



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (review)

Tanya Golash-Boza

American Studies, Volume 48, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 171-173 (Review)



Published by Mid-American Studies Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.0.0077>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/375285>

music to be proper fans, but also—paradoxically—predatory and exploitative of the hapless musicians whose artistry they cruelly ignore in their lust for celebrity sex. For anyone casually acquainted with rock culture, the term describes the most usual position of women in the music of the 1960s and 1970s.

In *Electric Ladyland*, Lisa Rhodes disrupts this assessment and reveals the diverse, creative and important roles of women in rock that have been obscured in sexist accounts of rock culture. She examines the work of women who were fans, rock critics, and musicians during the tumultuous years when rock dominated popular culture. Most importantly, she sheds new light on the fascinating, complex, and contradictory experience of the groupie.

The book tackles three main areas of rock culture where women's involvement has been obscured: performance, journalism, and fandom. In the first category, it contributes usefully to the dialogue about and history of female musicians, an area already explored in such books as *She Bop*, *She's a Rebel*, and numerous articles and books about individual rock stars. Rhodes's discussion is doubtless informed by her own professional experience as a rocker; her 1986 album *Shivers* led to collaborations with the likes of Aaron Neville, Joan Jett, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, and she was featured in *Billboard* magazine and the television show *American Bandstand*.

Nevertheless, Rhodes's original and interesting book draws on archival research, interviews, and thoughtful scholarly analysis, rather than memoir. In its second section, *Electric Ladyland* presents sustained discussion of the lives and work of women rock critics Ellen Willis and Lillian Roxon, who penned some of the most creative and original rock criticism of the rock era; Roxon compiled, edited, and herself wrote most of a *Rock Encyclopedia* (1969), and Willis wrote for publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Ms*. The work of these two critics indicates the importance of rock music and culture to the serious press during the 1960s and 1970s. In the first serious published analysis of these writers' work, Rhodes deftly deconstructs the sexist, even misogynist, values and ideology of rock journalism in magazines such as *Rolling Stone*.

In 1969, that magazine published a special issue on groupies, and their prurient interpretation of the groupie's role and function came to be definitive. As Rhodes demonstrates, however, groupies themselves understood their experiences and importance in very different terms, both before and after *Rolling Stone* gave them notoriety. The third and most exciting part of *Electric Ladyland* concerns itself with groupies, contextualizing them in the upheavals surrounding sex roles and sexual relations of the 1960s and 1970s. Giving voice to former groupies as well as musicians, Rhodes helps the reader reassess easy assumptions about the role of women in rock, and, indeed, in contemporary culture.

Dalhousie University

Jacqueline Warwick

SEEKING REFUGE: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada. By María Cristina García. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006.

In this clearly written and engaging treatise, García posits that the United States, Mexico, and Canada reacted to the Central American refugee crisis (1974–1996) on the basis of each state's interest, as well as a consequence of each others' actions. She also pays substantial attention to the grassroots movements and advocacy networks that pushed the agenda on the table in each of these three countries.

García first addresses Central American migration to Mexico. The Central American refugee crisis was particularly challenging for Mexico, not only because it accommodated the largest numbers of Central American refugees, but also because this was the first time in its history that Mexico had become a major refugee destination. While national discussions about migration had previously focused exclusively on out-migration, Mexican authorities now had to turn their attention to their newly found position as a safe haven for refugees. This also meant that Mexico's regional and international credibility now depended on its responses to immigration. This was made even more difficult when the Guatemalan government demanded that Mexico repatriate the refugees, in light of concerns that refugees were providing support to the opposition forces in the refugee camps.

The first group of Central American refugees to arrive in Mexico were the Nicaraguans, who began coming in the 1970s, and continued to arrive until the 1990s. Nevertheless, the Mexican government never officially recognized or gave any assistance to the Nicaraguan refugees.

Guatemalans, in contrast, were recognized as refugees, and were placed in refugee camps. Guatemalans had been migrating seasonally to Mexico since the mid-twentieth century for work, and the southern part of Mexico was Guatemalan territory until 1824. In fact, Mexicans presumed that the first wave of Guatemalan refugees in 1980 were the estimated twenty to one hundred thousand seasonal workers that come to Mexico each year. The Mexican government eventually agreed to accept the Guatemalan refugees, so long as they remained in the refugee settlement camps. These camps were initially only along the southern border. However, international organizations and advocacy networks were able to convince Mexican officials that these refugees were in danger, and 18,000 of the 46,000 Guatemalan refugees were relocated further north in Mexico.

While the majority of the Guatemalans who fled to Mexico were agricultural workers, the Salvadorans were more urbanized, and thus more likely to end up in Mexican cities, where they tried to blend in so as to avoid immigration officials. If they were accosted and found to be undocumented, they would be immediately deported to Guatemala, where they often would attempt to enter the country again. In 1990, Mexico deported 126,000 Central Americans, as compared to the 12,133 Central Americans the United States deported in 1989.

The Mexican government established a voluntary repatriation program when the civil conflict allegedly ended and democracy supposedly returned. Many Guatemalans chose to return, while others, hearing of continued violence in Guatemala, elected to remain in Mexico. In 1996, the Mexican government created a special program which allowed Guatemalans to regularize their status, and by the year 2000, around 25,000 Central Americans had taken advantage of these legal provisions and decided to remain in Mexico.

By the late 1980s, there were as many as one million Central American refugees in the United States, as compared to between 500,000 and 750,000 in Mexico. Since the Guatemalans were granted protective status in Mexico, more Guatemalans opted to stay in Mexico, while Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, who were not officially recognized by the Mexican government, were more likely to migrate to the United States. Mexico's policy also allowed U.S. officials to claim that Guatemalans did not need protected status in the United States. As García points out, this is just one of the many examples where Mexican policy has an impact on the United States.

In the United States, refugee advocates claimed that the United States had a moral obligation to help refugees because of the United States's long history of economic and military intervention in Central America. The Reagan and Bush administrations, however,

were “reluctant to admit that their policies caused displacement and generated refugees” (33), as this would have implied that the governments that the United States was supporting with billions of dollars each year were “terrorizing their own citizens” (10) and “were despotic regimes that violated human rights” (90). Between 1983 and 1990, only 2.6 percent of Salvadoran asylum seekers were granted asylum, and only 1.8 percent of Guatemalans. In contrast, Nicaraguans had an asylum approval rate of 25.2 percent in these same years. This is of course much less than that for Cubans or those from the USSR, whose approval rates hovered around 75 percent during the Cold War.

García provides ample historical background for United States–Central America relations, going back to the mid-twentieth century, and links these actions to the conflict and subsequent emigration. García describes in detail the ways that migration policy decisions were intimately linked to foreign policy decisions. But, she also explains how grassroots organizations were influential in both of these sorts of policies. In response to the violations of human rights at the border and in Central America, a sanctuary movement emerged which involved as many as 450 safe havens in 1987. NGOs and religious organizations who were opposed to U.S. foreign policy in Central America operated sanctuaries as a means of protest. “They criticized the Reagan administration for requesting continued aid to El Salvador, to supposedly end the violence, while denying safe haven to the victims of that violence” (93).

As in Mexico and the United States, Canadian NGOs were active in ensuring that human rights issues were taken into account in immigration policy decisions in Canada. In all three of these countries, religious-based movements were willing to engage in extra-legal activity in light of what they perceived to be inhumane refugee and asylum policies. Canada received far fewer Central American refugees than did the United States or Mexico, and granted asylum to a larger percentage of applicants.

The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in the United States led to higher levels of emigration from the United States to Canada, and thus to policy changes in Canada. Like in the United States and Mexico, the call for increased restrictions on border control was supported by the general public, but vociferously contested by advocacy networks. García ends this book with a brief discussion of immigration politics and policies in North America in the post- 9/11 era, which expands her discussion of the common goals and responses of the three North American countries. She argues that Mexico, the United States, and Canada share the goals of increasing free trade in the region, but also wish to control the movement of “undesirable” people.

Overall, this book does an excellent job of balancing the stories of three countries who sent refugees North and three countries who had to respond to the Central American refugee crisis. García’s analysis is detailed and comprehensive, yet easy to follow. This book will be suitable for both regional experts and novices, insofar as it provides substantial historical background, yet also points out connections that have not been made before, especially those between the advocacy networks in the three countries and the governmental policy decisions.

University of Kansas

Tanya Golash-Boza