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## RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

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ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO. *The Years of Blood: Stories from a Reporting Life in Latin America*. Duke University Press, 2025.

*The Years of Blood* is something less than a book but something more than a collection of articles (most first appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, though some hail from *National Geographic* or *The New Yorker*). Guillermprieto's book resembles a Cubist painting; she assembles immersive portraits of events in half a dozen Latin American countries or reviews of key books and even some art exhibits. The strength of this approach is that we learn from dozens, if not hundreds, of interviews that Guillermprieto fashions into unforgettable tales of, among other things, drug-related violence in the region.

Three portraits of Colombia explore the violent conflict between left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary squads, detailing how drug money fueled their addictions and how its reverberations helped to fan the flames of protest that overwhelmed the presidency of Iván Duque (2018-22). Chapter 5 covers the brutal war between the left-wing guerrillas of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; FARC) and the right-wing paramilitary squads in El Salado, a village south of Medellín. Chapter 6 is a review of Carlos Castaño's widely read memoirs. Castaño, a cattle rancher, is infamous for organizing the paramilitary squads that would wage war against the FARC, and the FARC's kidnapping of his father is what got Carlos involved. Carlos and his family had coughed up the money for two ransoms before guerrillas released their father. But his family only recovered the patriarch's cadaver, the shock and anguish of which led some of the Castaños to organize paramilitary hit squads. Chapter 4 interviews street protesters and other residents of Cali, who took to the streets against Duque's Conservative government. That Duque resisted implementing the 2017 peace agreement with the FARC is the irony here; it was the absence of gainful employment that created the constituency for war in rural Colombia as well as for the protests that led Duque to withdraw the tax increase bill that had, during the height of the fallout from the coronavirus, set off the time-bomb of street mobilization.

But the Cubist strategy shows its limits in the ten chapters devoted to Mexico. They cover a range of topics—including an insightful review of the archeology of pre-Columbian Mexico (Chapter 17), an enthusiastic one of Diana Kennedy's

books on “the high art of the tamale” (Chapter 18), and a penetrating essay on Alfonso Cuarón’s film, *Roma* (Chapter 19)—whose angles make it hard to decipher the image on the canvas. How the Mexican state continues to ignore or brutalize its rural and especially Indigenous peoples seems to be the unifying theme of these fragments. There is a chapter (11) on the rise of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), but nothing on how he went from losing successive presidential elections to winning in 2018 and transforming its multi-party system into an updated version of one-party rule. While Guillermoprieto does not explain why AMLO did little to improve a horrific human rights situation, she suggests that political change in Mexico since 2000 has been a sham, largely through insightful portraits of Mexican journalists killed while covering the collusion between drug dealers, gangs, and local politicians (Chapters 14-15) and the 2014 case of the 43 disappeared students of Aytozinapa (Chapter 21). The chapter on the 43 missing students is a thorough and compact essay on their families’ search to obtain justice from a government whose security forces are implicated in the crime as well as in its coverup.

Two chapters cover Bolivia and a third addresses Venezuela. Chapter 2 is about female wrestlers in El Alto, which shines a light on female empowerment in the new Bolivia ushered in by Evo Morales and his party, the Movimiento hacia el Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism; MAS). The sketches of Evo (Chapter 1) and another on Hugo Chávez of Venezuela (number 3) are fine as they go; each acknowledges the autocratic proclivities of each leader while concluding that Evo’s governments produced much more social change than Chávez’s. But their brevity prevents Guillermoprieto from exploring why Evo was more successful than Chávez and why each managed to reshape the politics of their countries.

A theme running through many of these chapters is the bizarreness of the Latin American mirror. True to her calling as a journalist, Guillermoprieto provides even-handed, fact-based examinations of characters that are regrettably non-fictional. Chapter 8 covers president-for-life Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and his wife, Rosario Murillo, who, in January 2025, became co-president and next in line to the throne. From fighting the Somoza dictatorship to winning and then losing the presidency of revolutionary Nicaragua (1985-90), Ortega took over the Sandinista movement to return to power and swiftly move to dismantle its troubled democracy. Along the way, he and Rosario found each other, and mom looked the other way as stepdad sexually abused her eldest daughter from a pre-adolescent age. Chapter 12 covers Marcial Marciel (yes, his names are spelled correctly), an ultra-conservative Mexican priest who helped found the Legion of Christ. Guillermoprieto discloses that Marciel had a common-law wife (and that he fathered children with other women, too), and sexually abused

numerous children (including his own)—but gained favor with John Paul II, in part because he left large envelopes of cash for Solidarność (Solidarity), the Polish labor union that opposed their country’s Communist regime. “You can’t make this stuff up,” is what I kept repeating as I plowed through these and other chapters in *The Years of Blood*.

*The Years of Blood* emphasizes disappointments with democracy and underscores the horrific results of the US-sponsored War on Drugs. Guillermoprieto is a stylist who knows how to tell a tale, and these portraits are as evocative as they are informative. Readers with little knowledge of Latin America will struggle, but Latin Americanists will benefit from reading this book. Guillermoprieto takes the techniques of the journalist—interviews and storytelling—to new heights in 21 portraits of the region over the past two decades.

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PRISCILLA SOLANO. *Shelter on the Journey: Humanitarianism, Human Rights, and Migration*. Temple University Press, 2024.

*Shelter on the Journey* presents a wide-ranging discussion of humanitarian and human rights issues concerning Central American and other irregular migrants transiting through Mexico to reach the United States. The book is not a systematic study of migrant shelters in Mexico but rather a conceptual exploration of the treatment of irregular migrants, based on the experiences of the author, Priscilla Solano, in the Mexican migrant shelter “La Esperanza.”

Irregular migrants are foreign nationals traveling without visas, though the term is not always equivalent to “illegal migration.” There are variations within irregular migration: some individuals enter a country without a visa in order to seek work, while others enter without a visa in order to request asylum. Regardless of their initial intent, most irregular migrants in the United States enter through the southwestern border, often after traveling for days, weeks, or even months across Mexico. This journey typically involves dangerous conditions, including risks of assault, robbery, rape, and murder. Hundreds of irregular migrants die each year while attempting to cross the US–Mexico border, often in desert regions or waterways. These fatalities, while now documented and publicized, are still underreported in many official statistics and media outlets.

As *Shelter on the Journey* describes, a network of shelters operates across Mexico to provide humanitarian and human rights support to these migrants. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted at La Esperanza in 2012, Solano raises and examines a number of social, cultural, and religious issues concerning