

# WOMEN AND MIGRATION(S) II



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# Introduction

*Kalia Brooks, Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano  
and Cheryl Finley*

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The Women and Migration(s) Working Group is an interdisciplinary project based at New York University that set out to examine the role that photography, art, film, history, and writing have played in identifying and remembering the migratory experience of women. The collection that follows features different types of writing styles, namely, memoir, artist statement, and journalistic and critical essays. Women have been part of global and historical movements of people, to escape war, to avoid persecution, for work, for security. Women have been uprooted, stolen, trafficked, enslaved; they have been displaced from land despoiled of resources and habitats lost to extreme weather patterns and climate change. Women have moved and migrated for deeply private and personal reasons—to reach their potential freely, to lead meaningful lives, to secure a future for themselves and their families. They have sailed, flown, driven and walked. Some have not survived the journey.

We seek to capture the breadth of experience: an account of the migration of women is the totality of many stories. Ultimately, we leave it to our contributors to respond to the term as they are inspired, hoping that diverse perspectives will enhance our collective understanding.

This research group, supported by NYU's Global Institute for Advanced Study, first convened on the campus of NYU Florence in June 2017. A book resulted, published in March 2019, that was a compilation of the contributions of forty-two women scholars, authors and artists. The essays in the first book charted how women's profound and turbulent experiences of migration have been articulated in writing, photography, art and film. As a whole, the volume gives an impression of

a wide range of migratory events from women's perspectives, covering the African diaspora, refugees and slavery through the various lenses of politics and war, love and family. The contributors, a combination of academics and artists, offer both personal and critical points of view on the artistic and historical repositories of these experiences. Selfies, motherhood, violence and Hollywood all featured in this substantial treasure-trove of women's joy and suffering, disaster and delight, place, memory and identity. This collection appealed to artists and scholars of the humanities, particularly within the social sciences, though there is much to recommend it to creatives seeking inspiration or counsel on the issue of migratory experiences.

The group convened again in Abu Dhabi in 2019. In both instances, scholars, artists, and writers from each national community were included. Our convening in Washington, D.C. was scheduled for March 2020, but had to be postponed and reorganized as a virtual gathering due to the restrictions generated in response to COVID-19.

The Women in Migration(s) Working Group perspective on migration crosses boundaries of discipline, geography, law, politics, history and temporality. In this second volume, we seek to capture the breadth of intersectional experience: we include diasporas, internal displacements, and international and transnational migrations. The public policy lens through which the current crises are analyzed is one vantage point, and an essential one to be sure. We hope that the contribution of artists and writers will help us to understand the lived experiences of home and loss, family and belonging, isolation, borders and identity—issues salient both in experiences of migration and in the epochal times in which we find ourselves today. These are stories of trauma and fear, to be sure, but also stories of the strength, perseverance, hope and even joy of women surviving their own moments of disorientation, disenfranchisement and dislocation.

Today, in the midst of a global pandemic, protests against anti-black racism, and collective action around environmentalism, we are living through a moment of profound disorientation, dispossession and dislocation and, as in most crises, women are affected disproportionately. These global crises are aggravating and intensifying the injustice, marginalization and insecurity experienced by women and other exploited people. Women are unequally in low-paid, high-risk, insecure,

“essential” employment, on the front lines of the health care, social justice, food services, home care, emergency, and all other services sustaining the social distancing and sheltering in place that secure the general population.

What is happening to women already displaced by war, racism, famine, globalized climate change and nationalist governments? Migrant workers, who travel long distances for work, including across borders, already precarious and marginal, are losing jobs. With borders slamming shut, people can neither stay put, nor return to the places from which they have fled.

Violence against women, whether in domestic settings or the temporary and communal living arrangements in which women and girls in migratory situations are sheltered, is on the rise during this health crisis. The World Health Organization, drawing on UN data, states that “reports of domestic violence have tripled around the world, not even counting the many ‘invisible’ cases where women have no way to ask for help.” As in any other global crisis, women who are displaced, refugees and living in conflict areas are particularly at risk. Women compelled to stay home during the quarantine requirements of this public health crisis are trapped inside with their abusers, often without access to help. This is a time when women across the demographic spectrum are learning to be allies in the pursuit of social reform on a global scale. Through a wide interdisciplinary lens, and a diverse set of voices, we examine the experience of women and migration through art, history, crises, protest, memoir, narrative, and joy.

The goal with the second volume is to broaden commensurately the conversations begun previously with the circumstances of our current time, in order to deepen understanding, and encourage space for ongoing reflection in service to building a more just future.

