

## **Foreign correspondent addresses life at war**

By Calyssa Richie - April 20, 2020

Janine Di Giovanni was one week away from returning to Syria. Instead of preparing for her departure, Giovanni took the time to speak at an official TED conference to inform the audience about what she saw when in the war when she was reporting.

Giovanni is a multi-award-winning reporter who has been reporting for over three decades across the globe. She focuses on war crimes, global terrorism, refugee issues and sexual violence during the war. Giovanni currently is a Senior Fellow and Professor at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. Her goal is to document evidence that can later be cited in war crimes tribunals.

In the TED talk, Giovanni shares different stories and personal feelings with the audience to create a sense of how difficult war is and what role she plays as a journalist. "This is how war starts. One day you're living your ordinary life, you're planning to go to a party, you're taking your children to school, you're making a dentist appointment. The next thing, the telephones go out, the TVs go out, there's armed men on the street, there's roadblocks." Implying that she witnessed lives go into suspended animation and stop.

Giovanni first started off by telling a story of her friend in Sarajevo who was a young mother. Giovanni focused on how the experience the young mother went through was mind-altering and life changing. Giovanni stated, "I say I have the honor and the privilege of being there because it's taught me everything, not just about being a reporter, but about being a human being." She continued on with about how she learned about compassion and ordinary people who could be heroes.

For the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege she met with other reporters and humanitarian aid workers who worked during the war in Sarajevo along with the brave Sarajevo people themselves. She witnessed 12,000 red chairs in the middle of the road to symbolize those who had died during the siege in Sarajevo.

She is now haunted by the one million people who were slaughtered in Rwanda. She can remember looking down the road and seeing dead bodies piled up twice her height. There is a national constitution now that one is not allowed to say Hutu or Tutsi or identify anyone by ethnicity, which is how the slaughter started.

She now covers Syria. She says, "I started reporting it because I believed that it needs to be done. I believe a story there has to be told." Giovanni continues to that she has seen the same actions of the people. Nobody wants to leave their home because people do not want to believe the war is coming.

Giovanni describes the people in Syria as "incredibly heroic people". Some of the things they are fighting for are things we take for granted every day. She states, "That is why I do it."

She really makes the audience start thinking when she tells the story of being forced to go report in Baghdad after giving birth to her son four months previously. When she arrived a friend of hers told her, "Go home, because if you miss his first tooth, if you miss his first step, you'll never forgive yourself. But there will always be another war."

As the wars are continuous, she realizes she is just a witness. She says, "My role is to bring a voice to people who are voiceless."

Many in her audience and viewers walked away with a new perspective on war and life. Mies viewed Giovanni's talk as inspirational. She states, "It really does put life in perspective" and that "we are lucky to be in the position we are today."

Another viewer, Anna Richie, thought that Giovanni showed the mental and physical strengths it takes to be a war reporter. She says, "It must have been hard leaving her family to go to a war" and that "it really makes you respect those who have difficult jobs during war."

As Giovanni's TED talk ends, she thanks the audience as they applaud and walks off stage.

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