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“DYING TO TELL”

Abstract

The present reflection is based on the documentary “Dying to tell” by Hernan Zin (2018). This report is intended to provide the reader with insight into the reality of war reporters who give their voice and sometimes lives so that the truth is known. The documentary addresses issues such as different emotions (fear, frustration), the consequences of PTSD, death, or what this profession implies on a daily basis. It can be concluded that even though war correspondents do not have sufficient social recognition, their informative work on society is crucial to have reliable sources of events such as the war of Syria or Afghanistan.

Keywords: war correspondents, fear, death, war, social work

The director Hernán Zin tells us in documentary format the experiences of several war correspondents. Here they narrate from a very personal and intimate perspective feelings such as fear, stress, pain, depression, loneliness, and frustration. Moreover, through the first-person experiences of journalists and photojournalists, they tell us their fears, talk about their loved ones, and what this profession entails in their daily lives. In addition, it can also be seen the chronicles and explicit images recorded from wars like the ones in Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, and Gaza. Finally, a tribute and homage is paid to the reporters killed in these armed conflicts. This documentary leaves no one indifferent, as it exposes the daily life of war reporters without any kind of coldness through desolate images and with all the cruelty of the reality of wars.

When the human brain is consistently exposed to extreme situations, such as the conflicts in which war correspondents lived, the threshold of excitability takes part. In fact, neurons are excited leading to higher alertness and usually a constant fear condition. Unlike the reality of us, “ordinary” people, since we did not experience those events, it is easier to obviate these realities.

Regarding fear, the documentary highlights how war journalists have to know how to live and deal with this emotion. One of the things that caught my attention was the following phrase of the reporter David Beriáin “I have always been a very fearful person”.

It seems incredible to me that he had that courage, but at the same time admits that he is a fearful person, since I see that he contradicts himself. But once I finished the documentary I knew what kind of fear he was talking about. They do not fear so much for their lives but for the suffering of their loved ones knowing that something bad could happen to them. Moreover, he explains how grateful he is to his family, as he describes their love for him as the purest, most radical and sincere love, a free love. Freedom to pursue his goals, even if it means his death.

Hernan Zin interviews other journalists, asking them about their feelings, which many of them admitted that they sometimes find obscene to talk about their emotions like pain. It seems indecent to them to express their pain after having seen those atrocities of the pain of others; but it is a real pain and there are no small or big pains. The film compares pain to a glass of water, which occupies all the space and sooner or later overflows due to the experience of traumatic events. At the same time, I believe that this feeling of pain is “required” for this profession. In the sense that this pain comes from empathy, a quality that is necessary to tell the war and conflict stories in a truthful way.

Similarly, the film also introduces the topic of disorders that many war journalists suffer from. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the most common due to the exposure to distressing and traumatic events. Every experience is noticed in their day-to-day life. Many of them admit that they had a hard time dealing with crowds and chaotic life, as they associate it with war and evoke the same feelings. Panic, anxiety attacks, tachycardias, chest pains, loss of hair, problems interacting with people, feelings of loneliness, autodestructive thoughts, depression... are also usual pathologies. In this way, reporters have to pay a very high emotional cost in order to access true information.

Thanks to this documentary, my attitude changed from the one I had in the beginning towards war correspondents. To be concrete, I believe that through the informative and social labor of war correspondents, the truth is made known; however, I do not consider that this work has the merit and social recognition that it should have. On many occasions, they risk their lives, as in the case of the photojournalist Manu Brabo. He was captured and kidnapped by the Libyan army in the Syrian war in 2011. One of the things that struck me the most and that I was unaware of is that, in theory, war reporters (like medical reporters, for example) are “protected” and have immunity from attacks. But in Brabo’s case, he wanted to exceed what was legal at the time by entering the country illegally and practicing journalism without a permit. This leads me to conclude that what is legal is not always fair, since what is legitimate is only approved by a very small and privileged number of people, and in this case, the photojournalist wanted to tell the truth, risking his life.

I have also realized that severe humanitarian crises that receive little or no response from the international community mean that events such as armed conflicts are forgotten. Furthermore, the lack of political commitment and insufficient media coverage amplifies the damage done by wounded people and keeps the war going.

Today we have the difficulty of capturing our attention with the influence of the media, such as social networks and fake news with attractive headlines. We leave aside truthful sources such as the ones the reporters of this documentary do. However, as part of a privileged society that is not involved in any humanitarian problems, such as a war conflict, I believe we have a duty to inform ourselves of what is happening outside our bubble. As Hernán Zin said “I am human, and nothing that is human is alien or foreign to me”, which means that we cannot ignore these realities.

In conclusion, war reporters and photojournalists give their voices and sometimes live to make the truth known. This profession has a crucial social utility and purpose, because without witnesses to observe and tell the stories, it would be as if it had not happened and we would be denying the truth.