



# HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ACROSS INTERNATIONAL BORDERS:

## LIFE STORIES OF CENTRAL AMERICAN WOMEN ON THE MOVE



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## Preface

A border is a temptation. To cross it may mean to improve a *performance* or to have dared too much. In both cases, it is a transgression (*trans*, beyond, and *grèdi*, to pass). But going beyond a border can be a necessity. At least it is for all those migrants who leave their communities of origin to escape a war, a famine, an environmental crisis or, more simply, to improve their living conditions or follow their ambitions. The border, the political one, thus becomes the threshold (*limen*), the place of encounter with the other, the stranger. It is the place where different identities meet, where our identity is amplified and that of the other is de-powered.

The re-discovery and enhancement of the values that are the foundations of our identity suddenly find a profound meaning at the moment of contact with migratory experiences. The State closes its borders. Their openings are maintained where there are economic or geo-political interests, but the filtering function is accentuated when you speak only of people. It is a “tightly woven” sieve when it comes to welcoming the foreigner.

But however impermeable the borders may be, men and women continue to move and will continue to find the strength and strategies to overcome any physical and bureaucratic barriers that may arise. There is no wall that cannot be overcome. There is no fence that cannot be crossed. There is no customs officer that cannot be circumvented. Especially when the place of destination is far preferable than the place of departure. The border thus becomes just a concept. A virtual obstacle. A symbol that is necessarily weakened along the path of growth and renewal.

The following pages tell the stories of women travelling along and across borders. Identity and political borders. Borders that describe their gender belonging where fragility and despair turn into strength against the abuse suffered in the family and the pitfalls of the journey.

Thousands of women and their children leave the lands of Central America to reach Mexico and from there move towards the United States. A journey made up of expectations and hopes, but also of violence and resilience. The women leave countries where they experience social inequality and insecurity conditioned by obedience to criminal gangs and family abuse. Thus, escape becomes a compulsory choice. In all this,

the absence of the state is heavy in protecting women with specific laws and policies, if not also in punishing the perpetrators. Discrimination and violence continue during the migration process. Women fall into human trafficking networks and sexual favours become the currency to pay for the journey. Furthermore, the author does not fail to point out the involvement of migration authorities working in concert with criminal organisations and the vulnerability of women belonging to the LGBT community. Abuses and human rights violations do not end even when the last border is crossed. Thus, the *caravanas* become a strategy of survival and risk reduction.

Ashanti Collavini tells us about violent borders – linked to gender migration – but also about interesting narratives that redefine border spaces and migration flows. Women, with their courage and experiences, give birth to new boundaries (and identities) in the relationships woman-man, employee-owner, migrant-resident that arise from an increased self-awareness.

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