

For example, the discussion of the vocabulary of “background” in relation to class identity is revealing, but one would have appreciated a more detailed rendering of the conflicts and tensions of class identity and status that get played out in IT workspaces. Further, because the focus is on women IT professionals, the IT workforce appears to be mostly elite and cosmopolitan – although a few examples of male software engineers from lower-class or small-town backgrounds points to its actual social diversity. As these examples suggest, there is a significant class difference between male and female IT employees, on average, yet Radhakrishnan does not expand on this social feature of the workforce nor its implications for workplace dynamics.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the monograph is a must-read for scholars of contemporary south Asia, globalization, and the sociology of work, class, and gender.

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SILBER, IRINA CARLOTA. *Everyday Revolutionaries. Gender, Violence, and Disillusionment in Postwar El Salvador*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey [etc.] 2011. 238 pp. Ill. \$27.95. doi:10.1017/S0020859012000740

The two decades of violent civil conflict in El Salvador, which left significant traces on the country’s socio-political development, have triggered substantial scholarly attention. Much of this literature lacks any focus on the private lives, motivations, and agency of actors, however. For this reason alone *Everyday Revolutionaries* is an invaluable resource for those aiming to gain an insight into the private motives of actors and into how these individual and collective dynamics influence each other. The book is a politically engaged anthropology which documents in detail the lives of those actors who make up the women’s movement and other social movements in a small community in El Salvador.

In her book, Silber discusses several issues related to the meaning of postwar democracy, including the limits of a transition to democracy, and the impact of the “global postwar development and peace-building industry” (p. 9). She goes on to consider how former subversives have been discursively and materially reframed as legitimate neoliberal subjects. How has this impacted upon their chances of building up a new life in the repopulated communities? How much community participation can be asked of people? And what are the possibilities of socio-economic and political justice for the everyday revolutionaries turned undocumented migrants?

The author’s starting position is that “transitions from war to peace, from state-sponsored violence to internationally observed, democratic elections, bring with them new modalities of violence that continue to marginalize the subaltern” (p. 4). She analyses how the modalities of violence affect the lives of a number of former participants in the conflict, by documenting – with exceptional rigour and commitment – their activism, motives, hopes for change, despair, and the way in which they interpret their own histories. The protagonists of the book are mostly women, meaning that gender not only constitutes an important organizing theme of the book, but that also gendered experiences in everyday life – such as “transborder mothering” (p. 185) – are accurately accounted for, for example when describing the entanglements of a recent emigrant in the US, who left one child behind in El Salvador with her mother, while mothering another in the US as she tried to make a living there and to send money home.

Through her personalized writing and reporting style, the author manages to capture the very diverse life histories of the protagonists in a way which does justice to the multiple entanglements of these individuals, while at the same time avoiding a depersonalized description of social movements. This is made possible through the personal engagement and deep-rooted ties which the author has with her research subjects and the communities where she has conducted long periods of fieldwork, both in El Salvador and in several cities in the United States. Silber also conscientiously describes the performative aspect of doing fieldwork, and on several occasions addresses the ethical dilemmas which this engagement involves. She displays a great awareness of her own position and the assumptions that this brings with it, as well as of the fact that, away from the academy, the role and objective of an anthropologist becomes hazy. Nevertheless, Silber manages to combine academic distance with an involved activism in an exceptional way.

The argument which the author develops in this book about the meaning of post-conflict transitions rests on four pillars which run through each chapter: resocialization, disillusionment, persistent social inequalities, and migration. The most substantial element of her argument revolves around the concept of the resocialization – or even remarginalization – of former revolutionaries. Through her insightful ethnography, the author demonstrates the ways in which the impact of the neoliberal structural adjustment policies pursued by the Salvadoran state, the economic concessions made by the FMLN, the “often-romanticized” spaces of NGOs, and grassroots development politics reinforced one another to remarginalize members of destroyed communities, subordinating them to a neoliberal, conservative political agenda (p. 11). The *base* (grassroots) became “a site to be developed” (p. 92). She documents the process that required community members to relinquish their identities as revolutionaries and to take on identities as productive yet marginalized postwar citizens, through the rubric of “participation” that also fuelled their revolutionary action. While we are not presented with the points of view of the various actors – local grassroots organizations, nationally driven neoliberal actors, and international donors – who shape these projects, the ethnographic information on its contradictory effects is comprehensive.

One of these effects, according to Silber, is disillusionment. The story which Silber describes is one of courage, commitment, and strong beliefs, but also about frustration, despair, and substantial failures. However, what she presents is not an analysis of failed NGOs or failed revolutions, but of NGOs that “have been failed” by the same neoliberal policies and institutions that are working toward their participation and empowerment (p. 11). This way, Silber manages to integrate a political analysis into her ethnography without losing track of agency; or, in other words, to embed personal life histories into the community’s history. And agency is pivotal in this story, as the life histories illustrate. The case of a revolutionary activist, turned community activist, turned *aburrida de todo* (tired of everything, bored), illustrates clearly what the effect of these neoliberal postwar policies is, and how – by demotivating individual actors – they affect the potential for successful social activism. The added value lies in the fact that throughout the book, Silber refrains from a linear description of activism, and instead presents activists who move “in and out of periods of activism” (pp. 34, 93), thereby constructing a balanced story which considers the hopes and eagerness, as well as the disillusionment, of individuals.

A third element in her analysis of postwar social activism are the continuing social, economic, and gendered inequalities and the high levels of violence and impunity, which contribute to what she calls the “ideology of disillusionment and deception” (p. 60). She also dedicates ample attention to the programmes dealing with these issues, programmes which, in the opinion of many participants, have substantial negative effects, not only in terms of reinforcing existing inequalities, but also in terms of making people dependent receivers of aid. Moreover, in her analysis Silber stresses how a neoliberal discourse tends to frame the multiple realities of women as technical problems to be solved by “modern capitalist projects” (p. 96).

Also, the lack of openness and accountability and the opportunities for corruption which this approach creates are explored with great care on the basis of testimonies and several case studies.

Fourthly, Silber connects her analysis of post-conflict politics and entanglements in a Salvadoran community with an analysis of the life histories of several Salvadoran emigrants in the US. This leads to an excellent and convincing analysis of how displacement continues to take place, fifteen years after “the transition to democracy”. Silber eloquently describes how these emigrants are not the ones now advocating human rights in the US, because, due to their status as undocumented migrants, they have to leave their political activism behind to live a life of subsistence in “the hidden dimensions of social reality” in the US (p. 17). While being critical about this situation, whereby El Salvador’s primary mode to engage in globalization is through the emigration of its citizens, she also highlights the extent to which this emigration can be interpreted as a political act. She deconstructs in great detail the language of obligation – to emigrate – to make visible the agency of community members in making their own choices among constrained options (p. 176). This way, we are presented with an image of emigration as a call for an ongoing struggle, as well as emigration as a symptom of the failure of transition to a neoliberal participatory democracy.

In sum, this ethnographically detailed study on the contradictions of grassroots activism in postwar El Salvador presents an engaged critical analysis of the role of NGOs and social movements in a neoliberal postwar society, which embeds scholarly arguments in an extensive and involved ethnography. This makes convincing the author’s suggestion of the need to rethink the meaning of “postwar”, and to consider the idea that development can to some extent be understood as the resocialization of survivors of the civil war as, in this case, contentious citizens.

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