

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

public perceptions of irregular migration and the work of migrant shelters. One key issue is the distinction between humanitarianism and human rights work. While some observers treat the two as interchangeable, others see important differences. Humanitarianism refers to the care and concern shown toward vulnerable populations—such as those served by shelters—whereas human rights work entails efforts to support the right of all individuals, including irregular migrants, to travel safely and with dignity. The distinction also shapes how shelter workers see their roles—some as providers of immediate relief, others as advocates for systemic change.

According to Solano, some communities in Mexico hold limited or exclusionary views about which groups in transit deserve support. Migrant shelters often rely on local neighborhood stores for food and supplies, but neighborhoods can also become sources of opposition. In some cases, neighborhood leaders portray foreign migrants as intruders or threats to social order and pressure shelters to close. Despite a shared language and regional identity, many Mexicans view Central Americans as too different to be fully accepted. A similar pattern unfolded in the United States in the late 1980s, when Mexican American leaders in San Benito, Texas, mobilized to shut down a shelter operated by Catholic nuns that was assisting Central American migrants. These examples reveal the layered nature of ethnic and national belonging, even within the broader category of Latin American identity.

Solano highlights how migrants in transit in Mexico encounter a contradictory environment marked by both the protection and the violation of human rights. While the Mexican government has issued statements affirming migrants' rights and has offered humanitarian visas, serious violations—including fatal assaults—persist. Between 2006 and 2012, more than 70,000 migrants in transit “simply disappeared in Mexico” (p. 3). Some of these violations are perpetrated by the Mexican police, including those colluding with criminal cartels. Although Solano does not elaborate on this, research shows that in some Mexican regions, cartels exert more control than the state itself. Mexican soldiers may briefly deploy to contested areas, but they often withdraw, ceding control to heavily armed criminal groups. These dynamics complicate the role of law enforcement and make it difficult for migrants to seek protection, even when they encounter threats or violence.

For Solano, public awareness of the dangers facing Central American migrants intensified following the 2017 discovery of mass graves in the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas, containing the remains of hundreds of migrants murdered by a cartel that dominated the region. According to sociologist Karl Mannheim, social generations frame historical eras through markers socially defined by their own generational experiences. In this light, the publication of

a 1997 US research report revealing that hundreds of irregular migrants were dying each year at the US–Mexico border was a pivotal moment. Ensuing media coverage—including front-page stories in *The New York Times*, national television segments, and a feature on *60 Minutes*—drew widespread attention to the dangers of US border enforcement strategies, which funneled migrants into remote and hazardous terrain. Migrant shelters and human rights advocates helped raise awareness of how these policies contributed to migrant deaths. The documentation of these deaths also became a tool for activists to pressure governments to rethink their border strategies and humanitarian obligations.

Solano further explains that while Mexico has taken steps to protect the rights of migrants in transit, it operates within the geopolitical constraints imposed by its proximity to the United States. Some US officials consider Mexico's southern border to be the true southern frontier of US immigration control. That is, preventing Central Americans from entering Mexico is seen as a way to stop them from reaching the United States. In response, Mexico has at times implemented programs like Plan Sur to reinforce enforcement at its southern border—often at the behest of the United States—though these measures tend to be short-lived. As Solano points out, during President Trump's first term, Mexico also agreed to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), under which asylum seekers were forced to remain in Mexico while awaiting US immigration hearings. Yet the name of the policy is misleading, as those waiting in Mexican border towns were often exposed to violence, extortion, and exploitation by cartels and gangs. Critics argued that MPP created refugee camps in unsafe regions, violating international norms on asylum protections.

Shelter on the Journey is an important resource for those seeking to understand the moral and ethical dimensions of migration governance. The issues it addresses extend beyond the US–Mexico context to encompass migrant experiences across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. As the United States under a second Trump administration has undertaken a policy of deporting migrants to third countries, Solano's insights into humanitarianism and human rights become increasingly relevant. The book also underscores the role that civil society—religious organizations, human rights groups, non-profits, and local volunteers—plays in shaping the experiences of migrants and resisting policies that dehumanize or endanger them.

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