is fluid. This means it is not tied to a specific territory and culture but can be influenced by interactions within networks across different regions and cultures. Additionally, migrancy and transnationalism highlight the power inequalities arising from racialization and the politics of ethnicization (Harney & Baldassar, 2007). This understanding can shed light on why and how migrants choose to participate politically in their host countries, highlighting the distinction between their desire to engage in local politics and their capacity to do so (Koser, 2007). Moreover, migrants' potential to influence local policy and the shift in the notion of the nation-state as the sole and uncontested pivot of identity, belonging, and political loyalty (Mau, Mewes & Zimmermann, 2008, p. 16), raises questions about how transnationalism might reduce or reconfigure state power (Koser, 2007).

Transnationalism provides a framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted experiences of migrants. It illustrates how migration is not merely a one-time move but an

ongoing process of navigating and integrating multiple identities, cultures, and social connections across national boundaries.

Political transnationalism explains the condition in which an individual can hold more than one political citizenship by exercising their political rights in multiple states simultaneously, thereby making them de-territorialized (Baubock, 2003). Political practices in transnational individuals include voting, their relationship with the State of origin and the host country, political activism, and double citizenship (Padilla & Ortiz, 2012).

Political transnationalism refers to the phenomenon where individuals actively engage in the political processes of more than one nation-state, thereby holding multiple political citizenships and exercising political rights across borders (Baubock, 2003). This concept challenges the traditional notion of political participation being confined to a single nation-state, as it highlights how migrants and diasporic communities can maintain political ties and influence in both their country of origin and their host country. The de-territorialization of political engagement reflects the increasingly interconnected nature of the world, where geographic boundaries are less significant in determining an individual's political identity and participation.

According to Baubock (2003), political transnationalism is made possible through the extension of citizenship rights and political participation beyond the confines of national borders. This means that migrants can remain politically active in their home countries while also participating in the political life of their host nations. This dual engagement not only enriches the democratic processes in both states but also creates a more complex and layered understanding of citizenship. It challenges the traditional, territorial-based concept of citizenship and opens up new possibilities for political identity and participation that transcend national boundaries (Baubock, 2003).

Building on this, Padilla and Ortiz (2012) examine the specific political practices that transnational individuals engage in, such as voting in elections in both their home and host countries, maintaining relationships with the state of origin, participating in political activism, and acquiring dual citizenship. These practices illustrate how transnationalism allows individuals to navigate and negotiate their political identities across different national contexts. Padilla and Ortiz argue that transnational political engagement is not merely a byproduct of migration but a deliberate and strategic way for individuals to assert their rights, influence

policies, and maintain connections with multiple states, thereby redefining the traditional notions of citizenship and political belonging (Padilla and Ortiz, 2012).

1.2.5 Transnational families and return

In recent decades, more research has focused on how family influences migration decisions, especially in transnational families. These studies examine how migrants manage to live across borders and maintain connections in different countries (Christou & Kofman, 2022), as transnational families strengthen their ties and networks, maintaining flexible relationships that stretch across two or more nations. According to Bryceson “transnational family constitutes a multi-dimensional spatial and temporal support environment for migrants, as well as providing motivational impetus for migration’ (2019).

About the return of migrants to their homeland, different studies have been conducted, however, in most cases the studies focus on the first-generation return (Behrmann and Abate 1984; Braun 1970; Cerase 1974; King 1978; Thomas-Hope 1985). Nevertheless, there exists a gap in research concerning the return of the second and third generations to their ancestors' homeland (Christou 2006; Panagakos 2004; Potter 2005; Wessendorf 2007).

As Wessendorf explained (2007), root migration consists of the people's action to move to their parent's place of origin, but where they never have lived before. Using this logic, the term “return” refers to the notion of returning to the place with a historical connection rather than an actual return. Also, Tsuda (2009) introduced the term “ethnic return” to refer to the return of the first and subsequent generation of migrants to the country of origin of their parents, grandparents, and so on. In most cases, the decision to migrate to their ancestral place is motivated by the transnational ties of migrants during their young life (Potter 2005, Wessendorf 2007, King and Christou 2014), as holidays travel to their parent's homeland, society organizations in the place of residents, cultural identification, and so on. With this frame of reference “transnational families might seek to secure their immigration status and citizenship in the destination country, or, they might further enhance affective locational nodes with the ancestral homeland or the country of origin” (Christou & Kofman, 2022, p.61).

The decision-making process of individuals who decide to migrate to their parents' origin countries is based on personal reasons intertwined with pre-migration history from their

parents (Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog, 2021). This could be “the degrees of social integration”, with their country and the ancestral one (Wessendorf, 2007). In this sense, individuals with migration history in their families are usually part of international networks, which allows them to have information about the country of destination – economy, laws, social norms, and so on. As scholars stress, the development of these networks provides the knowledge and support needed during the decision-making process to migrate, even more so if such a decision involves family mobilization (Benería, Deere & Kabeer, 2012).

Chapter 2. Contextualization

The Venezuelan political and economic crisis, which started in 2010 and is still ongoing, resulted in continuous migration flows as a direct response to the degradation of living conditions in the country (Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog, 2021). The temporality of this crisis, its diverse origins and ramifications, and its impact on regional and global order are still under analysis (Hernandez Valencia, 2018). Regionally, it has been “reshaping refugees and migratory governance” (Bull & Rosales, 2020) and polarizing regional politics. Globally, it affects oil markets and the global political economy (Bull & Rosales, 2020). The political, social, and economic consequences of the migration exodus towards Europe have not received the same level of investigation as the one in Latin America (Padilla, B. & Lopez, M, 2021; Ayuso, A., Breda, T., Gunnarsdottir, E. L., & Riddervold, M., 2024). This is primarily because most Venezuelan immigrants choose neighboring and easily accessible countries in Latin America. Additionally, many Venezuelans migrating to Europe hold dual citizenship, becoming invisible to official statistics; as they enter the European Union as citizens and therefore, enjoy a different migration experience from those who do not hold the same status (Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog, 2021).

2.1 Venezuela’s Crisis

Socialism of the 21st century, the economic and political systems implemented in Venezuela in the 2000s, and further exacerbated in the 2010s, caused the country to transition from being a recipient of migrants to a sender of migrants (Páez, 2016). This shift occurred due to political decisions, poverty levels increased, political persecution extended to non-political individuals, and security deteriorated. Venezuela is currently experiencing the worst economic crisis in its history despite having some of the world's largest oil reserves (Venezuelan & Ausman, 2019). This paradox is due to a combination of factors including mismanagement of the oil industry, corruption, and economic policies that led to hyperinflation, shortages of basic goods, and a collapse of public services (O’Neil, 2019; Van Roekel & De Theije, 2020). Venezuelan & Ausman (2019) attribute the economic crisis to “bad politics, bad policy, and corruption” leading the country for the last 20 years. By 2019, the minimum wage was significantly below

the United Nations' extreme poverty threshold, and 90% of the population was classified as poor (Van Roekel & De Theije, 2020). While the Government of Nicolas Maduro blames international sanctions for the economic decline, the opposition argues that the “Bolivarian Revolution” initiated by former president Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) failed to produce a sustainable transition from capitalism to socialism, instead exacerbating rentier practices (Bull & Rosales, 2020).

During the 1960s, Venezuela was classified as one of the 20 wealthiest countries in the world, largely due to its abundant oil reserves and booming petroleum industry. However, starting in the 1990s, the country began to experience economic decline as a consequence of political and economic reforms. These reforms were intended to liberalize the economy, privatize State-Owned Enterprises, labor market reforms, and improve efficiency, but they were not fully implemented or were poorly managed, leading to economic instability, inefficiencies, and a lack of sustained growth (Venezuelan & Ausman, 2019). From the 2000s onwards, the country faced expropriations and nationalizations (O’Neil, 2019). Under Chávez's presidency, a national and international economic and political system dependent on oil revenues was implemented, coupled with electoral irregularities and the undermining of institutional authorities (Bull & Rosales, 2020). In 2013 economic recession broke out in the country, coinciding with Chávez's death and the beginning of Nicolás Maduro's presidency, which has been characterized by low oil revenues and consolidation of power through military and paramilitary alliances (Venezuelan & Ausman, 2019), imprisoning opposition political leaders and compromising free press and speech (O’Neil, 2019; Bull & Rosales, 2020), causing the downfall of the rule of law in the country (Gan, 2020).

International organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2018 and 2019) and the Organization of American States (OAS) (2021), have meticulously documented the profound crisis that has gripped Venezuela since 2015, a period marked by a devastating collapse of the economic, due to the falling of oil prices in 2014 and its political systems, as authoritarianism got stronger (Venezuelan & Ausman, 2019). The economic choices had a catastrophic impact on the human rights of Venezuelans (O’Neil, 2019), exposing them to a multitude of abuses, including extreme hunger, rampant violence, crumbling public infrastructure, and a collapsing healthcare system. Venezuela's situation has been described as the worst crisis in recent history not linked to war – civic or international–, but broader effects not only politically and economically but social and cultural as well (Bull & Rosales, 2020).

Since 2017 life expectancy for Venezuelan residents dropped by 3,5 years and in 2018 91% of the population was living in extreme poverty (*Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida* 2019 as cited in Gandina, Lozano Ascencio, and Prieto, 2019).

Feline Freier and Doña-Reveco (2021) explain that the country's economic and political degradation, which accelerated in 2016, has led to the displacement of around 6 million citizens. It is important to stress that this figure does not consider those who migrate irregularly or hold a second nationality and therefore do not form part of the official statistics.

Similarly, Gandina, Lozano Ascencio, and Prieto (2019) noted that Venezuela has shifted from being a host country to an emigrant one, mostly focused on the Latin American region, with around 3.0 million citizens living in Colombia, Perú, Chile, and Ecuador alone. Through a general analysis of Venezuelan institutional, economic, and social erosion, the authors consider the Venezuelan migration as an exodus, due to the emigration being massive and essentially forced.

In summary, deteriorating economic and health conditions, combined with political polarization, persecution, and violence, have accelerated Venezuelan migration, resulting in a humanitarian crisis with significant repercussions, particularly in the Southern Cone of America but with an international dimension as well.

2.2 Democratic and Civic Rights in Venezuela

In response to this acute humanitarian situation, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), took decisive action to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in Venezuela (OHCHR, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) first comprehensive report, covering the period from January 2018 to May 2019, was presented in October 2019, providing a stark picture of the human rights violations rampant across the country. The latest report, issued in July 2023, offers an updated assessment of the situation, highlighting both areas of persisting concern and potential signs of improvement.

In response to the persistent human rights violations in Venezuela, the UNHRC, through Resolution 45/20, adopted on October 6, 2020, reaffirmed its commitment to monitoring and addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. This ongoing monitoring and

engagement by the OHCHR underscore the global concern about the human rights situation in Venezuela and the need for sustained international attention and action to address these pressing issues.

The High Commissioner's 2022 assessment offers a detailed and unbiased overview of the Venezuelan context, utilizing a rigorous methodology that includes collecting and corroborating information from diverse sources such as victims, witnesses, government officials, and civil society organizations. Adhering strictly to OHCHR's established protocols, the report provides a comprehensive analysis of democratic and civic space in Venezuela, focusing on three key areas: the right to participate in public affairs, the stigmatization and criminalization of civil society actors, and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of association, the right to peaceful assembly, and freedom of opinion and expression.

In contrast, the High Commissioner's 2019 report presented a broader overview of civil and political rights in Venezuela, addressing a wider range of issues including freedom of opinion and expression, targeted repression and persecution on political grounds, and the excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions. Over time, the focus of these reports has evolved to reflect the changing reality in Venezuela. Despite some progress, the OHCHR continues to highlight ongoing issues such as restrictions on civic and democratic space and the stigmatization of dissenting voices. The 2022 report notes a decrease in arbitrary detentions during protests, attributed to a decline in the number of protests due to fear and intimidation by government-aligned groups. Violations of freedom of opinion and expression persist, with the government closing newspapers and banning independent news websites. Additionally, the OHCHR has expressed continuous concern over the government's obstruction of access to critical data and public information, which restricts internet access and undermines transparency and accountability.

The High Commissioner's 2022 report offered a more focused and detailed analysis of democratic and civic space in Venezuela. Adhering to rigorous methodology, the report concentrated on three key areas: the right to participate in public affairs, the stigmatization and criminalization of civil society actors, and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression. While acknowledging some positive developments, such as new spaces for dialogue and a decrease in arbitrary detentions during protests, the report emphasized ongoing issues. These included persistent restrictions on civic and democratic space, the continued stigmatization and criminalization of dissenting voices,

and violations of freedom of opinion and expression. The report highlighted that the reduction in protests was primarily due to widespread fear and intimidation by government-aligned groups, and it expressed ongoing concerns about the government's obstruction of access to critical data and public information, as well as the use of internet curtailment as a tool of censorship and control.

In contrast, the High Commissioner's initial report in 2019 provided a comprehensive overview of civil and political rights in Venezuela, addressing the worsening political, social, and economic crisis that had been intensifying since 2014. The report covered a broad range of issues, including freedom of opinion and expression, targeted repression, and persecution on political grounds. It highlighted severe human rights violations, such as the excessive use of force and deaths during anti-government demonstrations, arbitrary detentions, torture, ill-treatment, and killings during security operations. The report documented the government's use of security measures and institutions to target opposition members and individuals critical of the government, reflecting a pattern of systematic repression. This broader analysis underscored the deteriorating state of civil liberties and political freedoms in Venezuela as protests against the government intensified.

Despite some incremental progress, the OHCHR continues to identify areas where further improvements are necessary.

2.3 Venezuela and Portugal Migrations History: The beginning of “Luso-Venezuelans”

To better understand the Venezuelan presence in Portugal, it's necessary to know the historical ties between the two nations. Portuguese have been present in Venezuela since the colonization period (Acosta Saignes, 1993; Gomes, 2009; *Observatório das Migrações* [OM] 2009), where they participated in the incursions to the territory and subsequently through commerce in the Caribbean coasts (Acosta Saignes, 1993).

Immigrants' presence in Venezuela started to win significance after the Great Depression in 1929 (Briceño-León, 2006). During the 30s and the 40s, Venezuela had an immigration policy of “open doors”, to promote qualified immigration (Páez, 2016). After the Second World War, and as a direct consequence of the economic crisis Europe was going through, (Paez, 2016; Baptista, 2006; Briceño-León, 2006), the country started to be a desirable destination to

Europeans. Such migration increased following the *oil boom* in the '60s (Baptista, 2006; Gomes, 2009), it helped to incentivize the modernization process of the country during the 20th century and to make Venezuela one of the countries from Latin America with greater racial integration (Briceño-León, 2006).

Da Rosa, Gandsman, and Trigo (2010) studied Portuguese migration into Venezuela in the 1950s, a direct consequence of Venezuela's pro-immigration laws. During this decade, individuals from Spain, Italy, and Portugal intending to migrate to Venezuela only needed to present a certificate of good health and good conduct, as well as being under 35 years old (González Sanavia, 2006). Thanks to this migration law Spanish, Italians, and Portugues became the most predominant nationalities of immigrants in Venezuela (Briceño-León, 2006), with 32.011, 39.590, and 11.785 citizens each (Picón Salas, 1952 as cited by Lovera, 2006). However, Spanish and Italian migration to the country decreased, while the Portuguese one continued to arrive in the 70s as a result of the colonial war between the country and its African colonies, mainly with Angola, and the Revolution in 1974 (Briceño-León, 2006). Also, the Portuguese had a higher rate of stay in the country (González Sanavia, 2006), partially thanks to the Venezuelan family reunification policy (Padilla & França, 2022). 75% of this migration was from Madeira Island, with the remainder coming from Oporto and Aveiro (Ramírez Ribes, 2006).

Portugues migrants were recognized for their adaptability and integration into the host country societies and the establishment of social structures to function as networks to help other Portuguese to migrate (Ponte e Sousa, 2017; Ponte e Sousa, 2017). Furthermore, Da Rosa, Gandsman, and Trigo (2010) pointed out that the Portuguese population has greatly impacted Venezuelan development. Portuguese migration to Venezuela ventured into activities such as agriculture, carpentry, masonry, tailoring, and food trade (Ramírez Ribes, 2006). Mainly, the Portuguese owned the major bakeries, butcher shops, and fishmongers in the most important cities of the country (Ramírez Ribes, 2006). The increase of Portuguese commercial activities in the country led to the Portuguese Venezuelan Chamber of Industry, Commerce, and Related opening in 1998 (Erdmann, 2006). Also, there was a great mobility of citizens with double nationality (Luso-Venezuelans) between the countries as an outcome of the family ties in both countries and the increase of commerce of Portuguese goods in the country (Padilla & França, 2022).

In 2010 the Portuguese community in Venezuela was around 400.000 people (Da Rosa, Gandsman, and Trigo, 2010) attesting to fairly successful socialization and integration dynamics. Official figures from the Portuguese consulates in Caracas and Valencia (the main cities of Venezuela) indicate that by 2023 there were a total of 397,000 people of Portuguese origin in the country (*Correio da Venezuela*, 2023). Even more, according to the *Observatório das Migrações* (OM), by 2019 were 53.473 people born in Portugal living in Venezuela, in 2020 this number dropped to 501.471 (*Correio da Venezuela*, 2023).

More contemporary examples of Portuguese influence in Venezuela are the establishment of social-cultural organizations or Portuguese social clubs around the biggest cities of the country (Caracas, Maracay, Puerto Ordaz) (OM, 2009; Aristeguieta, 2006), the *Central Madeirense* supermarket (Tabuas, 2022; Lovera, 2006), the construction of *Santuário de la Virgen de Fátima* in the capital of the country, and the famous baseball team named *Navegantes del Magallanes* (OM, 2009).

Notwithstanding, from 2007 onwards, in light of increased insecurity, violence, and economic decline in the country, which worsened in 2014 Portuguese and Luso-Venezuelan citizens began leaving for Portugal and other European and Latin American countries leveraging their dual citizenships and family connections (Gomes, 2009; Padilla & França, 2022). As a result, by 2019, Venezuelans had become one of the largest migrant groups in Europe, ranking among the top three nationalities of migrants, following the peak of the Refugee Crisis in 2015 (Christou & Kofman, 2022).

Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog (2021) highlight how the current migration from Venezuela to Europe can be considered return migration as original migration flows existed previously from Europe to Latin America, as “current counterflows not only incorporate descendants of immigrants but also have been based on the existing migratory systems and networks between these countries” (Szente-Varga & Bata-Balog, 2021).

Padilla and López (2021) highlight that the Venezuelan migration to Portugal is a result of the Portuguese migration to Venezuela. This research identified Portugal as a chosen destination for this migration especially due to its migratory policies, being more open to the regularization of migrants, as well as to grant nationality to descendants, than other countries of the European Union. Venezuelans perceived Portugal as a desirable destination, as due to familial ties, they can obtain residence or even nationality, facilitating their legal status and

therefore better opportunities to find jobs and continue their education (Padilla and López; 2021).

Venezuelans are Portugal's second-largest Latin American population, being surpassed only by Brazilians (Padilla & França, 2022). In 2022, the extinguished SEF registered a total of 239.7441 Brazilians living in Portugal (110.746 men and 128.998 women) and 8.936 Venezuelans (3.720 men and 5.216 women) (SEF, 2023).

In this context, Luso-Venezuelan, as described by da Silva Isturiz (2020), refers to those citizens born in Venezuela but with at least one of their parents being first- or second-generation Portuguese migrants. It is important to stress that until 1999 Venezuela did not allow double nationality, being this a reason why part of the Luso-Venezuelan community is still in the process of obtaining Portuguese citizenship (Gomes, 2009).

Hernandez Valencia's master dissertation (2018) underscores the unique socio-demographic characteristics of Luso-Venezuelan in Portugal, such as high levels of education and Portuguese nationality and support networks, facilitating their integration. According to this study, factors attracting these migrants include bureaucratic ease, legal status, cultural ties, and the presence of family in Portugal (Hernandez Valencia, 2018).

da Silva Isturiz's master dissertation (2020), however, identifies the integration difficulties faced by returnees, particularly women who experience cultural differences and loneliness more acutely than men. The research emphasizes women's narrative of sacrifice for their children's well-being and the social support networks they rely on to combat feelings of isolation (da Silva Isturiz, 2020). On the other hand,

Despite these two examples, there is a current gap in understanding the Venezuelan migration and its impact in Portugal as there is limited information on those citizens who fled out of the country holding Portuguese citizenship. Also, most of the investigations developed to document the migration of Venezuelans to Portugal have been centered on the integration of this population into the society of their new country.

This thesis intends to contribute to the investigation of how women with double nationality who migrate to their ancestors' land decide to exercise their political rights. Given what has been said, the present study focuses on the case of Luso-Venezuelan migrant women in Portugal.

Chapter 3. Methodology

As previously explained, the focal point of this research project is centered on Luso-Venezuelan migrant women's exercise of political rights and political engagement (e.g., participation in elections, rallies, protests, and social movements).

Qualitative research methods become invaluable when a study seeks to investigate relatively new or underexplored social events, as Swedberg (2020) highlights. These methods provide insights into the complexities of human behavior and societal dynamics, tapping into the motivations, emotions, and personal experiences of individuals directly involved in or affected by the social event in question (Swedberg, 2020). By focusing on qualitative research, this thesis strategically aims to "give voice to the participants in the study" (Vibha, Bijayini & Sanjay, 2013), allowing Luso-Venezuelan migrant women to share their stories in an empowering way, allowing participants to express their perspectives, feelings, and realities, which may otherwise be overlooked in quantitative studies (Vibha, Bijayini & Sanjay, 2013). The use of an interview guide provides a framework to explore the political experiences of Luso-Venezuelan migrant women, ensuring the collection of rich, nuanced data. Semi-structured interviews are particularly advantageous in this context, as they allow for flexible yet focused discussions, encouraging participants to reflect on and share their unique experiences. This method fosters a deeper exploration of complex topics, such as identity, migration, and political participation, providing specific, detailed information that may not be accessible through other research methods. It enabled the participants go beyond the questions asked, sharing personal anecdotes, questioning the questions, and adding their own. By focusing on the voices and experiences of the participants, it is expected this dissertation give a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with Luso-Venezuelan migrant women over 24 years old and living in Portugal since at least 2019, to gather more extensive information on their personal experiences and reasoning behind the political activities and engagement in Portugal. The interview guide was based on two chronological moments, first about the interviewees' political participation while they were living in Venezuela and second, their political participation in Portugal, about the Portuguese and Venezuelan political landscape. These two moments help to compare their political activities in their homeland and the host

country, understanding if there is a difference related to the feeling of belonging or if on the contrary, there is any difference regarding the political engagement and the country of residence. Considering this, the interview guide was composed of questions about their relation with their ascendants' country (Portugal) while living in Venezuela, their participation in elections, gatherings, and social movements, as well as their motivation behind their political engagement.

The interviews were conducted in Spanish, face-to-face, and through video calls (Zoom, WhatsApp, and Google Meet), from April 19th, 2024 to August 9th, 2024, with an average duration of 25 minutes each. The participants were selected thanks to personal connections, friends of the interviewees under the same circumstances (the snowball effect), and social media, through a Luso-Venezuelan organization based in Portugal. The interviews were audio recorded and destroyed after the transcriptions, guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants.

Choosing Luso-Venezuelans over 24 years old implies that these individuals have had many opportunities to participate in electoral processes and demonstrations within Venezuela. Since 2001 to the present, Venezuela has been characterized by the regularity of demonstrations, protests, and rallies, due to the political context and the socioeconomic reality of the country. At the same time, from 2008 to 2017 (around the period when all the interviewees were living in Venezuela and had the legal age to vote) the country held 8 elections. Additionally, stipulating their relocation to Portugal in 2019 ensures they have had sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the national political landscape, and have had the opportunity to participate in the various election processes explained before, and join public demonstrations. All participants migrated as adults, enabling them to engage in political activities in Venezuela. The participants originally came from major Venezuelan states, and in Portugal, they live in the three principal districts

The findings were evaluated using thematic analysis as it allows to “identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows us to examine people's experiences, perspectives, and behaviors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The dimensions of analysis were focused on cultural integration; political behavior in Venezuela, with subdimensions of vote and protests and Portuguese elections and political landscape; and political behavior in Portugal, with subdimensions of vote, Portuguese political landscape, protests and gatherings and Venezuelan elections and political landscape. The themes identified derived directly from the content of the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although the sample size of 10 interviews is relatively small, it provides valuable and in-depth qualitative data. While the findings may not be fully generalizable to all Luso-Venezuelan migrant women living in Portugal, they offer rich insights that deepen our understanding of their experiences and help support new research avenues. Moreover, Luso-Venezuelan migrant women living in Portugal and with some degree of political participation represent a group difficult to reach, since some of them moved to Portugal at a very young age, before fully exercising their political rights in Venezuela, and on the other hand, due to the situation in Venezuela, many Luso-Venezuelan migrant women distanced themselves from politics.

Throughout the study, my positioning as an ‘insider’ showed value in certain steps of this research, particularly during the interviews, where I could communicate in the participants’ preferred language and understand the use of colloquial or regional expressions, as well as unspoken practices. Moreover, belonging to the same cohort as the individuals being studied, I could relate to some of their stories and bring up issues that I was acquainted with because of my condition as a Luso-Venezuelan migrant woman. In this sense, reflexivity was essential throughout the interviews and the analysis, as I was aware of my connection with the topic and the participants (Dahinden et al., 2020), helping me to keep myself in check, to ask follow-up questions when I knew I could gather more information while refraining from implanting any of my own ideas in them. Feminist Studies and reflexivity are intertwined, and in this study, it recognizes the asymmetry of power between the researcher and the participants, but at the same time, it pretends to build critical knowledge by reflecting on the unique experience of migrant women (Neves & Nogueira, 2005).

3.1 Ethical Considerations

This study was guided by the document “Ethics in research: Best practices, best science” of ISCTE-IUL (2016) and the guidelines and recommendations of my supervisor. Before the interviews, participants were given a written consent form, explaining the purpose of the research, their anonymity in the work, their rights to withdraw at any moment (before, during, or after the interview), contacts of myself and the Data Protection Officer of ISCTE, and the destruction of personal data after the conclusion of the research. After the interviews, I distributed the debriefing form to the participants. After the transcription, the recordings of the

interviews were destroyed. To ensure anonymity regarding the information gathered, the names of the participants were changed to fictional ones.

3.2 Interviewees Profile

The following table shows the sociodemographic profile of the women interviewed. For confidentiality purposes, each interviewee will have a fictional name based on mythological goddesses who had unique powers to fight against arbitrary power relations. The variables presented are age, year of migration, year of arrival in Portugal, where they used to live in Venezuela, and where they lived in Portugal.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile

Nº	Age	Year of migration (mm.yyyy)	Year of arrival in Portugal (mm.yyyy)	Interview date (dd.mm.yyyy)	Location in Venezuela	Location in Portugal	Fictional name
1	33	05.2017	06.2017	09-04-2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Athena
2	32	08.2012	2017	30.04.2024	Caracas	Vila Nova de Gaia	Freya
3	31	05.2017	05.2017	05.05.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Isis
4	28	02.2018	02.2018	17.05.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Luna
5	42	09.2014	2019	04.06.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Gaia
6	32	2019	2019	06.06.2024	Caracas	Aveiro	Hera
7	30	06.2017	05.2019	29.06.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Artemis
8	53	05.2017	05.2017	05.07.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Vesta

9	57	11.2016	11.2016	10.07.2024	Aragua	Great Lisbon	Brigid
10	41	2015	2017	09.08.2024	Caracas	Great Lisbon	Demeter

Furthermore, to facilitate the subsequent analysis, I will present the degree of connection between the participants and Portugal, indicating whether they are first- or second-generation Luso-Venezuelans, on their maternal and/or paternal side.

Table 2. Degree of Connection

Fictional name	Maternal side	Paternal Side	first- or second-generation Luso-Venezuelans
Athena	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Venezuela	Born in Angola when it was a Portugues Colony. Grandparents are from Madeira	First generation
Freya	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Venezuela	Born in Viana do Castelo. Grandparents are from Viana do Castelo	First generation
Isis	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Ovar	Second generation
Luna	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	Second generation
Gaia	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	First generation
Hera	Born in Porto. Grandparents are from Porto	Born in Aveiro. Grandparents are from Aveiro	First generation

Artemis	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Braga. Grandparents are from Braga	Second generation
Vesta	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	First generation
Brigid	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	First generation
Demeter	Born in Venezuela. Grandparents are from Madeira	Born in Madeira. Grandparents are from Madeira	Second generation

In addition to the information provided in the tables, six of the ten interviewees are married or live with a partner, and three have children. Seven of the interviewees hold bachelor's degrees in fields related to social and human sciences, such as political science, public administration, law, and library science. Notably, only three interviewees did not complete their university studies, mainly due to their migration path. Perrin and Gillis (2019) suggest that attending college has a positive impact on individuals' political engagement by exposing them to diverse viewpoints and fostering critical thinking skills. Considering all the participants went to university, at least for more than 3 years, it is expected that they show some degree of political engagement.

The participants are first- and second-generation Luso-Venezuelans since at least one of their parents was born in Portugal and moved later on to Venezuela. There are cases where both parents were born in Portugal. The findings support the idea presented by de Jong & de Valk (2023) that immigrant parents pass on transnational ties to their children through social and cultural exchanges and by maintaining relationships with relatives living abroad. These connections help preserve a bond with their country of origin and the family left behind.

Cultural activities, social centers, food, music, and travel are some of the ways this is achieved. Nine individuals had traveled to Portugal at least once for tourism or family reconnection before relocating there permanently. Such transnational ties not only nurture a love for their heritage but also can play a role in shaping political attitudes and engagement.

All participants in this study identified as being part of the middle class during their time in Venezuela. They unanimously mentioned insecurity and economic adversity as the primary drivers behind their decision to migrate. Despite having relocated, all ten participants continue to maintain familial ties with Venezuela, as they still have relatives residing in the country, reflecting the ongoing personal connections these women have to their homeland. Specifically, for Athena, Luna, Hera, and Demeter as their parents remain in Venezuela.

Chapter 4. Analysis of the Interviews

An important aspect to highlight is the difference between the dates of migration and arrival dates in Portugal. Half of the participants migrated directly from Venezuela to Portugal. These participants stated that family connections, closeness with the country, and its language were important factors in determining their migration path. Their decision demonstrates that transnational families, the relations that bind them between “here” and “there”, and their networks influence their migration journey (DemariaHarney & Baldassar, 2007). This is the case of Isis, 31 years old, holding a degree in library science, and her mother, Vesta, 53 years old:

“(…) ya teníamos la nacionalidad, yo tenía la nacionalidad desde pequeña, mis papás también. Tenía donde llegar. Mi abuela, la que vive aquí, nos iba a recibir. Entonces era como que el mejor lugar para empezar de cero, ya no tan de cero.” (Isis).

“(…) Mi suegra tiene casa, conoce acá y bueno fue una manera de abrírnos la puerta para dejarla a ella [su hija]. Pensábamos quedarnos 2-3 meses y regresábamos a Venezuela, pero no pasó.” (Vesta).

On the other hand, for five of the interviewees, Portugal was not their first destination country but rather a consequence of their migration journey. However, similarly to the first group, they eventually moved to Portugal due to a certain connection to the country. These Luso-Venezuelan migrant women chose to “return” because, after weighing the pros and cons of migrating to Portugal, their knowledge of the country, the opportunities available, and their network convinced them that it was a feasible and safe choice rather than a risky one (King & Christou, 2008). In their case, it is not the ascendant family ties that drive their migration choices, but rather their immediate family and closer relatives (de Jong & de Valk, 2023). This is the case of Artemis, 30 years old, with a Master's degree in International Studies and living in Portugal since 2019:

“Yo migré en el 2017 y en verdad primero fui a Bogotá, Colombia, porque mi hermana estaba viviendo allá con su esposo (...) Y me vine en mayo del 2019. (...) Porque teniendo la nacionalidad era muchísimo más fácil.” (Artemis).

Similarly, Demeter, 41 years old, administrative, lived in Bogotá for two years, then moved to Madeira, and now is based in Great Lisbon: “Ya había ido de vacaciones [a Madeira], tenía familia y quería esa conexión.” (Demeter).

4.1 Cultural integration

King & Christou (2008), argue that second-generation immigrants tend to share a cultural articulation between their country of origin and the ancestral country of their parents. This was also identified among our interviewees who declared to have a great connection with Portuguese culture while they were growing up. This is the case of Luna, 28 years old and a photographer, who claimed to have had some kind of connection with Portugal and its culture every day of her life while living in Venezuela, as her dad, who was born in Madeira, kept most of the Portuguese traditions:

“O sea, ya de por sí tener un papá que es portugués, que nació y creció allá, creo que era parte de nuestro día a día. O sea, tanto como escucharlo viendo televisión en portugués, como él llamando a su familia en Portugal o nosotros viajando a Portugal casi todos los años. Formando parte del centro portugués, yendo a todas las verbenas y pasando los días allá, comiendo comida típica portuguesa. Siempre.” (Luna).

However, even though they are familiar with the Portuguese culture, the interviewees do not feel 100% integrated with the Portuguese community. Some of them argue that some different aspects are missing in Portugal for them to feel part of the society. This applies to Brigid, 57-year-old, owner of a real estate agency, and mentor in quality and prosperity; and Hera, 32 years old, with a degree in Law, and the mother of a 3-year-old girl:

“(…) pero aquí la cultura es un poquito más cerrada, son más temerosos de abrirse a la amistad.” (Brigid).

“(…) pero no te termina de llenar, ¿sabes? El calor de tu tierrita es el calor de tu tierrita (…).” (Hera).

Similarly, Gaia, 42 years old, a professional in international commerce, emigrated to two different countries before settling in Portugal in 2019, explained that having the nationality does not mean that she feels entirely Portuguese and therefore belongs to the society:

“Tengo muchas más cosas venezolanas que no son portuguesas. O sea, me refiero a la forma en la que te enfrentas a problemas, como te relacionas, ese tipo de cosas, hacen que no me sienta portuguesa.” (Gaia).

In these specific cases, integration expands beyond mere cultural familiarity. While possessing legal documents and having cultural ties to the country may seem like advantages, they do not automatically lead to easier integration. Legal status and cultural familiarity can provide a foundation but do not guarantee social acceptance or a sense of belonging.

4.2 Political behavior in Venezuela

4.2.1 Vote and protests

When talking about politics and exercising their political rights in Venezuela, all participants guaranteed they joined protests in the country and actively voted in Venezuelan elections. Also, they related their political engagement to the specific Venezuelan political conjuncture:

“Creo que prácticamente todo el mundo participó en lo que eran marchas y todo eso... Iba pues para poder quedarme en el país. Ver que alguna cosa cambiase.” (Hera).

“Voté bastante en Venezuela. Me sentía bien, pero al mismo tiempo desmotivada porque había muchas veces que tú sentías que realmente iba a haber un cambio y al final los resultados de las elecciones no era el cambio que tú esperabas.” (Isis).

“Siempre iba a marchas y voté en todas las elecciones que se celebraron mientras estuve en Venezuela. Supongo que lo que me motivaba era el cambio. Sin embargo, terminé mudándome.” (Demeter).

This is also the case for Freya, 32-year-old, who studied cinematography, commented that she attended protests with her mother since she was a little girl, starting with the closure of a major national television channel that opposed the government:

“(...) yo iba a las marchas y a las protestas desde cuando estuvieron los militares en Altamira, que eso fue como en el año 2000. (...) Bueno, desde esas protestas, íbamos a las concentraciones en Altamira. Y al seguir los años, íbamos a marchas y concentraciones” (Freya).

As noticed by Franceschet, Piscopo & Thomas (2016), one of the key motivations for women in Latin America to exercise their political rights, whether through voting or protests, is the fight against what they perceive as injustices in society, often closely tied to the defense of what could be understood as human rights. This is the case of Gaia, who manifested going to gatherings related to human rights, like freedom of expression:

“Fui a marchas relacionadas con la libertad de expresión, básicamente eso. Había muchas marchas a las que iba y solo llegaba hasta cierto punto porque después cuando empezaba el problema yo no quería estar de sometida corriendo, entonces me iba antes.” (Gaia).

4.2.2 Portuguese elections and political landscape

Nevertheless, although at least one of their parents was born in Portugal, and as previously explained, they maintained a cultural connection with the country while living in Venezuela, most of them grew up distant from Portuguese politics. Even though the interviewees were first- and second-generation Portuguese and were legally able to exercise the political right to vote in Portuguese elections while living in Venezuela (Abrantes, et al, 2015) they did not do it before moving to the country. Still more, nonetheless, Portugal has an active policy to promote diaspora engagement in politics (Lisi, et al.2014) it seems that it has not had the best turnout, as cultural ties do not equate to political ones. This could be understood as that citizens prioritize issues that affect them directly and immediately, rather than international ones, as long as it does not impact their daily lives (Dalton, 2006). That is the case of Athene, 33 years old, who studied political science; and Vesta:

“(…) yo nunca supe que se podía votar. Pero sí, de una u otra manera la información que llegaba era más que todo de Madeira, una información política mínima. Y nadie cuestiona nada de eso, o sea nadie decía nada, era como que estaba la noticia y ya, nadie entra a un debate o una conversación.” (Athena).

“En ese tiempo no se hablaba tanto de política. Cuando mamá y ellos migran, ellos vienen huyendo de Salazar. Ellos sufrieron mucho.” (Vesta).

4.3 Political behavior in Portugal

4.3.1 Voting

The interviewees' political socialization (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995), that is, their political attitudes and values, was strongly influenced and shaped by their experiences during their early life and adulthood (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). Athena explained that in Venezuela, for as long as she can remember, there has been a very active political culture, specifically voting:

“Creo que la cultura electoral que existe en Venezuela es algo que, obviamente por la situación país, uno solamente ve allá. (...) el venezolano, yo considero que tiene una cultura electoral muy fuerte.” (Athena).

The aforementioned is important as once in Portugal, interviewees reported continuing their voting tradition, as it is essential for them as Portuguese citizens:

“Y cómo te dije, o sea, siempre que yo tengo oportunidad de ejercer mi derecho al voto, lo hago.” (Brigid). -- Brigid was talking about voting in general, for Venezuelan or Portuguese elections, as for her, that right is also a duty as a citizen of any country.

Demeter statement goes hand by hand with Brigid's point of view: “Si formas parte de una comunidad y tienes la oportunidad de votar debes hacerlo.” (Demeter).

Stolle and Hooghe (2003) argued that national identity is closely tied to political participation, suggesting that a sense of civic belonging is essential for political engagement.

One of the interviewees mentioned that, for her, being interested in Portuguese politics reflects a certain level of integration, as it denoted awareness and interest to belong and understanding:

“Es una retroalimentación que sucede. No a todo el mundo le interesa participar políticamente. Es un nuevo proceso de adaptación.” (Athena). -- She connected the process of adapting to a new country with the level of political interest one may develop.

Despite this, most of the interviewees do not regularly follow the political landscape of Portugal. When participants were asked how they decided for whom and which party to vote for, the migrants' networks remained important for their decision-making process (Benería, Deere & Kabeer, 2012), as they mentioned consulting friends with more knowledge about politics, besides turning to social media accounts specializing in politics and watching TV programs featuring opinion-makers:

“Hablo con las personas, voy escuchando, pido opiniones. O sea, cuando es el momento de ejercer mi derecho al voto, me informo. (...) hablo con diferentes personas que sé que están muy empapadas y me formo mi propio criterio y voto.” (Brigid).

“Busco en Internet, le pregunto amistades, veo los resúmenes de los debates en Internet, los programas políticos, eso sí, los leo. Y me baso en eso para tomar una decisión.” (Isis).

“O sea, siento que tiene que ser algo muy importante como para de verdad yo saberlo, ver algo sobre eso o buscar algo sobre eso.” (Luna).

4.3.2 Portuguese political landscape, Protests, and gatherings

The political integration of Luso-Venezuelan migrant women into Portuguese politics can be understood as multidimensional and relative (Schlumbohm, 2013). Furthermore, Bloemraad (2013) explores how political integration often involves more than just legal entitlement to exercise political rights and can depend on social networks and access to resources like information and education.

Rubio-Marín's (2000) study recognized that legal citizenship is not sufficient for full inclusion as other social, economic, and cultural barriers can still limit political participation.

Once more, the data collected from the interviewees suggested that being legally entitled to exercise their political rights does not necessarily translate to it, as integration goes further from cultural familiarity and legal status. In this sense, Artemis highlighted that there is still work to be done in the integration process:

“Esto es parte de lo que me falta de la integración. En Venezuela era muy fácil saber cuándo había marcha y en dónde. Aquí me entero el día siguiente cuando estoy leyendo las noticias”. (Artemis).

While the interviewees emphasized the importance of voting in Portuguese elections, it can be observed through their responses that, for most of them, there is a lack of engagement in other forms of political participation, such as involvement in political movements, protests, and demonstrations. Most participants reported that they had not taken part in any protests in Portugal. Among the sample of 10 Luso-Venezuelan women, only two of them, Gaia and Brigid, do not follow this pattern.

It is important to note that neither Gaia nor Brigid viewed their activities as political, but rather as social involvement. This emphasizes the need to promote a broader understanding of politics, enabling individuals to fully grasp the political impact they have on the societies in which they live. With greater awareness, they can better leverage the opportunities available to improve both their own lives and those of the people they care about.

Gaia stated she has participated in manifestations promoting LGBTQ+ rights in Portugal, as for her, this community still needs to fight to guarantee basic human and civil rights:

“Bueno, la marcha del orgullo. Es una manifestación por derechos que todavía nos faltan.” (Gaia).

Brigid forms part of *Venexos*, a Venezuelan Civic Society Organization based in Portugal with the mission to send humanitarian aid to Venezuela.

“Aquí apoyo a Venexos cuando recogen medicamentos, Entonces hay que separarlos, esa es mi contribución. Sin embargo, tengo ya mucho tiempo de no estar con ellos, pero no es porque no quiera, sino porque bueno a veces el trabajo no me deja.” (Brigid).

The former reinforces the idea that the political interests of Latin American women often center on caretaker activities (Franceschet, Piscopo & Thomas, 2016), as many choose to engage in initiatives that promote the rights of marginalized communities.

As Tarrow (2022) describes, political engagement often manifests through social activism, with such movements acting as powerful agents of political change. Migrants, particularly migrant women, are reshaping traditional modes of political participation by fostering transnationalism (Pipper, 2006) and cross-border social activism. Transnational networks have empowered movements to operate across borders, fueling the increase of global activism on issues like human rights (Tarrow, 2022), as seen in initiatives like *Venexos*.

However, the political and social attitudes of Luso-Venezuelan migrant women cannot be generalized. For instance, Hera and Vesta view Portugal as a relatively easy going country to live in, and as a result, they do not consider active political engagement to be as important as it was in Venezuela. As Gatti et al. (2023) explain, not every citizen fully exercises their political rights, and this is often less about their legal status as citizens and more about personal choices and preferences:

“Estoy como lejos de eso. O sea, yo solo quiero como que vivir bien y estar bien. O sea, comodidad y ya. Que no se metan con mis intereses. Que yo pueda trabajar, que pueda mantener a mi hija, que los servicios funcionen. Pero políticamente no tengo a nadie.” (Hera).

“Siento que a veces somos muy duros juzgando el entorno que tenemos. Porque siento que, mismo que no hay nada que vaya a ser perfecto al 100%, y que, por ende, tienes que seguir luchando y señalándolo. Pero para mí, yo siento que está todo muy bien aquí [en Portugal], porque la pasé muy mal allá [en Venezuela].” (Vesta).

4.3.3 Venezuelan elections and political landscape

Concerning their engagement with Venezuelan politics, most of the interviewees assured that they had distanced themselves from it, mainly because they do not feel related to the Venezuelan context anymore or due to a lack of hope for any political change. As explained by Peltoniemi

(2018), time living abroad, the relationship between the national and the country, as well as historical memories, affect the likelihood of migrants' participation in homeland politics:

“En argentina voté una vez [en elecciones venezolanas], pero en verdad ya no. Creo que principalmente es porque ya no tengo familia allá y no es que no me interesa, pero estoy muy distancia.” (Freya).

“Cuando vivía en Colombia todavía lo hacía, pero cuando me mudé a Portugal fue como no puedo más. Principalmente porque al vivir fuera de Venezuela dejas de entender muchas cosas. El país es como una realidad alternativa y si no estás allá, aunque leas no lo entiendes.” (Artemis).

“Puede ser que, a lo mejor, en el fondo de mí, siento que ellos van a hacer todas las porquerías que quieran y se las van a ingeniar para no soltar el poder.”. (Vesta).

However, those with family still in the country, as in the case of Hera, tend to feel greater belonging to their home society (Tsuda, 2012), remaining committed to its politics. National loyalty seems to be stronger in those with active networks in their country of origin (Hammar, 1985):

“Quisiera ir a votar el 28, pero tendría que madrugar para ir a Lisboa. Voy a ver. (...) Yo estoy aquí, pero estoy allá.” (Hera). – according to her, her life is a part, as her husband and daughter are in Portugal, but her mom, dad, and brother are in Venezuela. Additionally, and as commented previously, she misses Venezuelan culture and does not feel fully integrated into the Portuguese community

Similarly, Brigid manifested she still follows the Venezuelan political landscape:

“Como te dije, o sea, no estoy metida de lleno a ver los puntos y coma de la situación política en Venezuela, pero por supuesto tengo idea general de lo que allá sucede.” (Brigid).

For Brigid and Demeter, the political engagement with Venezuela remains. They hold Venezuelan institutions primarily responsible for their decision to no longer participate in elections, as they encounter various challenges in exercising their right to vote as Venezuelan

migrants in Portugal, from the bureaucratic process of renewing their passport, which its validation became mandatory to the registered on the electoral roll in Portugal, to the simple refusal of consular officials to register them in the electoral system:

“Pues, no voy a participar en las lecciones, no tuve oportunidad de renovar el pasaporte.” (Brigid).

“No pude inscribirme. Nunca estaban disponibles.” (Demeter).

Conclusions

At the outset of this dissertation, my primary aim was to understand more about my fellow nationals living in Portugal and determine if their experiences mirrored my own in the political context. Being a migrant is inherently challenging, regardless of legal status, and the experience of being a migrant woman presents additional complexities. I wanted to amplify their voices and make it evident to Portuguese society that we are here. Even though we may not be reflected in official statistics, there is a significant group of migrant women that Portugal must consider if it aims to achieve true political integration, which would benefit both the host country and its immigrant communities. Political activism produces individual and collective gains, as participation is a fundamental pillar of democracies (Lijphart, 1997). Understanding the motivations behind political engagement, or the lack of it, is crucial to strengthening democratic systems. Furthermore, in a global context marked by wars and economic crises that drive migration, it is essential to consider the political roles and contributions of migrant populations within their host countries.

Though this study was initially motivated by personal interest, it also served as an academic exploration of a topic with significant political and social implications for Portugal. The research focused on the migration of Luso-Venezuelan women to Portugal, driven by the socio-political and economic crisis in Venezuela since 2010, and examined how these women exercise their political rights in Portugal. Their participation ranged from voting to engagement in social movements, gatherings, and organizations. I aimed to address how Luso-Venezuelan migrant women who arrived in Portugal after the outbreak of the Venezuelan Humanitarian crisis exercise their political rights in the country. To explore this, I began by examining the intersection of migration and gender, emphasizing how the experiences of migrant women are often marginalized or overlooked. By focusing on the category of political rights exercised by these women, I sought to shed light on the ways their roles shift and new limitations emerge in their host country.

Based on data collected from 10 semi-structured interviews with Luso-Venezuelan migrant women residing in Portugal, it became evident that migration has affected how they engage politically. Due to their political socialization in Venezuela, particularly about voting rights and duties, these women have continued to exercise their right to vote in Portuguese elections. However, their approach has changed: they now invest time and effort in understanding the political proposals of each party before casting their vote, through talking

with friends with more understanding, turning to social media accounts and TV programs specializing in politics, and voting according to which proposal resonated the most with them, instead of voting for just two alternatives, which was the case in Venezuelan. Due to the polarization of the Venezuelan political landscape, voters often felt compelled to choose between two main alternatives, either you voted for Chávez or Maduro to continue the administration, or you voted for whoever won the opposition's primaries to pave the way for a change in government (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Penfold, 2018). This shift reflects a deeper engagement with the democratic process. Nevertheless, for some interviewees, Portugal's political and economic stability reduces their perceived need for active political engagement, in stark contrast to Venezuela, where their political actions were seen as a vehicle for change.

Regarding other forms of political participation, it was evident that being legally entitled to participate does not automatically translate into active engagement. This is often linked to the level of integration Luso-Venezuelan migrant women feel within Portuguese society. While they tend to participate in gatherings and movements focused on human rights, such as LGBTQ+ rights or social movements concerning Venezuela, their involvement in Portuguese-specific social issues is more limited. This lack of engagement is not due to indifference, but rather a deficiency in sociopolitical integration, as they often lack information about when and where such activities take place. Their transnational reality also shapes their political involvement in Venezuela. For some, the distance and complexity of Venezuela's political situation discourage active participation in their home country's internal politics. However, family ties and personal networks in Venezuela motivate others to stay politically engaged, driven by a desire to see the changes they hope for in their homeland.

This study successfully demonstrated that Luso-Venezuelan migrant women in Portugal navigate a complex political landscape, confirming that while they maintain strong political engagement, especially concerning voting, their engagement in broader social and political movements is hindered by issues of integration. Luso-Venezuelan migrant women exercise both formal and informal political rights. However, there is room to enhance their engagement, particularly in formal political spheres, where they can further advocate for the rights they currently support through informal political activities. As demonstrated, true integration involves navigating complex social, economic, and institutional systems, as well as forming meaningful connections with the local community. These migrant women still face challenges, such as overcoming stereotypes, bridging social divides, and accessing employment and

services—issues that require more than legal or cultural recognition. Full integration is a multifaceted process that goes beyond mere legal status or shared heritage and demands ongoing effort and adaptation.

Studies on Luso-Venezuelan migrants demonstrate how “returnees” navigate a hybrid identity, balancing their cultural heritage with the realities of both Venezuela and Portugal (Dinneen, 2015). Yet, Luso-Venezuelan women face unique challenges, particularly in the realm of political participation and cultural integration.

Future research should aim to broaden the understanding of the socio-political impact of Luso-Venezuelan migrants, with particular attention to how women navigate their identities and political rights in Portugal. Comparative studies exploring the experiences of Luso-Venezuelan migrant men could provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender differences in political engagement. Furthermore, while this study provides valuable insights, its scope is limited by the relatively small sample size of interviewees. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, as well as exploring the experiences of other migrant groups in Portugal to offer a more comprehensive view of migrant political participation. Beyond the specific case of Luso-Venezuelan women in Portugal, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how gender, migration, and political participation intersect in today's increasingly globalized world. The findings highlight the need for more nuanced approaches to studying migrant integration, particularly those that consider gendered experiences and transnational realities. These findings suggest that there is a need for targeted policy interventions aimed at increasing the political engagement of migrant women in Portugal. Specific measures, such as providing more accessible information about local political issues or creating spaces for migrant women to share their experiences, could help facilitate deeper integration.

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Annex A. Interview Guide

English version

Please tell me a little bit about yourself. Your age, professional, with whom you live, and where your Portuguese roots come from.

Back in Venezuela

Were you and your family somehow related to Portugal's cultural, social, and political ways?

Did you vote in the Portuguese Election when in Venezuela? Did you use to follow the Portuguese Political agenda in Venezuela? Why?

Did you take part in any manifestation, demonstration, or protest in Venezuela?

Can you tell me more about that? What was it about? Why? When?

Did you participate in any elections back in Venezuela?

Can you tell me more about that?

Life in Portugal

When did you move to Portugal? And why did you choose Portugal?

Do you feel you are integrated into the Portuguese community? Why, how?

Are you part of any political party or association? Why?

Did you take part in any manifestation, demonstration, or protest in Portugal?

Why? Can you tell me more about that?

Do you consider you have any kind of political activity in Portugal? Which one?

Do you follow the political discussions in Portugal? Why?

Did you participate in any elections in Portugal? Why?

Can you tell me more about that?

Do you think your political engagement with the Portuguese scene can contribute somehow to your integration within the community? Why? How?

Do you still participate in political activities in Venezuela? Why?

Spanish version

Cuéntame un poco sobre ti. Tu edad, profesión, con quién vives y de dónde provienen tus raíces portuguesas.

En Venezuela

¿Tú y tu familia estaban de alguna manera relacionados con las cultura, sociedad y políticas de Portugal?

¿Votaste en Elecciones Portuguesas cuando vivías en Venezuela? ¿Solías seguir la agenda política portuguesa en Venezuela?

¿Participaste en alguna manifestación, demostración o protesta en Venezuela? ¿Puedes contarme más al respecto?

¿Participaste en alguna elección en Venezuela? ¿Puedes contarme más al respecto?

Vida en Portugal

¿Cuándo te mudaste a Portugal? ¿Y por qué elegiste este país?

¿Sientes que estás integrada en la comunidad portuguesa? ¿En qué sentido?

¿Eres parte de algún partido político o asociación? ¿Por qué?

¿Participaste en alguna manifestación, demostración o protesta en Portugal? ¿Por qué?
¿Puedes contarme más al respecto?

¿Consideras que tienes algún tipo de actividad política en Portugal? ¿Cuál?

¿Sigues los debates políticos en Portugal? ¿Por qué?

¿Participaste en alguna elección en Portugal? ¿Por qué? ¿Puedes contarme más al respecto?

¿Crees que tu compromiso político con la escena portuguesa puede contribuir de alguna manera a tu integración en la comunidad? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo?

¿Todavía participas en actividades políticas en Venezuela? ¿Por qué?

Annex B. Interview Consent

El propósito de este formulario de consentimiento es proporcionar a los participantes en esta investigación una explicación clara de la naturaleza del estudio, así como de su rol como participantes en el mismo.

La investigación está siendo llevada a cabo por Juliete Andreina Da Costa Da Silva, estudiante de la Maestría en Estudios Internacionales del Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), y se centra en entrevistas semiestructuradas con mujeres luso-venezolanas residentes en Portugal.

Si decide participar en dicho estudio, se le solicitará que responda preguntas durante una entrevista relacionada sobre su perfil migratorio y su ejercicio de los derechos políticos en Portugal. Dicha entrevista será grabada para que la investigadora pueda transcribir posteriormente las ideas expresadas.

La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria, confidencial y no conlleva ninguna compensación económica. La información recopilada se utilizará exclusivamente para los fines de esta investigación, y los resultados solo se divulgarán con propósitos estadísticos, educativos y científicos. Toda la información obtenida y los resultados de la investigación serán archivados en formato papel y electrónico, y posteriormente destruidos una vez concluida la investigación (en un plazo máximo de 9 meses desde la entrevista).

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre el proyecto, puede plantearla en cualquier momento. Asimismo, tiene la opción de retirarse de la entrevista en cualquier momento sin ninguna repercusión. Si alguna pregunta durante la entrevista le resulta incómoda, tiene derecho a hacerlo saber a la investigadora y/o a optar por no responderla. No se esperan riesgos significativos asociados con la participación en el estudio.

ISCTE cuenta con un *Data Protection Officer* que puede ser contactado por correo electrónico: dpo@iscte-iul.pt. Además, tiene derecho a presentar una queja ante la Autoridad Portuguesa de Protección de Datos (CNDP) si así lo considera necesario.

Declaro que he comprendido los objetivos de la investigación tal como me los explicó la investigadora, que se me ofreció la oportunidad de hacer cualquier pregunta relacionada con el estudio y que recibí respuestas claras a todas mis inquietudes. Acepto participar en el estudio y autorizo el uso de mis datos personales de acuerdo con la información proporcionada. Entiendo que puedo pedir información sobre los resultados de este estudio cuando éste haya concluido. Para esto, puedo contactar al e-mail jacsal@iscte-iul.pt

Nombre completo: _____

Firma: _____

Ciudad y fecha: _____

Annex C. *Debriefing* / Explicación de la investigación

Gracias por haber participado en esta investigación. Como se indicó al inicio de su participación, el estudio trata sobre los las mujeres migrantes luso-venezolanas residentes en Portugal después de la crisis humanitaria en Venezuela ejercen sus derechos políticos en el país.

En el contexto de su participación, esta será anónima y sus datos personales se destruirán una vez que se haya completado el trabajo final (estimado en un plazo máximo de 9 meses desde la entrevista).

Le recordamos que puede contactar a la investigadora (jacsal@iscte-iul.pt) para expresar cualquier pregunta y/o comentario, así como para indicar su interés en recibir información sobre los principales resultados y conclusiones del estudio

Una vez más, gracias por su participación.