Photojournalism and the Ethical Dilemmas Involved in the Westminster Terror Attack.

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Introduction:

The purpose of the news photographs is to capture reality and state the facts of the situation (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). So, a single picture can have a great effect in a society, beneficial or unbeneficial. In the case of the published photos taken by Toby Melville, the pictures of the Westminster terror attack in London on the 22th of March in 2017 had unbeneficial effects for the society and victims. The attacker of this attack was Khalid Masood, 52, who drove and crashed his car right outside of the Westminster Palace, injuring at least 50 people, killing 4, and stabbing to death a police officer (Agerholm, 2018) Melville's pictures depicted the victims of the attack laying on the streets or pavements covering in blood. Eventhough the content of the images was too graphic, Reuters decided to publish them. So, the result of such action was that the publication and pictures violated the privacy of the victims and their families. This paper will analyze through various philosophical theories the reasons why the photographer Toby Melville, first on the scene, should not have taken the pictures of the victims, and why the media should not have decided to publish the images of the Westminster terror attack.

Ethical Questions:

The photo coverage of the victims during the Westminster terror attack by Toby Melville raised many ethical problems about the reason he took the pictures. Photographs of victims of illnesses, injuries, traumas, and attacks have been in the center of attention for many years (Calain, 2013). Such pictures have raised a lot of ethical questions and criticism. One of the main dilemmas in photojournalism is whether to shoot or not to shoot the picture, and whether to publish or not to publish the picture. While the attack was taking place outside of the palace a lot of photojournalists arrived at the scene to report and take pictures of the attack. One of these photographers was Toby

Melville who happened to be in the bridge during the attack (Melville, 2017). Melville was taking pictures around the parliament before the attack, since he was covering the story of the Britain exit from the European Union (Melville, 2017). As he was trying to call for help, he saw the image of bystanders who were trying to help the injured victims. This was the moment where the photographer decided that instead of helping he had to document the incident and later give the images to his media organization, Reuters, where they published them (Melville, 2017). This action could be justified by the conflicting loyalties stated by May, in 2001. Melville prioritized the need to be loyal to his media organization, rather than the loyalties that arise from shared humanity, respect, and compassion for other people (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). Melville was not called by his organization to report the story, but he happened to be at the scene. Even if he gave priority to his profession rather than the people, this doesn't justify that he did the ethical thing.

Moreover, his action to take the pictures raised many ethical problems and questions since he did not take permission from the injured victims to shoot the pictures. In the photojournalism profession the misfortune of someone could be good fortune for the photographer, since many of the nominated pictures from the last couple of years depicted violence, tragedy, and death (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). This was also the case for Melville who was one of the winners from the 61st World Press Photo Contest ("Witnessing the immediate aftermath of an attack in the heart of London", 2018). His photos were selected out of the sample of 73,044 pictures taken by 4,548 photographers ("2018 Photo Contest", 2018). This fact raises a lot of questions whether Melville shoot the picture because he wanted for the world to know and be informed about what happened during the attack or because there was another more selfish decision behind his actions. One the other hand, it is understandable why Melville took the pictures and why Reuters published them,

since it was showing the whole truth of the situation and the consequences of this attack. But even if this is a valid excuse, the violation of people's privacy is more important.

According to Erving Goffman people have several "territories" which they have the right to control at any time (Goffman, 1956). One of these "territories" is the right for people to maintain, control, and keep their personal space from invention, such as from a camera or a photographer (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). Moreover, people should be able to preserve someone's privacy and information, such as grief and happiness from public view (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). So, as stated by Goffman photojournalism is invading the "territories" of citizens, which is something unethical. The same thing applies to the actions of Melville who took initiative without permission and took the pictures of the victims. For the victims this was a personal moment of shock, grief, and panic where no one should have violated such private moment. Moreover, eventhough in some of the pictures the victims of the attack were still alive, there was no guarantee that these people will eventually survive. And that was the case for two of the victims who died after a couple of days in the hospital (Victims of the Westminster terror attack", 2018). The consequences of Melville action may have traumatized the victims and their families.

Right to Know / Need to Know / Want to Know:

The decision of the Reuters organization to publish the pictures of the victims was unethical, because there was no benefit out of these pictures for the society. The media organizations play a huge role in political conflict situations, like terrorist attacks (Jetter, 2017). The media are powerful weapons that could spread political violence, such as propaganda or they can spread information to a large heterogenous audience very quickly (Jetter, 2017). According to a study that was conducted in the United States, 44% of the population is afraid of terrorist attacks, and people are very afraid that one of their family member will become a victim of terrorism attacks (Jetter, 2017).

This fear has been mostly exaggerated by the media coverage, since the constant coverage and exposure of terrorist attack increases the possibility of the population to be more afraid of such actions (Jetter, 2017).

In the case of the Westminster terror attack, the photos taken by Melville where published at Reuters which is an international news agency that began from 1850 ("About us", 2018). Since Reuters is a global news agency the story of the terrorist attack together with the very graphic pictures, reached a huge portion of the population and created fear. There is an argument that states that terrorism is an act of communication where both the media and the terrorists' benefits from such action. And indeed, this argument might be true for some cases (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). According to Patterson and Wilkins there are three categories when it comes to news coverage. The first one is the "right to know" media coverage that states that people have the legal right to know the information. The second one is the "need to know" media coverage that the public needs to know the information because the impact is good and will help people move on with their lives. And finally, the "want to know" media coverage that triggers the curiosity of people with no moral justification (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). At the Westminster attack case people needed to know the story, but without publishing the pictures of the victims. The decision to publish the pictures may have traumatized the victims because it was a private moment concurred by fear that should not be shared with the rest of the society. Moreover, such graphic pictures create the feeling of fear and panic to the public. On itself the story of a terrorist attack is scary, but when the story is accompanied with pictures of people lying on the streets covered in blood, these images become powerful and spread only fear.

Garry Bryant:

Melville's decision to take the pictures of the victims was unethical because it compromised the privacy of the victims. Every photojournalism should have a moral justification when capturing a moment so tragic like this terrorist attack. Melville he should have asked himself several questions whether he should have shoot or not shoot the pictures. As Garry Bryant stated in 1987, every photojournalism should ask himself four questions when arriving on the scene and before taking the pictures (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). These four questions determine whether it is ethical or unethical to capture the moment. The first question is "if this moment should be made public" (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, 190). The answer of this question concerning to the case is no. Melville violated the privacy of the victims and did not have the consent of the victims to take or publish the pictures. The second question concerns whether the picture will "send the subjects into more trauma" (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, 190). The pictures of the victims from the Westminster attack may have traumatized the subjects. Emotions are very important for the psychology and survival of the people; therefore, the pictures may have damaged the emotions and feelings of the victims (Simpson, R. & Coté, W., 2006). When people are confronted with traumatic experiences their bodies activate an automatic response called fight or flight. So, when people are confronted with horrible circumstances sometimes this mechanism might not work, therefore damaging the emotional system (Simpson, R. & Coté, W., 2006). Even if the subject survives the attack their body and mind will never forget the accident. So, the victims of the terrorist attack may have had to fight the memories of the attack and the deal with the pictures which were everywhere. This constant reminder from the media might have put the survivors and their families into more pain and suffering.

The third questions states if the photojournalist is in the "least obtrusive distance," which means that the photographer should keep a fair amount of distance between the camera and the subject

(Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, 190). Sometimes the best solutions for the photographer who decided to take the picture is to shoot from a distance so that the face of the victims is not relived (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). This question might have been the middle solution of this case. Melville is a photojournalism where his job is to take pictures for Reuters. Photographers act instinctively when they arrive at a scene and they shoot and edit later (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). This approach to take the pictures from a distance and not reveal the faces of the victims, might have been one solution. Finally, the last question states if the photographers are "acting with sensitivity and compassion" (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, 190). Because Melville did not do anything to try and protect the victims and their families, he did not show any kind of compassion.

Utilitarianism / Aristotle's Approach:

Melville's actions may have harmed many individuals because he did not try to protect the victims by any means. According to the Utilitarian approach "the consequences of an actions are important in deciding whether they are ethical "(Patterson & Wilkins, 2014, p. 10). This theory helps people to determine whether an action was ethical or unethical. Because the published pictures may have created further trauma to the victims and their families, they should not have been taken or published. Moreover, the story of the attack created fear and panic in the society, and this is justified because on itself a terror attack attempts to spread fear. So, Melville and Reuters helped this fear to be spread without thinking the consequences. But because Melville was doing his job, he could have tried at least to protect the victims and society. This could have been accomplished by Aristotle's approach that suggested that every person should act virtuously. This could be accomplished by exercising practical reasoning, flourishing, and prosperity (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014). As stated by Aristotle the golden mean theory suggests that virtue lies between two extremes. This advocates that in this case the two extremes were not to take the pictures and

to take the pictures and reveal the faces of the victims. For Aristotle the middle solution would be to take the pictures for a distance and therefore protect the victims and society.

Conclusion:

The decision of Melville to take the pictures of the Westminster terror attack may have traumatized the victims and their families. Furthermore, the graphic pictures of people lying on the street published by Reuters, may have assisted to spread of fear and panic in the society. The choices to both take the pictures from a close range and later publish these pictures were unethical. Melville should have tried and protected the victims and society by taking the pictures from a distance or by not taking the pictures at all.

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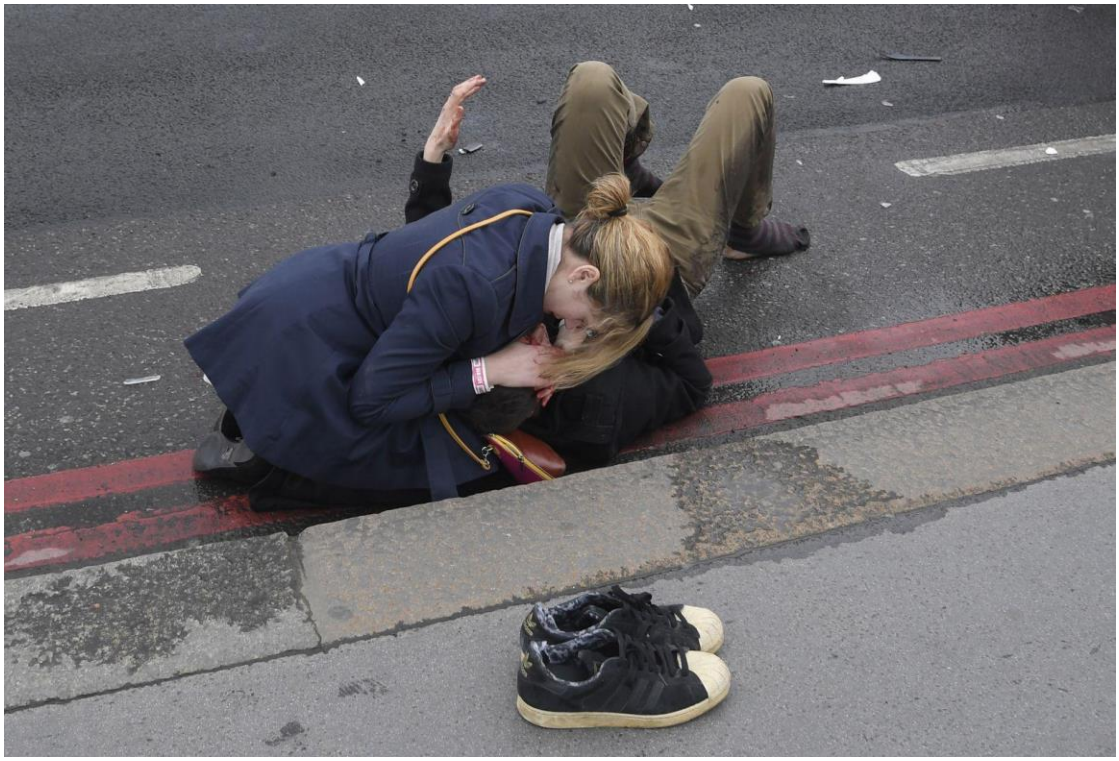
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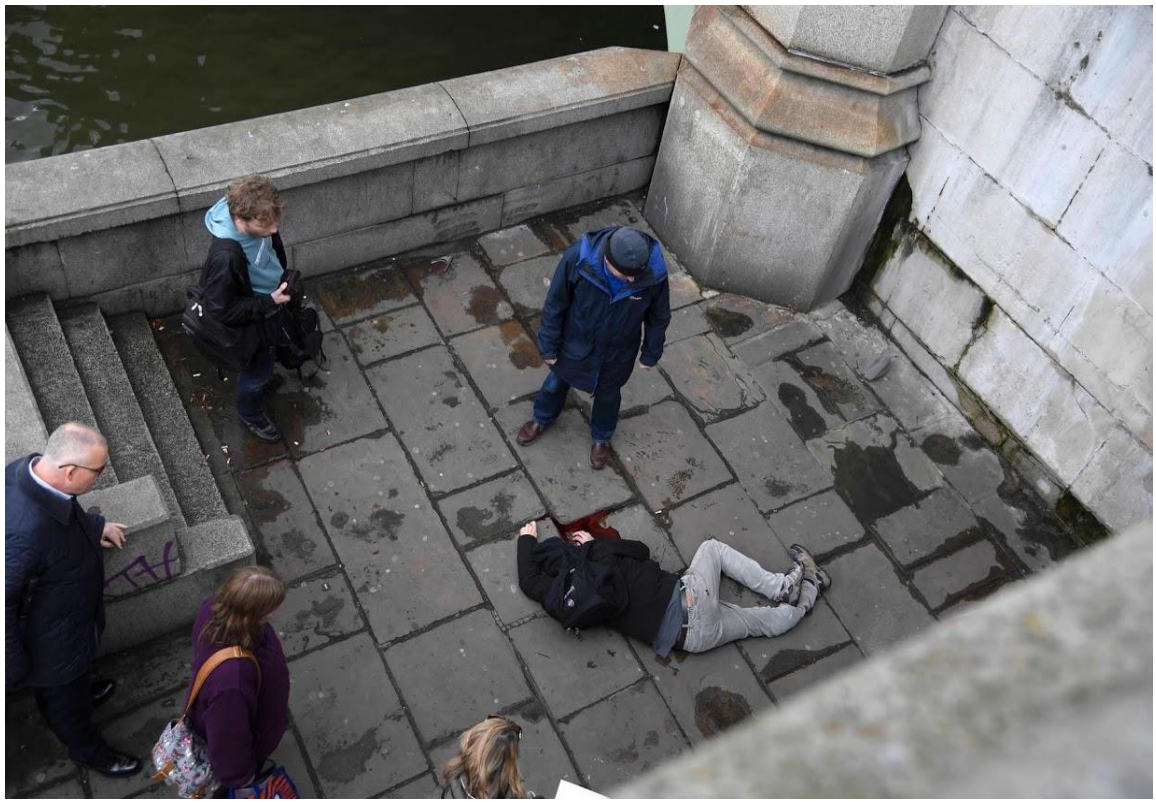
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