Disclosure/Translator's Introduction: *Below are excerpts from Óscar Martinez' book Migrant s Don't Matter*
. The reality for women, transgender and transsexual persons (some of whom are fleeing sexual persecution in their country of origin) on the migrant trails of Mexico is, horrifically, that many have learned to expect rape and sexual abuse as part of the journey. What Martinez' book brings to light is both the fortitude and resilience of some of these victimized persons as well as the systemic impunity of their offenders. Not only are the rapists and assailants very rarely brought to justice, but the women and other victimized persons, rightly scared to denounce abuses or rape, suffer and sometimes die in near-complete anonymity. The excerpts below reveal the violent and too often overlooked life of women, transgender and transsexual migrants in Mexico.

Source: ElFaro.net

Photos: Toni Arnau / RUIDO Photo / Elfaro.net

Aquí se viola.

Aquí se mata.

Here they rape,

Here they kill.

Chiapas, May, 2009

The most dangerous part of the migrant trail through Mexico, where undocumented Central Americans have no protection and where the horrors seem ceaseless and locals seem deaf to cries for help, is La Arrocera. Over the course of a year of walking that migrant trail, I heard the stories of hundreds of attacks on migrants, of people beaten to a pulp, of murder, of women screaming while they were raped in the hills, while, just beyond them, Mexico refused to listen.

Luis Flores, as head of the International Organization for Migration in Tapachula, Mexico, leads community education projects in the area and case manages Central American human trafficking victims. Here, he explained to me, migrant women are turned into a product. “They come having already been raped, abused, they come from dysfunctional families in which, many times, it was their father or uncle who raped them. What many of them won't tell you, is that they knew they'd be raped on this journey, while migrating, that they feel it's a sort of bill that must be paid. According to the Guatemalan government, it's estimated that eight of every ten Central American migrant women suffer some form of sexual abuse in Mexico. It's six of every ten, according to a study done by Mexico's Chamber of Deputies. They travel with that lodged in their minds, knowing that they'll be abused once, twice, three times [...] Sexual abuse has lost it's terror. At a certain level, they know they're victims, but they don't feel that way. Their logic runs like this: yes, this is happening to me, but I took the chance, I knew it would happen.”

Of every 250 migrants who were raped, and who participated in a survey by the International Organization of Migration, only 50 accepted medical and counseling help. Many said they thought it would be pointless because they thought it would happen to them again, that there was still a lot of road left to walk.

There is, Flores says, an expression for the transformation of the migrant's body: cuerpomátic. The body becomes a credit card, a cuerpomátic, which buys one safety, a little bit of cash and the insurance, though far from guaranteed, that your travel companions don't get killed.

Paola, a 23-year-old transsexual Guatemalan, says that she expected to be attacked while traveling. “I'd been told this always happens to migrants,” she says. We are sitting next to a stalled train in Ixtepec, just a few miles north of where she escaped her attackers. Tall and dark, she wears heavy make up, a black, low-cut shirt and tight cowboy pants. She tells the story of her rape La Arrocera. She says that she tried to relax, readying herself to the idea of being raped. Her shirt had been torn by one of the men standing behind her, all of whom smelled of grass and looked like laborers. They had suddenly come out of the nearby brush with shotguns and machetes.

Calm, despite being, as she put it, in doggy position, Paola understood she had only two bets left: her wit and her will. She listened to the outlaws negotiating behind her. “You can give her a fuck first. I'll go next.”

“Look here,” Paola interrupted them, “do what you want, but for your sake, I'd put a condom on. I've got some over there in my backpack. It'd be for your own good, you know, I've got AIDS. It's just, I didn't think I'd be running into this sort of problem. I thought you were all macho men, you know, the sort that only rape women.”

Paola said this matter-of-factly, though she's identified as a woman for years now and would never answer to her former name. A short moment of silence passed. Paola imagines them staring at each other, dumbstruck, wide-eyed, but of course she doesn't know. She still had her back to them. She was still on her hands and knees, her head raised high and her eyes steady, with all the dignity she could muster. “Just get the fuck up you fucking whore!” One of them said. “And go to hell.”

Paola doesn't actually have AIDS. What she does confess to catching, after five years as a sex worker in Guatemala and Mexico City, is a life-saving swiftness around perverted men: her wit and her will. Mugged and jostled, without a cent in her pocket, she went on walking across unnamed roads toward El Norte. “But at least I was prepared,” Paola finishes her story. “I mean emotionally,” she says, referring to being warned that attacks like this one happen often on the migrant trail. She is a true survivor of La Arrocera.

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