

Foreword by Patrick Porter

It is an honor to write the foreword to Daniel McKay's rich, painstakingly careful work, *Beyond Hostile Islands*. Not least because it offers the chance to engage in a dialogue often promised but rarely delivered in academia, a dialogue across disciplinary frontiers. McKay writes primarily as a student of literature, but his attention to political context makes this equally a work invaluable for students of history and politics. Let me sketch out some ways it resonates for me.

One feature of modern war is the unprecedented scale, variety, and creativity of the literature it has spawned. While armed conflict and storytelling are obviously prehistoric practices, only relatively recently in history have societies produced large quantities of written accounts by participants, across every military rank, that millions of people could access and read. A convergence of developments—modern mass education, literacy, large readerships with disposable income, and, more recently still, the paperback revolution—brought the published war memoir, novel, or poem to public attention. For the first time, war's horrors could be made known to a vast readership beyond those who had first-hand experience of it. "The horror of war" as a widely agreed reality, in large measure, is an image of a modern, literate marketplace. This in turn has raised problems and disagreements among scholars about such sources. How far can we rely on them, given they are, of necessity, never written at the exact time of combat? To what extent, as often retrospective accounts, are they self-censored performances that tell us more about memory and identity than "what it was like"? Apropos the present book, how did survivors of battles in the Pacific Theater come to terms with a war that had been characterized by intense, mutual racial hatred, atrocity, and counter-atrocity, and which began and ended so differently to the war in Europe, not with a declaration of war and a conventional defeat, but with a shock assault and atomic strikes? Could the "war without mercy," in John Dower's famous words, also be a "good" war?

Beyond Hostile Islands is a seminal step forward in a neglected task, namely a consideration of how war literature coped with, reinvented,

sidestepped, or confronted the peculiarities of the Pacific struggle. As well as the racial hatred, there was disease (at times deadlier and more disabling to units than combat). There was the geography of distance and water, so that the fighting moved from standoff strikes, to amphibious landings, to the harsh intimacy of blasting or bayonetting dug-in defenders out of fortified positions. There was the mutually reinforcing suspicion of the other side's motives and mentality. The notorious fanaticism of Japan's defenders was principally generated by the Tojo regime, which propagated a popularized credo of honor/shame, encouraged an attitude towards surrendering enemies as worthy of enslavement, and told its people that Americans would do horrific things to them if they surrendered. In turn, Imperial Japanese forces' refusal to surrender even against hopeless odds, their ruthless tactics such as the booby-trapping of corpses, and their mistreatment of captives all served to reinforce an image of fanaticism and to emphasize the imperative for force-protection, if necessary with forms of behavior that were themselves merciless. As McKay demonstrates, while the war in Europe was hardly clean, there was a carefully curated notion that it was ultimately waged, not to eliminate a racialized enemy, but to liberate "good" Germans from Nazism. The war against Japan, by contrast, fed off a more visceral, popular desire for annihilation, even if that did not always determine Washington's policy.

For anglophone readerships at least, the consumption of the "war experience" as a literary event is one primarily based on a European or Mediterranean memory, with its focal points ranging from the Western Front in the Great War, 1914-1918, to the Second World War campaigns from North Africa and Sicily to Normandy. For American readerships, too, Europe remains the epicenter and the main scene of the "good war" and the "Greatest Generation." There isn't a uniform "Western" memory, of course. For instance, Britons had a memory of predatory threats getting uncomfortably close in 1940, whereas mainland Americans perceived direct dangers as flowing from the more distant assaults at Pearl Harbor and the Philippines. As for life in the Antipodes, McKay skillfully shows that New Zealanders went to war from a distinctive vantage point—the danger was not quite as distantly "over there," even though the distances were still great, and the Māori population, of course, 'came to' the Pacific theater with an awareness that it was more than a strange exotic battlefield. (To McKay's credit, unlike so many authors he does not fall prey to counter-stereotyping, in which Indigenous New Zealanders become separate, primordial others.) Still, across the board, there remained a sense that the war in the Pacific, all told, was a stranger affair, more existentially distant to the thought-worlds of fellow citizens. It was

more unfamiliar to the mental maps of citizens who still often had a primarily European orientation. Given the mercilessness of the combat and the greater prevalence of disease, it was harder to incorporate into stock-standard narrative conventions about war as a process of moral struggle, redemption, and the preservation of humanity under fire. McKay navigates the different ways authors retold the story of such a conflict, amplifying the idea that the countries who waged the war see themselves as Oceanic as well as continental in their history and outlook, and that islanders need not be insular.

Patrick Porter is Professor of International Security and Strategy at the University of Birmingham and author of *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*.

Beyond Hostile Islands

