

# WOMEN AND MIGRATION(S) II



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Kalia Brooks, Cheryl Finley, Ellyn Toscano and Deborah Willis (eds), *Women and Migration(s) II*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0296>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800647084

ISBN Hardback: 9781800647091

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800647107

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800647114

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800647121

ISBN XML: 9781800647138

ISBN HTML: 9781800647145

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0296

Cover image: FIRELEI BÁEZ for Marie-Louise Coidavid, exiled, keeper of order, Anacaona, 2018. Oil on canvas. Installation view: 10th Berlin Biennale, Akademie der Künste (Hanseatenweg), Berlin, 9 June 9-September 2018. Photo: Timo Ohler. Cover design by Anna Gatti



# 41. How to Look at Silence

*Nohora Arrieta*

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The border, they say, is alive and porous, crossed as if by osmosis, as the cells of an organism feed. Crossing the Guajira Desert in Colombia to get to the state of Zulia in Venezuela is what my maternal grandmother Elvia Mármol did for fifty years. This movement, which was so natural to those of us who grew up surrounded by it, still happened shrouded in silence. First, there is the nationalistic discourse that Colombia as a country is very different and very distant from Venezuela. According to this discourse, this back and forth across the border never happened or only happens now that, due to the crisis in the neighboring country, Colombia is “overrun with Venezuelans.” The other silence arises from the movement itself and from the experiences of the women who moved and who move: what happens at the border? What is life like on the other side? On this side?

Elvia or Mami, as she liked to be called by her granddaughters, was the proud owner of the first telephone in our neighborhood, calle Aurora. This luxury turned the house into a center of communications. The phone never stopped ringing, the ring *tliiiiin*, sharp and infinite. “Elvia Mármol’s house, with whom do I have the pleasure?” Mami would answer, mimicking an experienced receptionist. Then she would run to the terrace and yell out: “Fulaaaana, it’s so-and-so from Venezuela, hurry!” The woman would dash across the room to the telephone in its little corner (dark and private, like an oracle) and lift the receiver with her hands still soapy from the Saturday wash. “He is not coming this December”, “he left me for someone else”, “that woman does not care about her children”, “they fired her from work”, Fulana would say after hanging up, her brow furrowed in what could be sadness or anger.



Fig. 1 Von Diaz, *Coconuts and Collards: Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South*. 2018. Photo by Cybelle Codish. Image author's own.