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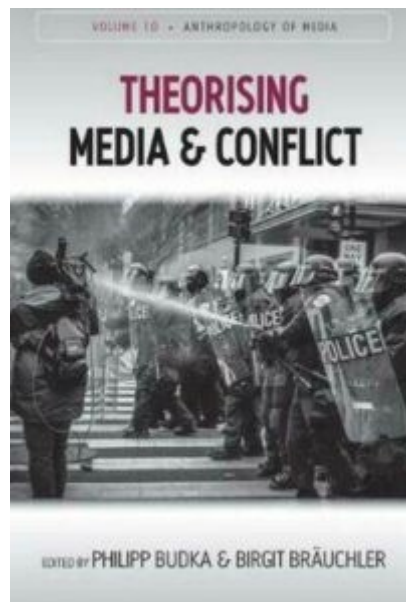
Theorising Media and Conflict

Budka, Philip & Bräuchler, Birgit (eds.) (2020). *Theorising Media and Conflict*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. 350 pages. Print ISBN: 9781789206821. E-book ISBN: 9781789206838.

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The intertwining of media and conflict has only deepened and developed during the past decades, leaving us with an urgent need to find new ways of approaching the topic. Today, media no longer are merely tools in the hands of the warring parties but rather have come to take shape as actors in wars with an agency of their own. The edited volume under review shows us a variety of conflicts being fought not only on the battlefield but also in the media where images, stories and rumors have become just as real a part of the war as military operations, soldiers and weapons. In all the case studies, it is evident that states and media institutions no longer control the media just as the boundaries between media producers and media consumers have dissolved. This rapidly changing empirical life leaves us with a methodological quandary. How can we understand the interplay between media and conflict when media no longer are clearly defined as official entities, when the producers are also the users (and vice versa), and when wars are not limited to military actions? This is what the edited volume *Theorising Media and Conflict* proposes to provide answers for.



The book urges us to acknowledge the importance of ethnographic methods if we

are to understand the integration and mutual constitutive power of media and conflict in the twenty-first century. Rather than looking at media and conflict as two separate spheres, the overall aim is to investigate media-related everyday practices in contexts of conflict as social processes. In order to do that, this edited volume brings together anthropologists as well as media and communication scholars to facilitate a collective conversation that moves beyond the search for media effects by focusing on the lived experience of people in conflict areas. In the introduction, the two editors Birgit Braßuchler and Philipp Budka argue for the importance to apply a non-media-centric and non-media-deterministic approach to the study of media and conflict in order to move beyond normative discussions on media effects. It is an argument that the following contributions underline and illustrate through diverse and rich ethnographic material.

The edited volume consists of 14 contributions, an introduction and an afterword. The case studies take us from the US and Australia to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Rwanda, and Mexico, bringing together both Western and Southern settings. We also get a rare insight into the fascinating context of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (the contested area between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan) and the diaspora environment in Los Angeles, when Rik Adriaans investigates how two competing annual media rituals in a diasporic media ecology interplay with an ethnoterritorial conflict in the homeland. He concludes, in line with the message of the volume, that the relation between media and conflict is all but simple, as they both challenge and modulate the perception of the other.

Reflecting the regrettably high level of conflict in the Middle East, four countries of the region (Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt) constitute sights of fieldwork represented in the book. Focusing on media aesthetics, Mareike Meis explores the ambivalent views on Mobile Phone Videos between exiled Syrians in Germany as they considered the videos to hold the potential to both de-escalating and escalating the conflict in their home country. Nina Grønlykke Møllerup, on the other hand, uses post-Mubarak Egypt when protests and violent clashes were part of everyday life as the setting to theorize media as place-making. Even though media, in general, are becoming mobile and thus less attached to particular places, Møllerup argues that in the context of conflict, media and violence are “co-constitutive of places and crucially entangled in the movement of people, rocks, snipers’ bullets and more” (p. 192). Oren Livio’s contribution takes us to the Palestinian-Israeli context during the 2014 Gaza War, giving us a surprising introduction to an ongoing encounter between the Israeli left-wing activists and the official Hamas communication unit on Twitter. The question up for investigation is not whether Twitter has positive or negative effects on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but rather on what practices Twitter enables for the people living in the context of this conflict.

Half of the contributions are made up of anthropologically informed media

research and the other half consists of qualitative media and communication research and thus attempts through its structure to establish a dialogue between the two traditions on how to study media and conflict. This approach allows for new and inspiring ethnographic material that offers an insight into everyday media practices of people who live and navigate in this decade-long conflict while new media technologies change the ways of communication. While digital media and citizen-generated content make up the media context in most of the contributions, also 'old-school' TV, cinema as well as two historical Arab newspapers – *al-Ahram* in Cairo and *as-Safir* in Beirut – are included. The contributions are divided into seven parts exploring different aspects of the interlinking of media and conflict, namely: 1) key debates and anthropological approaches, 2) witnessing conflict 3) experiencing conflict, 4) language of conflict 5) sites of conflict, 6) cross-border conflict and 7) conflict transformation.

The present format does not allow me to do justice to all the contributions but I can highly recommend the reader to take a closer look at *Theorizing Media and Conflict*. The volume brings new perspectives to the table and helps us move our attention from quantitative evaluations of the role of media in conflicts to the everyday media practices in conflict areas. This sets us free to investigate the fascinating interlinking and interplay between the two – or rather to dissolve what seems to have become an artificial division of one coherent phenomenon. The book is an ethnographic contribution to the study of media and conflict, adding qualitative research to a field where quantitative studies traditionally have dominated. It is easily accessible and I believe that it is of relevance for students and researchers within the fields of media, communication and conflict. I hope that the volume finds the audience it deserves.