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Article

The case of migrant women from the Central American Northern Triangle: How to prevent exploitation and violence during the crossing

Abstract

Violence and inequalities suffered by Central American women force their migration. Once the process has begun, they are exposed to greater violence because they are migrants, poor, indigenous or mestizo, women and, sometimes, minors. The journey is the space in which Central Americans, particularly women, are exposed to violence perpetrated by criminal organizations. Orderly and regular mobility would protect them from the dangers to which they are exposed; to this end, migration governance is needed. This analysis works with intersectionality as a theoretical approach and the methodology used was qualitative, based on interviews and a bibliographic review.

Keywords: Migrant Women; Central American Northern Triangle; Human Smuggling; Human Trafficking; Violence; Feminicide

Introduction

Latin America is the region with the highest number of women murdered worldwide, either by the actions of organized crime, domestic abuse or other forms of Human Rights violations. Homicide rates reflect this violence: Latin America account for 37% of global homicides and 8% of the world's population (UNODC 2019), although other forms of violence are also high, especially in the Central American region, since 288 robberies and 10 rapes occur per hour; the latter, moreover, represent a problem that receives little attention: Guatemala has a rape rate of more than 76 per 100 thousand inhabitants, El Salvador of 39.2 and Honduras of 33.3 (Resdal 2016). There is also indirect

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violence - extortion, kidnappings and threats - which is much more difficult to measure and is carried out by organized crime.[1]

Central America accounts for the highest rates of femicides[2] in the Americas. El Salvador is in the top of the list, with 8.9 homicides per 100 thousand women and the rate has grown 8 times between 2012 and 2016 (UNODC 2019). Between 2005 and 2013, femicides have increased by 262% and, of all of them, 50% have organized crime as the perpetrator. Likewise, the highest rates of female homicides are concentrated in age the group ranging from 15 to 44 years old (UNODC 2019, 62), highlighting the vulnerability of women and minors. As a result, Central America is going through a social crisis that has been causing forced displacement for years, a situation that is even more intense in the case of the Northern Triangle.

Violence in this region involves a combination of elements that are related to class, race and gender inequality and that, in addition, is linked to organized crime; therefore, the migration to which women are forced must be qualified as forced migration because "those who flee seek to escape extreme violence" (Forina and Bäckström 2017, 45),[3] exposing themselves to situations of extreme vulnerability.

It is in the migratory process that women are most vulnerable, as they are migrants, poor, indigenous or mestizo and, on many occasions, minors; a vulnerability that places them in a propitious environment to become targets of organized crime networks; another victimization added to those that come with being born in conditions of inequality.

This paper will be guided by two research questions. First, to what kind of violence, risks and threats are women exposed in their home countries and during the crossing? Second, how do migrant networks contribute to their protection in the overall migration governance system?

The hypothesis underpinning our work is formulated in the following terms: "The difficult conditions in which women from the Central America Northern Triangle face the journey, with no support, no papers and no clear knowledge of what they will find, expose them to higher levels of violence during the journey." We worked with qualitative methodology, based mainly on documentary analysis and supported by interviews with specialists and migrant women.

In-depth interviews were conducted with five key informants. Two women working in NGOs that help women in their origin and in transit, and three women – one from each of the countries we studied – who were able to survive the journey and are living in the US. The first two interviews were conducted by zoom by one of the researchers while the other three took place close to the school the women attend in order to learn English in the Washington DC metropolitan area, and were conducted by the second researcher. The strategy used was snowballing. From the first two

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[1]   Organized crime is a way of committing crimes, not a crime itself. By organized crime group we understand "a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit" (UNODC 2004, 5).

[2]   The category feminicide (opposed to femicide) broadens the meaning by considering not only the murder of women, but also a whole range of violent, verbal or physical conduct, such as rape, kidnapping, and humiliation.

[3]   IOM defines migrant as "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM 2019, 132).

interviews, a network of contacts was generated and allowed us to contact women who were difficult to reach and reluctant to talk. We used semi-structured questionnaires with open-ended questions.

Likewise, we use statistics published in reports of international organizations to support the analysis, which will be descriptive and explanatory. This article will be divided into four sections. In the first, we will work with an intersectional approach, establishing the categories that define Central American migrant women, which are not only determined by gender[4]. Second, we will describe the socioeconomic and security scenario that forces women in the Northern Triangle to migrate. We will also analyze the violence, risks and threats to which women are exposed. Third, we will discuss the need for global governance involving all actors in the migration process, in order to protect women during their journey. Finally, we will draw some conclusions. Our study will contribute to understanding how women are made available to criminal organizations during the crossing so decision makers will bare that in mind while working on governance of migrations.

Intersectionality as a paradigm

The motivations involved in migratory movements have diverse causes, but it is almost always the search for a safer life, flee from poverty, persecution or violence. Half of migrants worldwide, 272 million people (IOM 2020), are women, and this determines the meaning of migration, since gender roles and the power that one traditionally exercises over the other have a decisive influence on migratory processes. In this logic, women in transit become victims of a chain of violence that reproduces the same situation from which they are fleeing. This reality, which has been occurring since the 1970s, when it was observed that unaccompanied women were the main protagonists of migratory flows, highlights the *feminization of migration-violence* binomial, placing the link between mobility and gender on the agendas of organizations, States and civil society, as discussed below.

The existence of violence against women can be explained by different theories. Sociological explanations based on social structure, such as patriarchy, may provide one of the reasons why Central American women are forced to migrate, although it is not the only one. Thus, not only a patriarchal power system, but also the geographical, political and cultural contexts cause vulnerabilities in women, particularly in migratory processes, where mobility itself is a risky process. Therefore, women who begin their journey by clandestine methods are exposed to greater violence. This explains why migrant smuggling becomes a human trafficking situation.[5]

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[4]   Intersectionality incorporates to gender categories such as age, literacy, social class, ethnical origin and experiences related to violence, as we argue below.

[5]   Migrant smuggling involves the use of non-regular channels controlled by criminals who facilitate the migrant's entry into the receiving or destination countries upon payment of the service. In this cases, the migrant-criminal relationship only occurs while the debt is outstanding. However, this relationship, which begins as a commercial transaction, can end in trafficking; where the migrant, whether or not the debt has been paid, is exploited for labor or sexual purposes by the criminal network. The smuggling of migrants necessarily involves the crossing of borders. In the case of trafficking, it may take place in the same country from where the victims came.

Psychological theories allow us to understand the process by which a woman bows to relations of domination, which refer to an organized or structured power where one's own will is imposed on others. In this sense, following Weber (1984), the foundations of domination, the reason why people obey are rooted in tradition. Traditional domination helps to explain why women bend to the power that men exercise over them, not only at the individual, but also the societal level (patriarchy). Likewise, domination leads to a social structure, formalizing power and endowing it with rules, procedures and rituals (Martínez-Ferro 2010, 415), perpetuating this relationship of domination. During the interviews, safety was mentioned as the main reason to leave the country of origin. Also, it is important to highlight how individual experience related to violence and insecurity has led women to migrate. According to the testimonies, the presence of gangs was an important reason to leave their homeland.

When women are in transit, they are exposed to more violence, particularly sexual violence, with trafficking by criminal organizations being its most extreme manifestation. For Kuhner (2011, 23), "some examples of sexual violence include: Rape by strangers. Unwanted sexual advances or harassment, including demands for sex in exchange for favors. Forced prostitution and trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation." In the opinion of Sheffield, quoted by Posada (2008, 63), this form of aggression against women "is sexually expressed power." This power can explain the relationship between victim and criminals. Criminals objectify women through physical and/or psychic violence as instruments of submission and in this we recognize the existence of a patriarchal reality, where women "are translated into a kind of property, in a process in which sexual violence is juxtaposed with other physical violence that tends to relegate or trivialize sexual violence in the strict sense" (Ríos and Brocate 2017, 83).

One tool that can explain gender inequalities is intersectionality, which "has become the expression used to designate the theoretical and methodological perspective that seeks to account for the crossed or imbricated perception of power relations" (Vigoya 2016, 2). Intersectionality refers "to the situation in which a particular class of discrimination interacts with two or more groups of discrimination creating a unique situation" (Expósito Molina 2012, 205). "Sexual exercise in migration has become a constant for these women" (INMM 2008, 110) in such a way that there is an undervaluation of the body and a naturalization of sexual violence, given its omnipresence in migrations (Asakura and Torres 2013, 81). One of the interviewees told us how some women were taken away from the group against their will. Although staying together was a strategy, it did not always work to stop those who exercised direct violence against them.

Although Crenshaw (1989) originally focused his analysis on the interaction of the axes of power produced by race and gender, an evolution of this theory allows the addition of more axes as generators of discrimination. For McCall (2005), the paradigm of intersectionality makes it possible to address social complexity from a multidisciplinary point of view, since it understands that reality is complex and affected by more than one axis of oppression. Therefore, gender is not the only analytical category that determines the exercise of power and relations of domination. The concept of intersectionality "allows us to analyze the relationship in which different axes of

categorization and differentiation such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, citizenship status, functional diversity, age or level of education, among others, are intertwined in a complex way in the processes of domination" (Gandarias 2017, 74). Hancock (2007, 251), in his intersectional perspective, recognizes that "categories of difference are conceptualized as dynamic productions of individual and institutional factors. Such categories are simultaneously contested and enforced at the individual and institutional levels of analysis," that is, "generating hybrid realities or principles of social differentiation by combining more than one social category" (Gelabert 2017, 239).

Intersectionality is useful because it avoids the homogenizing vision of women based on gender differences, which does not consider other categories such as contextual and circumstantial. In this sense, and in relation to the case we are studying, the characteristics of Central American migrant women do not respond to a single category because, in addition to being women, and sometimes also minors, they are poor, illiterate, ethnically indigenous or mestizo, and with traumatic experiences of violence. Therefore, all of them are located at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and social class, and all these categories should be considered equally relevant.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that this intersection of axes takes place in a context or situation and in circumstances where the forms of oppression are manifested. For Romero and Montenegro (2013) it is necessary to move from intersectionality as a crossing of axes to intersectionality as a situation, because in this way we can address the particular circumstances in which differences occur.

In general, the mobilization of migrant women, including minors, has been devalued and made invisible, particularly in the case of Central American migrant women, who are exposed to threats of extortion, rape, kidnapping and even loss of life during their journey. Therefore, contextualizing the structural factors that motivate migration, that is, "structural intersectionality," is crucial to understand the exposure of Central American migrant women to domination, violence perpetrated in transit by actors who exercise oppression, and consent to subordination.

Factors of expulsion and violence during the crossing of women from the Central American Northern Triangle

The scenario presented by the Northern Triangle countries is complex. In addition to the economic and social challenges that historically characterized extremely unequal societies such as those of Central America, we need to consider the impact of the (in)security situation in general and violence against women in particular.

As highlighted in the report by the National Institute of Women of Mexico (INMM 2008, 7-8), the decision to migrate corresponds to the interaction of two levels: the macro level, which includes issues related to the political, economic, social and security context; and the micro level, which refers to the individual experience and the cost-benefit calculation implicit in the decision to migrate, in relation to intersectionality as axes of category and as a situation. Based on the interviews conducted and the reports analyzed, the micro level seems to have more weight when making the decision to migrate.

Regarding the macro, "it is widely accepted that the level of development is one of the most important structural factors driving emigration" (Canales and Rojas 2018, 32). According to ECLAC data, countries with lower GDP per capita are those that generate greater expulsion of their population. Therefore, economic and productive asymmetries, which are increasingly pressing, seem to reinforce the trend. Likewise, in a context of low salaries, wide inequalities and few possibilities for the future, the youngest decide to emigrate. These young people leave their country not only to improve their opportunities, but also to function as providers for those who remain behind. El Salvador shows this extreme trend: 43% of its economically active population emigrated in recent years, six times the Latin American average, while Honduras and Guatemala reach 16%, twice the regional average. As a consequence of economic constraints and low levels of GDP *per capita*, there is a systematic surplus of labor, which emigrates in search of opportunities (Canales and Rojas 2018, 35).

The countries of the Northern Triangle have a prominent participation in migration that has as its main destination the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada. Between 200,000 and 400,000 Central American migrants cross Mexico and approximately 25% of them are women (Huerta 2017). These figures make this migration corridor the most important in the world. Between 2009 and 2017, the resident population in the United States from these countries increased by 35% (Canales and Rojas 2018, 15), with an estimated 46% of people from Central America living in the U.S. being women.

Women migrate for reasons as diverse as the search for family reunification; dependence on a male with whom they travel (father, husband, brother, partner); escape from family conflicts and power relations linked to them (in sexist and patriarchal societies that oppress them); because they are young single women who do not see possibilities for development; because, as heads of the household, they see in migration a possibility for subsistence in a context marked by high levels of poverty and unemployment; because they must pay debts owed by family members who emigrated; and/or because they have been captured by human trafficking networks for sexual or labor exploitation.

In this context, "migration becomes an attempt to flee violence, family conflicts and the situation of domination and humiliation in which they find themselves" (SICA 2016, 68), violence inflicted by gangs, by members of their community or by relatives, acquaintances or their own husbands, at the domestic level. According to Huerta (2017), the diaspora of women fleeing feminicidal violence represents 52.6% of the total in the region. The paradox of this situation is that, by fleeing violence, they expose themselves to suffer other violence (*vide infra*).

The lack of knowledge with which they face the migration process is striking, in spite of relatives who are part of the diaspora. According to ECLAC (2018, 27) male migrants outnumber women by 26% (2015 data) and 82% of migrants have family members in the US, which allows them to begin the journey with other tools, achieving a reduction in some of the risk factors. Additionally, migrant networks function as support networks along the journey. In the event that the journey is made in stages, contacts at the stops, especially in Mexico, are essential to avoid being abused either economically or physically. They also provide them with a source of income as soon as they arrive.

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Socioeconomic and security scenarios

The socioeconomic scenario in the Northern Triangle countries is extremely complex. Poverty in Honduras reached 74.3% in 2015, in Guatemala 67.7% and in El Salvador 41.6%. The situation worsens in rural areas, as a result of the impact of climate change, considering that harvests are no longer sufficient even for subsistence; in the Honduran countryside 82% of the population is poor, in Guatemala poverty reaches 77%, and in El Salvador it is 49% (ECLAC 2018, 13-14).

Economic factors are important in migration. In the case of Guatemala, 71% of migrants left their country for economic reasons; in the case of Honduras, the percentage reaches 67%, and in El Salvador it is 50%. Unemployment, low family income and a pessimistic view of the future are central components in this decision. Among young women (18-29 years old), in El Salvador more than 18% are unemployed and plan to migrate, while in Guatemala that figure is 11.5%, and in Honduras it reaches 8.2% (Creative 2019, 4).

In addition to poverty, there are other structural factors that encourage migration, such as the "high level of economic, political and social exclusion in which the majority of the population in the region survives and which materializes in the lack of job opportunities, lack of education and the impossibility of covering basic family needs" (SICA 2016, 66).

Likewise, in the case of women, the structural are compounded by "seeking to free themselves from the controls inherent to their gender status" (INMM 2008, 26), whether linked to the role they must fulfill at home as caregivers, or to the role imposed on them by fathers, husbands or even brothers, in a power relationship, as explained above.

To the socioeconomic scenario described, it is necessary to incorporate a scenario of violence marked by the presence of gangs and criminal organizations that make homicides, threats, extortions and aggressions a habitual form of action, to which is added a high number of femicides. In the case of El Salvador, the rate is 10.2 femicides per 100 thousand inhabitants; in Honduras, it is 5.8 and in Guatemala, it is 2.6 femicides per 100 thousand inhabitants (ECLAC 2018, 18). However, victimization, understood as the perception of exposure to violent crime, including homicides, does not seem to play as important a role as one might think. 38% of Salvadorans interviewed with intentions to migrate cited victimization as the main cause, while in the case of Honduras that percentage dropped to 18%, and in Guatemala to 14% (Creative 2019, 6).

But isolating the variables is not easy. As Orozco and Yansura (2015, 52) highlight, when trying to determine the motives that lead the inhabitants of the Northern Triangle to migrate, "the communities of emigration are those with the largest populations, but also where the highest number of homicides occur in each country." If internal displacements show how people are willing to leave their homes in search of a safer life, everything suggests that the search for security is a fundamental component when it comes to emigration, even though economic motivations continue to come first. In this sense, Salvadorans and Hondurans living in the US say that violence is the main reason for migration, while for Guatemalans, lack of opportunities and violence have the same weight when it comes to justifying migration.

Such violence does not affect everyone equally; violence against women reinforces other situations of exclusion and marginalization to which they are exposed, generating a strong motivation to migrate. Most studies agree that migration is the alternative that women find to preserve their lives in societies that are adverse to them and do not respect their basic rights. But they are neither victims nor heroines. Many of them are heroines once they leave their lives back home behind. But unfortunately, sometimes they are victims of a different kind of violence during the journey and cannot reach the freedom they are looking for. Moreover, they end up as perpetuators of the same violence they have suffered from, as a way to recover their freedom.

The dangers of the crossing: fleeing violence to violence

In the last decade, women have become migrants by choice, in what is called feminization of migration. Despite the limitations generated by the scarce economic resources they have, women find a way to start the journey, even if it means running more risks and taking longer. As Araya and Salazar Araya (2016) points out, recently women were added to the flee to the North, "emptying" the Central American countries. But the crossing is the stage in which women feel most unprotected (SICA 2016, 72) for several reasons. First, because they have no documents, which makes them clandestine and fearful of approaching the authorities and therefore vulnerable; second, because they do not count with a containment structure; and finally, because violence is present throughout the journey and particularly because they are at the mercy of criminal organizations. They can be abused by travel companions, by migration authorities, by smugglers or traffickers, which highlight the violent masculinity in the entire Central American migration system, and in the worst cases, they can even lose their lives. It should be noted that, in their ignorance, many women believe that they have no rights because they are irregular.[6]

During the Mexican crossing, women are exposed to different types of violence: 1. Economic violence, linked to the debts contracted with the organizations that help them migrate. 2. Physical violence, often linked to discrimination by groups that intercept them during their journey. 3. Sexual violence, latent throughout the journey, either because they are abused and raped, or because they are deceived by the claim that in exchange for sexual favors they are guaranteed certain protection. 4. Psychological violence, expressed in the stress and anguish suffered during the journey, as a result of the uncertainty they face every day, afraid that the authorities will return them to their country of origin, but also of being kidnapped, raped or murdered. 5. Symbolic violence, which is the violence they suffer for being women and, in many cases, indigenous or mestizo, which leads to discrimination by some of the inhabitants of the towns where they stop along the way, as well as by the authorities.

These abuses lead to irreparable psychological damage that often ends up facilitating the work of criminal networks. Criminal organizations take advantage of these vulnerabilities. First,

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[6] "A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party" (IOM 2019, 133).

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they exploit the symbolic mechanisms to which women have been exposed all their lives and use gender-based violence to subjugate them (SICA 2016, 61). For Asakura and Torres (2013, 82) "the line between trafficking and human trafficking becomes ambiguous." It is a unilateral change of the agreement in the provision of a service, taking advantage of a relationship based on power and submission, as we justified when addressing the theoretical framework. The extreme vulnerability in which women in transit find themselves makes them conceive of obeying orders as the only way to survive: in other words, submission, since it is not in vain that life is the only value to be preserved.

Although trafficking is a transnational phenomenon, it does not necessarily imply an international movement, as there is also domestic trafficking "in which the process of recruitment, transfer and exploitation takes place within the victim's borders" (Anguita and Della Penna 2017, 254). In these cases, deception mediated. Women who wish to leave their country unknowingly place themselves in the hands of criminals who offer them a labor contract and transportation to their destination. Once the woman submits to the network, sexual or labor exploitation begins.

> While not all acts against women are rooted in gender, in the case of trafficking the two basic conditioning factors are met: first, women are trafficked mainly because they are women, being the fundamental object of the demand and, second, it is a gender issue because they suffer it disproportionately (Anguita and Della Penna 2017, 256).

In this sense, it is important to note that organized crime has incorporated the figure of "caregivers" who "use disguised gender identity and empathy to function as recruiters and vigilantes" (IDRC 2016, 38). These women, who are part of the criminal structures, capture them for trafficking or participate in their kidnapping (Asakura and Torres 2013, 81).

Both Mexico and the US have stepped up surveillance, especially along traditional irregular migration routes. However, far from containing the problem, the dangers for migrants increase, as restrictive policies force them to use different migration strategies, far from the traditional routes, which exposes them to greater risks and fears during the journey. The Central America – US corridor evidence the loneliness of these women in transit, as the most important support centers are located on the main male route and, even there, do not have the conditions to respond to women's needs (IDRC 2016). Women do not use traditional routes, exposing themselves to a more aggressive environment where they cannot even count with the help of NGOs. As our interviewees reported, there was no help on the routes they took, nor were the authorities present, nor were there people from outside the crossing business. One of them told us that the *coyote* abandoned them and they were lost in the desert for 5 days. They were only saved because they ran into a group of people in a similar situation, who still had a leader. In sum, clandestine routes may seem less risky regarding state control but make women more vulnerable to violence, especially since there is no registry of them crossing. These routes take them away from the social and institutional support that can actually contribute to a successful crossing (Lemus-way and Johansson 2020).

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At this point, it could be said that migrant women from the Northern Triangle of Central America do not escape the violence that oppresses them in their societies of origin when they migrate, quite the contrary,

> violence against migrant women is, in turn, a reflection and symbol of the existing inequality in the societies of their countries of origin; this current situation must be seen as a product of a patriarchal and sexist system that permeates the society of each of the countries in the region (SICA 2016, 35).

To counteract this violence, it is necessary to build solidarity ties. These ties can be based on the relationship between States and NGOs, or they can be the result of the work of migrant networks. Regardless of the format adopted, it is necessary to guarantee safe migration where the Human Rights of all migrants are respected.

Global governance for the protection of migration

The mobility of people in absolute numbers has increased considerably with the dynamics of globalization and globalization of international society, which have reduced distances, costs and times. The motivations for such movements are diverse, those that are carried out legally are for labor needs, tourism, business, etc.; however, there are also situations in which mobility is forced, such as the search for a better life, away from conflict, violence, poverty and lack of opportunities, as in the case of women in the Northern Triangle. These flows, which are increasingly intense and complex, are almost always irregular and massive, and therefore end up being perceived as a threat to the security of the receiving countries, which focus their actions on border control policies. Therefore, it is necessary to manage this mobility,[7] establishing governance parameters that make possible to face migratory challenges not as a threat, but as an opportunity to promote development for migrants and communities of origin, transit and destination.

In this sense, and despite the fact that female cross-border migration is a growing phenomenon, it has been invisible until the beginning of the 21st century. Since 2005, the concept of "migrant women" has been included in the global agenda, becoming a cross-cutting issue in the elaboration of policy recommendations, even though many of them have not had a direct impact on the safety of migrant women. It was not until 2015, with the approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) by the United Nations General Assembly, that the links between migrations and development were first established. In this document, it is recognized that "all migrants, women, men and children, form a vulnerable group that requires protection," also recognizing them as agents of development.

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[7]   While refugees and migrants have the same universal Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, they constitute two distinct groups, governed by separate legal frameworks. Only refugees are entitled to specific international protection, defined in international refugee law (UN 2018).

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For the IOM, migration management is a general term that refers to "the combined frameworks of legal norms, laws and regulations, policies and traditions as well as organizational structures (subnational, national, regional and international) and the relevant processes that shape and regulate States' approaches with regard to migration in all its forms, addressing rights and responsibilities and promoting international cooperation" (IOM 2019, 138). Therefore, governance becomes a valid analytical framework for dealing with migratory flows and guaranteeing both the safety of migrants - especially irregular migrants, who are more vulnerable to numerous forms of violence during their journey - and of receiving countries, as well as countries of origin and transit.

IOM (2019) uses governance of migration as a synonym for *migration management,* despite the narrower meaning it might have. For Pecoud (2018, 38), "the notion of governance is used by researchers and observers, but it remains unpopular among states that consider it as an opening towards non-state actors who do not wish to include it in the area of state policies." Thus, the term that has gained currency is migration management. In this logic,

> The term "management" presupposes that States can, if they so wish, close their borders hermetically. Despite everything, management presupposes a certain dose of control: a managed phenomenon is a phenomenon under control, which will probably not escape the regulatory capacity of States; management is thus a reassuring word suggesting that States maintain solidarity" (Pecoud 2018, 38-39).

In any case, "both notions underline the importance of interstate or international cooperation for the regulation of international migration and refer unfailingly to the notion of orderly migration" (Domenech 2018, 110). According to Barbosa and Dadalto (2018, 213), "the management of global migration needs to be more flexible in order to adapt to changing economic, legislative and environmental conditions," thus, migratory irregularity could be oriented in an orderly migration far from the consideration of threat.

Migration is an area that has traditionally been under the competence of the States, which is the guarantor of security and, as a consequence, establishes its migration policy in a restrictive, controlling, securitarian sense.

Nevertheless, the current migratory crises are clear examples of a failure to lead effective policies, by practicing securitarian policies that do not respond to the objectives of human mobility. The challenge of migratory flows is no longer a national issue, but a transnational phenomenon. It is also essential to go beyond the analytical category of the State as a provider of security, to give way to global governance (Anguita and González 2019a), based on a cooperative and holistic approach in which all the actors involved participate and in which countries are not classified by origin, transit or destination of migration, but rather by their impact, so that all must participate equally in migration governance.

A turning point in this area was the Intergovernmental Conference to adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, held under the auspices of the UN.[8] In the spirit of this Pact is the promotion of "international cooperation on migration among all relevant actors, recognizing that no State can address migration alone." Furthermore, it considers that migration generates "prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalized world, and that these positive effects can be optimized by improving the governance of migration" (UN 2018, 3). Besides, the Pact incorporates a gender perspective, contemplating the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, "recognizing their independence, their capacity to act and their leadership, to stop perceiving migrants almost exclusively from the prism of victimization" (UN 2018).

For the first time, guiding principles that place emphasis on migrants, on their welfare, on the human dimension and not so much the security dimension have been adopted, although the spirit of the Covenant recognizes the sovereignty of States and their obligations under international law.

Despite the potential for development that migratory flows can imply, irregular migration is seen by many States as a security threat and a challenge to the migration policies of receiving countries (Anguita and González 2019b). Unfortunately, the restrictive policies established by the main States of the international system often leave some particularly marginalized social sectors with no alternative. The increasingly restrictive policies of the Global North towards migrations from the Global South indirectly harm foreigners and reduce their freedoms by exposing them to situations of extreme vulnerability in their journeys. As a consequence, not only situations of violence are generated, but also flagrant violations of Human Rights, especially in the form of forced trafficking by criminal organizations (Hidalgo 2015).

According to the interviewees, since women are more vulnerable during the journey, especially due to the fact that most travelers and coyotes are men, but also because they are strongest than them, strategies are thought out before and during the journey. Some of the women try to find partners before leaving their country, which can either be other women in a similar situation or men that give them a sense of security. A second strategy mentioned was that, during the journey, women gather in order not to be taken out of the group, especially at night. The interviewees claimed that they have seen woman being taken out of the group to be raped, kidnapped and even killed, but none on the interviewees have suffered this kind of violence themselves.

For all these reasons, considering the inability of States to resolve these crises, the purpose of the Global Compact emerges to "reduce the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrants during the various stages of migration" (UN 2018, 4). They are based on normative principles such as Human Rights, and take into account the interests of all parties, including the least developed countries.

Migrant networks can function, according to Barbosa and Dadalto (2018), as informal governance mechanisms. The experience of women in the Northern Triangle shows how crossings can be improved by having relatives paying for the transfer (avoiding debts), recommending a coyote or providing accommodation, reducing the vulnerabilities to which migrants are exposed as a result.

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[8]　Migration as a challenge has been addressed in numerous international forums.

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In this logic, "migrant networks can be conceived of as systems that facilitate chain migration" (Barbosa and Dadalto 2018, 212), considering that this chain is established on the basis of three elements that grant trust to initiate the move (Choldin 1973): first, because migrants travel to a destination where relatives or friends are located. In the case of the Northern Triangle, this is one of the main motivations for crossing to the US; second, because they travel with relatives, who act as protection mechanisms, especially if these relatives are men, providing a false sense of security (women often end up at their sexual mercy, but they believe they will not have to provide sexual favors to other men during the journey); and/or, third, because they are received by relatives at the destination, who provide them with lodging and a network of contacts that allow them to start a better life, if they manage to complete the journey successfully. Clearly, the role of relatives can help make the migration experience more positive. In this sense, "network-based migration governance can help ensure safety and dignity, even in the face of dangerous migration routes" (Barbosa and Dadalto 2018, 216).

By 2050, the number of international migrants, according to IOM data (2018, 2), is expected to reach 405 million, so achieving migration governance is paramount. Even more if the Human Security approach is adopted, which consists of protecting all lives in a way that enhances freedoms and the full realization of the human being. We need to work on the governance of migration to ensure orderly and safe processes, on the one hand, and to reduce the factors of expulsion on the other.

As we mentioned, States will not be the only key agents, the task will also fall on civil society, governments at different levels (local, regional and global), non-governmental actors, all in order to achieve equitable development, equal access to public and private goods, gender equality and respect for Human Rights. In short, migration governance begins in the migrant's place of origin, but also affects the countries of transit and destination where equal and dignified treatment must be guaranteed.

Conclusion

The harsh reality faced by women in Central American societies, marked by a lack of opportunities and harassed by violence, leads them to initiate a forced migration process. This form of migration is far from safe and orderly, as suggested by international organizations. On the contrary, migrant women are highly exposed to various dangers, including different forms of violence. In this regard, as has been shown, violence can range from physical to symbolic, including economic, sexual and psychological. Paradoxically, when trying to flee from a violent scenario, they enter an even more complex reality, in which they may even end up at the mercy of criminal organizations that subject them to trafficking or disappearance.

The decision to migrate corresponds to the interaction of two levels: the macro level includes poverty and social development, and generates opportunities for violent criminal organizations that affect women's daily lives; the micro level refers to the individual experience and the cost-benefit calculation implicit in the decision to migrate. The personal experience of each woman will determine the order of the factors that force them to migrate. In some cases, the search for

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safety will be the main cause, while in others the search for development opportunities will be central. There seems to be a certain degree of underestimation of the migration experience, based on the lack of information about the process. Although the migrant networks can be key actors in increasing the safety of crossings, nowadays they do not provide sufficient information and support to prevent the violence experienced during the journey.

Despite the fact that the women design strategies prior to their departure in order to guarantee a certain degree of safety, the situation they experience once they begin their journey is far from what they imagined. While criminal organizations are seen as the main perpetrators of violence, during the journey these women discover that violence can come from different sectors. Not only those who were supposed to protect them, but also those who could provide them with help at the different stages they go through, take advantage of them by abusing their situation of integral vulnerability. Their status as irregular women, in many cases minors, leads to the belief that they have been stripped of all their rights. As a result, they do not turn to the authorities - whom they perceive to be corrupt - to report any of these acts of violence.

The integral vulnerability of these women is summarized in different intersectional axes that categorize them as poor, indigenous or mestizo and minors. As a result, they experience varying degrees of discrimination throughout their journey and even at their destination.

Increasingly intense, massive and irregular migratory flows are seen as a threat to the security of States. In order to protect their borders, States apply restrictive and securitarian policies that end up curtailing the rights of migrants. This is why, in order to ensure safe, orderly and regular mobility, international cooperation involving international organizations, States, civil society and non-governmental organizations is necessary. In this sense, migrant networks could take on a more significant and formal role, allowing a rapprochement between migrants and States of origin, transit and destination. Nowadays, the role of migrant networks is limited. It would be interesting to incorporate them into the global debate on migration governance, in order to obtain a more complete picture of the challenges faced by migrants, especially during irregular crossings.

Migration governance could optimize the positive effects that migration generates, such as prosperity, innovation and sustainable development. To achieve this, it is necessary to reconsider the securitarian and criminalizing migration policies supported by the countries of the Global North. In this way, all migrants, but especially women, would benefit, being able to develop an orderly and safe migration process, which would protect them from the dangers, threats and violence to which they are currently exposed.

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