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"Northern Ireland Media Coverage: Fact or Fiction ? "

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Introduction

Contemporary Western society is increasingly dependent upon the mass media as being the primary means of communication, entertainment and dissemination of information. Within these media representations of violence, death, warfare, etc..., are so commonplace that frequently they render an audience indifferent, speechless and unreactionary. These representations appear in a variety of contexts but most tenuous of all are those concerning current affairs and contemporary social and political conflicts. Among the vast pools of information regarding national and international affairs the viewing public have little power to control or ensure the validity and objective content of such reports. The presentation of current affairs rests in the pliable and persuasive hands of those individuals who bring us the news. How this information is to be consumed and thereafter understood lies in our own hands.

The aim of this research is to highlight the medias communicative strategy and the level of accuracy it demands in its coverage of terrorism in Northern Ireland. The first chapter will concentrate on the initial representations adopted at the beginning of the civil rights movement and its subsequent radical change in style in order to adapt to the changing face and standpoint of British control over Northern Ireland. The various techniques highlighted are mainly those pertaining to the British press and later British television. By concentrating on these journalistic trends and modes of communication, one begins to realise the presence of another less vocal partner engaged in creating and tapering news reports etc... accordingly. One example of this is brought to light by observing the media's approach prior to and after Britain's application of direct rule. A determined pattern that

suggests conspiracy by both the British government and national press to depoliticise the conflict in Northern Ireland becomes discernible.

Furthermore the strictly supervised and highly censored regulations that apply to broadcasting on Northern Ireland contribute greatly to misinformed accounts. Relevant to these restrictions is the "referral upwards system" enforced by British Media Companies. Another contributing factor to this debate was the Irish governments Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act , a piece of legislation which imposed constraints and further contributed to a rigid and severely controlled censorship.

In recent decades connections between "terroristic" violence, government misinformation and propaganda have been at the centre of ongoing social political and psychological debate. Central to these debates are the problematics of trying to establish a common understanding about the definition of the terms "terrorist" and "terrorism". The second chapter explores the multiplicity of meaning and the interpretation which can be associated with these terms. The theories of Noam Chomsky and Ulrich Preuss are given expression, together with Western governments' understanding and actual utilisation of these terms. The way's in which the media employ such definitions are also explored. The neutrality of language often hides the extent of political ideology. This chapter focuses on the manipulation of language to exercise such ideological power and influence. It highlights the semantic subtleties of Northern Ireland news coverage and illustrates how "contests over definitions are not just word games, real political outcomes are at stake." (Schlesinger, Murdock, Elliott, 1983, p.1) It further highlights certain major characteristics of the British media's coverage of Irish affairs, implicating it's role in disseminating British government policy.

Chapter three examines the application of direct and indirect political censorship by successive British and Irish governments. It describes the development of internal broadcasting controls such as the "reference-upwards" system and Section 31 indicating how they partly instigated a form of self-censorship amongst journalists. It supports how these long-standing broadcasting restrictions have helped to enforce the official view of the British

government, that the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland is primarily sectarian. This chapter indicates the anti-terrorist context through which journalists reported the conflict in Northern Ireland and how that context dramatically changed with the emergence of the peace process. The transition from what one can almost undoubtedly call totalitarian broadcasting restrictions in Ireland and then eventually in Britain was as drastic as the complete turnaround in British government policy.

Chapter One

Development of the media as a tool in the Northern Ireland conflict.

The social and political conflict in Northern Ireland remains to date one of the most researched and documented conflicts in modern Western European history. There is little consensus among interpreters and chroniclers as to the actual nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The arguments over whether the causes originate from simply a sectarian rivalry or a wider centuries old Anglo-Irish conflict are rife in the efforts to explain and understand the complexities of the situation. In Explaining Northern Ireland McGarry and O'Leary examine the logic of explanations which try to distinguish the cause and nature of the conflict. They class the diverse explanations as emphasising either 'exogenous' or 'endogenous' causes. External or 'exogenous' explanations situate Northern Ireland in a British-Irish state relationship. They explain the evolving conflict as an outcome of external institutions. They further claim that in order to solve the multiple problems present in Northern Ireland external or international transformations were required. The internal or 'endogenous' explanations treat Northern Ireland as a distinct political, economic, and cultural system which can be examined, in principle, independently of external influences. This theory isolates Northern Ireland as a separate unit of analysis. (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p.5)

Interpretations of what the conflict is about are directly related to the vested interests of the different parties involved in producing these interpretations. The acceleration of open conflict in the North of Ireland from the 1970's onward and the political developments which accompanied this could be argued to have determined the nature of media coverage of the conflict. Liz Curtis argues that after the introduction of internment in 1971 '... media coverage of the conflict was hammered into the shape we know today.' She further claims that in order to contain the accusations of torture and British Army brutality '...the British authorities manifested a deep concern to control the flow of information to the British public.' (Liz Curtis, 1984, p.5)

The government of Northern Ireland was housed at Stormont and had been in place since 1922 which meant that no British or Irish government had to be concerned with the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. A widely held view is that this government was created purely on the basis of a sectarian headcount in favour of a Protestant majority. David Miller discusses how the creation of Northern Ireland is itself seen to be a breach of democracy in that the last elections in Ireland overwhelmingly returned a Sinn Fein government. 'The idea that there is a democracy in a state which is gerrymandered from the start is fundamentally flawed.' (Miller, 1994, p.8) The internal affairs of Northern Ireland were never to be discussed in the House of Commons. 'The British media made themselves part of this conspiracy of silence, which lasted until the civil rights explosion of the late sixties made it impossible to turn a blind eye any longer.'(Curtis, 1984, p.18)

The momentous developments of the civil rights movements were ignored locally and nationally by the BBC. In 1966 a Tonight reporter, who later became a producer of ITV's 'This Week' programme reportedly left the BBC because he was not allowed to make a film about gerrymandering, [1] the process by which a regime manipulate constituency boundaries so that local election results are grossly distorted in favour of that regime. Discrimination against Catholics only began to be recognised when the civil rights movement attracted the attention of international media coverage. The eviction of a Nationalist MP from a house in Caledon in Co.Tyrone, which had been allocated to a 19 year-old single Protestant woman, successfully drew attention to discrimination in housing. [2] The notion of the suffering Catholic people and the martyr figure vividly expressed in 19th century nationalist propaganda, took on a new meaning when the civil rights movements were met by Protestant suspicion and then physical opposition. In 1969 violent attacks on civil rights marchers climaxed in an incident at Burntollet Bridge, where loyalists ambushed a group of marchers and, assisted by some of the marcher's police escort, attacked them with stones, bottles and clubs. The Cameron report found, 'A number of policemen were guilty of misconduct which involved assault and battery, malicious damage to property ... and the use of provocative, sectarian and political slogans.' [3]

The civil rights movement demanded equal rights for Catholics. The events which followed the civil rights demonstrations and the governments reaction to them raised the question of the legitimacy of British involvement in Ireland. The growing unrest was proving to be a major problem for the British government, as their role in the North was being continuously scrutinised. The fundamental dispute in Northern Ireland is centred around the legitimacy of the state. British presence in the North was not only opposed by republicans of all shades in Ireland but by a large body of opinion in Britain as well. Since 1971, opinion polls have repeatedly indicated that a majority of people support troop withdrawal for a variety of reasons. However, these opinions have been largely ignored by the British media. When Ken Livingstone became leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1981 campaigns for withdrawal received massive publicity. For years he had spoken in support about withdrawal from Northern Ireland at meetings organised by the Troops Out Movement and other groups. A Sunday Express commentator, heavily critical of television for showing the British army in Ireland 'in a bad light', noted,

> It is now that we in Britain are running up against this problem. It is one that has assailed the United States for nearly a decade. There can be little doubt that television coverage of the Vietnam war was largely responsible for sapping the moral fibre of the American people to continue the struggle. [4]

In order for the government to legitimise their presence in the North, indeed, the whole British war of attrition in order to be to justified needed the media on its side. When his GLC colleague Steve Bundred joined a Troops Out Movement delegation to Belfast in August 1982. The Sun branded him a 'TRAITOR' headlining the story 'Lefty police boss boosts the IRA'. (The Sun, 9 August 1982.) The next day The Sun followed this up with a picture of Bundred among Troops Out demonstrators headlined 'TRAITOR'S MARCH'. (The Sun, 10 August 1982.) These headlines clearly support the view that Britain's involvement in Ireland is legitimate, and those who dispute such legitimacy are not only severely criticised, but publicly denounced.

In 1972 The Unionist-dominated parliament at Stormont was dissolved and the British government began to rule the province directly. The British government set about trying to contain the conflict in Northern Ireland by redefining it in terms of law and order rather than a political problem. The policy taken up by the new regime was one of Ulsterisation, normalisation and criminalisation which was adopted in relation to paramilitary organisations, primarily the IRA. Both Ulsterisation and criminalisation were consistent with the British attempt to normalise the conflict . This was to help in de-politicising the war, thus, criminalising their activities and branding them as 'terrorists'. (Curtis, 1984, p.68, Miller, 1994, p.80) The reduction in army operations secured by the policy of normalisation, argues Miller, can also be seen as an attempt by the Northern Ireland Office to resolve the serious internal divisions which were increasingly gaining control over the army.

The drive to reconstitute the conflict within social democratic norms required that the government appear to act within the civil law rather than in a manner more reminiscent of an anti-colonial counterinsurgency campaign. (Miller, 1994, p.82) The Official British view sees the introduction of the 1972 direct rule as having fundamentally reformed the Northern Ireland state, thereby removing the causes of conflict; any subsequent manifestations of unrest can only be explained as proceeding from 'extremists'. This view denies the political motivation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who are seen simply as 'terrorists'. The IRA is held to be a criminal conspiracy which is similar to organised crime networks such as the Mafia (thus the term 'godfathers' in some official propaganda). (Miller, 1994, p.7) Terms such as these are used by the media in their endeavour to depict the IRA as external to, and unrepresentative of, the nationalist community, (this is not to say that the IRA represents the entire nationalist community). The Sunday Times quoted a police officer who described social clubs in the province as places where 'witch doctor' techniques are used to 'hypnotise' the young with republican songs: 'Then the next day the godfathers put a gun or bomb in their hands and send them out to kill someone.' (The Sunday Times, 22 August 1976). Liz Curtis claims that this account 'excludes the possibility that republican culture has developed as the product of a community, and that

young people might wish to join the IRA of their own accord.'(Curtis, 1984, p.129)

British General J.M. Glover, an intelligence expert and Commander of Land and Forces in Northern Ireland, drew up a paper on the future of the IRA entitled Northern Ireland : Future terrorist trends. [5] It was a top secret document completed on 2 November 1978 reviewing the IRA's progress to that date and it's likely activities to the end of 1983. The paper was leaked to the Provisional IRA in 1979 and its findings were later published in the Republican News, the IRA newspaper. (Schlesinger, Murdock, Elliott, 1983, p.10). In his paper he said:

> 'The Provisional's campaign of violence is likely to continue while the British remain in Northern Ireland ... we see little prospect of political development of a kind which would seriously undermine the Provisional's position.' [6]

He further contradicted the notion that the IRA were just a criminal organisation by citing the judgement of an earlier intelligence assessment:

> The Provisional IRA (PIRA) has the dedication and the sinews of war to raise violence intermittently to at least the level of early 1976, certainly for the foreseeable future. Even if 'peace' is restored, *the motivation for politically inspired violence will remain.* Arms will be readily available and there will be many who are able and willing to use them. Any peace will be superficial and brittle. A new campaign may well erupt in the year ahead. [7]

He went on to comment on the degree of professionalism which the PIRA had illustrated through their use of modern technology, and which they would continue to exploit. The report also discounted the commonly held view that the terrorist is necessarily devoid of popular support. He also concluded that :'Our evidence of the calibre of rank and file terrorists does not support the view that they are merely hooligans drawn from the unemployed and the unemployable.'[8]

The British governments influential control over the media helped to apply its strategies such as that of 'criminalisation'. The sympathetic media reports of the civil rights had given way to a more restricted and often biased style of reporting. Miller argues that 'there was a major change in the public relations of the British government between 1969 and 1971.' He further claims that part of the explanation for this 'must relate to the source organisations which supply journalists with information.' (Miller, 1994, p.77) The Northern Ireland Information Service (NIS) is the press and public relations division of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the British government department responsible for running Northern Ireland. The Information Service is a major source of political news on Northern Ireland. It delivers press releases to news desks in Belfast and London offices three times a day. As the NIO is an extended arm of the British governments control over Northern Ireland the information which it filters to journalists is in turn filtered to us through mass communications. There thus remain terms and phrases generated by the governments initiative to de-politicise the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Information Policy was a separate unit working for the intelligence services but expected to operate under the cover of public relations. It's function was psychological warfare. The best definition of that comes from a Ministry of Defence document : 'An Introduction to Psychological Operations' which was published in 1974.

> Psychological Operations (Psyops) is an all-embracing term defined by NATO as 'planned psychological activities in peace and war directed towards enemy, friendly and neutral audiences, in order to create attitudes and behaviour favourable to the achievement of political and military objectives'...
>
> Strategic psywar pursues long-term and mainly political objectives. It is designed to undermine an enemy or hostile group to fight and to reduce the capacity to wage war.
>
> It can be directed against the dominating political party, the Government and/or against the population as a whole, or particular elements of it. It is planned and controlled by the highest political authority. [9]

This 'psyops' was not something new to the 1970's. As the 1974 document made clear, psyops had become part of the military strategy of NATO countries, especially the United States of America where the techniques of psyops were developed throughout the Vietnam War. [10] The task of the Information Policy was to discredit the IRA through the circulation of misinformation to journalists.

From the very onset of the troubles, reporting was selective, the media were generally anxious to portray soldiers in the best light. Journalists heavily relied on official sources to provide accounts of incidents accepting army accounts with little or no question. In his survey of newspaper coverage in 1974 and 1975, Philip Elliott found in the British papers a 'reliance on official sources to provide accounts of incidents, to identify victims and attribute violence . . . scepticism of the official account was rarely shown.' He contrasted the Irish papers, which 'often dropped official versions they no longer believed and taking on themselves the responsibility of pointing the reader in the right direction.' [11] Even where the media give a number of versions of an incident the army's or RUC's version is always given first. As one BBC sub-editor told sociologist Philip Schlesinger: 'I've always assumed the official line is we put the army's version first and then any other,'. (Schlesinger, 1978, p.225.) The official accounts originated from the (NIS) office in Lisburn. On a number of occasions grave discrepancies and blatant fabrications of the truth surrounding numerous incidents of confrontations with, and the murders of Catholic civilians were relayed in statements from the Lisburn office to the media. A notorious case of army falsehood concerned the killing of Brian Smyth in April 1973. Robert Fisk of the Times reported at the time:

> In Belfast . . . paratroopers shot dead a young man and wounded two other at a street corner in the Roman Catholic Ardoyne area. The Army said the three men were about to fire at soldiers, although the IRA, and some local people, say they were unarmed. (The Times, 18 April 1973.)

Although the journalist had taken care to give both versions the army's was given first. After the shooting, the soldiers involved testified in court that the dead man and one of his companions, Eddie McClafferty, were holding an

Armalite rifle and pistol. This was accepted by the court and McClafferty was jailed for eight years. But in 1976 one of the soldiers, Chris Hendley, revealed that he had been ordered to fire on a group of unarmed men and that the army's story had been concocted to justify the incident. McClafferty was then retried, acquitted and released. [12] A more controversial incident was the killing of twelve year old Majella O'Hare. The army later claimed that she had been 'killed in crossfire' between the army and 'gunmen'. This version was duly repeated in the papers. The Sunday Express, said she 'was hit by a ricochet from a gunbattle between terrorists and paratroopers'. Later the police confirmed that she had been killed by army bullets and that there had not been a 'gunbattle'. Six weeks later The Sunday Times reported, 'The police . . . are now certain that Majella was hit by two bullets fired by a machinegun fired by a soldier of the Third Parachute Regiment. The police have no evidence that any shots were fired.' (The Sunday Times, 26 September 1976) A soldier was later tried for unlawful killing, but escaped conviction apparently because of his 'belief' that he had fired at a gunman. As a result of the army's lies, nationalist politician Seamus Mallon, a leading member of Social Democratic and Labour Party, found himself in a very embarrassing position. He had seized the army's initial statement and had publicly condemned the IRA for the child's death. When the true facts emerged, he contacted the press and accused the army of issuing false statements to the police, the media and to him.' [13] The politicians outburst helped to stimulate an unusual amount of publicity both for the fact that the army had lied and for the responsibility for Majella's death. The effect of the credibility of the army Information Service was quite severe. David McKittrick, (1990, p.5) of the Independent summed it up in the following terms: 'It came to be regarded as probably the most unreliable of the many agencies involved in the conflict earning itself the nickname of "the Lisburn Lie machine". The IRA was found to be more reliable than the army.'

The images conveyed through both television media and the print media are of paramount importance to the British government in achieving support for their involvement in the North from the British people and the rest of the world. If the government are able to present paramilitaries as

'murderous terrorists' through use of the media then the adoption of policies such as internment and torture of alleged IRA members could be made to seem as justifiable measures in an effort to dissuade 'extremists'.

The escalation of IRA offensives in the early 1970's initiated attacks on television coverage from politicians and the press as to how these incidents were presented. Political scientist Jay G.Blumler summed up:

> For supposedly allowing instant interviews after controversial incidents, hectoring official spokesmen, giving a platform to IRA sympathisers, and publicising complaints about the security forces, television (mainly the BBC) is accused of harassing and disheartening the army and giving aid and comfort to the enemy. [14]

Such attacks prompted the BBC to design new rules to minimise the number of items which might attract political controversy. This was achieved by giving enormous control over programming decisions to BBC management. It saw the introduction of the 'refer-up' system which meant that every item related to Ireland had to be referred to the highest level. It was made compulsory for programme-makers to consult management about all programmes on Ireland so that permission was only granted by top executives. A similar system evolved in ITV at the same time exercised by the Independent Television Authority. [15] Programme makers had to consult top management, including the Northern Ireland Controller, at all stages of production all programmes considered to be of a controversial nature have to be viewed by top management before transmission.

The 'referral-upwards' system acted as a filter removing undesirable programmes or items at an early stage preventing the need for embarrassing acts of censorship. Richard Francis said, 'Early warning, briefing and consultation is essential if the controller in Northern Ireland or the Editor of News and Current Affairs in London is not to be caught between last-minute "censorship" or "disregard". [16] These measures not only applied to news and current affairs, but to every area of programming.

Broadcasting restrictions did not only apply to British television but also to those in the South of Ireland. The formal relationship between government and broadcasters in both Britain and the South of Ireland are roughly similar.

In both countries, the broadcasting companies are supervised by their own government appointed bodies, the BBC Board of Governors and the Independent Broadcasting authority in Britain, and the Radio Telefis Broadcasting authority in Ireland-although the government does not exercise direct control. Both the British and Irish governments, however, have the legal power to stop the broad- casters transmitting either specific programmes or any specified class of material [17]

On 1 October 1971 Gerry Collins, the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, invoked Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act and issued a directive requiring RTE:

> to refrain from broadcasting any matter of the following class, i.e. any matter that could be calculated to promote the aims or activities of any organisation which engages in, promotes, encourages or advocates the attaining of any particular objective by violent means. [18]

Successive Irish governments had renewed the Section 31 restrictions annually up until the declaration of an IRA cease-fire in 1993. This has not been renewed even in the aftermath of the breakdown of the cease-fire but it has not been abolished. Liz Curtis elaborates on the extent and on the effects which such broadcasting restrictions have on journalists and the public, acknowledging that the greatest perpetrators of broadcasting restrictions remain in Britain.

> 'In Britain television censorship casts its net wider, making it difficult to report anything which appears to challenge Britain's hegemony. While the censorship mechanisms are less immediately obvious than in the Republic, the fact that they have affected such a wide range of programmes and programme makers has generated much disaffection'. (Curtis, 1984, p.196)

Taking into account the severe restrictions imposed on the media in relation to Northern Ireland it is not difficult to sympathise with Tim Pat Coogan's view in 'The Troubles' that 'trying to accurately follow the situation in Northern Ireland through the media is equivalent to trying to look across the Irish Sea through a telescope with the lens cap on!

Endnotes to Chapter One.

1. Information given by a later This Week, producer, David Elstein, in a TV discussion following the showing of 'Before Hindsight', BBC2, 11 February 1978. This remark was cut from the transcript published in The Listener: see The Leveller, April 1978.
2. In June 1968 one of the key events in the history of the civil rights movement occured. The Unionist-controlled local authorities allocated council houses on a sectarian basis, giving precedence to Protestants regardless of their circumstances. In protest, homeless Catholic families squatted newly built council houses in Caledon Co.Tyrone. The local authority evicted them and gave one of the houses to a 19 yr old single Protestant woman who was the secretary of a Unionist parliamentary candidate. A Nationalist MP at Stormont, Austin Currie, then occupied the house and was himself evicted, and in the process successfully drew attention to discrimination in housing.
3. For a history of the UVF, see David Boulton, The UVF 1966-73: An anatomy of loyalist rebellion, Dublin: Torc Books/Gill and Macmillan 1973.
4. Derek Marks, 'The Monster in the Box', Sunday Express, 21 November 1971. Authors who contest this view of Vietnam coverage include Noam Chomsky, 'The US media and the Tet offensive', Race and Class, vol.xx,no.1, Summer 1978; also Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty, London: Quartet 1978; see also Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock, Philip Elliott, Televising 'Terrorism', London: Comedia 1983.
5. The entire report is reproduced in facsimile in Roger Faligot, Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland: The Kitson experiment, London, Zed Press, 1983, pp.223-242. The book was originally published in French as Guerre Speciale en Europe: le laboratoire Irlandais. Paris. Flammarion. 1980. published in full in Sean Cronin, Irish Nationalism, Dublin: The Academy Press 1980; London Pluto Press 1983, pp.339-57.
6. Terrorist Trends, in Roger Failgot op. cit.
7. Terrorist Trends, Roger Failgot op. cit.
8. Terrorist Trends, Roger Failgot op. cit.
9. Accounts of operations of the activities of the Northern Ireland Information Service, Paul Foot, Who Framed Colin Wallace?, London Macmillan Books, 1990, pp.1-79.
10. Who Framed Colin Wallace?, Paul Foot op. cit.
11. Philip Elliott, 'Reporting Northern Ireland: A study of news in Britain, Ulster and the Irish Republic', Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, 1966; later published in Ethnicity and the Media, UNESCO 1978.
12. The Irish Press, 22 June 1976; The Sun, 22 October 1976; The Guardian, 30 December 1978.
13. The Irish Press, 16 August 1976; Mallon's accusations were also mentioned the same day in The Guardian and the Daily Mirror.
14. Jay G. Blumler, 'Ulster on the small screen', The Listener, 5 October 1978.

15. Quoted in Anthony Smith, 'Television Coverage of Northern Ireland', Index on Censorship, vol. 1, no. 2, 1972.
16. Richard Francis, 'Broadcasting to a community in conflict-the experience in Northern Ireland', lecture given at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 22 February 1977, London: BBC.
17. BBC Licence Agreement of July 1969, Clause 13(4); Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 1973, Section 22(3); Broadcasting Authority Act 1960, Section 31. A useful outline of the legal constraints on British broadcasting is found in Colin R. Munro, Television Censorship and the Law, Farnborough: Saxon House, 1979.
18. See, for example, the speech by Irish Taoiseach Sean Lemass to the Dail in October 1966, quoted in Paul O'Higgins, 'The Irish TV sackings', Index on Censorship, 1/1973.

Chapter Two

Definitions of "terrorism "and " terrorist" in a post-modern society.

How can we define 'terrorism' taking into account the complexities of 'terrorist' motives in relation to their historical and geographical location. Among linguists there is no general consensus to what the term 'terrorism' actually means. Modern 'terrorism' was originally an instrument of those in power rather than those who actively confront state power. Whether an action is terroristic and whether its perpetrators are 'terrorists' depends on our own values and assumptions. The terms 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' may seem black and white but they are full of contradictions. The use of the terms such as 'freedom fighter', 'member of the resistance', as opposed to 'murderer', creates a feeling of a legitimate struggle for liberation by a suppressed group. Those who control the state have an interest in delegitimising their enemies, just as their opponents have an interest in promoting their armed struggle. In effect, the manipulation of both language and imagery is central to the exercise of ideological power and influence.

> 'How dare you molest the sea?' asked Alexander. 'How dare you molest the whole world?' the pirate replied 'Because I do it with a little ship only I am called a thief ; you doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor.' (Chomsky, 1991a, p.9)

This short story told by St. Augustine of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great is used by Chomsky to support his theory that the most fundamental problem with trying to define 'terrorism' is that it is contested. The need to define the word 'terrorism' may appear to be an unnecessary waste of time since the word has such currency the answer may seem to simplistic. Nonetheless, the changing meaning of the word over the decades has meant that imposing a definition may be more difficult than it appears, if it is at all possible. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'terrorist' as : 'a person who uses or favours violent and intimidating methods of coercing a government or community. This definition could be understood to imply that all

governments are unflawed and that any attempt to go against them is automatically characteristic of a 'terrorist'.

In Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, he describes how the problems of meaning have preoccupied him and have led him to the realisation of the difficulties of any kind of definition. He argues that when we say 'we just don't speak the same language' we mean something more general:

> that we have different immediate values or different kinds of valuation, or that we are aware, often intangibly, of different formations and distributions of energy and interest. In such a case, each group is speaking its native language, but its uses are significantly different, and especially when strong feelings or important ideas are in question. No single group is 'wrong' by any linguistic criterion, Though a temporarily dominant group may try to enforce its own uses as 'correct'. (Raymond William's, 1976, p.10)

Some writers would argue that those who debate the definition of 'terrorism' are simply trying to obstruct 'anti-terrorist' policies: Paul Wilkinson a British terrorism studies writer shares this sentiment suggesting that:

> The problems of establishing a degree of common understanding of the concept of terrorism have been vastly exaggerated. Indeed, I suspect that some have tried to deny that any common usage exists as a device for obstructing co-operation in policies to combat terrorism. (Wilkinson, 1990, p.27)

Western governments consider 'terrorism' as an illegitimate form of violence which is a dangerous threat to liberal democracies. The alternative view is that which emphasises the rhetorical and ideological functions of the term terrorism. In this view Western governments and counter insurgency writers label their enemies as terrorists and ignore their own 'terrorist' actions.

Noam Chomskys' The Real Terror Network argues that the real terrorists are the United States and other Western governments, and that what we normally call 'terrorism' is in fact a justified response to merciless repression for which we, as citizens of the West are supposedly responsible. In "Talking 'Terrorism': Ideologies and Paradigms in a Post modeern World", one of a series of conferences organised by the humanities faculty of

Stanford's School of Education in 1991, questions of state terrorism and insurgent terrorism were the key issues of discussion.

Terrorism is presented to us in various forms. The most prominent of these are state terrorism, waged against the people of other states; state-sponsored terrorism defined as 'social-revolutionary and single issue terrorism aiming at the top of society.' (Schmid and De Graaf, 1982, p.1) State terrorism may have claimed more victims, but insurgent terrorism has achieved far more visibility and provoked an extensive amount of literature involving controversial dispute. In the case of state terrorism, the disappearance of a victim might only be made known by word of mouth. Insurgent terrorism on the otherhand, does not shy from publicity but seeks it. The news media play a prominent role in linking up the 'terrorist' with his victim and the public at large. As one IRA source put it '... last year taught us that in publicity terms one bomb in Oxford Street is worth ten in Belfast...'[1] Paul Wilkinson observes, 'that when one says terrorism in a democratic society, one also says 'media'. For terrorism by it's very nature is a psychological weapon which depends upon communicating a threat to the wider society.' [2] This view emphasises that there is an obvious symbiosis between terrorism and the media. Many authors contend that 'terrorism' thrives on publicity, therefore, the exploitation of the mass media is a fundamental element in 'terrorist' strategy. As Walter Laqueur has stated: "The media are the terrorist's best friends. The terrorist's act by itself is nothing; publicity is all... They are, in some respects the superentertainers of our time." [3]

At the conference on "Talking 'Terrorism'..." repeated images of Winston Churchill, holding a gun (dating from the British General strike of 1926) were projected near the entrance to the talks. Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer prompted the use of force against illegal pickets. Chomsky claims that images like these reiterate the point that Western State terror is long-standing; indeed, that modern Western democratic capitalism is intrinsically terroristic and attempts to destroy it, are not merely understandable but worthy of support.

A more controversial speaker at the conference was Ulrich Preuss, a former member of the Baader- Meinhof organisation. [4] Preuss stated that all

moral implications of acts of terror were 'imputed by official institutions'. He claimed that the difference between terrorism and violence in general was that terrorism carried more political content which was the threat of the use of violence to create so much public fear that the legitimacy of the political authority is challenged. It is this challenge to the political authority of the British and Irish governments that has led to the type of media coverage we are exposed to today. The terminology used by the British and Irish media is selective.

'Ireland is a terminological minefield.' (Liz Curtis, 1984, p.133) The language used to discuss or report events in Northern Ireland reveal political positions. Whether we regard the statelet of Northern Ireland, as it was named by the British government after Partition in 1922 , (a term which is geographically incorrect considering that Donegal is further north) or as the Six Counties indicates whether or not we regard the presence of Britain in Northern Ireland as legitimate. Republicans refer to it as the Six Counties, nationalists as the North of Ireland, (which is also geographically incorrect) loyalists and the British media refer to it as Ulster or the Province (terms which are also inaccurate as three of the nine counties which make up the province of Ulster are governed by the Republic of Ireland . Not only do place names reveal political positions but there is an obvious specific vocabulary which depending on the terms we use clearly indicates one's political direction. Peter Taylor illustrates such 'semantic subtleties' stating that :

> At the most basic level, where is the conflict taking place? Is it in Ulster? Northern Ireland? The province? The North of Ireland? Or the Six Counties?...
> And once you've sorted out the names, what's actually going on there? Is it a conflict? Is it a war? A Rebellion? A Revolution? A criminal conspiracy? Or a Liberation struggle?...
> Lastly, and probably most important, how do we describe those involved? Are they terrorists? Criminals? The Mafia? Murderers? Guerrillas? Or freedom fighters? It depends on your perception of the conflict , and who you happen to be working for at the time.... Such semantic subtleties apply to scarcely any other conflict we report, be it El Salvador or Africa. (Peter Taylor speaking at a conference on 'Representations in the mass media', National Film Theatre, London, 5 April 1983.)

The approved vocabulary of politicians consistently conveys the official political message of the British government which is that the IRA are wrong and bad and the British side are right and good. This opinion is in turn relayed by British and Irish media coverage. Thus the British Army, UDR and RUC are 'security forces' while the IRA and INLA are 'terrorists'. Victims of security forces are 'shot dead' while victims of the IRA are 'murdered' or 'gunned down'. In 1978, for example, an Ulster TV news reader said in a news bulletin that a man Paul Duff, had been 'murdered' by the 'SAS'. Thirty minutes later the bulletin had been rewritten: now Duffy had merely been 'shot dead' and the news reader apologised for the earlier 'inadvertent phraseology' (Hibernia, 9 March). Such distinctions also apply to differences between the victims of republican paramilitary groups and the victims of loyalist paramilitary groups. In January 1997 Ulster TV news broadcast a report concerning the UVF death threat against Billy Wright, an alleged leading loyalist. The report indicated that Billy Wright had previously escaped three 'murder' attempts by IRA 'terrorists' whilst he had merely avoided 'attacks' by loyalist 'extremists'.

'Language is the product of human intelligence that is, for the moment, the most accessible to study. A rich tradition held language to be a mirror of the mind.' (Chomsky, 1988, p.155) Language is rarely contested in the case of Northern Ireland because we have become so familiar with the terminology used by the media. The language used by the British and Irish media could be said to be a mirror of the minds of those in power. 'A person who knows language has acquired a system of rules and principles - a "generative grammar", in technical terms - that associates sound and meaning in some specific fashion." (Chomsky, 1988, p.140) The sound meaning of language generated by present day media associates the IRA with the words 'murderers' and 'terrorists' devoid of political content. Mainstream journalism reports violent incidents without giving any context or explanation for them.

The overall tendency of the British press was to write the IRA into the headlines on the slightest excuse often with ludicrous consequences. When former Northern Ireland Prime Minister Brian Faulkner died in March 1977, the

Daily Express headlined the story 'Faulkner target of the IRA dies in fall from horse'. Another tactic of the British media was to back up any questionable incident that might be the fault of the British army by reporting on an IRA incident to take the pressure off any subsequent criticism. The commentary on a 'BBC Tonight ' film illustrates one such reporting strategy, over footage of Bloody Sunday, the audience was told that :

> In January 1972 British paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed civilians attending a Civil Rights march in Londonderry. In retaliation the Official IRA bombed the "para's" Aldershot headquarters. The explosion killed five women canteen workers, a gardener and a catholic padre. [5]

Violent incidents are generally reported in terms of human interest. The identities and experiences of victims involved may be disclosed or withheld. 'Whereas victims of British or loyalist violence usually feature as little more than ciphers, nameless, ageless, without occupations or mourning relatives, victims of republican violence are fleshed out and given a human identity'. (Curtis, 1984, p.113) The influence of the media and its numerous propaganda tactics cannot be underestimated.

> It is necessary to control not only what people do but what they think. Since the state lacks the capacity to ensure obedience by force, thought can only lead to action and therefore the threat to order must be excised at the source. (Chomsky, 1988, p.132)

The British government realised from a very early stage that if the press was handled properly it could be the most powerful weapon they had in controlling what people thought.

Chomsky elsewhere talks about the manufacture of consent, he argues that : The process of creating and entrenching highly selective, reshaped or completely fabricated memories of the past is what we call 'indoctrination' or 'propaganda' when it is conducted by official enemies, and 'education', 'moral instruction' when we do it ourselves. (Chomsky, 1988, p.124)

From the very onset of the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland media coverage was selective. The escalation of loyalist attacks on Catholics manifested in

violent assaults on the Civil Rights marchers of 1968, were not to be made aware to the British people due to the lack of coverage such incidents received. 'The events of these early years have conveniently disappeared from the establishment mythology.' (Liz Curtis, 1984, p.90)

The media's ambiguity towards loyalist violence reflects the attitudes of the authorities : an attitude inadvertently revealed by the Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins when he accused loyalist assassins of playing into the hands of 'the terrorists'. This remark implied that loyalists who killed Catholics were not 'terrorists' but the IRA were. The English press claimed that the 'bloody struggle with the IRA' was 'now increasingly bringing in Protestant extremists' and that 'IRA violence' had been ongoing. (The Guardian, 19 November, 1972)

The IRA had been blamed for numerous violent incidents carried out by the British army or loyalists. On Saturday 4 December 1971, 15 people were killed when a bomb exploded in McGurk's Bar, a Catholic pub in North Queen Street, Belfast. An anonymous phone call claimed that the 'Empire Loyalists' had carried out the attack. Yet the army and police immediately blamed the IRA, they made up a story complete with manufactured 'evidence', claiming that it was an IRA 'own goal'. The Times reproduced the army's account in a front page article, which began:

> Police and Army intelligence officers believe that Ulster's worst outrage, the killing of 15 people, including two children and three women, in an explosion in a Belfast bar last night [sic] was caused by an IRA plan that went wrong...[6] (John Chartres, The Times, 6 Dec.1971)

The bombing of McGurk's Bar had claimed more victims than any single previous incident. The army and police had successfully diverted attention from evidence proving loyalist involvement using the atrocity to discredit the IRA. In 1978 Robert James Campbell, a loyalist, was convicted of the 15 murders at McGurk's Bar. He was given 15 life sentences. This event passed unremarked by the British media.

At the time of the death of Bobby Sands during the hungerstrikes of 1981 Conservative and Unionist MP's and Christopher Thomas of The Times asserted that the IRA had killed 2,000 people. The cartoonist of the Expresss

(Cummings) marked the death of Bobby Sands MP with a drawing of a huge memorial inscribed '1969 - 1981 THEY HAD NO CHOICE, 2094 MURDERED BY THE IRA.' (Daily Express, 6 May 1981.) The front page of the Times, began: 'The Roman Catholics buried Robert Sands yesterday as Protestants lamented their 2,000 dead from 12 yrs of terrorism.' He went on to refer to the '2,000 victims' of Bobby Sands' 'collaborators'. (The Times, 8 May 1981.) The message from this was clear that the IRA had killed 2,000 Protestants. (Christopher Thomas) [7] The fact that such a statement could be made without any serious action from the papers editor illustrates the extent of the 'fact-rigging' process that had gone on since the beginning of the 'troubles'. Of course, the 'security forces' would claim that they do not kill civilians deliberately, but then so would the IRA. Indeed, the IRA routinely apologises when it does kill civilians 'by mistake'.

In the context of Northern Ireland, 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' refer to the IRA or INLA, occasionally to the loyalist paramilitaries - who are more usually referred to as 'extremists'. The term never applies to the Army or RUC. The power of the words lies in the fact that they imply that the violence of the IRA is of a worse nature than that of loyalist paramilitaries or the Army or RUC.

A BBC internal memo to television newsroom staff in January 1974, headed ' guerrillas and terrorists', instructed:

> 'Terrorist' is the appropriate description for people who engage in acts of terrorism, and in particular, in acts of violence against civilians, that is operations not directed at military targets or military personnel.
>
> 'Guerrilla is acceptable for leaders and members of the various Palestine organisations of this kind, but they too become 'terrorists' when they engage in terrorist acts (unless 'raiders', 'hi-jackers', 'gunmen' is more accurate). (Philip Schlesinger, 1978, pp.229-30)

In the BBC's News Guide, reporters are told:

> Don't use 'commando' for terrorist or guerrilla. In the 1939-45 war, the word had heroic connotations, and it is still the name of the units of the units of the Royal Marines.
>
> Even so we still have problems with 'terrorist'or 'guerrilla'. The best general rule is to refer to 'guerrillas' when they have been in action against official security forces, and to use 'terrorist ' when they have attacked civilians. Thus we should say 'Guerrillas have attacked an army patrol in the Rhodesian bush...', but 'Terrorists

have killed six missionaries in Rhodesia...'(BBC News Guide, 1979)

These distinctions may seem fairly straight forward in theory, but in practice the criterion that a 'terrorist' is someone who attacks civilians is not used. If this was the case then the RUC and the British Army would on occasion be termed as 'terrorist'. While the IRA and INLA - many of whose victims have been policemen or soldiers would be described as 'guerrillas'. The fact that the term 'terrorist' means the IRA as opposed to the state forces indicates the application of a completely different logic .

Chomsky and Herman have written that the words 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' 'have become semantic tools of the powerful in the Western World', and observe that they 'have generally been confined to the use of violence by individuals and marginal groups,' while official violence which is far more extensive in scale and destructiveness is placed in a different category altogether.' (Philip Schlesinger, 1981, p.80)

Endnotes to Chapter Two.

1. Quoted in paper from an International conference held in London in May 1982 titled "Terrorism and the News Media", which brought together 'terrorism' experts such as Professor Paul Wilkinson of Aberdeen University and Professor Jonah Alexander of the state University of New York, politicians including Merlyn Rees and Lord Chalfont, and assorted journalists.
2. Paul Wilkinson, conference paper 'Terrorism and the news media' op. cit.
3. Quoted in Maurice Tugwell, "Politics and Propaganda of the Provisional IRA" in ed. Paul Wilkinson, British Perspectives on Terrorism, London: George Allen & Unwin 1981.
4. Ulrich Preuss had been among the legal counsel of the Baader-Meinhof gang, who from 1968 to 1972, and with the logistical support of various Arab and Eastern European regimes, committed numerous murders and other acts of violence against the citizenry of European countries before they were eventually caught and sent to prison.
5. Tonight report on the IRA, transmitted 15 February 1977, quoted in ed. Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, The British Media and Ireland: Truth the First Casualty, London, Information on Ireland, 1979, p.29
6. The theory assembled in the security forces intelligence circles is that a large IRA operation was planned for last night involving a bomb attack on a police station or an Army headquarters in the North Queen Street district of the city. An ambush of troops who would have had to move into the district would have followed. Word had been passed to several people in the Catholic community to 'Keep out of North Queen Street' last night . This got back to security forces , who were alerted... The Army's theory is that the bomb in McGurk's bar was 'in transit', that it had been left there, probably without the knowledge of any of the people who were killed or injured, by a 'carrier' for another person to pick up, and that the second person was unable to keep his rendezvous because of the security operation. John Chartres, The Times, 6 December, 1971.
7. In November 1983 the New Ireland Forum released a report on the 'costs' of violence in the North. This included statistics which showed that 2,304 people had been killed in the North between 1 January 1969 and 30 June 1983: republican paramilitaries were responsible for 1,264 of these deaths, loyalist paramilitaries for 613, and the 'security forces' for 264, while 163 were 'non-classified'. Other statistics showed that of the 1,297 civilian victims, 773 were Catholics, 495 were Protestants, and 29 were not natives of the North. The Irish Times, 4 November 1983.

Chapter 3

Role of the Media: Censorship in Britain and Ireland; The effects of the peace process.

This chapter examines the broadcasting bans in both Britain and Ireland in relation to Northern Ireland. It explores the different guises political censorship takes on, primarily through a consideration of mainly television but also newspaper coverage. It discusses how these different forms of censorship were implemented. After painting this picture of direct and indirect censorship it helps to illustrate the difficulties experienced by the media after the controversial discussions between the British Government and Sinn Fein. It looks at how the British media dealt with changes in British policy and the emergence of the peace process. The eventual lifting of these broadcasting bans on Britain and Ireland followed a ruling of the United Nations Human Rights Committee in July 1993, that section 31 contravened Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the order was allowed to lapse in January 1994. RTE, the Republic of Ireland's state appointed broadcasting authority, then immediately introduced a "reference upwards" system to deal with Sinn Fein appearances. (O'Farrell, 1994, p.16) The decision to withdraw Section 31 was made in the context of the then "peace process" which eventually led to the British ban being lifted. Two weeks after the IRA declared a cease-fire John Major announced in Belfast on 16th September 1994:

> "I believe the restrictions are no longer serving the purpose for which they were intended...Most importantly, we are now in very different circumstances from those of 1988 when the restrictions originally came in." (Miller, 1995, pp.47 68)

The emergence of the peace process had a huge impact on the coverage of Sinn Fein. The abolishment of direct censorship however did not mean that there were no longer any constraints on broadcasting.

In Britain throughout the 1970's and early 1980's there were continuous debates about censorship and Northern Ireland. The nature of the troubles in Northern Ireland (whether political or sectarian) are central to the whole basis of censorship policy in these islands. Philip Schlesinger, a sociologist who has extensively researched media coverage on Northern Ireland said of the BBC that:

> Ministerial intervention has been elusive and there was nothing in the BBC's approach to editorial control which approximated to the popular image regarding classic totalitarian censorship with it's directives and specially planted supervisory personnel. (Schlesinger, 1978, quoted in Rolston, 1993, pp.161-168)

This statement could lead us to believe that censorship only takes place in a classic totalitarian manner. However Bill Rolston argues "that there are more subtle and often more efficient ways of censorship in democratic societies and the case of broadcasting in these islands shows that very clearly." (Rolston, 1993, pp.161-168)

During the 1970's and early 1980's there was no direct state censorship in Britain however there were other ways in which state pressure could be used. There are a variety of laws in both Britain and Ireland which can be exerted against the media. The existing techniques of state pressure and intimidation, together form a process of self-censorship. The history of relations between the Broadcasters and the State is one of governmental pressure and voluntary self-restraint by the broadcasters. BBC reporting has always shown a degree of balance and impartiality to the official line of thinking. Prior to the broadcasting ban of 1988 more subtle approaches were take to reporting conflicts. Rex Cathcart, the historian of the BBC in Northern Ireland, notes that "Until 1951 the BBC (in Northern Ireland) sought to portray a society without division: the very mention of "partition" was precluded. (Fortnight, November, 1988).

It was only after the Civil Rights marches of 1968, that Northern Ireland appeared on the television. In 1971, Lord Hill, Chairman of the BBC, wrote to the Home Secretary, defining the relationship between the state and the Broadcasters. "In terms which accorded with the states definition of the

situation", (Schlesinger, 1987, p.212) he agreed that "as between the British Army and the gunmen the BBC is not and cannot be impartial". (Schlesinger, 1987, p.212). These comments by Lord Hill illustrate the readiness of the BBC to comply to government consensus and to report or not report accordingly. This very clearly shows their willingness to apply certain degrees of self restraint in excluding the discussion of sensitive topics. The television reporter Peter Taylor said "If Northern Ireland is the most sensitive issue in British broadcasting, interrogation techniques are it's most sensitive spot." (Taylor, 1978, p.5)

There were unofficial no-go areas in journalism. Journalists realised how far they could go, what they could say and more importantly what they could "They ignore a story here, resist an idea there, look for a safe angle or seek out events which are not contentious and of marginal significance". (Jonathan Dimbelby, The Times 3rd Feb. 1972). The pressures of editing and reference upwards created an official form of censorship. "The introduction of 'reference upwards' in 1971 led rapidly to the most insidious form of censorship : broadcasters began to censor themselves. (Liz Curtis, 1984, p.188). "For every programme that gets banned, there are about twenty that don't get made". (Mary Holland, 1981). "The system ensured that censorship was not only hard to pinpoint, but was also almost invisible to the general public." (Liz Curtis ,1984, p.189). The problematic of isolating censorship and defining clear examples of it arose through how indirect censorship occurred. "Precisely because of it's subtlety this British way of censorship" as Mary Holland dubbed it, has won the admiration of the international fraternity of "anti-terrorism" experts, who have recommended it as an example worth following." (see Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock, Phillip Elliot, Televising Terrorism, London: Comedia 1983.)

Direct censorship did exist in the Republic of Ireland from the mid 1970's and later in Britain from 1988 in the form of restrictions on interviewing representatives of political and paramilitary organisations. On the 19th October 1988 Douglas Hurd issued a notice, under section 29 (3) of the Broadcasting Act 1981 and Clause (4) of the BBC License and Agreement, restricting interviews with eleven organisations. This was an extremely large directive

which effectively excised a whole variance of elected political opinion. The notice that he issued was a more obvious approach to political censorship than had been previously exercised. It was a very definite mode of censorship aimed at opposing political organisations, some of which claimed to have political agendas.

Censorship in the Republic of Ireland had. From a very early stage, played a more blatant role in broadcasting restrictions. When Douglas Hurd announced the British ban he acknowledged that "these restrictions follow very closely the lines of similar provisions which have been operating in the Republic of Ireland for some years"(Hansard, 1988, col.893) and to a large extent the wording of this notice "is drawn form the Irish wording". (Hansard, 1988, col.901) The power to restrict broadcasting in the South of Ireland was vested in the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Authority Act 1960. "Both the British and the Irish governments have the legal power to stop the broadcasters transmitting either specific programmes or any specified class of material." (Curtis, 1984, p.89).

In the Republic of Ireland, Section 31 has been in place since the mid 1970's, it is much more direct and stricter than the British ban. Section 31 not only bans the broadcast of interviews but also reports of interviews with listed organisations in Northern Ireland. The organisations are Sinn Fein, The IRA, the UDA, Republican Sinn Fein, the INLA and all organisations proscribed in Northern Ireland. (Rolston, 1991, p. 51-68) Section 31 also bans transmission of actual events from inside the Houses of Parliament and the European Parliament. RTE do not just ban representatives or spokespersons of listed organisations but actually people who are simply members of those organisations, namely Sinn Fein. RTE operates in line with the British view that the conflict in Northern Ireland is sectarian. It could be argued that the restrictions imposed by Section 31 are characteristic of "classic totalitarian censorship." The extremities of the ban and the entire scope of organisations, or members of such organisations, that the ban covers denies any possible attempts to debate or discuss in an informed manner the intentions of such organisations. Journalistic arguments against such bans state that the whole point of covering Sinn Fein and the IRA is to discredit the Republican

Movement as part of the campaign to defeat "terrorism". An editorial in the Independent proposed the argument that: "The wickedness of their arguments can be best exposed by allowing these to be voiced, especially in the aftermath of some particularly horrifying atrocity" (Independent, 20 October, 1988)

The language which had previously been adopted by both the British and Irish media was shaken during the cease-fire because it's terminology was only justifiable when the IRA was at war. The emergence of the peace process meant that changes had to be made within the media. In particular the British media, who had over the previous years condemned the IRA as sectarian, devoid of a political ethos, had now found themselves in a situation where the government was talking to Sinn Fein. The "shaking hands with murder" accusation ,was very difficult to shake off. In 1989 Home Secretary Douglas Hurd stated:

> "I believe that, with the Provisional IRA and some of the Middle-Eastern groups, it is really nothing to do with a political cause any more. They are professional killers. That is their occupation and their pleasure and they will go on doing that. No political solution will cope with that. They just have to be extirpated -." (Rolston, 1991, p.70).

British Government policy had firmly been that there would be no discussions with "terrorists". However a year after this statement was made it was brought to light that such discussions were taking place with Sinn Fein, discussions which continued until November 1993. This complete change in government thinking was highlighted in a statement by a "key British source" to the observer. According to this source:

> "the provisional IRA was imbued with an ideology and a theology. He then added the breathtaking statement that it's ideology included an "ethical dimension"- that members would not continue killing for the sake of it. He went on to argue that the Provisionals did not kill "for no purpose", and that if that purpose were removed, there was no reason why they should not stop killing." (Bevins, 1993, p.3)

This statement completely contradicts that of Douglas Hurd, and the official analysis of the conflict, even more damming, from a journalistic point of view, is the fact that it seriously undermines nearly all mainstream media reporting from the previous 25 years, both in television and in the press. The allegations of collusion between Sinn Fein and the British government threw a spanner in the works of the entire foundations of British and Irish media coverage on Northern Ireland. Understandably the allegations of talks with Sinn Fein were not admitted immediately by the British government. On 1st November John Major said in Parliament that talking with Sinn Fein "would turn my stomach". This voice was echoed through the Northern Ireland Office who dismissed the allegations saying: "No such meetings have taken place." The head of the Northern Ireland Office, Andy Would, claimed that such reports belonged "more properly in the fantasy of spy thrillers than in real life." (McKittrick,1993, p.6) Despite the continuous denial on the part of the British government Sinn Fein confirmed the story on 15th November 1993. Although the allegations made by Sinn Fein could easily be dismissed, the government finally admitted to the allegations. The explanation given was that they had been approached by Martin McGuinness in February 1993 with the message, "The conflict's over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close". Sir Patrick Mayhew said that "The government had a duty to respond." (Observer 28th November). The meetings were supposedly "unauthorised", an allegation which Sinn Fein later rejected. Martin McGuinness said that "they were authorised meetings which became unauthorised meetings when they were caught out" (McKittrick, 1993, p.6)

Later when both Sinn Fein and government documents were released there were obvious discrepancies between the two versions. The full texts of the communications between the British government and Sinn Fein were printed in the newspapers on 29th November 1993. Paul Nolan of the Fortnight Magazine commented that "the savoury bits had been left out". Sir Patrick Mayhew described it as "typographical errors", "It was in fact, the diligence of print journalists like Dick Grogan in the Irish Times and David McKittrick in the Independent which revealed the discrepancies in the

government's account, leaving the balance of credibility with Sinn Fein". (Paul Nolan, 1994, p.36)

> "If even half of what the republicans claim is correct, a truly appalling vista is being revealed : ministers lied to parliament and public about their contacts, are still lying about the real extent and nature of these; passed information on the Irish government to terrorist; and have published concocted documents as part of a continuing cover-up."(McKittrick, 1993, p.6)

Even in the conservative papers such as the Sunday Telegraph conclude reluctantly : "Perhaps the strangest consequence of the process has been that the IRA have now become more believable than the government." (Quoted by Paul Nolan, Fortnight, 1994, p.36) Print media seemed to be acknowledging that the government could have lied, however these were not the sentiments preferred by television news coverage, they were content to promote the version given by the government. In order to defend statements, like that of John Major, (1 Nov.93) the government denied that it was all in the name of peace and it would have been unforgivable to turn down such an opportunity. The news media played a huge role in projecting this scenario.

Whilst the government was being 'economical with the truth' (18.20 News Bulletin 28 November 1993). Sinn Fein, making claims that the government were prepared to talk to the IRA in return for a 14 day cease-fire were described as having "stepped up the propaganda war" (21.00 BBC1 News Bulletin, 2 December 1993). No such accusations were made against the government which could easily have been the case. Journalists, mainly television journalists, declined from asking hard questions about British government strategy over contradictions with previous policy. In order for the British government to back up this complete turnaround in British policy, (talking to paramilitary organisations previously denounced as sectarian) they needed the media to be on their side. They needed to create a positive opinion in favour of the talks, which was best executed through television news media. Television dutifully portrayed the sentiments of the government painting the picture of the government's "duty to respond" to an IRA outcry for peace.

The emergence of the peace process in Ireland has thrown journalists into disarray. For the last 25 years reporting on Northern Ireland has taken place within an "anti-terrorist" context, devoid of political agendas- "Terrorism" was the sole reason for the conflict. The only way to live in peace was to defeat the IRA. It is now evident that the official view has dramatically changed. Sinn Fein are now being regarded as having a political agenda and an eventual right to be present at the negotiating table. In general Television news appears not to notice that the "anti-terrorism" context is in crisis. The role of the British media has always been to dutifully defend the government and it's actions even as it moves closer to "shaking hands with murder".

Conclusion

There remain many interpretations concerning the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The selective nature of media reporting makes it difficult to realise where the importance within Northern Ireland lies. Morally, there is no right or wrong to give a true account of Northern Ireland's history, there are no rules as to what material can be published, so historical engineering comes into play. It is only through Revolutionary People's Politics like that of the civil rights movement, when people who were directly involved used their voices as a means to reveal untruths; Catholic discontent translated into organised action. Site specific occurrences carry the real weight of true reflection of Northern Irish society, however, events are distorted by the media rendering them futile. Catholic considerations in a predominantly Protestant society have been and continue to be overlooked creating a hierarchy society, marginalising groups.

The British government legitimised their presence in Northern Ireland by reorganising definitions and restructuring the situation with policies like Ulsterisation. The appropriation through the media, of definitions associated with other organised "terrorist" groups, ie. the Mafia, to define the IRA sensationalised the "troubles" and the "terrorists" gaining public outcry swaying opinion in favour of the British government. The British government directly control Northern Ireland, the fact that they had to assert definitions implies that they have little control over what actually happens. It could be said that some of their actions are taken under the pressure of maintaining favourable public opinion which is generated by the media.

Definitions of the words "terrorist" and "terrorism" are debated among linguists but are defined by the British media and to a greater extent by direct and indirect government controls over the media. Central to conflict is the battle to enforce either parties legitimacy through the manipulation of the media to provoke positive public opinion for either parties benefit the complexities of language usage is a result of the continuous struggle for legitimacy. The British, the paramilitary organisations, and the Irish

government have all exploited the power and influence of the media. The propaganda war between the government and the 'terrorists' is as familiar to us now as the means by which they disseminate their messages. The use of disinformation has been and continues to be a major tool employed by the British government in relation to Northern Ireland. Examples of this official policy are numerous and have been widely used from the 1970's to the present day.

Every major incident over the last thirty years has been distorted through the media with the result that the only people who really know the truth are those directly involved in the incidents. Controversial incidents from the past are continuously regurgitated in the media due to their unresolved nature. The controversy over the events of Bloody Sunday which are as controversial today as they were twenty five years ago is a prime example of disinformation on the part of the British government. The circulation of misinformation has often backfired on the media manipulators as is becoming increasingly apparent with the growing swell of political opinion demanding a fresh enquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday. The Widgery report will go down in history as direct and blatant British government propaganda, the report was made solely on the basis of British Army accounts devoid of any civilian input which can only result in a biased and uninformed account.

The policy of censorship has had to be more carefully masterminded since reporting bans against Sinn Fein have been lifted. When the British government were caught unawares by the declaration of the IRA cease-fire on 31 August 1994 the Public Relations machine was put on overdrive and stories of a Pan Nationalist front became visible in both television and print media. The so called "window of opportunity" began to close due to internal party politics, which required a reliance on the unionist vote in order to maintain a majority in the House of Commons, made the cease-fire become a false one in the eyes of the British media.

The anti-terrorist paradigm within which all major media reporting on Northern Ireland was conducted has been thrown into turmoil with the success and failure of the peace process. Language of war was seen giving way to the language of peace. The present difficulties of accepting Sinn Fein's legitimacy

as a political party could be argued to be partly a result of the type of language disserted by the British media in support of government policies of Ulsterisation, normalisation and criminalisation. The allowance of a political voice being given to Sinn Fein is still a matter of controversy, because for years they were devoid of a political mandate.

The extent to which the use of misinformation has been implemented can not be stressed enough, it happens on a regular basis affecting even the very basic coverage of everyday actualities in Northern Ireland. It has not become static nor has it become more sophisticated, it has simply followed change in British government policy. The British media have stood by the government in the past and they are standing by them now. If one is reliant on mainstream British media, as an informed and objective means of obtaining an insight into the realities of life in Northern Ireland, then truth comes a poor second place to propaganda.

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