

and cultural networks extending beyond nation-state borders' at the core of the concept of transnationalism (p. 7). In fact Roniger does an excellent job bringing together a broad array of recent literature, mostly in the social sciences but without neglecting the cultural turn, to create a comprehensive and well-crafted narrative putting transnational processes at the centre of the stage. (The book does have occasional lapses – a discussion of *mestizaje* in Central America without acknowledging the work of Jeff Gould?) Given the nature of the work, research on primary sources does not play a significant role until the last chapters.

The project of historicising transnationalism is successful, and Central America is an ideal case for exploring the concept. For someone more interested in Central America than in looking for insights on transnational theories, the book reads like an excellent, sharp, theoretically informed survey of Central America from a transnational perspective but is unlikely to modify the reader's basic understanding of the region. A transnational dimension has always been implicit in most authors' analysis, but putting the concept at centre stage is a very useful way of approaching the present-day reality of Central America and of thinking about the prospects for the near future.

Fordham University, New York

HÉCTOR LINDO-FUENTES

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 44 (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X12000922

Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2010), pp. xviii + 286, \$29.95, pb.

In this excellent book Molly Todd illuminates the wartime flight of peasants in El Salvador's northern regions from pursuing government troops, their resettlement in refugee camps in Honduras and their wartime repopulation of abandoned villages and hamlets. Todd argues that these peasants, often portrayed solely as victims, organised themselves into a force that contested for political space and rights, and amidst difficult circumstances, scored victories over the years. In so doing they affected the war's outcome and post-war conditions. Many other studies of El Salvador's war, Todd asserts, either remove the displaced from history, see them as passive, fatalistic non-subjects, or see them as followers led by liberation theology priests or the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN) guerrillas.

In Todd's compelling account, persecuted peasants from the northern provinces of Chalatenango and Morazán fled on foot in organised groups, which, although it made them easier for the enemy to spot, maximised collective security. Once in the refugee camps, the peasants – mostly women and older men – struggled with their 'protectors', such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the directors of the camps, various international NGOs and the Honduran government, for better living conditions, control of education and health care.

Eventually the peasants pushed to return to their home villages, as a matter of right, even though the war still raged. They negotiated with the Salvadorean government, which dragged its heels, and demanded safe passage. Once in their villages they wanted freedom from harassment by the military. They raised transport funds and enlisted the support of international actors and the Church in the form of material aid and bearing witness. Todd also accounts for the repopulations that emanated from

Church-run camps in El Salvador. In a few years, organised groups that had fled for their lives had developed complex tactics and multilevel negotiations while maintaining, sometimes forcefully, group cohesion.

Todd's analysis rests upon extensive documentary research and interviews with veterans of the process. One of the latter testifies: 'We have achieved everything through concrete actions ... by forcing the issue.' Todd is at pains to portray the autonomy of these groups from the FMLN by citing differences. For example, the groups recognised the Salvadorean state (though they thought that bad people ran it), negotiating with it and asking for identity cards, well before the FMLN entered into negotiations with the Salvadorean government. However, she cites another scholar who notes that the repopulation groups in Morazán had increasing autonomy from the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People's Army, ERP), the wing of the FMLN that was dominant there, which suggests rather less than full independence.

There can be no doubt that Todd convincingly makes her case about the peasants' agency. However, their relations with the FMLN are, in the account, subtle and somewhat opaque. By asserting the refugees' autonomy from the FMLN, Todd may have missed for the moment an opportunity to more fully engage with the complex research of Elisabeth Wood (*Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Cambridge University Press, 2003). Wood's wartime work on peasants in the south-central province of Usulután focused mainly on those who, in a variety of ways, supported the FMLN – a distinction from her own case that Todd underscores.

In Usulután, an area with large coastal plantations and upland coffee plantations, these peasants, as well as some who were not supporters of the FMLN, took over lands when the well-to-do landowners left under threat, and in some cases supported the FMLN with food, water and military intelligence. Some, like Todd's northern peasants, had been active in the 1970s until repression forced them to 'lie low'. Wood asks what led these groups to active agency when under enormous risk of death if caught, and how they differed from others who tried to avoid both sides in the war.

My estimation is that these two sets of groups – in Todd's and Wood's books – are more similar than different, particularly on the question of agency under conditions of high risk, and the differences between them, worthy of exploration, have less to do with proximity to or relations with the FMLN than they do with the military correlation of forces, and the contrasting agrarian structures and geography, in the two regions of the country. On the issue of relation to the FMLN, Wood's work shows a range of types of 'support'. In Todd's case, the Salvadorean government's opposition to repopulations from Honduras stemmed from its perception that the refugees sympathised with the FMLN and would support it when back in El Salvador. While it was perhaps exaggerated, the government's perception was not mere fantasy.

I was part of a small delegation from Cambridge, Massachusetts that went to a repopulated village for a week between Christmas and New Year 1986, a few months after the refugees had reclaimed San José las Flores. In San Salvador we were loaded into a van festooned with a six large piñatas, filled not with candy or toys but with medicines. The military prohibited taking medicines to repopulated villages, claiming they were meant for the FMLN. We made it through two military checkpoints, then stopped by a grown-over, burned-out village, where the road north had been blocked by the FMLN years earlier.

After dark, villagers with pack animals arrived. We hiked eight kilometres and were greeted by the five-person directorate of the villages – and the wild cheers of kids, once they spotted the piñatas. At dinner by the church, we were joined, perhaps as Christmas Eve guests, by two FMLN commanders, obviously not from peasant backgrounds. We didn't see them again. Later the military lobbed a mortar shell that exploded about 100 metres beyond the village.

An eventful week ensued. One peasant narrated for two hours the story of his group's flight to Honduras, and how the FMLN had assisted them. There was a visit by an Irish priest, then a small Jesuit delegation. An infant died of diarrhoea; a funeral was held. Small groups of FMLN fighters, mostly men, passed through occasionally. Some could be seen entering villagers' homes. The directorate emphasised that the town government was independent of the FMLN, and of the national government. Midweek we walked to a small hut a few hundred yards from the town centre and were met by a weathered FMLN fighter dressed in black. He offered greetings from the FMLN. On New Year's Eve there was a modest party with a battery-driven music player. In the dark, young men with assault rifles could be seen shyly dancing with young women from the town.

Did this town support the FMLN? Extreme poverty would make much material support difficult. Might any of those medicines have found their way into FMLN knapsacks? I think the answer would have to be yes. Although living under very different conditions and walking different paths, these villagers were rather similar to the peasant 'insurgents' in Wood's account. This does not undermine Todd's central argument about agency, but it does invite comparison of these two social histories of the Salvadorean war zones.

University of Massachusetts, Boston

JACK SPENCE

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 44 (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X12000934

Irina Carlota Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries: Gender, Violence, and Disillusionment in Postwar El Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), pp. xvi + 238, \$27.95, pb.

The central characters in Professor Silber's searching and compelling post-war account reside in a hamlet she calls El Rancho in the rural municipality of Las Vueltas in northern El Salvador, a municipality that was 'repopulated' during the 1980–92 war. In the early 1980s government troops drove civilians from their villages, killing many. Silber begins her book with a 1981 AP report of ten Las Vueltas men being pulled from their homes, tortured and murdered. Survivors, in organised flight, made their way to refugee camps in Honduras, suffering more losses en route. They asserted their interests in the camps, eventually including the right to return home, even with the war raging. Other figures in Silber's account had been fighters with the FMLN (FPL branch), or party cadres. Some characters work for urban-centred, pro-FMLN NGOs.

The book traverses three main periods: the immediate post-war years, the end of the decade, and this century, when some of the characters of different generations migrated to the United States. Although elements of chapters move back and forth in time and space, the book roughly follows this chronology. As the author notes, at the outset of her field research just after the end of the war, post-war ethnographies were new. She uses this uncharted analytic space to create a rich narrative form. In between its chapters of ethnographic accounts and social theory are shorter 'interstitials' that