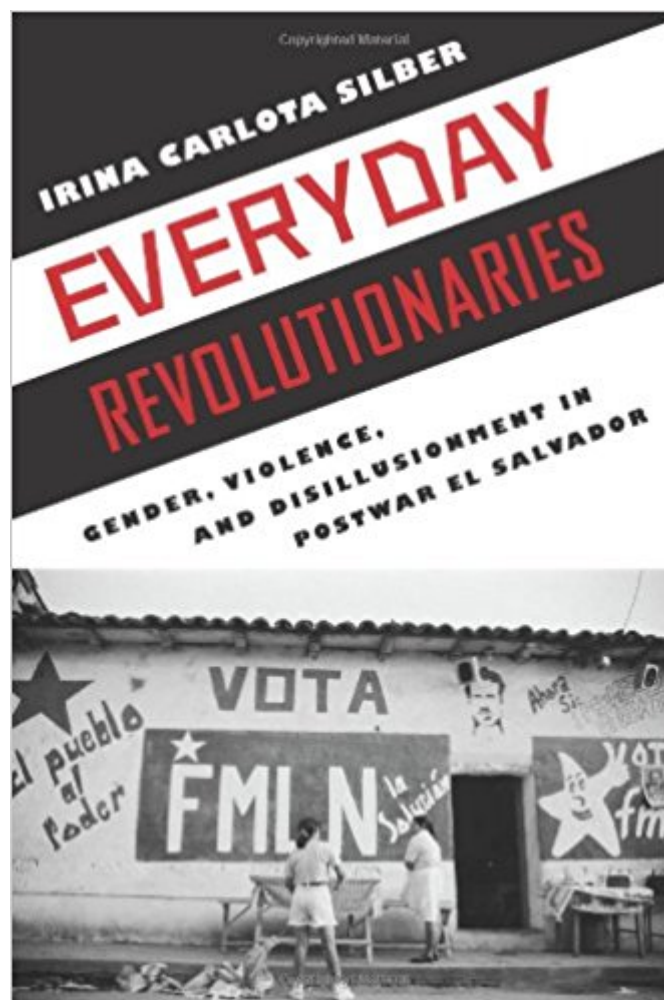




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# Everyday Revolutionaries: Gender, Violence, And Disillusionment In Postwar El Salvador (Genocide, Political Violence, Human Rights)



## Synopsis

Everyday Revolutionaries provides a longitudinal and rigorous analysis of the legacies of war in a community racked by political violence. By exploring political processes in one of El Salvador's former war zones—a region known for its peasant revolutionary participation—Irina Carlota Silber offers a searing portrait of the entangled aftermaths of confrontation and displacement, aftermaths that have produced continued deception and marginalization. Silber provides one of the first rubrics for understanding and contextualizing postwar disillusionment, drawing on her ethnographic fieldwork and research on immigration to the United States by former insurgents. With an eye for gendered experiences, she unmask how community members are asked, contradictorily and in different contexts, to relinquish their identities as "revolutionaries" and to develop a new sense of themselves as productive yet marginal postwar citizens via the same "participation" that fueled their revolutionary action. Beautifully written and offering rich stories of hope and despair, Everyday Revolutionaries contributes to important debates in public anthropology and the ethics of engaged research practices.

## Book Information

Series: Genocide, Political Violence, Human Rights

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Rutgers University Press (December 29, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0813549353

ISBN-13: 978-0813549354

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,882,481 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #64 in Books > History >

Americas > Central America > El Salvador #1464 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social

Sciences > Specific Demographics > Hispanic American Studies #4644 in Books > Politics &

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a stunning book. Silber is brilliantly able to ground her scholarly arguments in extensive ethnography, based on long-term research in a community with which she has deep ties." (Ethel Brooks author of Unraveling the Garment Industry 2010-01-28)"In this deeply insightful ethnography

of post-war El Salvador, Silber successfully captures the hopes of Salvadorans for change and revolutionary times. She unmask how these hopes are often challenged by the reality of poverty and continued social, economic, and gendered inequalities." (Lynn Stephen University of Oregon 2010-09-09)"This preceptive ethnography not only captures memories, sentiments and hopes, but also examines strategies of managing the present, including the paradox of mass migration to the US. Silber has made a major contribution to the study of postconflict societies, as well as to the centrality of gendered experience. Highly recommended." (Choice 2011-09-01)"Silber provides great detail on the postwar lives of a few handfuls of people in this inquiry into everyday life, historical memory, NGOs, and gender relations. Everyday Revolutionaries is notable for its honesty and openness." (Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology 2012-03-01)

IRINA CARLOTA (LOTTI) SILBER is an associate professor of anthropology in the department of interdisciplinary arts and sciences at City College of New York.

Taylor MarguliesEthnographic Book Review #1 Irina Silber perfectly encapsulates the struggles and hardships endured in postwar El Salvador. The ethnography centers around two main periods in El Salvador; the immediate postwar and the migrations to the United States. Through the retelling of personal accounts and analyses of first hand experiences in and with the people of El Salvador, Silber argues that the failure of a democratic society in postwar El Salvador is bound to not work, and this could be seen in the unjust migration of the Salvadorans(pg. 11). The book focuses on the juxtaposition of "forced" migration to the United States as a means of helping to be a democratic state. Chapter by chapter Silber builds an elaborate case for the people of El Salvador, highlighting the hardships and brutality endured. She keeps the ethnography very personal, to allow the reader to connect on a deeper level. What helps is that the characters of the accounts are all people whom Silber had become very close with over the years. We feel the pain and suffering of Elsy and Flor and all the other accounts we have read. The facts of the postwar are both shocking and a reality for many people. I think one of her main goals was to make us empathize and feel a deeper connection to the brutal history of these people. This whole notion of the continuum of violence is emphasized, and is connected back through each personal account. There is a disillusionment surrounded around each character. In chapter 5, we are brought back to the story of Elsy. Within the following narratives, Elsy experiences this disillusionment firsthand when she realizes how many promises were broken. She did her part as an activist, participating in the meetings that there is much deceit as she receives the occasional gift. Padre Jose concludes the chapter by making a very bold

statement. "Sometimes the new name of capitalism is NGO (p 110.)". When analyzing this statement, we start to see the disillusionment that Silber stresses throughout the ethnography. In the overview, she clearly highlights her main points; stressing the entanglements of postwar and attempts at understanding life in El Rancho postwar. I believe Silber has succeeded in painting a vivid image of the postwar experience all the way until migration to the states. I really felt a strong sense of empathy for the protagonists of the story; we feel their pain and celebrate their accomplishments. I think the characters that really stood out to me the most were both Flor and Elsy. Two very strong and powerful women who persevered. There were accounts entangled in the analysis of the postwar, which really helped to clarify information and learn firsthand. I think this approach made it more personal and humanize do, rather than a textbook which often lacks personal recollections from the people who experienced the events firsthand. The language used when telling the stories were bold and moved me. The first recollection that comes to mind is that of Daysi. The bullet points and in depth description of the torture endured really stuck with me. Silber allows us to feel as close to these brave heroes as she has, and this is clearly reflected in this ethnography. Silbers main points are presented in many styles. She switches from firsthand eyewitness accounts, to personal recollections and stories to factual information for the given topic. Together this entanglement of sources allows us to see what postwar life was really like in El Salvador. I believe that an extensive prior knowledge of the Salvadoran history is not essential, but helps serve as a better framework for understanding these events. From the start of this ethnography she provides the reader with a list of important organizations and a brief overview of each character. This is useful in that I continued to find myself flipping back to these resources when they appeared in the text. I don't think that Silber could have illustrated this story of the Salvadorans in a better way. She truly succeeded in highlighting the hardships and battles these people face to this present day. I think the one assumption that shouldn't be made is to believe every person of El Salvador went through the same battles. As we have come to find, each experience was unique in and of itself, and as a collection highlights the disillusionment a country faced as a whole. Not that I didn't know much of what was going on with the people of El Salvador, but I must admit that my view of the world as a whole has changed. We have always heard about disturbing and sad histories throughout the war; genocides of people and injustices preventing people from basic necessities. Not only did this ethnography highlight just how bad things got, but it also made me see a different side of corruption within the government. Without a prior extensive knowledge of the Salvadoran history, my hopes for this ethnography was that it would end with a great sense of success and progress. Though we could celebrate little strides throughout the

struggles, overall my last impressions of the history of these people was that maybe life was better during the war. When put in the context that the new name of capitalism was NGO and the deception people faced, I began to realize that things aren't always as they seem. Even if communities were able to come together as a whole to do workshops and projects, there was always a hidden agenda. What struck me the most was this idea that democracy could only be possible through the migration of its people to the states. This didn't account for the fact that once in the states, some undocumented, new problems arose. The crossing of the borders is an issue that more recently became news headlines. This depiction of these characters crossing borders is literally a matter of life and death. It becomes a little more personal as we hear recollections of the torture and injustice experienced. Due to the fact that Silber made strong, tight knit relationships with these characters, I do believe that this is a reliable source about the story being told. From the devils advocate perspective however, this ethnography could be interpreted as bias, in that we only hear one side of the story for the most part. In part, this ethnography helped shift my understanding of history. This makes me more wary of trusting everything I read, as we have learned about the deception these people were entangled in for so long. This piece of work also leads me to believe that to understand history, you must hear it firsthand from the people who experienced this. Of course there is this issue of remembering and forgetting that Silber stressed, but I still think the accounts hold much significance. The accounts in this ethnography take us on a time trip from the immediate postwar; the confusion and hardships that were faced by so many people. We learn about the rise and eventually "fall" of the NGOs, as people came to realize the entanglement of lies and broken promises. We get brief flashbacks throughout the ethnography of the early to mid 2000s. These almost often take place in America, and we can vividly see the contrasts of life in El Salvador. The way that the book was laid out really helped to set the tone; to empathize with the hardships and endured and to celebrate the strides made. This idea of hope lingers within each character Silber introduces us to. Through the remembering, we are able to relive such a rich history. The story of the Salvadoran people speak to a greater message. It highlights the corruption and inequalities faced by people of postwar societies. Without much interest in this kind of historical accounts prior to this class, I must say that I have become engulfed in this ethnography. I think my feelings of dislike stem from learning about historical context from regular textbooks. The accounts that Silber shares really shed light on a different, more real and personal side of history. I felt very strong mixed emotions when stories of torture and death were shared. I felt happiness when things went well; even the little accomplishments were taken as great strides. Born and raised in the states, I think this gives a new perspective on illegal immigrants. The media tries to make things

seem as if they are the bad ones; but in reality it is quite the opposite. Reading about the lives of these people really opened up my eyes and I strongly empathize for these people even more than I did before.

In the book *Everyday Revolutionaries* it shows us El Salvador in what the author describes and what I agree to be one of the toughest times in its history. Starting at 1980 and ending around 1992 Salvadorians witnessed bloodshed, promises and migration. People lived in fear and in harsh conditions due to political differences. Author Carlota Silber depicts every part of the book as clear as possible and narrates in the best way so that you can feel that you're part of the revolution. She shows how in times of war peace and democracy are, at best, shallow she does this by pointing out what triggered the war who were involved (i.e. political groups, main actors) and what was the outcome of all that happened in the post war in El Salvador. The author also gives two main points that the book focuses on. The first point being the reconstruction period, and the second being the recent immigration to the U.S. She focuses on these two aspects to give us a sense of what was going on and how things were during and after the war. She talks to people like Chayo and his mom to try and understand what was going on at the time and her roommate Carlos that had also migrated to Europe. In the reconstruction aspect of it she gives examples of how the people from El Rancho and Las Vueltas were struggling because of the war. The community in a way was receiving aid by grassroots organizations like the CCR and the CORDES foundation.

*Everyday Revolutionaries* was beautifully written and captures postwar El Salvador accurately. Based on the real narratives of the people who lived through the war and its aftermath, it is valuable for anyone who would want to get a better understanding of El Salvador and Latin America in general. Silber adequately justified her thesis and effectively explained these revolutionaries' post-war lives. Based on the simplicity of the language used in this book, I believe Silber expects to reach readers who may not have any prior knowledge of anthropology or El Salvador. I especially liked that she included a section with a list of organizations as well as a cast of characters section. Silber's overall presentation of her research was clear, compelling, heartbreaking at times but also hopeful for the people of El Salvador. While Silber answers many questions throughout her book, she invites even more. I would highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in anthropology or current events. I walked away with a greater understanding of why Latin Americans risk it all and leave behind so much to cross over into the

United States illegally.

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