



Book Review

Media, War & Conflict

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Clint Willis (ed.)

Writing War: The Best Contemporary Journalism about Warfare and Conflict from around the World
Thunder's Mouth Press: New York, 2003; 289 pp.

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Clint Willis has previously edited compilations on warfare, including the anthology *American Soldier: Stories of Special Forces from Iraq to Afghanistan* and the *War: Stories of Life and Death from World War II*, and *Writing War: The Best Contemporary Journalism about Warfare and Conflict from around the World* presents some of the most powerful writing on the subject from the last few decades. The various sections present a point-blank account of the gruesome reality of mine laying, genocide, maiming, massacre, atrocity and murder from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Chechnya, the Rwandan Genocide and America's 'wars on terror'. It includes 14 excerpts from articles by prominent journalists and gifted writers including Robert Fisk, Robert Kaplan, Michael Kelly and Rezak Hukanovic, as well as non-professional writers such as John Sundin. Unlike superficial television and newspaper reports, these writers condemn the wars and positive perceptions constructed around them while meticulously creating narratives to provide readers with a deeper insight.

The compilations 'Pity the Nation', 'A Complicated War', 'Means of Escape', or 'Martyr's Day' offer detailed accounts from the diaries of journalists, who otherwise 'report' war from the battlegrounds. In 'Pity the Nation', Robert Fisk speaks of the horrors of an invasion, witnessed by him and his companion, which still haunt them. A portion from 'Martyr's Day' is based on Michael Kelly's visit to Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion, when torture and pain were inflicted on Kuwaitis. These depictions present war from a different angle, which opens a window for the outside world. Svetlana Alexienvich's 'Zinky Boys' tells the tale from the soldiers' perspective and speaks of their agony. The first-person account of a soldier and his mother highlights the sufferings of soldiers and their families as they talk about how the war in Afghanistan changed their lives, which in turn builds sympathies with the presumed aggressor. In a similar way, an interesting character sketch of an Afghani Mujahideen is presented in Robert Kaplan's 'Soldiers of God'. In stark contrast to how America's 'war on terror' has demonized them

as a potential threat to international peace, this fighter comes across in this account as brave, courageous and righteous.

Although wars are denounced throughout the book, soldier David Hackworth's 'Hazardous Day' confirms that the human urge to go to war will survive as long as there is a yearning for passion and adventure, noting wryly: 'No wonder war won't go away. Young guys get off on it' (p. 141). Nonetheless, he still expresses a feeling of futility, referring to the Yugoslavian crisis as mindless killing (p.148). 'The Tenth Circle of Hell' is a prison memoir of a previous prison inmate, who has seen the harsh realities of the life of a prisoner of a war. This bloody reality, like a frozen apparition, became sealed upon prisoners' very souls. Fear got under their skin, penetrating deep into their bodies in tiny beads of sweat.

This book contains stories written by reporters in a pool of dirt, amidst the dead in some cases, living the stories while putting their own lives at risk. The compilation does not present the romanticized view of war found in Hollywood. However, there are some omissions. The book does not reflect upon the conflicts in South East Asia, between Israel and Palestine, or the Somali civil war – all major conflicts that need to be addressed. Also, except for Rezak, who is Bosnian, all the contributors are American or English. A broader perspective would have been useful. However, this book is crucial for everyone living in McLuhan's 'global village' and Alvin Toffler's 'information society': a world where we cannot ignore the realities of modern warfare.