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E-team

Jodi McDavid

Cape Breton University, jodi_mcdavid@cbu.ca

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E-team

Abstract

This is a film review of *E-team* (2013), directed by Katy Chevigny and Ross Kauffman.

Author Notes

Jodi McDavid is an instructor in Folklore and Gender & Women's Studies at Cape Breton University. She earned her BA at St. Thomas University (New Brunswick) and her MA and PhD from Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her PhD dissertation was on anticlericalism in folk and popular culture. Her current research interests include vernacular religion, the folklore and folklife of children and adolescents, and gender and women's studies.

E-Team
(2013)
directed by Katy Chevigny, Ross Kauffman
U.S. Documentary

Following a small team comprised of members from various countries who are described as the "Emergency (or E) Team," this



documentary follows several years of research on human rights allegations, starting with Kosovo and moving to present day Syria. Despite the heavy topic, the film is quite funny (intentionally!) at times.

Anna, a Russian-born investigator based in France, is at the heart of this compelling documentary. A chain-smoking mom with a new second marriage, she balances home life and work, eventually investigating bombed out buildings with her husband when she is seven months pregnant.

Where does religion come into play in this film? Many of the atrocities that are under investigation occur due to differences in religious belief. Many of the victims shown in the film call on God to avenge family deaths, and call on God to protect them. It is undoubtable that the conflicts have had impact on religious practice in war torn countries; dead bodies of tortured victims are laid

out in testimony to the violence, and a parade of onlookers to bear witness to the body as an illustration of violence is now customary as part of death rites.

The majority of the E-Team seem to be propelled to do this type of work because they feel it is morally right to do so. Fred, one the first people to start this type of Emergency Team type of work, talks about how this first began with his work in Kosovo. When Fred hit the ground there to examine the refugee situation, someone brought him to a town where a massacre had just occurred, and showed him an open mass grave which was within the town. Fred began then to interview large amounts of people and collect their stories. This was the birth of the human rights E-Team. Now the E-Team works like a criminal investigation unit, starting with the event and working out in concentric circles. Great emphasis is given in the film to the sacred trust that is given to the researcher when they collect the victim's testimony of violence.

The electronic age has also impacted their work. Intelligence moves quickly, and the E-Team must turn out reports, interviews and intelligence with little notice. Anna responds to a letter submitted by Vladimir Putin and published in a US newspaper, with her own online piece. She and her partner Skype from the field, summarizing the day's work and getting out the details to international journalists.

The amount of self-sacrifice by the members of the E-Team is heartbreaking at times, and quite well illustrated when Anna agrees to an

interview about a conflict while still hospitalized for her child's birth. It is easy to identify with the people in the film, and to feel compassion for the human rights researchers, and the people they work with. The film tells a compelling story about rights, morals, and just and unjust ways of dealing with conflict and war.

— Jodi McDavid