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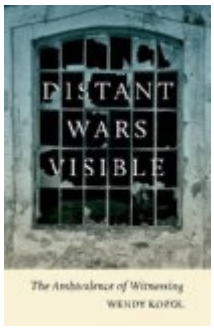
Wendy Kozol. *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. Illustrations. 280 pp. $67.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8166-8129-7.



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As citizens of the United States, how do we visually witness and process conflicts taking place far from home? Do we have the free will to empathize with societies facing the might of American militarism, or can we only process what we see within the dominant narratives of US hegemony? These are the central questions of Wendy Kozol's *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*. Kozol's answer to these questions lies in her title. There is an inherent ambivalence in the ways Americans witness visible and invisible human suffering abroad. Often when witnessing the suffering of others we simultaneously feel caring, hate, and fear. Dominant Western tropes of white, masculine, democratic capitalism temper our perceptions, Kozol argues, but we also evade this powerful national security logic to reach a state of personal empathy.

Kozol's work analyzes visual culture and our perceptions of it. Her main sources are personal archives, missile advocacy websites, independent films, Associated Press war photography, and human rights photographs. She is interested in not only the visual products but also the intent and craft of those who created them. Kozol demonstrates the ambivalent meanings of these sources in six distinct chapters spanning from the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombings of Kosovo through very recent drone strikes in the War on Terror.

Chapters 1 and 2 show how photojournalists covering the 1999 bombings of Kosovo and the US invasion of Afghanistan visually captured the suffering of women because of the rhetorical power that gendered stereotypes hold on Western society. In these images, American viewers saw ahistorical depictions of female sufferers in need of American rescue that neglected the complicated realities of their past. At the same time, Kozol demonstrates, many of the female subjects asserted their own agency, not meshing with the image of someone in need of rescue. In chapter 3, the author examines how the US national security system relies on fear and precarity created by threat of nuclear attack from invisible enemies. She contrasts the invisible world of nuclear warfare with

the abstract, but visual, photographs of US spy satellites taken by photographer Trevor Plaglen. Chapter 4 uses war trophies from a WWII family archive and torture photos from Abu Ghraib to show that witnesses to such battlefield trophies become compliant in the violence needed to take them. Her final chapter moves beyond recent American conflicts and focuses on our "obligations to remember" horrific events in the past. This chapter analyzes visual documents of skepticism from the Vietnam War, the 1956 Israeli massacre of Palestinians, and the genocide of the Khmer Rouge.

While ambivalence is the central theme of Kozol's work, each chapter poses other modes of analysis. She consistently discusses the ethical spectatorship present in witnessing conflict abroad and argues that visual witnessing is important because it challenges us to critically analyze and question our compliance in violence. Political recoil is perhaps the theme that most effectively demonstrates the ambivalence Kozol tries so hard to capture. Her discussion of Abu Ghraib is arguably the most accessible and powerful in her work. In this chapter, she shows the ambivalent recoil that we as witnesses have when viewing horrific images of torture, such as those that came from the Abu Ghraib prison in the Iraq War. Kozol posits that, when viewing photos of American torture, Americans have an instinctual recoil. By turning away from images of torture, they can confirm their own disdain for the conduct of the war. Still, they ultimately must accept their complacency for such torture because it was made possible by the security state in which they are privileged to live.

This work fits into the ever-growing field of cultural approaches to US international relations. Kozol notes in her introduction that she aims to "contribute to the conversation of the dominant visual regime of US imperialism" (p. 7). Her visual approach to diplomacy is effective because it not only encompasses our perceptions of visual representations but also raises questions about race, gender, and sexuality. Kozol clearly proves that visuality is an effective means to frame a study of US international relations. Her analysis could easily be applied to visual coverage of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century US conflicts.

This reviewer's biggest criticism of Kozol's work is the density of the text. ***Distant Wars Visible*** is well researched and cohesive, possesses an imaginative argument, and contributes to the historiography of modern US international relations. Yet excellent case studies are often clouded by the application of overcomplicated analytical constructs. The heavy theory used by Kozol distracts, at times, from a sound argument. This work, as a result, would best be used in a graduate-level seminar on US international relations or journalism.

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