

**Everyday Infrastructures of Negotiation: Borders, Xenophobia, and Belonging
among Latin American Migrant Women in Portugal**

By

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A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Global Governance

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2026

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Portugal has become an important destination for Latin American migrants. Yet its self-image as a “migrant-friendly” country sits uneasily alongside bureaucratic dysfunction, rising housing precarity, and persistent gendered and racialized exclusions shaped by colonial histories. While scholarship on intersectional migration in Western Europe has focused largely on securitized border regimes and core destination states, migrant-positioned women in semi-peripheral cities remain underexplored. This is particularly the case in contexts where EU, national, and local governance frameworks are unevenly implemented. This dissertation addresses this gap by asking how migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America navigate borders, xenophobia, and belonging in Porto, Portugal, and how relational solidarities emerge as key forms of support and survival within fragmented governance arrangements.

The study is based on a qualitative case study of Porto. It draws on 63 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2022 and 2024 with migrant-positioned women and representatives of migrant-serving organizations. Porto provides a particularly revealing site where global governance frameworks, including EU migration and integration regimes, are translated unevenly through national and local institutions. This produces fragmented and often inaccessible forms of support. The analysis develops a translocational approach to negotiation that brings together three interconnected dimensions. Translocationality is understood as shifting social positions shaped by gender, race, class, and legal status across time and place. Negotiation is conceptualized as a feminist practice of everyday agency, ranging from subtle adjustments to more explicit forms of resistance within the constraints of governance. Relational solidarities are

understood as trust-based migrant-to-migrant networks operating across both digital and embodied spaces as informal infrastructure in contexts of institutional insufficiency.

The findings show that migrant-positioned women respond to bureaucratic precarity through collective knowledge-sharing, confront racialized and sexualized forms of xenophobia linked to enduring colonial imaginaries, and actively produce forms of belonging that exceed formal integration frameworks. A counterintuitive comparative finding emerges. Hispanic Latin American women report relatively greater experiences of social welcome than Brazilian women. For Brazilian women, perceived cultural proximity to Portugal can intensify forms of discrimination. The dissertation makes four contributions. It advances a translocational lens on negotiation that resists binary framings of vulnerability and privilege, conceives relational solidarities as everyday infrastructure within fragmented governance systems, provides one of the first sustained analyses of Latin American migrant women in Portugal, and reframes digital platforms as critical spaces of collective organization under conditions of institutional fragmentation. It concludes by pointing to the importance of examining how Portugal's post-2024 restrictive policy shifts may reshape these dynamics, particularly for women arriving without regularisation pathways.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Suzan Ilcan, for her guidance, support, and attentiveness throughout this research and the program. Her thoughtful feedback, questions, and suggestions encouraged and challenged me to develop this project in ways I could not have anticipated at the start. I also appreciate the opportunities she gave me to develop my research and professional skills through assisting with an international research project and helping to plan an academic conference. These experiences greatly contributed to my academic and professional development. I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Kim Rygiel and Dr. Seçil Dağtaş, for their careful reading, critical questions and observations, and contributions to this dissertation.

I am especially grateful to the migrant-positioned women, organizational representatives, and civil society members who participated in this research. Thank you for sharing your experiences, knowledge, time, and perspectives with me. This dissertation would not exist without your willingness to take part, and I hope I have done justice to the complexity and depth of what you shared.

I also thank my colleagues, friends, and members of the Balsillie School of International Affairs and the University of Waterloo, as well as colleagues and friends from other institutions who have gone through similar processes. Your intellectual exchange, encouragement, and support have been invaluable throughout this journey.

Finally, I am profoundly grateful to my family and friends for their love, patience, and support throughout this PhD. To Francisco, thank you for your support and for being part of the moves that shaped this journey. And to Cassia, thank you for arriving in time to teach me, every day, to be present in the world beyond the dissertation.

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Introduction

“People arrive very uninformed; people arrive looking for opportunities here. Moreover, there was also a wave of misinformation, of YouTubers saying that here in Portugal it was very easy to get [legal] documents, look for work, live, earn money, and many people came here. They feel deceived.” (Interview, 25 May 2023, Porto)

Representative of a Latin American migrants’ cooperative, *Huellatina*

“I came in very good conditions compared to other people. I was never illegal [irregular], never. And my husband is Portuguese, his family is Portuguese and can help out, but I still had a hard time.” (Interview, 22 June 2023, Porto)

Carolina, a woman from Brazil.

“In 5 years {of living here}, I don't have a Portuguese friend.” (Interview, 1 June 2023, Porto)

Nayita, a woman from Venezuela

These excerpts illustrate the intersecting challenges of migration, social integration, and community-building that shape the everyday experiences of migrant-positioned women in Porto. They highlight not only individual struggles but also the structural and social frameworks within which these women operate. Together, they reveal that women are simultaneously navigating borders, xenophobia, and belonging, as well as legal uncertainty and everyday exclusion, not as separate experiences, but as overlapping and ongoing processes. These overlapping processes unfold across formal and informal, social, institutional, and spatial contexts, creating a

complexity that requires an analytical lens attentive to both the positioning and strategies of migrant women.

To capture this complexity, this dissertation examines translocational negotiation, bringing together two complementary concepts. *Translocationality* (Anthias, 2012) provides a lens to understand how social positions, shaped by gender, race, class, and nationality, shift across time, space, and institutional contexts. *Negotiation* (e.g., Ilcan & Squire, 2023; Ilcan et al., 2025a) refers to the practical, everyday strategies women deploy to navigate, respond to, and at times rework structural constraints. Together, these concepts allow the study to capture both the structured and shifting nature of social positions and the active ways women respond to them in daily life.

Portugal, and Porto in particular, offers a distinctive site for examining these processes. Its postcolonial ties to the Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) world, combined with a relatively receptive policy context, shape how Latin American women experience and negotiate borders, xenophobia, and belonging. As a peripheral European city in the far west of Southern Europe, Porto makes these intersecting dynamics especially visible, highlighting the relational, multi-scalar, and everyday strategies through which migrant-positioned women assert agency, build community, and claim rights. These local experiences of negotiation occur within broader global migration and governance contexts.

Situated within the interdisciplinary field of global governance, this study argues that migration governance cannot be understood solely through state- or European Union (EU)-centric frameworks of analysis (e.g., Betts, 2011; Pécoud, 2024; Piper, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2022). Betts (2011) shows how regulation emerges in fragmented, ad hoc, “bottom-up” configurations of states, NGOs, firms, and migrants themselves, rather than only through

top-down multilateralism. Latin American migrant women arrive in Portugal not only as subjects of Portuguese and EU migration regimes, but also as actors responding to broader global pressures, including economic crises in Argentina, political and economic collapse in Venezuela, and insecurity in Brazil.

In Portugal, fragmented national and EU-driven infrastructures, such as the *Manifestação de Interesse* case-by-case regulation process (outlined in Chapter 2) and its 2024 repeal, intersect with local bureaucratic practices and NGO intermediaries, forming a multi-scalar governance configuration that produces uneven and gendered access to rights and recognition. At the same time, migrant-positioned women deploy community-based initiatives and digitally mediated networks as forms of governance from below, coordinating information, housing, work, and support in ways that both mitigate and expose institutional gaps. Digital platforms can facilitate connection, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support, but they also shape the conditions under which these solidarity practices occur, including through uneven access, commercial logics, and the circulation of unreliable information. Digital infrastructures therefore function not only as an infrastructure for solidarity but also as a mode of governance that creates both possibilities and constraints. Examining these dynamics from a secondary European city, Porto, rather than from a capital or border hotspot, demonstrates how this context reflects wider patterns in contemporary migration governance, including the proliferation of multi-level and informal arrangements, the coexistence of “receptive” narratives with exclusionary practices, and the central role of everyday migrant infrastructures in sustaining mobility and belonging across scales.

Building on these governance dynamics, the study’s central premise is that migrant-positioned women are not passive recipients of migration-governing regimes. In Porto, across borders, in encounters with xenophobia, and through everyday efforts to build belonging, they

actively respond to structural constraints through situated, relational practices shaped by shifting positionalities. To guide this study, I develop a translocational framework of negotiation, which integrates three interconnected concepts: translocationality, negotiation, and the relational practices that sustain migrant networks. These concepts are introduced here to guide the reader and are elaborated in Chapter 1, where their analytical function is defined.

I use *migrant-positioned women* to acknowledge that women in this study variously self-identify as “migrants,” “immigrants,” “expats,” “international women,” or “foreigners,” and they note their diverse legal statuses, ranging from visa holders to EU passport holders, to those undergoing regularization. Drawing on Anthias's concept of *translocationality* (2002, 2008, 2012), this terminology emphasizes that these women are positioned within multiple, shifting power relations across time and space, rather than within fixed categories. This focus on positionality allows the study to move beyond static categorizations of migrants and instead examine how inclusion and exclusion are lived, contested, and reworked in everyday contexts. Portugal provides a distinctive context for examining these processes, and Porto, as a secondary city with specific postcolonial and policy characteristics, offers a particularly revealing site of analysis.

Portugal Migration Context

Portugal has recently transitioned to an immigration destination. Its postcolonial relationships with Brazil and its position as a “migrant-friendly” destination undergoing political shifts create unique conditions for studying how migrant-positioned women negotiate across these three domains (Marques et al., 2025). Portugal's emergence as a migrant-receiving country represents a recent historical shift. According to statistics by the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (*Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo*, AIMA), by the end of

December 2024, Portugal registered 1,543,697 foreign citizens residing in Portuguese territory (mainland Portugal and Madeira and the Açores or Azores islands), quadrupling the 421,803 foreign resident population at the end of 2017 (2025). Among this population, Brazilians account for 484,596 individuals (31.4%), representing nearly the entirety of South America's 34.2% share (527,000). In comparison, Spanish-speaking Latin American groups are much smaller, highlighting the demographic predominance of Brazilian migrants within Portugal's foreign population.

For centuries, Portugal experienced primarily outward migration to its ex-colonies, with minimal inward migration. The country's first significant experience receiving migrants occurred during decolonization in 1974, when over half a million Portuguese and Portuguese-descended "returnees" fled from African colonies (Challinor, 2018). Challinor further notes that this repatriation coincided with economic difficulties, a democratic transition, and ongoing Portuguese emigration (2018).

Genuine inward migration began only in the 1980s, following Portugal's accession to the EU and the growth of its service economy (Pereira & Azevedo, 2019). Initial arrivals came primarily from former colonies in Brazil and Africa before diversifying to include Eastern Europeans, other EU nationals, and migrants from South Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), North America, and Latin America (Schlessner, 2025). The 2013 financial crisis marked another turning point. Austerity measures and high unemployment drove educated Portuguese youth and some newcomers to leave the country (Pereira & Azevedo, 2019).

Post-2013 government strategies to improve the country's economic situation focused on boosting tourism and foreign investment, which has fueled growth in short-term rentals and attracted lifestyle migrants, including retirees, Golden Visa investors, and digital nomads, who

have greater purchasing power than locals (Schlesser, 2025). The increase in tourist rentals and immigration is thought to significantly contribute to Portugal's severe housing affordability crisis; however, it is not the sole cause. Other longstanding factors include an abundance of vacant properties nationwide that remain underutilized, high construction costs, and inadequate housing supports (Antanaityte, 2023; Leidecker et al., 2026). Housing costs have outpaced salaries, eroded people's living standards, and prevented young people from starting a life, contributing to the outward migration of Portuguese youth (Leidecker et al., 2026). The minimum wage reached only €920 per month in January 2026 (Governo da República Portuguesa, 2025). However, alongside locals, low-income migrants are affected by high housing costs (Carreiras, 2024).

In 2020, following the death of a Ukrainian national in custody at Lisbon airport, Portugal's *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (Foreigners and Borders Service, SEF) began a controversial restructuring process that culminated in October 2023 with its replacement by AIMA (Garraio, Solovova, & Santos, 2022). The High Commission for Migration (*Alto Comissariado para as Migrações*, ACM), which previously provided various support services to all migrants, was incorporated into AIMA (EMN Portugal Factsheet 2024). This institutional reorganization, combined with COVID-era backlogs and increasing migration, extended residency processes from months to approximately two years. However, the restructuring and launch of the new institution were widely reported as problematic, with growing legal complaints, migrant protests in Lisbon and Porto over delays, and criticism from government officials, who described SEF's closure as "political ineptitude" (*Ordem dos Advogados*, 2024). For example, throughout 2024, there were increasing legal complaints and challenges against

AIMA, and migrants in Lisbon and Porto staged several protests regarding the delays (*Ordem dos Advogados*, 2024).

According to SEF, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine significantly reshaped Portugal's migration landscape, with 56,585 Temporary Protection applications (2022). When combined with pre-war Ukrainian residents, Ukrainians constituted Portugal's second-largest foreign resident population after Brazilians in 2022 (SEF, 2023). However, by 2025, nationals from India and Angola had become the second- and third-largest foreign resident populations in Portugal, respectively, with nationals from Ukraine fourth (AIMA, 2025). Portugal's response to Ukrainian refugees stands in contrast to its earlier, less successful efforts to host Syrian refugees, which scholars attribute to several structural challenges: Portugal's inexperience as a refugee-receiving country; the absence of an established Syrian or Arabic-speaking diaspora community; and the fragmented nature of civil society responses (e.g., Challinor 2018; Goldberg, 2021).

In 2023, Portugal introduced several new visa categories, including a streamlined Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) visa for applicants with pending regularization cases and a Job-seeker Visa to manage labour migration. In October 2025, these visa categories were then discontinued under the guise of a new skilled labour visa that must be applied for in advance (see Government reinforces requirements on citizenship laws and residence, 2025). The country also launched the Digital Nomad Visa, adding to its existing options for privileged migrants such as the D7 visa for retirees or those with passive income and the recently modified Golden Visa (Schlesser, 2025). These developments further stratified Portugal's migration regime, creating a spectrum of lesser and greater privileged avenues of migration that some scholars characterize as the "commodification of citizenship" (Surak, 2021).

These structural and historical factors shape migrants' everyday experiences, including the social and institutional barriers they encounter. In particular, the ways xenophobia and gendered discrimination intersect reveal how Portuguese society positions Brazilian and Hispanic Latin American women differently within public, labour, and community spaces. While xenophobia occupies a central place in this dissertation, it is entangled with racialization and other intersecting forms of discrimination through which migrant-positioned women are positioned within hierarchies of belonging and exclusion. By racialization, I refer to the processes through which people are differentiated, ordered, and governed according to perceived racial and ethnic categories, as well as national origin and geopolitical positioning, often in interaction with gender, class, and migration status. This racialized dimension is a significant, if sometimes implicit, thread in the analysis and is elaborated in the empirical chapters that follow.

Xenophobia and Gendered Experiences

Despite Portugal's relatively receptive migration policies compared to contexts where far-right politics have gained greater traction (Tsagkroni & Dikaïos, 2024), migrants reported experiencing significant xenophobia. Brazilian migrants are particularly exposed due to their status as the largest and most visible immigrant group (AIMA, 2025). Although often highly qualified, they are disproportionately concentrated in precarious sectors (Nazaré Oliveira et al., 2019) and positioned within a postcolonial hierarchy marked by "cultural proximity" alongside perceived inferiority (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021; Gomes, 2018). These dynamics manifest across multiple domains. In the labour market, Brazilians frequently experience occupational downgrading, working in sectors such as construction and customer service despite their qualifications (e.g., Nazaré Oliveira et al., 2019). Discrimination is also reported in access to healthcare and other public services (Barata, 2022). A substantial body of literature further

highlights Brazilian women's gendered experiences of xenophobia, including hypersexualized stereotypes rooted in colonial legacies (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021; Gomes, 2018; Malheiros & Padilla, 2018; Oltramari et al., 2022). By contrast, Brasil and Cabecinhas (2018) identify a significant gap in research on Hispanic Latin Americans' experiences of xenophobia in Portugal, particularly when compared to the Spanish context. This study addresses this gap.

Following Floya Anthias (2012, p. 103), the national context can be understood as “a node of position and place in a global landscape of inequality.” This provides a key lens for analyzing migrant experiences. It situates Portugal within broader global governance regimes of migration, shaped by unequal postcolonial relations, racialized labour markets, and EU migration and border frameworks. At the same time, it foregrounds how these dynamics are reconfigured at the national level. Portugal remains a relatively under-researched European destination for migration. Its historical legacy as a former colonial power, combined with its more recent transition to an immigration country and its position in Europe's southern periphery, produces a distinctive constellation of power relations that migrant-positioned women must navigate. This distinguishes it from other southern European contexts, such as Greece, Italy, or Cyprus, where migration is more strongly structured through securitized border regimes and irregularized entry (see, for example, Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026).

Within Portugal, Lusophone postcolonial ties shape a dynamic of “cultural proximity” alongside perceived inferiority (e.g., Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2018; França & Oliveira, 2021; Gomes, 2018). Migrants from formerly colonized contexts are accordingly rendered familiar and subordinated simultaneously. This configuration structures forms of gendered xenophobia that differ from more overtly securitized regimes elsewhere in Europe, while still remaining embedded within EU labour and mobility hierarchies. At the same time, these populations are

relatively new and highly visible. Their concentration in precarious and lower-skilled sectors, despite the qualifications many bring with them, reinforces their economic and social precarity (Nazaré Oliveira et al., 2019). In a transforming economy, this intensifies their exposure to everyday precarity.

Together, these dynamics make Portugal a particularly revealing site. They show how global inequalities are mediated through EU and national governance frameworks and postcolonial histories. In turn, they shape translocational positionalities and contribute to broader patterns of racialized and gendered inequality in Europe, without positioning Portugal as exceptional.

Porto as a Research Site

I conducted this empirical research in Porto, Portugal's second-largest city, which offers opportunities for insights beyond those from frequently studied capitals and border regions. While Lisbon has been the focus of much research (Malheiros et al., 2024), Porto provides a vantage point into migration governance in a secondary city, where global, EU, and national policies are implemented unevenly, and institutional responses remain underdeveloped. This makes visible how governance operates in practice, through gaps, negotiations, and everyday enactments, rather than through consolidated state infrastructures.

Porto's "embryonic" yet increasingly active diversity regime (Oliveira & Magalhães, 2024) intersects with a growing Latin American population navigating limited institutional support. Adopting a gendered lens is particularly valuable in this setting. Migrant-positioned women often occupy roles at the intersection of precarious labour markets and social reproduction. Examining their experiences highlights how governance gaps are mediated through care, domestic work, and community-building. These activities remain largely invisible in formal

policy analyses, revealing how global and local governance structures are lived and negotiated differently across genders.

At the same time, in recent years, rapid tourism-driven transformation has intensified housing pressures and socio-spatial inequalities (Fernandes et al., 2024). These tensions are reflected in public discourse: during Portugal's snap election in May 2025, a news report observed, "Housing is unaffordable. Migrants are a flashpoint issue. The far right is here to stay. And Portugal is deeply divided as it heads to its third general election in three years" (de Sousa, 2025). Stratified migration pathways further exacerbate inequality, reinforcing divisions between migrants with access to capital-intensive routes and those facing increasing precarity in housing and work (Carreiras, 2024).

Porto's combination of a still-consolidating migration regime, Lusophone postcolonial ties, and rapid urban restructuring make these inequalities particularly visible. Focusing on Latin American migrant women reveals how multi-scalar governance, postcolonial hierarchies, and urban transformation intersect in everyday life. It contributes to broader debates on migration governance while foregrounding gendered experiences that would otherwise remain invisible.

Research Gap and Problem Statement

Drawing on the context outlined above, Portugal has increasingly depended on migrant labour and cultivated a reputation as a migrant-friendly destination. However, recent political shifts—far-right gains after the 2024 elections and housing crises scapegoating migrants—have challenged this image, forming a receptive-yet-xenophobic paradox that remains underexplored in intersectional migration scholarship. Migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America face persistent barriers across governance systems, labour markets, and social interactions, exacerbated by gendered, racialized, and postcolonial power relations.

Migration studies grounded in intersectionality based in Western Europe often focus on securitized EU frontiers, such as on intersectional analyses within these highly securitized sites (e.g., Cappiali & Pacciardi, 2025; Dağtaş, 2018), or on racialized minorities in core states (e.g., Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). By contrast, Portuguese intersectional migration scholarship, though growing (e.g., Araújo et al., 2023; França & Oliveira, 2021; Piccinelli et al., 2025), rarely examines Latin American women navigating the period between post-COVID recovery and the 2024 political shifts. In this context, Lusophone postcolonial proximity shapes everyday xenophobia, as cultural intimacy amplifies discrimination across multiple social, administrative, and affective realms.

This dissertation study addresses these gaps in two ways. First, it examines Brazilian and Hispanic Latin American women comparatively in Porto, showing how Lusophone ties intensify Brazilian women's racialized and gendered precarity relative to less-studied Hispanic women who lack such proximity. This comparison yields intersectional insights that go beyond single-group studies. Second, it highlights how Latin American migrant women in Portugal draw on *relational solidarities*, understood as horizontal, migrant-to-migrant, trust-based networks of mutual support that operate across digital and face-to-face spaces, enabling migrant-positioned women to navigate exclusion, exchange knowledge, and sustain both individual and collective resilience. Here, horizontal refers to the migrant-to-migrant basis of these relationships rather than to a complete absence of power differences between participants. These solidarities may not necessarily be even, uniformly reciprocal, or uniformly supportive. These networks are shaped by women's different positionalities, including education, language skills, class, legal status, and access to social and material resources, which influence the forms of support and connection available to them. Relational solidarities can therefore take different forms and may involve

unequal exchanges, dependencies, or competing interests, including through the circulation of information, the exchange of resources, and varying degrees of vulnerability. Understanding solidarity in these terms also informs how I approach negotiation, not simply as an individual response to structural constraints, but as a relational process through which migrant-positioned women navigate and respond to uneven social and institutional conditions. I therefore frame negotiation as a feminist mode of agency, encompassing both subtle and overt strategies through which women contest structural barriers and actively shape belonging. This approach shifts the analytic focus from institutional fragmentation to migrant-led practices of support, knowledge-sharing, and empowerment.

While existing scholarship increasingly examines intersections between borders, discrimination, and belonging, few studies focus on how these dimensions are negotiated simultaneously by migrant-positioned women in secondary European cities. This study highlights how women navigate intersecting precarities across administrative, social, and affective realms, often relying on informal and digitally mediated relational systems within and beyond formal institutions. Digital networks, including social media and messaging platforms, play a critical role in enabling access to information, support, and community-building, allowing women to respond strategically to barriers in real time.

Research Questions

This study asks: How do migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America negotiate borders, xenophobia, and belonging in Porto, Portugal, and what role do relational solidarities play as critical infrastructure that enables these negotiations? Using a translocational framework of negotiation, it examines how women respond to structural constraints and social inequalities through everyday practices, showing how inclusion and

exclusion are experienced, contested, and reshaped in local contexts. It also considers how gender, race, class, and legal status shape the strategies women use and the support networks they build. By linking individual practices to broader social, institutional, and digital infrastructures, this study highlights the multiple, overlapping dimensions of migrant life in a semi-peripheral European city and the ways in which women exercise agency within these contexts.

To answer these questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews with migrant-positioned women and organizational representatives. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, highlighting both the structural constraints women face across governance systems, labour markets, and social spaces and the relational strategies they develop to navigate them. By integrating intersectional and translocational analysis, the study shows how women negotiate overlapping challenges as they move through global, EU, and national governance frameworks.

Migrant-positioned women in this study rely on relational solidarities, understood here as trust-based networks of mutual support and knowledge-sharing, a concept I elaborate in subsequent sections. These include digital and community-based networks that enable women to extend agency across borders, institutions, and everyday encounters. Online platforms extend networks of care, knowledge, and solidarity, while in-person interactions anchor these connections in local communities, showing how positionalities, agency, and relational practices operate across interconnected contexts. This approach reveals how informal, migrant-led infrastructures mediate structural constraints, challenge fragmented governance regimes, and capture the complexity of everyday negotiation, belonging, and resistance. This study contributes to critical migration and border studies by framing negotiation as a feminist mode of agency,

through which migrant-positioned women employ both subtle and overt strategies to navigate exclusion. By centering these practices, the research highlights how relational solidarities across digital and embodied spaces enable women to co-produce knowledge, sustain mutual support, and actively shape belonging.

Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality serves as the theoretical cornerstone of this research, chosen for its capacity to provide a gendered analytical focus, to account for differences among women, and to foreground power relations. Feminist intersectionality has increasingly informed critical migration scholarship by providing analytical tools for understanding migrants' multidimensional experiences (e.g., Carastathis, 2018; Ilcan et al., 2025b; Mountz & Mohan, 2022; Taha, 2019).

Crenshaw (1991) pioneered the intersectionality framework through her legal analysis of employment discrimination, demonstrating how a Black woman's overlapping identities created unique forms of exclusion that single-axis frameworks failed to capture. Her analysis revealed how race and gender intersected in maintaining occupational segregation, with men of colour relegated to factory labour while white women occupied front-facing office positions. The conceptualization of intersectionality illuminated how "single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). This approach fundamentally distinguished intersectionality from earlier feminist waves by centring the distinctive experiences of women of colour (e.g., Carastathis, 2014; Collins, 1998, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991, 1997). In the context of migration, I used this framework to examine how migrant-positioned women navigate overlapping aspects of identity, which shape experiences different from those of migrant men, especially for women of color, who face additional layers of marginalization.

Building on Anthias's concept of translocationality, Bastia et al. (2023, p. 463, para 6) assert that "people are constituted as gendered, classed, racialized subjects prior to migration, and are 'othered' as they travel such that intersectional social locations enable mobility for some but restrict it for others." Bosworth et al. (2018) empirically demonstrate this through their analysis of European border regimes, revealing deeply racialized and gendered policing practices. As Mountz and Mohan (2022) emphasize, intersectional and transnational approaches reveal how migrants face persistent structural barriers after relocation, including legal classification challenges, livelihood insecurity, and cultural-linguistic barriers, often compounded by racism. Translocationality is particularly useful for this study because it helps capture how Latin American women in Porto act as everyday translocational negotiators, navigating overlapping pressures in their daily lives. It shows how local urban transformations, such as tourism-driven gentrification and housing crises, intersect with colonial legacies to shape women's experiences. Their practices illuminate how global, EU, and national migration governance is enacted on the ground. By highlighting these dynamics, translocationality reveals how global inequalities and postcolonial power are both experienced and reproduced through migrant women's practices.

I enhanced this intersectional approach by incorporating decolonial perspectives, responding to calls for feminist, intersectional, decolonial knowledge-building in academia (Lykke et al., 2024). As Cappiali and Pacciardi assert, "decoloniality interrogates the ways colonial and imperial conquests continue to shape the modern world, while intersectionality examines the interconnected nature of systems of social categorization and domination" (2024, p. 3, para 4). This integration of decoloniality and intersectionality was particularly relevant for understanding how colonial legacies shaped Brazilian women's experiences of

hypersexualization and racialization in Portugal (e.g., Araújo, 2013; França & Oliveira, 2021; Machado, 2021).

Methodological Approach

My methodological approach aligned with what Bastia et al. (2023, p. 463, para 7) describe as the "ethos of decolonising knowledge production and circulation and highlighting the significance of southern knowledges." By centring the perspectives and scholarship of Brazilian and Latin American researchers, this study actively challenges dominant Global North frameworks and prioritizes knowledge produced from the Global South. In doing so, it reshapes how migration is understood by foregrounding historically rooted inequalities, colonial legacies, and gendered labour dynamics, while also highlighting forms of agency, resistance, and community-building that might be overlooked. By building on scholarship by Brazilian and Latin American researchers, this study contributes to efforts to amplify voices that have often been marginalized in Global North academic discourse. This is especially important given the understudied yet growing migration of Hispanic Latin Americans to Portugal and the wealth of scholarship on the unique experiences of Brazilian women in Portugal.

I designed this research as a qualitative case study of Porto, Portugal, examining how migrant-positioned women navigate structural constraints through everyday practices of solidarity and negotiation. This qualitative approach was particularly appropriate for capturing the nuanced lived experiences of migrant-positioned women, centring their often-marginalized voices, and revealing the subtle ways power operates in migration contexts. This design allowed me to explore in depth the contextual particularities of migration in a semi-peripheral European nation while developing analytical insights that contributed to broader theoretical understandings of the agency of migrant-positioned women.

The timing of my research coincided with significant transitions in Portugal's migration landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) initially disrupted migration flows, followed by an increase in arrivals from 2022 onward, creating unprecedented administrative delays that persisted well beyond the pandemic's acute phase (Schlesser, 2025). My fieldwork concluded just before a critical juncture, the June 2024 dismantling of regularization pathways following political shifts in Portugal (Marques et al., 2025). This sequential context enabled me to capture the experiences of migrant-positioned women during a uniquely dynamic period, revealing how they navigated both pandemic-related disruptions and the final phase of Portugal's relatively open migration regime before its restrictive turn.

I conducted 63 semi-structured interviews in Portugal between 2022 and 2024: 26 with migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America living in Porto, and 37 with representatives from migrant-serving organizations, including government entities, non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and migrant-led initiatives, some of which were in Lisbon. Eleven participants from the latter group were themselves migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America. The women interviewed represent diverse positionalities within Portugal's migration regime. While most would self-identify as "immigrants," their circumstances varied considerably: some arrived with legal status through work, study, or family reunification visas; others held EU citizenship through second- or third-generation status; still others were navigating regularization after overstaying tourist visas. The women I recruited had lived in Porto for a range of periods, from 8 months to 8 years, and although I interviewed only adult women, I recruited women aged in their twenties to their fifties. I did not recruit any senior citizens or women of retirement age. Their trajectories differed widely across dimensions of racialization, class, education, employment, family status, and linguistic repertoires. Venezuelan

participants merited specific mention, as many would likely have sought asylum in other countries but pursued alternative regularization pathways because of Portugal's legal framework. The study also includes two Ukrainian refugees, whose experiences reflect the distinct humanitarian response to the 2022 Russian invasion. Their inclusion provided insight into Portugal's shifting approach as a more recent host country for refugees and the increased diversity of migrant groups, and foregrounds recent changes in Portugal's migration landscape that marked a rupture in its reputation as a migration-friendly country.

I recruited participants through multiple channels to attract a diverse group: community encounters, online groups (Facebook, WhatsApp), migration-related events, NGO referrals, and snowball sampling. My samples would have been biased toward women who use information and communication technologies (ICTs); however, I also recruited at in-person events and community encounters to reach women who might not be active in online groups. I conducted follow-up interviews with women navigating ongoing regularization processes to capture longitudinal insights. I conducted interviews in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, reflecting my language competencies as a native English speaker with Spanish fluency and intermediate-to-high proficiency in Portuguese. I used the Otter.ai platform to transcribe English interviews and Microsoft Word's transcription function for Portuguese and Spanish, with native-speaking research assistants verifying translations produced by DeepL software.

My interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and followed a semi-structured format that ensured consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to pursue emergent themes. I designed the interview guide to cover challenges and examine practices of relational solidarities, while adapting to participants' specific circumstances and narrative priorities (see Appendix A). With migrant-positioned women, I typically began with migration biography

questions before exploring the challenges they encountered and the strategies they developed across different phases of their migration trajectories. When interviewing organizational representatives, I focused on their organization's role regarding migrants, including refugees, observed patterns in the experiences of migrant-positioned women, institutional responses, and evolving approaches to support. I primarily conducted interviews in public spaces such as cafés and parks, and in organizational offices, and occasionally via online video calls. This approach prioritized participant comfort while enabling me to observe relevant contexts.

I analyzed the data in multiple stages, beginning with an in-depth review of interview transcripts to identify emerging patterns. I employed a hybrid coding approach combining inductive and deductive strategies. I began with my key research question, then employed open inductive coding to identify emergent themes directly from participants' accounts. Subsequently, I applied focused deductive coding, drawing on theoretical concepts from the intersectionality and migration literatures. I developed a coding structure in NVivo that captured and identified both thematic content (experiences of borders, xenophobia, belonging) and analytical dimensions (specific challenges, forms of negotiation, specific infrastructures of relational solidarities, solidarity practices, power dynamics). I engaged in an iterative process that involved regular movement between data, codes, and theoretical literature to refine analytical categories. I particularly focused my analysis on identifying variations in experiences and practices across different intersectional positions, mapping how factors such as nationality, racial presentation, class position, and legal status shaped women's encounters with institutional structures and their strategic responses. I conducted cross-case analysis to identify patterns across different groups of participants, particularly those from Brazil, those from Hispanic Latin America, and those with

regular status and those who underwent and were undergoing regularization, while maintaining attention to individual narratives that illuminated the complexity of migrant experiences.

I conducted this research with approval from the University of Waterloo Ethics Review Board, granted on October 4th 2022 (ORE #44623). Given the potentially vulnerable position of migrant participants, particularly those with precarious legal status, I centred ethical considerations in all phases of the research. I provided all participants with information about the research purpose, data handling procedures, and their rights to withdraw in their preferred language (English, Portuguese, or Spanish). I obtained informed consent verbally and/or in writing, depending on participants' preferences and comfort levels. To protect confidentiality, I removed all identifying information during transcription and used pseudonyms throughout. I stored interview recordings in encrypted files and deleted them after transcription. Beyond procedural ethics, I approached interviews with an ethics of care, remaining attentive to power dynamics and potential emotional impacts of discussing challenging migration experiences. I maintained contact information for local support organizations to provide referrals if participants expressed a need for support.

My position as a Canadian white female researcher, while simultaneously navigating Portugal's migration bureaucracy, shaped both my access to participants and the dynamics of our interactions. I benefited from participating in social groups on these platforms, which supported my own processes of mobility and social inclusion. This engagement enhanced my understanding of how digital networks intersect with offline practices, shaping opportunities and constraints in everyday life. My status as a foreigner, coupled with residence permits, appointments at the immigration office (SEF), and bureaucratic requirements, afforded me partial insider knowledge of the administrative challenges facing migrants. However, I remained acutely

aware of the substantial privileges that mediated my experience: my whiteness, financial resources, institutional affiliation, and Canadian passport afforded me pathways and protections unavailable to many participants. This positioning created a research dynamic where I could relate to procedural frustrations while acknowledging the profound differences in stakes and barriers.

As a mother managing my child's documentation and integration into Portuguese systems (schools, healthcare, residency), I gained additional insight into the gendered labour of migration administration that many participants described. These shared experiences of maternal responsibility for family navigation sometimes created meaningful points of connection in interviews, particularly with women who were also mothers. Additionally, the collaborative nature of a research project critically examining migration power structures fostered meaningful connections, particularly with participants engaged in social justice advocacy who recognized our shared commitment to exposing systemic barriers within migration regimes. This alignment in purpose, documenting exclusionary practices while amplifying migrant-positioned women's agency, often transcended our positional differences, creating spaces of mutual recognition and intellectual solidarity despite our contrasting experiences of the systems under analysis. This partial insider status facilitated trust-building while still requiring ongoing reflexivity about differences in our circumstances. Throughout the research process, I maintained awareness that while I experienced bureaucratic complications, I did so without the compounding challenges of racialization or precarious legal status that characterized many participants' experiences.

I approached this research with the awareness that my positionality and theoretical commitments inevitably shape my interpretations. To mitigate interpretive biases, I maintained regular reflexive notes throughout the research process, documented analytical decisions, and

actively sought feedback from project participants on emerging interpretations from multiple perspectives. This included follow-up conversations with interviewed women, interviews and consultations with migrant-serving organizations and associations, and discussions with Portuguese and migrant-positioned women colleagues familiar with local migration contexts. This multifaceted, reflexive practice enabled the continuous development of my analytical approach and the deepening of my interpretation of the data.

This study faced several methodological limitations. First, while efforts were made to include diverse participants, the sample inevitably reflected selection bias, particularly toward women with sufficient comfort and stability to participate in research, due to factors such as time availability and accessibility to my recruitment efforts. Therefore, migrant-positioned women in the most precarious situations were probably underrepresented despite targeted recruitment efforts. Additionally, although this study adopts an intersectional framework, sexuality did not emerge in participants' narratives. As none of the women referenced it in relation to exclusion or belonging, it is not foregrounded in the analysis. This reflects the empirical data rather than indicating that it lacks theoretical relevance.

Second, while I participated in and had access to some of the online groups used by participants, I did not have full analytical access to all groups or all platform content. I could have structured the study to focus solely on the groups I could access, thereby enabling a more detailed, systematic analysis of digital interactions. Such an approach might have provided richer insights into relational practices, governance mechanisms, and everyday coordination within migrant networks. However, prioritizing breadth through participant accounts enabled the study to capture a wider range of experiences and perspectives across multiple networks and offline contexts, balancing depth with representativeness.

Third, language considerations could have occasionally constrained the depth of communication, particularly in Portuguese interviews where my intermediate proficiency sometimes limited follow-up questioning. While translation assistance and native-speaker verification of transcripts mitigated this challenge and enabled the identification of essential nuances, some subtleties may have been lost in the initial exchanges.

Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic influenced both migration patterns and research access during the early phases of fieldwork. This potentially shaped the initial participant pool, as migration numbers were limited at the onset of the pandemic but increased rapidly from 2022 onward. Additionally, the pandemic caused significant delays to regularization and family reunification processes that some women were navigating, and the subsequent increase in newcomers exacerbated these delays.

Fifth, the research was conducted just before a period of significant policy change in Portugal, following the election of a right-leaning government after years of relative tolerance toward irregular migration and newcomers, and the subsequent dismantling of regularization processes in June 2024, creating a shifting landscape that complicated longitudinal analysis. This policy shift meant Portugal began to operate without a regularization regime, suggesting that experiences of women arriving irregularly might differ substantially in future research contexts.

I addressed these limitations through several approaches: consulting pre- and post-pandemic scholarly and policy literature; comparing organization representatives' perspectives with migrant-positioned women's accounts; ensuring temporal diversity by including both recent arrivals and women who had lived up to eight years in Porto; and carefully contextualizing findings within the specific temporal and spatial parameters of the research.

This study makes four contributions to critical migration and border studies. First, it advances a translocational framework of negotiation showing how migrant-positioned women simultaneously experience privilege and precarity across borders, xenophobia, and belonging, moving beyond binary categorizations of migrants as either “privileged” or “vulnerable.” Second, it introduces the concept of relational solidarities to theorize gendered, trust-based networks as everyday infrastructure through which women navigate migration regimes and reshape structural constraints, thereby foregrounding the interdependence of structure and agency (as defined fully in Chapter 1). Third, it provides one of the first in-depth qualitative analyses of Hispanic Latin American women in Portugal, situating their experiences alongside those of Brazilian women in a secondary city context and demonstrating how everyday practices, from bureaucratic navigation to community-building, constitute sites where exclusion is contested and belonging produced. Finally, it conceptualizes digital platforms not merely as communication tools but as critical infrastructure enabling both daily survival and collective organization under conditions of administrative dysfunction and social exclusion.

Using this framework as a lens, the examination of Porto highlights migration patterns frequently overlooked in research centred on metropolitan hubs or border regions. Within this setting, informal support systems and online platforms assume heightened significance where formal institutional assistance remains limited. Drawing on firsthand accounts from migrant-positioned women and on the perspectives of practitioners within organizations serving migrant communities, the study captures how women navigate systemic barriers, build collective solidarities, and assert agency. This empirical grounding is especially valuable for critical migration and border studies, as it reveals how governance, at local, national, EU, and global scales, is experienced and negotiated in everyday life, rather than only in policy documents. By

centring the voices of those directly engaged in migration processes, the research enriches global governance scholarship with situated, qualitative evidence of intersectional and translocational dynamics in practice.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation proceeds in four parts. Chapter 1 develops the translocational framework of negotiation, identifies key gaps in migration scholarship, and elaborates on how translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities function as integrated analytical tools. Chapter 2 examines how women negotiate administrative borders, particularly through Portugal's *Manifestação de Interesse* regularization process that created prolonged precarity. Chapter 3 analyzes how women navigate xenophobia shaped by colonial legacies, linguistic hierarchies, and gendered stereotypes, while building collective resistance through digital platforms. Chapter 4 explores how women actively construct belonging through relational solidarities that transcend both state integration frameworks and local community exclusions.

Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework

This chapter develops a translocational framework of negotiation, organized around three interconnected concepts: translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities. Drawing on research in global governance and in critical migration and border studies, the framework captures how migrant-positioned women navigate structural constraints through everyday practices across social, legal, and affective contexts. This chapter argues that Latin American women in Porto negotiate borders, xenophobia, and belonging through relational practices, including digital and community networks. By focusing on these everyday practices, the study highlights how women navigate overlapping structural constraints across local, national, and EU

governance contexts. This approach is particularly valuable for critical migration and border scholarship because it links local, everyday experiences to multi-scalar governance processes, showing how EU, national, and local policies intersect with informal, community-based, and digitally mediated strategies. The framework provides the analytical foundation for the empirical chapters, enabling a systematic examination of how negotiation unfolds in administrative encounters, experiences of exclusion, and everyday practices of community-building, and offering insights that extend beyond Porto to broader questions of migration governance and social inequality.

I use *migrant-positioned women* to acknowledge that women in this study variously self-identify as "migrants," "immigrants," "expats," "international women," or "foreigners," with diverse legal statuses ranging from visa holders to EU passport holders, to those undergoing regularization. This terminology emphasizes how women are positioned within multiple, shifting power relations across time and space, rather than within fixed categories (Anthias 2002, 2008, 2012, 2020). These positionalities, including gender, race, class, nationality, and legal status, transform as women move through different contexts, producing differential experiences of mobility, exclusion, and inclusion. Following Anthias (2012), I understand social class not as a fixed economic category but as a set of relational dynamics shaped by gendered, racialized, and migratory histories. These relations influence how resources, recognition, and life chances are created, distributed, and contested in specific times and places.

Migration scholarship has increasingly recognized how gender shapes migration experiences, with recent work highlighting how intersectional factors, including race, ethnicity, class, and legal status, create distinct patterns for migrant-positioned women. Anastasiadou et al. (2024) demonstrate, through a quantitative meta-analysis, that women and men experience

migration differently across multiple dimensions. Men and women migrants hold different migration aspirations, encounter distinct challenges during journeys and at destinations, draw on different social networks, and attain varying integration outcomes. Despite this recognition, significant gaps remain in understanding how migrant-positioned women actively navigate structural constraints across different domains of their migration trajectories. Sagor and Aktar (2023) identify this limitation in their ethnographic study of gendered barriers, such as employment discrimination, workplace exploitation, sexual violence risks, and healthcare access obstacles facing women migrants from developing countries in Europe. They also stated that scholars have paid insufficient attention to the compounded vulnerabilities of migrant women in these settings.

To better understand these dynamics, it is necessary to recognize several key gaps in existing scholarship. While migration studies have advanced our knowledge of legal and structural hierarchies, they often overlook how women's social positions are fluid, context-dependent, and shaped by intersecting factors such as nationality, race, class, and legal status. Similarly, much research emphasizes dramatic border-crossing moments or formal governance processes but pays less attention to the everyday practices through which migrant women navigate exclusion, cultivate relational networks, and exercise agency. The role of digital practices, postcolonial ties, and emerging migration streams in semi-peripheral contexts like Portugal remains particularly understudied, limiting understanding of how layered positionalities and intersectional power dynamics operate in less-examined locales. The following section elaborates on these gaps, developing a framework that foregrounds negotiation, relational solidarities, and translocational positionalities.

My research addresses these gaps by centring women's agency as they encounter administrative barriers, social exclusion, and questions of membership in a context where Portugal's self-image as a "migrant-friendly" destination often obscures the persistent inequalities migrants face. This study examines how structural hierarchies, fluid positionalities, and everyday practices intersect across three key domains: borders, xenophobia, and belonging. These domains matter because they reveal the mechanisms through which structural inequalities are enacted and contested, highlighting how agency and positionality are produced in specific, context-dependent ways. Borders capture the administrative and legal constraints women face, revealing how rigid governance frameworks interact with postcolonial ties and migration hierarchies. Xenophobia highlights the social and racialized exclusions that shape daily interactions and access to resources. Belonging reflects the relational and affective dimensions of inclusion, showing how women cultivate social networks and negotiate membership in local communities.

In this chapter, I first elaborate on key gaps in migration scholarship that reveal why current frameworks incompletely account for the agency of migrant-positioned women, shifting social positions, and relational strategies. I then elaborate on the three core concepts: translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities, showing how they function as integrated analytical tools for understanding women's strategic responses to structural constraints. Finally, I preview how this framework underscores the negotiations of migrant-positioned women across three domains: borders, xenophobia, and belonging. This approach situates local strategies of negotiation within broader governance structures and policy regimes, connecting micro-level experiences to global migration dynamics.

Key Gaps in Migration Scholarship

Critical migration and border studies show that migration governance often constructs a binary between “privileged” and “vulnerable” migrants. Ellermann (2020), for example, demonstrates how visa regimes produce hierarchies of mobility that privilege skilled and resourced migrants while rendering others precarious, reproducing racial and class inequalities. Similarly, Muller (2010) shows how virtual bordering extends the border onto the body itself, distinguishing “trusted” travellers from those deemed high risk. However, these broad binaries overlook the fluid and context-dependent nature of women’s positionalities.

While analytically useful, this distinction offers only a partial account of migrant experiences, particularly for women whose social positions shift across domains and contexts (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Söhn & Prekodravac, 2021). For instance, a woman may hold legal residency yet simultaneously experience social marginalization or racialized exclusion in everyday interactions, such as in the rental market. The same woman may experience privilege in some domains and vulnerability in others, depending on legal status, access to administrative processes, and social positioning. For example, a woman may hold EU citizenship yet face racialized exclusion in rental markets. Crawley and Skleparis (2018) argue that rigid categories such as “migrant” and “refugee” fail to capture how economic, political, and social drivers of mobility intersect and shift across time and space. Kunz (2019) further shows how distinctions such as “migrant” versus “expatriate” reproduce racialized hierarchies, as these labels are often unevenly applied along lines of nationality, race, and class, privileging certain groups while marginalizing others. While intersectional frameworks have been central in revealing these power dynamics, fixed, identity-based categories may not fully capture how positionalities are continuously reconfigured across contexts, highlighting the need for analytical approaches that

account for shifting experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In this vein, recent work calling for “methodological denationalism” and “de-migrantizing” migration studies (Anderson, 2019; Raghuram et al., 2024) urges a move beyond the figure of “the migrant” as a fixed category. Indeed, Raghuram et al. (2024) support an approach that treats immobility and liminality as analytically central rather than secondary to migration.

Söhn and Prekodravac (2021) similarly demonstrate that migrant women may experience downward mobility when credentials are unrecognized, alongside lateral or upward mobility shaped by institutional contexts, positionality, and time. Yet little scholarship examines how these layered positionalities unfold in the Portuguese context, where migration stratification has intensified through preferential visa regimes. Rather than treating this as a purely empirical gap, focusing on Portugal provides a critical vantage point for understanding how differentiated legal pathways, postcolonial ties, and emerging migration patterns interact to produce shifting and uneven forms of inclusion and exclusion. This, in turn, offers broader insight into how migration governance operates beyond major destination countries, highlighting dynamics that remain less visible in dominant migration scholarship. Building on this focus, this research examines how women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America in Porto navigate shifting positions across borders, xenophobia, and belonging. Rather than treating privilege and vulnerability as fixed categories, it shows how they shift across domains within a single woman’s lived experience. In doing so, it advances a conceptual understanding of migration as a dynamic and context-dependent process, demonstrating how women’s positionalities are continuously reconfigured through everyday interactions, administrative processes, and social relations, and how these negotiations both reflect and reshape broader structures of migration governance.

Beyond this problematic binary, more recent migration scholarship examines both structural constraints and individual agency, highlighting how these forces are deeply intertwined in shaping the everyday realities of migrant-positioned women (Bakewell, 2010; Chi, 2019; Marchetti & Salih, 2017). In her research on friction in mobilities, Chi (2019) persuasively argues that analytical focus should encompass both agency and structure, viewing these dimensions as fundamentally "co-determining" rather than separate domains. Indeed, prioritizing one aspect over the other risks missing crucial nuances. Women strategically accommodate certain restrictions while challenging others, moving beyond reductive portrayals of migrants as either passive victims or empowered actors (Gioli et al., 2017). This complexity demonstrates that agency and structural constraints are inseparable in shaping migration experiences, and that migration is best understood as a dynamic process of ongoing negotiation rather than a state defined solely by constraint or empowerment.

Connected to this structure-agency dichotomy, critical migration research often privileges dramatic border-crossing moments or explicitly political aspects of migration while overlooking the mundane yet potentially transformative everyday practices through which migrant-positioned women construct lives in new settings (e.g., Kanal & Rottman, 2021; Lögdberg et al., 2023; Yuval-Davis & Cassidy, 2019). Indeed, media coverage can also focus on dramatic moments, but, as Young (2022) illuminates, references to crisis, emergency, or "spontaneous arrivals" by state actors tend to marginalize the ongoing dynamics and connections that shape life at the border. Indeed, this scholarship reveals how everyday acts, such as establishing routines, creating home spaces, developing local knowledge, and forming relationships, constitute crucial sites where migrant-positioned women adapt to new settings. Scholars have primarily examined these so-called "quotidian" dimensions within specific domains, such as migrant care work or

motherhood, but recent research has recognized their broader significance (e.g., Chan, 2023; Dyck, 2018; Perez & Palma, 2023). This emerging recognition is evident in the literature. Perez and Palma (2023) demonstrate how Venezuelans in Chile engage in everyday residential practices that imagine alternative modes of membership and social recognition while reproducing urban life.

These seemingly minor practices harbour significant transformative potential. Routine acts of place-making and knowledge-building cumulatively create alternative modes of belonging that challenge exclusionary structures. Dyck (2018) conceptualizes how these daily, informal, and often-overlooked practices operate across multiple scales and function as meaningful, though unrecognized, forms of political participation. From a translocational perspective, these practices are embedded in and responsive to intersecting structures of power, including race, gender, class, and legal status across both origin and destination contexts. Importantly, these practices are dynamic and evolving. As women's positionalities, needs, and resources shift, the strategies they use to navigate exclusion, build knowledge, and sustain networks of support also change. This lens, drawing on Lero's (2025) synthesis of homing and everyday bordering, reveals the alignment between anthropological attention to everyday, embodied practices and global governance concerns. It emphasizes that the everyday is not merely a backdrop but a strategic and political domain where migrant-positioned women negotiate, contest, and transform the terms of their inclusion, exercising agency in ways that link local action to broader structural processes.

These everyday practices increasingly unfold through digital spaces, where migrants build connections, share knowledge, and navigate exclusion and belonging. While scholars have examined digital architectures in migration (e.g., Borkert et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016;

Latonero & Kift, 2018), including their enabling, constraining, and ambivalent effects (Guma et al., 2023), less attention has been paid to women's experiences within these infrastructures. Indeed, despite the growing importance of digital technologies in migration, the gendered dimensions of these digital engagements remain significantly understudied (e.g., Fung et al., 2025; Saïd, 2021). As Saïd (2021) persuasively argues, research has insufficiently investigated how digital networks address distinctively gendered aspects of migration experiences. The gendered nature of digital practice demands more focused analytical attention (Fung et al., 2025). Emerging research highlights how migrant-positioned women create, maintain, and utilize online spaces differently from men (e.g., Angulo-Pasel, 2018; Candidatu, 2021; Ponzanesi, 2021). This gap is particularly significant because digital platforms facilitate forms of solidarity and knowledge-sharing that may be less accessible to women in physical spaces due to gendered mobility constraints, care responsibilities, or safety concerns (Saïd, 2021). Digital platforms shape how migrant-positioned women navigate both virtual and physical worlds to establish support networks and negotiate belonging.

Research into migration issues in Portugal reveals geographical and demographic biases that limit understanding of diverse migrant experiences. While Portugal's migration research rightly emphasizes postcolonial patterns reflecting historical relationships, the country's migrant landscape has undergone significant diversification. Scholars now investigate newer migration streams, including South Asian populations such as Nepalese migrants (Pereira et al., 2021) and privileged "urban lifestyle" migrants (see McGarrigle, 2021) from high-income European regions, such as Sweden (Rauhut, 2021). There is also extensive literature documenting Brazilian women's experiences in Portugal (e.g., França, 2021; França & Oliveira, 2021; Lamartine & Torres da Silva, 2022). Comparative research situating their experiences alongside those of other

Latin American migrants in Portugal remains markedly absent. Notably, the growing Hispanic population in Portugal remains virtually unstudied, with no significant case studies published, despite its increasing presence and distinctive experiences.

Taken together, these gaps point to the need for an analytical framework that can capture negotiation as an ongoing, gendered, and relational process. Rather than treating migration outcomes as fixed or domain-specific, this approach reveals how migrant-positioned women negotiate overlapping forms of exclusion while simultaneously creating pathways toward inclusion.

A Translocational Framework of Negotiation

This research question emerges from and contributes to critical migration and border studies. I draw on two interconnected bodies of scholarship that inform this translocational framework of negotiation. First, I engage with scholarship that conceptualizes borders not as fixed geographic lines but as dynamic zones, continuously constructed through the performative practices of migrants and nation-states (e.g., De Genova, 2017; Mapril et al., 2019; Visan & Mountz, 2025). I employ the term borderlands in the sense of Visan and Mountz (2025), not as cultural spaces of hybridization (Anzaldúa, 1987), but as spaces of ongoing negotiation in which power relations are actively contested. The concept of borderlands originates in Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where borderlands are theorized as cultural and embodied spaces of hybridity and contradiction, produced at the material and symbolic boundary between Mexico and the United States. For Anzaldúa, borderlands are sites where gendered, racialized, and colonial tensions generate hybrid, resistant subjectivities rather than fixed identities. Within the broader critical border-literature, Visan and Mountz and many others reinterpret this notion, shifting the focus from cultural hybridization to relational

contestation and treating borderlands as sites where power is produced, reproduced, and contested through everyday practices, infrastructures, and bureaucratic encounters. In this dissertation, I mobilise their reframing to read borderlands as bureaucratic borderlands, which Näre (2020) describes as the ways in which administration and bureaucracy manage and control migration through visa, residency, and biometric processes. Näre points out that these processes are subject to reform and waiting, and that people's experiences are shaped by state-level migration institutions and policies, as well as the interpretations or responses of street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Borrelli, 2021). Drawing on scholarship that addresses bureaucratic and administrative bordering (e.g., Morrell, 2025; Van Houtum & van Uden, 2021), I treat these spaces as sites where visa applications, residency decisions, paperwork, waiting-lists, and bureaucratic routines become central to the differential production of mobility, precarity, and belonging.

Recent scholarship reveals how European borders operate through informality rather than orderly migration controls (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2025), highlighting the opaque mechanisms through which migration is governed. Critical scholarship on migration and borders also highlights how migrants face precarity throughout their trajectories (e.g., Baban et al., 2021; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Piper, 2022). This work connects to scholarship on differential inclusion and embodied exclusion (e.g., Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Mountz, 2010), which reveals how borders operate through stratification rather than simple exclusion. The same woman may experience both privilege and precarity across different domains, accessing certain rights while being excluded from others (e.g., Duplan & Cranston, 2023; Robertson & Roberts, 2022), demonstrating how borders function not as barriers but as filters that sort and stratify. Ilcan et al. (2025a) reveal how navigating these “borderland porosities” cultivates distinctive forms of

political subjectivity and community formation, while Rygiel (2025) argues that making the exclusionary impacts of borders visible creates openings for social justice politics.

Second, I engage with research on migrant politics and citizenship practices that examines how migrants enact agency beyond formal citizenship structures. This includes scholarship on the citizenship practices of undocumented migrants and hierarchies of deservingness (Nordling et al., 2017), transgressive citizenship (Rygiel & Baban, 2024), and the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Building on Yuval-Davis's foundational work, Spector-Mersel (2025) examines migrants' intersectional experiences of non-belonging, demonstrating how exclusion operates across multiple axes of difference. Crucially, migrant politics extends beyond individual migrants to encompass solidarity activism, as civil society members act alongside migrants and refugees (Ataç et al., 2016, 2021; Basok & Candiz, 2021). Basok and Candiz (2021) demonstrate how migrants' rights are claimed and negotiated through solidarity activism movements in Mexico, while Cuttitta et al. (2023) further elaborate on the nuanced role of civil society. These theoretical foundations inform the translocational framework I develop in the following section.

To understand how these political and social dynamics intersect with individual positionalities, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1997) provides a starting point. Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw (1997), identifies how systems of oppression operate through overlapping social identities. Intersectional factors shape the positionality and mobility of migrant-positioned women and operate differently even among women of the same nationality. In their work on migrant integration in South Africa, Zinatsa and Saurombe (2022) found that partners who accompanied their husbands for family reunification faced barriers related to gender, race, ethnicity, and migrant status, which increased labour-market inequality and contributed to greater

precarity, immobility, and informality. While intersectionality illuminates overlapping systems of oppression, it assumes relatively stable identity categories, which can obscure the fluid and context-dependent ways migrant women experience constraints and exercise agency. Building on this insight, translocationality captures the shifting positionalities of Latin American women in Porto.

Building on this insight, translocationality extends intersectionality by recognizing that overlapping social factors are not fixed but shift across time and space, highlighting positionality as dynamic rather than fixed (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2012). Dağtaş (2018) adapts Puar's (2007) assemblage thinking to reveal emergent hospitality assemblages among Syrian women at Turkey's securitized frontier, where Christian, Sunni, and Alevi differences temporarily intersect through kitchen-table practices. However, Anthias's concept of translocational positionality more effectively captures Latin American women's navigation of Portugal's simultaneously accessible yet persistently exclusionary context, shaped by enduring postcolonial hierarchies. Unlike Dağtaş's borderland encounters, Porto's persistent postcolonial hierarchies produce predictable structural pressures across local, national, and EU scales. Nonetheless, migrant women's positions and strategies alter over time in response to changing urban dynamics, governance regimes, and social interactions. In this sense, translocationality offers an analytical lens for understanding how gendered, racialized, and classed positions are continually reconfigured. Situating this concept within wider debates on power and belonging connects it to several related theoretical traditions.

Translocationality connects to several related theoretical traditions. Hill Collins's (1998) work on outsider positionality examines how women can be positioned as outsiders who do not belong to specific groups, thereby creating unique standpoints from which to understand and

challenge power structures. Similarly, Yuval-Davis's (2006, 2011) scholarship on intersectionality and the politics of belonging directly engages with Anthias's (2002) concept, exploring how belonging operates as a political project that intersects with multiple axes of differentiation.

Existing scholarship has further developed the analytical potential of translocationality. La Barbera (2013) uses translocational positionality as a framework to examine how migrant women in Madrid negotiate their shifting identities and life trajectories across different contexts. PourAli and Eslamieh (2022) draw on translocationality to analyze the shifting positionalities of Palestinian Arab women both in-transit and after settlement in America. Anthias's book (2020) systematizes her research, emphasizing the relational, spatial, and temporal dimensions of translocationality. She argues that categories such as "migrant" or "refugee" are not fixed groups but rather positions within shifting hierarchies of translocational belonging. Nowicka (2025) extends this framework by demonstrating how social class itself operates as both "fluid" and "sticky," shaped by interconnected, dynamic factors that shift across different positionalities.

These theoretical foundations inform my application of translocationality in this study. I draw on translocationality to emphasize how migration shapes women's racialized, gendered, and institutional positioning in ways that extend beyond legal categories or immigration status. This framework acknowledges that women's experiences are shaped by intersecting structures of power, including race, gender, class, and mobility regimes, and provides a lens for understanding how they navigate, respond to, or accommodate social and gendered norms across both origin and destination contexts. Unlike transnational feminism, which emphasizes cross-border solidarity (e.g., Çağatay et al., 2022), translocationality focuses on how women's positionalities shift across places and contexts, highlighting the movement of power, exclusion, and agency in

everyday life. As both subjects of structural marginalization and active participants in reshaping local communities, migrant-positioned women offer a vital perspective on the intersections of migration, race, and gender in contemporary Portugal.

As Bastia et al. (2023, p. 462) articulate, migration and migrants themselves are inherently intersectional, shaped by complex configurations of power that shift across space and time. These power geometries operate across origin contexts, migration journeys, and destination societies, necessitating analytical attention to multiple social boundaries. My research findings indicate that interconnected factors, including nationality, legal status, racial presentation, educational attainment, economic resources, and familial configurations, shape migrant-positioned women's struggles for inclusion and social justice.

Erel and Ryan (2019) argue that understanding migrant positioning as dynamic rather than fixed is essential, suggesting that such positions may shift across temporal and spatial contexts as individuals access resources and capital in varying ways. This perspective helps illuminate how the same woman might simultaneously experience privilege and vulnerability across different social fields. It aligns with Amelina's (2021) call for a more nuanced critical examination that transcends simple classification and moves toward understanding the broader social processes underlying the categorization of “migrants” or “migration.” As Christou and Kofman (2022) note, intersectional studies focusing on more privileged migrant groups have received relatively less scholarly attention in the field.

This translocational perspective elucidates how migrant-positioned women negotiate borders, xenophobia, and belonging. For example, a Brazilian woman with EU citizenship negotiates borders differently than a Venezuelan woman seeking regularization, and a white Argentine woman experiences xenophobia differently than an Afro-Brazilian woman. By

focusing on how positionalities shift in response to intersecting structures of power, the translocational lens highlights not only who is affected by structural constraints but also how women exercise agency and adapt strategies. The following sections elaborate on the domains of negotiation, borders, xenophobia, and belonging, showing how women's shifting positionalities inform the dynamic, context-dependent strategies they employ across these interconnected challenges.

Negotiation

In this dissertation, negotiation refers to the everyday, situated ways migrant-positioned women respond to constraint, not formal bargaining, but lived practices of adaptation, resistance, and care. Drawing on critical migration scholarship (e.g., Ilcan et al., 2025a, 2025b; Mainwaring, 2016; Rygiel, 2011; Young, 2013), I employ the term negotiate to underscore migrant-positioned women's active and situated responses to structural constraints and social exclusions. This conceptualization transcends formal institutional bargaining to encompass the diverse micro-practices through which women exercise agency within and against unequal conditions.

This understanding of negotiation builds upon established scholarly foundations. Mainwaring (2016) conceptualizes borders as "zones of negotiation" in which migrants exercise agency despite structural limitations. Building on this, scholars examine how migrants negotiate border constraints through diverse strategies, from complexities of migrant-smuggler collaborations (Augustova et al., 2023) to navigating what Ilcan et al (2025a) term "borderland porosities" that cultivate distinctive forms of political subjectivity. Their subsequent research (Ilcan et al., 2025b) deepens this analysis by examining how refugee women and volunteers enact transversal solidarity across power differentials. This study builds on Yuval-Davis's (2011)

concept of "transversal politics" and demonstrates that negotiation is a relational practice even within unequal positionalities.

Beyond borders, scholars examine negotiation in everyday urban contexts. Vásquez-Roa (2018) illustrates how migrants negotiate borderscapes and inscribe meaning onto urban spaces, while Puumala and Maïche (2021) explore how daily negotiations shape belonging and presence. Hosseini (2025) extends this by examining Arab women's everyday negotiations with "unbelonging" in Sweden, highlighting women's active agency in contesting exclusion. In her research with youth in Toronto, Young posits that their narratives illustrate belonging to be multidimensional and negotiated (2013). Taken together, this scholarship underscores negotiation as an ongoing, situated process through which migrants navigate and rework exclusion across spatial, social, and institutional domains.

Building on this scholarship on negotiation and belonging, this dissertation argues that these negotiation practices unfold across multiple, interconnected dimensions in the lives of migrant-positioned women. Material strategies encompass navigating bureaucratic systems, challenging legal classifications, developing workarounds for documentation, and creating alternative economic arrangements. For instance, women develop sophisticated knowledge-sharing systems through digital platforms to decode Portugal's complex regularization processes, effectively creating informal information infrastructures that compensate for inadequate official guidance. WhatsApp and Facebook groups are vital spaces where women exchange real-time updates on documentation requirements, share NGO and legal service recommendations, and collectively troubleshoot bureaucratic obstacles. Instagram and YouTube provide additional channels for information-sharing, though with less interactive support.

In parallel, symbolic negotiations include confronting stereotypes, asserting visibility in public spaces, reclaiming narratives of migrant identity, and strategic self-presentation across contexts. Women negotiate xenophobic assumptions through strategic choices, such as how to respond to xenophobic comments or hypersexualized stereotypes, and where to assert their presence in public spaces. Digital platforms enable these symbolic negotiations in distinctive ways. For example, women curate their social media presence to challenge reductive narratives about Latin American migrants, share counter-stories in Facebook groups that humanize migrant experiences, and use online spaces to name and resist discriminatory treatment collectively (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021; Lamartine & Torres da Silva, 2022). Together, these interconnected practices operate throughout physical, social, and digital spaces, demonstrating women's strategic adaptability across various domains of life.

My study contributes to critical migration and border studies literature by framing negotiation explicitly as a feminist mode of agency that encompasses both subtle and overt strategies for navigating exclusion. This feminist lens illuminates how gendered power relations shape the specific tactics women employ, the risks they calculate, and the spaces they claim or create. The digital dimension of these negotiations is profoundly gendered. For example, women join groups based on shared gender, nationality, or migrant background to seek guidance navigating life in Portugal, accessing services, sharing experiences of exclusion, and finding pathways toward inclusion. Specifically, migrant-positioned women create and maintain WhatsApp and Facebook "mom groups" in which they share information on navigating schools, healthcare, and childcare, as well as everyday knowledge such as activities for children, where to find or buy items for children, and how to exchange or resell children's goods. Such practices transform feminized labour into infrastructure for collective navigation. International women's

Facebook groups function as spaces where women negotiate belonging by seeking recommendations, offering mutual support, and building transnational communities. Digitally empowered relational solidarities enable negotiations that might be less accessible in physical spaces due to gendered mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and work schedules.

For migrant-positioned women, negotiation practices often draw on feminized knowledge, care networks, and emotional labour while simultaneously challenging gendered expectations and constraints. Crucially, these negotiations are shaped by translocational positionalities, which structure migrant-positioned women's access to resources, exposure to exclusion, and the strategies available to them across different contexts. Negotiation is therefore not a uniform or static process but one that is continuously recalibrated as women move across intersecting locations of gender, nationality, legal status, and class. Within this context, migrant-positioned women negotiate across three interconnected domains: borders, xenophobia, and belonging. While analytically distinct, these domains overlap in practice. A woman negotiating her documentation (borders) simultaneously navigates stereotypes about her nationality (xenophobia) while building community networks (belonging).

Relational solidarities

The concept of mobile commons emerges from the autonomy of migration tradition, which places migrant agency before border regimes, immigration control, and the sovereign management of mobility (Mezzadra, 2004, 2011; Papadopoulos et al., 2008). Rather than reading migration primarily through the lens of state policy or legal status, this approach foregrounds migrants' own movements, knowledges, and collective practices as forms of social struggle and political subjectivity.

Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) develop the autonomy of migration perspective within critical migration studies, from which they introduce the concept of mobile commons. The mobile commons refers to forms of everyday mobility shaped by collective, informal practices across five dimensions: shared knowledge, infrastructures of connectivity, informal economies, communities of justice, and politics of care. These dimensions highlight how migrants collectively generate the practical and affective resources needed to navigate precarious conditions and show how digital infrastructures become central to these practices (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Trimikliniotis et al., 2014). The term mobile commons is most closely associated with Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013), who elaborate on it within the autonomy of migration framework, and is later refined by Trimikliniotis et al. (2014) in relation to migrant digitalities and the right to the city. Subsequent scholarship that operationalizes the concept often does so by elaborating on Trimikliniotis et al. (2014), which links mobile commons directly to empirical settings, digital infrastructures, and urban struggles.

In this dissertation, I draw on this framework to contextualize the infrastructural conditions within which migrant-positioned women build support. Specifically, I use it to ground an analysis of relational solidarities, particularly its emphasis on shared knowledge, connectivity, and collective care across digital and embodied spaces.

Across borders and amidst exclusion, migrant-positioned women draw on relational practices, horizontal, trust-based networks of mutual support operating in both digital and physical spaces, as a crucial infrastructure for negotiating belonging and navigating xenophobia. Relational solidarities are understood in this dissertation as gendered, trust-based, and predominantly migrant-to-migrant networks of mutual support that operate across both digital and embodied spaces, enabling migrant-positioned women to navigate exclusion and construct

belonging. While these relationships are horizontal in their migrant-to-migrant basis, they are not necessarily equal or uniform, as migrant-positioned women's different positionalities and access to resources influence how solidarity is experienced and enacted.

The concept of relational solidarities builds on feminist and migration solidarity scholarship that emphasizes solidarity as something actively produced across difference rather than assumed through shared identity. Feminist debates from the 1980s and 1990s, particularly Black, postcolonial, and Third World feminist scholarship, challenged universalist notions of sisterhood and highlighted the need to build solidarity across racial, national, and class divides (e.g., Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2003). From this tradition comes the idea of transversal solidarity (Yuval-Davis, 1994, 2011), which describes solidarity across unequal positions, and later work on reflective solidarity (Siim & Meret, 2021), which shows that solidarity is shaped by power and context rather than shared identity. In recent migration and citizenship research, solidarity has been further developed in relation to the 2015 "migration crisis" and its aftermath. Bauder and Juffs (2020) conceptualize solidarity as contested and multidimensional; della Porta (2018) analyses it as a dynamic, movement-based practice; and Baban and Rygiel (2020, 2025) distinguish among transversal, transgressive, and other forms of solidarity emerging in and around migrant support practices.

Building on these debates, and rather than claiming conceptual novelty, relational solidarities are used here as a specific application of existing feminist and migration solidarity scholarship. This framing aligns with work that distinguishes between solidarity with migrants and solidarity among migrants (e.g., Esengen, 2025) but foregrounds its infrastructural and everyday character more explicitly. These exchanges constitute feminist praxis, as they transform everyday interactions into collective knowledge production, redistribute expertise, and challenge

individualized responses to structural exclusion. These solidarities are dynamic and translocational: women's engagement evolves as their positionalities, needs, and resources change, yet the knowledge and experience they accumulate can be drawn upon to support others across geographies. Digital spaces extend and maintain these digital solidarity connections, allowing trust-based, reciprocal relationships to persist even at a distance.

Relational solidarities foreground the interpersonal and embodied nature of solidarity connections. Rather than treating solidarity as an abstract collective resource, this concept highlights how migrant-positioned women forge solidarity through trust-based relationships, both online and face-to-face, and through ongoing practices of mutual support (e.g., Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Bartlett et al., 2026; Çağatay et al., 2022; D'Angelo, 2021; França & Oliveira, 2021; Ramírez March, 2022; Squire, 2018). As Ramírez March (2022) argues, "mobile commoning" emerges through affective exchanges and shared ways of experiencing. These solidarities are explicitly gendered, manifesting in spaces such as WhatsApp mom groups, nationality-based women's groups, international women's networks, and informal meetups. While "mobile commons" scholarship often focuses on migration journeys and moments of arrival, relational solidarities center the ongoing everyday practices that persist long after initial arrival. This extends Trimikliniotis et al.'s (2014) use of Henri Lefebvre's (1967) concept of "right to the city" by foregrounding the distinctively gendered spaces through which these solidarities operate.

These spaces connect migrant-positioned women across diverse positionalities. Participants share crucial information about documentation appointments and bureaucratic shortcuts, as well as everyday knowledge about schools, childcare, and local resources. For example, a Venezuelan woman who arrived five years ago continues contributing to digital

networks, helping newly arrived Argentinian women navigate both administrative systems and daily life. As Kofman and Raghuram (2015) argue, such practices constitute global social reproduction, where migrant women sustain households and communities through informal care infrastructures that operate across both crisis and mundane moments. These practices operate through both crisis moments and mundane interactions, functioning as a durable social infrastructure.

Scholarship on solidarity practices examines digital platforms as spaces of care (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022), solidarity practices among irregular migrants (Nordling et al., 2017), migrant-led mutual aid networks (Ramírez March, 2022), and the transnational dimensions of migrant solidarity (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). Particularly significant for my framework are gender-focused studies examining gendered challenges in accessing mobile commons resources (Angulo-Pasels, 2018) and the intersection of gender, technology, and migrant solidarity (Saïd, 2021).

I advance relational solidarities as both social infrastructure and feminist praxis, distinguishing them in three ways: first, they are horizontal migrant-to-migrant relations, rather than hierarchical; second, they operate through interpersonal practices rather than formal institutions; third, they are enacted across digital and physical spaces.

The digital dimension of relational solidarities, therefore, demands particular attention. Existing scholarship shows how digital platforms facilitate transnational solidarity and activism (e.g., Çağatay et al., 2022; D'Angelo, 2021), while França and Oliveira (2021) demonstrate how such spaces enable transnational community formation. Building on this, I argue that ICTs function as vital infrastructure for the “mobile commons,” with platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram enabling not only the circulation of information but also the formation of communities

of care across borders. As Fischer and Jørgensen (2022) show, these forms of digitally grounded community-building can evolve into more complex and sustained networks over time.

Rather than treating digital and embodied solidarity as separate domains, the empirical data in this study show that they are mutually constitutive. Digital platforms often enable initial contact, coordination, and information-sharing, which are later consolidated through face-to-face encounters that build trust and reciprocity. At the same time, embodied interactions frequently precede digital connections, as migrant-positioned women are introduced to online networks through trusted interpersonal ties. Digital and embodied solidarities therefore operate as a continuous, bi-directional process through which relational ties are formed and sustained.

However, digital infrastructures are not inherently enabling. As scholarship on digital architectures in migration shows, they are characterized by ambivalent effects that simultaneously produce support, dependency, visibility, and risk (e.g., Borkert et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Guma et al., 2023). These ambivalences also shape relational solidarities, which unfold within uneven conditions of access, trust, and informational reliability. These conditions are not simply external limits on digital solidarity but are partly produced through the infrastructures, commercial logics, and governance practices of the platforms themselves.

Within this context, even seemingly practical actions, such as sharing tips on regularisation in WhatsApp groups, constitute forms of feminist praxis as evidenced in the empirical data of this study. Through these interactions, participants co-produce knowledge, redistribute expertise, and challenge individualized responses to structural exclusion, while navigating the tensions and risks embedded in digital participation.

Relational solidarities operate throughout the negotiations of migrant-positioned women. In navigating borders, relational solidarities manifest through information-sharing networks that help women traverse bureaucratic processes. In confronting xenophobia, they offer emotional validation and collective strategies for resistance. In constructing belonging, they create alternative communities that recognize and value the presence of migrant-positioned women. What distinguishes relational solidarities is their grounding in small acts of interdependence that may, over time, evolve into more formalized political solidarity while remaining rooted in the lived experiences of migrant-positioned women.

Conclusion

This translocational framework of negotiation shows how the migrant-positioned women in this study exercised agency across three interconnected domains: borders, xenophobia, and belonging. Their negotiations were not separate but overlapping practices shaped by shifting positionalities and supported by relational solidarities. By centring negotiation and using translocationality as the analytical lens, the framework captures both the structural constraints these women faced and the creative strategies they used to navigate them.

This approach moves beyond binary categories of migrants as either privileged or vulnerable. Instead, it shows how the same woman could experience both privilege and precarity across different domains. It also demonstrates how structure and agency are deeply intertwined, and how everyday practices of navigation and care become key sites where exclusion is contested, and alternative forms of belonging are created.

Guided by this framework, the analysis of Porto reveals migration dynamics that are often overlooked in studies focused on major cities or border zones. In this semi-peripheral context, informal networks and digital platforms take on heightened importance, particularly

when institutional support is limited or fragmented. While the framework guides analysis and interpretation, the primary contribution of this study is empirical: it draws on the lived experiences of migrant-positioned women and the insights of those working on the ground in migrant-serving organizations to provide detailed, context-specific evidence of how migrant-positioned women navigate structural constraints, build relational solidarities, and exercise agency. These findings extend existing conceptual frameworks by demonstrating how relational solidarities operate across digital and embodied spaces, adapt to shifting positionalities, and support collective knowledge production. In doing so, this study contributes to the field of global governance and scholarship on solidarity movements by showing how gendered migration is shaped not only by formal policies and institutions but also by everyday practices of solidarity and negotiation, offering insights relevant to other European and transnational contexts where marginalized migrant women encounter structural barriers and pursue agency.

Chapter 2: Negotiating Borders

“In November of last year, in November 2022, after 4 years in this country, I had my residency. Many times I went through many things, obviously negative things, because I did not have a residency. I was denied jobs, I was sometimes denied at the hospital. But I had many problems because I did not have a resident card, I had to pay a lot of money, I had to fight a little bit for my rights and well, many things, many things happened because I did not have residency.”

(Interview, 1 June 2023, Porto)

Nayita, a woman from Venezuela

“The documentation issue, I think, is the main issue, because there are many people with an expression of interest. The period depends on the presentation of the expression of interest until the center calls the person to deal with the documentation. Sometimes it's two years, two and a half years, so it's a long time. People are left in limbo.”

(Interview, 30 November 2022, Porto)

Representative of JRS (Jesuit Refugee Services)

Portugal's *Manifestação de Interesse* (Expression of Interest) case-by-case regularization process exemplifies how contemporary borderlands operate through administrative complexity and temporal control rather than through physical barriers alone. Critical border scholars have shifted their understanding of borders from fixed geographic demarcations to dynamic socio-

political constructs, viewing them as fluid and contested spaces (De Genova, 2017) and as processes constantly being remade through migrant practices. This chapter demonstrates that borders in Portugal extend beyond territorial boundaries, operating through everyday administrative practices that affect the lives of migrant-positioned women in this study in diverse and uneven ways.

I understand borderlands as spaces in which borders and the mechanisms of bordering are experienced differentially, and in which they can simultaneously both connect and hinder migrants' movements and access to rights. Following Ilcan et al. (2025a), I emphasize borderland porosity not as openness or the absence of control, but as uneven and selective permeability, in which movement is facilitated in some moments while blocked in others. This understanding is similar to other recent research on borderlands (e.g., Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026; Rumford, 2008, 2012; Visan & Mountz, 2025). The concept of borderlands, as mobilized through Visan and Mountz's (2025) reinterpretation of Anzaldúa's (1987) work and elaborated in Chapter 1, offers a way to read bureaucratic bordering not only as an exclusionary practice but also as a terrain where relational solidarities among migrant-positioned women are produced and reconfigured. Following Visan and Mountz (2025), I understand borderlands as spaces co-produced through the interaction of state power performances and migrant resistance, where geographical locations and spatial practices are essential to understanding their formation.

This chapter contributes to the growing scholarship on migrant regularization in Portugal and on Portugal as a borderland (e.g., Malheiros & Peixoto, 2023; Mapril et al., 2019; Mapril, 2021), particularly a bureaucratic borderland, as Mapril et al. assert (2019). Within border literature based in Portugal, gendered analyses remain limited, with notable exceptions including Esposito et al.'s (2020) examination of gender, vulnerability, and resistance among detained

migrant women. Furthermore, research focusing on the border experiences or regularization in Portugal from an intersectional perspective is lacking.

The *Manifestação* process exemplifies Portugal's "soft border controls," or administrative mechanisms that manage migration flows through procedural complexity rather than physical exclusion typical of well-studied European border sites (e.g., Borrelli, 2019; Challinor, 2024). While ostensibly offering a pathway for irregular migrants to regularize their status, the process creates a prolonged limbo that transforms Portugal into a bureaucratic borderland, where documentation requirements, waiting periods, and institutional dysfunction produce internal borders that govern access to rights and social inclusion (Mapril et al., 2019). Within bureaucratic borderlands, which Näre (2020) describes as spaces where administration and bureaucracy manage and control migration through visa, residency, and biometric processes subject to reforms and waiting, people's experiences are shaped by state-level migration institutions and policies, as well as interpretations or responses by street-level bureaucrats (Borrelli, 2019).

Drawing on this critical borderland perspective allows me to examine how migrant-positioned women navigate and reshape these bureaucratic boundaries through their everyday practices and relational solidarities. Negotiation refers to the deliberate, context-specific ways migrant-positioned women respond to structural constraints and social exclusions (e.g., Baban & Rygiel, 2024; Ilcan et al., 2025a, 2025b; Mainwaring, 2016), as exemplified by Mainwaring's (2016) analysis of the situated agency of deportees amid ongoing border enforcement. Through a translocational lens, I examined how women's shifting positionalities across nationality, legal status, class, and race created differentiated experiences of administrative bordering. The migrant-positioned women in the study negotiated borders that were fundamentally shaped by

their intersecting positions, the challenges they faced, the strategies available to them, and the resources they could access.

This chapter examines how those women negotiated borders through three interconnected dimensions: the differentiated access created by translocationality, the ambivalent infrastructures of relational solidarities, and the constrained practices of bureaucratic negotiation. Central to these negotiations were *relational solidarities*, the informal networks of mutual support that function as crucial infrastructure enabling women to navigate bureaucratic borders. These solidarities provided the information, emotional support, and strategic resources that enabled negotiation under severely constrained conditions. The central questions guiding this chapter are: How did the translocational positionalities of migrant-positioned women shape their differentiated experiences of administrative bordering in Portugal? How did relational solidarities function as an infrastructure that enabled the negotiation of bureaucratic borders?

This chapter progresses in three parts. First, I use the chapter to show how translocationality creates differentiated border access across the varied legal pathways of migrant-positioned women, demonstrating that initial advantages do not predetermine subsequent experiences within Portuguese bureaucratic dysfunction. Second, I analyze how relational solidarities function as enabling digital infrastructures that facilitate border navigation, while ambivalence emerges within them through both deliberate exploitation and the unintentional circulation of misleading information. Third, I discuss migrant-positioned women's constrained negotiations with bureaucratic borderlands, demonstrating how they strategically navigated circular requirements and temporal controls while ultimately remaining limited by structural conditions.

Portugal's position as a European borderland reflects both its peripheral geographical location in Europe's southwest and its function as a gateway to Europe within EU migration governance systems (e.g., Mapril et al., 2019; Mapril, 2021). Mapril et al. (2019) characterize Portugal as a borderland and argue that the economic outlook provides a backdrop for the *Manifestação* regularization process, heightened border practices and policies, and changing migration patterns, thereby creating marginalization and exclusion that migrants and refugees must navigate. Building on literature that examines the temporal aspects of migration control (e.g., Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026; Ilcan, 2022; Manolova, 2022; Mountz, 2002), Mapril et al. argue that migrants seeking regularization often experience Portugal as a liminal borderland. They add that this is also true during journeys of secondary migration, during which migrants wait in limbo before ultimately moving to EU countries with better employment prospects (Mapril et al., 2019). Unlike more securitized southern European borderlands such as Greece, Italy, or Cyprus, where irregular maritime arrivals and border enforcement are more immediately visible (Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026; Squire, 2022), Portugal's borderland character is less crisis-driven and, as this chapter shows, more shaped by administrative delay, differentiated inclusion, and historically embedded migration pathways, including postcolonial and Lusophone mobilities. Although their research predated the closure of the previous border control institution in Portugal and the increasing delays in regularization, the temporal aspects of Mapril and co-authors' borderland argument have become increasingly salient (2019).

In her research, Challinor (2024) extends the analysis of Portugal's migration regime. She argues that Portugal's reputation of being perceived as migrant-friendly is undermined when the state overlooks ongoing irregular status issues and fails to provide effective migrant reception. She highlights how blurred accountabilities create strained relationships between migrants and

service providers through bureaucratic confrontation and ad-hoc responses to conditions beyond providers' control. She argues that when migrants cannot make sense of the system's rules, they shift from relying on formal services to navigating and circumventing the system (2024). This situation means that migrants often must navigate the system on their own, turning legal pathways and administrative processes into additional sites of negotiation and uncertainty.

Building on Ilcan et al.'s (2025a) concept of "borderland porosity," which examines how people navigate borderlands through convoluted routes, pauses in their journeys, and use intermediaries and transnational networks, my analysis focused on the differential accessibility of these porous spaces across women's intersecting social positions. Specifically, I examine the factors that render Portuguese borders porous to different groups, including gender, nationality, social class, legal status, and race. The migrant-positioned women in the study found that these differentiated opportunities primarily arose from their active engagement with diverse online migrant communities rather than through official channels, revealing how relational solidarities can enable women to identify and access borderland possibilities that align with their specific social positioning. I use the term migrant-positioned women to acknowledge that women in this study self-identified as "migrants," "immigrants," "expats," "international women," or "foreigners," and to capture their diverse legal statuses, ranging from visa holders to EU passport holders to those undergoing regularization. Drawing on Anthias's concept of translocationality (2002, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2020), this framing emphasizes how those women were positioned within multiple, shifting power relations across time and space, rather than fixed categories. This means that the same woman may simultaneously experience openness, restriction, privilege, and precarity, depending on where and how she is positioned.

The *Manifestação de Interesse* (Expression of Interest) or *Manifestação* process, established under articles 88 and 89 of Lei n.º 23/2007, created a distinctive regularization pathway that allowed tourists to apply for residency after arrival, positioning Portugal as offering relatively accessible migration options compared to other EU countries. However, rather than preventing entry, the system came to enable arrival while subjecting migrants to extended periods of legal precarity through administrative bordering. In this way, bureaucratic complexity exerts temporal and spatial control over migrant mobility, ultimately limiting their rights and opportunities for integration. The *Manifestação* application required multiple documents (Lemos, 2024), including an *Atestado de Residência* or *Atestado* (Certificate of Residence or Proof of Address) from the local parish of residency, an employment contract or proof of professional activity, Social Security Number (NISS, *Número de Identificação da Segurança Social*), and evidence of contributions to it, Portuguese bank account, Fiscal Number (NIF, *Número de Identificação Fiscal*), a criminal background check from the country of origin, and proof of legal entry. These documentary requirements created what migrants experienced as bureaucratic borders through their interdependence and non-linear processes. For example, obtaining a bank account typically requires proof of residence. In contrast, employment contracts may require initiating the *Manifestação* process, whereas submitting the *Manifestação* requires proof of employment.

The *Atestado de Residência* requirement exemplified how administrative bordering operated through local institutions. *Freguesias* (local parish councils) issue these documents through procedures that the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) described as "excessively bureaucratic due to the lack of clarity and obstacles it presents to migrants" (Belford et al., 2023). Obtaining an *Atestado* required a formal rental contract and two Portuguese citizen witnesses willing to

testify to the applicant's residence in the parish. In rare cases, applicants could succeed if their parish accepted utility bills registered in their name or two witnesses with Portuguese residency rather than citizenship. Such variations demonstrated significant jurisdictional inconsistency while typically presenting substantial barriers. This process created local-level borders within which parish officials exercised significant discretion over migrants' opportunities for regularization. At the same time, many landlords refused to provide formal contracts to avoid tax obligations, and newcomers often lacked contacts among Portuguese citizens willing to take time off work to serve as witnesses.

The *Manifestação* process reinforced what scholars conceptualize as temporal borders, using time and waiting as mechanisms of migration control (e.g., Mountz, 2010; Tazzioli, 2019). Processing times extended from several months pre-pandemic to approximately two years or more post-COVID, creating prolonged periods during which migrants experienced what Ilcan (2020) refers to as the "borderization of waiting." During this waiting period, migrants faced restricted mobility, unable to travel internationally without risking inability to return, while maintaining limited access to rights and services. They had to continue paying social security contributions without accessing benefits, effectively subsidizing the Portuguese state while occupying positions of legal uncertainty.

The 2023 closure of Portugal's *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (Foreigners and Borders Service, SEF) and the creation of *Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo* (AIMA, Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum) intensified the bureaucratic borderland characteristics of the Portuguese immigration system. This restructuring occurred amid a backlog of approximately 350,000 pending cases, which had grown to over 400,000 by 2024 (*Ordem dos Advogados*, 2024). The institutional transition created additional administrative barriers, as new

systems failed to process existing cases effectively or to establish clear procedures for ongoing applications. Migrants reported that AIMA processing was even slower than SEF's already delayed procedures, thereby creating longer waiting periods.

On June 3, 2024, an announcement of Portugal's Action Plan for Migration marked a fundamental transformation in the country's borderland character. The new right-wing government repealed articles 88 and 89 of Lei n.º 23/2007, effectively eliminating the *Manifestação de Interesse* process for new applicants (Demony & Rua, 2024). This policy change represented the transition from relatively porous administrative borders to more restrictive migration controls. The government justified these changes by claiming that the *Manifestação* process was being exploited and associated with trafficking and irregular migration networks (Casa do Brasil contra, 2024). However, *Casa do Brasil* noted that NGOs and migrant organizations expressed concerns that eliminating regularization pathways would increase, rather than decrease, migrant vulnerability (2024). In October 2025, the new government also discontinued the recently approved visa categories, such as the Job-seeker visa and the CPLP visa, under the guise of a new skilled labour visa that must be applied for in advance (see Government reinforces requirements on citizenship laws and residence, 2025). The timing of this research, conducted during the final phase of Portugal's relatively open regularization regime, captured and reflected the experiences of migrant-positioned women navigating a borderland in transition. Their strategies for managing administrative complexity and temporal uncertainty provide insights into how migrants adapt to shifting border regimes that operate through bureaucratic rather than physical exclusion.

Portugal's administrative approach to migration control created borderland conditions that differed significantly from highly restrictive border zones, generating complex effects that

combined support and exclusion. Rather than preventing entry, these bureaucratic borders subjected migrants to prolonged periods of legal uncertainty, thereby constraining their rights, mobility, and opportunities for social integration. Yet within this administrative complexity, Portugal maintained support structures that distinguished it from more stringent European contexts, such as Cyprus (e.g., Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026). Portugal established nationally funded migrant integration centres, including the *Centro Nacional de Apoio à Integração de Migrantes* (CNAIM, National Support Centre for Migrants' Integration) and *Centros Locais de Apoio à Integração de Migrantes* (CLAIM, Local Support Centres for Migrants' Integration), which offered a wide range of services regardless of legal status, including assistance with regularization. Portugal also maintained comparatively open legal frameworks that supported minors' access to public schools and healthcare after three months of presence. Notably, it provided undocumented migrants with access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic, in contrast to parts of Europe where far-right politics gained ground (e.g., Raposo & Violante, 2021; Tsagkroni & Dikaïos, 2024). These policies reflected a broader institutional commitment, with many people employed in government and in a network of non-governmental and civil society organizations supporting migrant rights and inclusion.

The elimination of the *Manifestação* process represented not merely a policy change but a fundamental shift in Portugal's borderland character, moving from administrative complexity that maintained possibilities for regularization toward exclusion that foreclosed such pathways entirely. These administrative complexities and temporal uncertainties, along with the support structures that coexisted within them, formed the backdrop against which migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America navigated differentiated pathways to Portuguese residency. While their initial access routes varied significantly by intersecting social positions,

the bureaucratic dysfunction documented above produced convergent experiences that revealed the dynamic character of translocationality in practice.

Translocationality and Differentiated Border Access

Drawing on translocationality, this section examines how diverse legal statuses produce uneven mobility and access among migrant-positioned women in Portugal. It shows how legal pathways such as visas, regularization processes, and EU citizenship function not only as mechanisms of inclusion but also as sites of bordering that shape everyday experiences and generate conditional forms of belonging. By connecting administrative encounters to broader inequalities, the section highlights how nationality, class, gender, and migration trajectory intersect to produce differentiated experiences of precarity, agency, and negotiation.

My empirical data draws on 63 qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Portugal in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. These comprised 26 interviews with migrant women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America (Type 1) and 37 interviews with participants from migrant-serving organizations at local and national levels (Type 2), including government bodies, NGOs, and migrant-run initiatives. Of the 37 participants who were representatives at various organizations, 11 were themselves migrant-positioned women from Latin America, who shared both their personal experiences and their professional perspectives.

This section primarily presents the findings of the 26 Type 1 interviews. Of these, 2 women were Ukrainian refugees with temporary protected status, and the remaining 24 Latin American women included 11 from Brazil and 13 from Hispanic Latin America. Their migration pathways were as follows: 5 arrived as EU residents through family descent; 1 as a Portuguese citizen via family descent; 3 as students; 6 via family reunification (including one pending

regularization); 1 with a D7 visa for remote work; 1 with a job-seeker visa; and 7 undergoing or having recently completed their regularization (*Manifestação de Interesse*).

Multiple Pathways, Converging Challenges

The varied legal pathways of migrant-positioned women reflect how intersecting social positions create fundamentally different border experiences. My analysis is informed by feminist intersectionality. This research draws on 63 qualitative interviews with migrant-serving organizations and with migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America, whose legal pathways varied significantly, with emphasis on those who navigated *Manifestação* regularization and family reunification processes. As discussed earlier, this analysis draws on feminist intersectionality to account for how overlapping social positions shape uneven experiences of power and inequality. In the case of migrant-positioned women, their diverse routes reflect what Anthias (2008, 2012), building on intersectionality, conceptualizes as translocationality, how women's intersecting social positions create differentiated experiences of mobility and inclusion. These differentiated pathways exemplify what Anthias (2008) describes as configurations that alter as people move across different contexts and geographical boundaries. This translocational perspective reveals how women's positionalities, shaped by intersecting identity factors of nationality, class, and legal status, fundamentally determine which Portuguese borders become porous or impermeable. The following analysis demonstrates how these shifting positions create differentiated experiences of administrative bordering.

Women's positioning within intersecting structures of social class, nationality, and legal status creates differentiated access to Portuguese borders before they even arrive. Colonial connections and shared language confer advantages for Brazilian women, who have greater access to student visa pathways and, as of 2023, to the CPLP visa for nationals of Portuguese-

speaking countries. This study conceptualizes social class, or class, as a dynamic construct encompassing economic resources, education, cultural practices, and social positioning that shifts across different locations and contexts (see Anthias, 2002; 2012). However, these benefits remain mediated by class positioning and social capital. Many Brazilian women lack the financial resources or family support necessary to pursue a university education in Portugal, despite being theoretically eligible and potentially qualified, given their professional backgrounds. Hispanic Latin American women face additional constraints due to language barriers and lack of political ties, making family reunification and irregular regularization more common pathways despite potentially having higher professional or educational qualifications than their visa categories suggest.

Beyond nationality-based advantages, economic and social positioning fundamentally shape access to pathways across all migrant categories. Higher-income visa categories, such as the D7 visa, which requires substantial passive income, and the new Digital Nomad visa, which demands proof of remote employment and specific income thresholds, effectively exclude most working-class women regardless of nationality. These “privileged” visa categories require significant access to economic and social capital and are often more accessible to migrants from countries in the Global North. As scholars argue, the mobility enabled by such migration infrastructures remains inherently exclusive (e.g., Cranston & Duplan, 2023; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). For women without these class-based advantages, two primary pathways remained available: the *Manifestação* process, which was one of the few accessible routes to European residency despite increasing restrictions and temporal uncertainties; and family reunification, which depends on having partners or family members with established legal status,

whether through traditional visa pathways, privileged visa categories, or previous regularization processes that demonstrate sufficient income to support dependents.

My study revealed that these initial advantages did not necessarily translate into smooth integration experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restructuring from SEF to AIMA produced widespread administrative delays across all visa categories, reinforcing Portugal's character as a borderland in which governance is enacted through bureaucratic delay and procedural uncertainty rather than solely through territorial entry controls (e.g., Challinor, 2024; Mapril et al., 2019). However, these delays did not operate evenly. Instead, they functioned as a stratified form of bordering that differentially shaped the trajectories of migrants according to legal status. Even women interviewed in this study who entered on regular visas, such as D7, experienced delays between visa entry and residency card appointments, as well as renewal delays that restricted travel and banking activities and prevented applications for family reunification processes, producing what can be understood as a form of secondary limbo affecting spouses and dependents. Yet, while regular visa holders primarily encountered friction within otherwise recognized legal pathways, women undergoing family reunification or *Manifestação de Interesse* regularisation experienced more extensive and sustained forms of precarity, including restricted access to employment, healthcare, and social services.

Legal Pathways and Administrative Barriers

This section examines everyday encounters with administrative borders, before turning to how women in the study interpret and respond to these practices in their daily lives. The experiences of participants undergoing family reunification illuminate how legal pathways can produce borderland conditions similar to those faced by those seeking regularization. While family reunification theoretically offers a "legal" route to residency, bureaucratic delays and

institutional dysfunction create prolonged periods of limbo that generate comparable precarity. My empirical findings show that women across different legal pathways experience bureaucratic delays in uneven ways, producing varying degrees of borderland conditions. Those in family reunification and *Manifestação de Interesse* processes face the most severe restrictions on employment, access to healthcare, and social integration. These differentiated experiences highlight the translocational nature of migrant women's positionalities and institutional contexts, rather than remaining fixed at the point of entry or within a visa category.

Although families may already be physically together in Portugal, delays in both family reunification and *Manifestação de Interesse* processes mean that co-presence is not fully translated into legal recognition or stable access to rights. While family reunification produces a form of internal household liminality, *Manifestação de Interesse* generates extended precarity through restricted access to employment, healthcare, and administrative stability during prolonged waiting periods. In both cases, bordering operates through temporal suspension rather than territorial entry, embedding uncertainty and deferred recognition within everyday life in Portugal.

Participants who completed family reunification before COVID-19 generally experienced shorter processing times, though not without challenges. Karol, a Brazilian woman who acquired Portuguese citizenship after eight years in Portugal, did not recall any significant delays in her family reunification process. However, her primary struggle centred on social isolation as a migrant newcomer mother, highlighting how integration challenges extend beyond bureaucratic procedures (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). Similarly, Carolina, who met her Portuguese husband during an Erasmus program and returned in 2018 upon marriage, recalled a relatively straightforward process, with her main concern being maintaining legal status during the waiting

period (Interview, 22 June 2023, Porto). Even in these pre-pandemic cases, women experienced some restrictions during waiting periods, but these were generally manageable and time-limited compared to post-COVID experiences. Both participants also described experiences of xenophobia, which, while shaping their broader integration trajectories, reflect a different dimension of experience than the administrative liminality and borderland conditions discussed in this chapter. Whereas the latter are structured through bureaucratic temporality and legal uncertainty, xenophobia reflects everyday processes of racialization and social positioning within Portuguese society and is further developed in Chapter 3.

However, even pre-pandemic family reunification could generate significant challenges when intersecting with liminality, racialization and family dynamics. Jessica, a dual Colombian Venezuelan national who arrived with her Portuguese-born husband in 2018, endured a difficult nine-month wait during which she experienced discrimination and racism from her in-laws (Interview, 20 April 2023, Porto). Unable to work during this period, she was forced to tolerate hostile family dynamics until her situation changed. Her experience directly illustrates how women immigrating as spouses through family reunification face increased insecurity and heightened risk of violence (Innes, 2023). This gendered pattern reflects broader dynamics in how migration systems create differentiated experiences of dependency and agency, with women accounting for 64% of family reunification visas in Portugal in 2020 and 62% in 2021 (Oliveira, 2021).

Jessica's experience illuminated how translocationality operates through racialized and gendered exclusion even within supposedly secure legal pathways. Her Venezuelan and Colombian heritage positioned her within Portuguese colonial hierarchies that rendered her suspect to her Portuguese in-laws, despite her legal right to family reunification. As Bastia et al.

(2023, p. 463) observe, movement through spaces entails processes such as being “othered,” gendered, or classed. Jessica's racialization as a Latin American woman created vulnerabilities that her marriage to a Portuguese citizen could not fully mitigate, forcing her to negotiate hostile family dynamics from a position of economic dependence during her waiting period. This demonstrates how translocationality encompasses not merely formal legal positioning but the ongoing social negotiations that shape women's everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

The pandemic era intensified these borderland characteristics across all visa categories, with family reunification cases becoming significantly more precarious. Claudia, a Brazilian single mother who arrived in 2022, exemplified how ostensibly "legal" pathways, such as family reunification, can become sites of profound precarity that rival the challenges faced by those pursuing regularization through *Manifestação*. Despite her Portuguese-born father, her Portuguese-born ex-husband, and her son's Portuguese citizenship, Claudia experienced more than two years of delays in family reunification, which have fundamentally shaped her integration experience. Claudia's family reunification limbo created comprehensive barriers to integration: *"The most difficult thing is this stress because it is already big to move to another country. It is already a big thing to leave your community, your future, like everything you raised in your life behind, to try to start something new, it's hard. People don't realize how hard it is. And [the bureaucracy] makes it harder"* (Interview, 8 May 2023, Porto).

Claudia observed that she faced greater challenges in Portugal than in the United States or Australia, revealing profound ironies within postcolonial migration systems. Despite sharing Portuguese as a language, cultural proximity, and multiple family connections to Portuguese citizenship, she encountered more bureaucratic obstacles in Portugal than in countries with no colonial ties to Brazil. In addition, she described how when she would seek information on her

case, the administrative staff would react with xenophobic hostility towards her, for example, by telling her that she should return to Brazil if she is unhappy with the progression of her case. Her experience demonstrates what Araújo (2013) describes as the persistence of colonial hierarchies within ostensibly postcolonial migration systems. Indeed, Portugal's bureaucratic dysfunction toward Brazilian migrants reveals continued “othering” despite shared language and cultural history, and how xenophobia can intersect with borderland experiences and liminality.

The gendered dimensions of these bureaucratic borderlands become particularly evident for women and mothers navigating family reunification. This is connected to how bureaucratic delays affect the closeness and personal relationships that migrants experience in their daily lives (Geoffrion & Cretton, 2021). As a single mother, Claudia bore sole responsibility for managing her documentation process and ensuring her son's access to Portuguese schools and healthcare despite significant delays. This reflects broader patterns identified by various NGO representatives, including those at Caritas: while regular visa holders experienced delays primarily affecting travel and banking, family reunification and *Manifestação* cases faced comprehensive restrictions that affected employment authorization, healthcare access, and children's enrollment in public services (Interview, 3 March 2023, Porto). In families with children, gendered parenting roles place disproportionate burdens on mothers, particularly when both mother and children lack regularized status. In Claudia's case, although her son was a Portuguese citizen from birth and, in theory, entitled to all social benefits, her own unresolved residency status created bureaucratic obstacles. Individual officials repeatedly denied her son access to certain services because she, as his custodial parent, did not have formal residency. For example, in her parish, she was repeatedly denied enrollment for her son into state-funded childcare, forcing her to pay for private daycare. As a single mother, she faced strained

household finances; although she continued to operate her Brazil-based business, which provided income, her budget was at capacity. Furthermore, she was denied jobs she applied for because employers were uncertain about her legal status and their ability to hire her (Interview, 8 May 2023, Porto).

Women with regular or more privileged visas, despite facing delays, typically maintained access to economic resources and higher-income remote employment, which facilitated private health insurance and schooling, thereby avoiding comprehensive exclusions. In contrast, women in family reunification and *Manifestação* processes experienced far-reaching restrictions affecting employment, healthcare, and social integration. The "grey-zone" experience of waiting, lacking full residency rights while legally present, became most pronounced for these women, generating borderland conditions that persisted for years rather than months.

These experiences demonstrate that translocationality operates dynamically rather than statically, with persistent stratification by legal status. While the COVID-19 delays and the SEF/AIMA transition affected all visa categories, women's initial legal position continued to determine the severity and scope of bureaucratic impacts. However, even these differentiated experiences reveal how Portuguese bureaucratic dysfunction creates convergent conditions of uncertainty and temporal control that ultimately transcend initial legal distinctions.

These converging experiences of bureaucratic precarity reveal a crucial finding: when formal institutional systems fail, women turn to alternative infrastructures. The next section examines how relational solidarities emerge as both a response to and a resource for navigating bureaucratic borderlands. However, these digital solidarities operate as ambivalent infrastructures that both enable women's border navigation and expose them to new forms of exploitation and constraint, including scams or fraudulent services, the unintentional circulation

of misinformation, and actors monetizing unprofessional or informal services within these networks.

Relational Solidarities in Digital Borderlands

In response to bureaucratic precarity, the women in this study developed relational solidarities, networks of support and knowledge exchange that offered practical, emotional, and strategic resources. These solidarities often extended into digital spaces, forming online communities that complemented in-person interactions and helped women navigate complex migration challenges. Within WhatsApp groups, social media platforms, and online forums, women exchanged information about documentation processes, interpreted bureaucratic requirements, and fostered belonging across national and linguistic boundaries. Yet these spaces were not without tensions, as questions about who could be trusted and uncertainties about others' intentions sometimes created ambivalence about sharing information and seeking support online.

Relational Solidarities as Border Navigation Infrastructure

The women in this study engaged with digital platforms as sites of mutual support well before arriving in Portugal. Through what Trimikliniotis et al. (2014) describe as the “mobile commons,” they participated in the production of shared knowledge, care, and affective cooperation across both in-person and digital spaces. However, as outlined above, access to and participation in these commons are shaped by gendered power relations, uneven digital access, and care responsibilities, which can constrain who benefits and how. While the mobile commons operate across both physical and digital spaces, scholars increasingly emphasize their online dimensions. In Portugal, the women in this study relied on WhatsApp groups, Instagram

accounts, Facebook communities, and Telegram channels to connect across borders and access crucial information about regularization processes.

Through the infrastructures of these mobile commons, migrant-positioned women cultivate what I term *relational solidarities*, situated, affective practices of mutual support that sustain women navigating legal precarity and social exclusion. Affective practices constitute the relational circulation of sticky emotions (fear, hope, care) that migrants embody, as affects adhere to bodies, objects, and networks, thereby structuring solidarity and belonging (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Abdel-Malek Neil, 2017). Ilcan (2025) conceptualizes affective borderwork as states and NGOs using emotions to govern migration beyond physical borders, yet migrants repurpose these same affective practices for mutual care. These practices operate horizontally across migrant networks, in contrast to institutional integration models or hierarchical assistance structures. Relational solidarities convert the connective potential of mobile commons into sustained support networks that cross borders and legal boundaries, functioning as subtle but powerful forms of resistance that imagine new possibilities for belonging and community membership. Rather than simply utilizing the connective possibilities of mobile commons, relational solidarities represent distinctly feminist approaches to community-building, characterized by care work, emotional reciprocity, and knowledge exchange rooted in lived experience. These practices should not be understood as inherent attributes of women or as forms of labour to which they are naturally relegated, but as relational forms of connective labour that enable agency in forging connections and remaking lives, even under conditions of precarity.

My research reveals that the digital landscape in Porto and Portugal encompasses nationality-specific groups, most often found on Facebook and then later through WhatsApp such as "Brazilians in Porto," "Latinos in Porto," "Argentines in Porto," and "Venezuelans in

Porto," as well as broader "expat" and "international" communities including groups like "Americans in Portugal," "British in Portugal," and "Canadians in Portugal." These different communities catered to distinct migration experiences and legal pathways. Migrant-positioned women in my study who already held EU citizenship or privileged visas often engaged with international groups such as "Expats in Porto," "Girl Gone International Porto," or "Porto Mamas," focused on lifestyle integration and tax implications. In contrast, many women in my study who were undergoing the *Manifestação* processes relied more heavily on Latin American migrant networks to address employment challenges and navigate the bureaucracy. For example, Fatima, a mother and café worker undergoing regularisation, used digital spaces primarily to seek information related to work and documentation (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto), reflecting time constraints and the immediacy of survival needs. Conversely, Bella, an entrepreneur with EU citizenship, used these platforms more for social connection and leisure-oriented integration (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto).

Women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America strategically navigated these digital spaces and gravitated toward gendered networks that center women's specific needs and experiences. Groups such as "Brazilian Women in Portugal," "Latina Women in Portugal," "*Mães Brasileiras em Portugal*" (Brazilian Mothers in Portugal), "*Mulheres Latinas no Porto*" (Latina Women in Porto), and "*Venezolanas no Porto*" created spaces where women shared not only practical information but also emotional support around motherhood, healthcare navigation, domestic violence resources, and workplace discrimination. These women-centred groups often addressed topics that broader nationality-based communities overlook, including childcare recommendations, gynecological healthcare access, and strategies for dealing with racialized and gendered exclusions in Portuguese society. While some women in my study, particularly those

who spoke English, accessed broader international networks, most of the women I interviewed relied primarily on Latin American women's networks for mutual support in Portuguese or Spanish and for culturally relevant guidance that speaks directly to their experiences.

All participants in this study who underwent regularization arrived in Portugal with prior knowledge of regularization procedures, having researched their options through digital platforms; however, their information needs varied significantly by intended legal pathway. As Lia, who migrated alone from Brazil to pursue *Manifestação* regularization, explained: "*Portugal is the only country here that gives the opportunity to come to do Manifestação de interesse*" (Interview, 19 June 2023, Porto). Many women discovered Portugal's relatively porous borders through videos on Instagram and YouTube. While some reached out directly to content creators to form connections, most built relationships with other migrant-positioned women through Facebook and WhatsApp groups. By enacting relational solidarities within these digital communities, the migrant-positioned women in this study discovered Portuguese borderland porosity.

Julia, originally from Mexico, who had migrated with her sister from Ireland, described her systematic research process: "*Our visa was running out in Ireland, and I started to look for options to start moving. And then I started to find out what options we had in the different countries, and I tell you that I found that this was the only one that allowed us that option of the expression of interest that we did not need to have a visa beforehand*" (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). Julia's account illustrates how migrants actively read and compare legal regimes across national contexts, treating migration systems themselves as navigable fields of opportunity rather than fixed constraints. Her research exemplified what scholars refer to as the "autonomy of

migration” (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), showing how migrants exercise agency in their mobility despite state restrictions.

Clara's experience also exemplified this pattern of digital discovery. After applying to immigrate to an English-speaking country with stricter visa requirements and growing tired of the wait, she discovered the *Manifestação* option in Portugal through online research (Interview, 10 December 2023, Porto). Her strategic use of digital platforms demonstrates how ICTs enable the capacities and skills that migrants need to navigate information and border complexities (Borkert et al., 2018). Borkert et al. (2018) document refugees' strategic digital competencies, in which migrants transform smartphones into “informational lifelines” to bypass institutional asymmetries. Clara's *Manifestação* discovery exemplifies this digital skill infrastructure, paralleling Syrian refugees' route-finding autonomy.

Beyond individual research, social media platforms serve as spaces for sharing embodied knowledge of migration through influencer networks and peer communities. Ernestina described how Instagram influencers guided her move to Portugal, presenting it as a country where she could access pathways to regularisation that would otherwise not be easily available, and shaping her ability to move to and remain in Europe: *"the guys from the Portugal project, who helped us emigrate. That's what they do... It's in Instagram... they are two young guys who arrived here two and a half years ago. And as they saw that many people were coming from Argentina, they created an Instagram that helps you to emigrate"* (Interview, 4 May 2023, Porto).

These influencer channels often connect migrants to broader peer networks. Alma elaborated on how multiple digital sources informed her research methodology: *"the people who give you information help a lot, they tell you the steps to follow"* through both influencer channels and migrant chat groups she joined before arrival (Interview, 2 May 2023, Porto). This

pre-migration engagement with layered digital communities reflects what Fischer & Jørgensen (2022) describe as platforms functioning as increasingly involved platforms of mutual care.

Some women drew on pre-existing networks within these digital infrastructures. Fatima connected with a Venezuelan couple who had previously lived in Venezuela and now owned a restaurant in Porto, and they guaranteed employment for both Fatima and her husband. She described their crucial support: "*We have someone who is still offering us work... we have the support of those people who were the ones who welcomed us. They helped us in everything. We arrived, we filled out the requirements... and the most important thing, they gave us was a stable job*" (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto).

Upon arrival, women across all visa categories continued to engage with mobile commons through multiple, overlapping digital communities, though their platform choices varied. Relational solidarity needs vary by legal status, language preferences, and cultural proximity. Fatima served as the primary navigator of her family's *Manifestação* regularization process, continuously seeking information through WhatsApp and Telegram groups. She recounted that she asked women in online groups questions to learn anything useful and to keep herself properly informed, and that she shared this information and mutual support with her family and others (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto). This evolution from information seeker to information provider illustrates how online platforms facilitate the formation of self-organized digital collectives. These are spaces where migrants and people in solidarity provide counter-information for navigation, networking, and solidarity (Jørgensen & Galis, 2022). While Fatima's intensive engagement reflected the heightened precarity of awaiting regularization, women across all legal categories used multiple digital spaces within relational solidarities to navigate

Portuguese bureaucratic uncertainties, though their levels of urgency, information needs, and platform preferences varied.

Some women become key contributors to these digital solidarities, using online spaces both to share information and to actively shape support networks that extend into everyday life. Paz, who arrived in Portugal on a D7 visa from Colombia, began creating social media spaces specifically for Latina women while volunteering with a migrant association. Through her accounts, she disseminated practical guidance about life in Portugal and responded to direct messages from women seeking advice and support. People sometimes contacted her through her channel or by joining the online Latina groups she created, and these interactions often informed offline encounters, helping women navigate bureaucracy, housing, and work (Interview, 9 May 2023, Porto). In doing so, these digital platforms functioned not only as repositories of information but also as relational spaces where online and embodied practices intertwined, producing practical strategies and collective support for everyday challenges. At the same time, Paz consistently cautioned interested migrants about the risks of irregular migration, emphasizing regular pathways, such as the D7 visa for those with resources or, at the time, the new Job Seeker Visa, as safer options. In October 2025, the new Job-seeker visa category and other categories were discontinued under the guise of a new skilled labour visa that must be applied for in advance (see Government reinforces requirements on citizenship laws and residence, 2025).

Paz's evolution from arriving with a D7 visa as a remote worker to community builder exemplified how relational solidarities develop across legal categories and multiple digital platforms, though with different motivations and capacities. Her transition from information seeker to information provider illustrates the temporal dimensions of the mobile commons, in

which migrants with resolved legal status become resources for others facing similar challenges. However, Paz's warnings about the risks of irregular migration reveal the complex ethics of solidarity work. Her privileged position (arriving on a D7 visa and working a remote English-language job) enabled her to advocate for safer migration pathways while acknowledging that such options remain inaccessible to many women lacking economic resources. Importantly, even in her relatively secure legal position, Paz would also have to renew her residency status amid ongoing administrative delays. To do so, she would likely rely on the networks she supports and broader international networks, demonstrating how relational solidarities serve women across the legal-status spectrum across multiple, overlapping digital spaces. This tension between solidarity and structural inequality highlights how even well-intentioned community-building operates within broader systems of differentiated access and class-based migration privileges.

Ambivalent Digital Solidarities

While digital platforms enable crucial mutual support, they simultaneously function as sites of misinformation, commercialization, and exploitation that complicate genuine solidarity practices. Migrant-positioned women must constantly navigate between helpful peer support, for-profit services and problematic information that can lead them into precarious situations. Indeed, in their research, Guma et al. reveal the ambivalent commercial underpinnings of migrant online groups, where “communities for interest” exploit peer trust for profit alongside genuine solidarity networks (2022).

The women interviewed reported that the first challenge migrant-positioned women encounter is determining information validity within online migrant communities. As Alma observed regarding Facebook and WhatsApp groups: *"they offer opportunities, but there is also everything, that is, there are things that are true and there are things that are not. You have to be*

careful, to know well... you always have to check and see all this" (Interview, 2 May 2023, Porto). While these platforms enabled migrant agency, they also circulated unverified information that can lead women to be misinformed or to enter difficult situations. This need for constant verification reflects broader challenges in which ICTs function as sites of both empowerment and control (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022).

Beyond misinformation, the commercialization of migration advice through social media platforms represents a particularly problematic dimension of digital solidarities. Ernestina noted how some Argentine influencers who had initially provided free assistance began monetizing their services: *"Before they did not charge, when they helped us they did not charge and well, now they do charge and charge"* (Interview, 4 May 2023, Porto). Even professional-seeming private services could exploit women's vulnerabilities. Julia described how *"We hired a lawyer who practically swindled us, because she didn't get the documents for us. She did the NIF wrong, so we practically had to start all over again after that"* (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto).

These individual experiences of exploitation reflect broader patterns of abuse by intermediaries within digital migration infrastructure. Many women encountered unqualified individuals charging substantial fees for services they could complete independently. An NGO worker from CLAIM Gaia (a local governmental migration integration office) explained that misinformed migrants could be fearful of approaching them for support, or unaware of their services, and could end up paying up to €500 for unqualified intermediaries to help them submit their *Manifestação* (Interview, 14 July 2023, Porto).

Multiple NGO representatives expressed additional concerns about how digital platforms influence migration decisions, which can sometimes lead women into vulnerable situations, and without adequate support systems. Margarita, a migrant-positioned woman from Venezuela who

arrived with Portuguese citizenship by descent and worked part-time at a migrant legal support organization, noted that many of the individuals she assisted had been influenced by YouTube channels that promoted an idealized vision of life in Portugal. She described how these portrayals often created unrealistic expectations that did not reflect the challenges migrants would face upon arrival. Margarita expressed frustration on behalf of these individuals, explaining that she had even considered contacting some of these influencers to highlight how their content could mislead prospective migrants (Interview, 20 June 2023, Porto). For example, a Caritas representative described encountering migrants who social media had influenced without developing in-person networks: *"Many of the testimonies we hear say exactly that they heard about Portugal on video or on Instagram Reel or on TikTok or Facebook... 'Yes, and we talk to other people via WhatsApp. we don't know each other, we exchange tips, go to this service and you have to do this. You have to do that'"* (Interview, 3 March 2023, Porto). This representative emphasized how digital connections could not replace genuine community support: *"These online connections are superficial. They cannot replace an actual in-person support network or qualified migrant-serving organization."* Together, these cases demonstrate how digital infrastructures shape migration decision-making in ambivalent ways, producing both opportunities for connection and conditions of uncertainty that require ongoing negotiation.

However, my analysis also revealed important limitations in understanding these digital dynamics. All participants had unhindered access to smartphones and social media platforms and sufficient digital literacy to use these resources. None experienced societal, economic, or other restrictions that limited their device access, a privilege not available to all migrant-positioned women (Godin & Donà, 2020). This access differential reflects what Angulo-Pasel (2018) describes as the need to "engender" the mobile commons, highlighting how gendered power

imbalances affect women's access to mobility resources. As Saïd (2021) argues, the ability to use ICT is influenced by gendered power relations, highlighting research gaps in how technology both reflects and potentially transforms gender relations during migration. However, although participants universally had access to ICTs and smartphones, questions about how social class and educational background might shape their digital literacy skills or their ability to critically evaluate information within these networks, or how gendered power imbalances could affect those skill sets, fell beyond the scope of this study.

These varied challenges revealed the fundamentally contradictory nature of digital migration infrastructures across all legal categories. While platforms enabled vital information sharing and emotional support, they simultaneously functioned as spaces in which commercial interests and misinformation circulated alongside genuine mutual aid. The research showed that the migrant-positioned women interviewed across visa categories had to constantly navigate between empowering peer connections and exploitative intermediaries who weaponize the same digital spaces for profit. Regular visa holders seeking renewal information or travel advice encountered verification challenges similar to those faced by those awaiting regularization, though with lower stakes and shorter timeframes. The need for constant verification of information affected all migrants navigating Portuguese bureaucratic systems, regardless of legal status.

This ambivalence reflects broader dynamics described by Gillespie et al. (2016), in which digital infrastructures simultaneously facilitate migrant mobility while also creating opportunities for state and commercial surveillance and exploitation. From the interviews, it was clear that migrant-positioned women's relational solidarities thus operated within digital borderlands that mirror the contradictions of Portugal's broader immigration landscape: officially supportive yet

practically constraining, enabling agency while creating new forms of vulnerability. These contradictions, as reflected in study participants' comments, indicated that the women's translocational positioning shaped their digital navigation. Those with secure legal status could access verification resources from a position of relative advantage, but all had to negotiate the ambivalent character of digital solidarities.

The ambivalent character of digital solidarities, simultaneously empowering and constraining, provides the context for understanding how the women interviewed engaged in negotiation practices within Portuguese bureaucratic systems. Negotiation refers to the deliberate, context-specific ways migrant-positioned women respond to structural constraints and social exclusions (e.g., Rygiel, 2011; Mainwaring, 2016; Ilcan et al., 2025a, 2025b). While relational solidarities provided resources for information sharing and emotional support, structural obstacles within administrative processes remained largely unaltered. As a result, women developed strategies that worked within the constraints of the immigration system, balancing immediate needs with longer-term navigation of bureaucratic barriers.

Constrained Negotiation in Bureaucratic Borderlands

Portuguese bureaucratic systems create what the women interviewed experienced as circular obstacles that required constant strategic navigation—a vicious circle. These "catch-22" situations exemplify what Mainwaring (2016) conceptualizes as borders functioning as "zones of negotiation" where migrants exercise agency despite severe structural limitations. The women's translocational positionalities shaped the circular obstacles they encountered and the ways they navigated them. Legal status, nationality, and class positioning determined whether documentation requirements were insurmountable barriers or surmountable challenges, primarily because they could exacerbate the vulnerabilities of particular women.

Julia's experience exemplified constrained negotiation within bureaucratic borderlands. Working at a call center while awaiting her *Manifestação* regularization, she described the documentation process as a "vicious circle": *"I think people know that it is taking up to 2 years for Manifestação, but I tell you, I think that is not even the problem, the problem is all the previous steps that you cannot do. I have to cover all these prerequisites prior to the expression of interest. Yes, because of all the hurdles they put in your way, I simply mean. The bank account, today it is practically impossible to open a bank account. Yes, if you don't have a residency I mean, and you can't get your Manifestation of Interest in if you don't have an account first, yeah, so it's not going to be two years"* (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). Indeed, these experiences spoke to what scholars Malheiros and Peixoto would consider the ambiguous nature of the regularization process in Portugal (2023). Furthermore, the migrant-positioned women in the study frequently encountered contradictory information from different institutional actors, creating additional burdens of negotiation. Julia observed: *"Different staff members would give different and conflicting information and answers, generating more confusion, frustration, and uncertainty... that doesn't make sense because they are all supposed to be governed under the same processes, the same procedures. So, it does not make sense, do you understand me? It doesn't make sense."*

Julia's articulation of bureaucratic requirements as a "vicious circle" revealed how administrative bordering operated through a contradictory logic in which a requirement depended on completing another requirement that could not be fulfilled without the first. This circular dependency exemplifies what Manolova (2022) describes: bureaucracy functioning as temporal bordering, in which administrative processes become mechanisms of control that trap migrants in prolonged uncertainty. Julia's analysis, that the problem is not the two-year wait but

the impossibility of initiating the process, illuminated how bureaucratic borders were operating through exclusion disguised as inclusion. The system appeared to offer regularization pathways, yet it embedded structural obstacles that prevented many migrants from accessing these purported opportunities. Julia's experience demonstrates how translocationality operates through administrative exclusion. Her positioning as a Mexican woman seeking regularization placed her within circular dependencies and constrained economic opportunities that women with privileged visa categories could bypass. Julia's analysis revealed how bureaucratic boundaries operated through interconnected requirements that created circular dependencies. Her negotiation involved attempting to navigate these systemic contradictions, though ultimately the structural constraints proved insurmountable.

Alma, who had arrived from Peru weeks before our interview, similarly articulated the bureaucratic contradictions she encountered: "*Yes, yes, it's the chicken or the egg,*" she explained regarding the sequence requirements for *Manifestação* submission (Interview, 2 May 2023, Porto). Alma's job search exemplified these circular constraints: some employers required a submitted *Manifestação* before hiring, yet submitting a *Manifestação* required proof of employment. Her negotiation strategy involved persistent applications while simultaneously gathering documentation, though this required constant strategic maneuvering within contradictory requirements.

The *Atestado de Morada* (proof of address) requirement created additional circular obstacles that demanded creative negotiation. As Alma explained: "*In the parish where I live the man [who works in the office] does not want to give me the Atestado if I don't have a [rental] contract and the lady who rents to me does not give me a contract because it is not convenient for her... because she would have to pay more tax*" (Interview, 2 May 2023, Porto). Furthermore,

obtaining the *Atestado* required two Portuguese citizen witnesses, creating additional barriers for newcomers without established social networks. Alma's negotiation ultimately required paying intermediary fees, a compromise that contradicted her initial strategy of avoiding such actors. She said, *"it's really difficult to find someone who wants to help you because you have to pay for it, if they want to help you."*

Even when women successfully navigated these initial documentation hurdles, the extended waiting periods created additional vulnerabilities that compounded their precarious positioning. Nayita, a Venezuelan artist who arrived in 2018, exemplified how temporal borders intersect with the exploitation of labour during regularization processes. After beginning her *Manifestação* process while working at a factory in a smaller city, she moved to Porto when a restaurant manager promised her a job contract. However, the manager repeatedly delayed providing the contract, ultimately exploiting her precarious status. As she explained: *"So I get a job in November 2019. In 2020 the Pandemic began. They sent me home, I was left without a job, the man never gave me a work contract, he cheated me for four months and of course, when I go to my appointment in June 2020, the SEF tells me that we can't give you the residency, you can imagine. So, well, I go home with that, imagine, with that worry was the anxiety disorder"* (Interview, 1 June 2023, Porto).

Nayita's experience, in which she ultimately spent four years obtaining residency after securing a legitimate contract from an employer, illustrates how temporal borders created windows of vulnerability that unscrupulous employers could exploit. Her case reflects broader patterns identified by NGO workers of employer abuse within the *Manifestação* system. A Caritas representative explained that migrants might be unpaid, underpaid, and unprotected by social security when employers exploited their documentation status in process (Interview, 3

March 2023, Porto). The gendered dimensions of this exploitation are particularly significant, as the migrant women interviewed might have been facing heightened vulnerability due to intersecting factors of immigration status, gender, and race that reinforced unequal power structures and created additional constraints within employment relationships. Rydzik and Anitha (2020) similarly demonstrate how visa precarity intensifies gendered workplace exploitation, reflecting the challenges Nayita encountered.

These individual navigation strategies collectively reveal how borderlands functioned not merely as geographical spaces but as administrative territories in which state power operated through complexity rather than clarity. Portugal's administrative bordering thus created internal borderlands in which the women migrants in the study encountered state power through circular, contradictory, and discretionary procedures and processes within parish offices, banking requirements, and employment dependencies that collectively function as dispersed mechanisms of migration.

My analysis indicates that migrant-positioned women engaged in negotiating borderland porosities through creative responses to institutional constraints. However, the women's negotiations operated not as successful resistance but as strategic accommodation within severely limiting structures. These strategies are unevenly shaped by differences in legal status, economic resources, and family configurations. While some participants were able to draw on transnational income, savings, family support, or EU citizenship to mitigate the effects of bureaucratic delay, others were constrained to rely on precarious employment or informal networks to navigate similar barriers. Despite these differences, all encountered procedural uncertainty and discretionary decision-making, revealing both shared conditions and unequal capacities for response. These positionalities are not set but shift over time as women move

through stages of regularization, employment, and family life, reshaping the strategies available to them. Rather than overcoming these structures, the women's negotiations reflect situated forms of agency shaped by and embedded within the constraints they seek to navigate.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America negotiated Portugal's bureaucratic borderlands, revealing both the constraints of administrative bordering and the creative potential of relational solidarities. By analyzing the experiences of migrant-positioned women across different legal pathways, from family reunification to *Manifestação* regularization, this research demonstrates how Portuguese immigration systems created convergent experiences of precarity that cut across formal legal categories. Even women entering through ostensibly straightforward "legal" pathways encountered similar administrative obstacles, temporal delays, and restrictions on their rights to those seeking irregular regularization.

Three key findings emerge from this analysis. First, translocationality operates dynamically to shape border experiences among the women who participated in the study. While intersecting factors of class, nationality, and legal status created differentiated initial access to Portuguese territory, bureaucratic dysfunction produced shared experiences of limbo that transcended these positional differences. Some women entering through "legal" family reunification encountered similar administrative obstacles, temporal delays, and rights restrictions as those seeking irregular regularization, challenging binary categorizations between "privileged" and "vulnerable" migrants. In Claudia's case, despite being eligible for citizenship and regular status through both her Portuguese-born father (by descent) and her son's Portuguese nationality (through her Portuguese-born ex-husband), she was required to navigate an extended

period of administrative limbo. While she was able to sustain herself and her son through income from her Brazil-based businesses, which helped her circumvent labour market constraints, she still encountered significant bureaucratic and everyday challenges during this period.

Second, relational solidarities emerge as crucial yet ambivalent infrastructures. Women's engagement with digital platforms enabled vital transnational information sharing, emotional support, and strategic coordination that began before migration and evolved as the women transitioned from information seekers to community builders. However, these same digital spaces simultaneously functioned as sites of misinformation, commercialization, and exploitation, requiring constant strategic evaluation. This ambivalence is illustrated in cases such as Ernestina, whose migration was initially shaped by commercial Instagram influencers, and Alma, who described the continual need to assess and cross-check information circulating through online networks.

Third, migrant-positioned women's negotiation practices operated as constrained agency, adapting creatively to bureaucratic obstacles while remaining fundamentally limited by structural conditions. Rather than overcoming border controls, negotiations typically involved managing circular documentation requirements and developing verification strategies for contradictory institutional information, as illustrated throughout this chapter. When strategies reached their limits, the women often exercised agency through departure, as in Julia's case, demonstrating how constrained agency can manifest through exit-based resistance. Together, these findings demonstrate that translocationality can serve as an analytical framework, revealing how women's shifting positionalities shape both the challenges they face and the solidarity networks they can access. Relational solidarities emerged as a crucial infrastructure, providing the resources and support that enabled this group of migrant-positioned women to engage in constrained yet

strategic negotiations with bureaucratic borders. Crucially, these solidarities are not merely supportive infrastructures but a gendered feminist praxis of horizontality, where digital and embodied interactions jointly produce care, knowledge, and collective agency.

These findings contribute to scholarship on critical migration and borders in several important ways. This research expands understanding of how borders operate across administrative and temporal dimensions, creating internal borderlands within destination countries. Portugal's bureaucratic complexity exemplifies how contemporary border regimes function through waiting periods that subject migrants to extended precarity while maintaining state narratives of openness, creating temporal borders that control mobility through time rather than space. By demonstrating how translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities interconnect within Portuguese bureaucratic borderlands, this research provides a theoretical framework applicable to other administrative migration systems where states manage mobility through complexity rather than physical exclusion.

The analysis also advances conceptual understanding of agency within constrained conditions. The practices of the women in the study reveal agency, not as heroic resistance but as strategic adaptation within limiting structural conditions, encompassing both accommodation strategies and resistance through non-compliance or departure. Recognizing exit as a form of negotiation expands frameworks beyond place-based resistance to include mobility-based responses.

Furthermore, the research contributes to scholarship on digital migration infrastructures by revealing the dual character of platform-based solidarities (e.g., Borkert et al. 2018; Guma et al., 2022). The study showed that while digital communities enabled crucial peer support, they also disseminated commercial interests and misinformation alongside genuine mutual aid,

challenging celebratory accounts of digital empowerment while acknowledging the vital role of these platforms.

The temporal context of this research, conducted before Portugal's June 2024 elimination of the *Manifestação* process, provides insights into how border regimes transform. The shift from administrative complexity that maintained regularization possibilities toward administrative exclusion represents a fundamental transformation in Portugal's borderland character. The elimination of regularization procedures suggests that relational solidarities may become even more crucial as formal pathways disappear, with women relying more heavily on informal support systems and potentially facing increased physical exclusion.

The broader implications extend beyond Portugal, illuminating how administrative bordering operates across European migration systems that increasingly rely on bureaucratic complexity rather than physical barriers. As states develop more sophisticated administrative mechanisms, understanding how women navigate these systems through relational solidarities becomes crucial for supporting migrant agency and challenging exclusionary policies.

In this study, the women confirmed that borders function as dynamic sites of ongoing negotiation within which migrant women exercise agency within structural constraints. Their experiences reveal both the limitations of their individual navigation strategies and the transformative potential of collective solidarity practices that transcended legal categories and national boundaries. Despite severely limiting conditions, the relational solidarities of these women create alternative possibilities for community building that point toward more inclusive migration governance and underscore the need for policies that support rather than constrain migrant agency.

This chapter reveals how the borders in Portugal at the time of the study extended beyond territorial boundaries into everyday administrative practices that shaped migrant-positioned women's access, mobility, and belonging. By tracing how women navigated these bordering processes, the chapter demonstrates how borders must be continuously negotiated in daily life rather than passively endured. Chapter 3 examines how xenophobic encounters compounded the uncertainties created by border regimes for the research participants, revealing how social exclusion operated alongside administrative control to shape the women's everyday negotiations.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Xenophobia

"But here in Portugal I don't go to male doctors...I won't. So, if I need to see a doctor, if I need to have an examination, I ask 'I want a woman doctor', 'I want a woman nurse'. Because it's happened to me that I've been to a male dentist and he's spent the whole appointment talking about the beauty and graces of Brazilian women. The whole appointment. Horrible...and it was in a sexual tone. It was the wrong tone. It was wrong. And he only stopped when he asked me if I was married and I said yes. I was actually married at the time, but if I wasn't I would have said yes, because it's a way for them to stop."

(Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto)

Karol, a woman from Brazil, mother of one.

"I think there's a lot of need for a welcome for anyone going to any foreign country, right? Because you're in a country where it's still the same language, even though they say that Brazilians speak Brazilian and not Portuguese. But I think that as well as the language issue, you have to adapt to another culture, another country, another climate. There are many things that you have to deal with at the same time and if there isn't this welcome from the country or the people who are there, it becomes much more difficult, this process ends up being....much more painful, much more painful. So I think this issue of welcome is something that is fundamental."

(Interview, 11 May 2023, Porto)

Tala, representative of migrant-positioned women's association

(*Brasileiras Não se Calam* [Brazilian Women Don't Stay Quiet])

Having examined how bureaucratic borders created ongoing precarity through administrative complexity, this chapter turns to the social dimensions of exclusion that migrant-positioned women interviewed encountered throughout their time in Portugal. While border regimes had established legal frameworks of inclusion and exclusion, xenophobia operated through everyday interactions, institutional practices, and cultural barriers that marked the women as perpetual outsiders, regardless of their legal status (e.g., Araújo et al., 2023; Borges, 2025; Ribero et al., 2024; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). For example, Araújo (2013) reveals how Portugal's Lusotropicalist “non-racist” narrative sustains everyday xenophobia toward Brazilian migrants, masking cultural exclusions as mere diversity challenges.

These bordering and exclusionary processes unfolded within broader dynamics of global migration governance, where colonial legacies continue to shape racialized and gendered hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion, and in which xenophobia is institutionalized as a central mechanism for managing mobility. Ravid argues that racism is constitutive of contemporary borderscapes and cannot be treated as external to global and national migration regimes (2025). Building on this insight, this chapter examines how xenophobia functioned as a social extension of bordering, shaping the everyday encounters of the migrant-positioned women who were studied, and their sense of safety and recognition.

At the global level, these dynamics are reflected in broader migration trends and political responses. In 2024, international migrants numbered 304 million, with women comprising 48.08% (Migration Data Portal, 2025). Mounting pressure on immigration systems worldwide, exacerbated by rising living and housing costs, has fueled xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and social media hate speech demanding stricter measures, with Portugal not immune (e.g., Buch

et al., 2025; Costa, 2025). Although Portugal's foreign-born population remains smaller than that of other European nations, migration has grown significantly (AIMA, 2025). June 2024 marked a critical turning point when Portugal's newly elected right-wing government repealed the *Manifestação de Interesse* policy, which had allowed case-by-case regularization, thereby departing from the welcoming approach of previous governments (Demony & Rua, 2024). The shift represented a stark reversal: Portugal had distinguished itself during the pandemic by expanding access to healthcare for migrants, whereas other European nations had imposed restrictions (Tsagkroni & Dikaïos, 2024).

While Chapter 2 examined how administrative borders created ongoing precarity, this chapter explores how social borders through xenophobia compounded these challenges. Understanding these social processes requires situating them within broader power relations and historical contexts. Colonialism, for example, continues to shape patterns of inequality and social hierarchy, influencing how migrants are categorized and excluded (Cappiali & Pacciardi, 2024). This is particularly evident in how gendered expectations of care shape migrant women's pathways to citizenship and reflect colonial imaginaries of belonging (Bassel & Khan, 2021). For example, Anderson (2017) emphasizes the importance of examining migration within the broader context of global processes, such as the outsourcing and exploitation of labour and resources from the Global South. Accordingly, De Genova (2016) calls for greater acknowledgment of Europe's colonial past and its post-colonial present, underscoring migrants' centrality in the ongoing redefinition of European spaces and identities.

In Southern European countries such as Spain and Portugal, xenophobic and racialized discourses about migrants from former colonies reveal distinct forms of "othering." Scholars have investigated how racialization operates in these contexts, particularly with respect to

policies and practices related to labour and resources. Migrants from former colonies are sometimes framed as preferable due to their perceived cultural proximity (e.g., Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2018; Martín Díaz et al., 2012). However, this framing is often rooted in asymmetrical power dynamics stemming from colonial histories. Brasil and Cabecinhas (2018) found that Brazilian Portuguese speakers in Portugal and Latin American Spanish speakers in Spain reported experiencing discrimination tied to their linguistic ties to former colonizers. This, they argue, is indicative of the enduring hierarchical relationships between colonizers and the colonized. Martín Díaz et al. (2012) further contend that, in Spain, these cultural connections are embedded within an ethno-stratified labour market, reproducing power relations. These findings underline the importance of examining the colonial dimensions of xenophobia, “othering,” and racialization in Europe. Indeed, scholars document how women in different migration contexts, such as Brazilian women in Portugal (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021) and Eastern European women in the UK (e.g., Sime et al., 2022), report incidents of being stereotyped as prostitutes.

As a social phenomenon, gendered racialization is particularly evident in the experiences of Latin American women, who are frequently subjected to racialized gendered stereotypes that portray them as exotic, inferior, or subjugated (e.g., Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2018). In a comparative case study conducted in A Coruña, Spain, van der Ende (2023) observed that Latin American women were often preferred over other migrant groups for caregiving roles due to linguistic ties. However, nationality-based stereotypes also emerged: Peruvians were perceived as “good girls” suitable for family caregiving, Colombians were stereotyped as potential threats to household harmony, and Brazilians were associated with prostitution. Focusing on Brazilian migrant women in Portugal, Lamartine and Torres da Silva (2022) describe how these women are subjected to overlapping forms of xenophobia, colonialism, racism, and sexual prejudice.

They contend: "Bound by various layers of oppression, aggravated by being colonized bodies in the colonizing, these women face countless forms of xenophobic, colonial, ethnic and, above all, sexual prejudice, which transform them into and advertise them as available bodies" (2022, p. 210, para 4).

While border regimes represent structural barriers to mobility, xenophobia emerged as an ongoing social and interpersonal manifestation of exclusion within borderlands that migrant women must navigate throughout their migration trajectories. As explained in Chapter 2, following Visan and Mountz (2025), I understand borderlands not as sites of cultural hybridization, but as spaces co-produced through the interaction of state power performances and migrant resistance, where geographical and lived spaces are essential to understanding their formation. Building on the previous chapter's analysis of how borders operate as racialized and gendered sites of negotiation, this chapter investigates how xenophobia materialized in everyday interactions and institutional practices in Portugal, as the women in the study discussed. The findings show that xenophobia functioned as a persistent layer of exclusion that operated simultaneously with bordering processes affecting the lived experiences of the migrants interviewed as they continued to encounter social boundaries that mark them as "other" across different spaces, times, and contexts of their settlement experiences.

Xenophobia represents a distinct challenge to both mobility and inclusion, often fueled by fears concerning economic threats (job loss, lowering salaries, social burden), cultural threats (national identity, differing values), and security threats (criminality, terrorism) (e.g., D'appollonia, 2017). Sanchez-Mazas and Licata (2015) trace the etymological roots and evolving usage of the term xenophobia, literally the fear of strangers or outsiders, showing how it has been explicitly applied to immigrants and various social categories perceived as threatening to

nationals or citizens. As such, Crush and Ramachandran (2009) conceptualize one of the distinctions of xenophobia as distinctive in its targeting of non-citizens specifically, while still intersecting with other forms of discrimination.

While I use the term *xenophobia* throughout this analysis, I recognize that it overlaps with racism and other forms of discrimination in shaping the social categorization of the migrant-positioned women in this study. This choice is informed by participants' own narratives: the women I spoke to most frequently described being treated as "foreign" or not belonging, and explicitly used the language of xenophobia, whereas only a small number engaged with concepts such as racialization or with racism specifically. At the same time, racialization remains a significant part of this chapter, since many of the experiences described by participants are structured through racialized and gendered hierarchies of belonging and exclusion, shaped not only by skin colour and phenotype but also by national origin and geopolitical positioning. In the Brazilian context, participants describe how being "Brazilian" itself becomes a racialized marker in Portugal, so that even women who are socially coded as "white" may be positioned as foreign, inferior, or out of place. Xenophobia is therefore useful for capturing how hostility is articulated around migrant status and perceived outsiderhood, while remaining analytically tied to these broader processes. For example, when migrant-positioned women report being told to "go back to their country," the term xenophobia captures both the immediate insult and the wider exclusion it indexes.

This chapter explores how migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America navigated xenophobia through their positionalities, strategies, and relational networks. As previously explained, I employ the term "migrant-positioned women" drawing on Anthias's concept of "translocationality" (2002, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2020), which captures how individuals

are situated within multiple, shifting power relations across time and space. This framing acknowledges the diverse positionalities represented in my study of women who variously self-identify as "migrants," "immigrants," "expats," "international women," or "foreigners," with legal statuses ranging from visa holders to EU passport holders to those undergoing regularization. Through analysis of their experiences, I reveal how xenophobia operates differently across the participants' intersecting and shifting social positions, how they created solidarity networks to resist exclusion, and how they developed diverse strategies to navigate hostile environments while asserting their dignity and belonging. This integrated framework moves beyond static categorizations to reveal how xenophobic exclusion operated dynamically across different contexts, how the women created vital support infrastructures in response, and how their strategic responses reshaped both individual experiences and collective possibilities for belonging.

Experiences of Xenophobia: Intersectional and Translocational Dimensions

The Latin American migrant women in Portugal who participated in this study experienced multifaceted xenophobia shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, migration status, nationality, race, and social class, as well as the power dynamics embedded within these intersections. Drawing on Anthias (2002, 2012), I view social class not as a fixed economic category but as a set of relational dynamics shaped by gendered, racialized, and migratory histories, which influence how resources, recognition, and life opportunities are produced, allocated, and contested in particular times and contexts. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews conducted in Porto, this section explores their everyday experiences of “othering,” exclusion, and discrimination. As Ellermann (2020) shows, social stratification intersects with migration governance to produce uneven experiences of inclusion and exclusion, underscoring

migration scholarship's reluctance to fully recognize class as a key axis of differentiation. Understanding these experiences requires an intersectional approach that recognizes how systems of oppression operate through overlapping social identities (Crenshaw, 1997), while simultaneously employing a translocational lens that captures how these intersections shift across time, space, and context (Anthias, 2008, 2012).

Equally crucial is understanding how the migrant-positioned women interviewed negotiated these xenophobic encounters, including developing strategies and responses that protected their safety, asserted their dignity, and resisted exclusion. Drawing on critical migration scholarship, I employed the concept of negotiation to encompass the diverse micro-practices through which women exercise agency within and against structural constraints, operating as relational practices even under unequal positionalities (e.g., Ilcan et al., 2025a; Mainwaring, 2016; Rygiel & Baban, 2024). These negotiations range from subtle adaptations to direct confrontation, and the women in the study demonstrated meaningful agency despite structural limitations. Through this translocational lens, I examine how those women's shifting positionalities across nationality, race, class, and legal status create differentiated experiences of xenophobic exclusion.

The negotiations with xenophobia of the migrant-positioned women interviewed were fundamentally shaped by their intersecting positions: which encounters they faced, which strategies became available, and which resources they could access. Central to these negotiations were what I refer to as relational solidarities, the informal networks of mutual support that functioned as crucial infrastructure, enabling women to resist xenophobic marginalization. These solidarities provided the emotional support, practical resources, and collective strength that enabled negotiation under conditions of structural constraint. The central questions guiding this

chapter are: How did the translocational positionalities of the women interviewed shape their differentiated experiences of xenophobia? And how did those women resist and negotiate these exclusions through relational solidarities?

This chapter examines xenophobia across three domains. First, I analyze how colonial legacies and linguistic hierarchies created differentiated experiences shaped by the translocational positioning of the migrant-positioned women in the study. Second, I document how sexualization and hypersexualization manifested across public spaces and workplaces, revealing gendered dimensions of xenophobic exclusion. Third, I explore how the women leveraged relational solidarities through digital and physical community-building to resist marginalization and create alternative spaces of recognition. Each domain reveals how translocationality shaped encounters, how the women negotiated strategically, and how relational solidarities provided crucial infrastructure for survival and resistance.

Building upon intersectionality, the concept of translocational positionality illuminates how the xenophobia experienced by the target group of migrant-positioned women was shaped by the dynamic intersection of gender, race, class, nationality, legal status, and their positioning across time and space. Rather than experiencing xenophobia as a uniform phenomenon, those women's encounters were differentiated by their specific social locations and how these shifted as they moved across different geographic spaces and social contexts. My research revealed how the same woman might experience relative privilege in some domains while facing acute marginalization in others, demonstrating the fluid and contextual nature of xenophobic exclusion. My research revealed that the Brazilian women in Portugal reported more instances of discrimination and xenophobia, particularly hypersexualization, than the Hispanic Latin American women in my study. However, exposure to xenophobia varied significantly based on

intersecting factors such as nationality, class, legal status, employment type, and public visibility, as the women in remote work or self-employed positions reported fewer direct encounters.

These women were often subjected to racialized stereotypes that exoticize, marginalize, or reduce them to narrow representations of their Latin American identity. Media discourse, for instance, frequently reinforces these stereotypes by associating Latin American migrant women with images from telenovelas, Carnival, and perceptions of poverty and violence in their countries of origin (e.g., Bueno, 2020; Costa, 2025). These narratives intersect with power relations in the labour market, positioning them in subordinate roles (Pontes, 2004). Indeed, Pontes (2004) specifically examines how Brazilian migrant women in Portugal are framed as non-white and impoverished, depicted through a discourse of tropical and exotic sensuality that sexualizes and essentializes differences in gender, class, and ethnicity. This pattern of sexualization and exoticization extends beyond Portugal. In various receiving countries, including other Latin American nations, Hispanic women are also often subject to similar dynamics. For example, Venezuelan migrant women displaced by the ongoing crisis face hypersexualization and stereotyping in Peru, due to the combination of being migrant women, as well as their nationality and how they might be perceived physically in their host society (Pérez & Freier, 2023). In Portugal, the xenophobia that Latin American migrant women interviewed encountered manifested in multiple ways, from overt hostility in public spaces to subtle microaggressions related to their accent. It also took the form of disrespectful treatment in dating contexts or more systemic institutional discrimination.

Feelings of Colonialism

Research has shown that Brazilian migrant women in Portugal are racialized in a way that extends beyond skin colour and race, with colonial history and the unique Portugal-Brazil

relationship playing a significant role in shaping their experiences of xenophobia for their national identity (e.g., Araújo, 2013; França, 2021; França & Oliveira, 2021; Gomes, 2018; Queiroz et al., 2020). Scholars have noted that Portugal's 20th-century authoritarian regime fashioned a narrative of colonialism as a benevolent, harmonious enterprise, distinct from the more exploitative colonial histories of other European nations (e.g., Piccinelli et al., 2025; Valentim & Heleno, 2018). Building on this work, Piccinelli et al. (2025) argue that these beliefs have evolved into a post-colonial Lusotropical ideology in which Portugal perceives itself as having a uniquely adaptable relationship with the tropics, a strong capacity for immigrant integration, and a less prejudiced society than other European countries. This romanticized narrative of colonial history shapes how Brazilian migrant women in my study experience and interpret xenophobia, often masking the systemic and subtle ways discrimination operates in contemporary Portugal.

Several Brazilian research participants commented on this colonial nostalgia. Luisa, a Brazilian psychologist who worked with other Brazilian women, observed that colonial history is still celebrated under the guise of the "Age of Discovery," with national pride overshadowing critical discussions of its violence. She argued that this uncritical glorification extends from school curricula into broader society, where colonialism remains unquestioned in public discourse (Interview, 30 March 2023, Porto). She also noted that little consideration is given to how colonial monuments in public spaces and government buildings affect people from formerly colonized regions, such as paintings near famous monuments in Porto depicting slaves toiling near their colonial masters. Similarly, Anita, a Brazilian-born mother and entrepreneur who is half Dutch and previously lived in the UK, recalled feeling both surprised and offended upon moving to Portugal and encountering the open celebration of colonialism, something she had

never witnessed in the other European countries where she had lived (Interview, 12 May 2023, Porto).

In contrast, the Hispanic women I interviewed did not express similar apprehensions regarding Portugal's pride or celebration of its colonial past, suggesting that different historical and social dynamics may have shaped their experiences of xenophobia and how they perceived their connections to Portugal as migrants. This differential experience demonstrates how translocational positionality operates. For example, the same colonial monuments and discourses that trigger feelings of marginalization for Brazilian women living in Portugal may be experienced differently by Hispanic Latin American women. Although many Hispanic Latin American countries also share histories of colonialism, their historical relationships with Portugal are less direct than Brazil's longstanding colonial and linguistic ties to the country. As some interviewees noted, colonial associations may instead be more immediately connected to Spain, shaping how Portuguese colonial symbols and narratives are interpreted and experienced.

Linguistic Hierarchies and Colonial Attitudes

Many participants, particularly Brazilian women, reported facing significant language discrimination and microaggressions related to their accents or vocabulary. Stefany, a Brazilian graduate student who worked with a migrant women's collective, linked these experiences to colonialism, explaining, "*They have this very imperial feeling—like, 'We own the language, and you're from a former colony, so you have to speak like us.' Otherwise, they find ways to discriminate against you*" (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Scholars such as Piccinelli et al. (2025) have examined how Brazilian migrants in Portugal experience microaggressions, even when they arrive already proficient in Portuguese, unlike many newcomers to Anglophone countries such as the United States (U.S).

Several Brazilian women in my study who had lived elsewhere noted that, when speaking English as a second language in countries such as the U.S., Ireland, the UK, and Australia, they did not encounter the same linguistic discrimination they faced in Portugal when speaking their native language. Valentina, a Brazilian entrepreneur fluent in three languages who studied for her Master's in Portugal, highlighted this contrast. She explained that while speaking English or French, no one tried to correct her accent or wording, yet in Portugal, she had random members of the public, such as a bartender, feel compelled to "fix" her Brazilian Portuguese (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto). Another woman from Brazil, Ana, commented that she arrived in Ireland barely speaking basic English and that people sought to understand her. However, after moving to Portugal, she found herself at times having to adapt her accent or language (Interview, 15 June 2023, Porto). This is also an issue that NGOs have raised concern with, as one representative of a European women's project said, "*So even for Brazilian learners, it's not the same Portuguese. So, they are always hearing that they don't speak Portuguese right, the good Portuguese, but of course, they speak Portuguese*" (Interview, 02 December 2022, Porto).

Additionally, because Brazil is a large country with distinct regional variations, geography may also affect how migrant accents are perceived in Portugal. Juliana, who operated a Brazilian migrant women's organization, *Plataforma Geni*, said, "*The northeastern Brazilian accent is stronger, more loaded. So they have this difficulty, not all women, but the women from the Northeast, they have a greater difficulty than everyone nowadays*" (Interview, 13 February 2023, Porto). Indeed, research suggests that even within Brazil, stereotypes operate through a form of internal colonialism that "others" those from the Northeast based on linguistic or cultural perceptions, intersecting with factors such as race, education and social class (Serrao, 2022). These internal Brazilian hierarchies interact with colonial attitudes in Portugal, producing

layered experiences of linguistic discrimination. In my study, women's regional origins shaped how their accents were perceived, adding another dimension of translocationality to their positioning and navigation within Portuguese social and institutional contexts. This also echoes Khosravi's argument that the racialized border is not only located at the territorial edge of the nation-state but is reproduced through everyday social distinctions and embodied markers of difference, including accent, which, in themselves, serve as border challenges (2019).

These experiences extended beyond everyday interactions into institutional spaces, revealing how translocational positioning can shape access to services and recognition. Anita, a fair-skinned woman of Brazilian and Dutch descent mentioned earlier, noted that she was often treated well in person. However, over the phone, her Brazilian accent regularly led to microaggressions, so she would ask her British husband to make calls for her, a negotiation strategy that leveraged her partner's linguistic capital to circumvent discrimination. She described reflecting on these telephone experiences and how they led her to examine her positionality as a Brazilian and European woman in Portugal (Interview, 12 May 2023, Porto). Paula, a Brazilian researcher and psychologist, questioned how public health workers in Portugal easily understood my Portuguese, spoken with a foreign second-language accent, despite my having only recently learned the language, but would pretend not to understand her Portuguese, spoken with a Brazilian accent, treating her with disrespect and making faces while she spoke (Interview, 31 January 2023, Porto). In academia, Stefany observed that Brazilian students were even required to write their research in European Portuguese rather than Brazilian Portuguese (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Indeed, many Brazilian women I spoke to reported feeling pressure in professional settings, frequently second-guessing how they phrased emails or spoke in meetings. Additionally, according to Stefany, Brazilian accents were a matter of contention in

school environments, where some Portuguese parents complained that their children were picking up words or mannerisms of Brazilian speech from Brazilian classmates, as well as from YouTube channels and Brazilian music stations, which are very popular in Portugal. These reactions reveal how Brazilian accents become framed as socially undesirable, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and reproducing exclusion across generations.

However, not all women reported experiencing xenophobia due to their accent. Silvia, a Brazilian woman who had previously lived in the UK, reported experiencing workplace microaggressions there because of her accent. Unlike in Portugal, where discrimination often targeted Brazilian Portuguese specifically, she felt that in the UK, it stemmed more from her being a foreigner in general (Interview, 05 May 2023, Porto). However, it should be noted that at the time of the interview, she had not yet entered the Portuguese workforce and acknowledged that her social interactions were limited. She also discussed positionality and suggested that her UK citizenship and decision to move to Portugal, rather than remain in the UK, shaped how people treated her. She chose to move to Portugal; it wasn't her only option. She perceived that being an English speaker also contributed to her positive reception.

By contrast, Hispanic Latin American migrant women who arrived in Porto speaking little or no Portuguese generally described more positive interactions, demonstrating how translocational positionality produces different experiences. Alma, a Peruvian woman who had recently moved to Portugal, acknowledged the need to study Portuguese but found locals to be patient and understanding when she spoke Spanish (Interview, 02 May 2023, Porto). Maria, a Mexican stay-at-home mother whose husband was transferred to Germany and then to Portugal for work, reported that when she attempted to communicate in a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese, people often asked whether she was from Spain. They responded with curiosity and

kindness after learning she was from Mexico (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Likewise, Ernestina, an Argentine stay-at-home mother who hadn't studied Portuguese, remarked, "*I throw in some Portuguese words, but I can't form full sentences. Still, people here are very willing to help you just have to speak more slowly, or they'll switch to Spanish. It's impressive.*" She also added that when people asked where she was from, they often commented on "*Messi, Maradona and the Pope*" and seemed receptive to Argentines. She stated that she did not feel that the reception in Spain would be so open, as she had heard there were too many Argentines moving there (Interview, 04 May 2023, Porto).

While these contrasting experiences highlight the different receptions Brazilian and Hispanic Latin American migrant women face regarding language, it's also important to note that the latter group did not work in high-level professional environments. Jessica, a Venezuelan entrepreneur who founded a tech company in Portugal, emphasized that while Spanish-speaking migrants who learn informally could manage daily interactions without formal language proficiency, it was difficult to fully integrate into society or access higher-level professional opportunities (Interview, 20 April 2023, Porto). Thus, while Hispanic migrant women interviewed in the study may not be subjected to the same linguistic microaggressions as Brazilian women, they might still face exclusion in more advanced social and economic spheres. Moreover, the ways linguistic discrimination and colonial attitudes intersect with gender and other social positions in my study suggest that female migrants experience these dynamics in distinctive ways.

Colonial Bodies: Xenophobia and Sexualization

While xenophobia linked to colonial histories and linguistic hierarchies affects migrants of all genders, my analysis shows that women encountered distinct forms of gendered exclusion,

particularly through sexualization and hypersexualization. These dynamics were especially pronounced for Brazilian women, indicating how national identity, colonial legacies, and gender intersect to produce differentiated and intensified forms of marginalization compared to Hispanic Latin American women.

Tala, a Brazilian woman who ran a migrant women's online platform, highlighted these dynamics, explaining: *"But, for example, I have friends who live in Spain who say that Brazilians there are treated less badly than here, that there is no such thing as colonialism, because Spain wasn't the main country that colonized Brazil. What there is in Spain, from what they tell me, is this kind of similar relationship that we have here with Brazilian women, this violence, with Latin American women from countries that were colonized by Spain. These are women who are seen as colonizing bodies, so there's a different relationship - it's not something exclusive to Portugal, but when it comes to Portugal, in fact, with Brazilian women, I see that there's a difference in the relationship because of this problem"* (Interview, 11 May 2023, Porto). Her comments align with literature on body politics and colonialism (e.g., França, 2021; Lopes Heimer, 2023), highlighting how these issues impact migrant women. More specifically, her remarks connect to scholarship on how colonial legacies continue to shape social hierarchies in Iberia, particularly for migrants from former colonies, despite shared cultural and linguistic ties (see Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2018). A Venezuelan entrepreneur, Jessica, shared a similar perspective, stating: *"Portugal sees us [Hispanic migrants] as children of Spain, and you never treat the children of others the same way you treat your own"* (Interview, 20 April 2023, Porto).

Brazilian women in Portugal have long been subjected to stereotypical media portrayals, which were further sensationalized by migratory movements of the 1990s and early 2000s and the backlash that followed (Gomes, 2018; França & Oliveira, 2021). A striking example of this

was the formation of *Mães de Bragança* (Mothers of Bragança), a group that mobilized to expel Brazilian sex workers from the town (França & Oliveira, 2021). This period reinforced public and media narratives depicting Brazilian women as migrating to Portugal to engage in sex work, steal Portuguese husbands, or disrupt families. Stefany, one of the interviewees, reflected on these events, questioning why the focus on these events reproduced stereotypes rather than investigating issues of sexual exploitation and trafficking. She also recounted an experience at her university, where a professor claimed that Portuguese people are prejudiced against Brazilian women based on this historical episode. However, she argued that such a simplistic perspective overlooks deeper, long-standing structural factors shaping the treatment of Brazilian women in Portugal. Hearing this viewpoint within an academic environment, especially from a pro-migrant professor, made her concerned about how such narratives could normalize and reinforce both sexualization and xenophobia (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto).

Several Brazilian women I spoke with shared vivid recollections of their experiences of sexualization and hypersexualization across multiple social contexts. Bella, a Brazilian entrepreneur who moved to Portugal for her master's degree, encountered this in public spaces, the workplace, and while dating. While working as a waitress, she recalled having customers ask how much she cost and suggest they find a hotel room, having assumed she was a sex worker. Before moving to Porto, she had lived in a smaller town, where she felt xenophobia was expressed more openly. As a Black woman, she also found that dating in Portugal, particularly through online platforms, came with many forward and sexualized assumptions. Men frequently suggested having sex on the first date, which contrasted with what her Portuguese friends told her. She had been stunned to learn that, in their experience, such conversations typically did not occur until several dates in (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto). Karol, a Brazilian single mother

working in education, also faced troubling experiences of xenophobia while living in Portugal. She recalled a dental appointment, in the opening quote, where the dentist spent the entire session speaking in a sexualized tone about the beauty and grace of Brazilian women's bodies. She said he stopped only after asking whether she was married. At the time, she was still married, so she answered yes; she said she would have said so anyway as a deterrent, given her discomfort and sense of insecurity (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). These experiences show that xenophobia toward Brazilian women often operates through racialized and gendered sexualization rather than isolated incidents. Brazilian nationality, blackness, and femininity become merged into stigmatizing assumptions that travel across workplaces, healthcare, and intimate spaces. This undermines women's wellbeing and sense of belonging, while requiring ongoing emotional and strategic labour to navigate everyday life.

Some women described pervasive everyday experiences that were less shocking but still impactful. For instance, Lisa, a Brazilian migrant working in Portugal who hopes to complete her studies one day, reported that she often felt uncomfortable in public spaces, such as cafés, where older men stared at her in ways that made her feel undressed by their gaze. Some have even made comments about her body or Brazilian women's figures in general (Interview, 19 June 2023, Porto). Many women, including Lisa, mentioned that since moving to Portugal, they consciously adjusted their wardrobe choices as a form of negotiating sexualized attention through strategic self-presentation, and some women realized that they began to do so unconsciously. They opted for plainer, darker clothing rather than the vibrant, colourful styles they had previously worn. Some limited revealing outfits to summer days or avoided them altogether. Juliana, a Brazilian woman who managed an online platform for migrant women, highlighted how clothing plays a significant role in these experiences. She noted, "*This issue of*

sexualization comes up a lot in the cases we receive, especially in the height of summer. It's not just Brazilian women, but we tend to wear shorter, more low-cut clothes, and that increases exposure" (Interview, 13 February 2023, Porto). A Brazilian psychologist, Laura, reflected on the shame and frustration of having experienced both xenophobia and harassment in public, more so as a black Brazilian woman. She shared that people made inappropriate comments or even attempted to touch her, which led her to avoid certain types of clothing unless she was accompanied by her husband (Interview, 30 March 2023, Porto). These wardrobe adjustments represent embodied negotiations with sexualized attention, in which women balance self-expression with safety. Such adaptations align with broader patterns scholars have identified: when confronted with xenophobia and sexualization, migrants often adopt strategies that downplay identity differences or limit public visibility to prevent confrontation. Pugh (2018) conceptualizes such strategies as the "invisibility bargain," whereby migrants contribute economically while consciously limiting their social and political visibility. These embodied negotiations show how gendered xenophobia becomes internalized through everyday self-regulation. They also shift responsibility for safety onto women themselves, while leaving the structural conditions that produce harassment largely unchallenged.

While some women found themselves navigating clothing choices in ways they never had to before, others deliberately resisted this pressure by wearing what they wanted. Bella, who initially lived in a smaller town before moving to Porto, had noticed she was adapting her wardrobe but eventually decided to reclaim her style. She recalled, "*That was when I was like, Okay, I'm done being basic. It was killing me, I was just killing myself, okay. It's gone. I don't live in Guimarães anymore, I don't have old men staring at me*" (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto). She felt Porto's more diverse inner-city environment allowed her greater freedom of self-

expression than smaller cities, demonstrating how spatial context influences negotiation strategies. However, she also made a point to respond to xenophobic comments or actions when they arose, resisting by calling people out on their harmful behaviour with a joke or pointed comment. Even when detailing her experiences with xenophobia, Bella acknowledged that her EU citizenship, education, and tech employment provided relative privilege and positioned her differently, even as a Black woman.

However, not all the Brazilian women I spoke to experienced sexualization. Some women told me that they themselves had not had such encounters, but that they were aware from friends and/or online groups or social media accounts that other Brazilian women frequently suffered from these issues. Indeed, a few women reported that, because they were older/married/worked from home, they didn't have these experiences. For example, a self-employed entrepreneur from Brazil, Ana, said, *"I believe it happens a lot. I don't experience it much because I'm married, I'm older, so it's different from a young person, who goes out, you know, who's single, it's different. You're more exposed, right? But, I believe that it happens, there's still a lot of sexualization of Brazilian women, as an object"* (Interview, 15 June 2023, Porto).

I also spoke with women who did not feel like they experienced xenophobia or racialization for being a Brazilian woman but then revealed encounters that begged to differ. For example, Silvia, a UK citizen and mother who worked in health care, was mentioned above and said she felt generally positive about her experience living in Portugal. She said she preferred it to the UK, where she had previously lived with her boyfriend. Her main complaint was with the lower salary she earned in Portugal. Yet after a moment's consideration, she then brought up how a "creepy" fisherman began regularly following her around the beach near her home and asked if

she was Brazilian. She revealed that one time afterwards, he followed her all the way to her house, and she became so uncomfortable because she did not want him to know where she lived. She then began having her boyfriend pick her up in the car when she went to the beach alone (Interview, 05 May 2023, Porto). Rather than indicating the absence of xenophobia, Silvia's narrative shows how such encounters can become normalized or remain initially unrecognized until participants are prompted to reflect on them more directly, even as they influence mobility, spatial practices, and feelings of security.

Luisa, a Brazilian psychologist who worked with migrant-positioned women, explained that she had to teach middle-class, whiter Brazilian women from positions of relative privilege that they were being racialized as Brazilians in Portugal. With limited prior experience of marginalization, these women often failed to recognize this phenomenon, instead blaming themselves or believing they had done something to provoke negative treatment, or remaining in denial about what was happening (Interview, 30 March 2023, Porto). She recounted that experiences of racialization proved especially bewildering for women from more privileged backgrounds who had previously lived abroad in other countries, where they had not faced comparable levels of xenophobia. Indeed, several women in my interviews also raised this point. This initial unawareness of racialization illustrates how migrant-positioned women can shift from relative privilege to marginalization when moving across different contexts, a dynamic also documented in studies of Brazilian migration (Araújo, 2013; França & Oliveira, 2021), and which emerged clearly in my interviews.

None of the Hispanic women I spoke to disclosed experiencing such sexualization in public spheres; however, some deal with sexualization while dating in Portugal. Sara, a psychologist from Ecuador, when discussing her experiences dating in Portugal, felt that

Portuguese men treated her differently for being foreign and Latin American, assuming they might get further with her [sexually] than they would with Portuguese women. She spoke about how it seemed like Portuguese males, particularly, targeted intoxicated foreign women in the bars, and she had heard many stories from her foreign friends and acquaintances. A few of the Hispanic women I spoke with also mentioned that Portugal has a more “macho” culture than they had expected. Indeed, Sara commented on how she expected she would leave “machismo” culture behind her when she moved, yet she found that in her job as a therapist, she treated a lot of [Portuguese] women suffering from domestic abuse (Interview, 24 May 2023, Porto).

However, many of the Hispanic participants expressed awareness that Brazilian women faced widespread xenophobia and, in particular, sexualization and hyper-sexualization. Additionally, numerous employees or representatives of migrant-serving organizations, including local, national and governmental organizations, expressed awareness and concern about the distinct xenophobia that Brazilian women encountered in Portugal. For example, a representative from *Alto Comissariado para as Migrações* (ACM, the National High Commission for Migration) reported that Brazilian women are the most disadvantaged group in the migrant population, facing prejudice and objectification based on intersectional factors. She shared details about government initiatives to improve issues such as gender equality, gender-based violence and discrimination (Interview, 20 January 2023, Lisbon).

Xenophobia in Public Spheres

The following section first situates everyday xenophobia within broader debates on social exclusion and then traces how the women interviewed navigated these encounters in workplaces, public spaces, and institutions. Xenophobia in public spaces shapes many aspects of migrant women's daily lives, creating obstacles to finding housing, feeling safe, and participating fully in

urban life. The rental market is a clear example of how these challenges play out. Housing costs increased rapidly in Portugal following the COVID-19 pandemic, yet Brazilians and people of colour face additional discriminatory barriers when seeking accommodation (Costa, 2025).

During interviews, multiple NGOs raised concerns about migrants' access to housing. For example, a representative of an international NGO with an office in Porto, JRS or Jesuit Refugee Service, brought up how migrants would chat to potential landlords on online platforms to inquire about rental units, but upon hearing their accent on a phone call or meeting them in person and seeing that they were black or of color, then the landlord would suddenly tell them the unit was unavailable (Interview, 30 November 2023, Porto). Accordingly, through her work with a Brazilian migrant women's platform, Juliana had observed numerous instances in which Brazilian women were denied rental housing because their accents or appearance signalled their nationality, with some ending up in precarious housing conditions (Interview, 13 February 2023, Porto). An NGO representative from Caritas in Porto noted that migrants had sought their help after being turned down for numerous rentals, overcharged on rent, or asked to pay, for example, six months' advance rent (Interview, 03 March 2023, Porto). Natalia, a Brazilian single mother who worked online for an EU tech company, reported that she believed her landlord disliked her because of her Brazilian background; however, she said her feelings were ambiguous. She believed it was because she was a woman, and perhaps the landlord was concerned that she would struggle to afford the rent as a divorced mother, although her income documents indicated she could afford it (Interview, 14 July 2023, Porto). However, acknowledging her positionality, Natalia noted that, as she worked remotely for a European Tech company and held EU citizenship, she felt largely shielded from uncomfortable situations that she knew affected other Brazilian women.

Claudia, a Brazilian entrepreneur and single mother, arrived in Porto late at night with her young son and their belongings, only to realize she had been scammed: the apartment she had secured online and prepaid months in advance did not exist. She said that her Uber driver responded kindly when he saw what had unfolded and connected her with an Airbnb host that he knew so that she and her child could stay the night there. The Airbnb owner then offered to rent to her long-term, for which she felt extremely fortunate given her single-mother status and having already been scammed of thousands of dollars (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). Rental scams have become increasingly common in Portugal (False rental scams warning, 2025). Scammers prey particularly on migrants, many of whom don't know the system, may be desperate for accommodation amid a housing crisis, or require rental contracts to meet visa requirements or for regularization (Donaldson, 2024).

Some migrant-positioned women in my study faced disturbing attacks in public spaces. Claudia's arrival in Portugal marked the beginning of her challenges. In addition to struggling with family reunification, which left her in a precarious legal situation, she frequently encountered microaggressions. Civil service officials told her to "*go back to your country*," and she was publicly insulted while seeking updates on her legal situation. At her local butcher shop, staff either ignored her or asked her to wait because she was Brazilian. Her neighbours initially viewed her with suspicion, assuming she was a prostitute. Her consistent presence became an everyday form of negotiation that gradually challenged exclusionary practices. One time, while sitting in a café, the owner accused her of coming to Portugal to steal a husband. Claudia confronted the woman angrily, questioning how she could make such an assumption. Claudia asked her if she truly had an idea how difficult it was for immigrants to decide to move their entire life, let alone face discrimination after doing so. Interestingly, this confrontation led the

owner to later form a friendship with Claudia and to view newcomers with greater openness. However, Claudia noted that she had to constantly fight for respect, either by standing up for herself or simply by being persistent to resist xenophobia. She also recounted an incident in which she and two other Brazilian mothers were accused of stealing a ball from an interactive game at a science center. After checking their children's clothing, in case one of the young children had accidentally placed it in their pocket, they realized none of the children had taken it. The staff member escalated the situation, loudly yelling at and accusing them in front of other visitors until the police arrived and ultimately found the ball stuck in a machine. Claudia recounted the incident with anger and sadness, stating that the women were publicly humiliated over a trivial matter simply because they were Brazilian (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto).

In another example, Karol was verbally attacked by an elderly man at a public swimming pool. He viciously screamed at her and her young daughter and berated them for being Brazilian and for living in Portugal, and Karol feared he would physically attack them. She called the police, but no witnesses were nearby to corroborate her account, and the police took no action against the man. The incident traumatized her, and she sought support online and through therapy, through formal institutions (police, later through the legal system) and more informal community support. The attack, which was the culmination of several negative xenophobic experiences, left her feeling unsafe in Portugal. At our interview, she stated that she had begun the logistical process for her and her daughter to move back to Brazil, negotiating xenophobia by leaving. She explained that she had previously lived in Colombia, Canada, and Angola, having moved for her ex-husband's work, and that, even though she was not fluent in Spanish or English upon arrival in those countries, she had never experienced visible xenophobia. The incident left a lasting impact. Her daughter occasionally recalled when "*the bad old man spoke to us,*" but also

reminded Karol how she had protected her. Though distressed by her daughter's trauma, Karol felt glad she had defended her and taught her that the man's behaviour was wrong and xenophobic (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). These experiences show how xenophobia can extend beyond microaggressions to open hostility, profoundly affecting women's sense of safety and belonging. Karol's response, including seeking formal and informal support, reflecting on her prior experiences abroad, and considering leaving Portugal, illustrates the strategic negotiation women undertake in the face of extreme xenophobia. Her story also highlights the intergenerational impact, as women navigate not only their own well-being but also the safety and emotional security of their children. Overall, these incidents reveal how structural vulnerabilities, social biases, and gendered expectations intersect. Navigating these challenges requires sustained emotional labour and strategic action to maintain access to public and community spaces.

The Hispanic women I interviewed reported fewer experiences of xenophobia in public spaces. However, some still faced discrimination, particularly in contexts where specific identity factors might have shaped their experiences. Jessica, a Venezuelan tech entrepreneur who identifies as *morena* due to her darker skin tone and racialized identity, experienced racism in Portugal, with the most distressing incidents coming from her own in-laws' comments and behaviours towards her as their son's *morena* wife, whom they felt obliged to accept. While awaiting her family reunification documentation after marrying their son, a Portuguese national, she was unable to work and had little choice but to remain in their home despite the unwelcoming attitudes and discriminatory behaviours they directed toward her (Interview, 20 April 2023, Porto). Nayita, a Venezuelan artist of Afro-Caribbean background, noticed that Portuguese men sometimes treated her with less respect. When selling items online, she found

that male buyers often sent her rude messages and demanded price reductions. However, when she began using her partner's account, bearing his name and photo and depicting him as a white European male, the behaviour stopped, so she continued to use it to avoid further disrespectful treatment (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto).

Xenophobia in the Workplace

Gendered xenophobia is prevalent in workplace environments, where the migrant women in the study often faced exclusion, were undervalued, and experienced both gendered and sexualized treatment. Several Brazilian women I interviewed spoke strongly about these challenges. Karol, the Brazilian single mother who experienced the violent public encounter above, worked in education. She described being the only Brazilian and immigrant in the schools where she taught. She sensed distrust from colleagues and felt immense pressure to prove herself, whereas Portuguese staff received automatic respect. She reported that this constant need to validate her abilities was exhausting and well above her teaching workload. She also shared that her daughter attended a private Montessori school and felt she was "*paying for her protection*" from xenophobia since she was not confident about how Brazilian students were treated in the public education system (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). This represents institutional negotiation where women reshape their service engagement to protect against xenophobia. Indeed, the opening quote also highlights how she negotiated in this manner, as she said she would only select female health care providers after experiencing hypersexualization from a male dentist. These examples show that negotiation extends beyond the workplace into everyday life. Migrant-positioned women adjust their choices, from schooling to health care, to manage gendered xenophobia, revealing how personal, professional, and institutional spheres are interconnected in the strategies they use to maintain safety and dignity.

In another example, Carolina moved to Portugal for her master's degree, later returned to Brazil for work, and then returned to marry her Portuguese husband. She struggled to find employment in her field, suspecting that her nationality played a role. While working in a temporary job issuing parking tickets, she encountered hostility from the public, including individuals who chased her after hearing her Brazilian accent. She eventually secured a management role in a male-dominated factory, where she was the only woman, let alone the only Brazilian, on a production floor of 40 men. There, she encountered frequent microaggressions, including surprise at her efficiency (implying Brazilians are lazy), remarks suggesting she should be grateful for her Portuguese salary (which was barely above minimum wage and less than she earned in Brazil), and comments about Brazilian women's beauty. On one occasion, when she expressed frustration at a remark, a colleague told her she "*couldn't be a real Brazilian woman because she wasn't smiling.*" As she became more assertive at work, Carolina questioned these stereotypes, noting that in Brazil she had observed a stronger work ethic and earned a higher salary. She was awaiting admission to a doctoral program; if not accepted, she and her Portuguese husband planned to move to Brazil, where they expected higher pay and an escape from xenophobia (Interview, 22 June 2023, Porto). Her continued presence, increased assertiveness, and potential exit plan collectively demonstrate her negotiation strategy, ranging from maintaining her presence to potentially departing.

Migrant-positioned women also reported encountering xenophobia in academic settings. While Brazilian music, cuisine, and soap operas are popular in Portugal, other cultural aspects and intellectual contributions may not be well perceived. Stefany, a graduate student in a program related to social justice, noted that her curriculum focused primarily on Global North scholarship, with Brazilian research and journals often dismissed. She and other Brazilian

students also felt that their ideas were poorly received when organizing academic events and projects (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Although she did not study in Portugal, Anita observed what she described as "*intellectual snobbery*" toward Brazilians. She was surprised to find that Portuguese bookstores did not carry Brazilian children's books she had enjoyed in her childhood, with one store owner explaining that stores did not secure the copyrights for Brazilian children's books because there was simply no demand for them. Anita found the scenario unusual, noting that UK bookstores would still stock children's books from other English-speaking countries. She also noted that her British husband, who operated their tech startup and worked from a co-working space, frequently overheard Portuguese colleagues making belittling remarks about Brazilians. When one dismissed the quality of Brazilian universities, her husband pointed out that some of these universities rank higher than their Portuguese counterparts. She explained that, in their company's hiring process, they struggled to afford Brazilian programmers due to their competitive salaries and high demand; yet the Portuguese applicants they received often lacked comparable experience and qualifications (Interview, 12 May 2023, Porto). As Raghuram (2021) argues, ideas of "skill" reflect imperial legacies that privilege Global North standards while devaluing knowledge associated with the Global South, often racializing migrants as "low-skilled" despite their qualifications and experience. These hierarchies reproduce unequal forms of mobility and recognition in the present. Several Brazilian women who pursued master's degrees in Portugal, such as Bella, had already completed graduate studies in Brazil and found those programs more rigorous; therefore, they were surprised by the negative opinions some Portuguese students held about Brazilian institutions (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto).

Not all women I spoke with encountered xenophobia in academic environments in Portugal. Some Brazilian women, particularly those in international English-language programs, such as Valentina, did not recall specific experiences of xenophobia during their studies. For her, xenophobia became more apparent upon entering the labour market, which was more difficult than she expected. After being unable to find work in her field, she accepted an office job at a car dealership, where she encountered a male colleague who appeared to hold a grudge against her for being a woman, specifically a Brazilian woman (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto).

The Hispanic women in the study who did report xenophobia were often those in public-facing jobs. Some women reported feeling excluded from the Portuguese labour market. Clara, an Argentine artist, entrepreneur, and mother, felt excluded by Portuguese clients, stating that none would hire her. She could only find photography work through Spanish- and English-speaking clients (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). She felt fortunate to be an English speaker, as her language skills enabled her to expand her network for inclusion and sustain her business. Margarita, a mother and lawyer, was born to Portuguese immigrants in Venezuela and, with her husband and children, relocated to Porto amid the ongoing crisis. Despite having been raised speaking fluent Portuguese, she was always “othered” by Portuguese people because of her accent and background, and she experienced social exclusion that she had not anticipated. She found herself working long hours in a restaurant and later as a nanny; however, she eventually completed the accreditation process for her law degree and had recently begun practicing. Nevertheless, she still felt excluded and found the process of building a practice very slow. In the meantime, she worked providing legal support to a migrant-serving organization, where she enjoyed applying her skills (Interview, 20 June 2023, Porto). Both Clara’s and Margarita’s experiences illustrate how xenophobia in professional contexts forces Hispanic migrant women

to adapt their strategies to survive and advance within exclusionary labour markets. Their negotiations show that access to work is not only about qualifications or skills but also about navigating social perceptions, language barriers, and cultural assumptions. Language ability, social networks, and professional flexibility became crucial tools for inclusion, while exclusionary practices reinforced the need for continuous adaptation and resilience. These strategies reveal the relational and situational nature of belonging in professional spaces, highlighting how women actively create opportunities for themselves even within constrained environments.

Some Hispanic women also experienced being reduced due to their status as migrant women. A performing artist and Afro-Caribbean woman from Venezuela, Nayita, remarked that at times, she experienced Portuguese men treating her arrogantly or talking down to her. She gave an example in which a male crew member at the venue where she was scheduled to perform spoke to her disrespectfully, prompting her to assert herself. Nayita also had to undergo regularization and dealt with bosses in service jobs taking advantage of her situation to essentially have her “*try out*” a job and work for free, or by lying and claiming they would provide her with a work contract as required for the regularization process, but then after several months refused to do so (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto). Her experience aligns with how migrant status may affect gendered migrants. Indeed, according to Anastasiadou and co-authors in their conclusion of a major systematic literature review, "evidence from the migration literature supports the assumption that migrant women experience a double burden of discrimination in the destination country labor market based on their gender and their migration status" (2024, p. 961, para 1). Similarly, according to Pugh's (2018) research, “class and gender also channel how discrimination is experienced and to what types of vulnerabilities migrants are

exposed” (p. 2, para 4), revealing how intersecting social positions create vastly different workplace experiences. In Nayita’s case, legal vulnerability additionally shaped her exposure to workplace xenophobia.

Most of the Hispanic women I spoke with did not report any instances of xenophobia in the workplace. However, these women generally fell into two groups: those who were out of the workforce and migrating with a spouse who held a work visa or was seeking work in Portugal, and those who were self-employed or worked remotely. This highlights how positionality and power dynamics influenced exposure to xenophobia. For example, Julia and her sister, both from Mexico, worked remotely for a call center. While their salaries were low, their home-based work environment limited their interaction with workplace hierarchies (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). A few of the Hispanic women I spoke with were pursuing doctoral degrees in Portugal or working in remote, higher-tier jobs that also required English proficiency, thereby intertwining social and class positioning factors. Eva, originally from Peru but raised in Miami, was a PhD student in Porto studying in English (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto). Paz, from Colombia, arrived with her boyfriend as a remote tech worker and worked in English (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Paulina, also from Colombia, entered Portugal on the new Jobseeker visa. This visa, which allowed four months for job searching, enabled her to secure a well-paid position in the business sector that required proficiency in Spanish and English, a role she likely would not have been considered for if she were undergoing regularization (Interview, 27 June 2023, Porto).

Community Building as Resistance: Claiming Online Spaces

The previous sections documented how translocationality shaped migrant-positioned women's differentiated experiences of xenophobia across multiple domains. This final section examines the infrastructure that enables their negotiations with these exclusions: relational

solidarities. The xenophobic encounters described above demonstrate persistent challenges, yet they also reveal how women leverage informal networks and digital infrastructures to forge connections, share resources, and collectively resist marginalization. Moving from experiences of exclusion to practices of solidarity, this section examines how the Latin American migrant women in Portugal developed and sustained these crucial support systems.

The literature shows that Latin American migrant women in Portugal rely on digital platforms throughout their migration journeys, using these spaces to counteract xenophobia and foster networks of support and solidarity (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021; Lamartine & Torres da Silva, 2022). For example, research conducted by Lamartine and Torres da Silva demonstrates how migrant women engage in digital activism to counter these layers of oppression, aligning with critical migration studies literature that conceives of the migrant body as a site of privilege and power contestation (2022). This section explores how social media groups, messaging apps, and online platforms serve as vital tools in resisting xenophobia and marginalization.

While Latin American migrant women use social media for everyday communication and entertainment, their engagement is distinguished by its migration-specific affordances. Participants in my study followed and engaged with accounts on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, participated in group discussions, and communicated through messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Many groups catered to national or linguistic communities, such as Brazilian or Hispanic women in Portugal, while remaining open to other migrants who spoke Portuguese or Spanish. Some participants, proficient in English or other languages, extended their engagement to English-language platforms and groups, further broadening their networks.

From a translocational perspective, these digital practices enable the women to navigate multiple social and geographic contexts simultaneously. Language skills were central to this process, allowing participants to move across digital spaces, access varied sources of information, and build connections beyond linguistically bounded communities. These capacities were further shaped by factors such as digital literacy, educational background, and access to social and economic resources, which influenced how participants navigated platforms, evaluated information, and engaged with transnational networks. These platforms, therefore, function not only as sites of communication but as tools through which migrant women negotiate belonging, access resources, and manage their migration trajectories across borders, exercising agency within transnational networks. These interconnected processes of navigation, information-sharing, and community-building were reflected in participants' everyday digital practices, which ranged from mutual support and informal guidance to more organized forms of assistance for other migrant women.

Solidarity in Online Spaces

These digital spaces provide social and emotional support while acting as sites of empowerment, allowing migrant women to reclaim their narratives and challenge stereotypes and intersecting oppressions (e.g., França et al., 2021; Lamartine & Torres da Silva, 2022). Through online communities, they created safe spaces and engaged in relational solidarities, sharing experiences, exchanging resources, and collectively coping with both the tangible challenges and emotional toll of xenophobia. Two notable digital initiatives led by Brazilian migrant women in Portugal, *Plataforma Geni* and *Brasileiras Não Se Calam* (Brazilian Women Don't Stay Quiet), actively counter xenophobia. Although based in Lisbon or elsewhere in the country, Porto and Northern Portugal are included in their reach. *Plataforma Geni* focuses on

gender equality and social justice, offering resources, events, and community programs through Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp subgroups. *Brasileiras Não Se Calam* centers on empowering migrant women by sharing news, personal testimonies, and connections to vital resources. These platforms challenge xenophobic narratives, amplify migrant women's voices in digital spaces, and encourage visibility in public life.

Several women I spoke with relied on these platforms when facing significant challenges. After experiencing a xenophobic attack in public, Karol sought support from *Brasileiras Não Se Calam*, where she found solidarity, psychological resources, and legal guidance to act (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). Her crisis response demonstrates multilevel negotiation, simultaneously engaging formal institutions (police and the legal system) and informal solidarities (online platforms). Administrators from both initiatives encouraged women to report xenophobic incidents, emphasizing that, although reporting may seem futile or slow, it is essential for data collection, legal proceedings, and policy advocacy. As Juliana explained, without reports, there would be no evidence to drive systemic change (Interview, 13 February 2023, Porto).

Many of the migrant women I interviewed resisted and negotiated xenophobia through acts of mutual support as well as community activism. Some of the participants studied themes related to migration, gender, and colonialism and drew on their experiences and knowledge to raise awareness. A few of them were psychologists who supported other migrant-positioned women through research and therapy and maintained an online presence to support and inform other migrant women. Stefany, a Brazilian graduate student, was a member of a collective of Brazilian women researchers and activists. They conducted research on themes related to migrant women, xenophobia, and gender, and they also participated in public festivals and community events to present their activist work (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Stefany's

graduate school experiences, in which Brazilian research was dismissed, and students were required to write in European Portuguese, exemplify how she learned to negotiate academic xenophobia through collective organizing. Her participation in a Brazilian women's research collective represents a strategic response that transformed individual marginalization into collaborative resistance; the women in the collective conducted research on xenophobia and gender in their own voices and presented their findings at public events. Stefany's experience highlights how collective action and mutual support can transform experiences of exclusion into sites of agency and empowerment. By creating spaces where their knowledge and experiences are validated, the women in the collective not only resist xenophobia but also construct alternative forms of belonging and influence public discourse. These practices show that negotiation is not only about survival within constraining systems but also about actively reshaping those systems through collaboration, visibility, and strategic engagement with broader communities.

Several of the migrant women I interviewed used social media platforms to engage in volunteer work as an act of mutual support and care, demonstrating how women across professions and circumstances created digital presences to support and inform other migrant women. Juliana, a representative of a Brazilian migrant women's platform, noted that, beyond sharing information and resources, women in these online spaces often provided material support during crises. She had witnessed Brazilian women, strangers to each other, offer emergency shelter to those in need (Interview, 13 February 2023, Porto). Claudia, a Brazilian single mother who had faced xenophobia and the challenges of raising a child alone, actively participated in chat groups in both Portuguese and English. When she learned of a newcomer mother in need, she mobilized resources by collecting and delivering donated clothing and children's items

around Porto (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). Valentina, who struggled to enter the Portuguese labour market despite earning her graduate degree in Portugal, dedicated herself to supporting other migrants. She had previously volunteered formally with various NGOs, including Caritas and JRS. She also collaborated with the project ENFEM (Female TCNs Integration in Local Communities through Employability and Entrepreneurship Local Oriented Strategies) to support the integration of migrant-positioned women into the labour market. Her role included assisting at events, but she also focused on enabling migrant-positioned women to network not only with one another and with civil society members, but also with larger companies that offer “working days” so migrants could learn about job opportunities there and build connections. She helped migrant-positioned women improve their professional social media presence, for example, on LinkedIn. She established a Portuguese-language social media channel that shared information and resources on migration, education, and employment in Portugal. She also featured special speakers to share insights and expand migrant-positioned women's networks (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto).

I did not come across any activist groups specifically for Hispanic migrant women. Instead, the online communities I identified, primarily Facebook and WhatsApp groups, were more focused on community building than on activism. This may reflect the smaller size of the Hispanic migrant population in Portugal, around 3.7% of the foreign population at the time of my study (AIMA, 2025), compared with Brazilians (31.4%) and the more recent growth of migration from Hispanic Latin America. By contrast, Brazilians are a much larger and more visible migrant group. Linguistic barriers and cultural nuance may make some Hispanic migrant women less likely to notice or report subtle forms of xenophobia, which could help explain why fewer activist initiatives have emerged in these communities. Nonetheless, this does not mean

Hispanic migrant women do not experience xenophobia, as discussed in the previous section; rather, its prevalence and visibility are shaped by intersectional factors such as race, class, language, and social networks.

Volunteerism was present in Spanish-language online spaces. Sara, a Colombian tech worker, created a social media channel to share information and resources for migrant women in Porto and to advise those considering migration to seek legal pathways, such as the Jobseeker visa, to avoid precarious situations. In addition, she volunteered in person with a Hispanic community organization (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Talia, an Argentine psychologist who primarily worked with Hispanic migrant women, noted that her clients tended to raise issues of inclusion and rebuilding their lives abroad rather than explicit xenophobia. However, she emphasized that the women she treated have the financial resources to access therapy; she was not privy to experiences from more marginalized Hispanic women (Interview, 27 April 2023, Porto). As such, social location and class positionality are crucial factors to consider.

Where Solidarity Meets Civil Society: Transversal Solidarity

In this section, transversal solidarity refers to forms of solidarity that emerge across social differences and unequal positions rather than from shared identity alone (e.g., Ataç et al., 2021; Dağtaş & Can, 2022; Ilcan et al., 2025b). As Ataç et al. suggest, transversal solidarity brings together actors situated in different social positions while still recognizing difference, asymmetry, and unequal relations. I use the term here to describe efforts by civil society actors, migrant organizations, and other local initiatives to build cross-group alliances around migration, racism, and inclusion in Porto. This is distinct from the migrant-to-migrant relations I emphasize, which are grounded in relational solidarities, referring to everyday, trust-based networks of support among migrant-positioned women.

My interviews in Porto revealed dedicated members of civil society working to support migrant inclusion and rights, as well as initiatives aimed at fostering connections between local and migrant communities. However, addressing xenophobia on a broader scale was a challenge, particularly in the socio-political climate of the time. One initiative, Forum Demos, organized an event to facilitate cross-sector dialogue, at which some Portuguese participants openly challenged the prevailing denial of racism and xenophobia in Portugal (Observation, June 2023, Porto). Engaged citizens raised their concerns and promoted space for solidarity and horizontal dialogue.

There is significant potential for stronger collaboration between local and migrant women's groups in shared projects and initiatives. The EU-funded ENFEM Portugal project, for instance, worked to build connections between civil society, migrant organizations, students, and the private sector while supporting migrant women's integration into the labour market. In 2024, MIGAP (*Migração no Porto* or Migration in Porto Project) was launched by academics and civil society members committed to understanding migration dynamics in Porto. The project established partnerships with migrant communities and service organizations and addressed gaps in migration data resulting from limited research focus and outdated government statistics, stemming from institutional shifts in Portugal's migration oversight.

Supporting and expanding these initiatives helps foster practical and inclusive forms of solidarity across diverse social positions. However, this form of solidarity, in which diverse actors collaborate across social positions (Ataç et al., 2021), is not without its complexities. Stefany, a representative of a research collective of Brazilian migrant women, highlighted the challenges of establishing genuinely horizontal relationships with Portuguese activist groups. While seeking collaboration, they encountered limitations: the specific intersectional experiences

of Brazilian migrant women extended beyond the scope of feminist or anti-racist organizations (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Their experience underscores the need for inclusive, nuanced approaches to solidarity that acknowledge the distinct needs, priorities, and constraints of different groups while enabling meaningful collaboration across social positions.

Drawing on interviews and scholarly literature, this section examined how Latin American migrant women in my study used digital spaces to navigate xenophobia and foster belonging in Porto. As other studies have emphasized (e.g., Dağtaş & Can, 2022), people can challenge exclusion through networks, collaboration, and community building. Positionality plays a key role in shaping how migrant women experience and respond to xenophobia. As my study focused on Latin American women, it did not account for the experiences of those who did not speak Portuguese or Spanish (and, in some cases, English) or for how language affects access to digital platforms and networks. Migrant-positioned women in Portugal who lacked a strong diaspora community might have had limited access to these “mobile commons,” particularly if they were not proficient in Portuguese. All participants in this study had access to mobile phones, ICT, and the digital literacy needed to engage with social media. This highlights a key limitation: research on the intersection of gender, migration, and ICT must consider who is included and excluded (e.g., Angulo-Pasel, 2018). Because recruitment relied in part on online groups and digital platforms, women without access to these technologies or who did not participate in these spaces were not represented. Consequently, the analysis primarily reflects the experiences of women who can navigate both online and offline networks, potentially overlooking the practices of those excluded from digital infrastructures.

Conclusion

My analysis highlights how the Brazilian women in Portugal reported more frequent and pronounced experiences of xenophobia, particularly hypersexualization, compared to Hispanic Latin American women in the study. However, their exposure to discrimination is shaped by multiple intersecting factors, including nationality, gender, class, race, family status, and social position. Women with greater economic security, remote jobs or self-employed status, or EU citizenship often felt shielded from direct xenophobic encounters; indeed, many expressed their relative privilege. Their experiences underscore how xenophobia is not only a structural issue but also a lived reality that varies across individual circumstances. Many women interviewed demonstrated acute awareness of their relative advantages or disadvantages, offering nuanced understandings of how xenophobia operates as both a daily lived reality and a broader structural issue.

The analysis reveals how translocational positionality shapes not only experiences of xenophobia but also the resources available for resistance and the strategies some women may develop for negotiation. The intersection of colonial histories, linguistic hierarchies, gender stereotypes, and class positioning creates a complex terrain where the same woman might experience privilege in some domains while facing acute marginalization in others. Brazilian women's encounters with sexualization and hypersexualization, rooted in colonial legacies and reinforced through contemporary media representations, demonstrate how historical power relations continue to shape present-day exclusions in specifically gendered ways.

The research showed that relational solidarities emerged as crucial infrastructures that enabled negotiation via both individual survival and collective resistance. These networks operated across digital and physical spaces, creating vital channels for emotional support,

practical assistance, and strategic knowledge-sharing, which also cross over into each other. The digital dimension was particularly significant, as platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram enabled the women interviewed to build community across geographical boundaries while challenging xenophobic narratives through alternative storytelling and greater visibility. However, access to these digital solidarities was unevenly distributed, with language skills, technological literacy, and economic resources shaping who could participate in these supportive networks.

Throughout the experiences documented in this chapter, migrant-positioned women's practices of negotiation reveal the sophisticated agency they exercised, even within conditions of structural constraint. From Bella's decision to reclaim her clothing style in Porto's more diverse environment, to Claudia's persistent confrontations that transformed relationships, to Karol's strategic choice to avoid male healthcare providers, participants employed diverse tactics to protect themselves while asserting their dignity and belonging. These negotiations were neither purely individual nor simply collective but operated across multiple scales, demonstrating how personal survival strategies connected to broader community-building efforts through the relational solidarities described above. However, access to these digital spaces was not universal. Migrant women who did not speak Portuguese or Spanish (or English), or who lacked ICT literacy or access, faced barriers to participation. This highlights an important limitation in the study of migration, xenophobia and ICT: analyzing exclusion is just as important as examining inclusion. Understanding these practices provides crucial insights for developing more effective approaches to challenging xenophobia while supporting the self-determined efforts of migrant women to create lives of dignity and belonging. The persistent creativity and resilience demonstrated by the women in this study offer hope that even as xenophobic exclusions continue

to evolve, so too do the strategies for resistance and the possibilities for building more just and inclusive communities.

These findings demonstrate that translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities can be analyzed as interconnected dimensions. Migrant-positioned women's shifting positionalities shaped both the xenophobic encounters they faced and the solidarity networks they could access. Relational solidarities, operating through digital platforms and in-person connections, provide the crucial infrastructure that enabled migrant-positioned women's constrained yet strategic negotiations with xenophobic exclusion. Relational solidarities function as a gendered and feminist praxis of horizontality, care, and knowledge production through which migrant-positioned women collectively transform individual survival strategies into shared practices of negotiation and resistance. These interconnected processes of exclusion, negotiation, and collective support are embedded within broader regimes of global migration governance that actively shape the conditions under which xenophobia emerges and is sustained across differentiated regimes of mobility, belonging, and exclusion. In this context, relational solidarities transform individual survival strategies into collective resistance practices, revealing how the agency of the women interviewed operates simultaneously at personal and communal scales.

Importantly, the chapter reveals significant potential for transversal solidarities that bridge migrant and local communities. Initiatives such as *ForumDemos*, ENFEM Portugal, and MIGAP demonstrate emerging possibilities for collaboration across differences. However, as Stefany's experience with Brazilian migrant women's research collective illustrates, building truly horizontal relationships requires acknowledging the specific intersectional experiences that may extend beyond the scope of existing feminist or anti-racist organizations. This tension

reflects findings from feminist research on women of colour's activism in Europe, which show that transversal solidarities are often constrained by racialized organizational spaces. Emejulu and Bassel (2025) describe this as “impossible solidarities,” where women of colour are relied on as moral and political actors, yet are not necessarily granted full recognition or belonging.

The women's experiences examined in this chapter reveal that xenophobia was operating as an ongoing layer of exclusion that intersected with bordering processes and belonging struggles throughout migration trajectories. However, through their relational solidarities and negotiation practices, those migrant-positioned women not only survived these encounters but actively worked to transform the conditions of their inclusion. Their agency demonstrates that even within structures of constraint, possibilities for resistance, connection, and transformation persist.

This chapter makes several key contributions to scholarship on critical migration and xenophobia. First, it demonstrates how translocationality created differentiated experiences of xenophobia even among migrant-positioned women from the same region, challenging homogeneous treatments of women from Latin America. Second, it conceptualizes relational solidarities as a crucial infrastructure, not merely support networks, that enabled negotiation of exclusion. Third, it reveals how colonial legacies continued operating through contemporary xenophobia, particularly through linguistic hierarchies and sexualization rooted in Portugal-Brazil colonial relations. Finally, it documents emerging forms of digital resistance specific to the Portuguese context, including platforms such as *Plataforma Geni* and *Brasileiras Não Se Calam*, which have the potential to transform individual experiences of marginalization into collective advocacy.

Looking toward the future, addressing xenophobia on a broader scale remains a challenge, particularly in the current socio-political climate marked by Portugal's shift toward more restrictive migration policies. Yet the practices documented in this chapter suggest that the foundations for more inclusive approaches already exist within migrant women's own organizing efforts and the emerging transversal solidarities that connect diverse communities. Supporting and amplifying these self-determined efforts while working to dismantle the structural conditions that produce xenophobia represents a crucial direction for both scholarship and social change.

This chapter shows how xenophobia functions as everyday social bordering, manifesting across colonial legacies, linguistic hierarchies, and public interactions. Some women counter these exclusions through relational solidarities, digital and physical networks that provide crucial infrastructure for negotiating marginalization and constructing alternative forms of recognition. Chapter 4 examines how these individual and collective negotiations culminate in active practices of belonging that transcend both bureaucratic constraints and social exclusions.

Chapter 4: Belonging

“So it's all very complex, and, if you ask me, 'do you feel that you have a community bond here?' No, I don't. I feel a lot, I feel that I have social, personal relationships, but I don't feel that I belong.” (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto).

-Ni, a woman from Brazil

“I met a mom in Covelo Park, I was new and my son did not have any friends.... and she added me to the WhatsApp group [of international English-speaking moms in Porto] and she was like, feel comfortable to ask whatever you need to ask, ask for doctor to ask schools or nurseries, or whatever; because they all going through the same thing, most of the moms arriving will share from you and other moms arriving as well. So we all share the experience. Moreover, that was something that changed my life a lot.” (Interview, 8 May 2023, Porto).

Claudia, a woman from Brazil, single mother of one.

While the previous chapters examined how a sample of migrant-positioned women navigated external barriers imposed by state institutions and social exclusion, this chapter turns to the generative dimensions of that agency. It examines how negotiations with borders and xenophobia culminate in everyday practices of community-building through which the women in the study actively created belonging. Rather than treating belonging as an outcome of “successful integration,” this chapter shows how belonging is continually made through mundane, relational practices, even in the presence of persistent exclusion.

Drawing on participants' experiences, I understand belonging not merely as the absence of exclusion but as the creation of meaningful connections to people and places, recognized civic participation, and claims to space and rights (e.g., Anthias, 2011; Anthias, 2020; Antonsich, 2010; Ilcan & Squire, 2023; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This builds on Yuval-Davis's (2006) foundational distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging, in which belonging encompasses individuals' different social locations, identifications, and emotional attachments, as well as shared ethical and political value systems that inform the enactment of citizenship through participation. Anthias (2020) develops the concept of translocational belonging as the processual enactment of social positions through everyday spatial practices, extending Yuval-Davis's distinction by highlighting how migrant women navigate intersecting hierarchies through relational micropolitics of connection and access to resources. As Ilcan and Squire (2023) demonstrate, belonging emerges as newcomers navigate everyday challenges through social, cultural, and economic activities. In my study, belonging emerged through the everyday practices and small negotiations through which women actively shaped their lives in a new environment.

The central question guiding this chapter is: How did the translocational positionalities of migrant-positioned women participating in the study shape their experiences of belonging in Porto, and how did they negotiate belonging through relational solidarities? Many participants, even those working locally and speaking Portuguese fluently, did not feel integrated into the local Portuguese community. Instead, their belonging developed through relationships with other migrant women and, to a lesser extent, with locals.

I use the term migrant-positioned women to capture the varied experiences and social positions of women in my study, encompassing diverse self-identifications, from "migrants" to "expats," and legal statuses, from visa holders to EU citizens. This framing highlights how

gender, race, class, nationality, and legal recognition intersect and shape women's lives across contexts. Social class is understood here not only in economic terms but also as intertwined with education, cultural practices, lifestyle, and social networks, thereby influencing both the women's self-perceptions and others' perceptions of them.

Following Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional framework, belonging cannot be understood by examining gender or migration status in isolation. Just as Crenshaw revealed how black women's overlapping identities created unique forms of employment discrimination that single-axis analyses missed, migrant-positioned women's belonging emerges from specific combinations of gender, nationality, legal status, class, and race that create distinctive challenges. Building on Crenshaw's insights, translocationality, as developed by Anthias (2002, 2008, 2012, 2020), extends intersectionality by examining how intersecting positions operate dynamically across time and space, producing differentiated experiences of inclusion and exclusion that shift across contexts. Migration scholarship has identified a persistent problem: the binary between "privileged" and "vulnerable" migrants fails to capture the nuanced, shifting positionalities that characterize migrant experiences (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).

According to Marques et al. (2025), Portugal's migration landscape has grown more contentious as far-right political forces gain parliamentary influence. The authors note that despite the nation's reputation for progressive migration policies and high rankings on migrant integration indices, entrenched structural problems persist, encompassing administrative delays, inadequate institutional infrastructure, and discriminatory practices. This contradiction reveals a significant gap between policy intent and implementation. Within this increasingly contentious landscape, institutional shortcomings and social barriers create ongoing obstacles to belonging that migrants must negotiate to achieve meaningful inclusion. These institutional and social

dynamics are embedded within broader regimes of migration governance that produce uneven conditions of belonging through legal, administrative, and social hierarchies.

This chapter applies a translocational framework of negotiation to examine belonging. Translocationality serves as an analytical lens, revealing how women's shifting positionalities across nationality, class, legal status, and race create differentiated experiences of belonging. Negotiation captures the process through which the women interviewed strategically navigated these experiences. I employ the concept of relational solidarities to describe horizontal networks of mutual support that provide the essential infrastructure for these negotiations, offering resources for both individual advancement and collective action. Together, these elements illuminate how individual belonging strategies and collective community-building are fundamentally interconnected.

This chapter progresses from examining how translocationality creates differentiated belonging challenges, to analyzing the negotiation strategies of the research participants, and then to exploring how relational solidarities function as alternative belonging infrastructures that transcend individual limitations and create collective possibilities for inclusion. The analysis incorporates experiences from both Brazilian and Hispanic women participants, with examples chosen for their theoretical significance.

Translocationality and Challenges to Belonging

Drawing on Ilcan and Squire's (2023) concept of “negotiating belonging,” this section examines how a sample of migrant-positioned women navigated belonging across three interconnected domains: economic, social, and cultural activities. Each dimension revealed distinct challenges and strategic responses shaped by intersectional positioning. Mountz and Mohan (2022) demonstrate ways in which migrants face persistent barriers to inclusion that

continue after physical border crossing, including racism, cultural and linguistic differences, and limited livelihood access. Mountz and Mohan reveal how multiple power relations create uneven pathways to belonging, with economic exclusions intersecting with social marginalization and cultural barriers to produce differentiated experiences of place-making. While Chapter 3 examined xenophobia and racism in detail, this chapter explores how these structural barriers manifest in economic opportunities, access to social services, and cultural integration, revealing the complex negotiations required for migrant-positioned women to establish meaningful participation in Portuguese society.

Economic Obstacles Shaped by Translocational Positionality

Class operates as an essential axis of stratification (Ellermann, 2020). The social class of migrant-positioned women shapes their categorization as they move. For example, those with EU citizenship, skilled-worker visas, or English fluency may be positioned as "expats" rather than "migrants," a categorization that, according to Kunz (2019), can reproduce racial hierarchies and problematic power structures. Anderson's (2019) notion of *migrantization* helps clarify this process, showing how people are made legible as migrants through racialized and classed relations of classification rather than through mobility alone. Migrant women's positioning is inherently contradictory. Kofman et al. (2015) show how women are simultaneously erased in family migration frameworks yet hypervisible through stereotyping. Söhn and Prekodravac (2021) extend this to mobility patterns, where women may experience professional decline in some areas while gaining ground in others, highlighting the fluid nature of intersectional categories.

In my analysis, the translocationality of a sample of migrant-positioned women fundamentally shaped their access to economic belonging, creating differentiated experiences

based on how their intersecting positions of class, nationality, legal status, and professional background interacted within Portugal's labour market. These dynamics revealed that belonging is not achieved simply through employment, but through the complex negotiations required to maintain dignity and professional identity within constraining structures.

The research showed that maintaining one's professional trajectory after migration is often hindered by accreditation barriers, recognition of qualifications, and limited social capital. Yet the translocational positionality of the women in this study produces vastly different experiences of these challenges, prompting them to employ various strategies to negotiate them. For women with higher education and professional backgrounds, translocationality often manifested as downward mobility despite their qualifications, and their strategic responses varied by their positioning along other social axes. The findings from this study provided examples of those responses, as explained below. All participants' names were anonymized.

In my study, several highly educated Brazilian women, despite holding master's degrees from Portuguese institutions, struggled to secure positions aligned with their expertise and developed sophisticated negotiation strategies to address professional displacement. For example, Valentina, who was fluent in three languages, held a Master's degree and a background in social justice, initially worked in the automotive sales industry before transitioning into entrepreneurship and migrant advocacy (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto). Carolina first took a parking-control job before becoming a factory production manager, a role that remained outside her field of expertise (Interview, 22 June 2023, Porto). Laura, a psychologist, noted that while Brazilian women may find jobs in hospitality and beauty industries, accessing higher-level professions is significantly more difficult without personal connections (Interview, 30 March

2023, Porto). In these cases, the women negotiated professional displacement by accepting temporary misalignment while maintaining long-term career aspirations.

Some women from Hispanic Latin America explained that they anticipated these challenges and adjusted their expectations accordingly, demonstrating how prior knowledge, class positioning, and cultural capital shaped strategic responses and enabled proactive negotiations. Fatima, a Venezuelan mother with an administrative background in interior design, accepted that her qualifications would not be recognized in Portugal. Instead, she took a café job within her pre-existing social network, though she and her husband aspired to open their own food business (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto). Her negotiation strategy involved redefining professional success while maintaining entrepreneurial aspirations within her social capital networks. Similarly, Alma, a Peruvian woman with experience in hotel event management, did not expect to continue her profession but hoped to become an entrepreneur (Interview, 02 May 2023, Porto). Her approach represents a negotiation that reframes migration as an opportunity for professional reinvention rather than continuation. Jessica, a Venezuelan lawyer, navigated significant obstacles, including language acquisition and mentorship programs, before launching a tech start-up. She began participating in NGO and government-led workshops to help other migrants learn from her experience (Interview, 20 April 2023, Porto). These cases reveal a distinct negotiation pattern: redefining professional success, leveraging existing networks, and maintaining entrepreneurial aspirations. Unlike the Brazilian women's strategies of credential accumulation, Hispanic Latin American women in the study more often reframed migration as an opportunity for professional reinvention rather than as a means of continuing their careers.

Some interviewees described how their uncertain legal status made everything more difficult: finding work, securing housing, and accessing basic services. These challenges were

not isolated—they intersected with their positions as women and as foreigners, requiring ongoing strategic responses over months and years. Nayita's experience illustrates how legal vulnerability intersects with gender and nationality to enable workplace exploitation, requiring complex negotiations for survival and eventual stability. A Venezuelan musician and artist, she worked in a factory in a rural zone after arriving in Portugal. She then moved to Porto to work in the restaurant industry, where her employer promised, but ultimately refused to provide, the employment contract required for her residency application. Nayita also encountered exploitative employers who coerced her into unpaid labour under the guise of a "trial period." Years of legal and economic insecurity took a toll, prompting her to seek NGO assistance, including mental health support. Eventually, she secured a job contract, obtained residency, and transitioned from precarious labour to a position at a media production company with her boyfriend (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto). Her case demonstrates how translocationality operates dynamically. Her positioning shifted from extreme precarity to relative stability as her legal status changed, yet her initial vulnerability stemmed from the intersection of her legal status, gender, and Venezuelan nationality in Portugal's labour market. Under severely constrained circumstances, Nayita negotiated survival by enduring temporary exploitation while building toward a more secure position, making complex calculations that balanced immediate necessity against long-term stability.

The study showed that migrants from advantageous social and educational backgrounds faced barriers to employment due to ambiguous legal statuses and employers' reluctance, revealing how translocationality operates even among those with economic privilege while requiring creative negotiations. Claudia, who was running a home care business in Brazil, sought to enter the Portuguese market to learn from national practices. She struggled to find

employment in the local care sector due to hiring hesitancy toward those undergoing regularization, in her case, family reunification, which was confusing for employers to navigate (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). Similarly, Clara, an Argentine entrepreneur and artist, faced financial strain as prolonged regularization processes drained her family's savings. Her husband, a lawyer proficient in electronics repair, received only restaurant job offers, which conflicted with their weekend childcare needs, as clients typically booked her services on weekends (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Ada, a Brazilian woman with a background in education, worked as a nanny while awaiting family reunification documents and authorization to work legally. Although her husband's secure tech job provided stability, and the family for whom she worked was a good employer, she found her nanny work socially isolating (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Their negotiations involved diverse strategies: persistent applications while developing alternative business plans; weighing economic necessity against family care responsibilities; and accepting temporary social isolation while working toward long-term career goals through additional education. These cases indicate that social class operates as a necessary but insufficient condition for belonging, as its effects are mediated through gendered labour market segmentation and legal uncertainty that systematically reclassifies skilled migrant women into feminized and often precarious forms of work. Translocationality operated across multiple axes, as these women strategically navigated intersecting legal, gendered, and racialized constraints to access labour opportunities, showing that even class advantage does not eliminate the need for careful negotiation (e.g., Parreñas, 2021; Rydzik & Anitha, 2020).

Explicit exclusion from local labour markets on the basis of foreign status prompted some women to leverage alternative positionalities. Clara, a photographer, was unable to secure Portuguese-speaking clients and relied on Spanish- and English-speaking clients for work. She

considered her English proficiency a crucial advantage, as it significantly expanded her networking opportunities and client base, allowing her to continue working in her profession (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). While her Argentine nationality limited access to local markets, her multilingual positioning opened alternative pathways, and market diversification became her strategy when local networks proved exclusionary.

The intersection of educational credentials with Portuguese institutional hierarchies emerged as another dimension shaping economic belonging. To advance their careers in Portugal, many women pursued further education even after holding advanced degrees from their home countries. This choice was a strategic investment that required significant time and financial resources. Several women, particularly from Brazil, enrolled in Master's or postgraduate programs despite already holding Master's degrees. Ada began a Master's degree in education to pursue the career she studied for in Brazil after her family reunification documents were processed (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Although Bella already held a Master's degree from a renowned Brazilian university, she completed an additional Master's in Portugal, gaining access to internship opportunities and mentoring networks that facilitated her transition into entrepreneurship (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto).

Some women moved to Portugal specifically to pursue further education and doctoral studies. Eva, who was born in Peru and had previously lived in the U.S., and Sara, from Ecuador with a psychology degree, both pursued doctorates in Porto (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto; Interview, 24 May 2023, Porto). Despite completing her PhD in Portugal, Sara encountered accreditation challenges because her Master's degree was not from a Portuguese institution. The professional body required her to take additional Master's-level courses, delaying her ability to work in the public sector, although she could work with private clients. She expressed frustration

that the University of Porto admitted her to the PhD program despite her non-Portuguese Master's degree, only to later deem it insufficient for accreditation. Her response involved challenging institutional inconsistencies while pursuing alternative professional pathways.

Several women underwent lengthy, bureaucratic, and costly accreditation processes to continue working in their fields, with outcomes that varied by position within professional, national, and class hierarchies. Luisa completed a Master's degree in Portugal, in addition to her Brazilian psychology degree and studies in the Netherlands, thereby accumulating credentials across multiple national contexts to overcome institutional barriers (Interview, 30 March 2023, Porto). Laura had her Brazilian diploma validated but was still required to complete a Portuguese Master's to join the professional order. During this time, she worked as a chambermaid and in a shopping center, framing lower-status work as a temporary sacrifice rather than permanent marginalization (Interview, 30 March 2023, Porto). Rosa, an Argentine psychologist in Lisbon, chose not to undergo the accreditation process, instead working with private clients online and organizing meetups on women's well-being, thereby creating alternative professional pathways outside formal institutional recognition (Interview, 27 April 2023, Porto). Silvia, a Brazilian with EU citizenship, had her UK healthcare therapist certification recognized after a prolonged wait, although she had not yet started her new job when she participated in the study (Interview, 05 May 2023, Porto). Margarita, a Venezuelan-born mother with Portuguese family roots, spent years re-certifying as a lawyer while working in restaurants and as a nanny. She eventually began her legal practice, although she faced challenges in building her clientele. She also provided legal support to migrants at an NGO office two days a week, maintaining her professional identity through unpaid legal work while accepting temporary employment in other sectors (Interview, 20 June 2023, Porto). These varied outcomes illustrate how translocationality shaped distinct

pathways, even when women faced broadly similar professional revalidation challenges, such as the non-recognition of Brazilian or Latin American professional credentials (e.g., Palma Lima Asensi, 2025). The strategic choices of these migrant-positioned women, whether to accumulate credentials, circumvent formal systems, or maintain professional identity through alternative means, significantly influenced their eventual success.

For the women in this study, economic exclusion went beyond immediate material constraints to shape their sense of belonging, deepening marginalization. Limits on legal status restricted employment and access to services, while professional displacement affected both their income and their social standing within Portuguese society. The following section examines how economic constraints translated into social exclusions that required additional layers of negotiation.

Social Obstacles Shaped by Translocational Positionality

This research builds on studies demonstrating how migrant women manage overlapping structural and social inequalities while negotiating access to resources, community networks, and belonging in changing spatial and temporal contexts (e.g., Mevsimler, 2021). The interviews in this study revealed that the migrant-positioned women constantly negotiated social obstacles across family, community, and institutional spheres to establish belonging. These negotiations shaped uneven experiences of inclusion and exclusion across different social contexts.

Some women found that their precarious legal status while awaiting regularization or family reunification procedures hindered their access to crucial public services. Claudia's experience illustrates how her legal precarity intersected with motherhood and Portuguese citizenship laws, creating paradoxical exclusions that necessitated creative responses. Claudia, a single mother, was eligible for Portuguese nationality through two routes: by descent through her

Portuguese-born father, and by family reunification, as her son was a Portuguese national through his Portuguese-born father. However, her ongoing family reunification procedure created a grey area: despite her son's Portuguese citizenship, his access to the public daycare and preschool system was blocked due to her unresolved legal status, forcing her to pay for private childcare (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). This demonstrates how translocationality operates through contradictory institutional policies. Although her son's citizenship should have guaranteed access, Claudia's legal status created barriers affecting both mother and child. She navigated this through a combination of accommodation, by paying for private services, and resistance, by advocating for her rights. Her experience highlights how legal precarity intersects with family responsibilities, institutional rules, and gendered expectations, creating layered exclusions. It also shows how migrant-positioned women must continuously negotiate access to resources and rights, balancing immediate survival with longer-term claims, and how these positional shifts require ongoing strategic and emotional labour.

Translocationality informs how similar legal situations can yield different outcomes due to bureaucratic variation and individual positioning, thereby requiring women to negotiate inconsistent institutional responses. The NGO Caritas described situations in which clients faced challenges enrolling their children in public schools; however, these challenges often overlapped with precarious housing conditions and the lack of a fixed address (Interview, 03 March 2023, Porto). The research findings showed that not all women in precarious legal situations faced these challenges in accessing public services. Ernestina reported no issues enrolling her daughters in school and family health care during the regularization process (Interview, 04 May 2023, Porto). This variation demonstrates how translocationality intersects with what Challinor (2024) describes as bureaucratic irregularity, in which access to public services can depend on

individual staff or offices, creating frustrating inconsistencies for migrants struggling to navigate social systems. In my study, women with similar legal statuses experienced very different access to public services. For example, some struggled to enroll their children in schools, as Claudia did with public preschool enrollment, whereas others, like Ernestina, faced no obstacles. These variations demonstrate how translocationality intersects with inconsistent institutional practices, requiring migrant women to constantly navigate unpredictable systems.

The research showed that childcare systems often disadvantaged the migrant mothers who lacked strong social networks, regardless of legal status. For example, Clara paid for private home-based day care for her younger child, as she was unable to access the public system, which had a significant wait (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). NGO staff at *Emprego Matosinhos* noted that many mothers in Portugal had difficulty securing a place in publicly subsidized daycare. The staff also stated that daycare hours reflected prevailing labour conditions and, anecdotally, recalled instances of women having to pay fines for being unexpectedly late in picking up their children at the end of the day. They observed that local Portuguese mothers may have had family support, whereas newcomers did not (Interview, 27 Oct 2023, Porto). As such, the intersection of migrant status with motherhood created additional barriers. Their concerns relate to the theory of the “motherhood penalty,” which affects all women but is particularly pronounced for migrant women without preexisting networks to rely on (e.g., Ala-Mantila & Fleischmann, 2018). This demonstrates how translocationality compounds structural inequalities: the migrant mothers faced the same childcare shortages as Portuguese mothers but without extended family networks to provide alternative support. The women navigated these constraints by creating alternative care arrangements through peer networks and by strategically scheduling work.

Healthcare access reveals another dimension of how translocationality shapes social belonging through the intersection of legal status, family configuration, and institutional knowledge. In Portugal, children who have been present in the country for more than three months are entitled to access to health and education, including regular family health services (as opposed to walk-in or emergency services) (Stubbe et al., 2017; Inclusion of Migrant Students in Education, 2024). Fatima, a married mother who worked in a café, said her family had difficulty accessing public healthcare and ultimately sought support from CLAIM Matosinhos to ensure their child's legal right to family medical care (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto). As discussed above, Nayita was, at times, denied access to health care (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto). These examples illustrate how translocationality operates within institutional complexity and how policy and access gaps persist. These examples highlight how migrant-positioned women actively negotiate institutional constraints, combining persistence, advocacy, and system knowledge to secure essential services. Their strategies reveal the relational and situational nature of belonging, showing that access to rights depends not only on formal entitlements but also on women's capacity to navigate, interpret, and act within complex bureaucratic environments.

The intersection of legal status with children's participation in community activities reveals how translocationality extended beyond basic services to encompass full social inclusion. This process reportedly required negotiations to protect children's dignity and opportunities. Although this study focuses on adult migrant women, their accounts consistently demonstrate how legal precarity is experienced relationally, affecting children's opportunities, belonging, and everyday lives. Fatima reported that her older stepson was barred from joining a soccer club due to his uncertain legal status. She recounted that he initially began playing, “...*but the coach later*

told him he couldn't continue because he didn't have a residence." Ultimately, without proper documentation, he was unable to play soccer or pursue his aspiration to become a footballer. She concluded by saying, "*he couldn't belong*" (Interview, 23 March 2023, Porto). This example demonstrates how translocationality operated intergenerationally. The boy's belonging was shaped by his parents' legal positioning, creating exclusions that extended beyond formal policy into community participation. This finding resonates with scholarship on migrant youth navigating precarity and vulnerable legal status, which emphasizes how children's belonging is mediated through family status and institutional visibility (Bernhard et al., 2007; Young, 2013). As Young (2013) shows, migrant youth often negotiate belonging through school and peer activities, yet moments of exclusion tied to legal status can intensify feelings of conditional acceptance and marginality. The family's negotiation involved seeking alternative sports opportunities while working toward regularization, demonstrating that exclusions in one domain required creative responses in others.

My interviews revealed that housing represented a crucial dimension of social belonging where translocationality intersected with broader structural inequalities. Portugal experienced a steep increase in the cost of living after the COVID-19 pandemic, as discussed in Chapter 1, and, at the time of the study, monthly expenses far exceeded the average monthly salary for most. There were numerous reports of landlords overcharging, requesting upfront payments beyond the legally permitted three-month period, bias against migrants, and rental scams. Claudia's experience illustrates how translocationality compounded housing precarity while revealing how solidarity can emerge through unexpected encounters. As a single Brazilian mother, securing a rental was difficult due to xenophobia and bias against tenants with young children, because families were harder to evict in cases of non-payment. She arrived in Porto and was immediately

deceived by a rental scam. She said, *"My first experience was I rented a house in Gaia, and it was really expensive, I had to leave 4 months of rent. I was in Brazil still and I arrived it was a fake. I arrived at the door, it was 11 o'clock at night, I was with four bags, my son, so tired you know whatever. And the guy was like all right, I'm sorry, because you're not the first one to come here to say that you rented the house. I'm really sorry I cannot receive you, go to an Airbnb or a hotel and figure it out tomorrow"* (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). After facing this challenge, she was especially grateful when her Uber driver promptly intervened, connecting her with an Airbnb host who later agreed to offer her a long-term rental. Claudia's negotiation transformed a devastating rental scam into stable housing by leveraging alternative support networks, demonstrating resilience and strategic adaptability.

The gap between online representations of Portugal and lived realities, which many participants identified as influencing their migration decisions, revealed how translocationality intersects with migration decision-making and subsequent challenges to belonging. This disconnect required migrant women, alongside migrant-serving organizations, to negotiate disappointment and financial strain. Several women in the interviews cited the high cost of living as a barrier to belonging, particularly those undergoing regularization and experiencing increased economic or social precarity. Many women had encountered online representations of Portugal that they later perceived as false, or perhaps outdated narratives about a country in need of migrants and with affordable rents, before planning their migration. However, upon arrival, they often found the situation more complex and the sharp rise in living costs immensely challenging. Julia, who migrated with her sister from Mexico, had first lived in Ireland to study English but found herself disillusioned with life in Portugal. She said, *"This is a, how can I explain to you, a government trap. Why is that what happens? People come here with all their savings, they sold*

their houses, you sell everything, you come here, and you make a lot of expenses, a lot of all kinds of expenses. And all your savings are gone, and you have to go back to your country. What is the only thing the country did? Take out your savings" (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto).

Indeed, Clara also commented on the false image she had seen on social media. She found their rental costs and the general cost of living far higher than projected, quickly draining their savings, which they felt were generous compared to what other newcomers arrived with (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto). These experiences show how migrants' translocational positions intersect with information asymmetries, in which migrants like Clara base decisions on social media peer content that underestimates destination costs (e.g., Dekker et al., 2018). The women's positioning as newcomers intersected with broader housing crises, creating vulnerabilities, and they responded by revising expectations, seeking alternative economic strategies, and, for some, considering onward mobility.

These social exclusions from services, housing, and community participation reveal how translocationality operates through institutional encounters and policy implementation. Yet beyond these formal barriers lay a more elusive dimension of belonging that could not be addressed through improved service delivery or bureaucratic reform. For the women interviewed, the cultural dimensions of translocationality involved navigating unspoken social codes, historical relationships between nations, and everyday interactions that determined whether these migrant-positioned women could access meaningful social integration, even when formal barriers were removed. While securing healthcare or childcare involved concrete institutional negotiations, cultural belonging required different strategies that operated through interpersonal relationships, community acceptance, and the complex dynamics of postcolonial

societies, in which linguistic similarity paradoxically created more, not fewer, barriers to inclusion for participants.

Cultural Obstacles Shaped by Translocational Positionality

As the studies presented below show, research on home and placemaking reveals how migrants reproduce their homelife through domestic spaces, connecting the material and emotional dimensions of belonging. Blunt and Dowling (2022) demonstrate that the home operates as both a site of identity construction and a matrix of social relations with symbolic and ideological meanings, encompassing feelings of both belonging and alienation. Building on this construction of home, Boccagni and Bonfanti (2023) examine how the material and emotional dimensions of home shape migrants' attitudes toward their new society and perceived prospects for integration. This homemaking process extends beyond private spaces. Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023) show how homemaking practices help newcomers integrate into their new society while maintaining connections to their home countries. These practices reveal that creating a home is not just a private domestic act but also a political one that shapes belonging.

The translocationality of migrant-positioned women creates particularly complex dynamics in cultural belonging, where the intersection of nationality, colonial history, language, and racialization produces differentiated experiences of inclusion and exclusion within Portuguese society. These dynamics reveal that shared linguistic or cultural proximities do not automatically translate into social acceptance, while also illuminating the specific mechanisms through which translocationality operates in postcolonial contexts and the sophisticated negotiations required to navigate cultural barriers.

Latin American migrant-positioned women in Portugal encountered significant cultural barriers to integration within local communities. Yet translocationality created varied experiences

of those barriers and different negotiation strategies. In the interviews, many women described limited friendships with Portuguese people, often linked to social distance around issues of race and postcolonial relations. Only a few of the women I interviewed reported having Portuguese friends, and even fewer described these friendships as close. What emerged as particularly striking in the interviews was how limited participants' connections with Portuguese society remained, even for Brazilian women, despite their linguistic commonalities with Portuguese people, and regardless of whether they had built strong communities within their own national or linguistic groups. Notably, the number of Hispanic and Brazilian women who reported having some Portuguese friends was similar, despite the additional linguistic barrier faced by Hispanic women. Many of these women had not formally studied Portuguese and did not consider themselves proficient at the C1 or C2 level, and many were not proficient even at the B1 or B2 level. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 on xenophobia, the experiences of Brazilian women were shaped by a unique form of racialization and postcolonial tensions, which complicate their social integration in Portugal, despite the shared language. Brasil and Cabecinhas (2018) documented discrimination experienced by Brazilian Portuguese speakers in Portugal and Latin American Spanish speakers in Spain that was linked to their linguistic ties to former colonizers. They interpreted this pattern as evidence of persistent hierarchical relationships between colonizers and the colonized. The experiences of the women I interviewed similarly demonstrate that linguistic proximity paradoxically creates greater barriers when intersecting with racialized colonial hierarchies, requiring Brazilian women to navigate both inclusion and exclusion simultaneously.

A few women in my study did develop close or relatively close connections with Portuguese individuals, often through university or family networks, revealing how

translocationality creates opportunities for connection within specific institutional contexts through strategic positioning. Bella, for instance, noted that over time she had made some Portuguese friends, but added, "*But I can count on my fingers*" (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto). She observed that the dynamics of these friendships were different from those with her Brazilian and other foreign friends: "*For example, we don't go to each other's homes.*" However, she was not particularly bothered by these differences, stating that she simply accepted the friendships in whatever form they took. Her experience illustrates how translocationality shapes the terms of belonging. Her position as a Brazilian woman enabled certain forms of friendship while constraining others, yet her educational and professional positioning afforded access to social networks unavailable to other women. She accepted her local friendships on Portuguese social norms rather than imposing her own cultural expectations.

Eva, a Peruvian PhD student who had lived in the U.S. before moving to Portugal to be with her Portuguese boyfriend, successfully integrated into his social circle. She also made some Portuguese friends through her doctoral program and described having one close Portuguese friend (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto). Her experience demonstrates that translocationality can afford privileged access to Portuguese social networks through romantic partnerships and higher-education positioning, while her prior U.S. experience provided cultural capital for navigating European academic environments and relationships with English-speaking foreigners. She leveraged multiple forms of social capital simultaneously. Ernestina, an Argentinian stay-at-home mother with two children in primary school, developed connections with some Portuguese mothers through their daughters' school activities and parent meetings. She explained that their children had playdates in public spaces or in each other's homes, and she had invited some of these mothers over for tea, though she had never been invited to any of their homes (Interview,

04 May 2023, Porto). Her experience reveals how translocationality operates through motherhood and children's schooling. These institutional connections create opportunities for social integration while remaining constrained by cultural norms around hospitality and access to the home. She offered hospitality without expecting reciprocity, maintaining relationships within Portuguese cultural boundaries, grateful for however these relationships configured.

Despite these few examples, many women reported having little or no close relationships within the Portuguese community, even after living in Portugal for more than five years. This illustrates how translocationality shapes social positioning across multiple axes, creating persistent barriers to deep social integration. Women's legal status, nationality, language, and prior experiences in other countries interacted with local social norms, limiting opportunities to form meaningful connections. As a result, most community-building occurred within their own national or linguistic groups or within the broader migrant community. Many noted that while Portuguese people were polite, forming deeper connections was challenging. Clara observed, "*I mean, they are just nice, I mean polite, but up to that point, yes, but they are not very open to relations with foreigners*" (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Sara, an Ecuadorian doctoral student, similarly stated, "*It's like that with Portuguese people, it was a little harder. They were kind and they were my colleagues, but they were not open to being friends. It's more complicated*" (Interview, 24 May 2023, Porto). Maria, a Mexican mother who moved to Portugal due to her husband's job, recalled that a Portuguese neighbour once told her, "*Portuguese people are really friendly, but they won't invite you to their homes*" (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). These consistent observations of women from different countries and social positions suggest systematic cultural barriers that intersect with their translocational positionality as foreign women, prompting them to seek belonging elsewhere.

Some women, particularly Brazilians, were surprised by the difficulty of forming friendships with Portuguese people. Translocationality reveals how expectations based on linguistic and cultural proximity can prove unfounded, requiring significant emotional adjustment. Paula, a Brazilian psychologist who completed her PhD in Portugal, noted, *"It's difficult to make friends with the Portuguese. There seems to be a barrier. So you work, talk, sometimes go to events, study together, but you never get an invitation to go for coffee. It's always a very superficial thing"* (Interview, 31 Jan 2023, Porto). She had previously lived in Ireland and recounted that she initially struggled to make local friends due to the language barrier but assumed that circumstances would be different in Portugal because she was fluent in Portuguese. Her experience illustrates how translocationality created false expectations. As a Portuguese speaker, she expected that social integration would be easier. Yet, despite linguistic fluency, her positionality as a Brazilian woman introduced unforeseen social barriers that limited deeper connections with Portuguese peers. Her negotiation involved revising her expectations while seeking connections within Brazilian and international communities.

Anita, a Brazilian-born mother of two who had also lived in Holland (where one parent originated) and the UK (where she met her husband), expected Portugal to blend familiar elements from these previous homes. Instead, she encountered unexpected cultural differences, particularly around social connections and parenting practices. Unlike her experience in the UK, where parents of young children naturally met through activities and developed friendships, Porto offered fewer such opportunities. As she explained, *"that's how they met neighbors or other people in the same life stage, you know, that they had a lot in common with and started meeting more often, initially about those activities, and they became friends. And here [in Porto] it was like, Okay, well, can I do? There was very little, there was nothing. And the explanation*

that I got very often is that, you know, parents are often with their children and grandparents, or parents are at work and grandchildren if they aren't at creche (daycare) they are often with grandparents. So that's a different dynamic, anyway" (Interview, 12 May 2023, Porto). Despite enjoying certain aspects of life in Porto, Anita ultimately found that the cultural dynamics and quality of life did not align with what she valued from her previous experiences in Brazil, the UK, and the Netherlands.

The translocationality of migration decisions becomes evident when examining the migrant-positioned women's responses to these belonging challenges through strategic exit negotiations. When I followed up with participants the following year, some had left Portugal, citing various barriers to belonging. Their departure decisions revealed how translocationality shapes not only their integration experiences but also exit strategies as legitimate forms of negotiation. Several women returned to other European countries where they had previously lived, while others went back to their home countries. Anita, the Brazilian Dutch mother and entrepreneur mentioned in the above paragraph, returned to the UK with her British husband and family. She mentioned several factors contributing to her decision, including better future opportunities for their children, the unfavorable cost-to-quality ratio of rent and services in Portugal, ongoing barriers to running her business, and personal experiences of xenophobia and microaggressions due to her Brazilian accent (Interview, 12 May 2023, Porto). Julia and her sister decided to leave Portugal because they found the working conditions and cost of living unsatisfactory and felt socially isolated. However, they still did not want to remain in Mexico and sought other opportunities (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). These departure decisions demonstrate how translocationality created differentiated exit options for the women in my study: women with EU citizenship, alternative residency rights, or family connections elsewhere

exercised mobility in response to belonging challenges, prioritizing well-being and opportunities over place-based persistence.

However, a translocational lens also reveals that departure is not equally available to all migrant-positioned women, leading to different strategic responses to belonging challenges that require alternative negotiations. For some women in the study, the contrast between life in Portugal and their expectations ultimately prompted them to leave. Many women felt that, despite their relative challenges, they preferred to stay in Portugal. Some women left countries and living situations that were highly difficult, such as the socio-economic migration crisis in Venezuela or the economic crisis in Argentina; for them, returning was never an option, and they developed alternative strategies for looking ahead. Clara did not believe there was an option to return to Argentina and that they had to work with the circumstances they faced, despite struggling with economic, social, and cultural barriers. However, her frustrations did not lead her to believe that Portugal was a suitable long-term home for her family should a different opportunity arise (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Her negotiation involved maintaining spatial flexibility while building present-day belonging. For some women, such as Natalia, who came from a background of relative privilege in Brazil, the safety and calmness they felt in Portugal was preferable to the insecurity and divisions they felt in their home country, especially when raising children (Interview, 14 July 2023, Porto). Indeed, despite her many challenges navigating belonging and xenophobia, Claudia still felt that raising her son in Portugal was better for them than Brazil (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). These women engaged in comparative assessments that prioritized certain forms of security and opportunity over others, demonstrating how belonging was negotiated through complex calculations rather than simple inclusion or exclusion.

While the preceding sections examined obstacles that required individual-level negotiation, these strategies alone cannot account for the women's persistence. This next section turns to the collective dimension: the relational solidarities through which the women created alternative infrastructures of belonging.

Relational Solidarities as a Negotiation Infrastructure

Many migrant-positioned women emphasized that survival and belonging emerged not from individual resilience but from connections with other migrant-positioned women. Rather than responding to exclusion solely through individual adaptation, the migrant-positioned women interviewed forged relational solidarities: horizontal, affective networks of mutual support that operate as infrastructures of belonging and collective resources for negotiating exclusion. As defined earlier in this study, relational solidarities are not reconceptualized here; rather, they are examined in terms of how women actively use and mobilize them in practice. These solidarities differ from formal institutional support in that they are grounded in shared lived experience, reciprocal care, and collective agency. Unlike humanitarian interventions that operate through hierarchical power relations (Tazzioli & Walters, 2019), relational solidarities function horizontally across migrant networks and may evolve into more transformative forms of collective action. One key site where these solidarities emerge and operate is through digital platforms, which create spaces for connection that transcend physical and institutional barriers.

Digital Relational Solidarities as Negotiation Infrastructure

This section first explores how digital platforms enable everyday forms of connection and then shows how these spaces function as critical infrastructure for belonging and mutual support. Digital platforms serve as crucial sites where women enact relational solidarities that transcend physical boundaries and create alternative spaces of belonging, providing vital resources for

negotiating individual and collective challenges (Jørgensen & Galis, 2022). Social networks have become fundamental to constructing a sense of place and belonging for migrants, with these connections and activities, essential for social inclusion and the development of social capital, increasingly occurring digitally on social platforms (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022). Migrants engage with the "mobile commons" of social media platforms before and throughout their migration trajectory, participating in acts of mutual support and solidarity while engaging in placemaking (e.g., Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022; Ramírez March, 2022; Trimikliniotis et al., 2014).

Further research is needed on how digital networks shape migration experiences (Fung et al., 2025; Saïd, 2021), despite their growing importance in migrants' navigation of new societies and in maintaining transnational connections. While access to digital networks can facilitate independent migration and collective identity formation (e.g., Mevsimler, 2021; Toma, 2012), digital literacy alone does not ensure integration without broader structural supports (Berg, 2025). However, Mevsimler (2021) demonstrates how migrants use digital networks to negotiate inclusion by developing collective identities and accessing resources. Wilding and Winarnita (2022) reveal how affect and emotion shape migrants' negotiation of belonging, showing how digital media become sites of creativity, especially for those at the margins of power.

In their engagement with social media platforms, the migrant-positioned women in the study created informal support networks via WhatsApp, Facebook, and other social media channels that functioned as relational solidarities in action. These networks enable them to collectively negotiate challenges of belonging while building alternative infrastructures of inclusion. The women in my study engaged with online platforms in Spanish, Portuguese and English. Some of these groups were very informal, and some were somewhat larger, beginning

with the initiative of one or a few women and then growing. The women in my study participated in numerous such groups in the Porto area; the examples below are only a few.

For example, Paz started a Porto Latina women's Facebook group, accompanied by a WhatsApp group. Brazilian women in Porto also joined various WhatsApp and Facebook groups. English-speaking participants accessed the Portuguese Mamas WhatsApp group and the Girl Gone International Facebook group. General Facebook and WhatsApp groups, such as Latinos in Porto, Brazilians in Porto, and Internationals and Expats in Porto, included members beyond women. Facebook groups were even accessible to migrants who had not yet arrived in Porto, allowing them to begin networking before moving. These online spaces enabled women to share information, seek advice and support, and build connections. Through participation in these groups, migrant-positioned women in my study demonstrated how self-organization and collective agency foster inclusion and belonging while negotiating structural barriers.

Many of the women interviewed emphasized that they engaged with social platforms, particularly those with a gendered core, in various ways to foster a sense of belonging through practical assistance and emotional support, and to negotiate daily challenges. Their horizontal knowledge-sharing exemplifies relational solidarities. Indeed, within these platforms, women navigated many aspects of social inclusion through relational solidarities. For example, these online networks served as sources of job opportunities, provided entrepreneurs with a platform to offer their services, and offered space to share information about room and apartment rentals, as well as to discuss the peculiarities of rental law and their experiences.

Many of the women harnessed social platforms to seek information and advice regarding regularization and navigating all the bureaucratic steps (for example, Alma, Ernestina, Fatima, Clara). Those platforms also serve as spaces for navigating various institutions within the

Portuguese bureaucracy, such as *Finanzas* (the fiscal institution), Health Care and Social Insurance, and for obtaining information and advice on schools and daycare. The women also used these platforms for more mundane daily tasks, such as learning how to navigate transit, completing specific tasks (such as printing documents or having photos taken for passports), and learning which stores sold which ethnic food products. Many women explained that they would turn to online groups when they had questions or needed guidance on how to proceed, finding practical support through horizontal knowledge sharing that enables them to collectively negotiate bureaucratic and daily-life challenges.

The emotional and community-building dimensions of these digital platforms reveal how relational solidarities operate through affective connections and mutual recognition, providing crucial resources for negotiating isolation and uncertainty. Ilcan's (2025) research on atmospheric bordering examines how displaced people navigate emotional experiences and exercise agency during border crossings. In my research, I found that solidarity networks functioned similarly for the women I interviewed. Participation in these networks enabled women to process the emotional toll of migration, recognize shared struggles, and access collective support, thereby transforming individual hardship into communal resilience. By way of illustration, Claudia met a mother on a playground who added her to the English-language Porto Mamas WhatsApp group. Claudia found the group helpful for navigating life in Porto as a newcomer and mother, as the women shared ideas for park playdates and events where she could take her son and connect with others. She also found the group helpful for realizing that she was not alone in her family reunification challenges, which, until then, she had been feeling very lost and hard on herself over, for not being able to resolve. She felt that belonging to that group was a life-changing link for her (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). This example illustrates how relational solidarities

operated through both practical assistance and emotional validation. Claudia both received information and affective support while contributing her own experiences to the collective knowledge base. Her negotiation of family reunification challenges was significantly supported by realizing that other women faced similar difficulties, transforming individual frustration into collective understanding.

Alma, a Peruvian woman who had arrived in Porto in search of work just before the interview, described the support she had found on Facebook groups, including through connections with people such as an Argentine family living in Caminha. She told me "*...They welcomed me, and I stayed with them for a night there. I was able to go out to visit, to get to know them and get an idea of what work and life is like*" (Interview, 02 May 2023, Porto). Her experience demonstrates how digital relational solidarities extended into embodied encounters and material support, revealing the interconnections between virtual and physical solidarity practices and enabling her to negotiate the uncertainty of her new arrival through concrete support networks.

In addition to using online platforms to seek and share practical information, advice, and support, the migrant-positioned women I interviewed also used their networks to build deeper community and friendships. These connections went beyond simply helping each other with practical tasks; they became meaningful relationships that created alternative pathways for belonging when local integration proved challenging. The women shared information about events and activities, thereby fostering in-person connections. Clara reported that although she struggled to be included in local social networks, she met a couple of friends through a WhatsApp group for Latina women. Those connections led to in-person social relationships that fostered a sense of belonging for her and her family, as they visited each other's homes for

playdates or to share a meal, something she missed from her native Argentina (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Her negotiation of cultural exclusion involved creating alternative community spaces that recreated familiar social practices within her new geographical context. Maria joined several Spanish and English-language groups and met some of her first mother friends through these Facebook and WhatsApp groups. She found one subgroup related to her locality to be the most helpful, for tips on the area and for connecting with other mothers in person for coffee dates (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). These examples illustrate how digital relational solidarities gave rise to embodied community-building that re-created familiar cultural practices in new geographical contexts, enabling women to negotiate social isolation through peer connections.

Intersectionality factors shape how migrant women can access and engage with online platforms and, thereby, the mobile commons of these platforms (e.g., Angulo-Pasel 2018; Saïd, 2021). Access to digital relational solidarities was shaped by differential positioning across multiple axes, particularly language proficiencies, such as fluency in English, Portuguese, or Spanish, which determined which platforms and networks the women could meaningfully join. Time constraints, stemming from employment demands, childcare responsibilities, and household obligations, further limited the women's capacity to participate in online discussions and attend embodied activities arising from digital connections. Economic resources for internet access and devices also created uneven opportunities for sustained engagement in solidarity networks.

However, the effectiveness of digital relational solidarities varied with participants' engagement and commitment to mutual support, indicating that successful negotiations require sustained reciprocal participation. Not all women found participating in the online groups they had joined conducive to belonging and fostering in-person connections. Julia did not find the

WhatsApp group for Latina women in Porto particularly helpful in fostering social meetups and friendships, noting that many of the women appeared not to be serious about helping one another or connecting, and often did not respond to questions or attend in-person encounters. She felt that similar groups she had belonged to while living in Ireland were far more active and cooperative (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). Margarita did not engage much with online groups or find them to be helpful (Interview, 20 June 2023, Porto). However, both Julia and Margarita lamented the lack of in-person connections they experienced. They did not feel that their national or Hispanic communities were as close or warm as they had expected. Women's legal status, nationality, language, prior migration experiences, and age intersected with local social norms to limit opportunities for meaningful connection. These findings align with Young's (2010) work on how age shapes migration trajectories. Specifically, women's age at arrival, their initial and subsequent legal status, and their length of residence in Portugal influenced both the structural constraints they faced and the intensity of their exclusion from or conditional acceptance into local communities. Women in their forties and fifties, such as Julia and Margarita, faced particular challenges in creating social opportunities, both within their national communities and in Portuguese spaces. These difficulties echo Machado's (2021) findings regarding older Brazilian women in Portugal, who are often overlooked and marginalized. These experiences reveal that relational solidarities require sustained commitment and reciprocal engagement to function effectively as belonging infrastructure. Women had to negotiate varying levels of community commitment when seeking support, with outcomes shaped by both individual engagement and broader structural constraints.

The evolution from information-seeker to community-builder exemplifies how relational solidarities develop dynamically over time and across different levels of engagement, enabling

the women to negotiate their own belonging while creating resources for others. Paz, a remote worker from Colombia, explained that she started a Facebook and WhatsApp group for Spanish-speaking women because there were none based in Porto. After experiencing loneliness from being far from her loved ones and culture, she felt compelled to create community. Paz also established a channel through which she shared information on migrant life in Porto and practical details on legal pathways to migration for those who contacted her. She encountered many women in situations of precarity through the online groups she administers and discouraged irregular migration because of these risks, instead sharing information about the Job-Seeker Visa with any prospective migrants who reached out (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). In October 2025, the new visa category and others were then discontinued under the guise of a new skilled labour visa that must be applied for in advance (see Government reinforces requirements on citizenship laws and residence, 2025). Her transition from newcomer seeking support to community organizer providing resources demonstrates how relational solidarities can evolve from individual need into a collective infrastructure that supports future migrants. Her negotiation of loneliness involved transforming personal isolation into a form of community-building. At the same time, her privileged position (arriving on a D7 visa and working remotely) enabled her to advocate for safer migration pathways for other women.

Many of the migrant-positioned women who were research participants used online platforms to engage in volunteerism, fostering mutual support and care that extended beyond their immediate needs while developing sophisticated negotiations between individual and collective support. Eva, originally from Peru, participated in numerous online groups and even served as administrator of two distinct groups at different times. She explained that, in her view, your experience as a migrant is primarily shaped by what you make of it, and that, for her to feel

engaged and a sense of belonging, creating strong friendships was part of that. She helped administer a group of international women researchers. This initiative began with the Porto Girl Gone International Facebook group, where she helped create a supportive group chat and organize in-person meetups and events, which led to many friendships and creative collaborative opportunities for some of the researchers (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto). Her approach illustrates how relational solidarities created both personal belonging and professional opportunities through collective organizing, while her negotiation involved actively building the community infrastructure she needed rather than waiting for inclusion elsewhere.

Some volunteer online group initiatives began to extend beyond promoting belonging in purely social terms to supporting migrants in situations of material need, demonstrating how relational solidarities evolved toward more comprehensive mutual aid while enabling collective negotiations of structural barriers. Juliana, a representative of a Brazilian migrant women's platform, emphasized that, beyond sharing information and resources, online spaces brought women together around shared interests, hobbies, and goals and often facilitate material aid during crises. For example, she saw Brazilian women who had never met before offering their homes to other women in emergencies (Interview, 13 Feb 2023, Porto). Claudia, a Brazilian single mother who had faced xenophobia and the difficulties of raising a child alone, actively engaged in chat groups in both Portuguese and English. When she learned of a Brazilian mother in need, she mobilized resources to collect and deliver donated clothing and children's items across Porto (Interview, 08 May 2023, Porto). This example illustrates how digital relational solidarities coordinate material support that goes beyond individual relationships, forming broader networks of mutual aid. Such practices allow women to navigate crises collectively, paralleling the concept of the "mobile commons," in which WhatsApp coordination extends

beyond formal humanitarian structures to deliver timely support (e.g., Ramírez March, 2022; Dekker et al., 2018).

Valentina's trajectory demonstrated how relational solidarities evolved from personal support-seeking into comprehensive community organizing that bridged multiple domains while creating sophisticated negotiations between individual advancement and collective empowerment. Despite holding graduate degrees from Portugal and Brazil, she struggled to enter the job market and began dedicating herself to supporting other migrants. She volunteered in person with NGOs such as Caritas and JRS and collaborated with ENFEM Portugal to assist migrant women in labour market integration. She supported ENFEM in its early development and events, and through an initiative to help migrant women network with civil society and major companies that hosted "working days" to introduce migrants to job opportunities. Furthermore, she launched a social media channel to share information and resources on migration, education, and employment in Portugal, featuring guest speakers to present on relevant themes and issues to expand migrant women's networks. She invited scholars, community workers and psychologists to give talks, for example (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto). She also provided one-on-one guidance on improving professional social media presence, particularly on LinkedIn. Her independent initiative demonstrates how relational solidarities grew from grassroots movements into more structured forms of support while maintaining their horizontal, peer-led character. Her negotiation involved transforming individual professional marginalization into an infrastructure for collective empowerment.

Embodied Relational Solidarities for Negotiation

While digital platforms provided crucial infrastructure for relational solidarities, the women studied also created belonging through embodied encounters and place-based community

building that complement and extend their virtual networks while providing additional resources for negotiating exclusion. These embodied relational solidarities operated through shared physical spaces and activities, creating opportunities for face-to-face connection and mutual support.

Some of the participants negotiated belonging through accessing in-person community supports, such as those offered by migrant and refugee serving organizations, which served as bridges to relational solidarities rather than replacing them, enabling women to transition from individual support-seeking toward collective organizing. Paz took Portuguese language classes from a government organization, both improving her language skills and offering social opportunities (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Nayita said, *"I found the São Cirilio Immigrant Center when I was researching, it was because of the pandemic. I started to investigate support centers, because I was going through a very difficult situation and I wanted to know if there were some institutions that supported immigrants."* She said that, aside from São Cirilio, all the support she received came from her own networking and community-building efforts (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto). Her experience illustrates how formal institutional support provided initial connections that the women then developed into more horizontal relational solidarities "through people." As Barglowski and Bonfert (2023) assert, migrants count on people and institutions simultaneously, though relational solidarities emerge from the peer connections that institutional contexts can facilitate. Nayita's negotiation involved using institutional support as a bridge toward peer-led community building.

The comments made during the research indicated that for some women, religious communities were essential sites of embodied relational solidarities that provided both spiritual and practical support. Through shared faith and cultural practices, the women were empowered

to negotiate isolation while maintaining cultural identity. Several migrant-positioned women, particularly Brazilian women, attended churches, mainly Evangelical churches. One of them was Lisa, a Brazilian woman who moved to Portugal to work (Interview, 19 June 2023, Porto), and another was Carolina, who worked as a factory-floor Manager (Interview, 22 June 2023, Porto). Representatives from some NGOs, such as JRS, highlighted the role that religious organizations played in providing social and material support to migrants, particularly Evangelical churches (Interview, 30 Nov 2022, Porto). Valentina also brought up the role of her church in finding belonging and mentioned that her closest friends were from her church: "*They have a very young vibe, so I got to know like a lot of young people there, and of course a lot a lot of Brazilian people. The people that I am super close to now, besides my husband, are from Hillsong Church. So, for me it was very important*" (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto). Religious spaces can provide frameworks for relational solidarities that combine spiritual support with practical community building across generational and social lines, enabling the women to negotiate belonging through shared faith communities when secular integration proves challenging.

Educational contexts create structured opportunities for embodied relational solidarities that can transcend national and linguistic boundaries through shared academic pursuits, although translocationality reveals how access remains shaped by women's positioning across nationality, class, and legal status. Migrant-positioned women who moved to Portugal to study often engaged in community building within their university programs, particularly international or Erasmus-based ones, as did Valentina and Carolina. Eva and Sara, both from Latin America, moved to Portugal and enrolled in PhD programs, where they formed connections primarily with other international students and, to a lesser extent, with local Portuguese students (Interview, 19 May 2023, Porto). However, the ability to afford a study visa and undertake studies in Portugal was

underscored by factors such as education, class, and social position. This reveals that access to educational relational solidarities remained shaped by the positionality of the women in my study. Their negotiations involve leveraging educational opportunities while simultaneously creating alternative community spaces.

Leisure and hobby-based activities provide additional sites for embodied relational solidarities that create connections through shared interests rather than migration status or national identity, enabling the women to negotiate cultural barriers through everyday activities. Some women participated in in-person community-building activities by joining community hobbies, classes, or other activities. Maria joined an acro-yoga class, where she met a Portuguese friend and some other women (Interview, 23 May 2023, Porto). Bella joined a hiking group and sometimes worked in a co-working space, where she also attended their social events (Interview, 18 May 2023, Porto). Ada joined a women's book club that began virtually but later met in person (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). Lisa joined a gym and started making friends there (Interview, 19 June 2023, Porto). These activities demonstrate how relational solidarities create opportunities for connection across cultural and national boundaries through shared interests. However, positionality is significant: many of the women interviewed were unable to afford formal hobbies or classes due to economic constraints or limited time, owing to their workloads or family responsibilities, necessitating alternative approaches to community building.

NGO programs that emphasize capacity-building and network creation provide structured opportunities for embodied relational solidarities that bridge individual support-seeking with collective empowerment, enabling women to negotiate marginalization through skill development and alliance-building. Some women participated in NGO programs that offered capacity-building and created opportunities to build networks and engage in solidarity actions.

ENFEM Portugal, in which Valentina participated (Interview, 22 May 2023, Porto), was part of an EU-funded multi-country project aimed at supporting migrant women's integration into the labour market. It also brought together migrant women with civil society members, including NGO representatives, government organization representatives, private sector representatives, education institution representatives, and interested public members, to attend and participate in events and workshops.

Another NGO program that helped in capacity and solidarity building was a Co-development program by *Associação de Solidariedade Internacional* (ASI), which supported migrant women entrepreneurs through group sessions and workshops. This allowed them to develop their ideas, imagine themselves within the new culture, share and receive feedback, learn about government and organizational support, and network with other migrant women and private-sector mentors. After more securely establishing herself in Portugal, Nayita participated in the ASI program. She emphasized the value of connecting with other women and having a dedicated setting to focus on her goals. She began a volunteer project in which she brought together children from her home country, Venezuela, to sing in an online chorus, and she also envisioned additional outlets for her performing arts (Interview, 01 June 2023, Porto).

Like other community-building efforts in European migration contexts (e.g., Ataç et al., 2021), initiatives such as ENFEM and ASI created spaces in Porto where women from diverse backgrounds could connect, form alliances, collaborate with other organizations, and navigate belonging while advocating for social change. These programs enabled the women to negotiate individual marginalization while building collective capacity for broader social transformation.

The Evolution of Relational Solidarities into Transversal Solidarities

Relational solidarities emerge from practices of care, knowledge sharing, and mutual support rather than from explicit political organizing. These mundane yet vital interactions, sharing job leads, offering childcare, navigating bureaucracy together, exchanging cooking ingredients, constitute the practical manifestation of building community and mutual support. While these practices may appear apolitical, they contain latent political dimensions (e.g., Çağatay et al., 2022; Dağtaş & Can, 2022). These daily practices may evolve toward more explicitly political forms, such as "transversal solidarity," that engage citizens alongside newcomers, fostering openness and commonalities, though not without erasing differences (Ataç et al., 2021; Yuval-Davis, 1999, 2006). García Agustín and Jørgensen (2021) conceptualize "transversal solidarity" as operating through three types: autonomous solidarity, civic solidarity, and institutional solidarity, each with dimensions of identity, space, and organization, and each implying different goals, actors, and practices. The evolution of "transversal solidarity" is neither automatic nor unproblematic, as scholars evaluate the limitations of externally imposed solidarity and nuances of migrant-led organizing (e.g., Dağtaş & Can, 2022; Ilcan et al., 2025b).

Drawing on Ataç et al.'s (2016) notion of "citizenship from below," relational solidarities can be seen as alternative forms of political engagement that emerge through everyday practices of mutual aid and care. These forms of solidarity are not fixed. They can evolve into what Ataç et al.'s 2021 research on "transversal solidarities" examines: collective action that becomes more overtly political and challenges conventional boundaries of belonging. Yuval-Davis (1997) describes transversal politics as a coalition-oriented practice that acknowledges differences while enabling collaboration toward common aims of equality and justice. This aligns with Ilcan and co-authors' understanding of "transversal community-building" as "emerging in diverse socio-

political contexts and consisting of various participants in unequal power relations, such as migrants, refugees, volunteers, citizens, noncitizens, activists, who come together, despite their social differences, to foster solidarity" (p. 250, para 4). This approach emphasizes how transversal solidarities can bridge power differentials while maintaining attention to structural inequalities that shape participants' positions.

My research showed that migrant associations play an important role in community building and in negotiating belonging while creating platforms for political engagement and advocacy that bridge individual support with structural change efforts. Some of the Brazilian women I spoke with engaged with migrant women's online platforms, such as *Plataforma Geni and Brasileiras Não se Calam* (Brazilian Women Don't Stay Quiet). Although based in Lisbon or across Portugal, the platforms enabled women in Porto to connect and participate in various groups and activities. Additionally, *Plataforma Geni* offered access to numerous WhatsApp groups and subgroups for migrant women, with some based in Porto. Some women reported using these platforms to share their own stories, learn from others, seek support groups, and obtain advice on accessing legal, psychological, and other social services. These practices illustrate how digital and embodied forms of solidarity are intertwined, extending relational solidarities across distance while reinforcing everyday support networks.

For example, Karol, a single mother from Brazil who, along with her young daughter, suffered from an aggressive xenophobic encounter, elaborated on in Chapter 3, reached out to *Brasileiras Não se Calam*, having seen their posts where other women shared their xenophobic encounters. She found it helpful not only to hear the stories of other women and to share her own, but also to receive referrals to psychological support and to learn how to file a legal denunciation of the incident (Interview, 20 May 2023, Porto). These platforms demonstrate how

relational solidarities provide both emotional support and practical advocacy assistance, enabling women to negotiate xenophobic violence through both individual healing and collective resistance strategies.

Some migrant-positioned women connected with migrant associations operating on the ground in Porto, though these associations revealed tensions between different organizational models and approaches to solidarity, necessitating negotiations over accessibility and inclusivity. *Huellatina*, a Hispanic migrant cooperative association, aimed to provide activities that fostered connections and cultural encounters among community members, thereby allowing them to engage with the Portuguese community. They also offered settlement services and assisted in some emergencies. Paz also volunteered with the association and loved bringing people together (Interview, 09 May 2023, Porto). However, the organization's cooperative structure was not well received by all Hispanic migrants. Julia referred to the costs of events, membership, and support services. She felt that the organization operated more like a business and argued that many Hispanic migrants in Portugal had to deal with economic precarity due to the high living costs and labour conditions, so it felt unfair and unsupportive to be structured in that way. She was generally dissatisfied with the organization (Interview, 30 May 2023, Porto). This tension highlights how organizational models either facilitate or constrain relational solidarities, depending on their accessibility and alignment with participants' economic circumstances, necessitating ongoing negotiations about how to structure solidarity to ensure its inclusivity.

Grassroots research and activist collectives represented another form of transversal relational solidarity, combining academic work with political organizing while enabling sophisticated negotiations between knowledge production and social justice advocacy. *Afrekete*, a Brazilian women's research collective in Porto, consisted of a small group of researchers who

studied gender, race, migration, and exclusion. They initiated the collective after being denied funding for a research project to study the effects of COVID-19 on black migrant women in Porto, which they expected would happen since, in Portugal, statistics on race and ethnicity were not being officially collected at that time. They engaged in research in a more activist and political manner, rather than just academic. They also participated in larger community and cultural events, sharing their activist work and research through collaborative public engagements, such as *Festimigra* in Porto in 2024. Stefany, a group representative, discussed the challenges of horizontal solidarity within local civil society organizations, such as feminist groups in Portugal that did not prioritize issues affecting migrants, women of colour, or Brazilian women (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). As Dağtaş & Can (2022) show in Turkey, solidarity work among women often manifests as “distant toleration,” mutual noninterference amid xenophobic pressures, rather than transformative alliances. While the women shared certain gendered experiences, these did not erase the social hierarchies that structured their differing positions in migration, and common experiences did not automatically translate into mutual understanding.

The experiences reported by women in interviews reinforced that solidarity required sustained effort. In that sense, the challenges in seeking horizontal alliances signalled the collective's political labours (e.g., Ataç et al. 2016). Nevertheless, they found some community linkages within local women's movements, creating spaces for encounter. For example, as noted earlier, one feminist café/artist space allowed the group to collaborate within its space for specific events (Interview, 19 April 2023, Porto). Their work demonstrates how transversal relational solidarities required sustained negotiation across differences while maintaining a commitment to intersectional analysis and social justice, transforming exclusion from academic

funding into alternative knowledge production that centers on the experiences of migrant-positioned women.

Political engagement represents perhaps the most explicitly transformative form of transversal relational solidarity, connecting the experiences of migrant-positioned women to broader movements for social change while enabling negotiations that bridge individual belonging with structural transformation. Juliana, a Brazilian woman who runs an online platform for migrant women, *Plataforma Geni*, reported that she joined a political party, stating, "*I belong to a political party, and I am very well received by my Portuguese colleagues*" (Interview, 13 Feb 2023, Porto). Her experience with the party exemplifies the formation of transversal community building and solidarity efforts. The party she belonged to was left-wing and welcoming of immigrants. She believed that she and some of the other women she knew who had become involved with the party could help create macro-level social justice changes for migrants in Portugal. Additionally, because the online platforms she operated included social media accounts and WhatsApp groups with numerous subgroups, she had a keen ear for the challenges facing Brazilian women and the practical strategies. In her role, she could help build bridges among migrant women, civil society, and the political arena. These shared perspectives not only mitigate social discrimination and injustice but also enable transversal politics by allowing participants to engage with compatible value systems that transcended social divisions (see Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Migrant-positioned women's solidarity initiatives can create what Rygiel and Baban (2024) term "transgressive citizenship," an alternative citizenship politics that is transnational, transcategorical, and motivated by social justice concerns. This concept embodies feminist transversal politics, which seeks to build solidarities across intersecting differences of race, class,

gender, and sexuality by working with rather than eliminating different positionalities (Yuval-Davis, 1999). Rygiel and Baban (2024, p. 22) assert that transgressive citizenship builds solidarity across differences while disrupting bordering processes and creating “new spaces of belonging and forms of place-making that transgress and disrupt territorial and ontological borders of the national community.” Juliana's political engagement exemplified their concept of transgressive citizenship in practice. Indeed, her online platforms bridged migrant women's experiences with formal political processes while creating alternative spaces of belonging that transcended national boundaries of citizenship.

My research shows that the women participating in the study moved from being receivers to producers of information and support within their networks. For example, Fatima initially joined online groups seeking help with regularization but later became a resource for newly arrived women navigating the same process. Juliana began connecting with online communities for practical advice after she arrived in Portugal but eventually organized collective responses to exclusion and discrimination (Interview, 13 Feb 2023, Porto). The horizontal nature of these networks, built on peer relationships rather than top-down service delivery, enables these shifts. Women's engagement evolved from addressing immediate personal needs to addressing collective structural challenges, demonstrating how individual and collective strategies reinforced one another.

However, the development of transversal solidarities among the migrant-positioned women I interviewed was neither automatic nor without challenges, requiring ongoing negotiations across power imbalances and conflicting priorities. Stefany's experience with Afrekete reveals how intersectional differences created barriers to horizontal alliance-building even among groups committed to social justice. These challenges revealed that transversal

negotiations must address not only external exclusions but also internal hierarchies that can reproduce marginalization within solidarity movements.

The participants' experiences suggest that relational solidarities function as transversal community-building when they created what Ilcan et al. (2025b) describe as spaces in which encounters between divergent positionalities generated new possibilities. Juliana's political engagement through her party and online platform demonstrated how solidarity networks could acknowledge power differences while practicing horizontal organizing that centred migrant women's knowledge and leadership. Her ability to bridge migrant women's experiences with formal political processes demonstrated transversal solidarity work, ongoing dialogue across differences, rather than assumed automatic alignment. However, as Stefany's experience with Afrekete revealed, participants also encountered challenges in building transversal solidarities, as intersectional differences created barriers to horizontal alliance-building even among groups committed to social justice. The networks documented here show that solidarity required negotiating hierarchies while maintaining focus on structural changes that benefitted the most marginalized community members.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to advance scholarship on migrant belonging by demonstrating how translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities operate as interconnected analytical tools that reveal the collective infrastructures through which women create belonging “from below”.

Three key findings emerged from the interviews. First, translocationality creates profoundly differentiated experiences of belonging that resisted simple inclusion/exclusion categorizations. The migrant women's positioning across intersecting axes of nationality, legal

status, class, race, and family configuration produced varied pathways to belonging that shifted across time and space. The Brazilian women's linguistic proximity to Portuguese, for instance, did not automatically facilitate social integration when intersected with colonial legacies. In contrast, Hispanic women faced different barriers in professional contexts that required formal proficiency in Portuguese.

Second, the migrant-positioned women's negotiation practices revealed sophisticated agency operating across multiple dimensions. Rather than passively accepting exclusion, the women interviewed developed strategic responses ranging from professional retraining and entrepreneurship to political engagement and strategic exit. These negotiations demonstrated how agency operated within constraints, and how the women accommodated certain limitations while challenging others, creating possibilities for dignity and advancement. Exit strategies emerged as legitimate forms of negotiation that prioritized well-being over place-based integration.

Third, for the participants, relational solidarities functioned as a crucial infrastructure for negotiation, enabling both individual survival and collective resistance. These horizontal networks operated across digital and physical spaces, creating channels for practical assistance, emotional support, and strategic knowledge sharing that transcended the limitations of formal integration programming. From WhatsApp groups facilitating everyday life navigation to political organizing bridging migrant and local communities, the women created belonging through mutual aid and collective action.

This analysis aims to contribute to belonging scholarship by demonstrating how translocationality shapes both barriers and resources for belonging. The findings illuminate belonging as a dynamic process in which the shifting positionalities of a sampling of migrant-

positioned women shaped the negotiation options available to them, while negotiation strategies employed relational solidarities that provide resources for further action. Meaningful belonging thus emerged through horizontal solidarities that transcended both state frameworks and local exclusions, with individual strategies contributing to collective infrastructures that could serve other women.

This research captured a critical historical moment as Portugal transitioned from the relatively open migration policies of the 2010s toward increasingly restrictive approaches following far-right parliamentary gains and the implementation of new regularization restrictions in 2024-2025. The relational solidarities documented here may represent adaptive responses to this shifting landscape, as women anticipated and responded to narrowing formal integration pathways. Given that similar restrictive policy shifts have emerged across Europe, these findings suggest the value of comparative research examining whether informal solidarity networks play similar roles in other contexts in which formal integration programs contract and anti-immigrant sentiment gains political influence.

The sophisticated community-building strategies documented here demonstrate the women's commitment to creating lives of dignity and connection in Portugal, while revealing that successful belonging need not conform to predetermined integration models, but could be achieved through alternative pathways that prioritize women's own definitions of meaningful participation. The relational solidarities of the migrant-positioned women in the study revealed both the limitations of individualized belonging strategies and the transformative potential of collective action rooted in mutual care. Their practices demonstrate that even within structures of constraint, possibilities for resistance, connection, and transformation persisted through the sustained efforts of women who refused to accept exclusion as inevitable.

This analysis intends to contribute to belonging scholarship in several ways. First, it demonstrates how translocationality shapes not only barriers to belonging, but also the resources women access for creating alternative belonging infrastructures. Second, by showing how relational solidarities function as sites where belonging is actively constructed rather than passively experienced, this research challenges deficit-based approaches to migrant integration. Third, it reveals that women's constrained negotiations create meaningful belonging through horizontal solidarities that transcend both state integration frameworks and local community exclusions. Finally, it provides empirical evidence of how economic, social, and cultural domains of belonging intersect and reinforce each other, requiring holistic rather than segmented approaches to integration support.

Understanding these practices provides crucial insights for developing approaches that support rather than constrain migrant women's self-determined efforts to create lives of dignity and meaningful participation in Portuguese society. Given Portugal's recent policy shifts toward more restrictive migration governance, future research will be essential to examine how women's negotiation strategies and solidarity networks adapt to these changing conditions. Critical questions include whether the community-building infrastructures documented here can sustain themselves under increased structural constraints and whether relational solidarities can maintain their collective care practices as regularization procedures become more restrictive. Additionally, comparative research examining similar dynamics in other European contexts experiencing restrictive policy shifts would illuminate whether the patterns observed in Portugal reflect broader trends or context-specific responses. As restrictive migration policies proliferate across Europe, the horizontal networks documented here suggest that women's collective strategies may be more sustainable than formal programs, which are subject to political shifts, making this

research essential for understanding both the resilience and limitations of peer-generated integration infrastructure in contexts of increasing constraint. These dynamics are embedded within broader regimes of global migration governance that shape the conditions under which belonging is enabled, constrained, and unevenly distributed. Within this context, relational solidarities function as a gendered and feminist form of horizontal praxis, operating through intertwined digital and embodied practices of care, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support that extend beyond formal integration frameworks.

This chapter has revealed that belonging is a dynamic process of construction through everyday social practices. Despite persistent exclusion, women create spaces of recognition, care, and participation through active community-building that assert their presence and claims to place. Taken together, the chapters show how migrant-positioned women navigate borders, xenophobia, and belonging through interconnected practices of negotiation shaped by translocational positionalities.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined the ways in which migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America negotiated borders, xenophobia, and belonging in Porto, Portugal, and the role that relational solidarities play as the critical infrastructure enabling these negotiations. The research was conducted during a critical juncture: Portugal's transition from relatively open migration policies toward increasingly restrictive governance, even as thousands of migrant families established roots in communities, workplaces, and schools. This temporal positioning reveals how exclusion operated even under ostensibly welcoming frameworks, providing baseline evidence for understanding intensified hardships as pathways narrow and institutions contract. These dynamics are embedded within broader regimes of global migration governance that structure differentiated access to rights, mobility, and belonging across migrant populations, shaping both the production of exclusion and the possibilities for negotiation.

Portugal's Migration Paradox: From Welcome to Restriction

Testimonies opening this study highlight a central contradiction in contemporary Portuguese migration. Despite narratives portraying Portugal as an accessible destination, migrants often arrived with expectations shaped by misinformation, including outdated or incorrect information circulated through informal networks and digital platforms. Even those entering through relatively privileged pathways encountered unexpected barriers. One Brazilian participant reflected, *"I came in very good conditions... but I still had a hard time."* A Venezuelan participant described persistent social isolation: *"In 5 years... I don't have a Portuguese friend here."* Exclusion was particularly pronounced during the period studied, which coincided with institutional restructuring and administrative backlogs. This occurred prior to a

period of policy tightening, and despite the continued presence of integration services and civil society support.

Rather than an isolated set of experiences, the accounts of the women in the study reflect a broader gap between narratives of accessibility and migrants' lived experiences of administrative precarity and exclusion. Relatively open policies began shifting toward more restrictive approaches even as the foreign resident population quadrupled between 2017 and 2024. Rapid demographic change, rising living costs, and a severe housing shortage intensified pressures on both newcomers and long-term residents. AIMA, which replaced the former border agency, SEF, in 2023, inherited substantial pending regularization cases, contributing to prolonged precarity. The *Manifestação de Interesse* regularization pathway was eliminated after data collection, during the writing of this dissertation, further narrowing legal avenues for inclusion.

Yet Portugal's migration landscape cannot be reduced to simple narratives of either welcome or hostility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the country expanded access to healthcare for migrants without legal status (Raposo & Violante, 2021). Portuguese law guarantees minors access to public education and healthcare after three months of residence, while civil society organizations and NGOs provide legal guidance, social support, and advocacy initiatives. These supports coexist alongside administrative barriers, xenophobic encounters, and belonging challenges that migrant-positioned women in this study navigated in everyday life.

The Translocational Framework of Negotiation

Addressing the research question draws on studies proposing analytical lenses capable of moving beyond binary frameworks that position "migrant as a fixed category" (Anderson, 2019), frame migrants as either vulnerable or privileged (Kunz, 2019), or emphasize either structure or

agency as separate domains (Chi, 2019). These works foreground the complexity and overlap of migration processes and challenge analytical tendencies to treat borders, xenophobia, and belonging as distinct and self-contained fields. In line with Raghuram et al. (2024), this study avoids treating “migrant” as a fixed category and instead focuses on mobility and immobility across the whole migration process. Rather than approaching these as separate domains, this dissertation brings them into relation to capture how they operate simultaneously and interdependently in migrants’ lived experiences: migrant-positioned women arriving with “good conditions” yet facing unexpected hardships; legal status providing certain advantages while leaving other exclusions intact; privilege in some domains coexisting with acute marginalization in others. The translocational framework of negotiation integrates three interconnected concepts that together provide a tool for understanding how migrant-positioned women navigate structural constraints while creating possibilities for dignity and belonging.

Translocationality, drawn from Anthias’s work (2002, 2008, 2012, 2020), illuminates how migrant-positioned women are situated within multiple, shifting power relations across time and space rather than fixed categories. This perspective allows analysis of how inclusion and exclusion are lived, contested, and reworked in everyday contexts. Unlike intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, 1997), which maps the co-constitution of identity categories at a given moment and place, translocationality tracks how these positionalities shift as women move across geographical spaces, temporal trajectories, and institutional encounters. It captures not only who someone is, but where and when they are positioned, and how that positioning transforms in motion. For example, a Brazilian woman's class privilege may buffer her in one context and space while her race and nationality produce acute marginalization in another; the same legal status opens one door and closes another depending on temporal and spatial context. This

dynamic, located understanding of power is what translocationality adds beyond the crucial but more static mapping that intersectionality provides. The term migrant-positioned women itself reflects this understanding, acknowledging diverse self-identifications and legal statuses, including visa holders, EU passport holders, and those undergoing regularization. Positionalities, including gender, race, class, nationality, and legal status, transform across contexts, producing differentiated experiences of mobility, exclusion, and inclusion.

Negotiation, drawing on critical migration scholarship (e.g., Ilcan et al., 2025a, 2025b; Mainwaring, 2016; Rygiel, 2011), captures the deliberate, context-specific ways migrant-positioned women respond to shifting positionalities and structural constraints. Practices include navigating bureaucratic systems, building informal networks, managing stereotypes, asserting presence in public spaces, and coping with emotional strain. These strategies operate across institutions, workplaces, public spaces, and digital platforms, highlighting resourcefulness within constrained conditions. Negotiation is fundamentally limited; strategies rarely remove structural obstacles completely, and some become unsustainable, prompting strategic exit. Exit strategies are treated here not as failures of integration but as legitimate exercises of agency, strategic decisions to prioritize well-being and future possibility over place-based persistence. That this option remained differentially available based on citizenship status, economic resources, and home-country conditions is itself evidence of how translocationality structures the range of negotiations possible. Recognizing these limits situates agency realistically within persistent inequalities.

Relational solidarities, which draw on scholarship on the “mobile commons” (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Trimikliniotis et al., 2014), describe networks and infrastructures that support these negotiations. Horizontal, migrant-to-migrant trust-based

connections operate across entwined digital and physical spaces, providing durable resources for navigating exclusion and constructing belonging. These networks are explicitly gendered, temporally continuous, and evolve from crisis response toward collective organizing. Relational solidarities link individual coping to broader social, institutional, and digital infrastructures, converting personal strategies into collective capacity for survival and advocacy. When combined with translocationality and negotiation, they form an integrated framework capturing the multiple, overlapping dimensions of migrant life in a semi-peripheral European city. What distinguishes relational solidarities from broader concepts of social networks or community support is their grounding in feminist praxis: these are explicitly non-hierarchical, ethically oriented connections shaped by principles of mutual recognition, care, and collective accountability rather than charity or clientelism. Their horizontal character is not incidental but constitutive, enacting a political commitment to migrant women's dignity and self-determination. This feminist infrastructure does not merely supplement formal systems. It co-produces collective knowledge, redistributes expertise among women at different stages of migration, and refuses to treat structurally produced barriers as individual problems to be solved alone.

Together, translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities as an infrastructure of negotiation form an integrated analytical framework. Migrant-positioned women's shifting positionalities shape which negotiations are necessary and which networks are accessible, while their negotiations sustain and evolve these solidarities. This framework captures the overlapping dimensions of migrant life and the interplay of agency, constraint, and collective capacity.

Why This Research Matters: The Contradictions of Contemporary Migration Governance

Portugal functions as a semi-peripheral node in layered migration governance, shaped by EU border directives, national regularization frameworks, and local institutional responses in

secondary cities such as Porto. These governance scales are not abstract; they are lived through administrative encounters, colonial hierarchies, and the everyday labour of belonging. Drawing on critical borderland scholarship (e.g., De Genova, 2017; Mapril et al., 2019; Mezzadra, 2004, 2011; Rumford, 2008, 2012; Visan & Mountz, 2025), I employ borderlands not as spaces of cultural hybridization but as terrains where power relations are actively contested by migrant-positioned women through negotiation and relational solidarities, and where administrative bordering is enacted by states and institutional actors through bureaucratic delay and procedural uncertainty rather than territorial entry controls alone.

This matters on several critical grounds. First, examining how borders operate through administrative entanglement challenges dominant narratives that position migration governance from “open” to “closed,” and from “welcoming” to “hostile.” The analysis revealed that even under relatively open policy frameworks, migrant-positioned women encountered circular documentation requirements trapping them in years-long precarity. Building on research on liminality and the “borderization” of waiting (e.g., Dağtaş & Ilcan, 2026; Ilcan, 2022; Manolova, 2022; Mountz et al., 2002; Raghuram et al., 2024), this dissertation shows that these processes generate not only prolonged waiting but also legal precarity within otherwise accessible systems. The ambivalence of these systems operates precisely through their contradictions, through the gap between promise and reality, between formal rights and substantive access. The proliferation of restrictive governance highlights the need to understand administrative borders as mechanisms of control rather than as failures of implementation.

Second, to centre participants' own terminology, I use xenophobia rather than racism or racialization because it encapsulates both the hypersexualization experienced by Brazilian women and the professional barriers faced by Hispanic women, while highlighting how these

experiences are shaped by colonial legacies and gendered violence and ultimately converge in exclusion from belonging. The research revealed that Brazilian and Hispanic Latin American women faced profoundly different yet equally constraining forms of xenophobia rooted in Portugal's colonial history. Brazilian women encountered distinctive racialization despite sharing the Portuguese language: their Portuguese was considered inferior, their bodies hypersexualized across public spaces and workplaces, and their cultural production was dismissed as intellectually inferior. Hispanic women faced different patterns, often more neutral initial linguistic receptions, yet still encountered professional barriers and workplace discrimination. This differentiation reveals how colonial hierarchies structure contemporary xenophobia, creating what one participant called Portugal's "imperial feeling" towards Brazilian women, and hypersexualization towards them but not towards Hispanic Latin American women. The gendered dimension proved particularly stark: wardrobe adjustments as negotiation strategies, healthcare encounters marked by sexual objectification, and workplace assumptions about Brazilian women's availability. Understanding xenophobia as shaped by colonial and gender hierarchies, rather than as generic prejudice, challenges integration frameworks that assume equal treatment based on formal legal status.

Third, examining belonging challenges reveals how integration operates as social closure rather than individual achievement. Despite years of residence, fluency in Portuguese, and active efforts, few migrant-positioned women reported close friendships with Portuguese people. Many described politeness without intimacy, cultural barriers blocking deeper connections, and a persistent sense of a barrier. One participant's observation after five years, "*I don't have a Portuguese friend here,*" captures how belonging operates on social and political levels that can overlap and create exclusion. This fundamentally reframes belonging. The alternative

communities that migrant-positioned women constructed through WhatsApp and Facebook groups, embodied activities, migrant-led organizations, and through political organizing represent not supplementary support but primary sites of recognition and dignity. These horizontal solidarities demonstrate that belonging emerges through collective claim-making rather than granted inclusion, as a political process rather than a cultural achievement.

Across all three domains, the translocational framework reveals that privilege and precarity operate simultaneously rather than locating migrant-positioned women in fixed hierarchies. Migrant-positioned women with EU citizenship face workplace discrimination; those with advanced degrees encounter credential barriers; Brazilian Portuguese speakers experience linguistic marginalization. Initial advantages do not predict outcomes; positioning shifts dynamically across contexts. This fundamentally challenges binary frameworks categorizing migrants as either vulnerable or privileged, forced or voluntary, victims or agents. Migration governance produces hierarchies within migrant populations, differentiating access and experiences in ways that fragment potential solidarities while individualizing structural violence. These diffuse practices create internal borderlands where migrant-positioned women encounter state power and social exclusion simultaneously across multiple domains.

Analytical Insights across Three Domains of Borders, Xenophobia and Belonging

The translocational framework of negotiation, developed as a result of the research, integrates three concepts, translocationality, negotiation, and relational solidarities, to capture dynamics invisible through conventional approaches. The analysis across three domains (borders, xenophobia, and belonging) revealed several critical insights.

First, exclusions compound across domains rather than operating independently. Migrant-positioned women navigating administrative delays simultaneously faced workplace

discrimination and social isolation, with each challenge intensifying the others. Legal precarity blocked employment, which constrained housing, which prevented school enrollment, which restricted community participation. Yet these compounding effects operated differently: Brazilian women's linguistic proximity provided no protection against distinctive racialization through hypersexualization and colonial hierarchies; Hispanic women's different positioning created barriers around language acquisition and professional recognition. The experiences of both groups of women converged on profound challenges to belonging despite years of residence and fluency in Portuguese.

Second, negotiation emerged not as successful resistance but as constrained agency within fundamentally unequal conditions. Migrant-positioned women's sophisticated strategies, decoding bureaucratic requirements through digital networks, adjusting wardrobes to negotiate sexualized attention, and building alternative communities through WhatsApp groups and religious spaces, rarely overcame structural obstacles definitively. Instead, negotiations enabled survival within limiting systems, created temporary improvements requiring constant maintenance, or reached unsustainable limits, prompting strategic exit. This reveals how contemporary migration governance operates through making migrants responsible for navigating contradictions they did not create and cannot resolve individually.

Third, relational solidarities functioned as vital infrastructure precisely because formal institutions fell short. When official systems provided contradictory information, imposed circular requirements, and generated indefinite delays, horizontal networks became primary navigation tools. Digital platforms enabled real-time updates, crowd-sourced verification, and rapid crisis coordination. Embodied connections through religious communities, educational contexts, and leisure activities created spaces of belonging, even as broader social inclusion

remained difficult to achieve. Crucially, these digital and embodied spaces did not merely coexist but actively shaped one another. Digital connections often led to physical encounters: a WhatsApp introduction became a shared apartment, and an online recommendation became an in-person gathering. At the same time, embodied encounters also generated digital connections, as trusted relationships opened access to online groups that women would not otherwise have found. This shows how digital and physical spaces are mutually produced within a single, interconnected relational infrastructure. This relational infrastructure also evolved over time: for some participants, relational solidarities built within migrant communities developed into transversal solidarities that bridged social differences and connected them to local civil society actors. That trajectory points to the collective political potential of peer networks beyond immediate crisis response.

Belonging challenges operated across three intersecting domains. Economically, credential non-recognition and legal precarity limited professional participation regardless of educational background. Socially, access to healthcare, schools, and housing remained uneven, even in some cases for women with formal status. Culturally, the surface-level politeness without relational depth that many women reported blocked deeper connections despite years of residence and fluency. These domains compounded one another: economic exclusion deepened social isolation, which in turn intensified cultural marginalization.

Fourth, the fundamentally ambivalent character of digital infrastructure emerged clearly. The same WhatsApp groups that shared genuine mutual aid also circulated misinformation; Facebook communities that enabled support were exploited for commercial gain; and influencers who provided valuable guidance also promoted unrealistic expectations. Migrant users seeking information and connection may circulate incomplete or misleading content, while migrant

advocates build infrastructures of collective support and commercial influencers and intermediaries monetize migrant precarity. Because these actors share the same digital spaces, solidarity and exploitation become structurally intertwined rather than separate processes. This ambivalence extends beyond individual platforms, revealing how digital capitalism reshapes migration: knowledge previously exchanged freely becomes monetized, peer support is extracted as data, and solidarity networks are transformed into sites of surveillance and profit. Understanding this ambivalence becomes urgent as migrants increasingly depend on digital platforms amid declining political openness.

Conceptual Contributions to Migration Scholarship

This dissertation advances critical migration and border studies through four interconnected contributions. First, the translocational framework of negotiation demonstrates empirically how privilege and precarity operate simultaneously across domains, rather than positioning migrants in fixed categories. Migration scholarship has often relied on binaries, vulnerable versus privileged, forced versus voluntary, structure versus agency, that fail both empirically (e.g., women holding EU citizenship yet facing workplace discrimination, possessing degrees yet encountering credential barriers) and analytically (obscuring how power operates through differentiation and stratification). Translocationality addresses these shortcomings by centring the ways migrant positioning shifts across geographical spaces, temporal moments, and social contexts. This framework extends recent scholarship questioning rigid binaries (e.g., Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Duplan & Cranston, 2023; Robertson & Roberts, 2022; Söhn & Prekodravac, 2021) while adding empirical depth, showing that initial advantages do not preclude unexpected hardships and that privilege and marginalization often coexist within the same individual.

Second, relational solidarities are conceptualized as vital infrastructure rather than supplementary support. In contexts where formal institutions fall short or even fail, provide contradictory information, impose circular requirements, or generate indefinite delays, horizontal networks function as essential resources. This framework moves beyond “mobile commons” scholarship (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Trimikliniotis et al., 2014) by highlighting the interpersonal and affective character of these networks (e.g., validating that migrant-positioned women “are not alone”), their explicitly gendered nature (such as WhatsApp groups addressing feminized information needs), and their temporal continuity, as migrant-positioned women who secured status years ago continue supporting newcomers. These solidarities evolve from immediate crisis response toward collective organizing, with some migrant-positioned women creating platforms serving large communities or engaging in political advocacy, demonstrating both the enabling potential and ambivalent character of digital migration infrastructures. Analytically, this study distinguishes relational solidarities, defined as horizontal, migrant-to-migrant networks, from transversal solidarities, which emerge across social differences and unequal positions, connecting migrant-positioned women with local civil society actors (Ataç et al., 2021; Ilcan et al., 2025b). This distinction captures an important empirical trajectory: relational solidarities built the collective capacity that, over time, enabled some participants to engage in transversal organizing, as seen in initiatives such as *ForumDemos* and ENFEM Portugal.

Third, the framework rejects a binary view of structure versus agency by showing how constraint and creativity operate simultaneously. Migrant-positioned women exercise meaningful agency through sophisticated strategies, navigating documentation requirements, challenging stereotypes, and constructing alternative communities, yet these strategies operate within severe

structural limitations rarely overcome definitively. Exit strategies are treated here not as inclusion failures but as legitimate forms of agency, specifically, decisions to prioritize well-being over place-based persistence. That this option remained unequally available, depending on citizenship, resources, and home-country conditions, is itself evidence of how translocationality structures which negotiations are possible. This analysis responds to calls to attend to the co-determining dynamics of constraint and agency (e.g., Bakewell, 2010; Gioli et al., 2017; Marchetti & Salih, 2017).

Fourth, the research demonstrates that digital platforms fundamentally reshape contemporary migration experiences beyond serving as communication tools. Platforms enable practices impossible through physical networks, including real-time updates for adaptive strategies, crowd-sourced verification of bureaucratic information, and transnational communities maintaining connections across borders. This extends scholarship on ICTs in migration (e.g., Borkert et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Guma et al., 2023; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022) while revealing platforms' ambivalent character: mutual support coexists with commercial exploitation, and valuable guidance can generate unrealistic expectations. These findings underscore the need for frameworks that capture how digital solidarities both empower and expose migrant actors, and at the same time enable connection while imposing new constraints.

Empirical Contributions

The primary contribution of this study is empirical. First, the research addresses the gap identified by Brasil and Cabecinhas (2018) by providing one of the first in-depth qualitative studies of Hispanic Latin American women in Portugal, extending a body of scholarship that has largely focused on Brazilian women (e.g., França & Oliveira, 2021; Gomes, 2018; Malheiros &

Padilla, 2018; Oltramari et al., 2022). Examining experiences of both groups of women reveals how colonial histories create differentiated exclusions: Brazilian women encountered distinctive racialization through linguistic discrimination despite Portuguese fluency and hypersexualization rooted in postcolonial stereotypes, while Hispanic women faced different barriers around professional advancement and full language acquisition. Yet both groups converged in belonging challenges. This comparative analysis demonstrates xenophobia's differentiated operation rather than treating "Latin American migrants" as homogeneous while revealing how shared cultural distance operates beyond language alone.

Second, the Porto focus illuminates the migration dynamics of secondary cities, often overlooked in scholarship that focuses on capitals (e.g., Malheiros et al., 2024). Porto's setting as a city with early stage yet rapidly evolving diversity (Oliveira & Magalhães, 2024) reveals how institutional responses develop in contexts where experience with diverse flows remains limited, with infrastructure gaps intensifying migrants' reliance on peer networks when formal support proves inadequate. Porto's tourism-driven gentrification and housing crises provide crucial context for understanding how urban transformation compounds migration governance exclusions, as rising rents disproportionately impact newcomers and neighbourhoods oriented toward tourists rather than residents.

Third, temporal positioning captures Portugal's transition from relatively open migration governance toward more restrictive approaches, providing a crucial baseline for comparative analysis. Fieldwork conducted prior to the June 2024 elimination of the *Manifestação* Process documents what was possible under a formally "welcoming" system, while also revealing the administrative contradictions and bordering effects embedded within it. Migrant-positioned women navigated prolonged waiting, bureaucratic opacity, and conditional access to rights

despite the continued availability of regularisation pathways. These conditions show how the effects of policy change are produced even before formal implementation, through uncertainty and the need for strategic adaptation.

Methodological Reflections and Limitations

This research was informed by feminist intersectional methodology, centring the voices and experiences of migrant women while requiring sustained reflexivity regarding my positionality as a Canadian, white, female researcher. My prior navigation of Portuguese migration systems provided partial insider knowledge of administrative frustrations; however, substantial privileges, including whiteness, financial resources, institutional affiliation, and a Canadian passport, meant my stakes and risks differed fundamentally from those of many participants. Maintaining awareness of these positional differences was critical throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Several limitations shape the scope and applicability of the findings. First, the participant sample is shaped by self-selection and structural access constraints. Migrant-positioned women able and willing to participate were those with sufficient temporal stability, comfort with research engagement, and accessibility to recruitment channels, likely excluding individuals in the most precarious or marginalized situations. All participants had reliable access to smartphones and sufficient digital literacy to engage with online platforms, privileges not universally shared among migrant women (Godin & Donà, 2020). Consequently, findings cannot fully account for the experiences of women without reliable or sustained digital access, or for how technological barriers may shape access to solidarity networks and information.

Language dynamics occasionally constrained the depth of communication, particularly in Portuguese interviews, where my intermediate proficiency sometimes limited follow-up

questioning, potentially limiting my interpretation of the nuance in participants' accounts of complex bureaucratic and social experiences. While not the central focus of the analysis, the study did not systematically explore how educational background, prior professional experience, or class positioning intersected with digital literacy and the capacity to critically evaluate information, factors likely influencing engagement with online and offline solidarities.

The timing of the research further shaped findings. Fieldwork spanned the COVID-19 pandemic and the final period of Portugal's relatively open migration policy, capturing a unique moment of flux. While this allowed observation of dynamic institutional responses and anticipatory strategies among participants, migration patterns and bureaucratic processes evolved rapidly during and after data collection. Policy changes implemented during analysis and writing mean that findings reflect a specific historical moment, limiting direct applicability to current conditions but offering a valuable baseline for comparison.

Critical Takeaways: Beyond Individual Cases to Systemic Patterns

Three critical takeaways emerge from this analysis, with implications beyond the Portuguese case for understanding contemporary migration governance. First, administrative dysfunction is not simply policy failure; it is policy. The circular requirements, contradictory information, indefinite delays, and bureaucratic inconsistency documented here should not be understood as implementation problems awaiting technical solutions. Rather, they function as mechanisms of migration management, producing prolonged precarity that enables labour exploitation, restricts political organizing, and individualizes structural violence. This condition, in which migrants are legally present yet unable to fully work, plan, or access rights, operates as a mode of governance rather than an administrative accident. When such outcomes are

repeatedly produced through institutional processes, they can be understood as structured effects of migration governance rather than incidental faults.

Second, belonging is not achieved through individual integration but through collective struggle. The profound difficulty migrant-positioned women faced in forming friendships with Portuguese people despite years of residence, linguistic fluency, and active effort reveals how belonging operates through processes of social closure rather than individual achievement. While some Portuguese individuals do form meaningful friendships and close relationships with newcomers, these connections remain limited and do not necessarily translate into broader societal inclusion, leaving many women struggling to access wider social worlds. These patterns point to socially bounded interactions in which opportunities for sustained relational depth are often only partially realized. These dynamics are not individual failings but reflect how social boundaries are maintained and reproduced in everyday interactions. In this context, the alternative online and in-person communities that migrant-positioned women constructed represent not supplementary support but primary sites of recognition and dignity. These horizontal solidarities demonstrate that belonging emerges through collective claim-making rather than granted inclusion, which is a political process rather than a cultural realization.

Third, contemporary migration scholarship and policy could better recognize the role of peer networks as informal infrastructure, while also acknowledging their limitations. The solidarities documented here supported navigation, emotional support, and political possibilities, but also emerged in response to gaps and inequalities in institutional provision. Migrant-positioned women developed sophisticated information systems in contexts where official guidance was often unclear or insufficient. They built emotional support networks where broader processes of social inclusion were unevenly accessible, even though some individuals did form

meaningful connections. They also engaged in collective forms of advocacy in spaces where formal channels did not consistently reflect their experiences. These dynamics point to a tension in which peer infrastructures both compensate for and are shaped by institutional arrangements. At the same time, some actors operate ambivalently within these spaces, as environments that enable support and information-sharing can also be used for commercial gain and the circulation of incomplete or misleading information. These networks therefore operate under significant constraints, including the substantial feminized labour required from migrant-positioned women already managing complex negotiations. This highlights how such networks function simultaneously as enabling infrastructures and as responses to uneven institutional landscapes.

Areas for Future Research

This research opens several urgent directions for sustained scholarly and political attention. Future research would benefit from tracking migrants' longitudinal adaptation to Portugal's restrictive turn, and some questions might include the following: with regularization pathways eliminated and visa categories discontinued, how do migrant-positioned women navigate when previous strategies no longer function? Do relational solidarities intensify as formal support contracts, or fragment as heightened precarity limits participation? What new organizing forms emerge, more explicit political mobilization or fear constraining collective action? Do migrant-positioned women who secured status before restrictions support newcomers, or do different challenges create temporal divisions? These questions carry profound stakes as restrictive governance proliferates across Europe.

Comparative research in other European secondary cities experiencing parallel transformations is highly recommended, including research on Latin American migrants in Spain and North African and Caribbean migrants in France, where distinct colonial legacies and

migration histories provide important comparative contexts. Such research could investigate whether the patterns documented in Porto reflect broader trends in secondary cities in other Southern European or peripheral European countries, or whether different national contexts, legal configurations, and migration histories produce distinct dynamics. How do varying colonial legacies shape xenophobic hierarchies? Such comparisons could help situate Porto within wider European processes of urban transformation, bordering, and belonging, while identifying where these dynamics converge or diverge across contexts.

A deeper investigation into the sustainability and scalability of peer-led infrastructure is also recommended, raising a number of questions: as state resources contract, can horizontal networks offer more resilient alternatives to top-down programming? What resources do peer networks require to function without exhausting organizers? Can voluntary effort sustain itself, or does sustainability require formalization that risks reproducing the hierarchies and networks initially challenged? How can civil society bridge to these groups? How can governments and NGOs ensure that clear and accurate information is easily available and perhaps bridge it to migrant digital infrastructures? These questions have the potential to connect migration studies to broader struggles over digital commons and data justice. These questions extend beyond Portugal to challenge how we conceptualize support for inclusion amid widespread cost-of-living challenges and intensifying exclusionary politics around migration and belonging.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Migration governance can be understood more productively beyond the binary framing of “open” and “closed” borders. The administrative practices documented here, including circular requirements, indefinite delays, and contradictory information, can be interpreted as mechanisms of governance rather than simple implementation failures. This perspective points to the need for

clearer procedures with enforceable timelines, more consistent application of rules, and accessible multilingual guidance provided through official rather than informal or commercial channels. It also raises questions about how accountability might be strengthened regarding administrative practices that perpetuate prolonged precarity. Underlying these considerations is the need to shift analytical and policy approaches toward recognizing migrants as rights-bearing subjects rather than administrative objects of governance.

Addressing xenophobia requires confronting colonial legacies structuring contemporary hierarchies. This extends beyond diversity training to incorporate migration histories and colonial violence into curricula, establish accountability across the healthcare, housing, employment, and education sectors, support migrant-led advocacy financially and politically, and challenge media representations that reproduce stereotypes. Attention to gendered xenophobia (the hypersexualization Brazilian migrant-positioned women face) requires naming this violence explicitly and holding perpetrators accountable. Portugal's reluctance to name racism explicitly in public discourse and policy frameworks obscures structural inequalities, allowing colonial hierarchies to be reproduced rather than contested.

Supporting relational solidarities involves recognizing peer networks as vital infrastructures that require material support, while also situating them within broader processes of institutional transformation that reduce their reliance on crisis-driven responses. This includes strengthening conditions for collaboration between migrant-positioned women's initiatives and civil society organizations and fostering transversal solidarity that enables sustained engagement across different actors and positionalities. It also involves supporting grassroots organizing led by migrant-positioned women in ways that do not undermine autonomy, while acknowledging the value of peer support work as a form of labour that often remains unrecognized. At the same

time, it underscores the importance of more reliable official guidance and fewer administrative barriers, so that peer networks are not required to function primarily as emergency infrastructure but can also support longer-term forms of collective organization and political engagement.

Inclusion is not just about individual effort, but about the conditions that shape who can belong. The experiences in this study show that while some migrant women do form meaningful relationships with Portuguese individuals over time, these connections tend to remain isolated and do not translate into broader collective inclusion. The persistent difficulty of building deeper social ties despite sustained effort points to inclusion operating as a form of social closure that cannot be overcome through individual adaptation alone. Policy must therefore shift from expecting migrants to achieve inclusion on a case-by-case basis toward creating conditions that enable collective inclusion and claim-making. This includes supporting migrant political organizing, ensuring representation in governance structures, recognizing alternative communities as legitimate sites of belonging, and addressing forms of exclusion within the host society itself. For Portugal, a country facing an aging population and outward youth migration amid rising migration, this challenge is particularly urgent: long-term social cohesion will depend not on isolated instances of individual inclusion, but on developing structures that enable newcomers to participate meaningfully in society.

This dissertation examined how migrant-positioned women from Brazil and Hispanic Latin America negotiated borders, xenophobia, and belonging in Porto, Portugal, and the role relational solidarities play as critical infrastructure in these processes. The opening testimonies illustrated a gap between Portugal's international reputation as a migrant-friendly country and the structural and social obstacles that migrant-positioned women encounter. Experiences of belonging differed widely. Some had legal status, linguistic fluency, or social connections, yet

these advantages did not guarantee meaningful inclusion. Others faced compounded precarity due to irregular status, limited language skills, or constrained social networks. Amid these differences, substantive belonging depended less on individual attributes and more on collective strategies, supportive networks, and the infrastructures that enable navigation of structural barriers.

Analysis across the domains of borders, xenophobia, and belonging shows that migrant-positioned women navigate multiple, overlapping inequalities through negotiation within constrained structures. Administrative systems produce prolonged precarity and enforce circular bureaucratic requirements, limiting political and economic participation. Xenophobia operates through colonial legacies and gendered hierarchies, producing differentiated patterns of exclusion even among Latin American migrants. Belonging is maintained through social closure mechanisms, with limited individual integration translating into few opportunities for broader societal inclusion. Relational solidarities, including digital networks, community associations, and political organizing, provide essential support and facilitate collective claim-making, yet they do not replace institutional responsibility and remain constrained by labour demands, digital precarity, and broader structural barriers.

The translocational framework of negotiation demonstrates how privilege and precarity operate simultaneously across time, space, and social contexts. It captures how migrant-positioned women exercise agency within limitations, how exclusions compound across domains, and how solidarities create both survival strategies and pathways for collective influence. Transversal solidarities, meaning connections that bridge migrant-positioned women and local civil society actors, including organizations such as *ForumDemos* and ENFEM Portugal, further extended collective capacity, enabling advocacy across difference and linking

migrant networks to Portuguese institutions. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing horizontal networks as essential infrastructure while addressing the structural barriers that limit migrant inclusion. Supporting collective strategies, reducing administrative obstacles, and confronting gendered and racialized hierarchies are central to enabling meaningful participation. In Portugal, where migration intersects with demographic shifts and social change, addressing these challenges is critical for fostering sustainable inclusion and social cohesion.

This dissertation study contributes empirically, methodologically, and conceptually. It provides evidence of differentiated exclusion among Latin American women in Portugal, demonstrates the infrastructural role of relational solidarities, and advances the translocational framework for understanding negotiation under constraint. By synthesizing these findings, it highlights that migration governance operates through structural mechanisms rather than individual failings, that inclusion is achieved collectively rather than individually, and that transforming these conditions requires coordinated action across policy, civil society, and migrant-led networks. Overall, this study demonstrates how nuanced, context-sensitive approaches are necessary to understand contemporary migration governance and its implications for social justice, equity, and the societies we aim to build.

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Appendix A:

Interview Guide for:

(A) Organizations and for (B) Migrant-positioned women

There are several general areas about which I am interested in gathering data. The questions provided below are examples of some of the types of questions that might come up in my meetings with staff working at refugee-serving organizations in Portugal, staff or representatives of women's organizations in Porto and refugees living in Porto. This list is intended as a rough guideline only to interview participants as it will provide them with an idea of my interests and time to think about the questions before we meet. It will also help them make a more informed decision as to whether they would be willing to speak with me. The exact questions, order and areas of focus, however, will depend to large extent on the interests, expertise, responses and comfort of the participants.

A) Examples of questions that I would ask personnel working at migrant-serving organizations (whether NGO, international organization or government) are:

- Can you describe the role your organization plays in migrant inclusion in Portugal?
- What has helped to make inclusion efforts successful, and what challenges remain?

- How does your organization relate to and cooperate with other migrant-serving organizations?
- Can you describe any formal or informal partnerships you have with other migrant-serving organizations?
- Does your organization work with transnational organizations and initiatives supporting migrants beyond Porto, and if so, in what capacity?
- Can you describe any migrant-led community building activities or initiatives that you are aware of, and if so can you describe your relation with them? Do you know if they receive any kind of support?
- How does your organization support migrant women?
- Does your organization engage in any specific solidarity initiatives or campaigns with migrants, and also with women in particular, or if not, do you know of any and how they operate?
- How would you describe the involvement of civil society in your organization's initiatives?
- In what ways are migrants finding inclusion in the greater community in Porto?
- What factors might inhibit inclusion or lead migrants to feel lonely, excluded, powerless, or perhaps to even leave Portugal? How do these factors affect women?
- If your organization is a migrant-led initiative, how do its activities differ from non migrant-led organizations? What does migrant-led representation mean to members? Can you describe the dynamics of your organization? What role do women migrants play in your organization?

B) Examples of questions I would ask migrant-positioned women in Porto are:

- Can you describe the positive aspects of your new life in Porto as well as the challenges?
- In what ways do you feel connected to or supported by others, here in Porto and outside of Portugal?
- Can you describe any community activities or organizations you participate in here?
- Do these activities or organizations receive any outside support?
- How did you decide to come to Porto?
- What do you like about living in Porto?
- What have been your greatest challenges to resettlement in Porto?
- Do you feel these challenges are the same for all migrant women, or how are they different for you?
- Has your role in or outside of your home changed since you came here?
- How do you try to confront these challenges?
- How do you interact with and find mutual support with other members of your community, here and outside of Portugal?
- Can you describe the networks you maintain, in Porto and beyond?

- If you are part of any kind of group or organization, can you describe your participation?
What role has participating in that group played in your migration journey and/or your new life here?
- How have you encountered the services of NGOs and migrant-serving organizations here?
- Do you feel inclusion or belonging in the greater community of Porto now, and why or why not? Has that changed somewhat in the time you have been here?
- How are your relations with women from other communities in Porto, Portuguese and otherwise?
- Have you felt supported by any social movements here in Porto, or outside Portugal?
- Do you plan or hope to stay here, why or why not? If not, what would need to change for you to feel different, and what is missing?