



Let's give peace a chance

The media are urged to focus on the non-violent alternatives to conflict resolution.



 **Journalism**
REPORTING CONFLICT
 Jake Lynch and
 Johan Galtung
 UQP, 225pp, \$39.95

WHEN BLOOD AND BONES CRY OUT
 John Paul Lederach and
 Angela Jill Lederach
 UQP, 262pp, \$39.95

ENDING WAR, BUILDING PEACE
 Edited by Lynda-Ann
 Blanchard and Leah Chan
 University of Sydney
 Press, 187pp, \$35

It is impossible to read these three books, all in the burgeoning field of peace and conflict studies, without being struck by the futility of war generally and, in the case of Iraq, the failure of the international community properly to consider non-violent alternatives to conflict.

Reporting Conflict: New Directions in Peace Journalism, part of a series entitled *New Approaches to Peace and Conflict*, is a thought-provoking book. It proceeds from the premise that whereas “war” or “violence” journalism reports a conflict purely as a battle, “peace” journalism focuses on the whole of the conflict, including its underlying causes and effects, the suffering on all sides and possible non-violent solutions.

The authors contend that peace journalism is not peace advocacy but rather the “expansion of the conflict discourse to include peaceful outcomes and processes”. This seems to be a fine distinction. They argue that journalists, when describing conflict, should give equal prominence to non-violent alternatives, with the goal of reducing human suffering.

The authors propose ways to promote peace journalism, such as courses in journalism schools, a regular newspaper section on world conflicts and peaceful solutions and a dedicated internet site. Noting that most countries are at peace most of the time, they suggest that more journalism should be devoted

to reporting peace. The authors illustrate how peace journalism might look in their critique of the reporting of the conflicts between North and South Korea, NATO and Serbia and in the first Gulf War.

A chapter is dedicated to the lack of “constructive, peace-oriented reporting” of the events of September 11 and the ensuing war in Afghanistan, with the admonition that to explain the causes is not to justify the atrocity but rather to prevent it from happening again. Another chapter deals with the “violence and victory oriented” journalism concerning the war in Iraq. The authors argue that if the media had balanced the case for using force against the peaceful alternatives,

the international community might have been in a better position to make an informed decision.

The book will be of interest to those working in the field of peace and conflict studies and to other readers with a more general interest in the influence of the media.

When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation is from the same series. The book begins with a question – “How do people with collective experiences of violence reconcile and heal from experiences that penetrate below and beyond words?” – which it then attempts to answer. The authors state that their purpose focuses on the concept of “social healing”, which is somewhere between indi-



vidual healing and wider social reconciliation.

I found this book less accessible than *Reporting Conflict* largely because of the unnecessarily complex language. For example, the authors say they propose to “study the metaphoric structure of spatial simultaneity more carefully than that of directional sequentiality”. They also profess to use “sound as a metaphor providing insight into social healing” – a concept that is at times difficult to follow.

That said, the individual stories are movingly told. There is Morris, who at the age of 13 witnessed his father’s murder and then became a child soldier in the Liberian civil war to survive. Having witnessed and participated in unspeakable violence, Morris works after the war with other child soldiers to grow fruit and vegetables, in an effort to give something back to the community. Morris is also involved in healing and reconciliation through traditional communal drumming and dancing.

There is also the story of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign, comprised of women who sing, dance, refuse to have sex with their husbands and, ultimately, make their way to the negotiating table where a peace agreement is concluded. There are horrifying stories of “disappeared”

husbands in Colombia and of child sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Throughout the book, the authors point to the restorative power of music, dance and speaking as aids to reconciliation.

By reason of its fairly theoretical approach, this book is not for the general reader but will be of considerable interest to those in academia.

The third book, *Ending War, Building Peace*, contains an excellent collection of essays born from a conference titled “Iraq, Never Again”, which commemorated the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University. The book considers the catastrophic consequences – humanitarian, economic, political and environmental – of the war in Iraq. As the title suggests, its theme is the prevention of the recurrence of such a war.

The essays are prefaced by a thoughtful introduction by Professor Stuart Rees, who proposes a peace settlement that includes financial reparation, the withdrawal of foreign troops, the removal of the debris of war and the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The opening essay deals with a theme revisited later, namely the veneration of violence in everyday life. Other essays consider the human costs of the conflict, includ-

ing the deaths of more than 1 million Iraqis and more than 4000 American troops, and the displacement of more than 4 million Iraqis. As to the financial costs of the war, one estimate is \$US3 trillion (\$3.5 trillion) – or about \$US12 billion a month – money that could have been better spent to alleviate the plight of the world’s poor. Another essay explores the implications for stability in the Middle East, pointing to the resurgence of Iran as one consequence of the war.

The second part of the book focuses on non-violent alternatives and the notion of peace with justice. Associate Professor Jake Lynch makes the connection between the use of force and the vested interests of the arms industry – “disaster capitalism”, as Naomi Klein calls it.

Donna Mulhearn describes her experience, as an aid worker in Iraq, of being shot at by American soldiers after asking permission to transport much-needed aid to a hospital. In a particularly poignant passage, she describes the response of an Iraqi to her protestation that most Australians opposed the war and many had marched against it – “Then why did the government go to war, if the people didn’t agree? This is what happened, and you want to bring us democracy?” The point seems unanswerable.



Hard to heal ... victims of Liberia’s civil war have endured “experiences that penetrate below and beyond words”.