

January 2014

From Fun Factory to Current Affairs Machine: Coping with the Outbreak of the Troubles at Ulster Television 1968-70

Orla Lafferty

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr>



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lafferty, Orla (2014) "From Fun Factory to Current Affairs Machine: Coping with the Outbreak of the Troubles at Ulster Television 1968-70," *Irish Communication Review*. Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 4.

doi:10.21427/D7T14H

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr/vol14/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Irish Communication Review by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)

FROM 'FUN FACTORY' TO CURRENT AFFAIRS MACHINE': Coping with the outbreak of the 'Troubles' at Ulster Television, 1968–70

Orla Lafferty

THE INDEPENDENT TELEVISION NETWORK has received only limited critical academic analysis and, as a consequence, there is a particular dearth of research into commercial broadcasting in Britain, but more specifically commercial broadcasting in Northern Ireland. In their publication *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over fifty years*, Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock (2005) attempt to address this lack of scholarly analysis of ITVs' regional structure but Ulster Television does not factor in their study. Whilst *UTV at 50*, a publication released for the company's 50th Anniversary in 2009, provides some interesting insights into its progression as a broadcaster, it is primarily anecdotal. Nonetheless, Jeremy Potter's volume *Independent Television Companies and Programmes 1968–1990* includes a valuable chapter on UTV, investigating its history and the initial difficulties it encountered with the outbreak of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland in 1968. Building on this, this paper aims to address the dearth of research carried out on UTV and its position as a commercial broadcaster in Northern Ireland, operating within the ITV structure. It is clear that as a broadcaster it has been considered insignificant in comparison to its competitor BBCNI, on which a number of studies have been produced (Fisk, 1975; Schlesinger, 1978; Cathcart, 1984; Briggs, 1985; McLoone, 1996; Hajkowski, 2010). This is rather surprising as Independent Television is widely considered the 'people's channel' and often defeated the BBC in audience ratings battles (Cherry, 2005). Significantly, there has been more academic analysis of Radió Telefís Éireann (RTÉ)¹ and its reporting of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland than of UTV's coverage (Horgan, 2004; Graham, 2005; Kinsella, 2007; Ivory, 2012). This paper subjects UTV's news and current output during the period of 1968–1970 to an academic analysis for the first time. It attempts this by analysing archive material held in UTV's library. Material covering the rise of 'Paisleyism', the Derry Riots – October 5th 1968, and the 'Battle of the Bogside' – 12th–14th August 1969, will be considered in detail. This analysis is further contextualised by written Regional Officer's reports and Independent Television Authority papers detailing how various policies were implemented and adapted during this period.

¹ Semi-state and public service broadcaster in Ireland. It began television broadcasts on New Year's Eve 1961 (Horgan, 2001: 84).

Background

After the advent of Anglia Television in 1958, one of the areas which had yet to be served with an ITV service was Northern Ireland. It was a popular and 'desirable' choice for an independent programme company as 'Here if anywhere was a population with distinctive regional character; and the possibilities of signal overlap from mainland transmissions were small' (Sendall, 1983: 22). When invitations for the contract eventually went out in the autumn of 1958 two existing contractors, Associated Rediffusion² and Granada,³ applied along with two new indigenous applicant groups. Even in the early stages of the process which resulted in the creation of UTV, it was noted by the *Belfast Telegraph*⁴ that the Stormont government would presumably 'want to have its say in the appointment' because 'the political implications are considerable'. This unsettled the Director General of the ITA, Robert Fraser, who was 'deeply conscious' of the 'great importance in a Northern Ireland context of the Act's requirement of due impartiality' (Sendall, 1983: 23).

The Authority decided that the contract would be best served by a group with a greater understanding of the region and this left two regional applications as contenders. One of these was led by the Duke of Abercorn, a son of the first Governor of Northern Ireland, and included George Lodge, owner of the Belfast Royal Hippodrome and Grand Opera House, and Captain Orr, the Minister of Parliament (MP) for South Down who had played a prominent role in the 1954 Television Bill debates. *The Northern Whig*⁵ and *Belfast Telegraph* were also associated with this group. The second group, led by the Earl of Antrim included Sir Francis Evans, the former British Ambassador to Argentina, Hubert Wilmot, Sir Laurence Olivier, Betty Box, representing Beaconsfield Films, and William MacQuitty, a London film producer originally from Ulster, who was to be the company's first Managing Director. The newspaper interest in this group was represented by the *Newsletter*⁶ and its owners the Henderson family (Sendall, 1983: 23).

Interviews for the contract took place on 4th November 1958 and the Antrim-Henderson group was awarded the contract. The Authority noted that 'its statement of intent seems fuller and its membership seemed more widely representative of Northern Ireland as a whole' (Sendall, 1983: 24). With the authority aware that it would have to ensure adequate Roman Catholic representation both in the boardroom and among the shareholders of the new company, it remarked that it had been 'favourably impressed by Lord Antrim's good intentions in this respect' (Sendall, 1983: 23). While the Duke of Abercorn and George Lodge had believed the group's industrial and technical experience would work in their favour, they had made misjudged their opponents. The contract was not offered on the expertise of applicants, but on the political dimension which they offered the new service.⁷

The decision to award the franchise to a consortium which was dominated by the Henderson family, well known pillars of the Unionist establishment in Northern

² The network's London contractor owned by Broadcast Relay Services Ltd and Associated Newspapers.

³ A wholly owned subsidiary of Granada Theatres Ltd who held the network contract for the north of England.

⁴ Daily paper first published in Belfast in 1870.

⁵ Belfast newspaper founded in 1823. Ceased operations in 1863.

⁶ A prominent Unionist newspaper established in 1737 and still in circulation.

⁷ Gordon Duffield, Head of Press and Publicity 1959-1964, *UTV at 50*, episode 1, 31st October 2009, aired 6p.m.

Ireland, was unsurprisingly, looked upon sceptically by some people within the region. This scepticism was not helped by the Whicker Affair which occurred two months later when the BBC's current affairs programme *Tonight* 'aroused the ire' of local Unionists in Stormont after a report by journalist Alan Whicker on life in Northern Ireland was transmitted (Hill, 2006: 155). In early 1959 'it looked very much as if the broadcast media in NI could be safely relied on to safeguard Unionist interests' (Butler, 1995: 44). It was initially however, UTV's position as a *commercial* broadcaster which seemed to safeguard it from any further criticism as a pro-Unionist institution:

In spite of its Loyalist pedigree, from the start the company were pre-occupied with profit, not with projecting Protestant supremacy. Business sense dictated that a commercial TV station, depending on the sale of advertising time, could not afford to switch off up to 35% of its potential market. Not that party politics or political culture often intruded on the ITV schedules. Like most of the other commercial companies, in its early years UTV did not make socially analytic programmes ... The ITV network brand of apolitical populism thereby also spared the Northern Ireland company from giving offence to Unionist or Nationalist opinion (Butler, 1995: 44).

Sendall and Anderson both remark on the task which the company faced in its effort to get the station up and running for its target date of Hallowe'en 1959: 'No one in the United Kingdom had yet faced the daunting task of running a commercial television station on so small a scale ... (Sendall, 1983: 25). It was decided that for the time being the company's total production effort should be concentrated on a single magazine type programme to be put out at the same time each day called *Roundabout*.⁸

Roundabout however, could not have been described as a news magazine. The aim of the programme was to 'feature people and interesting local places on film about daily life in Northern Ireland' (*TV Imprints*, quoted in Butler, 1995: 45) and in this it reflected the overall ethos of the ITV network and its brand of 'apolitical populism'. It was only after Pilkington⁹ had forced the commercial companies to focus

⁸ This series ran from November 1959 until September 1962.

⁹ The Pilkington Committee was set up in the summer of 1960. The Report produced by the Committee in 1962 had two major conclusions. The first was that a second television channel should be given to the BBC which was to be financed by the licence fee not by advertising, an option which had been looked at. This move was accepted by government. The second was that due to a particularly poor performance the ITV system should be restructured. This suggestion was rejected by the government but significant changes were later made to the structure in subsequent legislation (Milland, 2004: 76). Milland argues that the primary reason behind the committee's assessment of ITV was a 'moral panic' that had developed around the growing television medium. Significantly, the moral panic had spread among all sections of the educated class, on the left as on the right. The Labour Party had been cajoled into departing from its original opposition to ITV due to the wide appeal it held among working-class voters. In time for the 1959 election Hugh Gaitskell admitted that it was 'here to stay'. For left-wingers within the party this departure was compulsory, but it nonetheless remained a regrettable one, particularly among middle-class Labour supporters, such as readers of the *New Statesman*. A February 1959 editorial was representative of their position: 'The ITV contractors have regularly played down to the lowest common denominator of public taste, and the BBC have followed ... from violence, crime and the public's obsession with get rich-quick shows, they have dredged up fabulous profits. Labour's main task is to ensure that the deplorable experiment of the Second Channel is not repeated when the Third is created' (quoted in Milland, 2004: 83).

on 'informing and educating' in 1962 that the news format hardened:¹⁰ 'In other words, however else it has been rationalised since, given the company's close links with the newspaper trade, the initial absence of journalistic input to the UTV product, certainly was influenced by the Board's acute awareness that politics might be bad for business' (Butler, 1995: 45).

The channel went to air on Hallowe'en night 1959, with inaugural speeches by Sir Lawrence Olivier and the Governor, Lord Wakehurst. A live show followed, featuring children playing Hallowe'en games. A tour of Northern Ireland was also included, after which UTV switched to the network showing *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Independent Television News (ITN)*,¹¹ *77 Sunset Strip*, a variety programme, wrestling and a movie. While Sendall claims that the night was a 'hitch-free' success, Anderson recounts one incident which may have served to be an indicator of future problems the channel would encounter. As mentioned above, as part of the evening's local programming the channel had organised a live show featuring children playing games around Havelock House.¹² After the sketch was finished the then Managing Director, Bill MacQuitty, took a call. The caller, it seemed, knew the children who had appeared in the sketch and made it known to the Managing Director would that he would 'rue this day's work' because the children were Catholic (Anderson, 2009: 53). From this incident it was clear from the outset that UTV would be forced to confront sectarian sensibilities in its programming.

With the introduction of their newsroom in November 1962 *Roundabout* was replaced by *Newsview*,¹³ a Monday to Friday programme which 'intended to combine a news bulletin with topical magazine and comment' (Sendall, 1983: 31). A regular local mid-afternoon bulletin was also put in place. This news-service was to prove crucial in Northern Ireland over the following years:

At the time, it might have been difficult to foresee the quite exceptional contribution this development of an efficient local news and current affairs service of high professional integrity would make to the uniquely important, if unenviable role that Ulster Television would be called upon to play before the end of the decade ... Long before these sleeping dogs of violence were once again unleashed UTV had been established firmly in the region's mind not only as a purveyor of 'oomph and publicity' but also as a trusted and respected medium of public information whose management and staff would be able to face their ordeal with confidence, skill and courage (Sendall, 1983: 32).

UTV and the 'Troubles'

Potter notes the extra responsibility placed on broadcasters in Northern Ireland, with UTV at the forefront of this for the Independent Television Network:

Broadcasters in Northern Ireland have always found their every utterance scrutinised for the most minute evidence or nuance of political or religious

¹⁰ *World in Action* was introduced to the ITV network in 1963.

¹¹ Founded in 1955, ITN still provides the main national news bulletins for the Independent Television network.

¹² The Company's building based on the Ormeau Road in Belfast.

¹³ *Newsview* ran for a year until November 1963 when it was replaced by a new news series *Radius* which ran until April 1964.

partiality. Now the local station was also held responsible for any shortcomings, real or imaginary, in ITV's network programmes. Added to this were the heightened physical dangers of living and working in Belfast, threats made by extremists against on-screen commentators and senior company executives, and the wearying sense of menace and the deadlock which hung over the province (1990: 199).

Northern Ireland was treated as a national area within the ITV system. There was an appointed Regional Officer and it also had a local advisory committee (NIC, later NIAC) which frequently met in the province to discuss various matters including the appropriateness of network programmes which, while not seeming to be antagonistic in other regional networks, could prove to be in Northern Ireland. Potter argues that UTV brought a lot to the ITV network in providing an understanding of the situation in the region, in comparison with the BBC which he claims was often run by an Englishman and thought of as an 'outpost' of its London base. UTV had a unique ability to strike up a trust among the local community (Anderson, 2009). The difficulties and challenges which faced the channel did not go unrecognised by the Authority and an assessment of their programme performance in 1974 praised the company:

Since 1969 UTV have faced the most difficult task of any company in the system and have acquitted themselves with skill and courage. The company's main strength has been in their news and current affairs output. The staff have had to face appalling stress and strain as well as covering the events in cramped conditions and with a minimum of film camera resources. They have established a reputation for honesty and fairness and *UTV Reports* is consistently preferred by the audience to the BBC equivalent. The company have endeavoured to give due emphasis to the normal aspects of life in their region ... They are efficient and thoughtful in their scheduling and co-operative with the Regional Officer. They are also flexible and willing to adapt their schedules to the exigencies of the situation (cited in Potter, 1990: 201).

It was easier for UTV to self-censor company material than it was to ensure that this objectivity also occurred in material aired from the mainland:

The golden rule at UTV was never to broadcast anything likely to cause violence on the streets, and a demanding set of checks and balances was instituted to ensure fairness and sensitivity and remove any suspicion of blood on the hands of the broadcasters. UTV's news crews covered many grim stories and returned with film showing harrowing scenes of death and destruction. Decisions had to be taken whether these should be screened in all their visual horror in *UTV Reports*, the main local news, transmitted at 6p.m. – a time when children would be viewing. Often 'publish and be damned' seemed irresponsible and, in spite of qualms about the ethics of suppression, editorial judgment was then exercised in favour of what seemed a greater good (Potter, 1990: 202).

The first indications of UTV's concern with rising tensions in the region are apparent in August of 1964, as the Regional Officer for Northern Ireland in his monthly reports to the ITA¹⁴ discusses the emergence of Loyalist leader Ian Paisley and the possibility of sectarian strife re-materialising in Northern Ireland.¹⁵ These concerns were also clearly evident within UTV's news output. In an early report to camera on the 21st of June in 1966 anchor Bill McGookin claims that the Prime Minister, Terence O' Neill, in a recent speech 'nailed Paisleyism for the evil thing he believes it to be' informing the audience that he declared the Paisley faction as 'mindless individuals who used unspeakable language in the streets'. McGookin also continues to quote the Prime Minister who branded Paisley as a 'demagogue' whose followers are not a political party but use the 'the sordid techniques of gangsterism' which has its 'parallel with the rise of Nazis to power'. Throughout this piece to camera which lasted two minutes UTV, while not overtly, allow the views of the Prime Minister Terence O' Neill to be aired without opposition. The piece, entirely dedicated to quoting the Prime Minister, discusses only one sentence of his resistance to extreme Republicanism, with the rest of the time committed to his condemnation of Paisleyism. In another Regional Officer's report covering June 1966, the ITA are informed that Paisley's popularity is still on the rise, putting pressure on the Authority to ensure that he is given adequate coverage within network programming:

I need not go over the facts which have brought this man to a position where he is now a force to be reckoned with ... It is not difficult to foresee a situation arising, possibly in the near future where the authority may be faced with the necessity of providing a platform for Paisley in any programme which tends to be critical of him ... The situation is undoubtedly deteriorating and I have told the company (UTV) that so far as Independent television is concerned, we must live strictly according to the letter in the Television Act. If we interpret any 'liberal' interpretation of it we shall be in serious trouble.¹⁶

While broadcasters in Northern Ireland throughout the 1960s did attempt to incorporate a more analytical narrative within their reporting, intemperate voices, in particular that of Paisley, were marginalised: 'As far as possible, he was treated as an embarrassing aberration. Ironically, throughout the 1960s there is more evidence of distaste for Paisley's theatrics than of an explicitly anti-nationalist bias among local broadcasters' (Butler, 1995: 47).¹⁷

In December 1967 the company were to come under political pressure to reduce the publicity given to Paisley. UTV was forced to make it apparent that while the broadcaster sympathised with the Government's position, it could offer no such guarantee or undertaking.¹⁸ Under the Television Act (1964), should UTV have agreed

¹⁴ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – August 1964. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

¹⁵ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – May 1966. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

¹⁶ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, June 1966. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

¹⁷ In July UTV prevented a *This Week* production *The Ulster Problem* which highlighted the 'virulent Protestantism' (Butler, 1995: 47) Paisley stood for, depicting him as a 'tub-thumping bible basher' (Curtis, 1998: 279) from being shown in Northern Ireland.

¹⁸ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, December 1967. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

to this or similar form of censorship, it would have quite clearly been subjected to the due processes of the law and such a case would have resulted in disastrous consequences for the company.

Amid rising tension in January 1968 UTV took the decision that its popular current affairs series *Flashpoint*¹⁹ was to be axed in March of that year and replaced by *UTV Reports* as the company's main news programme. *Flashpoint*'s formula had been determined by the unsettled political atmosphere in the region.²⁰ While the Regional Officer believed it had begun 'to look a little beleaguered', they admitted it had been a 'remarkable achievement' for such a small regional company 'to produce five nights a week for an hour a lively and much talked of local news magazine series'.²¹ However, *Flashpoint* was criticised for its tendency to lean towards sensationalism and 'to screw the utmost emotive element from situations'.²² The show had also gained a reputation for 'sledgehammer' tactics.²³ In a letter to the Regional Officer on 1st February 1968 the Managing Director explained the reasons behind the popular programme's removal from the schedule:

1. *Flashpoint* has run for 15 months, 5 nights per week. It needs a rest, for both the viewers and for the programme makers. It was a unique experiment, and we need to change the team and alter the approach.
2. Although ratings are still good, it is always sound practice to rest a programme while it is in the ascendant, although we do find Press critics and viewers tending to be restive.
3. It was a big risk to start the programme, and an even bigger risk when *News at Ten* began, thus necessitating an overweight of 'balance programmes' in the late evening together with the other ITA 'balance' signposts.
4. The programme had tended to concentrate too much on religion, politics and economic affairs and it has also become too city orientated.
5. The seam has been worked out temporarily because, in common with *This Week* and *World in Action*, producers tend to go back on subjects which have already been covered adequately. We want a new hard news base for current affairs. *UTV Reports* will have complete flexibility when major genuine news stories break.

The Managing Director also added that the series had resulted in a number of libel actions against the company. Staff had also become aware that in some sections of

¹⁹ Popular current affairs series which first went to air in January 1967.

²⁰ Presenter David Malhowe had been selected because of his position as an outsider to the province (he was from Manchester). It was believed that he could 'take a middle road approach and ask very strong questions' (Producer/Director of *Flashpoint*, Derek Bailey on *UTV at 50*, episode 4, 7th November 2009, aired 6 p.m.).

²¹ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, January 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Ireland's Saturday Night Weekend Magazine*, 8th July 1967. One particular *Flashpoint* which covered an abortive attempt to detonate a bomb in Belfast T.A. headquarters, was described as 'neither legitimate nor responsible', something which 'could only be conducive to raising public fears that an IRA attack on Northern Ireland was about to begin' (ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, January 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29).

the public it was felt that the English element in the *Flashpoint* team had not appreciated local attitudes, failing to discern the political, social and cultural disparity between both communities. *UTV Reports*²⁴ 'hard news base' was however to adopt a different approach to that of *Flashpoint*, focusing on getting politicians involved in relevant debate with the aim of developing community relations. Presenters of the programme, Gordon Burns and David Dunseith, were to challenge politicians on their policies and the impact which they were having on the community: '... they were able to take the politician on at his own level. They were well read, they were interested politics and so they were able to give politicians a run for their money; their answers did not go unchallenged'.²⁵ This 'ground-breaking'²⁶ approach was to have an influence on the local BBC service. Concerns were raised by the ITA in Belfast in June 1968 that BBCNI appeared to be striding for a similar agenda within their own news service. The Regional Officer noted that during period of rising tension among communities in Northern Ireland, UTV 'had been courageous for the most part...It has not only reflected but it had ameliorated' but any competition with the sphere of community relations would 'provide a very serious challenge ...'.²⁷

UTV has, throughout the past fifty years, continued with their enduring community relations and heavy 'people orientated' approach which, while instilled from its inception in 1959, was particularly anchored as tensions in Northern Ireland evolved throughout the 1960s. Essentially it became a coping mechanism and a self-censorship strategy for the company which positioned itself firmly at the heart of the community, examining political policies and investigating their effects on the population of Northern Ireland.

The Derry Riots: A 'formidable indictment'?

One particular local programme item of note was produced by UTV and screened on 17th September 1968 as part of its new current affairs series *It's All Happening*.²⁸ The item contained interviews with IRA leaders Cathal Goulding and Michael Ryan. During the interview they state that since the end of the civil war in 1923 the IRA has had the problem of not knowing what might replace British imperialism, but a definitive party line has now been agreed and they are working towards the setting up a socialist Republic. Admitting that in the past they had 'imposed our will' on the people and attempted to 'bring them with us whether they like it or not', they state they are now making attempts to educate people on their aims and objectives. Upon being questioned whether this will be through a process of infiltration of different political groupings and movements, the leaders admit that they are educating their members on the civil rights movement and have instructed them to support it 'to the fullest extent that they possibly can' and 'get as far as possible by non-violent means',

²⁴ *UTV Reports* replaced *Flashpoint* in April 1968 running until June of the next year. It returned to screens in January 1969 the main news programme *Ulster News*.

²⁵ Robin Walsh, News Editor 1969–74, *UTV at 50*, episode 4, 7th November 2009, aired 6p.m.

²⁶ Interview with Gordon Burns, via phone, 22nd January 2013.

²⁷ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, June 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

²⁸ This was a short lived current affairs series by the company which ran from September 1968 until December of that year.

²⁸ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, September 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

working constitutionally on issues such as education, housing and employment. The Regional Officer argued that the interviews simply provided the Minister for Home Affairs, William Craig, 'with the means whereby he could smear the civil rights movement'.²⁹ The significance of the programme was to increase the following month as tensions within the region came to a head during a civil rights march.

A Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) march was organised to take place in Derry on 5th October and when the parade was banned by Stormont many in the Catholic community threw their support behind the campaign (Prince, 2007).³⁰ On the day marchers came into confrontation with the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) who launched a violent baton charge in which a number of protestors were injured. The violent clashes were covered by both RTÉ and UTV. The BBC had however decided to use RTÉ's film as it was much more dramatic (Cathcart, 1984; Pettitt, 2000). The local *Derry Journal* reported that a UTV camera crew was sprayed with a water canon which had been brought in to deal with marchers (Bardon, 1992: 655). RTÉ's film was screened throughout the world, resulting in massive local and international media coverage (Cathcart, 1984; McCann, 1993; Butler, 1995; Ó Dochartaigh, 1997; Pettitt, 2000). For UTV, the Managing Director argues that the entire focus of the company's television values shifted: 'From that moment our world changed. The company which I had called a 'fun factory', the purveyor of popular entertainment to the people of Ulster, swiftly became a current affairs machine' (Henderson, 2003: 128).

The October 5th riots presented substantial problems in relation to the Television Act (1964) and required 'balance' for UTV, as the Managing Director was made acutely aware of when listening to one of his camera crew who had returned to Belfast with film of the event: 'It was as I listened to his account of the day that the complexities of the situation dawned on me. I saw that we could be used by others to project the images which they wanted to see broadcast. It might be the police or army, it might be Loyalists or Republicans, it might be politicians or rioters; we would have to be careful' (Henderson, 2003: 128–129). Analysing UTV's coverage of the event the Regional Officer argued that initially 'UTV reporting was heavily weighted on the side of the civil rights protestors'³¹ and interviews which UTV had carried out with victims of the riots 'all presented a formidable indictment of the Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig'.³² Interviewed after the riots, MP Gerry Fitt argues that there was no justification for the force used against the protestors: 'I do not believe that the police should have used brutality the way they did this afternoon. It is obvious that in this city of Derry which is so symbolic of all the inherent injustices which are contained within Unionism that they could not afford to let the people of Derry take a stand'. Fitt was filmed after the riot with blood still running from his head from a baton injury. This image conjures up for the audience associ-

³⁰ A last desperate attempt to convince Craig to reverse his order was launched by Eddie McAteer. In a lengthy telephone conversation, the Leader of the Opposition tried to persuade the Minister that such an action would be in both their interests. As the independent commission of inquiry later concluded, the march would have been a 'very small and comparatively insignificant affair' that would have passed off 'without incident' (Prince, 2007: 160).

³¹ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, September 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

³² Ibid.

ations with cruelty, persecution and injustice. These associations would become apparent not only in Northern Ireland and Britain but across the world as the campaign became more visible, tapping into the ideology associated with the Black American civil rights movement under Martin Luther King and imitated internationally by the student protest movement.

In contrast to this, interviewed the day after, Minister of Home Affairs William Craig argues that the actions of the police were only as a direct result of the fact that protestors defied an order by the police to avoid marching through certain restricted areas of the city and as a result gave the force no option but to take action in order to prevent serious consequences of their action: 'it was only when they started to force their way through that the police found it necessary to draw their truncheons and to take positive action to stop them – and I think that they did with great tact and discretion'. However, the interviewer uses this information and endeavours to draw an admission from Craig that violence was used by the police force: 'So ... you can't deny that violence was used by the police?' Craig attests that from the outset it was evident that the occasion 'was planned to create disorder', expressing Unionist frustration and anger at the media attention which the civil rights movement, as well as Republican paramilitary organisations has received. Quoting the recent *It's All Happening* interview with IRA leaders in Dublin Craig argues that they made it clear 'physical force was still on their minds' and that not only was this unsettling, but more disturbing was the fact that they 'were thinking of using all sorts of fronts and organisations to create conditions of unrest so that they could come in with physical force and hope to enjoy some support from the traditional Nationalist feeling in this country'.

In the days immediately following 5th of October, a significant case was being built against the police force for its actions on the day, evident throughout UTV interviews. One local protestor, Mr. Gillespie, upon being asked to describe the attitude of the police affirms that 'They were very vicious ... some of them seemed to be scared and some of them just seemed, just brutal you know'.³³ The views of Mr. Gillespie were also expounded by Eamonn McCann, a member of the local Labour Party executive in Derry at the time, who expressed his disbelief that the events have occurred within the city:

Well I can say that I was shocked and horrified at the senseless and mindless brutality of the RUC in Duke Street and the Diamond yesterday. We had expected some effort of some sort by the police to enforce the British restriction order, but in my wildest dreams I never imagined the mindless brutality which I witnessed in Duke Street yesterday could take place in Derry city.³⁴

Despite what would appear to be a weighted bias towards the civil rights protestors in coverage of the Derry trouble on 5th of October, later that week it 'became necessary for UTV to be careful from swinging into imbalance in the other direction'³⁵ when the Minister for Home Affairs and the Prime Minister, Terence O'

³³ This interview was most likely broadcast as part of *UlsterNews* at 6 p.m. While it appears to have been edited for air this cannot be confirmed.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland Report, October 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

Neill, were interviewed for a special programme, initially slotted to have twenty minutes of coverage within the half-hour production. After discussion between the ITA in Belfast and UTV it was decided that twelve minutes was adequate, the Regional Officer concluding that ‘the programme which emerged was a very competent impartial survey of the whole affair’.³⁶ This incident highlights UTV’s almost knee-jerk reaction to the discovery of its ‘bias’ coverage of events and attempts to redress the balance throughout coverage surrounding events in Derry.

In a seemingly pre-emptive move, the immediate dismissal of UTV’s current affairs series *It’s all Happening* from the programme schedule came in the same month that Northern Ireland was thrust into the media spotlight. The Regional Officer noted that while some of the series produces good television it seemed ‘to have a penchant for arousing troubles in some quarter each week’.³⁷ The 5th October riots had created massive media interest along with particular concern within London and Dublin and it appeared that ‘A historic opportunity had arisen to pressurise the Stormont government to respond to long-standing grievances ...’ (Ó Dochartaigh, 1997: 21–22).

‘We’re determined to hold it out here’: The Battle of the Bogside

Following continued and persistent antagonism and violence throughout the spring and summer of 1969, on 12th August 1969 a large group of Catholic youths gathered on the edge of the Bogside in opposition to the annual Apprentice Boys’ parade. The two crowds were separated by the RUC and a small line of Derry Citizens Defence Association (or Committee) (DCDC)³⁸ stewards, but this was not sufficient to contain the protestors and bring the situation under control (Ó Dochartaigh, 1997: 119).³⁹ It had become apparent that the RUC were not adequately equipped to control the situation unless they used firearms and the support of the B Specials. For Catholics, their concern was now the matter of ‘defence’, and by the morning of the 13th resistance was extensive. This resistance is evident in an ITN interview carried out on the 13th with young ‘defenders’ of the Bogside:

Reporter: What do you think of the situation in the Bogside now?

Male Interviewee 1: We don’t know what to do ... we’re determined to hold it out here.

Reporter: Have you been throwing firebombs across the barricades?

Male Interviewee 1: Yeah we have thrown everything.

Reporter: Do you think the police are going to try to come in here?

Male Interviewee 2: The police are afraid to come in here. They’re afraid for if the police come in here they mightn’t be fit to get out of here across those barricades.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ A group set up in July 1969 with the aim of defending the Catholic areas of Derry against what it viewed as attacks by members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the ‘B’-Specials. The DCDA was active in erecting barricades, organising patrols of what became known as ‘Free Derry’ (a ‘no-go’ area) (<http://www.cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/dorgan.htm>) [accessed 25/4/2010].

³⁹ See also: Bardon, 1992: 666–67.

⁴⁰ Most likely broadcast as part of ITN’s *News at 5.45*.

A local UTV interview with Nationalist MP John Hume on the same day attempted to link the continuing violence with the civil rights movement. It questioned the legitimacy of those who had attacked the Apprentice Boys parade and the stewards who had been placed to control any outbreaks of violence:

Reporter Ian Sanderson: Would you not agree that the civil rights demonstration on October 5th really started the trouble?

Hume: Well of course I could go back and argue with you and say the trouble started fifty years ago and has lasted fifty years because of a Government that has refused to deal with the situation. The civil rights movement on the streets is an absolute genuine movement seeking justice for all. It was met with physical force and that first act of the Northern Ireland government ... My advice now is that the Stormont government is not capable of providing a political solution to this problem ... their outrageous decision this morning after allowing the 12th in the face of the advice they were given and the banning everything else shows that they are totally insensitive to opinion that is opposed to them ... unfortunately our opinions have gone too far apart for them to provide a political solution and it must come from outside.

Sanderson: I think you will agree that there was no provocation during the Apprentice Boys march yesterday by the Apprentice Boys themselves?

Hume: Well of course I didn't go anywhere near the Apprentice Boys march myself, in case that my presence might be a provocation, so I didn't see the march at all.

Sanderson: Who are these people that have started throwing stones and who are now behind the barricades still throwing stones?

Hume: Well of course there are a lot more people behind the barricades than were there yesterday afternoon and they are largely made up of residents of the whole area ... There's an awful lot of people there now and they are all incensed and angered.

Sanderson: What happened to the band of stewards who were supposed to be keeping the peace yesterday in the Bogside area?

Hume: The band of stewards were there and worked very hard but were unable to control the situation.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from these interviews conducted during the period of the Battle of the Bogside. Firstly, action taken by the RUC appears to be justified because of the lawlessness of the rioters. The final comment by one of the Bogside's 'defenders' even appears to suggest that they would resort to criminal action in an effort to deal with the RUC: 'They're afraid for if the police come in here they mightn't be fit to get out of here across those barricades'. Attempts are made to discredit the civil rights movement and the legitimacy of its cause is questioned. This sits in contrast to earlier interviews with civil rights activists which UTV had filmed on October 5th. The 'formidable indictment' of the Minister for Home Affairs and RUC which previous interviews had presented was no longer evident.

During the 'Battle of the Bogside' many people in both Derry and Belfast, the majority of who were Catholics, were forced to flee their homes (Coogan, 1995: 106).

On 18th August UTV reported from a Refugee centre in Andersonstown in West Belfast getting reaction from fleeing families. Interviews highlighted in particular the plight of mothers trying to look after their children amid the violence and chaos. Ian Sanderson interviews one Catholic mother who was given an hour to evacuate her family or face being burnt from their home:

I was coming back from a shop and a man stopped me. I don't know who he was, I never seen him in my life before. He said to me are you from Eglinton Street maisonettes? I said yes and he said well we want you out in half an hour, he says we're going to burn you out if you're not out. Well I have five children so the first thing I done was went up and grabbed the five children; I just came right out of it.⁴¹

A Protestant mother forced from her home in Matchett Street also indicated her fears of how the violence is impacting her young children: 'My children's nerves are wrecked for even up here they have been up every night and I can't get them calmed down at all. I haven't even got to sleep or nothing else, trying to cope with them through the day and through the night too'.⁴²

Events throughout this period brought concern for local news teams. The vast majority of those forced to flee their homes, as mentioned, were Catholics. The question posed within news departments was whether the public should be informed of this information. The decision taken by both UTV and BBC was that this would not be mentioned but UTV did mention areas where the refugees were from, thus informing their audience covertly who the refugees were. It was later admitted by the BBC that they had not covered this incident accurately:

We made a mistake ... in 1969, in the August of that year when Catholics were burned out of their homes in the Falls by Protestants who attacked them from Shankill. The BBC reports then gave no indication of who these refugees were. They just spoke of refugees. The public was not to know whether they were Catholic or Protestant or who was attacking whom. That has subsequently been seen to be a grave mistake, and in eight years of reporting this thing, on and off, that was probably the only time when I was stopped by the powers above from saying what I wanted to say and what I have kept saying ... (Bell, 1979; cited in Cathcart, 1984: 211–212).

Adapting Policy

In the week following the August rioting UTV made a number of policy decisions regarding the circumstances in which the region found itself. They were as follows:

1. The company would go over to an entirely hard news situation. No attempt would be made to solicit comment. Television would not provide a platform for

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. Various interviews with government members during this period highly condemned this intimidation. In particular, Tom Cromie, placed in charge of the new body of the Public Protection Authority in a UTV interview aired 9th September 1969 stressed '... those carrying out intimidation of families 'just aren't respectable persons at all'.

any of the activists involved. Ministerial statements would be taken on their news value and Opposition comments would not be sought. If, however, public statements were made by significant parties about Ministerial statements then they would be covered, once again on their news value.

2. Outside cameramen and reporters were given a very clear direction that if they found themselves in immediate danger they should get out of it promptly. Hitherto they have had the right as individuals to decide for themselves, now they act on company order.⁴³
3. Internal security measures were greatly strengthened. Lower windows were boarded up where this was necessary and no interviews with activists were contemplated within Havelock House.⁴⁴
4. The company agreed to interrupt programmes and go to news bulletins and have news flashes at programme breaks (similar to the BBC policy).⁴⁵

The hard news policy adopted was, however, to be short lived. In the same month concerns were raised that, in adopting the policy, the news team were failing to reveal 'some of the potent forces operating in this society'.⁴⁶ After discussions the company once again 'began to move away from the rigours of hard news reporting'.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Developing tensions within Northern Ireland during the mid-1960s placed considerable strain on UTV, which, like the local BBC service, came under political pressure. While, as a commercial broadcaster UTV did have more flexibility to pursue their own policies and agenda, it appears that the company did, to an extent, submit to

⁴³ The Regional Officer highlights the stress placed upon staff resulting from events 'The truth is that none of the UTV cameramen or reporters were hired as war correspondents' and informs the ITA that one senior reporter had a nervous breakdown with a number of cameramen who were attacked in Derry with one left unconscious. Issues with this particular policy were also raised 'if this was to be carried out too effectively the Company's duty to the present a news service to the region might be impaired and that, although while the measures are understood it leads to concern over the adequacy of their news coverage' (ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports—Northern Ireland, 13th–19th August 1969. Policy Files, Volumes 3 and 4. File Reference: 3095/4/6).

⁴⁴ There was also a fear within UTV that Havelock House itself may come under direct attack. The reason for this was that on the Saturday before the policy decisions were taken a petrol bomb had been thrown in the street next to the building just as members of staff were entering the building. While it may not have been deliberate it gave the company cause for concern as it coincided with a number of vicious telephone threats. They took the decision to place regular RUC men on guard that night and the next.

⁴⁵ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, 13th–19th August 1969. Policy Files, Volumes 3 and 4. File Reference: 3095/4/6. See also IBA Paper 103(69) *The Impact of the Ulster Crisis*. Northern Ireland Troubles General Reports. Programme Files, Volumes 1–6 File Reference: 5005/16.

⁴⁶ ITA's Regional Officer Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, September 1969. Policy Files, Volumes 3 and 4. File Reference: 3095/4/6 This had also been noted at the Northern Ireland Committee meeting held on 1st September when a member questioned the Regional Officer on UTV's current policy arguing that by 'reporting freely and truly on moderate opinion alone the company may be held responsible for letting people know of the seriousness of the situation' stating 'ought they to show people like Paisley, McKeague and the IRA to warn the population that activities like these exist' (NIC minutes 87 (69). Authority Committee Minutes and Papers, Volumes 1–14. File Reference: 34(60)–280(90)). While this was defended at the meeting it appears that the regional officer took heed of this discussion.

⁴⁷ ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, September 1969. Policy Files, Volumes 3 and 4. File Reference: 3095/4/6.

this pressure by employing a pre-emptive censorship strategy within its current affairs programming. The decision to axe *Flashpoint* from the programme schedule in January 1967 supports this assertion. Criticism of the programmes emotiveness, noted by the Regional Officer, and condemnation of the ‘sledgehammer’ tactics, allegedly adopted by its interviewers, cannot have been comforting to the management of the company who were all too aware of the commercial consequences which such criticism could have on their business. *Flashpoint*’s director and producer Derek Bailey argued that it was *Flashpoint*’s critics and rivals who got their intended outcome: ‘Some people might have been reluctant to appear on *Flashpoint* maybe because at one time we did get a reputation for sledgehammer tactics. Yet there are those who welcomed this approach and it is they, not the programme, who have won out in the end’.⁴⁸ UTV’s position as a commercial broadcaster, it cannot be denied, had an impact on management’s decision to axe the popular current affairs series. As Butler (1995) has noted, UTV could not afford to alienate either community within Northern Ireland, an essential section of its market. Its necessity to appeal to the whole of Northern Ireland was also crucial for securing advertising deals with sponsors throughout the whole of Ireland, ensuring the company’s survival.

Nonetheless, when a NIACRA march on 5th October resulted in fierce clashes and rioting with the RUC, news and current affairs coverage of the event was unavoidable. The company, as it had in the early 1960s (Butler, 1995), could not accentuate moderate voices in the hope of reconciliation, instead having to accept that both sides of the emerging disorder would have to be provided with ‘balanced and impartial’ coverage. When the company realised that it had not provided this in the aftermath of 5th October they quickly attempted to redress this in an effort to avoid criticism and enflaming tensions.⁴⁹ The removal of the new current affairs series *It’s All Happening* the same month as the outbreak of violence again appears to have been a pre-emptive move by the company.

As the Battle of the Bogside resulted in the forced fleeing of communities from their homes, UTV’s human interest angle becomes increasingly apparent through its news interviews which were focused on the effects of violence on the domestic environment of the family home. After these events UTV adopted a ‘hard-news’ base in order to avoid providing a platform for ‘activists’ involved in inciting trouble. This ‘hard news base’ used by the local BBC service however, was to remain short lived as the company returned to its community relations strategy. This was a position which UTV were clearly more comfortable with and made a conscious decision to adopt and promote, already influenced by the news values of the Independent Television Network. It was however, still forced to ensure that it met the requirements of public service broadcasting to inform, educate and entertain and reported events according to their political significance. As David Butler explains, in Northern Ireland, this is an ‘irreconcilable object’ (Butler, 1995: 74). As much as possible UTV attempted to avoid, where it could, political debate considered ‘bad for business’ (Butler, 1995: 45).

⁴⁸ *Ireland’s Saturday Night Weekend Magazine*, 14th June 2010.

⁴⁹ ITA’s Regional Officer’s Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, September 1968. Policy Files, Volumes 1 and 2. File Reference: 29.

AUTHOR

Orla Lafferty is a PhD researcher in media studies at the University of Ulster.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Don (2009) *50 Years of UTV*. Great Britain: Gill and Macmillan.
- Bardon, Jonathan (1992) *A History of Ulster*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.
- Briggs, Asa (1985) *The BBC: A short history of the first 50 years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, David Ellis (1995) *The Trouble with reporting Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Cathcart, Rex (1984) *The most contrary region: the BBC in Northern Ireland 1924–1984*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.
- Cherry, Simon (2005) *ITV – the people's channel: ITV at 50*. London: Reynolds and Hearn.
- Coogan, Tim Pat (1995). *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966–1996 and the Search for Peace*. London: Hutchinson.
- Curtis, Liz (1998) *Ireland The Propaganda War: The British Media and the Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Updated ed.). London: Pluto Press Limited.
- Fisk, Robert (1975) *The Point of No Return: The Strike Which Broke the British in Ulster*. London: Times Books.
- Graham, Godfrey (2005) *Forty years behind the lens at RTÉ 1936–*. Dublin: Ashfield Press.
- Hajowski, Thomas (2010) *The BBC and national identity in Britain, 1922–1953*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Henderson, Brum (2003) *Brum: A life in television*. Belfast: Appletree Press Ltd.
- Hill, John (2006) *Cinema and Northern Ireland*. London: British Film Institute.
- Horgan, John (2004) *Broadcasting and public life: RTE news and current affairs, 1926–1997*. Dublin: Four Courts.
- Ivory, Gareth (2012) *RTÉ and the coverage of Northern Ireland on television news bulletins in the early years of the troubles*. Irish Communications Review Volume 13 p.31–51. (online) Available at: <http://dit.ie/icr/media/ditcr/documents/3%20Ivory.pdf>. [Accessed 02/10/2012].
- Johnson, C. and Turnock, R. (2005) *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over fifty years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Kinsella, Patrick (2007) War and peace on the screen: television representations of conflict in Ireland in Horgan et al. (eds), *Mapping Irish Media: Critical Explorations*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- McCann, Eamonn (1993) *War and an Irish Town*. (3rd ed.) London: Pluto Press.
- McLoone, Martin (ed.). (1996) *Broadcasting in a divided community: Seventy years of the BBC in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University Belfast.
- Milland, Jeffrey (2004) Courting Malvolio: The Background to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, 1960–1962. *Journal of Contemporary British History*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (online) Available at: <http://media-ucn.co.uk/Seminar%20Readings/Soc%202004/cbh%20pilkingtoncmtee.pdf> [Accessed 03/12/2012].
- Ó Dochartaigh, Niall (1997). *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- Pettitt, Lance (2000) *Screening Ireland: film and television representation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Potter, Jeremy (1990) *Independent Television in Britain Vol 4: Companies and Programmes 1968–80*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Prince, Simon (2007) *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Schlesinger, Philip (1978) *Putting 'reality' together: BBC news*. London: Methuen.
- Sendall, Bernard (1983) *Independent Television in Britain Vol 2: Expansion and Change 1958–68*. London: Macmillan.

List of UTV footage (In in order of discussion)

Reporter Bill McGookin piece to camera discussing Prime Minister Terence O'Neill's statement on 'Paisleyism', 21st June 1966, most likely broadcast during *UlsterNews* at 6p.m.

It's All Happening, 17th September 1968, Interview with IRA leaders in Dublin, aired at 8:15p.m.

Interview Gerry Fitt discussing outbreak of violence after civil riots march, 5th October 1968, most likely first broadcast during ITV's five minute Saturday weekend news bulletins at 6:10p.m. and 9.45p.m, although both UTV and the network may have had breaking news flashes throughout the day.

Interview William Craig, 6th October 1968, discussing outbreak of violence after civil rights march, most likely first broadcast during ITV's Sunday weekend news bulletins at 6.00p.m. and 10.10p.m.

Interview with local protestor Mr. Gillespie, 6th October 1968, discussing outbreak of violence after civil rights march, most likely first broadcast during ITV's Sunday weekend news bulletins at 6.00p.m. and 10.10p.m.

Interview with Eamonn McCann discussing outbreak of violence after civil rights march, 6th October 1968, most likely first broadcast during ITV's Sunday weekend news bulletins at 6.00p.m. and 10.10p.m.

Interviews with businessmen in Derry following outbreak of violence after civil rights march 1968, most likely broadcast on 7th October 1968 during *UlsterNews*, aired at 6p.m.

Special programme investigating outbreak of violence after civil rights march on 5th October 1968. A specific date and time of broadcast of this programme cannot be determined.

ITN interviews with 'defenders of the bogside', 13th August 1969, most likely broadcast during *News at 5.50*.

Interview with John Hume on rioting, 13th August 1969, most likely broadcast during *UTV Reports*, aired 6p.m.

Report from St. Theresa's refugee centre in Andersonstown and interviews with refugees, 18th August 1969, most likely broadcast during *UTV Reports*, aired at 6p.m.

UTV Series

Flashpoint January 1967–March 1968.

It's all Happening September 1968–December 1968.

Newsview November 1962–November 1963.

Roundabout November 1959–September 1962.

The Troubles I've Seen October/November 2012.

UTV Reports – First Series replaced *Flashpoint* in April 1968–June 1968.

Second Series began January 1969–1978.

ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive files (Originating from Bournemouth University).

ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, 1st January 1962–31st December 1968. Policy Files, Volumes: 1 and 2. File Reference: 29. Box Number: IA2462–1A2464.

ITA's Regional Officer's Monthly Reports – Northern Ireland, 1st January 1969–1st December 1971. Policy Files, Volumes: 3 and 4. File Reference: 3095/4/6. Box number: IBA/01043.

Websites

Cain.ulster.ac.uk (1996) *Abstracts of Organisations–'D'*. Available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/oth-lem/organ/dorgan.htm> [Accessed 25/04/2010].