

Philip Smith.**Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez.**

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The 2003 invasion of Iraq is one of the most central political episodes of our time. Arguing that Saddam Hussein and his regime represented a major threat to the United States and the rest of the “free world,” the Bush administration campaigned for months to convince both the U.S. population and foreign allies to support the invasion of Iraq. As the debate over the causes and consequences of this invasion remains lively within and outside academic circles, Yale sociology professor Philip Smith offers a fascinating comparative analysis of the cultural structures and framing processes that are a major yet understudied aspect of war-making in liberal democracies. Drawing on structural hermeneutics and the work of authors like Jeffrey Alexander, he argues that cultural structures and narratives shape our understanding of war imperatives. For Smith, such imperatives and the cultural frames giving meaning to them are at least as crucial to our understanding of war-making as state power and political strategies. Starting from the perspective that culture and discourse matter, he shows how actors mobilize structured symbol systems in order to reinforce or undermine war imperatives. Examining the “civil society discourse” about war imperatives formulated in media reports and political speeches, Smith identifies a limited set of binary codes and narrative genres present in the debates over the “need for war.” Although he shows how these codes and genres exist beyond national borders, Smith is careful to recognize the role of national identities and historical trajectories in shaping war and anti-war rationales. Furthermore, he demonstrates that cultural frames are a powerful causal factor that often creates path-dependent constraints on political and social actors debating war and peace. War-making involves discussion about the nature of the threat, and past claims about such a threat impact future debates and perceptions over war imperatives.

Empirically, the book explores three main cases: the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For each case, the author studies the debate over war imperatives in Britain, France, Spain, and the United States. Although more space is devoted to the United States than to the three other countries, their inclusion provides Smith with a fantastic opportunity to explore cross-national variations in war-making debates and frames. As for the data, Smith draws mainly on a qualitative analysis of major print media sources like national newspapers and magazines. The empirical analysis is both rich and coherent, as the author achieved a fine balance between case-specific contingency and a broad discussion about structural features present across the three cases and four countries at stake. For each of the three cases, Smith analyzes key moments in the war and peace debate, not only before but during and after the armed conflict. In the last chapter, he brings in three new cases: World War I, World War II, and Vietnam. Although the discussion about these cases is very limited in scope, it is both revealing and convincing. For example, Smith shows that, during the second half of the 1960s, the declining support for the Vietnam War in the United States stemmed from the weakness of the apocalyptic discourse generally used to legitimize war. Without a strong and believable apocalyptic discourse, Smith argues, it is hard to justify war in the modern, democratic civil society.

Concise and well written, this book deals with a major substantive and moral issue while drawing on a coherent sociological framework that structures a detailed empirical analysis. Yet, this excellent book is not without limitations. First, the first two chapters lack a clear rationale for selecting the three empirical cases. Strangely, such a coherent rationale is not formulated until page 212. Second,

Why War? does not feature a theoretically informed discussion about the role of fear and insecurity in political and cultural processes. Although Smith mentions fear in his empirical analysis, he does not engage with the growing literature on fear and the politics of insecurity (e.g. Altheide, 2002; Glassner, 1999; Robin, 2004; Tudor, 2003). Without a systematic understanding of the cultural and political construction of fear, several aspects of war-making discourses remain in the dark. In the future, scholars could further explore the relationship between culture, fear, and the politics of war-making. Smith's book is an excellent starting point for that type of analysis. Third, I believe that *Why War?* is not sufficiently centered on the framing strategies of political actors, who can often draw on cultural frames to their advantage. The discourse of President Bush on the so-called "war on terror" provides ground to this claim (e.g. Barber, 2003). Stressing the central role of culture and civil society in war-making is crucial; yet, Smith's theoretical framework could have placed more analytical weight on strategic — cultural — manipulation. Saying that political actors attempt to shape the public's perceptions does not mean that citizens are necessarily passive, and it is probably an accurate description of most political situations, including war-making ones. Fourth, there is a large literature on culture, framing processes, and political discourse the author could have engaged with. For example, the work of Snow and his colleagues on framing and "value amplification" would have been useful to understand the value-driven rationale for war in the four countries under study (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988). In future scholarship, it would be fruitful to bridge the cultural sociology of authors like Alexander and Smith with the growing social science scholarship on framing and ideational processes (e.g. Campbell, 2002).

Despite these limitations, *Why War?* is a wonderful piece of scholarship and a must read for scholars who seek to understand war and/or build bridges between cultural and political sociology. Hopefully, Smith or other scholars will draw from this book to take a truly sociological look at the Canadian debate over Iraq and the current mission in Afghanistan. Overall, I believe that Canadian and foreign scholars interested in war and peace could gain much insight from Smith's book.

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