

Book Reading and Discussion Guide for Students

Nordstrom, Carolyn

2004 *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

In this book, Nordstrom argues that “war is powerfully shaped by the intersections of individuals’ acts, national histories, and transnational cultures of militarization and economic gain” (2004: 10). This leads Nordstrom to revisit several questions central to the study of war such as ‘what is power?’ and ‘where can one locate processes of resolution?’. Nordstrom concludes that the answers to these questions lay in what she calls “the shadows,” realms of human life, governmental politics, and international trade that are conventionally ignored, or made invisible. Nordstrom claims that the solutions to these questions “are predicated on knowing the whole of the problem, not merely the classically visible parts” (2004: 12).

When you did your book survey, you will have noticed that this book is structured in five parts, each with shorter chapters that function much like the chapter subheadings in the other books that we have read. Nordstrom says that she structured the book in this way for two reasons: (1) because she wanted the book structure to reflect stages on the continuum of war-making and peace-making (2004: 12-13); (2) because ethnography must “follow the question” encountering commodities, monies, and peoples where they are move and where they are managed, be it war room or street café (2004:249). The book therefore loosens conventional organizational formats (like a chapter-wise historical progression or geographical focus); instead, it thematically presents ethnographic evidence from multiple late twentieth century warzones in order to show why Nordstrom thinks ‘network’ and ‘shadows’ are so important to the understanding of contemporary conflicts.

This guide will help you focus your reading and discussion. Your goal is to consider the link between evidence, interpretation, and analysis in order to better understand how Nordstrom’s makes her argument.

Part One: Introductions

What are ‘the shadows’, and why is it important to study them?

What is made invisible in war? How is it made to appear invisible and what purposes or interests does that serve? What is the true offense concerning violence? What is it we are not supposed to know about war? How do popular images of ‘war’ and ‘the clandestine’ impede our understandings of them?

How is ethnography, as a research method, particularly suited to the task of illuminating “the shadows”?

Part Two: War

Where are/ are there frontlines of war? What is the intention of violence that relates it to political practices? What are the ironies of power?

What does violence feel like? How is violence about im/possibility? What is a hierarchy of violence? What is the emotional content of violence? What dies in war? How is power exercised in war? What does it mean to say that power is “in the doing”?

Refer specifically to several of the ethnographic examples which Nordstrom describes and interprets to make her argument in this part of the book.

Part Three: Shadows

What are the links between the formal and non-formal, legal and non-legal, state and extra-state networks in the shadows? Why does the power of the state lay in its capacity to distinguish the formal and the non-formal? *Define ‘the shadows’ and describe their core features. How is the informal different from the non-formal? How are extra-state phenomena central to global politics, economies, and development? What is ‘the culture of the shadows’, and how do we experience it? What ironies and contradictions characterize the extra-state?*

Refer specifically to several of the ethnographic examples which Nordstrom describes and interprets to make her argument in this part of the book.

Part Four: Peace?

Where/when does peace begin and end? In what ways are war and peace ‘public secrets’? How are war and peace political goals, rather than states of being?

Does it matter when war ends? What happens when power changes hands or when war ends? How is violence institutionalized? What are the problems of peace? For peace, how is “the doing” everything? What is the illusion of power in peace?

Refer specifically to several of the ethnographic examples which Nordstrom describes and interprets to make her argument in this part of the book.

Part Five: Dangerous Profits

How and why do states engage in a ‘politics of invisibility’?

What are the ironies of the shadows? Why don’t we study the shadows? How is research into war research into power? What is the illusion that gives governments their power?

Refer specifically to several of the ethnographic examples which Nordstrom describes and interprets to make her argument in this part of the book.

PostScript: The War of the Month Club- Iraq

How does Nordstrom’s focus on ‘network wars’ and the ‘the global shadows’ give us tools that let us ask new questions about war-making processes in the war on terror/ in the 21st century?