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Collaborative filmmaking as a conveyor of (migrant) women's embodied experiences in Portuguese academia

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ABSTRACT

The collaborative film *My place is in between places* (2022) explores the experience of being a woman in contemporary Portuguese academia, bringing together researchers from diverse disciplines, career stages, and nationalities, united by a common experience of (past or present) migration. Drawing on multi-sensory feminist research methods and patchwork ethnography, we discovered that our voices resonate in unexpected interstices. Through this collaborative filmmaking process, we engage in collective reflection and made visible the embodied experiences of (migrant) women navigating in-between everyday spaces. This process deepens our understanding of migration, gendering dynamics, and the tension between precariousness and privilege in corporate academia. Collaborative filmmaking as a research method creates new social spaces of resistance and care. Furthermore, the act of writing and filming together generates complementary perspectives that converge into a polyphonic voice which can expand our understanding of subtle social issues. This approach fosters solidarity and support over competition.

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Introduction

A group of women academics, responding to an open call for participation, embarked on a project to explore the experiences of gendering in academia through collaborative filmmaking. Over four workshops and independent filming, our solitary voices found resonance in unexpected interstices – in-between places – where we found an "anthropology of common concerns" (Xiang, Uherek, and Horálek 2022). Our meeting itself was contested for its non-mixed and women-only composition, forging a position of forced resistance from the beginning, but also the creation of a safe space. In this space we found new possibilities and the conditions for a radical openness posited against the patriarchal structures and norms that have historically characterised the university

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system (Haraway 1988; hooks 2009). The genesis of our creative and intellectual process began with a group reflection on our positionality and how we, as women in science, produce knowledge. Using the commonalities from our narratives to guide our visual production, we focused on the seams in our everyday lives that stitch together the many different roles we perform across different spaces. This "patchwork ethnography" (Cardoza et al. 2021) disrupted the boundaries between our working lives and our private lives and allowed us to produce meaning from what is often invisible. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how collaborative filmmaking can be a productive method to make visible embodied experiences in collaborative research projects. We aim to share both the visual and theoretical outputs of our collaboration, but also provide methodological insights for future shared projects.

The making of the film *My place is in-between places* (2022) brought to the fore experiences that transverse other intersectionalities in our group. For all of us, our lives were crossed by diverse types of migration and mobility – internal, temporary, and permanent. For a majority, transnational practices defined our experiences. We hold different nationalities – Brazilian, British, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Swiss – and were born in different countries. We have lived in Lisbon for different periods – some spent their youth in the city, while others settled in later, the most recent arrival dated back from 2018. We are between 35 and 55, and at different stages of our career – lecturers, researchers, post-doctorate and PhD students. We also come from different disciplines – Biology, Sociology, Geography and Politics. Only one member of our collective holds a permanent position at the university, with precarious labour conditions (short-term contracts or scholarships, crossed by unemployment periods) being the norm for most. Notwithstanding, we share relative privilege as highly educated, white, middle-class, cisgender women researchers. The experience of mothering and raising small children often with a limited wider family support network was a further commonality for most of us. In that sense, the production of the film enabled us to visualise the embodiment of these experiences of gendering, migration, social reproduction and privileged precarity in an intimate but also anonymous way. It provided a fruitful intellectual ground to embrace the multiplicity of these perspectives and bodily experiences within our project to unsettle patriarchal norms through representations of the in-between and a cultivation of care (Lopez and Gillespie 2016).

What started out as a series of workshops to produce a film on being a woman in academia today transformed into a safe space of exchange, building relationships of solidarity and nurturing friendships. In an academic environment defined by metrics and competitive research, the collaborative space we created amplified our multiple voices and inspired care over competition. Thus, in this paper we argue that collaborative filmmaking as a research method potentiates new social spaces of resistance and care. As such, we situate our research within a body-oriented and multisensory literature which aims at challenging power dynamics, "producing reflexive approaches in migration studies, decentring narrations about macro-processes assisting migration" (Nikielska-Sekula 2025, this issue).

This article is organised as follows: we start with a brief state-of-the-art addressing how academic transformations, precariousness, mobilities, and privilege intersect. In the subsections that follow, we propose a collaborative methodology centred on our bodily experiences and the places we inhabit and share, mediatised by film. We then briefly

present the collaborative filmmaking project we were all participants of. Finally, we articulate the findings of this collaborative filmmaking exercise, which we define as a conveyor of (migrant) women's embodied experiences in (Portuguese) academia, through three dimensions: visibility (and awareness rising), collaborative research production (in care and solidarity), and resistance.

A place to start

Zozimo and colleagues (2023, 10) emphasise, "academic women's lives are not getting easier"; on the contrary they are intensifying in terms of demands, expectations and bureaucratic burden. In today's neoliberal academia (Lopez and Gillespie 2016; Pereira 2019a), "our labor is deeply (e)valuated along metrics that stem from a neoliberalized accounting of what 'counts' as work worth producing" (Lopez and Gillespie 2016, 7). Productivity metrics (privileging single-authored publications rather than collaborative work), together with project management efficiency, are the base of competitive funding, promotion, and access to tenure. This neoliberal paradigm also underpins the fiction of a (man) ethnographer uniquely and entirely dedicated to fieldwork. Yet the myth of meritocracy and the myth of work as its own reward contribute to the persistent exploitation of women in temporary academic positions (Zheng 2018).

In fact, neoliberal university labour conditions and increased competition result in varying degrees of precarity. In Portugal alone, while women are more than half of PhD holders, two thirds of employment contracts between 2017 and 2022 for researchers established in Portugal are fixed-term[1], and 60% of higher education teachers had precarious contracts in the 2018/2019 academic year (DGEEC 2020). This impacts women in particular, who continue to be under-represented among full professors and senior-level staff in academia (26%), and this without considering any other differences, such as ethnicity or geographical origin (European Institute for Gender Equality's Research 2022). This "precariousness has an objective dimension, translated into an unstable and sometimes discontinuous labour relationship, and a subjective dimension, translated into uncertainty that invades extra-work times and spaces and extends from the present into the future" (Ferreira 2023, 133).

And this is even more complicated for those who are precarious and have caring duties (and eventually transnational family obligations). Due to persisting structural inequalities, women continue to face disadvantages. They are more likely to remain in precarious situations for longer periods, and when they relocate to another city or country, they are often adversely affected by the loss of their support networks due to family responsibilities. The pressure of academic life, including demands for mobility and flexibility, actively contributes to precarity (Ivancheva, Lynch, and Keating 2019).

While precarity has negative implications on both professional and private lives, it also evokes privilege. Privileged mobilities and precarity in academia are interconnected in complex ways, reflecting broader social inequalities within academic institutions. In general terms, while privileged mobility relates to the ability to transport or even increase privilege across different geographical locations and contexts, this does not preclude precarity (Kunz 2016). Although coming from a place of privilege linked to the traditional representations of scholarly freedom and degrees of self-organisation (Perry and Harloe 2007) or vocationalism (rather than a regular job) (Barcan 2013), the experiences of mobile women in academia are an example of this.

Yet the researchers who navigate the liminality promoted by neoliberal academia are those who manage to deal strategically with this precariousness, whatever the costs in (mental) health (Acquistapace et al. 2015; Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Simula and Scott 2020). Such strategies include various types of mobility and transnational practices. Mobilities within academia may represent a strategy to overcome precarity by tapping into transnational networks to secure work opportunities and career progression. Care responsibilities and insecure employment produces specific experiences of mobility – whether for networking, internationalisation or fieldwork – affecting their career progression (Nikunen and Lempiäinen 2018). For women with young children, mobility often exacerbates stress, making it challenging to balance academic advancement with maintaining a supportive environment (Carter, Wolz, and Pallett 2024; Staniscuaski 2024). They may face the difficult choice between pursuing career progression and securing a (stable) family life depending on the positions held by individuals. However, academia can offer a more flexible environment than a traditional job, where women can organise their activities and establish routines that balance family and work life.

Many feminist researchers point out that creating spaces of resistance is a key strategy for promoting social change and tackling inequalities in our societies. Ahmed (2017) discusses how the creation of these spaces can enable resistance to everyday oppressions, but also transform individual lives and communities. Hooks (1989) writes of the need to have a "community of resistance" when working on the margins to help navigate the risk and locate a "counter hegemonic narrative" (206). These spaces represent places of empowerment, solidarity and mutual support, providing the valorisation of a multitude of experiences.

Collaborative practices to counter neoliberalising academia

We want to reinforce the importance of collective knowledge production and the creation of spaces of resistance that foster mutual care. Hawkey and Ussher (2022) emphasise the importance of feminist research that addresses intersectionality and promotes social change through collaborative and inclusive practices. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford (2006) explore how the dynamics of gendering and migration require a critical and collaborative analysis in order to understand and combat structural inequalities. In other words, the inclusion of diverse perspectives within a piece of research enriches the understanding of the complexity of social inequalities, adding other points of view and providing more holistic results.

The "scientific mosaic" metaphor used by Becker (1986) proves useful to account for our approach. As he points out: "each piece added to the mosaic enriches our understanding of the whole picture a little more" (Becker 1986, 106). In that sense, and against the injunction of biographisation (Delory-Momberger 2009), we have rallied to the claim that narrative visual fragments are "true iconographic breakaways: a way of telling one's story by circumventing the violence of the narrative injunction" (Bacon, Desille, and Paté 2021).

Working collaboratively in a safe and mutually caring space strengthens our resilience. As Lopez and Gillespie (2016) argue in their article on a "Buddy system", doing research together enabled them to "develop a more caring way of inhabiting the academy". This feminist epistemology fosters politics of committed positioning that have the potential to challenge hegemonic discourses and representations. Indeed, recognising the multiplicity

of standpoints does not lead to further social fragmentation, but to encounters that can themselves be transformative, and support resistance. As Gil (2006) proposes:

> "Ultimately, the notion of experience or subjectivity proposed by the feminist perspective has little in common with that put forward by postmodern ethnography. Feminist anthropology, in contrast to the fragmentation and complexity of the postmodern subject, centres its analysis on the political processes of differentiation, such that for it, "reflexivity that excludes the political is in itself unreflective" (Okely 1992, 4). The ethnographic experience emerges as a total act that involves body, mind, reason, and emotion in an inseparable way, as a practice of recognising the configuration of power relations. Hence, its criticisms of postmodern ethnography aim both to highlight the concealment of gendering produced in the encounter with the "other," and to question the political void and relativist danger implied by the fragmentation of the postmodern subject."[2]

Collaborative processes not only decentralise the researcher's voice but also validate the subjectivities of the participants, recognising them as active agents in constructing knowledge about their own experiences.

In this particular case, we focus on spaces for collaborative research reserved to women. While the intention was to include persons who identify as women, that is in non-mixed (trans-inclusive) spaces, the participants were cisgender. Non-mixed spaces represent a place/moment of rest from structural sexism where the pervasive patriarchal norms in society and institutions can be paused, disrupted, challenged, subverted. It is interesting to note that, in academia, women-only writing retreats have existed for some decades now and it seems that "women have a distinctive preference for writing socially" (Zozimo, Sotejeff-Wilson, and Baldwin 2023, vi). Working collectively provides a shared focus and cultivates mutual appreciation/care (Lopez and Gillespie 2016).

Multisensory and embodied research

According to Haraway's theory of situated knowledge (1988), the researcher's positionality influences what can possibly be known about the object of research. To adopt this stance is to assume that knowledge is not neutral and is produced from the perspective and the body of those who speak, write or film. And there are as many standpoints as there are persons/bodies. The centrality of our bodies in the work we collectively developed follows the calls to cultivate "sensory embodied reflexivity" (Culhane and Elliott 2016, 49) and "re-embody our qualitative inquiry" (Sandelowski 2002). The crucial contribution of a multisensorial and embodied research is that: "Sensory methods help to identify subtle, transient, and invisible experiences, of what it 'feels' like – including various sensory, emotional, visual, auditory, tactile, and intellectual experiences – to move through and dwell in certain spaces, places, and events from the insider's perspective" (Barry et al. 2023, 353). This means that we depart from the body to understand the production of our own lives, also called "anthroponomy" (Bertaux 2015). Embodied experiences constitute the daily life not only of research participants but of the researchers themselves (Desille and Nikielska-Sekuła 2023). In this Special Issue in particular, Rijcken, Karabegović, and Shinozaki (2025) include the back-and-forth of the women researchers in border zones as *sites of research*. Yet often we conduct research with our sensory bodies, and we dismiss them when analysing the data (Nikielska-Sekula and Desille 2025 this issue).

New feminist methodologies, such as Patchwork Ethnography, have innovated by disrupting notions of the "ideal researcher" and blurred the boundaries of the home and the field, replacing the body at the centre: knowledge production in academia occurs in unison with the domestic or personal sphere (Günel and Watanabe 2024). The potential of patchwork ethnography lies in revealing "subtle, transit, and invisible experiences". Indeed, "patchwork helps you 'make the seams visible', it foregrounds and highlights the moves of contextualization/decontextualization, extraction of data, the movement between field site(s) and home, and the various editorial decisions we make when we refine our stories. If seams are visible, a very different ethnographic project and theorization can emerge" (Cardoza et al. 2021).

Collaborative filmmaking as a means to produce embodied knowledge

We explore the potential of collaborative filmmaking to convey embodied experiences of (migrant) women. Collaborative filmmaking stands as a promising methodology among new methodologies developed in migration studies, and within a feminist epistemology in particular. As Jacobs (2016) has argued about a series of short films she and participants to her research project have collaboratively produced in Syria and Jordan, "film is a better fit in the body of research methods that are multi-sensorial, multimodal, practice-based and targeted towards how we experience our lived environment (Marion and Crowder 2013; Jewitt 2009; Pink 2011)" (481). Authors such as Hernández-Albújar and Ciccaglione (2022) show how using a camera can at the same time "bring our subjectivities into research", by giving personal accounts as a migrant woman, while making visible the power dynamics: "a camera can become a means to deconstruct, construct, and reconstruct narratives of normality, domination, and resistance" (83). In this case, the images representing one of the authors' embodied experiences make visible the discourses of discrimination against migrant women, it shows the body as a site – and the camera as a tool – of resistance. Such images have the potential of moving awareness and, ultimately, of achieving changes, argue Hernández-Albújar and Ciccaglione. We want to be careful here and avoid assigning the camera with the automatic potential of creating a safe and collaborative space, and enabling resistance. On the contrary, it takes an effort to turn the camera as a device enabling care (Jacobs and Salimbeni 2024), against the oppressive camera of colonial times; or the extractive role it plays in the mediatisation of migration (Augustová 2021).

In the last years, several projects were funded with collaborative filmmaking at heart, such as Smets' "Reelborders" (2023) focusing on migration in border zones, or smaller scale projects such as MacQuarie's PRECNIGHTS[3] exploring migrants' night work through a "multimodal nocturne ethnography" (MacQuarie 2023). Others have slowly built collaborative filmmaking within their PhD projects, as is the case of Piemontese (2021) who lent the camera to two Roma youngsters circulating between Spain and Romania. Filmmaker Gutiérrez Torres (2023) has written about her experience leading participatory filmmaking workshops in the three border zones scrutinised by the Reelborders project's team. In the border city of Ceuta, thirteen women have shared their views of the border through visual archives, storytelling and voice over. Gutiérez Torres highlights the importance of systematic reflexivity, and reciprocity in building an exercise where women have varied experiences of the border and its crossing. Boudreault-Fournier (2016)

demonstrates that films act as "catalysts that encourage researchers and students to reflect upon where they stand, with whom, and how" (71). The question of self-reflexivity was already raised by Kindon (2003), who asserted that our "gazes" can "perpetuate imbalanced or hierarchical power relations and can often create somewhat distanced or unreflexive claims to knowledge" (143). Instead, she proposed that "participatory video may offer a feminist practice of looking, which actively works to engage with, and challenge conventional relationships of power associated with the gaze in geographic research, and results in more equitable outcomes and/or transformation for research participants". Rooted in community development practice, what interested us most in this methodology were the "iterative cycles of shooting-reviewing", which enabled a continuous reassessment of our collective and personal experiences through the prism of theory on the one hand; and visual representations on the other hand; therefore, constructing meaning.

Although the distance and power relations between the different participants in the collaborative filmmaking workshop we will analyse in this paper is not as acute as the ones described by colleagues such as Gutiérrez Torres (2023) who worked with women sometimes irregularly staying in Ceuta, or Piemontese (2021) who solicited video diaries to young Roma migrants, collaborative filmmaking enables "unlearning" or "destabilising" of the research process, useful in creating more horizontal relationships between participants. Indeed, Pink (2001) has argued that collaborative filmmaking is a democratising methodology.

It is interesting too that collaborative filmmaking has been predominantly used in contexts of intersectional vulnerabilities: with youngsters, women, persons with migratory experiences and so on. Against a category of authorship (films by women) (White 2015), the organisation of women-only collaborative filmmaking workshop can be understood through a "feminist orientation positions women's films in relation to discourses of agency (authorship) as well as aesthetics (representation), in terms of the politics of location as well as place of origin" (Andrew 2004).

The filmmaking process: investigating the academic world through the eyes of (migrant) women researchers in a non-mixed safe space

This collaborative video making stemmed within the framework of an EU-funded organisational project, called Gearing Roles. As reiterated on the project's Website, the programme aims at "challeng[ing] the privileged status assigned to men by promoting women´s visibility and representation and juxtaposing their valuable contributions to knowledge creation and organisational quality to promote long-term behavioural and structural changes". The programme encouraged the implementation of training components.

It is in this context that Desille, co-author of this article proposed to facilitate the workshop "through our women's eyes", open to all women researchers at a Portuguese University in the fall of 2022. Based on principles of peer-learning and horizontal relations, the brochure indicated that the workshop aimed to "bring women together in a community of practice and of support, and cultivate the 'patchwork' of our scientific/personal lives". While not the intention of the collective, the wording of the call may have unconsciously led to the exclusion of trans-women as ultimately the space was cisgender.

This call for participants to the workshop, published in the Summer 2022, was followed by the disagreement of a few anonymous faculty colleagues. They asked that the workshop be open to men researchers, and disagreed with the creation of a filmmaking workshop reserved to all women of the scientific community. The argument was that it was depriving men of similar opportunities. Despite this pressure, a higher-level decision was made to keep a non-mixed space, open only to people who identify as women, that the brochure would not be circulated through official channels, but the workshop could be maintained.

Practically, the workshop was split into four encounters of two hours, running from the end of September to November 2022, and taking place on campus. No equipment or previous experiences were required, apart from a smartphone. Sixteen women of the University of Lisbon, and associated research centres signed up, and nine made it until the last session. During the first encounter, we set up the rules that guided us and that we all agreed upon to ensure the safety of the non-mixed space – which given the participants who signed up was a space that included cisgender women: mutual trust, caring and benevolence. After this first moment, Desille had prepared a lecture on filmmaking in academia, from a critical and feminist perspective. The encounter ended with a first discussion on our positionality, guided by the question "what are we in the world?" (Cardoza et al. 2021) and what is it to be a woman in science? How do we, women, produce knowledge?

At the second encounter, Desille had created a cloud of words based on the discussion on positionality (see Graph 1). This cloud informed a practical exercise: paired in two, we wandered on campus to create a short visual story consisting of three moving images. We gathered again to discuss the results, and found a common thread, that of "interstices" or "in-betweenness". We shared a few elements of filmmaking planning before individual shooting. In fact, during the two weeks that separated the second encounter, we all committed to filming the "interstices" of our lives with our smartphones: a few seconds of our daily lives, including work, commuting moments, childcare, leisure time.

We gathered once more for a third encounter, that we spent de-rushing and coding all the videos, following a thematic approach, which together represented the multidimensionality of our experiences as academic (and) women and as migrants. We had agreed upon the fact that all videos uploaded on a shared drive would become "ours". We committed to a collective authorship.



Graph 1. Our word cloud. The words were: commons, transformation, belonging, intimacy, legitimacy, language, courage, learning, fears, construction, between, transformative, creativity, and insecurity.

The fourth and last session was dedicated to creating the sequence of the film. Printed icons of all the videos shot, with the codes we associated with them, were hung on the walls. We used these icons as well as texts from the lecture and word clouds (see Graph 1) to create a mental map of our work and to generate a common problem. In that sense, the workshop followed Verstappen's proposal of film-to-theory (2021). In her words: "I extrapolate this discussion here to consider written articles and cinematographic outputs as interrelated rather than contrasting forms of research and publication. In my experience, text and film are merely supplementary modes of thinking through a topic, and I have always worked precisely by moving across these two genres. I thus propose a different model of interrelation between the two instances of knowledge creation, which is hybrid and non-hierarchical" (100). We regularly switched between visuals and texts, practice and theory, to be able to re-generalise (Gil 2006) and find common threads amidst the fragments we produced.

The "research question" was broken into three "answers" that guided the creation of the sequence. We have kept this structure below in the results section of our article. We registered the sequences created with the icons and edited the film accordingly. It is worth mentioning that Desille, who facilitated the workshop, was also the one with editing skills. Therefore, while decisions were made collaboratively, the technical work was done by one. However, the launch of the film and the following activities listed below enabled to blur the roles, and equalise relations within the group.

Beyond the workshop organised through this European programme, we organised two informal moments of encounter to adjust the edition of the film. We launched the five-minute film first online,[4] and then through an event at the University on 8 March 2023.

Written communication continued within the group, as we applied to festivals and scientific conferences.[5] With each proposal, we fine-tuned our analysis. Yet the temporality of our research projects and academic pressures, mobilities, and contractual situation (with lack of perspective) meant that we were not all able to participate in follow-up components every time. We therefore agreed that just a few members of the nine filmmakers could present the film in various venues. For this article, we discussed who would be available to write an academic piece, and only five of us could commit to this exercise. The four other members were regularly updated on the situation, and unanimous consent was given to use images of the film available here.

Results of the collaborative filmmaking: visibility, collective reflection, and resistance

The edition of the film was guided by the research question "what is it to be a woman in science?", to which three main results were identified: visibility of (migrant) women in academia; enabling of a collective reflection; and the film as a site of resistance. These three results became the three sequences of the film. Let us elaborate from here.

Visibility of academic women (and mothers) who experience(d) migration and precariousness

The premise of the workshop was to join academic women to discuss gender equality in science. Yet the de-rushing of our footage brought to the fore diverse experiences and diverse sources of vulnerability and/or discrimination that intersect and enhance

gender inequalities. The edition of these audio-visual materials permitted in turn to make those experiences visible. Therefore Kindon's argument (2003) that collaborative filmmaking could expose unseen parts of a research question was confirmed during this exercise.

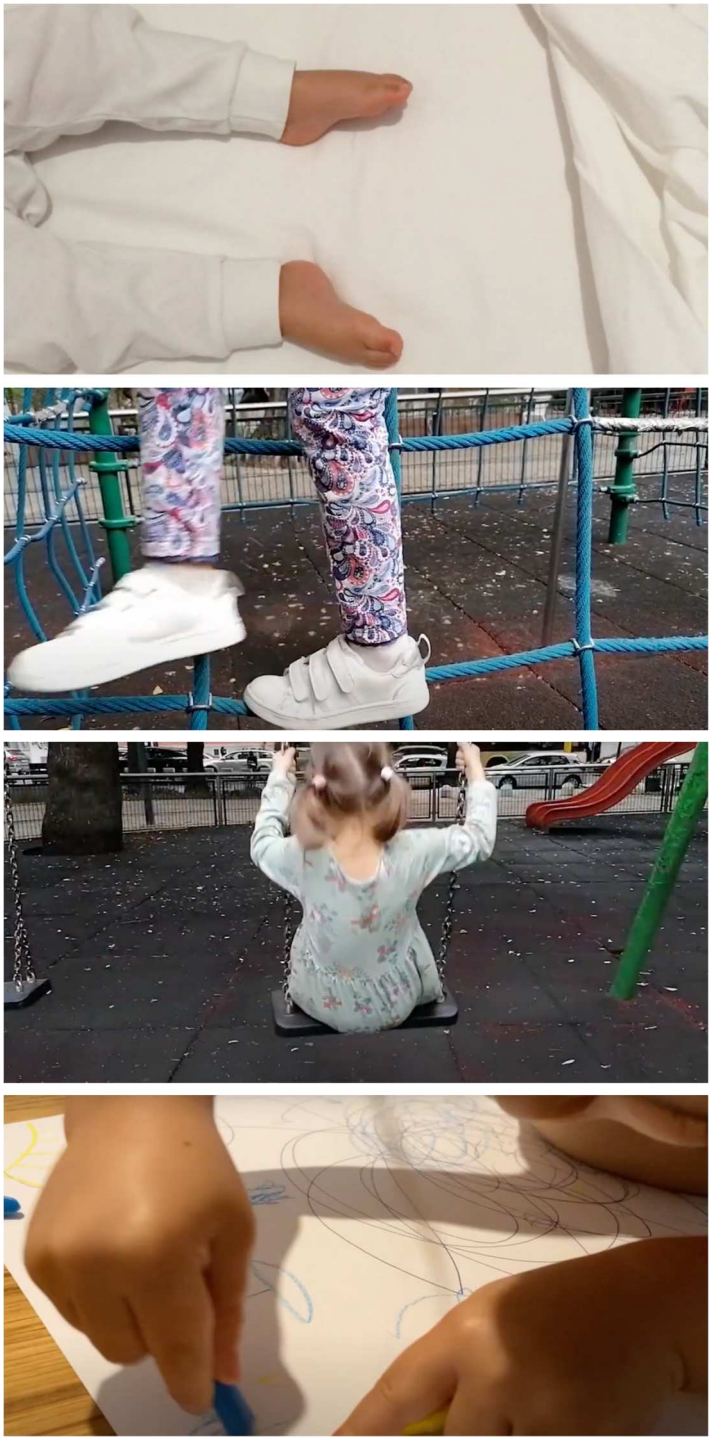
First, all participants, independent of their nationality, have experienced migration. Half of the women in the group migrated to Portugal either from Europe, Asia or South America, while Portuguese women had also experienced migration out of Portugal in the previous years. Up to today, we continue to sustain transnational lives, and some of us have since moved again out of Portugal. From the footage, we could identify different languages and accents, different experiences of familiarity and strangeness with the surroundings, and different strategies of dwelling in a city we all moved to, and which has been undergoing rapid transformation in recent years.

Second, only one of us has tenure, and most rely on project-based funding to remain at university. Some videos highlight the efforts made to conduct multiple activities in order to keep a competitive profile and maintain a position at university. But mostly, discussions occurring during the workshop highlighted a sense of fragile belonging to the institution, and the luring spectre of unemployment.

Third, mothering was shared by most of us. We shot images of our children's hands and feet, carefully "anonymising" while making sure that the interlaced care and professional work were made visible in the film. Most of us add care to research activities, as our children appear in the footage too (see Figures 1–4). We agreed that we tended to rationalise these strategies, letting our colleagues and the wider community know only of our successes, and not publicising the hardships on the way. The footage used for the edited film was often a first "outcoming" of those care activities.

A majority of us therefore shared these different positions: being a woman, being displaced from our initial place of origin/belonging, with child(ren) but some without the family support needed, and doing scholarly work with short-term precarious contracts. The first time we submitted the video to a scientific event, we refined our state of "in-betweenness" in the abstract, stating: "It is a space where we face the challenges of not fully belonging to any single world while, paradoxically, being an integral part of them all". The discussions taking place during the workshop comforted the idea of the creation of a non-mixed safe space. Indeed, from our discussions, we discovered we often adopted common strategies of concealing, coping, doing research in our immediate surroundings, at odd hours, or maximising fieldwork/conferences. In that sense, we successfully smooth down the obstacles, participating in a pretence that academia is for all. One of the film's main contributions is that it allows participants to expose those strategies.

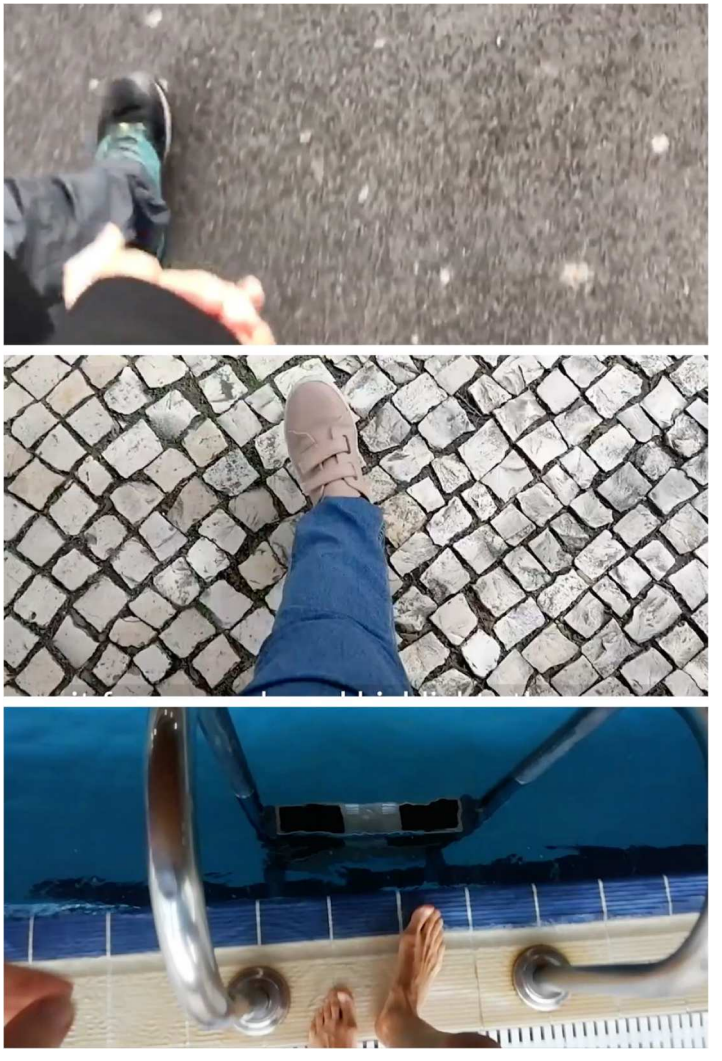
For this reason, we have often brought the topic of the collective patchwork ethnography in our discussions. In fact, our positionalities meant that we often met multiple barriers to access to full time, secure, supported and funded knowledge production. Yet, as this collective asserts, there is potential to theorise from these "interstices", these in-between places. Kindon (2003) has shown how researchers become tangled with research by having their bodies appearing in collaborative footage. While we talked about feminist perspectives of filmmaking, we put into practice methods that contrast with the male gaze and the competitive modus operandi that permeates today's neoliberal academia (Lopez and Gillespie 2016; Pereira 2019a). The challenge of looking at our daily lives in a visual mode has become a process of visibilisation of (male) biases that ignore



Figures 1–4. Our children's body parts appearing in the shots.

intersectionality and multipolarity of (women's) life. In many ways, the focus on "interstices" or "the seams" (Cardoza et al. 2021), has proved the continuity between the production of knowledge and the production of life/people, which is gender-structured.

The use of smartphones for shooting the entirety of the film, without tripods, and without any shooting crew, meant that the camera fully followed our body movement. Our bodies appear too in the footage, including bits of legs and arms (see Figures 5–7). But besides seeing bodies, the sensing body is highly present through water, nature, walks, urban infrastructures, attention to sounds (of bats, birds, cars, laughs, music, accents, languages), attention to textures (knitting, fabric being touched, pens sketching/writing on paper … shown in Figures 8–13), rhythms (metro, plane, car, stops and go … etc.). Other bodily sensations such as tiredness and stress are sometimes made visible too. Finally our bodily presence is also expressed in the voiceover, which mixes



Figures 5–7. Our own limbs.



Figures 8–13. Textures.

different accents and languages. In this film, we attempt to reveal how these embodied moments – through both the visible and invisible – are essential to telling a story about our experience. With this exercise, we aim to show that the visibilisation of bodily sensations is not only for the sake of an audience, but also acts as a reminder and even a disruption in science itself that our bodies are part of the research process, against the idealised representation of a neutral scholar.

Enabling a collective reflection

Collaborative filmmaking was primarily a means to reflect on what it is to be a woman in academia. From this "common concern" (Xiang, Uherek, and Horálek 2022), we started a collective discussion, during which we took notes. These notes became a word cloud, a score, a grid guiding our own individual exploration. And in fact, in our film, migration background appeared in the form of multiple languages (English, Spanish and Portuguese) used to mobilise resources, multiple socio-cultural worlds were brought together not only in the way we filmed but also the way we analysed and coded our videos. As Salzbrunn (2021) argues, start filming and see afterwards where migration stems, without purposely looking for it.

Once we brought together our multiple viewpoints and interpretations, all the images we shot shared authorship. This gave us a sense of collective ownership of the material. Being able to assign different meanings to one moving image meant that we also found more and more threads linking the images – and our personal lives and understandings – together. By thinking together, we also came to understand the power of experiencing together, rather than next to one another. In many ways, we had gone about our lives without realising the proximity of our experiences.



Figures 14 and 15. Interstices in the city.

Writing/filming with several hands/eyes broadens our understanding of society, allows us to reach complementary perspectives that become a polyphonic voice. From this process of dialogue and exchange of views emerged a consensus on what unites us and what distinguishes us. Aware of the various layers, we have produced an output that reflects a multiplicity of situations and conveys the complexity of being a (migrant) woman in academia.

Bringing together these moving images in a coherent text became a "metatheatre" (*mise en abyme*). The concept of "in-between" came across from the images themselves. Indeed we filmed moments in suspension, in the car, the bus, or a plane; waiting rooms or the washing machine cycle finishing; etc. In all these moments, the body is visible, ours or that of other people we are with or that we cross in these many everyday spaces. But we have also filmed cracks, irregularities, imperfections in the landscape (see Figures 14 and 15), metaphorical interstices.

We believe this is a replicable exercise precisely because, aside from the collection of sensory material, we have created a space for deeper collective reflection allowing us to move from the sensory bodies to intellectual conceptualisation. As crucial as the images were, the meanings we attributed to them involved moving back-and-forth between images and text, sensory experiences and theory.

The film as a site of resistance

A third result of the collaborative filmmaking was the fact that, beyond visibility and reflection, it allowed for creating collective resistance and resilience. The precarity



Figure 16. The red carnation, Portuguese symbol of resistance related to the revolution of the 25 April 1974 which ended the long dictatorship.

experienced by the participants and the fragmentation/precarity of working conditions go against collective organising and thinking. In an increasingly competitive neoliberal academia, we believe that resistance involves the adoption of collaborative research practices, such as those that led to the production of this film and this team-written article, among others (Figure 16).

Despite some pushback, we persisted in keeping the space non-mixed. In that sense, our first workshop was already an act of resistance. At the beginning of the workshop, as written in the methodology section, we agreed upon a series of principles of benevolence. The processual development of our collective work has reinforced this, with and without the camera. Indeed, with each encounter, we shared a deeper intimacy. By the time of derushing the footage we had shot, we had seen each other's intimate spaces – images of beds, homes, gardens, but also images of the spaces we cross weekly –, usually hardly introduced in our professional spheres. We felt entrusted with each other's worries and struggles, and we cared for each other.

Care was also expressed in the attention paid to filming (known and unknown) people. Except for the final part of the film, where a face-to-face interview appears, the shots avoid exposing people. Although we want to raise awareness of a social issue, we respect people's right to remain invisible, which is the ultimate paradox of visual research, as Prieto-Blanco (2021, 333) points out. The filmmaker's gaze favours parts of the subjects' bodies that do not allow them to be identified: legs, feet, arms, backs (see Figures 1–7). Yet the sensoriality of images enables one to feel human presence, even without seeing faces or full bodies.

The body parts in the image favour a more collective representation of our embodied experiences, but they also enable anonymity. Indeed, polyphony emerges as both a method for and a result of the empowerment and resilience of women researchers. Collective authorship enables the anonymisation of the claim and contributes to gaining power. We risk less, as it is hard to assign an experience or an opinion to a single person. The voice over is not in sync with the images. The images are themselves anonymised.[6] Interestingly, a tension subsists between losing individual authorship (forgetting who shot which frame, but recognising our own limbs), and having the body present.

Even while the film was completed, we realised that being a group allowed us to balance precarity and continuous migration or movements. The encounters, reading

and collective writing continue in smaller groups. We form a "cultivating community" – we read, write, film together. Working/writing as a collaborative group allows us to share tasks, promotes the exchange of ideas and also includes peer review moments, where co-authors validate the common work and assume co-responsibility and shared ownership. This work continued without losing sight of sensoriality. Discussions took place online, but also in co-presence before and after shared meals and coffees. Although the precariousness of mobility grants kept some of us away from Portugal for some time, whenever possible we hold face-to-face meetings where touch and hugs reinforce the collective spirit and the feeling of being part of a collective. In a spirit of mutual caring, there is room to ask about each other's feelings and moods, health, family, professional and personal concerns, and to probe each other's emotional working conditions. Our exchanges go beyond work, we share difficulties and anxieties that transcend the academic world, we share expectations, and we encourage one another.

Being part of a collective represents a form of mutual support, both in the process of producing knowledge and in academic life and life in general.

The whole process around this film proved to be important both personally and collectively. That is why, over time, we continued to meet and discuss the issues raised by the film and the filmmaking process, we organised screenings, presented at conferences and we decided to take the collaboration further, writing together. All these moments were useful for deepening our reflection. They also served to share the efforts and workload of scientific writing and publishing in a competitive academic context.

In this sense, we believe that collaborative filmmaking is a powerful means to resist the neoliberalisation of academia. This can certainly be extended to other collaborative research projects with participants (and researchers) who share "common concerns." Some principles can be replicated with other groups, such as working using an iterative process, necessary to develop empathy, trust, and eventually mutual care; as well as allowing for time and spaces of reflection so that the "patchwork"can be slowly woven together.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the film continues to circulate, enabled by its digital dematerialisation, that makes it possible to have it in the global digital world. Although we, the co-authors, can take the film to certain places where we want to show it and use it as a support for debate or an example of collaborative methodology, it acquired a life of its own. The film engages the audience's sight and hearing and can arouse the senses, as the narrative may resonate more or less deeply with the contemporary lives of many women, regardless of their location, origin, social status and profession.

The process of creating the film was, in itself, a space of discovery. As migrant women and academics, we brought with us different life contexts and embodied experiences. These differences did not generate disagreement, but opened space for mutual awareness and reflection. Engaging with each other's realities gradually led us to rethink not only our difficulties, but also our roles as researchers. Emotional labour, vulnerability, and the sharing of distinct experiences were all part of a collaborative journey that required trust, negotiation, and openness. These aspects, although often invisible in traditional research outputs, were central to the epistemological experimentation we engaged in.

Reflecting on the collaborative process that led to the film, we identify three key contributions to knowledge production and feminist epistemology. Firstly, the project demonstrates how collaborative filmmaking, grounded in multiple perspectives and personal bodily experiences, challenges traditional power dynamics. It disrupts the idealised image of the detached scholar by making visible the "in-betweenness" of (migrant) women's lives, where the domestic, professional, sociocultural, etc. spheres are deeply entangled. As stated in the introduction of this Special Issue, "not only do we unveil new understandings of micro migration processes, but we also make visible/palpable the imprints of macro-processes on singular bodies" (Desille and Nikielska-Sekuła 2023). Secondly, it enables a continuous conversation between bodily sensory experiences and intellectual reflexivity. In line with the ambition of this Special Issue, it shows that recognising the senses in our scholarly work enriches the data we base our analysis on and opens new venues for research. Thirdly, this epistemic shift allows for a more empathic, trustful and caring research process, albeit rigorous, replicable in other settings, and countering the current dominant norms in the academic world.

We are aware of the limitations of our standpoint. As previously said, we are a group of white cisgender women, and while our profiles reflect a closeness to the Portuguese academic system, we do not claim to represent all women in academia. Many diverse voices are absent from this discussion. Yet, despite these limitations, we believe our study contributes purposely by offering insights into the embodied experiences of women navigating the landscape of contemporary academia, thus contributing meaningfully to the ongoing conversation. Ultimately, the project we carried together is a practical example of a methodology that could convey embodied experiences of (migrant) women navigating in-between places and deepen our understanding of migration experiences, as well as of gendering, and of precarity/privilege. It exemplifies how collaborative research can be a catalyst for social and academic dialogue, fostering both personal and collective transformation. By doing so, we hope to inspire further research that continues to expand on these perspectives and include the voices and experiences of those we were unable to represent fully in this study.

Notes

1. https://empregocientificoedocente.dgeec.mec.pt/index.asp?grp=1&Ano1=2017&Ano2=2022. Accessed on 20/11/2024
2. Translation from Spanish to English done with the support of an AI tool.
3. PRECNIGHTS is the acronym for Precarity Amongst Women Migrant Nightworkers in Ireland, a project conducted by anthropologist Julius-Cezar MacQuarie, https://www.ucc.ie/en/precnights/project
4. Available on the official YouTube channel of IGOT-ULisboa: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tXfhAKWkoA
5. Our aim was to disseminate our film in specific places to access particular audiences and see what kind of debate would take place in each context. As Pereira (2019b, 983) argued, "place is not a neutral backdrop against which knowledge production unfolds; it plays an important role in academic practice on many levels, namely in negotiations of what counts as proper knowledge. Specific places are invested with epistemic authority, and thus lend credibility to the knowledge claims produced or presented within them". We have had difficulties in being accepted at film festivals, inclusive women film festivals. As an alternative, we have circulated our film through social media (e.g. Facebook groups of women scholars). We also

presented the film at the University on 8 March 2023. We presented the filmmaking process at the XIV Congress of Portuguese Geography in November 2023 in Lisbon, at the European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference in July 2024 in Barcelona, and at the Portuguese Sociology Association in Ponte Delgado in July 2025. This complementary dissemination strategy allowed access to a wider audience and to different groups within academia.

6. Apart from one frame where a friend of the authors appears (and gives her consent). She is not in academia, but she is herself a migrant.

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Declaration of ethics

Requirement for consent was waived by the ethics commission. Indeed, the empirical data supporting this article is a film shot by Amandine Desille, Ana Ceia-Hasse, Ana Costa, Ana Estevens, Elena Bulakh, Jennifer McGarrigle, Liliana Azevedo, Maria Teresa Santos, and Sara Larrabure. The film is the result of a collaborative effort and its authorship is collective; it has involved the authors of this article, as well as other researchers who were not involved in writing the article, but who all have given us consent to use the film for this purpose. The visual research on which this article is based did not include any risks or constraints for (in)direct participants, which were not recognisable, expect one. For the data in which an individual is recognisable, we have obtained their formal consent during the research process, as well as their consent for publication. The personal data of all individuals (in)directly involved in this research has been treated confidentially and in accordance with GDPR legislation.

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