

## **Women War Correspondents: From the Frontline, with Empathy**

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### **Abstract**

In January 2017, Clare Hollingworth died, aged 105: the first war correspondent to report on the outbreak of WWII. Her American counterpart, Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998), was described by Sigal (1986) as 'that special breed of women who never had problems identifying both as a woman and with men at war'. Their lives provide context for this paper, which examines narratives of conflict, written by women and focused on human suffering (der Lippe & Ottossen, 2016). It posits that an empathetic approach to the stories of others resonates in an 'autobiographical age' (Plummer, 2001). In this regard, the Syrian conflict offers a case study to examine the writing of two modern day female war correspondents, the late Marie Colvin and Janine di Giovanni, to consider how auto/biographical accounts and notions of empathy can be reconciled with the journalistic shibboleth of impartiality. Colvin postulated that 'I feel strongly that we have to include these stories of the suffering of civilians to get the point across' (Swain in Colvin, 2012:534). In 2012, staying in Homs when others had left, she lost her own life. Do the self-reflexive accounts of female correspondents tell us anything about 'truth'? Does a 'non-dramatic' journalism of compassion, shine light into dark corners?

### **Introduction**

The men in the fields stared up, while I, remembering machine guns, sheltered close to a hayrick. Three bombers slipped out of a cloudbank, high and leisurely; there was the familiar sound like doors slamming, the puff of shells wide of their mark, and then, the tremor of bombs. A cylinder of smoke pushed up from Luck, toppling slowly in the wind. I looked around me for a moment, to see the sun setting over Eastern Poland. (Hollingworth in Garrett, 2015, p.1).

Clare Hollingworth, was 27 years old and on her first assignment, having been employed as a journalist at the Daily Telegraph for only a week, when she found herself a spectator at the outbreak of war in September 1939. This extract from her eye-witness report opens the biography of an extraordinary woman, chronicled by her great-nephew, Patrick Garrett, and pieced together from a suitcase of papers found by her family, abandoned in the attic. Hollingworth died on January 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, aged 105. Her obituary in *The Guardian* explained how she had stumbled across the 'scoop of the century':

She borrowed the consul-general's car to drive into Germany across a closed border, even receiving a salute from the Germans as she had a flagged car. On the way back she noticed a large hessian screen preventing anyone from seeing the valley below. But the wind blew the hessian away from its scaffolding to reveal scores of German tanks lined up to enter Poland. The consul-general did not believe her story until she produced some of the goods she had bought in Germany. Then, while she telephoned her report to

the 'Daily Telegraph', he sent a secret message to the Foreign Office (Sebba, 2017).

She was highly unusual: even in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the few women who worked as journalists wrote mainly for magazines, or worked as junior researchers in the newsroom and were often presented as 'maladjusted' (Born, 1982). Arnold Bennett (1898), in his 'Journalism for Women', published at the turn of the century had described Fleet Street's dwellers as 'not two sexes, but two species – journalists and women-journalists – and ... the one is about as far removed organically from the other as a dog from a cat' (ch. 2). Indeed, Hollingworth described how her own mother saw journalism as 'low' and 'like a trade'. The novelist Henry James presented a more benevolent view: the London newspaper editor in one of his stories expected women to deliver from interviews 'anecdotes, glimpses, gossip, chat, a picture of 'home life', domestic habits, diet, dress arrangement', (James in Hunter, 2012, p. 206). Contrary to these stereotypes, women have – literally – battled to report the news – often from the frontline – since the 1860s and the Crimean War (Sebba, 1994).

Studies focusing on the autobiographical accounts of women journalists paint a picture of ambitious and professional women working within a 'traditional' newsroom context (Born, 1982). Autobiographical writing provides some understanding of the lives of legendary reporters like Hollingworth herself, Martha Gellhorn, Charlotte Haldane, Lynne Reid Banks, and many lesser-known women, and details important background to the role played by women in news reporting for over 150 years. By the end of the Second World War, female reporters were still a rarity and hence part of the story themselves, but, in general, women journalists

were taken seriously by this time, no longer used by their papers as 'stunts' (Sebba, 1994, p. 149).

According to her biographer, Clare Hollingworth's life was 'characterised by warfare' (Garrett, 2015, p.3), but her autobiography, *Front Line*, published in 1990, disappointed many for revealing so little about her personal and private life. As Sebba (2017) notes in *The Guardian's* obituary, 'the hallmark of Hollingworth's journalism was her supreme professionalism and her ability to present facts objectively rather than promote a cause or write about personalities, least of all her own'. However, when the suitcase in the attic was found to contain, amongst other things 'hand-written documents in German about refugees, identity documents that .... actually belonged to a Soviet spy, passports scattered with Nazi stamps ... 'her family realised that there was still 'quite a tale to be told' (Garrett, 2015, Prologue).

The ensuing biography, *'Of Fortunes and War'*, is a book about love and conflict, that illustrates the compromises that Hollingworth had to make in her personal life to pursue her journalistic career. As Sebba (2017) indicates, she lived and wrote in a time where all reporting was governed by the drive to be dispassionate and the shibboleth of objectivity precluded any sense of the journalist's life or character from their storytelling. Writing in 1940, she appeared to feel disappointed if she allowed her emotions to enter into her reporting, snorting at her own 'sentimentality' (Garrett, 2015, p. 91). Yet, although Hollingworth adhered to the normative values of her craft, *Daily Telegraph* editor, Charles Moore, remarked in his tribute, that 'she combined a professional determination to dig out world news with a practical compassion for the sufferings of humanity' (*Daily Telegraph*, 2017). She saw the frontline as 'the thing that really matters'

(Hollingworth in Sebba, 2017) and felt a 'duty to report' keeping her shoes by the bed each night well into her eighties, in case she was called out on a story (Garrett, 2015, p. 484; Sebba, 2017).

Hollingworth was adamant that she would never use gender to her advantage, 'to get a story that a man could not get' (Sebba, 2017), this won her the respect of Dwight D. Eisenhower, amongst others, who welcomed women foreign correspondents on the frontline, as long as they did not require special treatment. Likewise, Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998) transformed war reporting, but, became known as much for her relationship with Ernest Hemingway, her beauty, her affairs and she was often criticised for using her sexuality (Rollyson, 2007; Howell, 2001). John Pilger counters the criticism, talking about her 'commitment to humanity, life and peace' describing her as 'a woman, who was decades ahead of her time in pushing the boundaries of her gender,' (Pilger, 2001). Sigal (1986) described her as 'that special breed of women who never had problems identifying both as a woman and with men at war.' More recently, the BBC's Lyse Doucet has described this as being treated like a 'third gender':

We aren't treated like the women of the place. We aren't treated like the men. But in traditional societies, where hospitality trumps ideology, we are almost always accorded the special privileges afforded to guests. In conservative societies, that also includes a belief that women need to be protected (Doucet in Storm & Williams, 2012, p. 151).

Whilst the vicissitudes of their private lives cannot be ignored, implicit in the idea of women war reporters wearing cocktail dresses and flak jackets, the focus of

this paper is on the journalism produced by women on the frontline, not on their relationships or whether their gender helped them to secure stories. Through a close reading of their dispatches, presented within biographies and autobiographies, it seeks to explore how women share their experiences of witnessing war in their journalistic writing and how their own auto/biographies might influence the ways in which they tell the stories of others. BBC correspondent Caroline Wyatt discerns the potential advantages of her sex when reporting in Afghanistan:

We were welcomed into homes which no foreign male correspondent was allowed into, and we were privileged to hear and film the stories of women of the north in a way none of our male colleagues could. And perhaps we brought a different perspective to the war: a little less focus on the bombs and bullets, and more on what the end of the Taliban's rule in the north would mean for the families we met, and for their future (Wyatt in Storm and Williams, 2012, p. 8).

Equally, there is no intention to suggest that men are incapable of compassion or empathy, nor to draw gender comparisons, rather, through reading dispatches, this paper focuses on how women go about their job reporting from the frontline and what sort of journalism they produce. Even into the 21st, 'Journalism is known as a highly male-dominated field in which the newsroom culture is mainly shaped by patriarchal values' (Pirmasari, 2016, p.130). Female foreign correspondents, like Hollingworth and Gellhorn, were remarkable for their courage, never writing about the difficulties that they encountered, but focusing, instead, on the difficulties of others.

## **A commitment to humanity**

In the last few weeks neither fear of war nor fear of reprisals nor family nor financial complications explain the smaller but steady flow of people plodding over the Allenby Bridge, no matter what the waiting hardships of exile. 'They don't feel secure' said an intelligent Palestinian woman on UNWRA's staff in Hebron. 'they don't know what is going to happen next. They want to be among Arabs' (Gellhorn, 1993, p.261).

Over the years, I have met hundreds of refugees from different kinds of war and different kinds of conflict and humanitarian disaster. I always have the same questions though: What did you take with you? What did you leave behind? What do you miss the most? How will you re-start your life? (Di Giovanni, 2016, p.162).

Writing 50 years apart, Martha Gellhorn reporting on refugees fleeing in the midst of Israel's Six Day War in July 1967 and Janine di Giovanni writing about the current refugee crisis in Syria, both women focus on narratives of human suffering (der Lippe and Ottosen, 2016) through non-dramatic storytelling (Sigal, 2016), that also informs the wider geo-political debate. Here it is the issue of migration as a continuous theme of conflict in the Middle East and questions about what neighbouring states will do to ease the plight of those who have been displaced through conflict. The dispatches from the frontline, whenever and wherever they are written always have the same purpose – to raise awareness in the public sphere

and to try to effect change, whilst reporting with cool impartiality. This can afford a view of morality which, ' includes the limited altruism of recognising where others' interests have justifiable priority over our own' (McBride and Seglow, 2003, p. 218). A number of journalists have also observed the identity-shaping nature of bearing witness and reporting on the human stories from conflict zones (Beaumont, 2009; Colvin, 2012; Di Giovanni, 2011). As Sunday Times journalist, Marie Colvin explained in November 2010, speaking at a service of remembrance for journalists who had lost their lives reporting conflict: 'Our mission is to report these horrors of war with accuracy and without prejudice'. A champion of telling the human stories arising from conflict, she declared that 'the need for frontline, objective reporting has never been more compelling' (Colvin, 2010). She delivered the speech in St Bride's Church in London, known as the journalists' place of worship, wearing an eye patch, following serious injury in the Sri Lankan civil war. Two years later, she lost her own life in a missile attack in Homs, Syria.

This commitment to humanity and to reporting the impact of war on civilian populations faces a number of serious challenges: the 24/7 news cycle churns out a constant stream of stories of conflict and suffering, the 'CNN effect' brings war closer to us, through images 'delivered into sitting rooms, night after night' (Sontag, 2003, p. 93). This could be expected to evoke compassion, but in a world saturated by images, the converse is often true, 'we become callous' (Sontag, 2003, p. 94). Indifference, or 'compassion fatigue' presents another problem, possibly a result of an inability to cope with distant suffering, a human reaction to feelings of helplessness and fear. Moeller (1999) argues that compassion fatigue is 'the



unacknowledged cause of much of the failure of international reporting today.'

(Moeller, 1999, p. 2). 'Parachute journalism' – where (usually western) journalists fly in to 'get the story' and then fly out - equally can be alienating, both for the subjects of stories and those consuming news.

Living in an autobiographical age (Plummer, 1996) there is an expectation that journalists will put more of themselves into stories, sometimes sharing their emotional reactions, whilst adhering to the imperatives of truth and accuracy. Questions of 'what is truth?' arising from the current fake news debate, where journalism's credibility is under the spotlight, present further challenges. As Mark Thompson, CEO of The New York Times postulates, Iraq and subsequent conflicts underline that 'our inability to debate war honestly and in the round, is a terrible weakness' (Thompson, 2016, p. 256). Perhaps the time is ripe for a new emotional literacy, a slower and more immersive journalism that focuses on 'listening' rather than 'telling' and leads to greater empathy (Fowler-Watt, 2017).

Empathy is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the ability to understand and share the feelings of another'. This ability to understand can arise from first-hand experience, so that for frontline reporters like Di Giovanni and Colvin, a view of their world translates to an understanding of those that they write about – to the stories of human suffering. There is a connection here with the tenets of autobiographical journalism, as defined by Coward (2009) - the idea that a more empathic approach to storytelling can be cathartic, but also produce credible journalism that remains true to the craft's conventions and the audience's expectations. In this context, the autobiographical journalist is depicted as the narrator of authentic versions of human experience, whose 'experiential first person

writing' (Coward, 2009, p.235) is trusted, has veracity and might therefore be seen as closer to 'truth'. Through a close reading of Di Giovanni's 'Dispatches from Syria: The Morning They Came for Us' (2016) and Marie Colvin's 'On the Frontline' (2012) this paper seeks to explore whether emotional and media literacy, can be enhanced through engaging with notions of empathy. Is this a way to shine light into dark corners and to illuminate our understanding of the suffering of others?

### **Dispatches from Syria:**

The thing about a front line is that once you get there, having begged and cajoled and crept at last inside., once the fighting starts, you can't run away, (Di Giovanni. 2004, p. 22).

Janine di Giovanni, foreign correspondent for a range of publications including 'The Times' and 'Newsweek', articulates the shared view of Hollingworth, Gellhorn and Colvin, in her description of the compelling character of the frontline - a heady cocktail of addiction, guilt, fear and anger drives reporters to fight their way in and to stay, sometimes for too long. Di Giovanni's writing from Syria has an autoethnographic quality – through reporting on the bloody conflict that erupted in 2012, she reflects on her personal experience within a wider social, political and cultural context. These 'Dispatches from Syria', written in real time and recently updated in 2016 with an Epilogue to incorporate the siege of Aleppo, provide a case study through which to consider questions of identity, memory and empathy: she locates her storytelling in the lives of others, their pain and suffering. Reporting in

Syria tested her own identity as a war correspondent, listening to the 'voices of ordinary people in dark times'; in 2012, she went there to see what it was like before it 'tumbled down the rabbit-hole of war' (p. 3) and questioned her own existence in the face of the extreme suffering of others. Speaking to victims of torture and re-telling their horrific stories made her consider how anyone could return to 'the human race after being so brutalized?' (p. 19).

The war correspondent often feels disconnected from their own reality, seeking reference points within their lives to make sense of the horrors that they are witnessing; for Di Giovanni, watching young Syrian musicians playing their instruments and wondering how many would flee, or be tortured or killed once war commenced, she shared her own emotions as she recalled how she sang to her own young son. This provided a stark contrast for her and she described how this protective, reassuring song made her feel emotional, as she felt that the Syrian people had no protection, 'there were no angels' and 'God had forsaken Syria' (p. 53). Here, she was writing as a woman, a mother, as well as being a journalist.

Although the human interactions that occur within conflict zones, can give rise to 'sometimes pleasant memories' (p. 170), there is also a crucial tension at the heart of the journalist reporting from the frontline: They need to get the stories of others out, but this means that they have to ask them to engage with often deeply painful and difficult memories, as she explains:

Going back into memory is difficult even for those who have not withstood war or torture. Going back into war memories or memories of physical pain and deprivation requires a kind of iron strength (p. 66).

## Hussein's story

One of many stories told by Di Giovanni is that of the young Syrian, Hussein, whose house in Baba Amr, a suburb of Homs, was ransacked by paramilitaries 'like a swarm of bees' – he was thrown into a truck, headed to a military hospital where they were tortured, not treated. His brother died alone in an underground morgue, he barely slept at night as he listened to 'people breathing their last breaths. One night they tossed him on top of a body and when he turned his head, he saw his dead brother,' (p.69). He was then subjected to systematic torture, including being hung upside down for hours on end and used 'as a punching bag'. Hussein's story is one of many horrific stories of torture, which, due to the need to be impartial, accurate and fair, Di Giovanni verifies carefully, utilising a range of sources. She explains that she believes Hussein's story, but acknowledges that 'I am a journalist' and 'the need to be objective' means that she 'checked it from all sides', finding that it chimes with accounts of torture meted out by Assad's regime.

The stories themselves evoke empathy, but they are also told through the empathy of others – the regime doctor who listed Hussein as dead so that he could escape, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) who paid for a nurse to help him and the nurse who physically supported him as he walked with her out of the military hospital where he had been tortured. He wants to know whether anyone will be punished for the kidnap and torture, but Di Giovanni feels helpless as she cannot tell him.

This story operates on many levels as an illustration of how the reporting of Di Giovanni, and others like her, can illuminate our understanding of war. She built a

relationship with Hussein, when she met him, recovering in a hospital in Lebanon, so that he trusted her to share his story and felt secure to 'go back in his head to those days of torture' (p.72). She placed this story, auto-ethnographically, in the context of her own experiences, particularly as a reporter of the genocide in Bosnia in the '90s, which made her aware that war crimes are rarely punished and of the desperation of people caught up in the collapse of a civilised society. In this way, she draws on her own memory and experiences (conflicts in Bosnia, Sierra Leone) and those she loves (her son) to try and make meaning from the senselessness of war, to try and understand these stories depicting the extremes of human suffering. Thus, we are encouraged to empathise with her and those she is writing about. When she moved to reporting on the 'other side of the war', alongside the Syrian Army, she finds it is the human suffering of Hussein that fills her mind, rather than the 'cat and mouse' vignettes of snipers and recounting the methodical reclaiming of territory. But reporting the stories of human suffering presents challenges: a war correspondent has to make stories compelling, to encourage people to engage in a crowded, noisy world, and to understand and to find ways of communicating within the 'rules' of objectivity that inspire empathy, elicit meaning and awareness of different social norms, whilst portraying the total breakdown of normality.

### **Writing as a mother**

When I think back on my time in Aleppo, the strongest memory I have is of watching the baby die. I have my own child at home. He is

healthy and lives in the first world. He drinks milk and eats cookies before bed ... he does not know war (Di Giovanni. 2004, p.135).

Di Giovanni often refers to her maternal instincts, writing about the trauma of children caught up in a conflict situation and of mothers who can do nothing: 'helpless is being a mother and not helping your kids' (p.117). These women often show incredible courage in raising their children alone, usually in refugee centres in neighbouring countries. It is when writing about the plight of children in war that she expresses profound feelings of guilt and futility. The feelings of guilt extend to a concern that she will fail to do justice to these stories of lived experience that are shared with her:

The suffering of children is particularly painful for anyone, but for me as a mother, when I look into the eyes of the mothers whose children are helplessly dying, I feel like a fraud. I watch this, then I can go home (p. 135).

And guilt at having survived. She had felt this before, reporting on the atrocities of war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in the 1990s, again bringing an auto-ethnographic quality to her writing:

We had tried, my colleagues and I and dedicated humanitarians and diplomats, but we had failed to protect the very people that we had come to report on, to stop the killing, to somehow not allow the country to be ripped apart, limb from limb, throat, eye, knucklebone (p.171).

Di Giovanni builds character in her storytelling in a literary way, the people she depicts generally lack drama, even though they share often very dramatic stories. An example of this 'non-dramatic' style (Sigal, 2016) is evident in the 'Dispatches from Syria' where she portrays Mohammed, the man who buries the dead as 'completely devoid of drama' (p.143). He tells her, "it is my duty, my work of God, to bury the dead'. This simple, straightforward writing style can evoke a keenly felt sense of empathy for those she is writing about and the gruesome reality of their daily lives.

Journalistic storytelling is usually constructed within the media frameworks that the stories are being reported back to, and often dominated by Western perspectives or the point of view of the country's government and its foreign elite' (Boyd - Barrett, 2004, p.29). Journalists like Di Giovanni arguably bring a different perspective, as women reporting in the field, witnessing events directly (Pirmasari, 2016) and bringing their own autobiographies to the situation; located in the context of their memory of previous conflicts and their sense of the world as a woman, sometimes as a mother. Their focus on human stories inspires empathy in others – a key challenge for contemporary journalism - and allows the voices of those caught up in conflict to be heard, whilst conforming to the normative journalistic values of detachment.

**Drawn back in: the siege of Aleppo**

Life here was about deprivation...about yearning, wanting, forgoing. It was about memory and forgetting (Di Giovanni. 2004, p. 121).

In 2013, exhausted and traumatised by the experiences of reporting in Syria, Di Giovanni tried to extricate herself from journalism to work with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), but, as she was completing her memoir, she was drawn back in by the plight of Aleppo, having seen the effects of war on the female refugees that she had been working with in the camps, many the victims of abuse:

I swore that I would not feel again the terrible stirrings of guilt so profound – that feeling of we did nothing. I wondered sometimes what my life would be like had I never stumbled into a war zone for the first time when I was a very young woman (p. 172).

Di Giovanni does not, however, fall into the trap of writing narratives that conform to the 'women and children' approach to war reporting, in a bid to evoke empathy and to adopt 'the rhetoric of philanthropy' putting herself in the position of others and speaking on their behalf (Lippe, 2016, p.180). In sharing her own painful awareness of how war can shift the shape of identity, she acknowledges Beaumont's (2009) description of how:

As an observer, I know that I am not exempt from the same tendency to remodel the experience of conflict, sifting and listening and applying my own interpretations and prejudices... I realise too that not only is it impossible to separate myself from the stories I collect, but that it is necessary to channel



those experiences through my own to try to render in them emotions and sensations that have meaning for me (Beaumont, 2009, p.10).

Whilst always feeling the guilt characteristic of regarding others' pain (Sontag, 2005), she retells the stories of those caught up in conflict with a searing self-awareness, empathy and understanding. This, in turn, can engage those who read her reports in a more empathic way. She contributes her own understanding of the effects of war: 'War is the destruction, the skeleton and the bare bones of someone else's life' (p.133).

And the personal cost for the journalist, emanating from their own altered state:

As for your old world, it disappears, like the smoke from a cigarette you can no longer afford to buy. Where are your closest friends? Some have left, others are dead. The few who remain have nothing new to talk about. (p. 131).

## **The Last Assignment**

Marie Colvin was one of those friends who didn't come home from the frontline, her life claimed by the war in Syria. She was 56. Di Giovanni writes of their friendship, of how only weeks before they had been talking of 'boyfriends and clothes, of work and visions' (p. 100). Colvin had apparently not wanted to go to Homs that last time, but once there, felt committed to stay and to tell the story: 'I'm in Baba Amr: Sickening,

trying to understand how the world can stand by and I should be hardened by now' (Colvin, 2012). Her death made Di Giovanni afraid: 'And that was a good thing. I was liberated, realising that the normal emotion that most people felt when they went into one of the most dangerous places on earth had finally reached me' (p. 101). Both women felt that the world should know about the atrocities in Syria and they shook off the shackles of journalistic detachment to share their feelings about the horrors of war and the effect that it had on them. But they still went back, time and time again. Colvin (2012) stated that 'I feel strongly that we have to include the stories of the suffering of civilians to get the point across' (p. 534). The courageous Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, whose reporting from Chechnya made her a target for an assassin's bullet in 2006, understood the need to return and to stay, it was a deontological imperative to 'write what the journalist sees in reality', she was 'absolutely sure that risk is (a) usual part of my job ... and I cannot stop because it's my duty' (Politkovskaya in Davies, 2009, p.8; Poolos, 2006).

Despite Colvin's reservations about returning, she shared Politkovskaya's sense of duty and felt compelled to awaken the world to the horrors of the Syrian conflict. The narratives of those trapped had been lost, caught between the reports of western journalists 'parachuting in' for brief periods of time to report on particular episodes in the war and the partisan observations of Russia Today's television reporters, usually championing Assad's regime. Colvin's role was vital in telling the stories of normal people trying to conduct their daily lives and, as she describes in 'On the Front Line', she was acutely aware that 'the scale of human tragedy in the city is immense. The inhabitants are living in terror. Almost every family seems to have suffered the death or injury of a loved one' (p. 52).

Marie Colvin contextualised her first-person accounts with information about the military situation: 'for now it is a violent and deadly standoff. The FSA (Free Syrian Army) is not about to win and its supplies of ammunition are dwindling' (p. 526), but the primary focus was always the stories of human suffering: "The kids are screaming all the time", Hamida said "I feel so helpless" She began weeping. "We feel so abandoned. They've given Bashar al Assad the green light to kill us" (p. 526).

In bearing witness, a desire to seek truth as well as to inspire empathic understanding seems to drive the work of these women journalists. This is aligned to their own need to make sense of the senseless and of the relentless stories of human suffering and trauma. Marie Colvin's friend and 'Sunday Times' colleague, Jon Swain (2012), explained how she 'braved the dangers of Syria to tell the truth about its horrors' (p. 529). Colvin often lived with the people trapped by war, building relationships with them and experiencing the deprivations of war. Ironically, it was in the desperate dash to collect her shoes, left by the door out of respect, that she was killed, probably targeted as a journalist who was unearthing too many human stories of suffering in the eyes of Assad's regime. Her final dispatch had claimed that the regime was deliberately killing 'cold starving civilians' in Homs and Colvin's family claimed that this was the first time 'that a direct order to kill foreign journalists was made' (Ensor, 2016).

Her death scared her good friend, Janine di Giovanni, but, 'that was a good thing' – this realisation provides another dimension to reporting with empathy, as she felt 'liberated', aware that 'the normal emotion that most people felt when they went into one of the most dangerous places on earth had finally reached me' (p.101). Writing honestly about the fear that they felt, as well as the fear they

detected in those trapped by conflict, elevates the human aspect of journalistic writing; both women felt that the world should know about the atrocities in Syria and they jettisoned journalistic detachment to share with honesty their feelings about the horrors of war and the effect that it had on them. After Colvin's death, Di Giovanni often thought of a little boy that she had spent some time with in Homs, in his grandmother's house:

So when is the war over? This little boy asked me. "Soon", I said, knowing that I was lying. I knelt down and took his tiny face in my hands. "I don't know when, but it will end", I said. I kissed his cheek again and said goodbye and lied again. "Everything is going to be fine" (Di Giovanni, p.103).

This simple human tale evokes empathy and relates with simplicity, her grief for the death of her friend and the helplessness that she felt, trying to get the stories of conflict out for the world to hear.

## **Conclusion**

No matter how many times you listen and record someone's story, no matter how many refugees you see crossing over a mountain top wearing plastic bags on their heads to protect themselves from the freezing rain - you do not get used to it (Di Giovanni, 2004, p.59).

This simply expressed observation in Di Giovanni's memoir of the Bosnian conflict, conveys a deep understanding that she is permanently shaped by the experiences of telling the stories of others. As a human being and as a journalist she is aware of the emotional effect that reporting conflict has upon her, but the

imperative to report the human suffering of others to the wider world is a permanent, driving force. The legendary Martha Gellhorn covered the Spanish Civil War, the D-Day landings and the liberation of Dachau. She shared the impact of visiting the camp honestly in her dispatches; noting that a 'darkness entered my spirit' and later spoke of a 'dark grey sludge pit', (Gellhorn in Moorehead, p.10). Written self-reflexively, whilst drawing on the dispatches and notes of the time and set in an auto/biographical context, the memoirs of these women journalists provide an illuminating insight to living with war, where the frontline is situated in the daily battle for existence, in the homes and villages, the refugee camps and hospitals. In placing the memories of 'ordinary people' at the heart of their reporting, whilst also recalling their own, their accounts evoke empathy and understanding of the reality of war.

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