



**New Wars, New Media and New War Journalism: Professional and Legal Challenges in Conflict Reporting.** By Stig A. Nohrstedt and Rune Ottosen. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2014. 223 pp. ISBN: 9789186523961.

That the Western model of journalism is viciously undemocratic and helps perpetuate crimes across the globe in its own way to meet certain ends forms the marrow of war-reporting scholarship on the critique of international communication structure (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980; Peri, 2007; Stack, 2010; Tumber & Palmer, 2004). With the announcement of ‘war on terror’ by George W. Bush, not only were severe fissures in world politics witnessed but institutions of journalism—otherwise supposed to be the guardians of truth—were dramatically changed in their functioning, becoming carriers of military propaganda and key participants in inflicting death and destruction. Journalists, believed to bear the “responsibility of conscience” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; p. 179) and inform the public, moved away from the ideal and became, intentionally or unintentionally, active conduits of governmental lies and half-truths. As warmongering tendencies continue, is there a hope for change?

With *New Wars, New Media and New War Journalism: Professional and Legal Challenges in Conflict Reporting*, Stig A. Nohrstedt (Professor Emeritus in Media and Communication Science at Örebro University, Sweden) and Rune Ottosen (Political scientist and journalist, and Professor of Journalism at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway) offer an important contribution to this body of knowledge. Interrogating the Scandinavian media—Norwegian and Swedish in particular—for their coverage of NATO-led armed intrusions in the Middle East, Nohrstedt and Ottosen argue that Nordic media have been a passive receiver of military propaganda and that journalists lack critical thinking in reporting legal issues surrounding the so-called humanitarian interventions. In *New Wars* the analysis is based at multiple levels but what remains consistent throughout calls for making the practice of war journalism function more like academia by bringing critical thinking to the vocation as far as covering of wars is concerned. The authors express their concern at the very outset, “the working condition of journalists and the general public’s right to information” (p. 7). In the introduction Nohrstedt and Ottosen lament the “lack of legal competence” (p. 14) within the media profession; for them this very fault line makes journalists an easy target of war propaganda. Hence, *New Wars* poses a fundamental question: “Why did the media promote the explanations and the rhetoric of the politicians without critical questioning?” (p. 23). At the heart of *New Wars* is the subject of “critical questioning” (p. 23) that addresses both the arenas—academic and professional. It tries to build a case in favour of critical questioning and show how the absence of this essential ingredient of journalism has perpetrated crime in its own way and brought dishonor to the profession. This is why the principal calling of *New Wars* is the plea for “radical reforms in the field of journalism education and professional learn-

ing such as the integration of international law, international politics, and peace and conflict research into the syllabuses” (p. 162).

In Chapter 2, Nohrstedt and Ottosen focus on the systematic attacks on media houses and journalists by NATO forces and how Western and Scandinavian media have been adopting criminal silence on such incidents. They cite instances to demonstrate their argument: the bombing of Serbian television in 1999 and *Al Jazeera* offices in Kabul and Baghdad in 2001 and 2003 at the behest of the U.S. and its Nordic allies, in gross violation of the Geneva Conventions. The authors argue that the television stations were bombed because the U.S. and allies could not tolerate the line of reportage that highlighted grim façades of war that its media tried to hide. Nohrstedt and Ottosen envisage how atrocious an attack on a media house could be: “What would the reaction be if the Taliban decided to send a mission to Atlanta to blow up CNN because of its perceived anti-Muslim character?” (p. 63). The authors call war correspondents an “endangered species” (p. 11) because journalists continue to be killed across the world in volatile regions by government forces and insurgents. Seventy nine journalists were killed in 2016 alone, and among them more than 60 were stationed in volatile zones across the world (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2016). For Nohrstedt and Ottosen this is a “serious problem” (p. 11) for democracy.

In Chapter 3, *New Wars* offers an alternative to war journalism in the form of a peace journalism model that includes the principles of critical discourse analysis to strengthen the field in practice and advocates for rigorous academic engagement with the subject. Nohrstedt and Ottosen argue that “the lack of critical and investigative reporting of the threat-perception management strategies to which media are exposed is one of the greatest obstacles to the enlightenment of the public about politics and opinion-building today” (p. 75). Chapter 4 highlights the formation of an “alliance of the willing” (p. 187) between Norway and Sweden and how the two countries rally behind the American interests. The authors raise an important question as to whether journalists know the legal issues surrounding wars and whether they highlight those issues in their reporting. Their findings in certain earlier case studies reveal that much of the media in Nordic countries rallies around the foreign policies of their home countries that are mostly aligned toward the United States and NATO. They argue that the Nordic countries have been violating international law by siding with NATO in bombing Iraq and Afghanistan, and how the media are giving a safe passage to their countries’ politicians who have been involved in violations of international law and are responsible for the killing of civilians in the Middle East, the bombing of television networks, and the killing of journalists. Nohrstedt and Ottosen attempt to expose Norway and Sweden as having violent faces that they hide behind humanitarian masks. *New Wars* refers to instances of crime committed by this alliance and how Nordic media adopt silence over these crimes or cover them in defence of their countries’ actions. In Chapter 5, Nohrstedt and Ottosen delve into the rise of WikiLeaks as an alternative to mainstream media in exposing the criminal activities of the West. The authors argue that WikiLeaks is a potential tool for “critical reporting” (p. 131) and that such platforms contribute to global journalism.

Chapter 6 investigates the Norwegian and Swedish newspapers' portrayal of the war of Libya in 2011. Nohrstedt and Ottosen argue that the Nordic media failed to cover the issues of legal importance during the Libyan war and that it kept the public uninformed about the violation of international law by NATO forces. The authors advocate that courses must be offered in "international law or politics or the UN system and its organizations, rules, and cultures" (p. 135). In Chapter 7, Nohrstedt and Ottosen discuss the U.S. government's drone program and its legal implications. They argue that Nordic newspapers pay little attention to drone strikes and that such attacks are treated as "everyday routine" (p. 173) that gets little publicity. In Chapter 8, the authors underline that media are "national institutions communicating to national audiences with a 'domesticated' ideological perspective rather than a global network" (p. 160). They argue that "a globalizing world demands journalism with a global outlook and the competence, in its reporting, to connect local and national events with global conditions and processes" (p. 203). "This global standard," Nohrstedt and Ottosen argue, "combines insights from the theoretical discussion of peace journalism with practical insights from journalistic work on the ground in conflict zones" (p. 198). This proposed merger of the "theoretical" with the "practical" is rather a challenging task because of many disjunctures between academic and professional. It is also difficult to envisage a global model of journalism given the nationalistic agendas of the media in each country around the world and their economic interests. Nohrstedt and Ottosen do not engage with such a perspective.

Based on the authors' earlier work and that of others, *New Wars* is an attempt at building a new matrix of war journalism that strives to bring critical thinking into the vocation of reporting and in so doing help form a new global informed citizenry that traverses national boundaries. However, to make that happen it needs tremendous theorization of the field itself. Throughout *New Wars* "global war on terror" remains the principal reference point around which critical perspectives on war journalism are engaged. One wonders, however, why Nohrstedt and Ottosen have primarily focused on the recent wars despite the fact that war journalism is not a new undertaking, and since it has been here for a very long time perhaps there are pearls somewhere along the way to be emulated in "new war journalism."

What is missing in *New Wars* is the sense of historicity of the field, its emergence, and the transformations that it has gone through since the great event of the Crimean War that was reported by William Howard Russell—arguably "the first war correspondent" (Randall, 2005, p. 5)—in *The Times* in 1854 and 1855. It becomes necessary to delve into the historicity of war journalism if one is trying to demonstrate its newness and ways to transform it. As Nohrstedt and Ottosen note, news journalism is more often than not identified with "daily events" and "anecdotal" knowledge, and that the field has remained under-theorized, which could have encouraged more "systematic" (p. 12) learning. The problem with *New Wars* is that despite it advocating theoretical orientation and systematic learning to war journalism and those who practice it, the manuscript is unable to start on that count as the authors themselves do not problematize many of the areas that they have identified. Instead, Nohrstedt and Ottosen make use of case studies and coalesce them with crisp commentaries. The authors do not attempt

to go beyond the analysis of events that they so loathe in the introduction. Further theorizing about the “education of journalists” was much needed, as has been attempted by Adam (2008), who argues that the ideal aim of a universal curriculum is not just to shape reporters but “reporters, writers, and critics” (pp. 125–146). Though Nohrstedt and Ottosen advocate for certain changes to transform war journalism, not much theoretical attention has been provided to the subject.

As much as it interrogates the Scandinavian media for their silence on the war crimes committed by NATO forces in the Middle East, *New Wars* tries to highlight the Nordic countries’ policies in relation with the United States and how America, with the support of Scandinavian counterparts, pushed aside legal matters in invading Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. It is a book of tremendous importance for those studying communication in relation with international relations.

One expects *New Wars* to touch upon the facets of “new media” but the authors’ analysis is mostly based on the content of Swedish and Norwegian newspapers and tabloids, not on the new media as a genre. However, Nohrstedt and Ottosen analyze the role of WikiLeaks in contemporary war journalism and raise significant discussions on the potential of such tools. In a passage in the introduction, *New Wars* carelessly refers to *Wikipedia* (p. 34). It is sloppy of authors to have cited an open access database despite common knowledge that information provided by such websites is untrustworthy because anybody can manipulate it. Also, there are various grammatical, spelling, and punctuation mistakes in *New Wars* and the text in certain places lacks proper diction.

Faults aside, *New Wars* offers a great deal by intertwining international relations with journalism and how the two paradigms come to negotiate in a world marked by wars. The manuscript is essential reading to understand the Scandinavian media and will be helpful for students of journalism and international relations, media practitioners, teachers, and policy organizations.

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