



D Scene, Dunedin

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The mountain of injustice scaled

► ZEN UNDER FIRE

by Marianne Elliott
Published by Penguin
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Reviewed by Kate Wilson

Marianne Elliott's *Zen Under Fire* is the story of this New Zealand woman's work in Afghanistan.

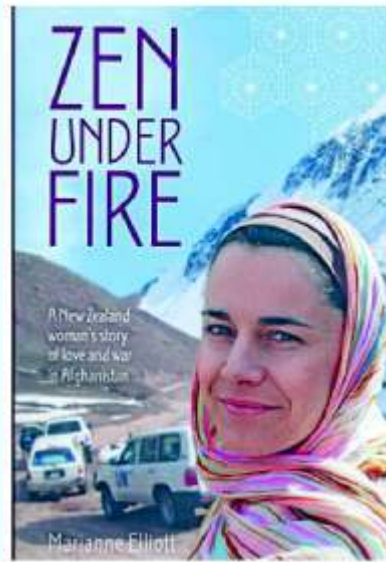
Elliott is a human rights lawyer working for United Nations, and has also spent time in Gaza and Timor Leste.

Zen Under Fire tells of the toll this kind of work takes upon a person, especially when they care too much.

The sheer scale of the suffering and injustice is like a mountain. In this work there are so many constraints on your personal life. For example you can't go outside your compound easily and so you can't go running round the block to get rid of stress, as you would do if you lived somewhere else – it is too dangerous.

Elliott tells of the merging of roles between the military and the Non Governmental Organisations, and how that increases the risk for those in civilian roles.

Elliott is a strong advocate of women's rights and the initiator of workshops held in outlying areas to train leading members of the judiciary and the police in



gender law. Much of this is customary law and therefore not necessarily legal: many Afghans have never seen a copy of a law book as such.

Elliott provides many personal stories of what life is like for women in Afghanistan.

Throughout, there is also the thread of her relationship with another aid worker, and how it is affected by the situation they are living in.

For myself, as a New Zealand woman and a member of Amnesty International, this book resonated strongly. I enjoyed it, and would highly recommend it.

Kate Wilson is an avid traveller, book club member and reader.