Book review

Janet Harris and Kevin Williams, *Reporting War and Conflict*, London: Routledge, 2018. 218 pp. ISBN 978 0 415 74378 5

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Reporting War and Conflict by Janet Harris and Kevin Williams focuses on the work of war correspondents through the lens of risk and how it shapes their overall working experience. The authors use risk theory, research, and personal experience to explore 'how risk and risk management have come to permeate the occupational culture and how calculations of risk are increasingly central to' covering war and conflict around the world (p. 8). The book attempts to move beyond the traditionally understood forms of risk, such as personal safety, by exploring risk in terms of professional, organizational, and occupational forms.

The topic is an interesting one given the storied history of war journalists and their distinct occupational subculture within the world of journalism. Risk and war journalism is also an appropriate pairing for research when one considers the inherent risk of a war zone and the thrill-seeking propensity of those who are willingly go there. As the authors note, 'Notions such as cultural choice, professional advancement, and thrill-seeking are all reasons why journalists take risks. These factors are particularly applicable to war zone journalism' (p. 27).

The book is structured in three sections. The first provides a history of the work of war correspondents and how their jobs have been affected by the evolution of communication technology and changing warfare practices. This includes chapters that categorize covering war as a form of witnessing, define risk and risk theory, and illuminate the inherent occupational and organizational elements of war reporting that lend themselves to increased risk. The second section focuses on how war has changed over time from traditional nation-state wars to the 'asymmetrical' and 'hybrid' wars of today, and how that has increased or changed the risks that war correspondents face. The last section looks at specific aspects or components of war that can impact risk, including gender, working with the military, propaganda and censorship.

The book stays true to its promise to address risk from a broader perspective versus just physical or mental risk. As a result, it provides a different look at the art of covering war that is not traditionally found in war journalism research or memoirs. As the authors state,

they are attempting to fill an obvious gap in news production study that does not typically consider 'how the practice of journalism is both facilitated and inhibited by the orientation of the media and journalism to a risk society' (p. 27). They do so by thoroughly explaining risk theory and how the media perpetuates risk within a culture. The historical information on how war has changed, thus also changing how war journalists report, is also particularly interesting. Though the book includes plenty of quotes and perspectives from working and former war journalists, its backbone is theoretical, not practical, which suggests that it is more suited to an academic audience versus those still working in the field.

The chapters are diverse in topic, but the overall theme seems to be about risks that interfere with proper coverage. Each new chapter inevitably relates back to threats to objectivity, accuracy and independent reporting, which feels repetitive. Other risks are briefly mentioned throughout, including risks to physical safety, mental health risks, risk of being scooped by another reporter, or the risk of a journalist's story not being used. However, those other risks are never explored, which raises the question of how much the book is actually adding to the discussion of risk and war journalism.

A number of sources cited within the book are quite old and, given how much technology and war coverage have changed in recent years, the relevance of these sources is uncertain. However, it is unclear if the use of older sources is due to a dearth of recent research on the subjects explored in the book, or if it was a matter of author choice. Additionally, quotes from working journalists come only from secondary sources, so no original interviews were done to gather the on-the-ground perspective which seems so integral to the book.

Halfway through, the book abruptly switches focus from a third-person perspective on research and journalism to one of the author's personal experiences with documentary filmmaking. This difference is problematic for two reasons. First, it is such a distinct change from the previous chapters that it feels as though you have picked up a new book. This content reads differently and disrupts the continuity and flow of the overall work. Second, by the authors' own admission, documentary film work and traditional war journalism are not the same. As the authors state, 'While the news attempts to present the facts as they occur, documentary film-makers seek to communicate what it feels like to be in the middle of a war zone' (p. 95). Therefore, the relevancy and applicability of this content to the work as a whole is questionable, and the authors do not supply a rationale for its inclusion.

Overall, the book raises interesting questions about the idea of risk and war reporting that extend past safety and security. Though it provides more questions than answers, these questions can serve as good starting points for those looking for new ways to explore risk theory and/or war journalism. There are many ideas throughout the book, but missing is a final chapter that brings all these ideas together, answers the 'So what?' question and suggests future direction. As a result, readers are left to distinguish those for themselves.