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Chased Away

An intersectional study on the forced migration of women and girls from Honduras

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides insight into the experiences of female migrants from Honduras and how these are shaped by gender inequalities and discrimination in the context of forced migration. It also analyzes the role of social categories, relations, structures, and discourses in the creation of these experiences by applying an intersectional, social constructivist approach as the main critical lens for analysis. For this purpose, the intersectional tool *societal arenas of investigation* developed by Floya Anthias is utilized to explore the patterns of exclusion that have an impact in the overall migration of women and girls. Moreover, it brings the question of agency by considering whether female migrants can be viewed as independent social actors in the process of pursuing their own goals and strategies. Findings reveal that migrant women and girls are impacted by a variety of social considerations that limit/enable their capacity to exercise agency and further exacerbate their exposure to dangers and risks in the migration process. This study concludes that the creation of specific routes of care and attention for female migrants, as well as the incorporation of gender-sensitive and intersectional considerations in migration policies, is needed to address the particular needs of this population.

Keywords: Intersectionality, female migrants, forced migration, Honduras, social categories, social relations, social structures, discourses.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HDI	Human Development Index
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
LGBTQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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1. Introduction

Human mobility is regarded as one of the most important contemporary issues of our time. However, many of those who have mobilized do not choose to do so of their own accord. Millions of people worldwide are displaced as a result of conflicts and humanitarian crises, triggered by political, economic, or environmental factors in their countries of origin. According to UNHCR's most recent estimates, a total of 79.5 million people worldwide are in a state of forced displacement, and the rate at which mass displacement occurs is only increasing (DeJesus, 2018; UNHCR, 2020). These numbers show the need to uphold the right for protection and security of displaced populations. As a result of the rise in protracted displacement and the incorporation of migration as a cross-cutting theme in the 2030 agenda, forced migration is increasingly being recognized as a development issue with humanitarian implications (Harild, 2016; OECD, 2017; Migration Data Portal, 2019). In fact, the main principle of 'leaving no one behind' is of particular relevance to address the concept of forced migration (Cazabat, 2018). Moreover, numbers reflect that nearly half of all migrants are female and the majority of those who have been forcefully displaced are women and children (IOM, 2017; IPI, 2014). Such estimates indicate that female migrants are active participants in migration processes but are disproportionately impacted by the immediate and long-lasting effects of forced migration.

Recent years have seen an increase in the forced migration of women and girls from Honduras. In 2019, a total of 800,707 Hondurans were reported to have migrated with an estimated 58.9% of them being female (Orozco, 2020). The increase in forced female migration is also reflected in the active participation of women and children in the migrant caravans and the immigration crisis of 2014 when a large number of women and children coming from Central America were detained at the Mexico-US border (Brettell, 2016). This indicates that women and girls are at the forefront of the migration flows coming from Honduras and studying their perceptions and realities is important to enrich understanding about the country's diaspora and its implications for future research and interventions.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

This paper, therefore, aims to analyze the experiences of female migrants from Honduras in the context of forced migration. The consideration of other factors, such as social categories, relations, and structures as well as their role in the creation and exacerbation of these experiences will be further explored. Thus, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

How are the experiences of women and girls from Honduras shaped by gender inequalities and discrimination in the process of forced migration?

Specific research questions:

- What implications does the intersection of different social categories have in the creation of these experiences?
- What role do social relations and social structures have in the exacerbation of negative outcomes impacting the female migrant experience?
- How can female migrants be viewed as independent social actors in the process of pursuing their own goals and strategies?

1.2 Contribution to the Literature

The following research is a contribution to the expanding literature on forced migration in Central America, mainly those papers that shed light on the particular needs and struggles of female migrants. Previous studies have focused on the violence encountered by female asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle of Central America and their realities in transit and destination countries (Verduzco and Lozano, 2011; Schmidt and Buechler, 2017). Others have fixated on the gendered and racial inequalities impacting the female migrant experience from Honduras, arguing that these stem from global migration processes and historical relations of oppression and colonialism between the United States and Central America (Gutiérrez Rivera, 2018). The present research is intricately connected to these studies. However, this paper elaborates on the inclusion of various social categories (such as age, sexuality, etc.) and the role of social relations, social structures, and discourses in the context of forced migration.

1.3 Thesis Outline

After the introduction, this paper proceeds to the second chapter, focused on setting the scene and discussing why forced migration, particularly that of women and girls from Honduras, is relevant for the purpose of this investigation. Chapter three places emphasis on the literature available starting with a general overview of gender and migration studies, then narrowing it down to the internal displacement and forced migration of women and girls and finalizing with a critique towards traditional migration theories. Later, chapter four introduces the main theoretical framework utilized in this study, intersectionality, and the intersectional tool *societal arenas of investigation* as well as a theoretical consideration of the relationship between structure and agency in the context of female migration. Afterwards, chapter five presents the methodology and data collection/analysis process applied in this research. Following that, chapter six highlights the findings and discussion through the application of the intersectional tool by looking into different levels of analysis where social categories, relations, and structures are co-constructed. To finalize, the paper concludes with a summary and recommendations for future research.

2. Setting the Scene

Honduras is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America (World Bank, 2020; Phillips, 2020). However, despite this progress, the country is positioned at 132 out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) due to the high levels of poverty, inequality, and violence (UNDP, 2020; Gutiérrez Rivera, 2018). An estimated 64.7% of the population lives in poverty, with the highest percentage of poor people living in rural areas (OHCHR, 2020). Violence from organized criminal groups such as *maras* or *pandillas* (gangs) is widespread and not effectively addressed by public security institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Furthermore, the country faces high levels of political instability, corruption, and impunity, as reflected in various international indexes such as BTI Transformation Index and the Corruption Perception Index (Stiftung, 2020; Transparency International, 2020). These factors have contributed to the increase in the country's migration flows. In the particular case of migrant women and girls, studies have shown that their outflows stem from high levels of gender-based and criminal violence surrounding them, their families, and communities (Fernández Aponte, 2018; OHCHR, 2020). Moreover, according to the Global Report on Internal Displacement, a total of 174,000 Hondurans were internally displaced in 2015 as a result of generalized violence (Gutiérrez Rivera, 2018). This number reflects a six-fold increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs) compared to previous years, which is important considering that internal displacement is generally a precursor of forced migration (Ibid).

Most recently, Honduras became the epicenter of a triple threat – the aforementioned pre-existing socio economic and political crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects of two hurricanes, Eta and Iota, which exacerbated the country's already vulnerable and fragile conditions. The latter events left more than 7,500 people displaced, homeless and food insecure (Cuffe, 2021). Reports have shown that more than half of the people living in shelters and in need of humanitarian assistance are women and girls, who have taken a disproportionate blow amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Ibid). Furthermore, a recent survey illustrates that following the disasters, an estimated 15% of people in the region were making concrete plans to migrate in search for protection and safety (WFP, 2021). These estimates enable the assumption that the forced migration of women and girls from Honduras will increase and, therefore, this paper is relevant to improve understanding of the particular experiences they encounter in the migration process.

3. Previous Research

The following chapter provides an overview of gender and migration studies and how the nexus between both fields has progressed over the years. It also gives a brief introduction on the literature available on internal displacement and forced migration of women and girls from Honduras. The chapter concludes with a critique towards traditional migration theories, explaining why they are not adequate for the analysis presented in this study.

3.1 Gender and Migration Studies

At its core, migration research analyzes the motivations and purposes behind migration patterns and takes into consideration the perspectives and experiences of migrants. Gender studies, on the other hand, explores the social construction of differences between gender identities and how these products are experienced in daily life (Brettell, 2016). Bringing both fields into this analysis leads to an understanding of how gender impacts, and is impacted by, geographic flows of migration and mobility. However, migration studies have historically lacked a gendered dimension, despite its inherently interdisciplinary and collaborative approach with various other fields of research (Ibid).

The intersection between migration and gender studies was first explored in the 1970s and 1980s, when research started shifting away from the paradigm that migrants are predominantly male and attempted to make female migrants more visible. Amelina and Lutz (2019) contested that men were largely considered the prototypical migrant and female migration was only an exception or a result of male migration, a phenomenon defined in contemporary terms as "dependent migration". In contrast, early feminist migration research strived away from this notion of female migrants as subjects and considered them important social actors within the migration process (Brettell, 2016). This approach contributed to observing the *feminization of migration*, understood to be the increasing number of female migrants across the globe (Amelina and Lutz, 2019).

Further research addressed the power dimensions of gender relations as related to migration, placing more emphasis on the determinants that affect the migration experience of different groups within society. Pribilsky (2012) added that, in order to increase the understanding of migrant experiences, it is crucial to consider the normative expectations and cultural factors within both host and recipient societies. Similarly, Brettell (2016) stated that, although all migrants face

discrimination in transit and destination countries, women and girls face double discrimination based on their female identity due to gender ideologies that stem from patriarchal structures. Moreover, both migration and mobility are considered socially constructed processes that occur in relation to historical complexities of knowledge and power that have been imbued within society (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). Migrant experiences are, therefore, shaped by historical considerations that place emphasis on gender inequalities and discrimination at all levels.

Present-day studies have considered not only the reasons behind migrating, but also the structural factors that impact the female migration process (Ibid). Among these, social institutions play an important role as they are imbued with gender considerations that create inequalities and discrimination within both host and recipient countries (Pribilsky, 2012). Literature reflects that the following social institutions are impactful in the female migration experience.

3.1.1 Nation States, Labor Markets, and Immigrant Families

Research has shown that migration laws and policies implemented by countries of origin, transit, and destination countries are often permeated with gender inequalities, even as they proclaim to be gender neutral (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). This includes citizenship laws and asylum considerations, which are constructed through gender ideologies that sustain the paradigm of men as breadwinners and women as dependents. Such laws and policies in host countries also disregard female migrants as independent actors and contradicts policies on domestic violence that allow women to act against their perpetrators (Ibid).

Previous studies have further reflected that the role female migrants play in the labor market has shifted from one of being a dependent to one that migrates voluntarily, seeking economic opportunities within the global assembly line and also in the global care work (Brettell, 2016; O'Reilly, 2012). However, despite their new roles in the economy, immigrant women tend to be invisibilized as they are more prone to be undocumented, irregular, and casualized (O'Reilly, 2012). An example are the female migrants who work as domestic workers in the United States, often coming from Mexico and Central America, who are not able to find other jobs apart from care work based on their undocumented status (Brettell, 2016). Moreover, female migrants worldwide have also moved to work in the sex industry where they often face violence and discrimination from a variety of actors within host societies (Ibid).

In the early 1990s, researchers observed that migrants kept close ties with their sending countries and hometowns (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992) defined this social phenomenon as *transnationalism*, which states that immigrants and families are interconnected through social spaces that go beyond geographic, political, or cultural boundaries (Brettell, 2016; O'Reilly, 2012). Within transnationalism literature, a new concept referred to as *transnational motherhood* came to be. This process is defined as the circuits of care and financial support that go beyond state boundaries (O'Reilly, 2012). Anthropologist Heather Millman recognized that the lives of transnational mothers require constant negotiation and are contested within geographic, economic, and social fields (Ibid). This "distant motherhood" allows for women to redefine their motherhood and still provide the required financial and emotional support to their children, with the support of other actors such as relatives who take care of the children in the country of origin.

Furthermore, female migrants have been found to make important contributions to their families and communities through *remittances* (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). Labor migration studies addressed the concept of remittances and how gender plays a crucial part in the construction and reconstruction of identities and relations within the household. Cecilia Menjivar (2011) examined the ties of Honduran women towards their husbands and sons working abroad. In this study, many of them emphasized the ability to endure the emotional pain of separation from their loved ones if that meant having the financial means to buy a house or pay for their children's education (Brettell, 2016). Some scholars also explored whether remittances are a source of empowerment for those left behind. On this subject, Hirsch (2003) suggested that even when women have access to more economic resources through remittances, gender ideologies limit empowerment and this can only be challenged once traditional gender roles are negotiated.

3.2 Internal Displacement of Women and Girls in Honduras

The most recent report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) on the situation of human rights in Honduras shows that Honduran women and girls face persistent inequalities and discrimination in all areas of life (OHCHR, 2020). This is especially the case for those who live in conditions of poverty, are indigenous, Afro-Honduran, or belong to the LGBTQ community. Public institutions remain ineffective in addressing the needs of this population, with many initiatives in support of gender equality and women's rights still pending in the National

Congress of Honduras (Ibid). Amongst these is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has to this day not been ratified by the Honduran government.

In Honduras, gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread and impunity for these cases remains high. During the months of January and August 2019, an estimated 672 cases of sexual violence were reported, with only 60% of these cases reaching trial or sentence for the perpetrators (Ibid). During these months, approximately 185 femicides were recorded, but only 15 of the cases were processed (Ibid). Such numbers reflect the ineffectiveness of the justice system in attending the particular needs for protection and safety of women and girls. Furthermore, the state has largely neglected sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and services which has translated into restrictive laws towards abortion (including cases of rape and incest), low access to contraception, and high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity (Ibid).

Estimates also show that Honduras has experienced an increase in female-headed households, which signifies an important restructuration of the gender and family roles that have traditionally been assigned to men (Ortega, 2015). However, studies have also demonstrated that many of these households are especially targeted by criminal groups, generally *maras/pandillas* (gangs), which increases the internal displacement of women and children (Burgi-Palomino, 2017). Such movements make them more vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, extorsion, and it is often the result of multiple threats and attacks (Ibid).

Tiusabá Gómez and Rodríguez Pastrana (2017) evidenced that IDPs remain invisible victims of generalized violence in Honduras. Although the government has made recent attempts to address the issue by establishing commissions and writing reports, these efforts have not been sufficient (Burgi-Palomino, 2017). None have evolved into policies or programs that attend to the particular needs of protection and humanitarian assistance for this population. Moreover, Morales (2020) discussed that women and girls in particular are displaced for a variety of reasons, namely:

- Generalized violence from organized crime groups in their communities.
- Different forms of GBV.
- Political violence on the basis of their political views and activism.
- Economic violence and lack of opportunities.

- Structural violence and lack of state protection.

3.3 Forced Migration Across Borders and the Cycle of Violence

The forced migration of women and girls is rooted in gendered processes, as they search for an improved quality of life away from gender inequalities and discrimination (Morales, 2020). Unfortunately, the cycle of violence that female migrants are escaping in their countries of origin is often replicated in the transit and destination countries.

Recent times have seen various changes in the migration trends of female migrants from Honduras. Women and girls are increasingly traveling through dangerous and clandestine routes that had only been used by male migrants in the past (Ortega, 2015). Furthermore, their motivations behind migrating have also shifted and the current trend sees more female migrants traveling alone or with children in search for opportunities, as they are often heads of households and face the responsibility of providing for their families (Ibid).

The Perilous Journey North (Source: UNICEF, 2018)

Previous research has also captured that female migrants are at a greater risk of facing some form of violence and, in some instances death, along the migration route (Diaz and Kuhner, 2007; Verduzco and Lozano, 2011; Schmidt and Buechler, 2017). The violence they encounter is influenced by aspects such as age, experience, and networks when entering the transit and destination countries (Ibid). In many cases, the systematization of violence is exerted by security forces and criminal groups using threats, beatings, sexual harassment, or rape, which are central mechanisms to exacerbate vulnerabilities (Verduzco and Lozano, 2011; Schmidt and Buechler, 2017). Diaz and Kuhner (2007) conducted interviews with female migrants from Central America and noted that they were hesitant to discuss the physical or sexual violence encountered in the migration process. However, an estimated 26% of the interviewees agreed to having suffered some form of violence (Ibid). Other studies support these findings by adding that sexual violence was found to occur as a form of payment in exchange for favors, such as transportation, or a preventive measure against being detained (Verduzco and Lozano, 2011). These female migrants were aware of the high probability of being raped, so they often went as far as getting some form of contraception prior to leaving their countries of origin in order to protect themselves (Ibid).

Moreover, studies on the experiences of female asylum seekers determined that Honduran women and girls are trapped in a cycle of violence gendered and racialized inequalities that stem from colonialism (Gutiérrez Rivera, 2018). An example of this structural violence is the invisibilization of Central American mothers in the immigration crisis seen at the United States Border in 2014 (Ortega, 2015). Though the attention centered mainly on unaccompanied children, in many instances the children were traveling with their mothers or their mothers were waiting for them in the US (Ibid). This invisibilization from the media increases the particular violence experienced by women violence as it overlooks their role in the migration process.

3.4 A Critique Towards Traditional Migration Theories

Migration theories have historically excluded female migrants, their perceptions, and realities in the migration process (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Aydiner, 2020). Their omission of gender is exemplified in traditional migration theories, which attempt to explain the reasons behind individual decisions to migrate and attributing these strictly to macro-economic factors. One of such theories is the *neoclassical economics theory*, which emphasized that international migration is the result of labor demand and supply, wage differentials, etc. (Oishi, 2002). In this model,

poverty is perceived as the only cause of emigration and regards economic indicators as amply adequate to explain the differences between men and women. Similarly, *Dual labor market theory* and the *world systems theory* are some of the dominant theoretical models used to analyze geographic migration and mobility, but they scarcely address female migrants and their contribution to the labor force (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). In contrast, the *new economics theory* stressed more the importance of family in the decision to migrate, but it also excludes other factors related to agency in the decision-making process (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Aydiner, 2020). These theories thus neglect to take gender seriously even though labor markets tend to be highly gendered and do not address the critical linkage between gender and migration (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Aydiner, 2020).

4. Theoretical Framework

This thesis is intersecting two scientific research fields, namely women's and gender studies and migration and minority studies. Though previous studies recognize that these two are interconnected, each has historically developed independently from the other (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). Both fields do not only explore dominant discourses, but also produce critical perspectives to analyze gender in the context of migrant 'Othering' (Amelina and Lutz, 2021). In this regard, modern migration theories show the need to move towards a greater interdisciplinary and comparative approach and explore how migration processes interact with gender (Brettell, 2016). This study, therefore, brings in the framework of intersectionality in an attempt to understand the migration experience of female migrants from Honduras and how these are impacted by categories, relations, structures, and discourses within and beyond state borders. This, as stated by Lutz and Amelina, serves to critique "a sedentary understanding of the nation state and to foster a multi-local frame of reference encompassing geographies grounded on and beyond nation-states" (as cited in Mora and Piper, 2021, p. 4).

4.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the main critical framework applied in this paper. Considered to be "the most important contribution that women's studies has made so far" (Davis, 2011, p. 43), the philosophical foundations of intersectionality stem from critical race theory and feminist theory rising from the Black feminist resistance of the 1960s and 1970s (Fernández-Sánchez, 2020). It was introduced by African American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to facilitate analyzing the interconnectedness and mutual co-construction of social categories (also called axes of difference/inequality) (Crenshaw, 1989; Amelina and Lutz, 2019; Amelina and Lutz, 2021). According to Crenshaw, processes of social categorization, such as the dichotomous male and female, play a crucial role in the rise of power hierarchies and they bring about unequal distribution of opportunities and resources to people within society (Ibid). Moreover, this theory considers the structural and institutional contexts where social categories and identities emerge, such as social institutions in the country of origin, transit, and destination countries (Marx Ferree, 2011).

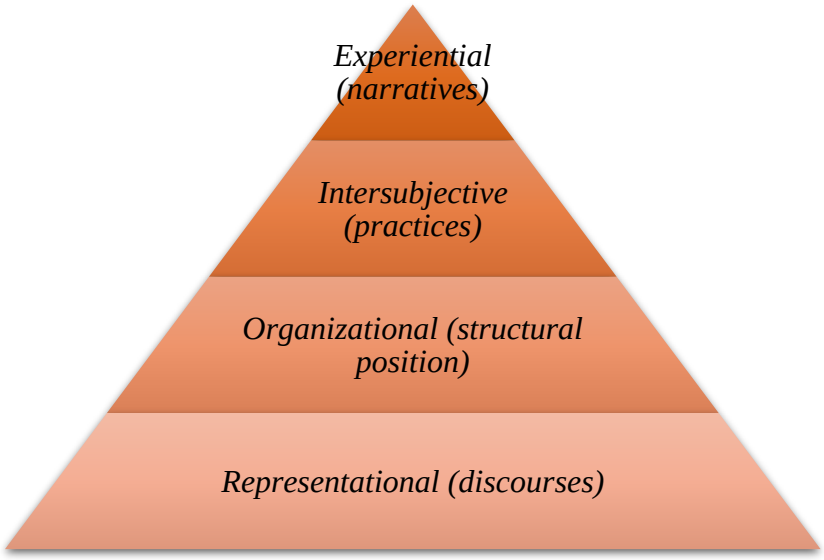
Social elements studied within this model include predominantly the classic inequality triad of gender, race, and class (Brettell, 2016). However, recent studies have seen the rise of more categories of social positioning, which include sexuality, age/generation, disability/health, national belonging, and space (Amelina and Lutz, 2021). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that individuals cannot only be members of one category as they all affect each other across an axis of social division (Amelina and Lutz, 2019). For the purpose of this study, the main intersections explored are across the social categories of gender, nationality, and citizenship status. However, other categories such as age, race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status will also be further explored in intersection with the previously identified social categories.

According to anthropologist Caroline Brettell (2016), a migration study that considers gender as a central theme must be essentially intersectional. There cannot be a thorough understanding of gender in migration without analyzing how social positioning impacts the migration experience. The present study, therefore, adheres to the intra-categorical approach of intersectionality to analyze the experiences of female migrants from Honduras at "neglected points of intersection" utilizing social categories as a guiding tool to understand the complexity of lived experiences within this group (Walby et al., 2012, p. 227). This approach allows for the consideration of how migrant identities and experiences are shaped as they intersect with patterns of exclusion that create gender inequalities and discrimination in the migration process (Mora and Piper, 2021).

4.1.1 An Intersectional Tool for Migration: Floya Anthias' *Societal Arenas of Investigation*

In order to organize and structure findings, this paper utilizes British sociologist Floya Anthias' (2012) intersectional tool *societal arenas of investigation.* The present research makes use of this tool as a framework model with adjustments for the context being studied to analyze social relations and social divisions that shape the migration experience of Honduran women and girls. Moreover, the tool is also useful to explore the patterns of exclusion that have an impact in the overall migration process. The following figure illustrates the different levels explored with this tool and below is a description on how they will be applied to this specific research:

Figure 1: Floya Anthia's *Societal Arenas of Investigation* (Source: the author)



Experiential (narratives): focuses on the individual, outlining the narratives of female migrants based on how they perceive their own migration and the realities they encounter in the pre-migration and migration stages.

Intersubjective (practices): explores the social relations and social divisions that impact migrant women and girls in relation to others and how these either constrain or facilitate their experience. This category includes nonhuman actors (e.g., security forces).

Organizational (structural position): analyzes the role of social institutions, structures and frameworks where different forms of inequality and discrimination are co-constructed and reinforced to create the female migrant experience.

Representational (discourses): explores the discourses around social divisions that shape social institutions and the perception towards migrants, further impacting human actions that stem from these discourses.

4.1.2 Theoretical Consideration: Structure, Agency, and Gendered Migration

The relationship between structure and agency in the context of gendered migration is also explored in this paper. This approach gives space to analyze how social structures impact the overall migration experience. In this regard, *structure* can be interpreted as the relationships and institutions that make up society, and *agency* is the individual or group action "which helps people survive and cope in specific situations of change or crisis" (Castles, 2007, p. 365). Such consideration reflects how female migrants exercise agency and if they can be viewed as independent social actors in the process of pursuing their own goals and strategies in the context of migration (Brettell, 2016). Moreover, Marx provides a basic insight on the relationship between structure and agency by adding, "people make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing" (as cited in O'Connell Davidson, 2021, p. 435). This insight brings attention to how female migrants are not willing or will-less subjects, but rather actors constrained by a system of domination that ultimately impacts their decision-making and capacity to exercise agency.

5. Methodology

This chapter expands on the epistemological and ontological considerations, research design, data collection, and data analysis carried out as well as the limitations and ethical considerations gathered in compiling Honduran female migrants' experiences in the context of forced migration.

5.1 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

The following research applies a social constructivist approach to describe and analyze the interplay between gender and forced migration. Such an approach, from an ontological point of view, adheres to the idea that reality is socially constructed (Andrews, 2012). From an epistemological perspective, social constructivism is concerned with the creation of knowledge and how it is understood as a result of conversations and social interactions (Ibid).

Moreover, the application of intersectionality as a method allows for the consideration of gender and other social categories such as nationality, race and ethnicity, class, sexuality, and so on. As stated by West and Fenstermake (1995), this creates a foundation to explore and give meaning to the experiences of female migrants by operationalizing "doing difference" across social dimensions (Amelina and Lutz, 2019).

5.2 Research Design and Methods

This thesis presents a qualitative study design primarily through the application of semi-structured, online interviews with civil society actors, namely representatives from local organizations, NGOs, and research centers. These actors are working with the topic of forced migration in the region and have compiled the experiences of female migrants across different spheres, thereby possessing a unique insight into the particular challenges faced by Honduran women and girls in the migration process. Interviewing allows for a deeper understanding of people's lived experiences and creates meaning out of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). According to Mishler (1986) the interview process also allows for the researcher and the participants to engage in the construction of meaning (as cited in Gold and Nawyn, 2013). The stories shared by interviewees are noted as a valuable source of information for the purposes of this research given their local expertise and direct interactions with the study group.

Furthermore, the present research employs inductive reasoning as the collected data provides guidance for the analysis involved in the research process. This implies that the study operates from a grounded theory approach in which the data shaped the direction of research and its future theoretical implications (Bryman, 2012). Such an approach differs from analyzing the data through deductive reasoning, which starts off with a general theory that guides the researcher in developing specific observations through data analysis (Ibid).

5.3 Data Collection

This study was carried out remotely due to travel restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was collected from individual interviews utilizing snowball and purposeful sampling methods, meaning all participants were selected either through references provided by other participants or based on recorded experience working with female migrants from Honduras. Respondents were located in countries across the region in an attempt to capture a more comprehensive view of these experiences, an opportunity that came with doing remote data collection. Various organizations that fit the previous criteria were directly contacted via email and a total of ten confirmed their participation, establishing the sample size of this study. Among the interviewees, five were located in Honduras, four in Mexico, and one in El Salvador, with eight of them being women and two men (see appendix 1). Furthermore, all respondents had professional and research experience working with the issue of migration in the region.

All of the interviews were carried out via Google Meet from January 29 through April 26, 2021. This platform was chosen based on its simplicity and accessibility, only requiring participants to have a link in order to access the video call. An interview guide of 14 questions (see appendix 2) and an informed consent form (see appendix 4) were provided to each of the participants prior to scheduling the interviews. In addition, all interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish, as this is the native language of both the author and the participants.

5.4 Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed manually in Spanish. A software called MAXQDA was utilized to slow down audio velocity during the transcription process. Inductive reasoning was then utilized in the coding and analysis of data,

allowing for the interpretation of data to shape the emergence of codes that are of theoretical significance to the study (Bryman, 2012). All transcriptions were coded using NVivo, which facilitated the initial process of open coding yielding concepts that were then utilized to develop categories across the collected data and finding common themes, leading to axial coding (see appendix 6). This type of coding is defined as the procedure in which data is put back together after open coding by linking codes to categories and themes across the data (Ibid). Furthermore, findings were then translated into English by the author and incorporated into the study.

5.5 Validity, Generalizability, and Limitations

Bryman (2012) argued that qualitative interviews conducted with a small sample of participants are impossible to generalize to other groups or settings. On this subject, the experiences shared by respondents were largely based on interactions with female migrants from Honduras. The findings, therefore, could be applicable to other countries, particularly contexts that share a similar history and challenges such as Guatemala and El Salvador, but they cannot be generalized to all female migrants coming from the Northern Triangle.

In regard to limitations, the original plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews with female migrants and therefore gather their experiences firsthand. This, as Bryman added, would enable a greater focus on women's narratives to "listen and explore their shared meanings" (2012, p. 411). However, this was not possible due to security reasons concerning the participants and the risks that come with doing online interviews in terms of protecting the privacy/confidentiality of the study group (Are, 2019). Remote access to this population is also limited due to lack of connectivity in certain parts of the region where they are located. Such constraints led to the decision of interviewing civil society organizations (CSOs), who provided a wide range of experiences and insights that would have otherwise not been considered in the process of collecting primary data on the ground. However, interviewing them meant having an intervening agent in the data collection process as these experiences were not directly shared by female migrants themselves, which poses a challenge for validity (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, conducting remote data collection presents another set of challenges. The time difference between the interviewees, located in Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico, and the author, located in Sweden, was seven hours, which meant all the interviews were carried out during the author's afternoon or nighttime CET.

This process required some flexibility depending on the availability of participants. Moreover, some participants also had connectivity issues since most of them were working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic and did not have a stable Internet connection.

5.6 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Being a native researcher presented a series of advantages and disadvantages that must be acknowledged. Although this position can facilitate collecting information and communicating with participants based on a shared language and cultural background, certain things could be taken for granted and overlooked (Gold and Nawyn, 2013). Having a good understanding of the context and the issue being discussed can create a level of bias from the author's part, which could limit diving deeper and catching clues given by the participants. In this regard, self-awareness and constant reflexivity is required throughout the interview process. As Berg (2009) argues, the interviewer must be a "self-conscious performer", thinking carefully about their position and the role they will be carrying out in each interview (as cited in Gold and Nawyn, 2013).

As a female researcher interviewing mostly women, the author's position also facilitated access to information that could have otherwise been limited. According to Padfield and Procter (1996), women volunteer more personal information to female interviewers as compared to male interviewers (Ibid). In this regard, the topic of migration is also relevant as it entails sharing stories of violence and struggles faced by female migrants in the process of forced migration.

Researchers have discovered that subjects can be hesitant to share information with fellow natives based on concerns for the anonymity and confidentiality of the information being shared (Ibid). This hesitance can be an issue when discussing sensitive topics such as generalized violence and state corruption in Honduras. The author then built trust with the respondents and reassured them that the information they shared will remain confidential and only utilized for the purpose of this study. Taking this into consideration, the author created pseudonyms to refer to each of the participants. However, all of them wanted their organizations to be acknowledged and the author gives mention to them in the list of participants (see appendix 1).

6. Findings and Discussion

The following section presents the findings and discussion in response to the main and specific RQs introduced earlier in this thesis. Responses from participants are outlined below and analyzed using intersectionality as the main theoretical lens and Floya Anthias (2012) *societal arenas of investigation* as the tool to further organize and compartmentalize the collected findings. These societal arenas are not interpreted as actual independent categories, but rather used heuristically to explore the various links between levels of research.

6.1 Experiential (Narratives)

At the experiential level, women and girls' narratives are imbued with a variety of internal and external conditions that impact their migration experience. In this regard, Marx specified that the relationship between structure and agency is important to consider, as "the capacity for people to act is always created and enabled by specific relations of subordination rather than by abstract canons of freedom" (O'Connell Davidson, 2021). Participants who collected narratives from female migrants emphasized that the following factors motivated their migration and, ultimately, shaped their experience once the journey was taken.

6.1.1 Reasons to Migrate

Family Problems

At least half of the participants listed family problems as one of the main causes for female migration. Participant A expressed that migrant women and girls from Honduras tend to have a very homogenous life story, with the majority of them being single mothers or women whose husbands migrated to the United States during the 80s and 90s. The participant said, "in Honduras women are facing violence by other male members of their communities because they are seen as being 'alone' and lacking protection". Such circumstances force them to migrate for family reunification with their partners and/or other family members in the United States. In addition, respondents added that many of these women whose husbands migrated a few decades ago have children that are now grown up and perceived to be "ready" to take on the migration route, also facilitating women's decision to migrate. Furthermore, participants stated that most women have been compelled to assume the role of breadwinners within their households as single mothers and sole providers, driving their decision to migrate in search of better economic opportunities in order

to provide for their families. This finding is compatible with the evidence presented by Ortega (2015), who said that recent years have seen an increase of female-headed households in Honduras, signifying an important restructuration of the gender and family roles traditionally assigned to men.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV was perceived by most of the interviewees to be an important driver for the migration of women and girls from Honduras, as shown by the high level of cases presented in the most recent report from OHCHR (2020). Crenshaw (1991) recognized this type of violence as part of a broad-scale system of domination that impacts women as a category. Participants stated that the majority of GBV cases they witnessed were of women and girls who had initially been internally displaced in an attempt to escape their aggressors and were then forced to migrate across borders. However, when it comes to international protection, gender experiences of violence are not generally recognized as persecution, which invisibilizes women and girls' particular need for protection and safety (Mora and Piper, 2021).

Respondents added that it is challenging to discuss GBV with female migrants, as they often carry a deep fear and trauma from these experiences, limiting their ability to open up and recognize it as a personal cause for migration. Participant C stated that, "many of these women and girls do not identify that they have faced GBV because they come from homes where the dad would scream at the mom and that was perceived to be normal." On this subject, Phillimore et al. (2021) added the need to conceptualize sexual violence and GBV as an ongoing experience of trauma that has consequences in the asylum-seeking process of women and girls. This demonstrates the particular needs of female migrants for psycho-legal support when presenting their cases and need for asylum in the receiving countries.

Furthermore, participants emphasized that one of the groups that experiences the highest levels of GBV in Honduras is the LGBTQ community, particularly lesbian and trans women, as they flee persecution due to their identity or gender expression. "We have seen an increase in LGTBQ people migrating who are expelled from their households or communities because they are 'not well seen in the eyes of God'", said participant F. On this subject, participant D added that this violence and persecution is not so much influenced by external factors, but internal ones within the family where gender discrimination plays an important role.

Generalized Violence

> *"They would leave because in their neighborhoods they were being forced to make their houses reception centers for drugs or 'casas locas' (torture chambers) for the gangs. It was like, you either do it or we will kill you. For a long time, women would suffer under these threats, but after some time they would say I cannot do this anymore, I have to escape because that is the only way out."* – Participant B.

Participants said that female migrants are fleeing generalized violence coming from organized crime groups such as *maras/pandillas* or drug cartels in Honduras, an observation supported by international reports from Human Rights Watch (2020) and OHCHR (2020). On many occasions, women and girls experience internal displacement but, amidst the lack of state protection and widespread presence of these groups, opt to migrate across borders. In this regard, respondents added that women who become victims of extortion, faced with the inability to pay, decide that migrating is the only option for survival. Moreover, participant G emphasized that violence directed at the family also impacts women, indirectly affecting their capacity to cope with the emotional trauma and financial constraints left from losing their husband and children, further incentivizing them to migrate.

Amidst the different types of generalized violence faced by women and girls in Honduras, respondents said that forced recruitment, which occurs when children and adolescents are forcefully selected to join or assume a specific role within the gang, is one of the most pervasive ones. In the particular case of girls, they are chosen to become the *novias de pandilla* ("girlfriends of the gang"), a role in which they face various forms of sexual violence and exploitation. "The majority of girls who become *novias de pandilla* rarely survive", added participant H. Boys, on the other hand, are recruited to join as gang members and their mothers or grandmothers decide it is time to leave in order to protect them. Participant B detailed the account of a grandmother whose grandchild was killed after he refused to join, "she added 'I was afraid that my other two grandchildren would be recruited, because they were already of age. Before they took my two boys away from me, I fled with them.'"

Moreover, a couple of participants added sex trafficking as a cause for female migration, which is most commonly seen in the coastal areas of Honduras where girls are sexually exploited for tourism purposes.

> *"A Salvadoran researcher was working in some brothels in Tapachula, Mexico, and she identified that women coming from these areas appeared to be more used to sexual services since they were young. There was a sort of naturalization and looking at it as a way of life to save money and take the migration route."* – Participant F

In this regard, Crenshaw advised about the 'over-inclusion' of sex trafficking as a "women's problem", when in reality the probability of becoming a victim is greater for certain groups of women than for others (Knapp, 2011). Due to their locality and ethnicity, Garifuna women are faced with a higher chance of becoming victims of sexual harassment and exploitation which weighs heavily in their decision to migrate in search of protection and safety, added participant F.

Poverty

Poverty was listed in the interviews as one of the main causes for the migration of women and girls from Honduras, a condition which intersects with other categories such as women's marital and parental status. As stated by OHCHR (2020), an estimated 64.7% of the population lives in poverty, leaving women and girls afflicted by the high levels of unemployment and lack of economic opportunities. According to respondents, this is the primary reason to migrate listed by female migrants, as other, more deeply ingrained reasons, such as GBV, tend to be relatively hidden and require more introspection. The group most directly affected by poverty in Honduras are single mothers, as they tend to be the sole breadwinners within their household (Ortega, 2015). In this regard, participant I stated, "women often say that they only want to work, save some money and then go back to their country and put up a business to support their families". Moreover, respondents added that female migrants generally report low levels of educational attainment, a contributing factor that leaves women and girls trapped in the cycle of poverty.

The Issue of State Protection

The issue of state protection was reiterated by participants as another reason for female migration from Honduras. Mora and Piper (2021) stated that, "formal and informal social protection conditions the possibilities for women and girls to be more vulnerable to social risks". In the case

of Honduras, formal social protection has not been guaranteed to address women and girls' particular needs for protection and safety. "The only response they receive is through Ciudad Mujer or Unidad de la Mujer Municipal, a state program that does not provide the adequate psychosocial and legal support they need", said participant E. Furthermore, problems such as corruption, inequality, and impunity, as reflected in international indexes (Stiftung, 2020; Transparency International, 2020), contribute to the migration of women and girls. "They do not see themselves as part of the elementary process of being able to change their living conditions", added participant C. According to the findings, this position of disempowerment and complete disillusionment in the government's responsiveness has led to an increase in female migration.

Natural and Environmental Hazards

According to interviewees, the most recent environmental hazards, Eta and Iota, exacerbated migration patterns of nuclear families traveling from Honduras including women, children, and adolescents. Some of the participants worked directly with victims and witnessed the aftermath of both disasters, highlighting that the events have disproportionately affected poor women living on the northern coast of the country. One of the testimonies was that of a single mother who lost all her material belongings and only source of livelihood, which she used to support herself and her children,

> *"She said, 'nobody helps me to support my children, I cannot find work to support them. I used to sell tortillas, but the hurricane took my hut and I no longer have a stove to make them. I have no way to live and that is why I'm leaving.' This is the current reality of many Honduran women"* – participant B.

Participants added that there are still victims living on the side of the road as shelters remain overcrowded and state response is minimal, with limited humanitarian aid. In this regard, findings show that the majority of people that remain displaced and in shelters are women and children, an observation further supported by Cuffe (2021). The disasters triggered migration as victims have a perceived sense of "nothing else to lose", as mentioned by participant E.

Taking all of this into consideration, participant H made an important observation stating, "although the passage of Hurricane Eta and Iota exacerbated the situation, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic should not be minimized either." Moreover, the participant established that

the reasons why thousands of groups have been leaving from Honduras remain the same. It is important not to overlook the socio-political and economic crisis that incentivized migration prior to these events, a context that was already permeated with unequal distribution of resources and gender inequalities. “Although a disaster may be triggered by a natural hazard, its effect on society is grounded in the social system in which it takes place” (BRACED, 2019, p. 4).

6.1.2 Intersectional Experiences Along the Migration Trail

When asked how women and girls from Honduras experience the migration journey across borders, participants emphasized that female migrants tend to face more challenges than their male counterparts, as reflected in previous studies (Diaz and Kuhner, 2007; Verduzco and Lozano, 2011; Schmidt and Buechler, 2017; Mora and Piper, 2021). “If migration is hard and cruel enough for male migrants, then for female migrants it is even worse”, added participant I. According to Brettell (2016), this is due to women and girls facing double discrimination along the journey based on two social categories: being a migrant and being female, the latter stemming from patriarchal structures and *machismo*, defined as the set of male expectations to exert power and superiority over women (Perilla, 1999). This discrimination translates into different forms of violence, but particularly GBV and sexual violence, impacting women and girls regardless of their age, ethnicity, or family conditions throughout the migration trail. However, respondents added categories, such as being underaged, a single mother or undocumented, further exacerbate these cross-border experiences.

At least one of the interviewees stressed that in the past, female migrants from Honduras utilized different migration strategies compared to men when crossing Guatemala and Mexico. “They generally took safer routes, but it implied spending more money because they paid someone to take them or provide them with documentation”, said participant H. However, respondents stated that recent years have seen an increasing number of women and girls traveling through clandestine routes and facing dangers and risks along the trail. These dangers include extorsion by human traffickers or coyotes, exposure to human trafficking for forced or sexual labor, sexual harassment, and abuse, to name a few, which are often met with impunity in transit and destination countries. Moreover, at least three of the respondents agreed that the number of female migrants who face

some form of sexual violence throughout the journey is roughly eight out of ten, which indicates a certain level of generalizability in these experiences.

Additional findings show that, in order to protect themselves from the violence they encounter along the trail, women and girls from Honduras have opted for different survival strategies. On this subject, participant F said, "most of them get contraceptive injections before migrating because they are aware that they could face sexual violence at any point and do not want to get pregnant", an observation supported by previous studies (Verduzco and Lozano, 2011). Other survival strategies include, "sending their children first, emigrating on their own and leaving their children behind, emigrating in caravans, and paying transit quotas", as mentioned by participant J.

Moreover, interviewees stressed that the following social categories amongst female migrants from Honduras exacerbate gender inequalities, discrimination, and dangers in the migration process across borders:

Adolescent Girls

According to participants, recent years have registered some of the highest numbers of Central American girls, boys, and adolescents traveling alone through Mexico, with the figures peaking in 2017-2018. This is a relevant observation due to the high vulnerability and specific threats this group encounters along the migration trail, with adolescent girls particularly exposed to a variety to threats, including sexual abuse and exploitation. In this regard, participant G added,

> "*Some organizations told us that, according to data, kidnappings and disappearances are most common among male migrants. However, between the ages of 12-18, the numbers of missing female migrants increase exponentially and exceed their male counterparts. The hypothesis is that at these ages girls are more sought for sexual exploitation*."

Trans Women

Respondents agreed that trans women are the most vulnerable group in the migration route, as they carry cultural and social violence from their countries of origin and their experiences are only aggravated throughout the migration trail. On this subject, participant B said, "very few of them are able to reach the United States and tell their story. Some scholars have even coined the term transfemicide, referring to the particular violence they encounter." Furthermore, participants stated

that this group is vulnerable to suffer sexual exploitation at the hands of traffickers because of the conditions in which they travel.

One of the participants added that belonging to the LGBTQ community also restricts the possibility of being granted asylum and refugee status in transit and destination countries. In this regard, Kosnick (2011) added that asylum regimes require making a compelling case of being persecuted on the basis of sexual orientation in the country of origin in order to achieve recognition. Moreover, trans women face further discrimination and GBV from fellow nationals, making the journey much more complicated and forcing them to opt for different survival strategies. "Trans women often take the train, *la bestia* (the beast), because they are in a very desperate situation and wanting to travel faster compared to women who travel in other conditions", added participant J.

Single Mothers

Findings show that single mothers traveling alone or with their children are more likely to face violence and are in a greater degree of vulnerability along the migration trail. This occurs because they are often faced with making decisions to protect and provide for their children at any cost, even with the few resources they have at their disposal. "Apart from traveling with fewer resources, they are also often uncommunicated because they sell their phones to make ends meet during the migration process", said participant H. It is also the case that when women and girls travel alone, they become easier targets to suffer some form of sexual violence, especially if they are traveling through less safe routes, an observation made earlier by participants.

Furthermore, participants added that single mothers can become part of a prostitution network as a means to provide for their children during the migration trail. On this subject, O'Connell Davidson (2021) stated that anti-trafficking policy presents a clear division between those who consent to this type of work and those who have been tricked into it. However, this perception of willing vs. will-less subjects can be contested as female migrants, and especially single mothers, are constrained by a variety of external conditions that motivate their choices. This stance is further supported by participant G, who stated that women who decide to participate are often forced to make this decision after feeling crushed by the economic and vulnerable conditions in which they are traveling. "They say, 'they are not forcing me, but I would not be here if I did not have the need to collect some money and then continue the journey with my family'", said the respondent.

6.2 Intersubjective (Practices)

Castles (2007) stated the importance of connecting migration patterns with wider social relations and social divisions. The following section outlines the different relationships that have an impact in the migration process of women and girls from Honduras, namely the immigrant family, fellow migrants, and security forces within and across borders. Furthermore, this section concludes with the influence CSOs and their supporting role in the female migration experience.

6.2.1 Social Relations and Divisions in the Migration Process

The Immigrant Family

When asked about the feminization of migration in Honduras, participants had a divided perception. Some agreed that, to this day, the majority of recorded migrants coming from Honduras are male but affirmed that the number of female migrants has certainly increased. Others stated that the number is equal to that of male migrants, but women and girls have different migration strategies and that is why their migration patterns are often invisibilized. However, all of them emphasized the rise of nuclear families taking part in the migrant caravans traveling through Guatemala and Mexico, in particular female-headed households. This observation confirms what has been established in previous reports which reveal that Honduran women are increasingly deciding to make the journey along with their children (Gutiérrez Rivera, 2018). “When they leave as a nuclear family, they obviously go with girls, which also increases the number of women, and mothers who go in the company of their partners or other relatives”, added participant F. On this subject, Mora and Piper (2021) added that in order to understand gendered processes of migration, it is important to acknowledge their changing nature and that the feminization of these represents only the beginning to understand the international migration of women and girls.

According to participants, something that conditions female migration from Honduras is that women are fearful of being separated from their children at some point during the migration journey. This situation motivates some female migrants to take the journey alone and leave their children behind with a caretaker, which leads them to exercise their *transnational motherhood,* providing care and financial resources from a distance (O’Reilly, 2012). However, caretakers sometimes decide to migrate with the children for family reunification. In this regard, interviewees highlighted that children and adolescent girls can often be seen traveling with family members or

foster relatives. Although traveling with a relative can offer a sense of protection, it can also become a challenge if they do not possess legal documentation of this guardianship. “Sometimes the mother migrated some time ago, died or lost contact and there is no way to obtain a document that proves it”, said participant H. Moreover, participants mentioned that they have seen many cases of adolescent girls traveling with a domestic partner. Legal authorities in Mexico and the United States do not identify these girls as emancipated and classify them as “unaccompanied minors”. Participant G added,

> “*Age is a very relative social construction in Central America, where a girl already has to take charge and assume her role as a woman at the age of 14, which includes having children. This category of unaccompanied, therefore, is a problem since it is a legal concept that does not fully apply to the situation in which these people are migrating and that is linked to the issue of age.*”

Not recognizing these sociocultural conditions within the legal and political systems in receiving countries increases vulnerability for children and adolescent girls, especially if they are separated from their caretakers or domestic partners somewhere along the way by the authorities.

Furthermore, participants added that female migrants can be seen traveling with their aggressors, most commonly a domestic partner or parent, and this can present a challenge for them. They face intimidation and violence during the journey and are, therefore, not able to openly express their particular needs and concerns. Such circumstances contribute to further invisibilize women and girls as they are tagged as “dependents” since they are not able to freely voice their experiences.

Fellow Nationals and the Migrant Caravans

Subsequent findings show that female migrants from Honduras prefer to travel in caravans, which offers them visibility and media coverage. “The caravans are also a way to circumvent restrictive policies, militarization, organized crime, and persecution”, said participant J. Moreover, the caravans can be identified as a self-protection strategy, allowing them to escape and challenge the different forms of violence they could encounter along the journey (Stefoni et al., 2021).

Respondents stated that, on the way, women and girls often encounter fellow nationals who have made the journey repeated times and are able to offer them guidance in the process. “Those with

few economic resources and social networks rarely travel alone. They all need to connect with others at some point to be able to move forward", added participant G. On this subject, Knapp (2011) said that traveling with fellow migrants could lead to the invisibilization of female migrants' experiences along the journey, getting obscured by the larger "migrant experience". In this regard, androcentric ideologies around migration that consider women and girls as non-prototypical members within the social category of "migrant" contribute to the obliteration of their particular perceptions and realities (Ibid).

Security Forces

According to participants, security forces are impacting the experiences of female migrants within and across borders. Respondents addressed that in Honduras, authorities are deemed to be colluding with organized crime and tend to be perpetrators of violence towards women and girls. "We have had to attend to cases of women who are fleeing from their husband, who was a policeman and also a hit man", said participant F. Moreover, findings demonstrate that there is little to no trust in the police, particularly in the attention and prosecution of GBV cases. "A woman reports their case of domestic violence and then the police tell her 'no, but you are going to forgive him', and proceed to ignore their call for help", added participant E.

In transit and destination countries, this lack of trust in the authorities becomes exacerbated by the fear of detention and deportation, but also fear of experiencing sexual violence. Participant H detailed the particular experience of female migrants in Mexico,

> "*The fact is that being in an irregular immigration situation makes them feel so insecure and afraid. Many women prefer not to report. Nor is it like there is much confidence in Mexican authorities or they know of a case where an authority figure was implicated in a case rape or assault."*

These conditions contribute to further increase the gender inequalities and discrimination experienced by female migrants, as they cannot rely on the authorities to protect or safeguard their lives.

6.2.2 The Influence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs have played an important role in the migration experience of women and girls from Honduras. According to participants, who largely belong in this category, CSOs provide a supporting role by offering a large amount of humanitarian, legal, and psychosocial services both within and across borders. For women and girls in particular, they offer safe spaces for them to share their experiences. “When female migrants find a space where they are simply listened, they begin to transcend that survival and regain freedom, perhaps even start a path towards healing”, said participant J.

CSOs are dependent on their internal capacity and the resources at their disposal, something that limits their response. Despite these limitations, many of the interviewees said some CSOs have been able to streamline a gender component into their work. “We have a shelter in Mexico City for asylum seekers and it is one of the few in the country that welcomes the LGBTQ community” said participant D. “We have recently incorporated a survey with a gender perspective in our work, with questions focused on women’s pregnancy condition, if they have experienced sexual assault, and so on” added participant G. However, in general, they perceive it a challenge to offer targeted services for this population. It is also the case that most interventions are project-based, which further restricts offering an adequate and dignified response to each case, especially in the provision of humanitarian assistance which can be “an extremely time consuming and costly endeavor” (participant B).

6.3 Organizational (Structural Position)

Marx Ferree (2011) stated that intersectionality insists on acknowledging the dynamic relationship between the individual and the institutional. Intersections between social categories are not static but a process imbued by different actors and organizational fields where different forms of inequality and discrimination are “experienced, contested and reproduced” (Marx Ferree, 2011, p. 56). Walby (2007) supported this position by recognizing intersectionality as an active system, where not one dimension or social category is limited to one institution. This section, therefore, presents the complexity of co-constructed meanings and realities reinforced by social institutions in creating the female migrant experience.

6.3.1 The Role of Social Institutions

Family Structures and Networks

The majority of participants said that family structures and networks are one of the major institutions impacting the migration experience of women and girls from Honduras. According to participant A, "women as such have historically been assigned a social and economic role within the family in which they are relegated as dependents". Participant B added that this is linked to the patriarchal structure of Honduran society and *machismo*. Furthermore, respondents recognized that women and girls face discrimination in all areas of life, but this is particularly clear within the family structure where they are limited from exercising their autonomy. However, the increase of female-headed households in Honduras signifies an important restructuration of gender and family roles, as women are increasingly exercising more freedom but continue to be restricted by structural conditions (Ortega, 2015).

Labor Markets

Participant H stated that female migrants are active participants in the labor markets of transit and destination countries, particularly Mexico and the United States. However, she stated that most of their contributions are within the informal sector, which does not grant them the necessary social protection they need, especially if their status is undocumented. These jobs, largely comprised of care work, are highly gendered and undervalued, demonstrating inequalities in the gender division of labor (Mora and Piper, 2021). Interviewees said that such circumstances can manifest in economic violence directed at female migrants from locals in these countries. On this subject, participant I added, "none of the jobs are well paid. People say, 'you are a migrant, you are undocumented, so I am going to pay you what I consider to be the most appropriate.'" This finding is further supported by previous studies that determine low rates of pay for female migrants within the current arena of austerity politics, giving rise to economic nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments within the labor markets of transit and destination countries (Ibid). In this regard, as migrant women shape the provision of care in these countries, they also, simultaneously, face vulnerability to social risks.

Political and Legal Systems

Respondents stated that political and legal institutions have an impact on the lived experiences of female migrants from Honduras. On this subject, Amelina and Lutz added that analyzing transnational contexts recognizes the spatialized nature of relations that are not exclusively grounded in nation-states, viewing inequalities and discrimination as socially constructed processes that occur on a continuum (as stated in Mora and Piper, 2021). This lens places emphasis on fostering a multi-local frame of reference that goes within and beyond national borders, an approach that has been supported throughout this paper (Ibid).

Participants based in Honduras added that the country presents an institutionalized lack of protection and response to secure women and girls' fundamental rights such as education, housing, work, and health. "They are being forced to leave their territories because they are not finding protection. This lack of state coverage crystalizes into increased levels of migration", said participant A. Moreover, these participants stated that there are no specific protocols of attention for women, children, and the elderly within national institutions. This lack of protocols has left a void in the system, enabling bias towards women who are looking to access basic public services or productive resources such as land and microcredits in Honduras. On this subject, at least two participants brought up the term "economic violence", referring to the type of violence that does not allow Honduran women to obtain a decent and dignified livelihood. Such violence manifests in the following ways:

> "*They do not have access to land. The owner of the parcel of land, if the family has any, is the man of the house. The central issue that domestic work, a predominantly female-led field, does not even fall into the category of work as such is economic violence. Women or single mothers have difficulties accessing credit or microcredit for entrepreneurial purposes*." – participant A

Moreover, this failure to provide targeted attention and services for women and girls in Honduras becomes more evident in the national response to GBV, with participants emphasizing the high levels of impunity and lack of investigation in the majority of cases. As exemplified by participant F, "femicides as such are not recorded because they are not investigated. The amount of data stating undetermined reasons for homicide is about 80 or 90 percent in the case of female victims."

According to participants, in regard to attending the particular needs of the migrant population, the Honduran governmental response has been limited and relies purely on welfare policies (short-term aid measures). For women, such policies can translate into "providing them with seed capital to pursue entrepreneurial activities once they are returned" (participant B). On this subject, Marx Ferree (2011) added that political contexts can utilize intersectionality as a means to meet emergent needs and "bend" it to fit their own agendas. However, such measures do not offer female migrants a long-term solution to the motives that forced them to migrate in the first place. Furthermore, two of the participants mentioned that a Bill for the Prevention, Care, and Protection of Internally Displaced People was submitted to the National Congress of Honduras in 2019 (OAS, 2021), but it has been under review for two years without any progress. On this subject, previous research found that efforts to address internal displacement in the country have been insufficient and IDPs remain largely invisibilized, especially if they possess added layers of vulnerability (Tiusabá Gómez and Rodríguez Pastrana, 2017; Burgi-Palomino, 2017).

In transit and destination countries, women and girls do not enjoy specific routes of attention and/or protection. In the case of Mexico, participant H stated,

> "*Female migrants are only protected by what is there already, which is the national law on gender-based violence that everyone knows does not work in practice. In the case of access to international protection, there are no differentiated or targeted services towards women and girls*."

According to interviewees, Mexico passed its first migration law in 2011 which aims for the regularization of the migrant population, a big step from previous frameworks that only included migration as an add-on. This migration law stipulated that migrants, whether undocumented or not, have the right to security, medical service, and civil registration (in the event of being born in Mexico). However, participants emphasized that in practice these rights are not guaranteed. Most recently, the national budget allocated towards migration issues was eliminated and the one for attention to violence was reduced. In addition, participant J added that a first special migration program was initiated last year, with specific actions towards access to justice and promoting a policy for a real regularization, but this was later cancelled again.

Respondents declared that there is a lack of health and sanitary measures offered to the migrant population inside detention centers in both Mexico and the United States and this has become palpable during the COVID-19 pandemic. On this subject, pregnant women were found to be in particularly vulnerable conditions within these detention centers, with some of them giving birth without the adequate health care. This situation can be interpreted as a form of structural violence where women and girls' needs are overlooked by "gender neutral" laws and policies in transit and destination countries, which further exacerbate gender inequalities in the migration process (Amelina and Lutz, 2019).

Furthermore, participants stated that transit countries, motivated by recent United States immigration policy, have been strictly hampering immigration from Honduras through the heavy militarization of border areas in both Mexico and Guatemala. This geopolitization of borders has transferred into physical violence directed at migrants from armed forces. "Hondurans who emigrated due to the natural disasters had little to nothing left, so they decided to migrate but when passing through Guatemala they were injured by the military", said participant D. In this process, women, children, and adolescents are the most vulnerable populations as they are not able to run and protect themselves if violence erupts. Participants added that this type of violence is most commonly witnessed in the Mexico-US border.

6.4 Representational (Discourses)

According to Foucault (1977), discourse can be defined as a political process where constructs of power, knowledge, and institutions are shaped (as cited in Marx Ferree, 2011). This process includes two central themes, categorizing and othering, used to make sense of the world but also to control it (Ibid). Moreover, Amelina and Lutz (2021) added that public discourses about migrants tend to be strongly influenced by stereotypes in which gender plays an important role, impacting human actions that stem from these discourses. The following section, therefore, expands on this stance and analyzes the role that discourses play in shaping the overall migration experience of female migrants from Honduras.

6.4.1 The Migrant as the "Other"

Participants addressed the xenophobia experienced by Honduran migrants within and across borders, which became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the migrant caravans were returned by Guatemalan and Mexican authorities. "When migrants returned to Honduras, people said 'no, because they are the ones who bring the disease, they bring the virus', that was the discursive narrative we heard" said participant D. Mora and Piper (2021) stated that this behavior has its roots in eugenic and degeneration narratives and is further exacerbated during period of economic crisis and uncertainty, framing migration as a "threat to health of the nation". Participants noted that returned female migrants were particularly discriminated within their communities, as members assumed they had been subjected to some form of sexual violence in the migration journey. In other cases, this rejection came from their own families who were disappointed they were not able to make it to the country of destination.

This marginalization is further exacerbated in transit and destination countries, where having a perceived lack of legal recognition from the state is a danger and is treated as not deserving of protection (Ibid). Xenophobia, therefore, is translated into violence directed at migrants from organized criminal groups, the state, and society at large. Moreover, they are also in a vulnerable position of facing repression and violence from the security forces, which stems from the perception of migrants as "terrorists" or "invaders" (participant B).

6.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

In their concluding remarks, participants emphasized that forced migration is a regional responsibility that should be addressed as such, starting from the countries of origin all the way to the transit and destination countries. On this subject, participant G stated, "migration cannot be seen in blocks, what we have seen is that they are chains of movement with different scales that are finally intertwined in terms of their causes and circumstances."

Although the right to migrate was recognized by all participants, they emphasized the need to tackle the root causes of forced migration, which strip women and girls from their agency and exacerbate gender inequalities and discrimination. One of the steps towards guaranteeing the protection of female migrants is reviewing the Bill for the Prevention, Care, and Protection of Internally Displaced People that was submitted to the National Congress of Honduras. According

to participant F, this bill outlines specific routes of attention towards addressing the necessities for shelter, protection, health, and education of IDPs. Participant B added, “before being migrants, they were displaced up to three or four times. If we go and target internal displacement, we will be able to prevent forced migration.” On this subject, De Alwis (2021) study recognized that, even though internal displacement brings negative outcomes into women’s lives, it can also present new opportunities for innovation and change.

The inclusion and active participation of women in national decision-making processes was highlighted by participant C as an essential move to create specific policies that guarantee the rights of female migrants. This includes targeted policies that address SRHR as well as GBV. However, what women need and want is different depending on who is included in this concept (Marx Ferree, 2011). Participant C added, “there must be a differentiation in these policies that incorporates the intersectional needs of women in all spheres of life”. In this regard, unless intersectionality is incorporated into these processes, the needs of certain groups within the female population will remain invisibilized. Respondents also elaborated on the collaboration with local authorities to address the root causes of migration and provide migrant women and girls with spaces to voice their perceptions and particular needs. Moreover, participant F added that in order to thoroughly address the needs of this population, migration flows should be thoroughly documented and registered. “Unless disaggregated data is available, we will not be able to recognize their needs”, she added.

Additionally, participant G stated that migrant services available in transit and destination countries ought to incorporate a gender lens, besides the integration of specific routes of attention directed at women and girls. This action entails the consideration of relational and structural aspects behind the provision of these services, as different needs often demand different priorities in terms of resource allocation (Crenshaw, 1991). In the case of Mexico, participant J detailed a proposal to create an intersectional policy that includes affirmative actions for female migrants and their families, including the right to identification and the right to education. This policy would indicate a positive route towards attending the intersectional needs of the female migrant population. However, the eliminated budget towards migration would need to be reincorporated for these actions to be undertaken.

Furthermore, respondents asserted the need to follow human rights indicators on gender that have been established by the UN, which also have a component on migration. These indicators provide the basis to create a more comprehensive response to the female migrant population and their particular needs for protection, safety, and access to rights. In this regard, Marx Ferree (2011) added that utilizing the term "rights" as a singular master-frame does not leave space for interpretation and provides a basis for intersectional considerations of equality and inclusion for the migrant population.

7. Conclusions

This study aimed to analyze the experiences of female migrants from Honduras in the context of forced migration and how these are created and exacerbated by gender inequalities and discrimination in the migration process. Furthermore, it attempted to scrutinize the implications that social categories, relations, and structures have and whether or not female migrants can be considered independent actors in the pursuit of their own goals and strategies. Such considerations were examined using the intersectional tool *societal arenas of investigation* (Floya Anthias, 2012), to explore different levels of experience that have an impact on female migration processes.

The findings show that female migrants from Honduras are primarily driven to displace as a result of the high levels of GBV, generalized violence, and economic violence surrounding them, their families, and their communities in the country of origin. In addition, issues such as family problems, lack of state protection, environmental hazards, and the COVID-19 pandemic were perceived to contribute to the increasing participation of women and girls in migration flows. Further observations complemented previous studies on the topic of female migration from Central America, especially in relation to the continuum of violence that women and girls experience from their countries of origin all the way to the transit and destination countries. However, in the particular case of female migrants from Honduras, the intersection of social categories related to age, sexuality, socioeconomic and marital/parental status appeared to weigh heavily in the exacerbation of these experiences, as single mothers, trans women, and adolescent girls were listed as the groups that experience the most vulnerability along the migration trail.

The rise in nuclear families taking part in the migrant caravans denotes that women are increasingly deciding to take on the migration journey with their children, which adds an extra layer of vulnerability to the process. For adolescent girls, traveling with a relative or domestic partner offers a layer of protection, but this is conditioned by the circumstances in which they travel and the legal status of this relationship. Moreover, female migrants utilize a variety of self-protection strategies to escape the different forms of violence they encounter along the journey, which include traveling with fellow nationals and in caravans. The first one provides them with a social network, especially when they migrate with few resources, and the latter offers them more visibility and media coverage. However, migrating in groups can also lead to further

invisibilization of women and girls as they are considered “non-prototypical migrants”, leading to their experiences getting obscured in large migration flows. Furthermore, security forces were recognized as perpetrators of GBV and physical violence towards women and girls within and across borders, supporting findings from previous research. In contrast, CSOs play a supporting role in providing humanitarian, legal, and psychosocial services to female migrants. However, these actors face limited internal capacity and resources which restricts their ability to provide an adequate and dignified response to migrant women and girls’ particular needs of protection and accompaniment.

Family structures and networks, labor markets, and political and legal systems were found to be the main social institutions which influence the migration experience. This finding emphasizes that the role of the family is impactful at every level in the lives of female migrants, from the individual all the way to the institutional. Within the family structure, patriarchy and *machismo* define gender and family roles. However, these roles are being challenged by the restructuration of family structures as women are increasingly becoming heads of households and migrating of their own accord.

Labor markets in Honduras and destination countries further constrain the female migration experience, as women, and particularly single mothers, are forced to migrate seeking better economic opportunities abroad. This being said, they encounter similar levels of economic violence abroad on the basis of their undocumented status, facing higher vulnerability and exposure to social risks. Such circumstances can often lead to them being pressed to participate in prostitution networks in both Mexico and the United States, in order to provide for their families. Moreover, the lack of social protection and state response to secure women and girls’ fundamental rights in Honduras was determined to impact female migration. Thus, addressing internal displacement is relevant to prevent the forced migration of women and girls. Furthermore, findings revealed that female migrants do not receive specific routes of attention and care in transit and destination countries and legal frameworks have not provided the needed social protection. Moreover, through the militarization and geopolitization of borders, women and girls are also at greater risk of encountering state violence from armed forces in border areas. The general discourse towards Honduran migrants has many implications in the overall experience of female migrants. Findings showed that the migrant population faces high levels of xenophobia within and

across borders. This marginalization is exacerbated in transit and destination countries where a lack of recognition from the state further increases their exposure various risks and dangers in the migration process.

Furthermore, by producing an analysis on the forced migration of women and girls from Honduras, this paper hopes to support the creation of specific routes of care and attention to address the particular needs and realities of female migrants. In terms of legislation, findings reflect the need to tackle internal displacement as one of the root causes of forced migration. On this subject, the Bill for the Prevention, Care, and Protection of Internally Displaced People submitted to the National Congress of Honduras in 2019 (OAS, 2021) could provide a start to create more gender-sensitive responses towards IDPs and contribute to prevent the forced migration of female migrants. Future policies should take into consideration the intersectional implications that shape the female migration experience, understanding that what women need is different depending on who is falling under this category (Marx Ferree, 2011).

7.1 Suggestions for Future Research

The main focus of this paper was to analyze forced female migration in the Honduran context. Future studies would benefit from incorporating such an intersectional approach to explore the experiences of female migrants in the other two countries located in the Northern Triangle, Guatemala and El Salvador, which are also experiencing high mobility flows of women and girls. Although all three countries share common problems, each context possesses particularities that should be considered for future intersectional analyses. In addition, the supporting role of CSOs in the migration processes of Central Americans should be explored in more detail, as participants shared remarkably interesting work that could not be incorporated as it was outside the scope of this research. CSOs were found to play an impactful role in the decision-making of women and girls, through the provision of safe spaces and resources they need to thrive within and across borders. Moreover, this study has the limitation of working with a small sample which indicates that future research would benefit from working with a larger sample size through the incorporation of quantitative, disaggregated data and/or different qualitative methods such as focus groups. Furthermore, future intersectional studies in the Honduran context should consider narrowing the scope to one of the social categories mentioned in this study, to provide a more nuanced view of their particular experiences and needs of women and girls in the context of forced migration.

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9. Appendixes

Appendix 1: List of Participants

Pseudonym of participant	Name of the Organization	Location	Gender	Date of Interview	Length of Audio Recording
Participant A	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Tegucigalpa, Honduras	Male	February 24, 2021	29:25
Participant B	Médicos para el Mundo	Tegucigalpa, Honduras	Female	March 5, 2021	1:20:56
Participant C	Foro Nacional para la Migración (FONAMIH)	Tegucigalpa, Honduras	Female	January 29, 2021	1:01:09
Participant D	Pastoral de Movilidad Humana (PMH)	Tegucigalpa, Honduras	Female	February 18, 2021	1:02:13
Participant E	Comisión de Acción Social Menonita (CASM)	San Pedro Sula, Honduras	Female	April 26, 2021	44:50
Participant F	Cristosal	San Salvador, El Salvador	Female	February 10, 2021	1:21:23
Participant G	Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes México (SJM)	Mexico City, Mexico	Male	February 9, 2021	1:04:11
Participant H	Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova (CDH)	Tapachula, Mexico	Female	February 25, 2021	57:35
Participant I	El Programa de Asuntos Migratorios (PRAMI) de la Universidad Iberoamericana	Torreón, Mexico	Female	February 8, 2021	1:03:38
Participant J	Instituto Nacional para las Mujeres en la Migración	Mexico City, Mexico	Female	April 27, 2021	53:43

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

(Original in Spanish)

Interview Guide

1. Please state your name, organization, and the role that you have within this organization.
2. Tell me a bit about the organization you represent.
3. Briefly describe your experience working with the topics of gender and migration.
4. Do you work directly with female migrants? How has your experience been and what can you highlight from it?
5. According to international statistics, female migrants make up 50% of the total migrant population from Honduras. Have you perceived this migration to have increased in recent years? If so, since when?
6. Which do you think are the main reasons that motivate female migrants from Honduras to migrate in recent times? Please explain.
7. According to official sources, Honduras reported a total of 44,000 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) last year, which means that women are victims of violence every hour. Do you think that the high levels of GBV and domestic violence in Honduras is one of the main causes for women to migrate? Please elaborate.
8. According to the *Fundación Chiapaneca de Mujeres Migrantes* (CHIMUMI), the migration flows of women, girls and boys traveling alone has increased by 20% only this year. Why do you think this is the case and in what ways are these groups exposed to different sorts of dangers along the migration route?
9. In your opinion, is there any group of women that is more vulnerable in the migration process? Do you think there is a different between groups (e.g. age, ethnicity)?
10. Do you think that natural disasters have an impact in the female migration from Honduras? Please explain.
11. What type of support do migrant women from Honduras receive from society, government, and/or civil society organizations?
12. How do you think female migration patterns affect the development of the country and region?
13. What kind of actions are needed from the government and civil society for migrant women to feel supported?
14. Any observations or final comments that you would like to add to this interview?

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form (Spanish)

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
[Formulario de Consentimiento para Participar en un Estudio de Investigación]

Título del estudio: Patrones de Desplazamiento y Migración Femenina en Honduras

Investigador principal: Fabiana Pineda

Mi firma abajo comprueba mi consentimiento de participar voluntariamente en este estudio de investigación y confirmo que he sido informado/a de lo siguiente:

- Es opcional ser grabado o no y si la entrevista se graba, solo la investigadora del proyecto tendrá acceso al archivo de audio y transcripción de la entrevista.
- La información que se comparta será tratada de manera confidencial y utilizada solo para el propósito de esta investigación.
- Puedo detener la entrevista cuando desee y reusarme a responder preguntas específicas.
- He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas acerca del estudio, y estas preguntas han sido contestadas.

_____ _____
Firma del sujeto Fecha

_____
Nombre del sujeto (en letra de imprenta)

_____ _____
Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento Fecha

_____
Nombre de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento
(en letra de imprenta)

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form (English)

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Female migration and displacement patterns in Honduras

Researcher: Fabiana Pineda

My signature below validates my consent to participate in this research and I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the following:

- It is optional to be recorded or not and if the interview is recorded, only the researcher will have access to the audio and transcription of this interview.
- All the information shared will be treated with confidentiality and used only for the purpose of this study.
- I can stop the interview at any point and say no to answer specific questions.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and these questions have been answered.

_____ _____
Signature of participant Date

_____
Name of participant (in print)

_____ _____
Signature of the person who has obtained consent Date

_____
Name of the person who has obtained consent (in print)

Appendix 5: Email Sample

(Original in Spanish)

Dear participant,

My name is Fabiana Pineda and I am a student of the masters in International Development and Management (LUMID) at Lund University in Sweden. I am currently doing research on the female migration and displacement patterns in Honduras and looking to interview NGOs, CSOs and research centers that work with the topics of migration and gender.

I believe that **XXXX** would be an ideal participant, due to its experience working with **XXXX**. I would be extremely interested in having a conversation with your organization and obtain your perspective on this issue. Similarly, I would greatly appreciate if you could give me a few minutes of your time to share your experience and work with female migrants and the consequences that this type of migration can have for the development of the country/region.

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and it will be done through Google Meet. Furthermore, the information collected will be treated with confidentiality and utilized only for the purpose of this research.

Please confirm your participation and availability by answering this email. Consequently, I will be sharing more detailed information about the study.

Kind regards,
Fabiana Pineda

Appendix 6: Axial Coding in NVivo