

# 'Terrorism' and the state: a case study of the discourses of television

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## Introduction

The legitimacy of the liberal-democratic state is no settled question. At the best of times, when peace and prosperity might appear to be the natural order of things, the state seems unshakable, and the mobilization of popular consent through the medium of representative institutions to be an adequate expression of its solid foundations in civil society. This smooth functioning, however, is sustained by a considerable and continuous process of ideological labour—one which is thrown into relief as we enter a period of crisis. In the present period of profound economic dislocation dating from the early 1970s, Western capitalist democracies are undergoing complex and manifold processes of recomposition of the state and civil society. The question of how ideological processes work to sustain the legitimacy of the social order is now of especial interest.

Within liberal-democratic political thought, the state is usually understood to derive its legitimacy from its constitutionality, from fair and free elections, its foundations in rational legal norms respecting individual rights, and an adherence to the rule of law. Much less emphasised is the place of force, or of 'legitimate violence', in the preservation of the social order. Thus, for instance, in the sophisticated liberal apologetics of Poggi (1978), or even in the radical democratic theorizing of MacPherson (1977), the state's repressive face is largely ignored.

But as Gramsci has noted, drawing upon the tradition which stems from Machiavelli, the political domain must be understood as combining both coercion and consent. This point was also clearly understood by Max Weber who conceived of the state as a 'compulsory association with a territorial basis' in which the use of force is regarded as legitimate only in so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it: 'The claim of the modern state to monopolise the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous association' (Weber, 1947: 156).

Of course, this general characterization extends well beyond the liberal-democratic state form itself. But Weber's comment that the state lays claim to the 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order' (ibid.: 154) is entirely consonant with a perspective which recognises the combination of coercion and consent in the practice of the liberal-democratic state. Such a

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perspective, as Sol Picciotto rightly notes, is but the starting-point for further investigation since 'the mere combination of the contradictory ideas of consent and coercion does not help to explain what form of coercion is involved, nor how consent is obtained' (Picciotto, 1979: 165).

Nevertheless, those contradictory moments of force and fraud, of repression and ideological hegemony, while needing precise definition in any given set of circumstances, pose inherent problems for the system of ideological representations in a liberal democracy. For if the state swims in the seas of its own legality and legitimacy and emphasizes the moment of consent, how then should politicians, intellectuals and the mass media represent the moment of coercion when the state has recourse to force? Moreover, how should violence which comes up against, or even transgresses the bounds of legality be handled? It is precisely this problem we seek to address in this paper, in which we focus upon how British television variously represents the question of 'terrorism'.

## Discourses upon terror: official, alternative and oppositional

As Luigi Bonanate has observed, 'deciding whether an action is terrorist . . . is more the result of a verdict than the establishing of a fact; the formulating of a social judgement rather than the description of a set of phenomena' (Bonanate, 1979a: 197). As an essential starting point we have to consider questions of definitional power, how what Chomsky and Herman (1979) call the 'semantics of "terror"' are discursively organized. We will begin by suggesting that it is useful to analyze discourses about terrorism in terms of three ideal types, which we will label the *Official*, *Alternative* and *Oppositional*.

The *Official discourse* emanates from within the state and is further elaborated by intellectuals engaged in the propaganda war against 'terrorism'. Of particular importance in Britain has been the persistent effort to deny any political character to the armed struggle of Irish republicanism and the insistence upon its criminality. Mrs Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, made this point forcibly in a speech delivered in May 1981. Speaking of the killing of some British soldiers in Northern Ireland (she used the term 'murder'), Mrs Thatcher said:

I hope that when their murderers have been tried and convicted, no one will claim that they are entitled to special privileges—which is what political status means—when they serve their prison sentences.

Of especial interest for our purposes is the way in which she linked her general characterization of terrorism to a view of what a responsible press and broadcasting will do:

They must, of course, report the facts. Nothing would be more damaging than misinformation and lack of balance. Yet the line is hard to draw for terrorism needs publicity. Newspaper and television coverage can provoke the very reaction the terrorist seeks. It can give the convicted criminals on hunger strike the myth of martyrdom they crave, but the true martyrs are the victims of terrorism (31st Annual Conservative Women's Conference, our emphasis).

Mrs Thatcher defined a desirable focus away from the false martyrs to the true. It is surely no coincidence that shortly after her speech both television organizations (and in particular the BBC) began to present a more victimological view of the Northern Ireland situation, emphasizing in particular the funerals of soldiers and of innocent civilians. Nor is it coincidental that in the fortnight after Mrs

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Thatcher's speech a Granada television programme, *Lying in State*, which examined both the Provisional IRA's and the Government's propaganda campaign, was withdrawn after a radical change was demanded by the Independent Broadcasting Authority.<sup>1</sup> This instance illustrates how a given definition injected into public debate at the same time as state pressure, indirectly shapes what television is able to show. But because of the mechanisms employed, the state itself is not open to accusations of overt censorship.<sup>2</sup> It is by repeated interventions of this kind, at different points in the system, that the Official view is sustained.

Aside from the persistent effort to portray politically motivated violence as criminal and lacking in rationality, a further dimension of the Official discourse involves the association of terrorism with communist subversion. The use of communism as a cultural category in the West may be analysed in terms of four major themes which are closely akin to those which predominate in wartime propaganda against an enemy. Those identified as *different*, as not proper members of society, are always a potential enemy. The more *threatening* the behaviour of these outsiders seems, the more clearly is the internal enemy identified. But the continuing presence and support of such outsiders has to be accounted for. Within the society's terms, such support as they may find is *irrational*. On some occasions the *similarity* of outsiders to ourselves may be stressed as a way of countering the positive claims of enemy ideology.<sup>3</sup> The first three of these structures of interpretations are broadly homologous with those used against terrorism.

A particularly clear illustration of the claimed fusion between communism and terrorism was given by the Reagan administration, inaugurating its new tough-sounding antisovietism at the beginning of 1981. According to the US Secretary of State, Mr Alexander Haig, 'International terrorism will take the place of human rights in our concern because it is the ultimate abuse of human rights.' The mobilization of 'international terrorism' as part of the foreign policy rhetoric of the major Western power indicates a serious effort to market a new ideological tool—one which is monistic, ubiquitous, and conveniently off-the-shelf. Quite diverse manifestations of political violence around the globe, from El Salvador to Namibia, are interpreted as instances of a global Soviet design for world domination.

The terrorist is the polar example of the extremist, a fanatic and psychopath who lies beyond the pale of the comprehensible, rational politics of a liberal democracy. A particular sign of this exclusion from the humane tradition is the terrorist's disregard for the value of individual human life, and his supposed necessary indiscriminacy in taking it.<sup>4</sup> This perception plays itself out against the view of the state as the embodiment of constitutional practice. It is precisely at this point, however, that the problems of legitimization arise: for the picture of the benign state versus evil terror can be challenged by introducing the concept of state repression or even state terror.

It is here that *Alternatives* appear to challenge the Official discourse. These alternatives derive from civil libertarians, critical academics, foreign policy experts and opposition politicians. All accept the ideal of a nonviolent, liberal-democratic state and reject the use of violence to pursue political ends. This means the alternatives do not offer a fundamental challenge to the claims to legitimacy found in the official discourse. Instead they develop piecemeal challenges at two points. First they question whether the state lives up to its democratic and nonviolent ideals. The more the state adopts repressive measures against its citizens the more do these

ideals become tarnished. Second, alternative spokespeople question the official strategy of repressing and exorcising terrorism, advocating instead strategies of political and social engineering designed to defuse the violence and tackle its causes. Arguments posed within the alternative perspective tend to question the human costs of war as against the technicized language of international strategy. This may lead to a far-reaching realignment of the concept of international terrorism, away from pure cold war connotations *à la* Reagan and Haig. Luigi Bonanate, for instance, places at the centre of analysis the 'balance of terror' (Bonanate, 1979*b*: 60):

It is the sharpest and most overall form of terror, the so-called *balance of terror*, whose relationship to the structure of the international system is so tight that this peculiar form of balance has been considered the fundamental condition for the survival of humanity in a thermonuclear war.

In this optic, it is the strategic relations between the superpowers, and the possibility of mass destruction which is the yardstick against which internal terrorism is judged, significantly diminishing its importance on the international level, and also questioning its efficacy at that of the nation-state.

Finally, we need to consider the ways in which these latter aspects of the alternative perspective are extended and developed into an *Oppositional* viewpoint which justifies the use of violence in the pursuit of political ends. Basically, there are two cases which have been argued by terrorists and their spokespeople or which they have attempted to demonstrate through their actions by the propaganda of the deed<sup>5</sup> or by exposing the hypocrisy of the state's claims to legitimacy. The first justification for political violence is that politically and/or economically the state is a repressive organization practising state terror, and in these circumstances any other form of political action is impossible or ineffective. The second justification is national or sectional liberation in cases where the state can be said to have adopted a colonial rôle towards another people or towards a section of its own population. The subjugation of other peoples may take the form of economic imperialism rather than colonial administration and so be carried out through intermediaries such as client states and dependent governments. In this second case warfare becomes a realistic metaphor for the insurgents to adopt although it is continually rejected by the authorities. It is a metaphor which confers legitimacy upon the insurgents by making their struggle one for territorial self-determination. The terrorist thus claims the rôle of an enemy with defined but limited war objectives. In the first case, however, the aim is the complete overthrow of the state and its political and economic system. Such distinctions are important in considering the cases made by different opposition groups but they are distinctions which are not drawn within the official discourse. Indeed the official discourse specifically rejects them, focusing instead on the violent quality of the acts involved and the loss of life or material and psychic damage which these entail.

#### 'Open' and 'closed' presentations

The official discourse and the alternative and oppositional replies furnish the images, arguments and points of reference around which television's presentations of terrorism and the state's responses are organized. But they do not pass through the television system like a stone through water. The raw ideological material they provide has to be actively worked on and turned into watchable television. This

production process is subject to a variety of constraints, ranging from political and market pressures, through restrictions of time and resources, to the limits set by the rules and conventions which define 'good' practice within particular programme forms. Since these constraints operate in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity in different parts of the programme system, presentations of terrorism turn out to be a good deal more diverse and complex than the simpler assumptions about television's relation to the state and to a dominant ideology would predict.

Some types of programming (such as news bulletins and action-adventure series) are relatively *closed* and operate mainly or wholly within the terms of reference set by the official discourse. But other forms (such as 'authored' documentaries and single plays) are relatively *open* in the sense that they provide spaces in which the core assumptions of the official discourse can be interrogated and contested, and alternative and even oppositional themes presented and examined. Before we look at the mechanisms through which these openings and closures operate, however, we need to itemize the major forms of programming dealt with in this study, and to outline the conditions under which they operate.

### Forms of actuality television

From the initial distinction between news and current affairs output, almost universal among broadcasting organizations, a variety of different forms have developed within actuality television, the main ones of which are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. *The major forms of actuality television*

Examples	Programme form		
	news bulletin	news magazine	current affairs
	<i>News at Ten</i> (ITV)	<i>Nationwide</i> (BBC1)	<i>Panorama</i> (BBC1)
	<i>BBC News</i>	<i>Newsnight</i> (BBC2)	<i>TV Eye</i> (ITV)
Frequency	daily	daily	weekly
Item length	short (news story)	short (programme item)	long (programme theme)
Presentation techniques	visual clips brief interviews	short film report/studio interview	film report studio discussion
Presenter's rôle	reader	reporter/ interviewer	reporter/ chairperson/ interviewer
Programme identified with	the broadcasting organization	the production team	the production team
Preservation structure	relatively closed	relatively closed	an individual presenter/producer relatively open

Because of the mass audience it attracts and the potential influence on public opinion that this confers, broadcast news has, from the beginning, been hedged around with a powerful set of formal requirements. In Britain both the BBC and the commercial television companies are obliged to present all their news with due accuracy and impartiality and to preserve impartiality in all programmes dealing with matters of political controversy. Since it is news output that attracts the most attention and scrutiny from politicians it is here that the authority and credibility of the broadcasting organizations is most exposed. Consequently, adherence to the rubrics of objectivity and impartiality is as much a matter of institutional survival as of external pressure. By cementing an image of the broadcasters as politically responsible these help to strengthen claims to autonomy and to forestall attempts to impose more stringent controls on their operations. This framework of constraints, however, produces a form of news which appears as a factual report of events happening in the world, rendered in a style that conceals the processes of selection and decision involved in the reports and allows the least room for comment and argumentation. The opinions of selected 'others' outside the broadcasting organizations are presented, but they are almost always confined to the holders of power in the major institutional domains: government ministers and politicians from the major parties; senior members of the police force and the judiciary; trade union leaders; the heads of employers' organizations; and the spokespersons of 'accredited' pressure and interest groups such as churches and professional organizations. As a result, news is one of the more 'closed' forms of presentation and operates almost exclusively within the terms of the official discourse.<sup>6</sup>

News magazine and current affairs programmes have developed as a complement to the news bulletins and are designed to provide space for longer, more reflective treatment of the day-to-day issues of social management. Nevertheless, they remain closely tied to news and are subject to many of the same constraints. They generally take their topics from some recent or forthcoming news event, and they tend to draw on the same cast of spokespersons. Although the rubric of balance and the easing of time constraints ensures that a wider spread of opinions is presented, the range generally remains confined to the positions taken up within the main political parties and 'accredited' interest groups and comparatively little attention is paid to views falling outside this range. Occasionally, these bounds are broken as in the instance (discussed below) when a spokesman for the Irish National Liberation Army was interviewed on the BBC daily news magazine *Tonight*. But these cases are the exception rather than the rule and they invariably provoke heated debate on the legitimacy of giving air-time to enemies of the state.

Within the 'normal' confines of the standard news magazine and current affairs formats, however, there are still important variations of emphasis. These can be seen in the different ways in which presenters perform their rôles of chairperson and interviewer. They may, for example, present themselves as populist spokespersons, articulating what they take to be the prevailing fears and preoccupations of 'ordinary viewers', and basing their questions on some supposed commonsense consensus on the issue (which places the discussion firmly within the parameters of the official discourse). Or, they may choose the rôle of devil's advocate, quizzing their Establishment witnesses from a perspective which incorporates alternative or even oppositional elements. Though here again, there are significant variations in the way this rôle is performed. Presenters may be deferential and apologetic, pre-

facing their remarks with phrases like 'Some people would argue . . .', or they may be more direct and obtrusive as in 'But surely you do not mean to tell me that . . .'. The aggressive style is most apparent when the witness is putting an alternative or oppositional view as in the interview with the Sinn Féin spokesman on *Newsnight* discussed below.

In choosing between these various rôles presenters are constrained in important ways by the programme's place in the schedules and by the kind of audience it is aimed at. The BBC's early evening news magazine, *Nationwide*, for example, goes out on the Corporation's main channel (BBC1) directly after the early evening national news bulletin and regional news round-ups, and plays a key rôle in building and holding a mass audience for the rest of the prime-time output. This strategic position in the ratings battle pushes the programme towards populist forms of presentation and discourse which work with the most widely held images and assumptions in the interests of mobilising the largest possible audience. *Newsnight* in contrast, is transmitted on the minority channel (BBC2) in a slot (10.55–11.40 pm) which is out of prime-time. This location gives it an audience concentrated among those with post-school education and professional and managerial jobs. And since the presenters can assume that they are addressing people much as they would like to see themselves—well informed, open-minded, and sceptical—they feel freer to present issues in a more complex way which allows greater scope for the consideration of alternative views and positions.

Nevertheless, this flexibility remains subject to the constraints which stem from the BBC's 'special relationship' with the state and with notions of nationhood. In Britain there is an important sense in which the BBC, in spite of its independence, is the national broadcasting organization in a way in which the programme companies making up the ITV network are not. This means that the BBC's general current affairs and documentary output is more closely identified with the organization, the organization is more exposed to political and other criticism, and its regular current affairs output is more closely tied to the political agenda of the day. The weekly *Panorama*, for example, is regarded as the BBC's 'flagship' in current affairs. Its topics and techniques are particularly exposed to political scrutiny and censure. It is expected to act as a national forum and deal with the important issues of the day. The regular current affairs output on ITV on the other hand has more freedom to select its own agenda.

At this point, however, we need to introduce a further distinction, between 'tight' and 'loose' programme formats. A 'tight' format is one in which the evidence and argument is organized to converge upon a single preferred interpretation and to close off other possible readings. A 'loose' format, in contrast, is one where the ambiguities, contradictions and loose ends are not fully resolved within the programme, leaving the audience with a choice of available interpretations.

This distinction cuts across our earlier dichotomy between 'open' and 'closed' presentations. A programme may be 'open' in the sense that it provides space for anti-official elements, but 'tight' in the way the material is mobilized on behalf of a particular reading. Usually, but not always, tightness confirms the official discourse. Actuality presentations are generally at their most 'closed' and 'tight' when dealing with contemporary terrorism within the boundaries of the British state. Where the imperatives of national security recede (and with them the concomitant threats of censorship or other state intervention) the possibilities of openness expand. This brings us to the operation of another important factor which we

can call *proximity*. This operates along several dimensions, the first of which is time. Thus, it is possible to cast a dispassionate, even acerbic eye over British activities in Ireland in an historical documentary series such as *The Troubles*, or a drama-documentary such as *The Crime of Captain Colburn*. Historical distance allows for the portrayal of economic exploitation and military brutality, and for the admission of past mistakes and excesses on the part of the British state. In depicting the contemporary situation, however, programme-makers bump up against the operation of proximity in its other main dimensions—the geographical and ideological. Other states' problems with terrorism attract an altogether more critical gaze. However, this geographical factor is heavily overlaid by ideological criteria. Hence, television presentations are likely to be at their most 'open' where insurgency takes place within nondemocratic states in which legitimate channels of dissent are either restricted or closed and in which state repression is a prominent feature of the system of rule. In such cases, where violence against the state may be seen as justified as a tactic of last resort, the label 'terrorist' is likely to be replaced by that of 'guerrilla', 'freedom fighter' or member of the 'Resistance'. In other words, attitudes towards insurgencies are inextricably tied to attitudes towards the regimes in which they take place. Feature films, documentaries and popular television series (such as *Secret Army*), for example, constantly celebrate violent acts of resistance against the Nazi occupation of democratic Europe, which would be unambiguously condemned as terroristic in other contexts. Though documentaries are often grouped in a series or occupy a regular time slot, they are less constrained than the regular current affairs output to follow the political issues of the day. They draw their agenda more widely across the full range of social, political and economic questions and often take the form of enquiries into the workings of particular organizations and social institutions. They rely less on studio presentation of the spokesperson for various legitimated views and opinions, more on sequential reports of the material that the producer has managed to put together on a subject. The rubric of balance requires the producer to take note of the major currents of opinion within the field he is investigating. This requirement has relaxed, however, as the notion of 'balanced output' has taken precedence over 'balanced programme', implying that balance need not be achieved within the single programme but in the output taken as a whole. The space opened up by this relaxation is at its maximum in the 'authored' documentary.

Whereas the news and most of the regular current affairs output are so closely identified with the broadcasting organizations as to be seen as 'their' products, for which they bear collective responsibility, 'authored' documentaries are ascribed to an individual reporter or producer and presented as their particular view of the subject. Accordingly, the commissioning organization is usually at pains to distance itself from the programme, by, for example, announcing at the beginning and end that it represents the personal opinions of the makers. This disavowal in turn licences the presenters to ignore the normal constraints of balance, and to offer their individual views backed by whatever material they can command. In the process, they move out of the normal rôles of observer and reporter and into the rôle of 'author', a rôle they share with the creators of television fiction, and more particularly with the writers of single plays.

### Forms of television fiction

We decided to include the main forms of television fiction in the present study because taken together, they provide the largest single category of programme output and the bulk of the most widely viewed shows. Consequently, any analysis that fails to incorporate them can only ever produce a partial and limited evaluation of television's presentations of terrorism and of their potential impact on popular consciousness and action. But the inclusion of fiction has benefits for analysis beyond greater *comprehensiveness*. It also allows us to *compare* actuality and fictional forms and to begin exploring the continuities and breaks between them. As Bazalgette and Paterson (1980/1981) have shown, certain narrative codes and ideological reference points cut across forms as varied as comic strips, news bulletins and realist drama. However, as we shall see, fictional forms also allow for a range of representations which are largely excluded from actuality programming.

In the first place, television drama is not subject to the strict requirements of objectivity, balance and impartiality and is therefore able to be more partisan. In addition it is able to depict two key groups of political actors who almost never appear in current affairs and documentary programmes—the terrorists themselves and the members of the military and intelligence service with special responsibilities for counter-insurgency operations. Indeed, the battle between the agents of terror and subversion and the forces of national security has been a stock theme of popular fiction since the turn of the century and still provides plots for television.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, certain fictional forms provide a good deal of space for probing the political motivations and rationales of terrorism and raising questions about the legitimacy and legality of the state's repressive responses. Unlike current affairs producers and documentary makers, writers of fiction can circumvent problems of access to clandestine state operations and high security institutions. And they can therefore explore the workings of the 'secret state' from the 'inside'.

Yet fictional presentations are still subject to a number of pressures and constraints stemming from the forms and genres they employ and from their position within the domestic and international market. For several reasons, these factors exert their strongest pressures towards ideological closure on popular *series* that feature a stable set of characters over different, self-contained episodes. Along with sports programmes, old movies, comedy and variety shows, series are at the centre of the battle for mass audiences which means that they are required to work with images and ideological themes that are most familiar and endorsed by the widest range of potential viewers. Consequently, they tend to draw heavily on elements from the official discourse, since these are the most pervasive and best publicized. In the case of programmes like *The Professionals* which are aimed at international as well as domestic markets, this tendency to closure is reinforced. The producers have to find themes that will be intelligible across cultures and especially so in the United States, since it is American sales which are the major factor in profitability. The result is often a kind of 'mid-Atlantic' style which draws heavily on the themes and formats of the action-adventure series (cf. Murdock and Halloran, 1979). This has two obvious advantages in terms of saleability. It ensures a product that is readily intelligible in any culture familiar with American shows, and because it centres on action (chases, fights, escapes) rather than dialogue, it saves the buyer the cost of extensive dubbing or subtitling. But it also has pertinent effects on the way that representations are organized within the programme itself.

The ratings success of a series largely depends on the extent to which the audience identifies with the core characters (and the stars who play them) since it is this that keeps them watching from week to week. This invitation to identify is inscribed in the titles of the programmes—*The Saint*, *The Avengers*, *The Professionals*—and provides the organizing principle around which the narratives are constructed.

The plots revolve around the adventures of the core characters. They are the heroes. The villain's function is to disturb the social and moral order and to present the heroes with puzzles to solve and tasks to be accomplished so that normality can be restored. But the villains do not need to be rounded characters to fulfil this rôle. They simply have to personify threats to order in a readily recognizable form (cf. Palmer, 1978). Consequently, in the action-adventure series, the upholders of order and the agents of disruption are always unequally represented. We know a good deal about the heroes, their private lives, their personalities, past experiences, and existential doubts since each new story can trade off the knowledge presented in past episodes. But we usually know next to nothing about the villains. They appear abruptly at the beginning of the episode and they are purged from the body politic at the end. But they remain drastically undercharacterized, and the action is presented almost exclusively from the heroes' point of view.

In terms of our previous distinctions then, the standard action-adventure series is both relatively 'closed' and relatively 'tight'. It tends to reproduce the emphases of the official discourse and to offer few spaces for alternative and oppositional viewpoints. And it tends to organize the narrative around a struggle between good and evil where the two sides are portrayed with little or no ambiguity or contradiction and where good always triumphs at the end of each episode. But within the general field of popular series and indeed within television drama *as a whole* there are significant variations of form and genre. An intermediate category is the popular *serial* where the plot develops over a number of weeks rather than in series where the action has to be resolved in the space of a single episode. The more relaxed narrative pace of the serial provides opportunities to develop more complex characterizations of terrorists and their motivations, and space to interrogate the nature and operations of the 'secret state'. Indeed, as we shall see with *Blood Money*, the military response to terrorism and the limits of its legitimacy can provide the central theme for popular television series.

This interrogation of the state's democratic credentials is most fully developed however, outside of popular forms, in the single play. Unlike series and serials, television plays are not in the front line of the battle for audiences or programme exports and so they are not under the same pressure to work with the most prevalent ideological themes or to deliver predictable pleasures to the largest possible number of viewers. On the contrary, the producers of single plays are expected to fulfil the rôle of 'authors' and to express their own particular viewpoints and commitments in their own distinctive voice and style. This notion of 'authorship' gives them a licence to raise awkward political questions and to do so in forms that may disturb or even overturn the audience's expectations (Murdock, 1980). This potential for provocation is not always fully realized of course. Plays on sensitive issues (such as the situation in Northern Ireland) are subject to political pressures from inside and outside the broadcasting organizations, and cuts and cancellations are therefore a permanent possibility.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, by no means all television playwrights take advantage of the potential flexibility of presentational

forms, to make space for diverse points of view. Nevertheless, a good deal of politically contentious material does get transmitted, and as we shall see in the case of *Pty Warrors*, it is possible to mobilize alternative and oppositional perspectives in a single play in a more complete and sustained way than is generally possible in popular series and serials. They are therefore the most potentially 'open' and 'loose' form of television fiction.

### Terrorism in actuality television

Two conclusions stand out from our survey of the treatment of terrorism in the recent current affairs and documentary output of British television. First, the term 'terrorism' and the meanings associated with it are openly contested in most of these programmes. In terms of the distinctions outlined above most programmes are open rather than closed. A variety of meanings and definitions are usually included even if the broadcasters, as interviewers, reporters or presenters, are working for closure in the terms of the official discourse. Second, the repertoire of meanings and definitions which is contested is remarkably narrow, mainly involving defining the violence as terrorism or not terrorism and weighing the reasons for violence against its consequences.

In the official discourse this balance is weighted heavily in favour of the consequences. The consequences in terms of human suffering are horrendous so that nothing can justify the resort to violence and terror. Those who engage in such behaviour do not have 'reasons' in the normal sense of the word. Their behaviour is senseless, irrational and inhuman (Elliott, 1980). No reasons can be given for killing and maiming. The terrorists even more than the other criminals and murderers with whom they are bracketed have put themselves outside civilized society.

An extreme example of this view that terrorists are not human shows one technique broadcasters use to re-establish the official discourse. After a filmed interview with a spokesman holding oppositional views, a spokesman for the Irish National Liberation Army, the organization which killed the Conservative MP and Northern Ireland spokesman Airey Neave, the *Tonight* programme (BBC1, 7 July 1981) reverted to the studio so that a presenter and two Northern Irish politicians could put the interview into perspective. In the interview the INLA spokesman had denied that INLA had 'murdered' Airey Neave, saying instead that he had been 'assassinated' or 'executed'. Following the interview the studio presenter, Robin Day, re-established the point that it was murder before inviting the two MPs to comment.<sup>10</sup> The immediate response of Robert Bradford, the Official Unionist spokesman, was that he had almost refused to take part in a programme which permitted an interview with such a 'subhuman creature'. Jerry Fitt, representing the SDLP, felt that it was unwise of the BBC to air such an interview which could only serve to inflame protestant and loyalist opinion in Northern Ireland. This same interview was cited, two years later in a discussion programme on television's reporting of Northern Ireland, as a prime example of the 'irresponsible and reckless use of the medium', in the words of Dr (ex-Major General) Richard Clutterbuck (BBC1, *The Editors*, 28 June 1981). In the same programme two journalists, one from the press the other from television, defended the case for interviewing 'terrorists'. Though the BBC presenter, John Morgan, pursued the official view that such people were 'mere murderers or thugs', this was refused by both

journalists who argued that the root of the conflict in Northern Ireland was political, that terrorism was politically motivated, and that the media had a duty to convey this to the British public by interviewing alleged terrorists. A further instance of the refusal of the official definition of terrorism occurred in a *Newsnight* interview with Danny Morrison, a Provisional Sinn Féin spokesman, in the aftermath of the death of the hunger striker Bobby Sands. Morrison attacked the 'two sets of laws' that operated in Northern Ireland which legitimated the violence of British troops (as on Bloody Sunday), while delegitimizing Republican violence as murder. He persistently refused the definition of the hunger strikers as criminals, redefining them as political activists 'in the war going on in Northern Ireland' (BBC2, *Newsnight*, 6 May 1981).

Another inflection of the official discourse on Northern Ireland is to emphasize the continuing human consequences of terrorism on the innocent civilian population of the province. This approach is to be found in all types of actuality coverage, but in its most frequent and popular forms it occurs in the news bulletins and daily current affairs programmes. The 'who, what, where?' format has become standard for reporting incidents in which someone is killed, as have the follow-up filmed reports which concentrate on the bravery and good character of the victim and the sorrow and endurance of their families and kin.

But state bullets inflict death and injury in just the same way as terrorist bullets, and this poses ideological problems for the dominant perspective. The weight of the argument against terrorism is that it causes suffering. If it can be shown that the state and its agents cause suffering there is some explaining to do. One answer given is that state violence is legitimate. But this is relatively rare because it admits that suffering caused by state violence was an isolated mistake, that under provocation some retaliation may be necessary, more general attempts to deny that the incident took place, or that state forces were responsible are more common. A further argument is that state forces were responsible for the incident. By comparison arguments from the initial and ubiquitous euphemism of defence. By comparison arguments that suffering caused by state violence was an isolated mistake, that under provocation some retaliation may be necessary or more general attempts to deny that the incident took place or that state forces were responsible are more common. A favourite British device which has been used in cases like Bloody Sunday when British troops shot dead 13 demonstrators, or following allegations of torture in Northern Ireland, is to resort to Widgery, to set up legal inquiries which, over a period, redefine the problems into acceptable terms. These the media can then report. In the case of Bloody Sunday, Lord Widgery found that there had been 'shooting by the army which bordered on the reckless'. Sir Edmund Compton re-defined torture as physical ill-treatment.<sup>11</sup>

In a *Paroxysm* programme on the North (BBC1 21 September 1981) the latest problem of civilian deaths from plastic bullets, supposedly used as a method of riot control, was set out as an understandable consequence of mistakes and retaliation. From a street riot/petrol bomb sequence (Peter Taylor, reporter, BBC1, *Paroxysm* 21 September 1981): '... Almost inevitably the violence from these mobs has provoked violence in return. Under a hail of petrol bombs, the security forces were bound to retaliate. In an attempt to control the riots they fired plastic bullets. These are meant only to deter but they can be lethal. The IRA has never been slow to exploit mistakes. Plastic bullets have killed seven people since Bobby Sands died. This has only deepened the alienation the Catholic community already feels.'

The programme went on to illustrate this point by interviewing the mother of a young girl killed while innocently bringing home some shopping. But in less

proximate locations, however, the sufferings of the victims of state force are allowed to carry more weight. In contrast to the presentation of the IRA and INLA, characterizations of the PLO are generally more ambiguous. The Organization is defined simultaneously as both 'terroristic' and as a quasi-state engaged in diplomacy, and this more flexible characterization allows the legitimacy of the Israeli state to be contested and its use of violence to be likened to that of the Palestinians—an equation of state terror and insurgent terror which is impermissible nearer home. South Africa, with its clear-cut racism and rejection of formal equality before the law, is a regime which can make no claim whatever to liberal-democratic legitimacy (although it can claim to be struggling against international communism). Here the ideological space for accepting the legitimacy of state violence against state repression is at its maximum and contestation over definitions hardly figures at all. An instructive comparison may be drawn from the television coverage of the funeral of Bobby Sands in Northern Ireland contrasted with that of Pallas Mallungu, a black striker in South Africa:

Kate Adey, reporter (BBC1, *The 9 o'clock News*, 7 May 1981): To the tens of thousands who watched his coffin to the grave this was the burial of Bobby Sands, martyr. . . . An army helicopter grinding relentlessly overhead all but drowned the tones of the Irish pipes and there were shouts by the stewards as they tried to supervise the coverage by the world's press. Tens of thousands of people from all over Northern Ireland and from the South, a grim-faced demonstration of support for the political aims of the hunger strikers, overtaking the private grief of the Sands family. . . .

Outside a shopping centre in Andersonstown came the symbolic moment for the Republicans. Three masked men stepped forward and obeyed orders in Irish to fire a three volley salute. Illegal uniforms. Illegal shooting. All grist to the mill for the convictions of republican and loyalist.

The Sands funeral is admitted to be a tragic symbol for his supporters but, according to the reporter it is a symbol arranged for the media which has no more than propaganda value for a cause which we, the reporter and her audience, cannot support. The Mallungu funeral on the other hand is a 'political demonstration'. In that case the reporter (*Panorama*, BBC1, 15 June 1981) develops the story to show how workers and guerrillas are united in the same movement, pursuing the same cause, the 'liberation of the black man':

Peter Taylor, reporter, against background of chanting mourners at funeral procession (BBC1, *Panorama*, 15 June 1981): Many black workers see themselves as comrades, fighting the same war as the guerrillas. Pallas Mallungu's funeral became a political demonstration. To the crowds who followed his coffin Pallas Mallungu was not just a martyr to the workers' cause. He was a martyr to the cause of black liberation. It's the political message of scenes like this. A mixture of anger and grief which makes the government ever more anxious about the power of the black trade unions. Many black workers see themselves as comrades, fighting the same war as the guerrillas. They share the same enemy, they share the same end. Only the means are different.

Liberation is the oppositional justification which may be allowable in less proximate contexts, so that 'terrorists' become 'guerrillas'. In Northern Ireland however the claims for political status for the IRA by, for instance, Danny Morrison in the interview cited above, were vigorously denied by the interviewer.

The official discourse only uses war as a metaphor, denying the terrorist even the limited legitimacy of being a conventional enemy. It does allow the possibility though that they may be agents of a foreign power whose aim is to subvert our way of life. Thus the *Panorama* programme could rehearse, albeit not too seriously, the South African government's case against the 'red threat' posed by the guerrillas, but in a more proximate case—the attempt on the Pope's life—the red threat was

treated much more at its face value. The claim that the KGB was behind the attempt, based on circumstantial evidence and the suppositions of the Italian right, was developed in a format that was both close and tight. With an agency so ideologically distant as the KGB all pretence was dropped that there were alternative views or an oppositional case (ITV, *TV Eye*, 3 September 1981).

But in 'authored' documentaries, which are clearly signalled as the personal viewpoint of their writer/presenter, dominant definitions of terrorism may be both contested and subverted, particularly if they bear on violence that has either passed, even if only recently, or which happened in areas remote from the immediate sphere of British interests. In a *Pilger Report* on the current plight of Vietnam veterans in the United States, the journalist John Pilger drew out the implications of their conditions for current American policy in El Salvador (ITV, *Heroes*, 6 May 1981). In the course of this tight programme Pilger dealt with the same repertoire of meanings and definitions as are to be found in the other coverage of terrorism which we have discussed. But he systematically inverted the official meanings and definitions and provided a clear statement of an equation which is the precise opposite of the dominant view of terrorism. In official discourse insurgent terrorism leads to unacceptable human misery. In Pilger's alternative statement it is state terror which produces unacceptable human costs:

Missing from this film are the other witnesses to the Vietnam period, the Vietnamese. We hear very little about them these days and the American veterans speak little about them perhaps because what was done over there was so terrible that only the victims can afford to speak about it. Such has been the politics of vengeance that the people of Vietnam are now almost completely isolated with only the waiting arms of the Russians to turn to, whom they rightly distrust as much as they distrust the Americans, the French, the Japanese and Chinese who came to their country selling noble causes.

So here is the news from Vietnam. In the wake of the war's devastation there is now famine. Rations are less than even during the war years, about half the food needed for a healthy survival. There is no milk any more for children over the age of one and unexploded bombs and mines kill children every day.

Like its refusal to help its own victims of the war the American Government has denied all help to the people of Vietnam and so too has the British government.

On the other hand both governments are building the greatest military machine in preparation for a war that may well end all wars and for that our heroes need not apply.

Throughout the programme the sanitized double-speak of the official discourse on war is systematically inverted. In drawing a parallel between Vietnam and El Salvador Pilger used US Ambassador White to redefine terrorism from insurgent terrorism to state terrorism. He then, in an El Salvador sequence, underlined the point by comparing the tragedy of the El Salvadorians and the Vietnamese, both victims of the state's military machine.

This book is a collection of *New York Times* front pages which trace the American involvement in Vietnam and reading it now is an eerie experience. The same headlines are appearing today. The same jargon such as escalation, and light at the end of the tunnel. The same delusions. Delete Vietnam and write in El Salvador and the stories seem almost identical. Like the politicians then—Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon—the politicians now, Haig and Reagan, see the world in the same arrogant, simplistic terms, speaking of dominoes as if nations were blocks of wood. Not societies given with their own differences and animosities. Today as before, honest men pay with their careers. The American Ambassador in El Salvador, Robert White, has said that the war in that country is caused by social injustice and that the real terrorists are the regime backed by Mr Reagan and Mr Haig and supported of course by the British government.

For speaking the truth the ambassador was sacked. Here is an announcement of US advisers going to Vietnam and US troops going to protect them. The advisers have already arrived in El Salvador. As

in Vietnam the people who are dying in the streets and jungles of El Salvador are nameless stick figures on a television news or between the commercials in a re-run Hollywood movie. The American veterans of Vietnam have much in common with them for they too have been declared expendable.

### Terrorism in television fiction

The *Pilger Report* is a rare statement in actuality television of the thesis that there is a problem of state terrorism. In contrast, the nature and legitimacy of the state's use of violence is a central theme in television fiction dealing with terrorism, although the way it is handled varies considerably. To illustrate this range we have chosen three programmes which represent the major types of television drama we outlined earlier. They are: an episode from a top-rating action-adventure series, *The Professionals*; a thriller serial written especially for television, *Blood Money*; and a television play, *Psy-Warriors*.<sup>12</sup> As with the actuality programmes just discussed, these instances can be arranged on a continuum running from relatively 'open' to relatively 'closed', as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

	maximum	Intended audience	restricted
Actuality programmes	news magazines e.g. <i>Panorama</i>	current affairs e.g. <i>Panorama</i>	'authored' documentaries e.g. <i>Hermot</i>
Fiction programmes	action-adventure series, e.g. <i>The Professionals</i>	serials, e.g. <i>Blood Money</i> , <i>A Spy at Evening</i>	single plays, e.g. <i>Psy-Warriors</i>
Programme structure	relatively 'closed'		relatively 'open'

*The Professionals* is one of the most successful action-adventure series produced in Britain in recent years. Almost all of the episodes have featured in the top ten most popular programmes and the series has been sold in most of the major overseas markets. The action centres around Bodie and Doyle, the two top agents of CI5, a crack Criminal Intelligence unit which bears more than a passing resemblance to the SAS. According to the publicity blurb for the series: Anarchy, acts of terror, crimes of violence — it's all grist to the mill of the formidable force who make up CI5 (*TV Times Extra*, 1979: 11).

CI5 breaks all the rules: no uniforms, no ranks and no conscience—just results. Formed to combat the vicious tide of violence that threatens law and order, its brief is to counter-attack. And when there's a hijack, a bomb threat, a kidnap or a sniper, men from CI5 storm into action (Blake, 1978).

This brief underscores two key themes in the official discourse. Firstly, it places terrorism firmly within a criminal rather than a political frame and defines it exclusively in terms of the violence it entails. And, secondly, it legitimates the state's use of violent countermeasures by arguing that exceptional threats to the social order require exceptional responses in which consideration of civil liberties, democratic accountability, and due process, are held in abeyance in the interests of efficiency. Within this perspective the end of re-establishing order justifies the use of dubious and even illegal means, and licences the men of CI5 to use the same dirty tricks as their adversaries. We are told that Bodie and Doyle:

believe in fighting violence with violence. They are cold and ruthless. They would think nothing of kidnapping a kidnapper, or chaining a bomber to his own bomb and leaving him to defuse it (*TV Times Extra*, 1979).

But, the fact that they are agents of the state means that popular support for these strong-arm tactics cannot be entirely taken for granted, so the unit's commander, Cowley, tells his men:

Oh, there'll be squeals, and once in a while you'll turn a law-abiding citizen into an authority-hating anarchist. There'll be squeals, and letters to MP's; but that is the price they, and we, have to pay to keep this island clean and smelling, even if ever so faintly of roses and lavender (Blake, 1978: 19).

Hence, while it operates firmly within the terms of the official discourse, the programme must also work *actively* to head off dissent and enlist the audience's support for powerful countermeasures by underlining the exceptional nature of the terrorist threat and pointing up the irrelevance of alternative and oppositional perspectives on state violence. This process of ideological mobilization is well illustrated in the episode entitled *Close Quarters*.

The episode opens with the assassination of a British politician, Sir Denny Forbes, at a check-in desk at London airport, killed by the leader of the Meyer-Helmuth terrorist group with a syringe of poison. This precipitating incident introduces four central themes; the essential criminality of terrorism; its identification with the Left; its characterization as an alien incursion originating outside Britain and the absolute contrast between the legitimate pursuit of interests through parliamentary representation and the illegitimacy of direct action. The assassination is a direct attack on the 'body politic' and on the 'British way of life'.

Having detonated these themes in the opening pre-credit sequence, the narrative immediately begins to elaborate them. The audience have already been invited to see Meyer's act as essentially criminal rather than political by the very fact that it is going to be tackled by CI5, a *criminal* intelligence unit. But to reinforce the point the scene immediately after the credits shows Cowley briefing his men in a style familiar from countless crime movies where the chief of police talks his officers through the 'most wanted' list. Although Bodie attends the briefing he is excused active duty because of an injured gun hand, and he decides to take his girlfriend Julie for a picnic on the River Thames at Henley. While on the water he recognizes Meyer standing on the bank. He follows him to the cottage he is using as a 'safe house' and arrests him. But the other members of the group arrive and give chase. Bodie eludes them and makes his getaway in a stolen car. The group pursue him and he barricades himself in a country vicarage which the group, heavily armed, surround.

The group's utter ruthlessness is confirmed when they shoot the vicar in cold blood as he is climbing out of a window in an effort to reason with them. This incident clinches the central ideological theme of the narrative; that you cannot bargain with terrorists and that faced with their arbitrary violence, the state is justified in using similar tactics. Popular support for this position is mobilized through the commonsense response of the housekeeper and Bodie's girlfriend. The audience is invited to see its real-life position as analogous to the women's situation within the narrative; innocent bystanders who are caught up in events they do not fully understand but who can recognize the state's moral right to combat terrorism with all the weapons at its command.

MEYER How does this concern you? You have no conception of what this fight is about. It's not your fight.

(addressing the girlfriend and the housekeeper)

HOUSEKEEPER I don't understand your politics, but I understand good and evil. You kill without cause. You kill people who cannot possibly stand between you and your ideas. You don't even know who they are.

JULIE You're right. I have no idea what you're fighting about. I just know it means violence and killing and someone's got to stop you.

Despite these protestations Julie still has reservations about the legitimacy of Bodie's use of violence (after he has shot two members of the group as they attempted to enter the vicarage). But at the climax of the plot, when the chips are down, Julie overcomes her qualms. As the last member of the gang storms the room where they are hiding, Bodie is disarmed by Meyer and it is Julie who picks up his gun and shoots. The ideological circle is finally closed, around the official discourse.

By no means all popular television fiction is as 'closed' or as 'tight' as this however. Serials in particular, may provide spaces for a more critical appraisal of state violence and point to contradictions which may not be entirely resolved within the scope of the text. This was the case with a six-part serial, *Blood Money*.

The narrative opens with a scene set in an exclusive private boarding school for the sons of the rich. The boys are out on a cross-country run through the sunlit landscape. One of them, Rupert Fitzcharles, is the son of the Administrator General of the United Nations and because of his father's political status he is guarded by a plain clothes policeman working undercover as a school sports master. Suddenly, figures wearing gas masks spring out from behind the hedges, spray the boys with CS gas, abduct the diplomat's son and drive him to their 'safe' house in London. They intend to release him when the authorities agree to meet their demands, but if they refuse the group intend to kill him.

As in the initial scenes of *Cloise Quarters*, this opening sequence calls into play two of the central themes in the official discourse; the essential ruthlessness of terrorists and their disregard for human life; and their characterization as an alien incursion. And as in *The Professionals*, this opposition between terrorism and the 'British way of life' is represented by idealised images of rural and upper class England on the one hand, and by making the terrorist leader a German (although in this case she is a blonde woman rather than a dark haired man, the model being Ulrike Meinhoff rather than Andreas Bader). As the narrative progresses, the framework established by this opening is made increasingly problematic.

The fact that the narrative is less compressed than in a standard series episode provides space for a fuller characterization of the terrorists and for some discussion of their motivations, and in the process tensions and contradictions begin to emerge. On the one hand, the characterization of the group's leader, Irene Kohl, reinforces the terms of the official discourse. She is consistently depicted as fanatical and ruthless. She shows no sympathy whatever for the kidnapped boy and the fear he feels. She sees him simply as a bargaining counter, necessary for the achievements of the group's political aims, but dispensable if things go wrong. And the fact that she is a woman is constantly used to underscore the official view that terrorism is 'unnatural' and dehumanizing. On the other hand, the characterization of the Irish member of the group, Danny Connors, leads in the opposite

direction. He shows considerable sympathy for the boy's distress and eventually establishes a friendly relationship with him. He is portrayed as an essentially decent man who has been led astray by political idealism, but his choice is presented as entirely intelligible given the history of the British ruling class's treatment of the Irish people. This contrast between the depiction of terrorists as fanatical and inhuman on the one hand and as human but politically motivated on the other is never resolved and remains a permanent tension within the text. But the larger and more significant fissures open up around the presentation of the forces of law and order.

Since the kidnap is classified as a crime the investigation is the responsibility of the relevant section of the regular police force commanded by Chief Superintendent Meadows. But because of the political status of the boy's father, Captain Percival of the Secret Intelligence Service is also assigned to the case. Meadows represents the rule of law and due process. His overriding concern is to return the boy safely to his parents and bring the kidnappers to justice. Percival on the other hand, is primarily concerned with eradicating terrorism and he is quite prepared to go behind the back of the law to achieve this. In the ensuing conflict between the two men, the normal connections between law and order are prised apart and the effective maintenance of order is presented as potentially *at odds* with adherence to legal processes.

The series as a whole encapsulates the essential dilemma that democracies face in balancing force against consent, order against law. Either the state can play by its own rules and bring the terrorists to trial thereby giving them a platform for their views and an opportunity to mobilize public opinion. Or it can violate its principles, dispense with due process and eradicate the terrorists without a trial, thereby undermining the popular consent on which its legitimacy rests. The solution to this dilemma is to kill the terrorists clandestinely, away from the glare of publicity. However, as Percival recognizes, the logic of this resort to force is exactly opposite to the logic of justice and the rule of law. To retain popular consent the law must operate in public and justice must be seen to be done, whereas force is best exercised in secret so that the repressive fist within the democratic glove remains concealed. But, as Percival has hinted earlier, there is an alternative—licensed murder by agents of the state—and that is the solution he opts for.

The terrorists have been tricked into thinking that their demands have been met, by a fake news broadcast by Meadows, who aims to arrest them as they leave the 'safe' house. But unknown to him, Percival has surrounded the house with a crack paramilitary unit. As the group step into the street, he gives the order to shoot them in cold blood. The boy is unhurt, but Meadows is outraged:

MEADOWS (to Percival) You bastard!

PERCIVAL

Why? The woman was armed, she was going to kill the child.

Technically, Percival is correct, but since he has made it clear from the beginning that saving the boy's life is secondary to eliminating the terrorists, the audience is invited to read his remarks as a somewhat flimsy and inadequate justification for judicial murder and the abandonment of the rule of law. This is the last exchange of dialogue, and the narrative ends on an ambiguous note with Meadows turning his back on Percival and walking away. Although the tension between order and law is resolved, the nature of that resolution is presented as highly problematic and open to question.

The same issues of state-instigated violence, the rôle and nature of the intelligence services, the use of terror as a normal and *systematic* feature of the democratic state's operation in periods of crisis are opened up in *Psy-Warriors*.

The play is set in a high-security installation whose existence is known only to selected members of military intelligence and senior Ministry of Defence personnel. The action opens with two men and a woman being brought in for questioning. They are suspected of having left a bomb in an Aldershot public house, popular with soldiers from the nearby army camp (a scenario based on an actual incident). Within the unit normal legal rights are suspended. The suspects do not have the right to call a lawyer or to inform their family or friends of their whereabouts and they can be detained without being charged or brought to trial. The play's opening scenes display the full range of disorientation techniques employed in modern interrogation. The group's leader is stripped naked and made to stand against a wall with his legs apart and a black bag over his head for hours on end. Later, he is led away blindfolded and taken up in an army helicopter and pushed out of the open door. In fact he is only a few feet from the ground but he is told he is over the Thames estuary. The second man is kept in a cage in a white-tiled room under constant glaring light and his regular patterns of sleep are interrupted by bouts of intensive interrogation. The woman's head is covered by a black bag smelling of vomit. She is forced to eat repulsive food, and when she asks to go to the toilet she is forcibly matched there. These techniques of sensory deprivation and psychological warfare are all drawn from official reports of the British army's operations in Ulster and elsewhere, but by displaying them in a particularly graphic way, the play forcefully raises the question of how far the state is justified in suspending basic human rights in the interests of securing confessions or information from suspected terrorists.

Thus the audience is invited to believe that they are watching a play about the way in which the state deals with possible terrorists, but the author then proceeds to overturn this assumption in order to raise less obvious questions about the legality and legitimacy of the state's operations in relation to terrorism.

After the initial interrogation scenes, the action cuts to a meeting between the directors of the unit and a visitor from the Ministry of Defence. It is revealed that the 'suspects' are not in fact terrorists at all, but army volunteers who are being tested for possible recruitment to an elite antiterrorist unit. The training exercise the play presents, requires them to assume the identity of terrorists in order to understand their situation and motivations from the inside so that they will be able to combat them more effectively. This phase of the training programme has culminated in them leaving a live bomb in the pub. But since the exercise is top secret, the police bomb squad were not informed, a fact which once again points up the tension within the state apparatuses between the *forces of law* on the one hand, represented by the regular police force whose actions are open to a certain measure of political and public scrutiny, and the *forces of order and security* on the other, who operate in secret and beyond the purview of parliament.

As well as raising questions about the legality of the 'secret state's' operations, the play's structure provides considerable space for the presentation of oppositional justifications for terrorism. The aim of the exercise presented in the play is to get the volunteers to understand the experience and motivations of terrorists from the inside. The narrative depicts two devices for achieving this. The first is to make them take on the persona of terrorists, act out these assumed identities, and

experience the possible consequences. The other is to licence the interrogators to act as devil's advocates, putting the strongest possible oppositional case in order to deepen the recruits' insights into the terrorist's motivations and to toughen up their resistance to counterpropaganda.

The oppositional case for terrorism is particularly powerfully put in the scenes between the chief interrogator and the woman. She has begun to crack under the strain and he needs to push her to the limit ideologically in order to find out where her breaking point is. At the climax of the final interrogation session, the interrogator presents the situation in Northern Ireland in terms derived from the rhetoric of militant Republicanism. This depicts it as Britain's last colonial war and presents the IRA's terrorist campaign as a guerrilla offensive against an army of occupation which consistently violates human rights in the defence of an exploitative colonial power:

Mau Mau, EOKA, the NILF, the IRA. I've spent the greater part of my working life watching British troops being pulled out of places they were never going to leave. A long hard line of colonial campaigns, and on every campaign the British used internment, concentration camps, and intensive interrogation, torture: sticks up bums, burns on blocks of ice, licking the lav bowl clean, nudity, humiliation, running round in circles and pissing in the wind. You name it, we've inflicted it. I've exploited it, the Empire, your heritage. . . . What you see in Ulster is the rear end of the cruelty and exploitation of over thirty colonial wars. The last colonial battlefield. A dog devouring its own tail. When it reaches its arse it will be in England.

### Conclusion

In this analysis of different presentations of terrorism on television we have tried to demonstrate some of the continuities and discontinuities to be found right across the output of the medium, embracing both 'actuality' and 'fiction' and the more popular as against the more exclusive forms. This we have done by looking at the ideological problems that political violence raises for the state and the contest over legitimization that is involved. Our approach, perforce, must challenge and extend the present orthodoxy in media sociology and cultural studies. This orthodoxy—one which we ourselves have helped to establish and develop—has concentrated almost exclusively on news. Factual programmes have come to be seen as virtual paradigms of how the national culture is represented. Consequently, news and current affairs programmes have had a heavy burden to bear. They have been taken by their critics to be a virtually self-contained area which provides the most crucial social map made available by the mass media to the wider public, and therefore as the most important targets. As is plain from our analysis, the frameworks of interpretation which we have delineated play a structuring rôle in forms as varied as news, documentary, the drama series and the single play. Moreover, the precise ways in which a given form may be structured is illuminated by comparison with others. This enables us to be made much more aware of the possibilities and limitations available within each form when it comes to representing an issue such as that of 'terrorism', and the wider relationships of political violence to the state.

Much recent work has reproduced the structure of attention of the media themselves by an excessive concern with the representation of formalized conflicts in the parliamentary arena, industrial relations or processes of law enforcement.<sup>15</sup> In these cases the system of representations to be found in broadcasting is heavily grounded in social institutions of conflict resolution and management, and reproduces the concerns of these institutions and their leaders. Nevertheless in the last

two cases particularly much of the conflict in terms, for example, of unofficial strikes, demonstrative picketing, factory occupations, street demonstrations, and riots occur outside the frameworks consecrated by the established institutions of the state and civil society. Where conflict escapes the institutions it is characteristically handled as 'violence' which poses a fundamental threat to the stability of society. We recommend taking violence as the central focus because it is precisely at this point that the legitimacy of the state comes under most pressure. Even if spokespeople for the 'violent' are denied routine access to the centre of the stage (though, as we have seen, their views do not go entirely unrepresented) those who exercise control in this area have to work hard to justify and legitimate repressive action and to maintain their indiscriminate condemnation of the violent, the criminal and the terrorist.

Instead of concentrating on those processes which affirm the stability of the state and civil society it seems fruitful to consider those which are deemed to pose a threat to their very existence. For one thing it brings another range of institutions into view, the apparatuses of the secret state. These are largely invisible in actuality programming but provide much of the substance of drama. An exclusive concern with factual representations is simply too narrow. What is needed is an awareness of the interrelatedness of the components of the national culture.

It would be inaccurate to imply that a radical conception of television as an inter-related culture is absent from the literature. A good case in point, one which follows much of our basic line of argument, is the study of Bazalgette and Paterson (1980/1981). Amongst other recent writings, Silverstone (1981) has attempted to analyse television as a fabricator of myths thus showing some recognition of the broader unity of television's output. George Gerbner has conducted a programme of research taking television output as the cultural indicator, the repository of the contemporary *Weltanschauung* and the functional equivalent of the medieval church (cf. Gerbner and Gross, 1976). Whereas this kind of approach tends to assimilate different forms and homogenize them, our interest has been in discriminating between forms at the same time as bringing out their interrelations. Consequently as we have argued above, a typology of forms can be worked out in terms of a variety of dimensions which gives primacy to the process of production and its constraints. Thus, factors which come into play are periodicity, style, market and organizational considerations, presentational rôles and the assimilation and translation of cultural artefacts and traditions from other media into televisual forms (cf. Tables 1 and 2).

Thus we are arguing for a highly discriminating and situated analysis of television's discourse. Although *Pty-Warriors* was the most 'open' programme we looked at, as we have shown, it was not an altogether isolated instance. Rather, it lies at one end of a continuum which runs from ideological 'closure' to relative 'openness', which operates in complex ways within the major forms of programming, and which provides space for rather more conflict and contestation than the prevailing wisdom of critical media research might predict. That this should be so came as something of a surprise to us, but it was also exhilarating, since it has opened up a whole range of issues for investigation and analysis which have barely been touched on by the work done so far.

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### Notes

1. Cf. the reports in *The Guardian*, 'Thatcher warns on danger of media aiding Ulster terror' (21 May 1981) and 'Granada stops films on Ulster' (2 June 1981); also cf. Peter Fiddick's article in the same paper, 'The Irish facts that are not fit to be shown' (9 June 1981).
2. For a synoptic account of the British model of censorship on Northern Ireland and policing, and for a more general discussion, cf. Schlesinger (1981).
3. This is argued out in Elliott and Schlesinger (1979: 195-210). The paragraph draws directly from p. 196.
4. Cf. 'Close watch on Russian conduct' and 'Washington chilled by cold war winds', *The Guardian*, 30 and 31 January 1981.
5. Matters are not so simple. Some 'terrorism studies experts', such as Wilkinson (1981) see terrorism of the non-state variety as necessarily being indiscriminate. However, it is plain that discrimination or indiscriminacy varies with the political strategy of the group in question. The Provisional IRA, for instance, has latterly pursued an almost exclusive policy of 'selective killing against strategic targets'. In Italy, it is *fascist* terrorism which is indiscriminate, whereas 'red' terrorism has been much more selective on the whole (cf. Marletti, 1979).
6. News has become the most studied of all televisual forms. For evidence on these points see for instance Golding and Elliott (1979) and on the cast of accredited spokespersons, Hall *et al.* (1978).
7. For a fuller analysis of *Nationwide*'s populism, see Brunson and Morley (1978).
8. On the origins of fiction dealing with terrorism and with the intelligence services, see Laqueur (1977: especially 15-32); Melman and Stafford (1981).
9. On the political sensitivity to television dramas dealing with Northern Ireland, see Hoggart (1980: 261-262) and Madden (1979: 17-21).
10. We are particularly grateful to Mairede Thomas and Paul Kerr of the British Film Institute for helpful suggestions which started us on a number of fruitful lines of enquiry.
11. The relevant texts are, on Bloody Sunday, *The Report of the Widgery Tribunal*, HC 220, HMSO, London (1972) and, on torture, *The Compton Report: Allegations against the Security Forces of Physical Brutality in Northern Ireland*, Cmnd 4823, HMSO, London (1971). The interrogation techniques portrayed in the play *Pty-Warriors* which we discuss below are based on those whose use was confirmed by Compton. For an account of reporting in Northern Ireland in this period see Winchester (1974).
12. *The Professionals* episode *Close Quarters* was written by Brian Clemens, directed by William Brayne and produced by Sidney Hayters. It was broadcast on ITV at 9.00 pm on Friday 5 June 1981. *Blood Money*, a serial in six episodes, was written by Arden Winch, directed by Michael E. Briant and produced by Gerard Glaister. Broadcast on BBC1 from 9.35 to 10.05 pm on Sunday evenings from 6 September to 11 October 1981. *Pty-Warriors* was written by David Leland, directed by Alan Clarke and produced by June Roberts. It was broadcast on BBC1 as a 'Play for Today' from 10.15-11.30 pm on 12 May 1981.
13. For politics see Hall *et al.* (1976); on industrial relations the Glasgow University Media Group (1976) and (1980); on law enforcement within the paradigm of news, Hall *et al.* (1978), and within the paradigm of election broadcasting, Clarke *et al.* (1981).

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## Broadband Black Death cuts queues. The Information Society and the UK

RICHARD COLLINS\*

The Government are on record to scuttle—a betrayal and a surrender; that is what is so shocking and serious; so unnecessary and wrong. Somebody introduced dog-racing into England, we know who, for he is proud of it, and proclaims it *ubi et orbi* in the columns of *Who's Who*. And somebody introduced Christianity and printing and the uses of electricity. And somebody introduced smallpox, bubonic plague and the Black Death. Somebody is minded now to introduce sponsored broadcasting into this country (Lord Reith, House of Lords Hansard, 22 May 1952).

Another concern that has been voiced has drawn attention to the extent to which the new information technology will encourage the individual to withdraw into his home. There will be no need to go shopping in person, to cash a cheque at the bank, to place a bet at the bookmakers, or, that most sacred of British passions, standing in queues to buy theatre tickets, train tickets, etc. The possible social effects of information technology have hardly begun to be counted (Lord Thompson, Chairman of the IBA at Bath University, 3 March 1983).

Fifty million television sets in America; and now the coaxial cable! (Tom Ewell [in extremis], The Seven Year Itch, 1955).

The messiah has foretold the coming of the post-industrial society and his disciples in Canada, Britain, France and Germany are locked in competition to induce the earliest birth of a viable infant. The spectacle of governments of diverse political colours across the world throwing money up in the air or into holes in the ground should give pause to those sceptical of the power of ideas.

### The Information Society

Bell's (1976) thesis of the information society has been embraced as a doctrine that will lead industrial societies currently locked into a cycle of beggar my neighbour protectionism, declining rates of profit and mass unemployment into a new promised land. In the UK, 1982 was designated Information Technology Year (1983 is World Communication Year), in which Government promulgated a number of initiatives to advance the labour of the old industrial society: the telecommunications monopoly of the state-owned British Telecom was terminated with the licensing of a competitive privately-owned network, Mercury, the supply of terminal equipment was opened to competition, Direct Broadcasting by satellite commencing in 1986 was authorized (hardware by Unisat, a consortium owned equally by British Aerospace, British Telecom and General Electric Company Marconi, software in two TV channels by the BBC), and the 'wired society'—a broadband cable network delivering entertainment television and a

\* Polytectnic of Central London.

# MEDIA, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

## A Critical Reader

edited by

Richard Collins, James Curran,  
Nicholas Garnham, Paddy Scannell,  
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