

**Friday 17 August 2012**

**FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

**“Doomed to make the same mistakes.”**

**War reporters Janine di Giovanni and Ed Vulliamy  
talk at the Edinburgh International Book Festival  
about the lessons we should have learnt from Bosnia**

The “tender soul” of war reportage, Janine di Giovanni and “anti-war reporter” Ed Vulliamy appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival today to talk about their experiences of covering a conflict which “broke all preconceptions”. “Bosnia changed everything for me, it changed what I believed in”, said di Giovanni, a sentiment which Vulliamy echoed: “I grew up in the 1960’s. I grew up to believe in a better world, that the bullies of history need not triumph... Bosnia tore all that up, and all because the international community let it go on for three bloody years. A number of lessons were learnt.”

Both reporters made harrowing discoveries in Bosnia; they investigated mass graves and mass rapes, and played witness to starving children, appalling violence and depraved concentration camps. “What we lived through.” di Giovanni exclaimed, “You don’t see that many mass graves, that many children in pain, and just get up and walk away.” She spoke about the moral dilemmas which go with being a “tender souled” war correspondent: “There’s a huge guilt that most of us had – that if you wanted to get out you could.” However di Giovanni was never merely completing a commission, “to me it wasn’t a story – it was witnessing humanity at its worst.”

After witnessing such brutality, Vulliamy argued that no one, not even a journalist, could morally remain neutral: “The neutrality of the press echoes the neutrality of the international community... neutrality means that you are complicit in the crime.” di Giovanni shared his sentiments but said that it was not always that easy: “I had the privilege to work in Syria recently... it’s a moral dilemma for me: I’ve always been on the side of the victims but now I have to report on the side of the regime. I was asked to go with the Syrian army on a raid but I just didn’t have the stomach for it, I felt like I was on the wrong side.”

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# THE WORLD, IN WORDS

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Despite the efforts made by both correspondents to “rescue people from being forgotten altogether”, Vulliamy said that “it was sobering when you realise how little people give a damn.” He condemned a society which cared more about the stories of journalists than the stories of the victims of war: “people don’t want to hear girls talk about the violations of their mothers, it’s all too close.” di Giovanni agreed, arguing that twenty years ago “it wasn’t about getting scoops... We are supposed to give people a voice who don’t have a voice... to shed light in the darkest corners of the world”. “Bearing witness” said Vulliamy, is not just capturing the horror stories and making the headlines, it’s capturing the feelings and experiences of the people who are involved, “Bearing witness to them having a laugh, bringing up their kids, living and surviving in a time of war.”

On a final, sobering note, di Giovanni said: “For me, Bosnia will never go away. As human beings we seem doomed to repeat the same mistakes. Bosnia was a cycle of violence which went back to World War One and even beyond that. If you let it fall into the sands of history it will be gone forever.”

The Edinburgh International Book Festival continues until Monday 27 August. Tickets and full details of the programme can be found at [www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk).

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