

REVIEWS

DR PHILIP CASS is reviews editor of *Pacific Journalism Review*.

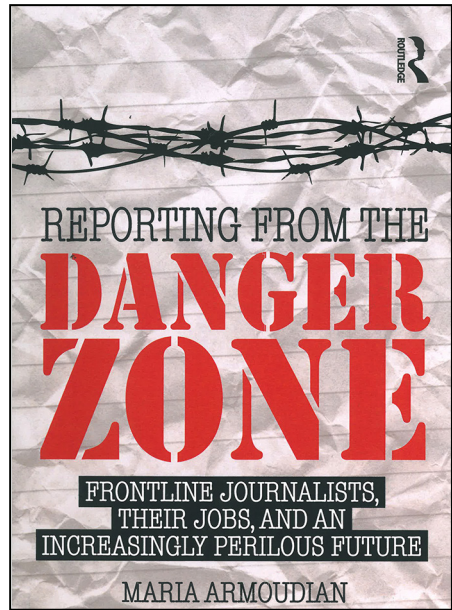
Journalists' voices explore dangerous times

Reporting from the Danger Zone: Frontline journalists, their jobs and an increasingly perilous future, by Maria Armoudian. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, 155pp. ISBN 978-1-138-84005-8.

IN HIS memoirs of his life as a foreign correspondent, British journalist Richard Beeston recalled:

We went to wars and revolutions in our drip-dry suits and button-down shirts—armed with a note book and an Olivetti portable typewriter. For us there were no steel helmets, flak jackets and armour plated cars...in those more innocent days we somehow managed an amateur and neutral status and were unlikely to become the target of hostage-takers or the victims of religious fanatics. The twenty-first century is a more dangerous time. (Beeston, 2006)

Maria Armoudian's important new book explores just how dangerous a time this is for journalists since those far-off days. Of course journalists died then, killed by stray bullets or drink—or both, but rarely were they deliberately targeted. The capture of Sean Flynn by the Viet Cong and later



murder by the Khmer Rouge stand out because it was so rare.

Now, as Armoudian notes, the clear lines that separated combatants and territories have faded and journalists may no longer be regarded as civilians. Equally importantly, where once wars were fought between governments by trained military personnel, now all too often they involve psychotic groups like ISIS.

Beeston's colleague, the Canadian journalist Eric Downton (1987), begins his memoir by describing an encounter with a Buddhist monk in the ruins of Hiroshima who left him haunted by what he calls a terrible riddle: 'Why cannot men stop killing each other?'

Similar questions continue to trouble many of Armoudian's interviewees:

...just as journalism can affect the politics of life and death, the politics of

life and death affects journalism. The physical and psychological wounds are sometimes debilitating, mentally and physically, and can impair the once-determined journalist when hopes and expectations fade to disillusionment and disappointment.

Armoudian's book explores the work of journalists in covering war, crime and trying to operate under corrupt and violent regimes. More importantly, she also looks at how journalists cope with the stresses of their work and the sometimes hideous things they have seen.

The things that journalists will brush off as all part of the adventure in their memoirs are quite often terrifying. The strength of Armoudian's book are the interviews she conducted with journalists. She lets their stories carry her message and reinforce what she wants to say.

To hear their stories about what it is like to be detained by heavily armed, nervous guerillas or locked up by the secret police in a dictatorship is to understand how much risk journalists take.

When we think of journalists risking their lives we normally think of war correspondents, but as Armoudian points out, covering crime, especially international industrial level crime such as drug smuggling, has become extremely hazardous. Criminals and terrorist groups use the same technology as journalists and are adept at tracking people who expose them or write negatively about them.

Mexican journalists writing about the cartels know they can be targeted.

Unlike war correspondents their danger zone is outside their front door.

For some journalists, danger comes in the form of civil war and Armoudian relates harrowing stories from Kemal Kurspahic, editor of the Sarajevo newspaper *Oslobodjenje*, who talks about what it was like to try to survive the siege of the city and keep his multi-ethnic team together in a war in which the euphemism 'ethnic cleansing' entered the general vocabulary.

In the same chapter, she interviews Pakistani journalists who talk about how the dangers and fear that are part of their work spread to their families and their friends until they either flee or find some inner reserve to carry on.

Fortunately, there is now a network of organisations supporting journalists and the first tentative steps have been taken to give them the protection they need. The United Nations has passed various resolutions, but it will need the full support of governments to ensure that journalists can safely pursue their vital task of providing the public with the information they need.

Danger Zone is an extremely important new book that deserves a wide readership among journalists, educators and members of the public who want to understand the conditions under which so much news is reported.

References

- Beeston, R. (2006). *Looking for trouble*. London: Tauris Parke.
Downton, E. (1987). *Wars without end*. Toronto: Stoddart.