



War on the other side of the camera

LIUDMYLA PIDKUIMUKHA
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF "KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY"

review of the book

Ukraine's War as Viewed by TSN Journalists
(Війна очима ТСН)
publishing house "Osnowy", Kyiv, Ukraine

As the war in Ukraine continues for over two years, more and more Ukrainian journalists find themselves as war reporters. Important battles take place not only on the Eastern Front, but also on the fronts of visual arts, literature, and journalism – fights for being honest and keep high standards, fights for people's trust and colleagues' respect. Journalists of 1+1 TV channel's daily news production TSN (Television News Service) have been working in a war zone since the very beginning of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The subject of my review is the book *Ukraine's War as Viewed by TSN Journalists*. This book is an attempt to make a panoramic view of military events in 2014–2015, happening in Donbas region. The authors of this book are journalists of Television News Service; some of them had previous experience as war reporters. For example, Alexander Motorny worked as a journalist in such hot spots as Georgia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and finally got to Donetsk airport. Andriyy Tsapliyenko has been working as a war reporter since 2001; he told stories of conflicts from Colombia, Nepal, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Ossetia, Macedonia, Kashmir, Liberia, etc.

Alexander Zagorodniy's first mission was to Kosovo in 1998; after he was sent on a mission to Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, Ruslan Yarmoyuk was an exclusive Ukrainian reporter who got a chance to cover from the ground an armed conflict in Georgian-Ossetian-Russian in August of 1998.

Ivan Hrebenyuk and Ruslan Kharchenko have not had any presence experience at wars before the events in East Ukraine; however, by now Ivan has traveled along the entire front line from Mariupol to Luhansk region. The editor in chief of *Ukraine's War as Viewed by TSN Journalists* is Olga Kashpor, born in Druzhkivka (Donetsk region).

Despite the fact that "war does not have a woman's face", there are many women among the war correspondents in Donbas region. Natalya Nagorna always had a dream to become a war reporter, but before the armed conflict in Ukraine she has never been sent to the zone. She caught the moment and became the first woman in TSN team willing to work at Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone (ATO zone). In opposite, Alla Khotsyanivska has been making a go/no go to Eastern Ukraine decision for a long time. At the end of the

day, she got no more tolerance to peaceful life in Kyiv, being deeply involved into producing news from the hottest place of the country. Similar inside changes through the time of Ukrainian struggles have happened to Yevhenia Tsvetanska, Marjana Bukhan, and Hanna Boka.

The very first thing I would want to touch in regard to the book is its title, which sounds as Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists. It has to be noticed that the discussed historical event is a difficult, treacherous and hybrid war. This is not just a conflict; this is not an anti-terrorist operation any more. This is a war in every sense of this word. ‘On the other side of the camera’ is a subtitle, chosen as a reference to remained off-screen stories that impressed our reporters the most.

Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists contains of 28 soulful stories – about real people, met in daily situations of unpeaceful routine. “Any resemblance to actual persons or events is not coincidental” – states the epigraph of the book. The characters of these stories are journalists; taking business trips to the ATO zone they live in a new reality, and recall on 224 pages of the book what they saw and felt over 12 months. It is a Ukrainian language edition with the war essays and lots of war photos taken by best Ukrainian photojournalists. A combination of essays and photographs makes this book one of the most important documentary evidences of our time. Photos successfully supplement the written history of a changing country; convey the spirit, emotions, and soldiers’ daily life. The main goal of this book is to open eyes to the war that is happening in Ukraine and to show people that a war is not something distant and incomprehensible, that this becomes a common problem.

Despite their own patriotism and sympathy to Ukrainian military forces, these reporters follow traditions and keep the standards,

trying to remain objectivity. That is why the official data, facts, statistics, and chronological description of events become critically important for the book. All the main events of the war between Ukraine and Russia since the very beginning (April 2014) and until February of 2015 are described in the book *Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists*. There is information about occupation processes in Sloviansk, Luhansk and Donetsk in April 2014, about battle of Mariupol and etc. The timeline includes strategic battles as a fight on the Saur-Mohyla height, Karachun, thermal power plant in Shchastya attack.

According to data of official military prosecutors, 459 people were killed and almost 500 were injured in Ilovaik when the city was under siege. As we can see, official information is given in this book together with alternative data, used in order to stay unbiased. For example, “according to various sources from 150 to 200 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in the “Debaltseve kettle” (Ukraine’s War, p. 156). “As results of bombardment 19 servicemen were killed (according to the other data at least 30 military men were killed) and more than 100 were injured near Zelenopillya” (Ibidem, p. 82). The basic concepts are determined and explained in the book: for instance, during the battle of Donetsk airport the word cyborg (Ukrainian: кіборг) was used to refer to the Ukrainian defenders of the airport. It refers to the way that the airport defenders were able to fend off constant attacks by DPR forces in close quarters with little sleep or support, just as science-fiction cyborgs are “indestructible half-men, half-machines”, or “superhuman”.

Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists is not just a collection of facts and background reports; more than all, it is an important source about what was happening on the front line, a unique evidence set of war. The main part of this book is a collection of 28 essays written by 1+1 TV journalists. Authors try to

convey emotions as impressionistic strokes, but each story is completed, has a beginning and a closing part, a starting point and an end thought. For example, in a story *Higgs Boson* by Alexander Motorny a so-called frame is used. At the beginning there is such a sentence: “A parcel is posted to you, – it was said on a portable radio transmitter” (Ibidem, p. 27). And the last sentence sounds like that: “A parcel is delivered, – a portable radio transmitter has wheezed” (Ibidem, p. 28). The film crew was called “a parcel”. The soldiers had a task to deliver journalists firstly from the secret place to Pisky and then to the Donetsk airport, through a terrible fire the crew was safely delivered. Alexander Motorny focuses on the battle of the Donetsk airport and his second essay *Cyborg’s Father* is dedicated to the colonel “Redut” who commanded at the airport. It is described how his kindness, wisdom and professionalism helped Armed Forces of Ukraine to battle at that strategic point.

Andriy Tsapliyenko in his stories describes a world of hunger. In the first essay, which is called *Hunger*, the author introduced us to an old woman who has been waiting for food and got disappointed when did not receive any. War and hunger go together, side by side. The other kind of hunger – hunger of information – is presented in the essay *The Passengers*.

In several cases journalists make friends with soldiers. *Artillery Scout “Jackson” phoned Andrew each morning. He told how the night passed in Debaltseve, what else the enemy artillery has bombed out, how answered ours. Tsaplienko was waiting for the news not only as a journalist. Another call meant that his friend “Jackson” was alive, his team was good, and Debaltseve was still our* (Ibidem, p. 49). So, there are stories which are entitled as “*Jackson*”, “*Ernesto*”, “*Tooth and Funny*” etc. All these titles are soldiers’ nicknames. Through a story of one particular military man tragedy of others is shown and built into a common tragedy;

through a problem of one soldier all difficulties of others are presented.

It is very important to be human in every situation, to respect dead people, even if they are enemies. In the essay “*Jackson*” Ukrainian military men covered dead Russian soldiers with white sheets – it was a sign of a military honor act. The Russians were so impressed by such a behavior that allowed soldiers to go and did not attack Ukrainian Army positions. On the other hand, there is a story untitled *Cold-bloodedness* by Marjana Bukhan where Donbas residents’ apathy could be observed. Those people simply walk around, worry about trifles and even do not think of covering up dead bodies. Similar situations and different behavior are described in these two essays. It is underlined that it is very important not to allow a war to kill everything human inside of us.

Each story in this book has a line. The line is between light and darkness, life and death, beauty and ugliness, love and hate. The concept of death is present in the stories because wars and death are interrelated things. One of the stories by Aleksandr Zagorodniy is even called *Death*. The author writes that death is not heroic at the front. It is senseless and stupid (Ibidem, p. 96). In the book *Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists* death is personified. In contrast to the historical reference, there is no statistics or general data. It is said about particular person or people. It hurts to understand that this man to whom you have recently spoken is already dead. It is much harder to survive the loss of a person when you know his a little (essay “*Ernesto*” by Alla Khotsyanivska). Despite that fact that “blood and death at the battlefield are everyday things” (Ibidem, p. 165), there is also little pleasures there, for example, French chocolate (the essay *French Chocolate* by Hanna Boka). This thing has surprised a journalist the most (Ibidem, p. 165).

Any war changes people, their characters and the way they take life. For example, a soldier, whose nickname was “Tooth”, has totally changed his temper after being injured – before this accident he was funny, joked every moment, but then he became nervous and sad (“Tooth and Funny” by Alla Khotsyanivska). War also makes people take important steps in their lives, for example, to make a marriage decision. In the essay *Marriage Ceremony* where “church bells argue with shots” (Ibidem, p. 169) two people decided to get married. They understood that life was too short to delay important moments.

Dichotomized “beauty and ugliness” are well-recalled in the essay *The War Flowers* by Natalya Nahorna. There are different types of flowers, described in the story. First of all, soldiers found long and beautiful rose in the bombed village. Another type of war flowers is 120-mm mortar mine which was given to Natalya. It looks like a flower when has already detonated. This iron flower was not even scary for the journalist; it was almost beautiful. It is nice until starts to “kiss the soldiers”, killing them.

The authors in their stories also define local residents and their attitude to Ukrainian Army. I have distinguished 4 types of people there:

1. To the first group belong those people who stay against Ukrainian Army, but continue to use Ukrainian resources and receive help from Ukraine (*The Passengers* by Andriy Tsapliyenko).
2. The second group consists of those people who were against Ukraine and Ukrainian Army, but who have changed their opinions after conversations with TSN journalists (as in the essay *Reeducation* by Alexandr Zagorodny). It is very hard to speak with people who are influenced by Russian propaganda.
3. To the third group belong those people who are pro-Ukrainian, but they were afraid

to speak it loudly (the essay *Confession* by Ivan Hrebeniuk). “*We are guilty in everything that has been happening in Ukraine. We are for Ukraine. But we did not say about it when it was necessary. Last spring when everything had started we should shout but we kept silence because we were frightened. I did not think that our hush could cost so much.*” (Ibidem, p. 124)

4. Finally the fourth group is represented by those people who are ready to fight for independent Ukraine. For example, Masha (from the essay *Masha* by Ruslan Kharchenko) who was not afraid of saying about her love to Ukraine and wrote about it on her social network pages, who helped Ukrainian Army and TSN journalists. This girl for her pro-Ukrainian position was convicted and sentenced to 25 years to life in basements. Ukrainian Army fights for those people as well. As Ivan Hrebeniuk worded: “*We can not abandon them*” (Ibidem, p. 124).

The book *Ukraine’s War as Viewed by TSN Journalists* is written to keep the history, to keep the evidences for future generations. It is believed in every essay that everything is not for nothing. 🗨

Liudmyla Pidkuimukha

Affiliation:

Ukrainian Language Department

National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”

E-mail: liudmyla.pidkuimukha@gmail.com